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U.S. and Romanian Executive MBA Students: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

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Currently, there are over 260 EMBA programs worldwide with approximately 180 programs resident in the United States. The number of programs available for EMBA students has increased competition for those students. One characteristic of this increased competition between EMBA programs is the addition of global initiatives to expose students to other cultures. Part of this global initiative has resulted in alliances and the establishment of working relationships between educational institutions. To facilitate and enhance the learning experience while in an EMBA program these alliances should consider the impact culture plays in shaping student expectations. This paper addresses the question of whether or not EMBA students, regardless of country of origin, have similar learning expectations or is there a cultural dimension that would impact their respective expectations? To answer this question a survey was administered to U.S. and Romanian EMBA students. This paper will analyze and describe the results of that survey.

Introduction

The Executive Master's in Business Administration (EMBA) is gaining acceptance worldwide as a viable means of obtaining an advanced degree in business. The participants in these programs feel the need for advanced work in business related topics and are seeking something other than the traditional MBA program. In reaction to this demand, numerous schools of business worldwide have introduced EMBA programs. There are currently 178 programs in the U.S. and 83 outside of the U.S. (EMBA Council). As a consequence of the expansion

of EMBA programs, competition amongst business schools is increasing, and schools are seeking partnerships between EMBA programs in an attempt to expose their students to global issues.

Global Initiatives

Global initiatives are viewed as being a necessity in the development of a global perspective and are being incorporated in numerous programs. Cass Business School established an EMBA program in China in alliance with the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics (Harrison, 2006). "We think it is really important that students who are studying in an international MBA program have the opportunity to interact with colleagues and businesses in foreign cultures," claims David Sims, Associate Dean for MBA programs at Cass.

There is wide variety on how these initiatives are structured and the manner in which they are delivered. As an example, The University of New Orleans (UNO) Executive MBA program in Puerto Rico flies American professors into a Puerto Rican satellite campus on a regular basis (CB Staff, 2006). The University of Maryland, through its relationship with the China Business Development and Executive Programs in Beijing, has a mixture of programs in China. In one program American professors provide middle and senior Chinese management with global business perspectives (Financial Times Information, 2006). DePaul's MBA-Czech Republic Program is based on the same principles (DePaul, 2006). Business School São Paulo takes a region specific focus that provides a combination of lectures and corporate visits to help business students gain a strong understanding of how business is done in Brazil and in Latin America (Business School São Paulo, 2006). The University of Toledo's College of Business Administration's EMBA Program attracts students with the opportunity to travel to Scotland, Poland, and Germany to meet local government officials as well as top management.

Kennesaw State University's (KSU) Coles College of Business EMBA Program has an alliance with The Institute for Business and Public Administration (ASEBUSS) in Romania that utilizes multiple face-to-face visits between students and leverages technology such as video conferences, message/discussion boards, and email. KSU feels that to truly know global business one must experience it firsthand and the experience cannot be based solely on a single exotic trip. KSU's Executive MBA incorporates an interactive global experience in cooperation with ASEBUSS that requires students be assigned to a global team with students and faculty from the two programs (Kennesaw). There are numerous other examples of how EMBA programs are implementing global alliances. In an ever increasing competitive global business environment MBA programs must respond with well thought out global alliances that complement and enhance the learning experience from an international perspective.

Another unique program that has an international alliance is the Georgia WebMBA. This Program is web-based and is delivered through a consortium

of five Georgia-based universities (Georgia WebMBA, 2006). For the past three years, the Georgia WebMBA Program and the Anhalt University in Germany have participated in a project in which students from each program work together to complete a Country Investment Opportunity project. Professor Elena Kashtanova, of Anhalt University, is the lead professor on the project, assisted by Professor Joe Bocchi, Director of the WebMBA Program, and Professor Constance Campbell, instructor for the Global and International Management class (Campbell, 2006). As part of the project, WebMBA students have the option to travel to Anhalt for a Project Week. According to Bocchi:

“Students gain experience working in a real multinational team and gain additional experience above and beyond their WebMBA virtual teaming environment. They work with real companies (some of which they visit) on real projects, and have the opportunity to experience another culture through personal connections and to see multinational business operations up close and personal.”

The international experience becomes one of the crucial factors that students consider before choosing certain schools. According to Rolf Cramer, Dean and Vice-President of the China Europe International Business School in Shanghai, which has a close working relationship with Cranfield Business School in the UK, schools must understand the cultural background of their students, and the students must appreciate the importance of changing their mindset (Harrison, 2006). This increased importance in global competencies requires schools of business to develop an understanding of prospective students to effectively focus marketing efforts and to enter into effective program alliances (Fowlie, 2006).

Prior Studies

The literature is surfeit with studies of student behavior, predictors of student performance, and use of standardized tests. These studies often provide conflicting outcomes or cannot be generalized to the EMBA in particular. The validity of quantifiable evidence such as GPAs and GMAT scores to predict success has been called into question (Hecht, Swinton, & Braun, 1989). However, the use of the GMAT for EMBA admission is being downplayed or not used at all by many top business schools in deciding on an individual's participation in an EMBA program (Gloeckler, 2005). The Aspen Institute studied MBA student attitudes about business and society and determined that student attitudes about business are shaped by what they learn in the course of an MBA degree (Aspen, 2003). Hungarian and U.S. MBA students were studied to determine differences in attitude towards business planning goals (Danis & Shipilov, 2004). The value of work experience as a prerequisite for admission into graduate business programs has also been studied (Dreher & Ryan, 2004).

Cross Cultural Studies

Dickerson, Kouzmin, and Korac-Kakabadge (2006) researched the cultural differences of the participants from Western and Eastern Europe from an ethical perspective and suggest that cultural bridges must be built to overcome differences and prevent dysfunction (Dickerson, et al. 2006). Cultural differences can often impact the interrelationship between business strategy, environment and control system attributes, and strategic management (Dickerson, et al. 2006; Douglas & Rhee, 1989; Kouzmin, et al., 1997; Porter, 1990). It is almost an operational imperative to have an in-depth understanding of the cultural backgrounds of the people with whom one is dealing. This cultural knowledge can lead to an increased probability of business success among investors and workers operating in foreign cultures (Laroche, 1998). Cultural studies and relevant training are very important in a multinational company's operation (Lee, 2006).

Although the literature is rife with studies relative to the value of the GMAT and other tests as predictors of academic success, program content and other aspects of MBA programs, as well as many cross-cultural investigations, there is very little in the literature studying cross-cultural attributes between nationalities as it applies to program expectations.

To effectively segment the EMBA market and effectively develop a global alliance requires an in-depth knowledge of prospective students beyond basic demographics and easily obtained quantitative data such as GPA or GMAT. The gathering of demographic data on prospective students is relatively easy. However, demographic information by itself does not provide the information necessary to effectively segment this competitive market. Schools of business will be required to develop a more thorough understanding of what prospective EMBA students value and expect out of a program of study and, likewise will need to understand student expectations as they pertain to foreign alliance participation. To determine what these two culturally diverse groups value and expect, a survey was administered to determine student expectations questions relative to the goals of a program and to capture demographic data.

Study Methodology

The study utilized a survey instrument developed by Angelo and Cross (1993) to measure teaching goals. The survey instrument was modified to determine what the EMBA student considered important, valued, expected, and to gather demographic data. The survey consisted of 52 value/expectation related questions, five demographic questions, and one question requiring the respondents to rank order business disciplines in order of importance. The value/expectation questions used a five point Likert-type scale where 5 is essential, 2 is unimportant, and 1 is not applicable. The rank order question listed the business discipline areas in alphabetical order and required respondents to rank the nine areas with one representing the most important and nine representing the least important. All of

the returned surveys were reviewed and evaluated for completeness and accuracy. The review resulted in twelve surveys being removed from the analysis.

Study Group

The study group consisted of 134 U.S. participants from KSU's EMBA and 128 Romanian participants from ASEBUSS.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was the Teaching Goals Inventory (TGI) developed by Angelo and Cross (1993). It was created as a self-assessment instrument of instructional goals. The purpose of the instrument is to help college instructors accomplish individual course goals. Consequently, college instructors can assess how well their teaching is providing the results they aspire to achieve and how effective student learning is. The instrument is also helpful for interactions among instructors in discussing learning goals.

Respondent's rate 51 teaching goal items on a five-point scale where 5 is essential, 2 is unimportant, and 1 is not applicable. Other items included in the instrument assess the student's perception of the role of the teacher, years of experience, gender, age and the importance of academic disciplines to the student's learning goals.

The 51 teaching goal items are subdivided among 6 categories established from previous research conducted by Angelo and Cross (1993). Items 1–8 comprise the first category described as "Higher Order Thinking Skills." Items 9–17 comprise the second category described as "Basic Academic Success Skills." Items 18–25 comprise the third category described as "Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills." "Liberal Arts and Academic Values" describe items 26–35 and comprise the fourth category. Items 36–43 comprise the fifth category described as "Work and Career Preparation" and the last category, "Personal Development," includes items 44–51.

Respondents

Two respondent groups participated in the current study. One group was comprised of 134 U.S. students enrolled in an Executive Masters of Business Administration (EMBA) program of a large southeastern university. This group was comprised of forty-three (43) females and eighty-four (84) males with seven (7) not reporting gender. Their age ranged from twenty-six (26) years to sixty-two (62) years with the median at thirty-eight (38) years. Thirty-nine (39) different academic disciplines were represented in the respondent group with finance being the most frequently cited by 5 individuals.

The other respondent group consisted of 128 students enrolled in a Romanian university EMBA program. This group was comprised of forty-eight (48) females and seventy-five (75) males with five (5) not reporting gender. Their ages ranged

from twenty-five (25) years to fifty-two (52) years. Forty-seven (47) academic disciplines were reported with economics cited most frequently at twenty (20).

Analysis

Independent samples tests were used to compare respondents from the U.S. EMBA program with the Romanian EMBA students. Means, variances, and tests for equality of both means and variances were used to compare the two independent samples. Results from these analyses are reported in the next section.

Results

Comparisons between U.S. EMBA students and their Romanian counterparts are shown in Table 1. Individual categories, as described previously, were analyzed as to the differences between U.S. and Romanian students. Differences in the variability of responses to items are shown as the F statistic for equality of variance. Differences in the item means are displayed as the t statistic for equality of means. Actual means are also presented for both U.S. and Romanian students when significant differences are identified.

Category 1: Higher Order Thinking Skills

Item 3 (Develop problem-solving skills) was the only item in this category showing significant differences between U.S. and Romanian students. The U.S. students had a higher mean at 4.41 compared to Romanian students with a mean of 4.09 ($t = 3.087, p < .01$) indicating this to be more important to them. No significant differences were identified in the equality of variance tests.

Category 2: Basic Academic Success Skills

Items 12 and 13 were shown to vary significantly on both the equality of variance and the equality of means tests. For item 12 (Improve listening skills), the equality of variance test provided an $F = 3.931 (p < .05)$ and the equality of means test gave a $t = 2.500 (p < .05)$. The U.S. students viewed item 12 as more essential with a mean of 3.68 compared to Romanian students who had a mean of 3.37. For item 13 (Improve speaking skills), the equality of variance test ($F = 5.656, p < .05$) indicated differences between the two respondent groups. Means also varied significantly ($t = 4.334, p < .001$) with U.S. students viewing this goal more important with a mean of 4.19 compared with Romanian students who averaged 3.59.

Items 15 (Improve writing skills; $t = 3.656, p < .001$), 16 (Develop appropriate study skills, strategies, and habits; $t = -2.006, p < .05$), and 17 (Improve mathematical skills; $t = 4.340, p < .01$) all had significantly different means. For item 15, U.S. students viewed this as more important with a mean of

3.80 compared to the Romanian students who had a mean of 3.30. U.S. students also had a higher mean for item 17 with 3.36 compared to the Romanian students' mean of 2.79. Romanian students indicated however that item 16 was a more essential goal with a mean of 3.77 compared to U.S. students' mean of 3.53.

Category 3: Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills

Items 19 (Learn concepts and theories; $F = 6.049, p < .05$) and 20 (Develop skill in using materials, tools, and/or technology; $F = 5.862, p < .05$) showed significant differences in variability. Item 20 ($t = 4.836, p < .001$) also had significant mean differences with U.S. students reporting a mean of 4.09 compared to a mean of 3.59 for Romanian students.

Mean differences were found for Items 21 (Learn to understand perspectives and values; $t = 3.050, p < .001$), 22 (Prepare for transfer or graduate study; $t = -4.778, p < .001$), and 25 (Learn to appreciate important contributions; $t = -3.062, p < .01$). American students viewed item 21 more important with a mean of 3.74 compared to Romanian students who had a mean of 3.42. To the contrary, Romanian students indicated items 22 and 25 were more important with means of 3.23 and 3.50 respectively, compared to U.S. students with means on the same items of 2.55 and 3.17.

Category 4: Liberal Arts and Academic Values

Item 26 (Develop an appreciation of the liberal arts and sciences) significantly varied ($F = 5.471, p < .01$) across respondent groups. This item also showed differences in means ($t = -3.386, p < .001$) with Romanians having a mean of 2.81 compared with the U.S. mean of 2.40.

Item 27 (Develop an openness to new ideas; $t = -3.232, p < .001$) had significant differences in means with Romanians viewing this goal as more important (mean = 3.93) compared to U.S. students (mean = 3.53). Item 29 (Develop a commitment to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; $t = -2.787, p < .01$) had the same importance trend with means for Romanians (mean = 2.98) higher than U.S. students (mean = 2.61).

Item 28 (Develop an informed concern about contemporary social issues) significantly varied ($F = 5.157, p < .05$) between the respondent groups. This item also showed differences in means ($t = -4.371, p < .001$) with Romanians having a mean of 3.46 compared with the U.S. mean of 2.90 indicating the stronger importance of this item for Romanians.

Category 5: Work and Career Preparation

Three items indicated significant differences between groups. Item 38 (Develop leadership skills) had an $F = 4.338 (p < .05)$ showing respondent groups varied in their answers to this item. Item 40 (Improve ability to follow directions,

instructions, and plans) had a $t = -2.339$ ($p < .05$) indicated a mean difference between groups. Romanians had a mean of 3.69 compared to U.S. students' mean of 3.40, showing Romanians thought this to be more essential.

Item 39 (Develop a commitment to accurate work) significantly varied ($F = 12.463$, $p < .001$) between the respondent groups. This item also showed differences in means $t = -2.258$, $p < .05$ with Romanians having a mean of 4.10 compared with the U.S. mean of 3.84. This again shows the item to be more essential to the Romanian respondent group.

Category 6: Personal Development

This category included more items with differences than any other category. Item 45 (Improve self-esteem/self-confidence; $F = 8.262$, $p < .01$), 50 (Develop a capacity to think for one's self; $F = 5.480$, $p < .05$) and 51 (Develop a capacity to make wise decisions; $F = 7.769$, $p < .01$) all had differences in the equality of variance tests. Of these items, 45 ($t = -3.071$, $p < .01$) and 51 ($t = -2.649$, $p < .01$) also had significant mean differences with both showing increased importance of these items for the Romanians. The Romanian means for items 45 and 51 were 4.11 and 4.46 respectively compared to U.S. student means of 3.72 and 4.16 for the same items.

Equality of means tests also showed differences on items 44, 47, and 48. Item 44 (Cultivate a sense of responsibility for one's own actions; $t = -3.038$, $p < .01$) had Romanians (mean = 3.83) indicating that this was more essential compared to U.S. students (mean = 3.44). Item 47 (Develop a respect for others; $t = -2.611$, $p < .01$) also had Romanians (mean = 3.73) indicating that this was more essential compared to U.S. students (mean = 3.40). The same trend held true for item 48 (Cultivate emotional health and well-being; $t = -2.124$, $p < .05$) where Romanians had a mean of 3.58 while U.S. students had a mean of 3.28.

Summary / Further Study

The study asked each student to assess the importance of 51 goals. They were asked to evaluate the goals from a perspective of what they deliberately aim to accomplish while in a program of study rather than the goal's general worthiness or overall importance to their institution's mission. The analysis suggests that there is significant variance between the two groups relative to what they deliberately aim to accomplish while in an EMBA program. The Americans had higher means in two categories: Category 1 (Higher Order Thinking Skills), Category 2 (Basic Academic Skills) and evenly split with the Romanians within Category 3 (Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills). The Romanians had higher means in Category 4 (Liberal Arts and Academic Values), Category 5 (Work and Career Preparation) and Category 6 (Personal Development). The almost even split on goals would suggest that there could be potential for conflict when working in group settings especially for tasks that play to one group's perception of the value

or lack thereof for the task. The potential for conflict could also exist if subject matter delivery plays to one group's perception of the value or lack thereof for the material being delivered.

At this point we can only speculate as to what may cause the differences. However, the results should be of use to administrators and faculty working within a global alliance. For example, if the means between two groups were radically at variance, care should be taken to manage expectations between the two groups when working on group projects. Likewise material that has been developed for one audience, which implies a unique cultural set of expectations, may have to be modified to overcome different expectations of another culture.

Further study is needed to determine the underlying causes of the variance between the groups. One area for further study might be whether or not delivery of the instrument in English impacted the Romanian responses. Another might be whether or not other intervening variables from a cultural perspective could be identified through the use of other instruments.

Table Example 1*Comparisons of United States EMBA's with Romania Students on TGI items*

TGI Items	Equality of Variance (F)	Equality of Means (t)	U.S. Mean	Romania Mean
Category 1: Higher Order Thinking Skills				
Item 3	NS	3.087**	4.41	4.09
Category 2: Basic Academic Success Skills				
Item 12	3.931*	2.500*	3.68	3.37
Item 13	5.656*	4.334***	4.19	3.65
Item 15	NS	3.656***	3.80	3.30
Item 16	NS	-2.006*	3.53	3.77
Item 17	NS	4.340***	3.36	2.79
Category 3: Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills				
Item 19	6.049*	NS		
Item 20	5.862*	4.836***	4.09	3.59
Item 21	NS	3.050***	3.74	3.42
Item 22	NS	-4.778***	2.55	3.23
Item 25	NS	-3.062**	3.17	3.50
Category 4: Liberal Arts and Academic Values				
Item 26	5.471**	-3.385***	2.40	2.81
Item 27	NS	-3.232***	3.53	3.93
Item 28	5.157*	-4.371***	2.90	3.46
Item 29	NS	-2.787**	2.61	2.98
Category 5: Work and Career Preparation				
Item 38	4.338*	NS		
Item 39	12.463***	-2.258*	3.84	4.10
Item 40	NS	-2.339*	3.40	3.69
Category 6: Personal Development				
Item 44	NS	-3.038**	3.44	3.83
Item 45	8.262**	-3.071**	3.72	4.11
Item 47	NS	-2.611**	3.40	3.73
Item 48	NS	-2.124*	3.28	3.58
Item 50	5.480*	NS		
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001				

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