

## International Business Student Collaboration Project

[Executive Summary](#)

[Task/Simulation](#)

[Statistics \(2010-2011\)](#)

[Data and Research](#)

[Schedule](#)

[Communication](#)

[Grading](#)

[MBA Students](#)

[Required Time Investment](#)

[FAQ, Challenges](#)

[What happens next?](#)

### Executive Summary

Students in International Business / International Management courses at universities around the world work together for about 8 weeks in teams of 6-7 on a business proposal/plan for a large multinational company. Up to 20+ countries participate in a given semester. The project constitutes 20-30 percent of the course grade. Data on team cultural diversity and demographics, prior international experiences, team dynamics and performance are collected and used to enhance student learning and for research purposes. Upon completion of the project, students and instructors receive Achievement Certificates. All necessary materials and infrastructure are provided. Participation in the project is completely free. About two thousand students from almost thirty countries have participated in the project in 2010-2011. In addition to enhanced learning, scholarly publications based on the data collected during the project are expected.

[Back to the top](#)

### Task/Simulation

The Student Instructions used in the Sep-Dec 2011 season could be downloaded [here](#). We are always looking for ways to further improve the project, so some changes in the task and structure of the project are possible.

Generally, in teams of 6-7, students prepare a business proposal for a large multi-national company. Each team can choose one of eight companies, each being a leader in a particular industry (IT, oil/gas, car manufacturing, retailing, entertainment, etc.) As a team, students write a proposal for a product or service for the company of their choice. It can be anything from just a viable business idea to “the next big thing.” The proposal provides details on

- product or service the team suggests for the company
- target market
- production site
- financing options
- likely marketing challenges and suggested solutions
- HR related issues such as staffing, selection and recruitment
- Other strategic choices

### *Deadlines*

To ensure timely completion of the project, the students have to meet several deadlines throughout the course of the project:

- Before the project starts: complete the Pre-Project Survey
- About 2 weeks into the project: establish contact with the teammates, start communicating
- About 4 weeks into the project: decide on the product/service the team will be working on
- Last week of the project: submit the team report
- Within one week after the project: complete the Post-Project Survey

[Back to the top](#)

## Statistics (2010-2011)

October-December, 2011 Semester

Total number of student teams: **155**

Total number of students: **1,150**

	Name	Country	University
1	Anja Schuster	Austria	Vienna U. of Economics and Business
2	Ricardo E. Buitrago R.	Colombia	Konrad Lorenz U.
3	Xavier Ordeñana	Ecuador	ESPAE Graduate School of Management
4	Karina Jensen	France	Parsons Paris Art and Design School
5	Louise Curran	France	Toulouse Business School
6	Stefan Boxen	Germany	Technische Universität Darmstadt
7	Samuel Yaw Akomea	Ghana	KNUST School of Business
8	Nilay Yajnik	India	Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies
9	Liem Gai Sin	Indonesia	Machung U.
10	Pinky Rusli, Karen Imam and Gerald Ariff	Indonesia	BINUS Business School
11	Nobuya Takezawa	Japan	Rikkyo U.
12	Fabian Froesse	Korea	Korea U. Business School
13	Alejtin Berisha	Kosovo	Universum U. College
14	Erika Vaiginienė, Marius Grigelionis	Lithuania	Vilnius U.
15	José G. Vargas-Hernández	Mexico	Ciencias Económico Administrativas Universidad de Guadalajara
16	Hanoku Bathula	New Zealand	AIS St Helens
17	Pawel Bryla	Poland	U. of Lodz
18	Liviu Voinea, Andrada Busuioc	Romania	Academy of Economic Studies
19	Jozsef Poor	Slovakia	U. SJE Komarno
20	Alfredo Jimenez	Spain	U. of Burgos
21	Norhayati Zakaria	UAE	U. of Wollongong in Dubai
22	Douglas Chan	USA-HI	U. of Hawaii at Manoa
23	Peter Magnusson	USA-IL	Northern Illinois U.
24	Leonard Guida	USA-MA	Suffolk U
25	Vas Taras	USA-NC	U. of NC, Greensboro
26	Susan Gupta	USA-NJ	Monmouth U.

March-May 2011 Semester

Total number of student teams: **157**

Total number of students: **682**

	Instructor	Country	University
1	Dr. BettyJane Punnett	Barbados	U. of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus
2	Dr. Agnes Borgulay	Hungary	University Pécs
3	Dr. Niron Hashai	Israel	Hebrew U.

4	Dr. Fabian Froese	Korea	Korea U. Business School
5	Dr. Erika Vaiginiene	Lithuania	Vilnius U.
6	Dr. Clara Lei	Macau	Institute for Tourism Studies
7	Dr. José G. Vargas-Hernández	Mexico	Ciencias Económico Administrativas Universidad de Guadalajara
8	Dr. Jozsef Poor	Slovakia	U. SJE Komarno
9	Dr. Baldegger Rico	Switzerland	School of Business Administration Fribourg
10	Dr. Dilek Zamantili Nayir	Turkey	Marmara U., Istanbul
11	Dr. Riika Sarala	USA, N. Carolina	U. of North Carolina, Greensboro
12	Dr. Vas Taras	USA, N. Carolina	U. of North Carolina, Greensboro
13	Dr. Charles Wankel	USA-New York	St. John's U., New York
14	Dr. Dilene Crockett	USA-Oklahoma	Northeastern State U., Oklahoma
15	Dr. Michael Minor	USA-Texas	U. of Texas Pan American

*Sept-Dec 2010 Semester*

Total number of student teams: **125**

Total number of students: **463**

	<b>Instructor</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>University</b>
1	Dr. Toshiya Ozaki	Japan	Rikkyo U.
2	Dr. Erika Vaiginiene	Lithuania	Vilnius U.
3	Dr. Sulaman Siddiqui	Pakistan	The Islamia U. of Bahwalpur
4	Dr. Pawel Bryla	Poland	U. of Lodz
5	Dr. Jozsef Poor	Slovakia	U. SJE Komarno
6	Dr. Dilek Zamantili Nayir	Turkey	Marmara U., Istanbul
7	Dr. Vas Taras	USA	U. of North Carolina at Greensboro

[Back to the top](#)

## Data and Research

Although the International Business Student Collaboration Project was envisioned as a teaching exercise, IRB approval has been received to collect data as a part of the project and use them for research-related purposes. We are currently developing several papers based on the data collected in 2010-2011 and we hope more papers are to come.

Using on-line survey tools, before project starts, students complete the Pre-Project Survey:

- Background, demographics, prior international experience
- Individual cultural values (Schwartz Value Survey)
- Perceived similarities/differences between participating countries (in your opinion, how different/similar are the following two countries, completed for every possible pair of countries participating in the project)
- Perceived ease/difficulty of working with people from other countries (in your opinion, how easy/difficult would it be to cooperate for individuals from the following two countries, completed for every possible pair of countries participating in the project)
- Expected challenges and other thoughts and expectations

and after the project ends, the students complete Post-Project Survey:

- The same questions used in Pre-Project survey +

- Peer evaluations
- Satisfaction with team performance, outcome of the project
- Group dynamics (communication frequency and media, conflicts and misunderstandings)
- Experienced challenges, lessons learned, suggestions

In addition, individual and team performance is monitored by tracking:

- Respect for deadlines (time stamps for completing each stage of the project)
- Quality of the report (novelty of the idea, economic feasibility, supporting argumentation, attention to detail, readability and formatting quality)
- Peer evaluations

Additional measures may be taken if a viable research proposal is presented.

[Back to the top](#)

### Schedule

The schedule will be set once the participant list is finalized. Based on the semester start/end dates reported by the participants this semester, we can start the project in February-March and set the project submission deadline in late April or early May. This would give our students about eight weeks to complete the project.

[Back to the top](#)

### Communication

During the project, students collaborate on-line relying on such free communication tools as email, Skype, Google Docs, Dropbox, Facebook Groups, instant messengers, video conferencing tools, and others. It is likely that the students will also try the newly released Google+ which is a powerful on-line collaboration platform. Many students stick with email and reluctantly explore other communication tools, but many seem to enjoy learning new technologies and experimenting with different communication media. Recognizing that not all students are versed in latest communication technologies (some of the tools listed above are only a year or two old), detailed instructions with screen shots will be provided to make sure students are properly equipped if they want to try.

[Back to the top](#)

### Grading

It is up to the individual instructors to determine how they grade performance of their students. It is suggested that the project is weighted at about 20-30 percent of the course grade.

The following indicators of performance are available to the instructors:

- Reports: each team produces one version of the team report (business proposal) and the studies submit exact copies of the report to their respective instructors. Quality of the reports is an important indicator of team performance.
- Deadlines: information about when each component of the project was completed (pre- and post-project surveys, contact with teammates established, product/service for the international joint venture agreed upon, report submitted). As the main goal of the exercise is teamwork in international context, team's ability to meet the deadlines (1-establish contact with each other; 2-decide on product/service the team will be writing a business proposal for; 3-submit the report) is a good indicator of how well the team worked as a team and how responsibly the students took the task. Furthermore, the time the pre- and post-project surveys were completed is a good indicator of individual diligence. We use a set of on-line tools to collect this information.
- Peer-evaluations: detailed peer evaluations (each student on the team evaluates each student on the team). In addition to team-level performance indicators, such as the team report quality and ability to meet deadlines, each instructor will also receive the results of the peer evaluations that are included in the post-project survey with ratings of each student by his/her teammates.

To reduce stress and make grading more efficient, many instructors choose to evaluate student ability to complete each component of the project on the pass-fail basis. Under this grading scheme, students would be given a fixed number of points for meeting each deadline, provided that each task is completed fully and effectively. To receive full credit for the project, students would

need to complete each project component in time and meet the quality expectations of the instructor. Missing some deadlines or not meeting quality expectations would lead to partial or no credit for the project. Given that the project is an exercise and not necessarily a test of knowledge, it is about gaining first-hand experience in international collaboration and not about testing students' ability to write business proposals, the pass-fail approach makes sense. As long as students are actively involved in the exercise, work with their teammates in other countries, meet all deadlines and complete all components of the projects, they should probably be given credit. However, it is up to infidel instructors to decide what evaluation scheme works best for their course.

For example, the grade for the project may be calculated as the following (this is only a suggested scheme):

Task	Deadline (exact deadlines TBA)	%
Pre-project survey: completed fully and on-time, no random response pattern detected	Before project starts	10%
Established contact: the team reported establishing contact with each other by the due date (tracked using an on-line tool)	About 2 weeks into the project	10%
Agreed on the product/service: the team exchanged ideas and agreed on what product/service the team will be working on	About 1 month into the project	10%
Report		
Submitted on time	Evaluated based on	10%
All questions answered in sufficient detail	the submitted report,	10%
Economic feasibility of the idea	each team submits	10%
Thoroughness and logic of supporting arguments	one report (identical	10%
Clarity of presentation, formatting, readability	copies)	10%
Post-project survey: completed fully and on-time, no random response pattern detected	3 days after report deadline	10%
Peer evaluations	Will be available within 3 days after post-project survey deadline	10%

Most likely, different instructors will choose a somewhat different evaluation scheme for their students. This, however, should not be a problem and in fact makes the exercise more reminiscent of real-life collaboration where partner companies pay their employees differently, set different expectations and place different values on the important of the project.

[Back to the top](#)

### MBA Students

While undergraduate students constitute the majority of the participants, we normally have a few MBA classes. Depending on instructor preferences, MBA students may be put on separate teams or they can be put on mixed undergraduate-MBA student teams.

### Required Time Investment

The provided infrastructure makes the project is not as time consuming as it may seem at the first glance. Here are rough estimates of the time requirements for instructors and students:

INSTRUCTORS	Hours
Before the project starts:	
Studying documents in the project package (instructions and guidelines, on-line surveys, etc.)	1
Pre-project correspondence with other instructors and other set-up tasks	2
During the project:	
Correspondence with other instructors	2

Correspondence with students, expect on average, 2-3 emails/meetings per student, at 10 min each	10
Other unexpected tasks and issues that need to be addressed	2
After the project:	
Grading the reports	5
Distributing Achievement Certificates to the students (the certificates with student names already types in will be mailed to you for free)	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20-25 hours</b>
Research (optional):	
Data analysis, writing papers, etc.; completely voluntary	Depends on the level of involvement

STUDENTS	Hours
Before the project starts:	
Pre-project survey	0.5
During the project:	
Correspondence with teammates	5
Report write up	5
Other unexpected tasks and issues that need to be addressed	3
After the project:	
Post-project survey	0.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10-15 hours</b>

[Back to the top](#)

## FAQ, Challenges

### Language:

English is the working language of the project and it is expected that all participating instructors and students have at least basic English skills. Unfortunately, there is no easy way around it. Experience shows, however, that even most basic English communication skills are sufficient. Most communication is written (email, Google Docs) and students have enough time to read/write project-related materials, use a dictionary if needed, as well as use Google Translate and other excellent free on-line translation tools. The data collected so far indicates that poor language skills were not among concerns reported by the students. Diligence and commitment are much more important than English skills. If anything this is a good experience. Those who are native English speakers realize that not everyone speaks their language. For others, the project is a great motivator to learn English.

### Undergraduate or MBA:

Although undergraduate students have historically participated in the project, it does not mean that MBA students cannot participate. We may have mixed undergraduate/MBA teams or we may have separate MBA and Undergraduate teams. The project is certainly suitable for both levels and we can work out a solution that would work for everyone.

### What if a student drops a class?

With so many students involved in the project, it is inevitable that some teams will lose/gain a member or even two during the project due to dropouts or late enrollments. Changes in team composition are not uncommon in the real workplace so students would get a good preview of real-life challenges of international business cooperation. With about five students per team, minor team composition challenges (+ or – one or two teammates) are usually easily absorbed and do not substantially affect team performance. The key is to let students know in advance that such changes are possible and should they happen, students should not panic and just carry on with the project using available human power.

### Wrong emails:

Occasionally emails provided by the students turn out to be wrong or outdated. Usually this problem occurs in the first days of the project. When students encounter the problem, they tend to send a

message (sometimes angry) to their instructor. The instructors who receive the complaints then forward the message to the instructor of the student whose email is not working for further investigation. Usually it takes a day or two to resolve the issue. Once the correct email is available, the information is sent to all concerned parties.

#### Missing students:

With so many students involved in the project, it is inevitable that there will be a few students who will simply not do their share of work, some deal with family issues, others have emergencies, some simply don't care. These cases are extremely rare, but you will definitely see at least a few of them. It is important to inform your students that it is possible that some of their teammates will not be responding to their emails and not doing their share of work. Students should keep trying to establish contact with all of their teammates, but should not worry if some of their teammates never respond. If one or even two teammates do not do their share, the remaining three or four team members should simply keep working on the project and do their best with the available resources. The peer evaluations will allow for adjusting individual grades to reflect the level of involvement of each individual student.

The problem may be bigger when a teammate does not participate during most of the project, but then surfaces a few days before the deadline when most of the work had already been completed. Usually all parties claim that they tried their best to establish contact with their teammates but never received any response. The core team that kept working on the project is usually inclined to exclude the "missing" student from their team saying that the work had already been completed. The "missing" student is desperately trying to earn some points, tells that he or she tried to contact the teammates earlier but never received any reply or actually presents legitimate reasons why he or she could not participate earlier. There seems to be no perfect solution to this problem. However, the situation presents a great research opportunity. We have the following options:

- Let each team work it out among themselves and detail their decision in the report and/or the post-project survey. The solution and what led to it would be an interesting research question.
- Create new teams from the "missing and resurfaced" students and let them complete the project in the last few days before the deadline. Again, performance and dynamics in these "last-minute" teams would present an excellent research opportunity.
- Let "missing" students complete the project on their own. This is the most efficient option from the logistics point of view. The problem is that the International Collaboration Project is an exercise, not a test. The value of the project is in students gaining first-hand experience in international collaboration. Leaving students an option to complete the report on their own defeats the purpose of the project.

Somehow this issue has not been a problem in the previous semesters, but it may well be next time around, so we may need to discuss it further to be prepared.

[Back to the top](#)

#### **What Happens Next?**

Here is an approximate scenario of what will happen next:

##### December 20

**COMMITMENT:** Interested parties must commit to participating in the project by mid-late December. We should have the final list of instructors participating in the project around December 20. Once the list is finalized, you will receive names and emails of all partners participating in the project this semester. This will give us a few weeks to finalize all details before the semester starts. In the last week of December you will receive detailed instructions and all documents, tools and materials that you will need to participate in the project.

##### January 10

**COURSE MATERIALS:** Once the list of participants is finalized, you will receive all materials related to the project that we have left from the last semester. This will include the instructions for students, guidelines for instructors, project description that you may want to include your course outline, links to the on-line survey and documents that students will be using, files with step-by-step guidelines for how to use free on-line collaboration tools such as Google Docs, Facebook groups, Skype and the like in case your students want to give them a try. We will then have a few weeks to review everything and make revisions

if needed. This way, we should have all materials ready by around January 10 and you can start incorporating them in your course and sharing with your students once your semester starts.

February 10

**STUDENT LISTS AND TEAM ASSIGNMENTS:** Once you have the list of your students, we will have to pool them in one file and assign students to teams. The students will be randomly assigned to teams of about 6-7. We may need to make an exception in the following cases though. First, one instructor requested before that her students are put two on each team. The students were not very fluent in English and the instructor felt they would have an easier time if working in pairs. If you feel your students may need this form of accommodation, we can do that. Second, and this one is a little tricky, we may need to have a few all-American teams. Since one of the goals of the project is to explore the effects of diversity on team dynamics and performance, we may need a few culturally homogeneous teams for control purposes. Otherwise, all teams will be equally diverse making it impossible to use diversity as a variable in the analysis. I am not sure how to decide who gets to be on these geographically dispersed (different US universities) but culturally homogenous teams, but we will need 5-7 teams like this. Any suggestions would be much appreciated.

**EMAILS:** Another big task for January-February is to collect student emails. While at many universities students have university-provided email accounts (.edu), this is not the case for most schools outside North America and Western Europe. If this is your case, your students will have to give you their personal email addresses. My experience shows that approximately one in twenty of these will not be working, so it is VERY important that you test the emails first by sending your students a test message and making sure it went through. Otherwise, we will find about the problem from students in other countries who won't be able to contact your students, in which case it will take four-six emails and several hours of man-time per case to fix the problem and inform all concerned parties, not counting the frustration our students will experience.

Late February-March (the dates to be determined)

**INFORMING STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR TEAM ASSIGNMENTS:** While you should be able to share with your students the project instructions and all materials from day one of your semester, the names and contacts of their teammates will become available only about a week before the project starts. Once we have those, you will then give that information to your students on the official start date of the project or shortly before that and from that point on the students should be able to work on the project on their own. Important note: while you as instructor will receive the entire file with all student names and contacts, for privacy concerns it is strongly advised that you do not share the entire file with the students. Instead, please send each student only the names and contacts of the people on his or her team. It may take some extra time if you teach a larger class, but I hope you agree that this is necessary.

Late-February- April (the dates to be determined)

**ACTIVE PHASE:** During this period students will work on the project. First of all, before contacting their teammates, the students will have to complete the on-line pre-project survey. Then they will start by initiating contact with each other via email. Once contact is established, many they will decide to use more sophisticated tools such as Skype, Facebook, Dropbox, Google Docs, Google+, etc. to communicate with each other. We will give the students instructions for how to use each of these tools, but it is totally up to them to figure out what works best for their team. It will likely take the students a couple of weeks to come up with the idea for the product/service for their proposal. They will then have to figure out how they divide the workload and start writing the proposal. Towards the end of November, the students will be finishing up and submitting their proposals. Each team will write ONE report and the students will submit identical copies of the report to their respective instructors. Once the reports are submitted, the students will complete the on-line post-project survey and that will conclude the active phase of the project.

During this phase, you will be receiving all kinds of questions from your students, some complains that some of their teammates are not doing their share, other concerns – things that you normally see and deal with when running any team-based course project. I would expect somewhat more questions than usual, some questions may require consulting other instructors - but won't be too bad, but certain level of your commitment is expected.

Late April-Early May (the date to be determined)

DATA: You will be receiving the updated data files every week. The final complete dataset is expected to be available in early May once the project is over.

December 3-10

SUMMARY: Shortly after, we will need to summarize the data we collected on-line and share the summary with our students so that they can see how their responses, expectations of challenges, experiences, and performance compares to those of other students. This should give the students an extra layer of information and a chance to reflect on their experiences and learn more. Prepare the summary will be a major challenge, the data files are enormous and quite mixed, but I hope we will be able to get it ready before our students go on vacation.

GRADING (MARKING) REPORTS: Once the reports are submitted, we will have to grade them and using additional performance data (peer evaluation, etc.) you will have everything you need to give your students course grades. It is up to you how you grade the reports and decide on the grades for your students. However, experience shows that it works best if we all use the same evaluation form. This way, we can share our evaluations and since each team will have 5-6 students, we will end up with each reported grades by several independent reviewers. We will need these data for research purposes, but many instructors choose to use these ratings for the course grades as well. Again, it is up to you how you handle the grading issue, these are merely suggestions based on what we learned works well.

Summer of 2012

CONFERENCES AND MEETING IN PERSON: Most participating instructors are planning to attend next year's AIB and AOM conference.