EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ONCE MORE: THE ROLE OF NON-CREDIT ACADEMIC
ACTIVITIES IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS EDUCATION

By

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ABSTRACT

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Extensive research has proven that integrating experiential learning techniques with
traditional teaching methods improves student learning, success, and outcomes in higher
education institutions (Derous & Ryan, 2008; Dolan & Stevens, 2006; Eyler, 2009; Kuh &
Ikenberry, 2009; McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006; Pierson & Troppe, 2010). The proven success of
these methods has inspired many fields to introduce experiential learning activities. As a result,
international business education has also become a field that benefits from teaching through
experience (Hagan, 2012). Many researchers have studied the impact of these methods in
international business education, mostly focusing on classrooms and other for-credit activities.
However, the studies on the effects of experiential learning in non-credit academic activities
(NCAAs) have been limited in the past.

To situate my research in this space, I expand the examination of NCAAs and study
former students who have participated in an NCAA during their college enrollment. I enrich the
study with my experiences and offer a detailed profile of the aforementioned NCAA. My
research seeks to understand the role of experiential learning in non-credit academic settings and
examine student perceptions about what they believe they have learned as international business
skills. To accomplish this, I used Kolb's experiential learning theory as a framework that also
guided data coding, interview questions to former students, and further analysis. Five themes
were identified from the analysis of the interviews: learning through experience, impactful

experiential learning activities, personal development and self-confidence, employment, and learning international business. In this work, I offer my findings categorized under these five themes, an extensive profile of the NCAA I studied, my analysis and discussion of the research findings, my recommendations, and implications for future research.

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Aybige; my son, Arda; my parents, and my brother, who never stopped believing in me and supporting my dreams.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

NCAA   Non-Credit Academic Activity

CIB   Center for International Business

IB-Club   International Business Club

CIBER   Center for International Business Education and Research

IBR   International Business Resources

CCIBI   Community College International Business Institute

EGP   Export Growth Program

EDO   Economic Development Organization

CCID   Community Colleges for International Development

NACCE   National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship

MPS   Market Potential Study

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning is a process where knowledge is created through the insights gained from an experience while combining the constructs of previous knowledge, perception, and cognition with that experience (D. Kolb, 1984). Numerous experiential learning practices have been used extensively in higher education since the early 1990s, starting only a couple of years after David Kolb developed his experiential learning theory based on the philosophical roots of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget's previous studies (David A. Kolb, 2014). Some examples of experiential learning applications include service learning, field trips, cooperative education, and study abroad experiences. Researchers have studied experiential learning quite extensively, and research on experiential learning theory has always been highly interdisciplinary, focusing on various educational issues in a wide range of fields (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009b). It is well documented that incorporating experiential learning practices into traditional education settings provides better student learning outcomes, improves the persistence of students throughout school life, promotes student's social integration into campus life, and enhances student skills and competencies significantly (Derous & Ryan, 2008; Dolan & Stevens, 2006; Eyler, 2009; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006; Pierson & Troppe, 2010).

With all the validated advantages they bring to higher education, experiential learning techniques have also become a staple tool in teaching international business topics in business schools (Hagan, 2012). Traditionally, teaching in business schools relies heavily on lectures because topics taught are mostly in the form of concepts and theories, which are better explained with classroom teaching (Hodge, Proudford, & Holt Jr, 2014). However, using lectures alone would not have been enough for international business students to have successful learning

outcomes because the international business field has specific topics, such as cross-cultural education, and certain aspects, such as the need to learn business principles and practices utterly different from those of one's country of origin, that can be taught better with experiential learning activities (Neiva de Figueiredo & Mauri, 2013). Therefore, educators incorporated experiential learning methods into international business education through case studies, study abroad programs, internships, field studies, and work-based experiences. Still, these techniques are primarily used as standalone for-credit learning practices or integrated into classrooms as a part of the international business curriculum. A quick literature review reveals a plethora of studies that examined the use of these techniques in international business education. (Ahn, 2008; Hagan, 2012; McHann & Frost, 2010; Piercy, 2013; Varghese et al., 2012).

Even though most of these experiential learning methods have been studied extensively, practices that took place outside the scope of international business classrooms as non-credit activities did not attract much attention from researchers. Such non-credit academic activities (NCAAs) are extracurricular involvements, such as student employment in international business-related jobs on campus, that may provide students with experiences like conducting international business-related research, working with multinational companies through outreach programs, and creating educational materials such as online international business portals for students and faculty or blogs on current international business topics. It is a bit surprising that the role of experiential learning in international business education through NCAAs was not studied as extensively because NCAAs are known to be efficient practices with many advantages for student learning and employment in other fields of higher education (M. S. Cole, Rubin, Feild, & Giles, 2007; Derous & Ryan, 2008; J. Kaufman & Gabler, 2004; Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003). Moreover, the use of NCAAs in international business education deserves more attention

because of the differences between for-credit and non-credit settings. The mechanism behind student participation in course-related activities is very different than the mechanism behind student participation in NCAAs. For example, Fujita-Stark claims that student participation in non-credit activities is voluntary, and it is entirely the student's decision to choose what activities to join (1994). For these activities, students' primary motivation may be to satisfy the need to know without the effect of grades and requirements of a credential program (Fujita-Starck, 1994). Furthermore, research shows that student choice about NCAA participation is strongly aligned with identity (Thompson, Clark, Walker, & Whyatt, 2013). Since student motivation for learning may be different in an NCAA than in a classroom due to the reasons mentioned above, I argue that the experiential learning process of international business in a non-credit work environment may be different than that of a for-credit teaching environment. I believe that also means that it is vital to study the role of experiential learning in international business education through NCAAs to better understand the effectiveness of experiential learning in these practices and design new NCAAs for improved learning outcomes.

To fill in the gap and contribute to the literature, this research aims to study the role of experiential learning in international business education at the Center for International Business (CIB), a non-credit experiential learning environment at a large Midwestern higher education institution. CIB is a pseudonym for the actual center. The role of experiential learning in international business education at CIB will be explored as a case study, and it will be based on the accounts of former students who are now professionals currently pursuing their careers. The analysis of personal observations will also be a part of this study.

Background of the Problem

Over the last couple of decades, the unprecedented developments that took place in transportation, communications, and technology have given the world a new momentum (Stromquist, 2007) and transformed the world into an interdependent global space where differences amongst societies and across national borders have diminished (Mok, 2003; Urry, 1998). These advancements which created the phenomenon known as globalization are so powerful and pervasive that globalization and the reaction to globalization, known as internationalization (Altbach, 2007; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Chan, 2004), are both widely recognized as multifaceted, uncontrollable and inevitable trends (Altbach, 2004; Burnett & Huisman, 2009; Knight, 2007). As the virtual borders between nations diminished, the business community and governments all started competing for resources and customers in a global market that consists of players from all around the world (Dunning, 2014).

Moreover, as internationalization increased, global trade has been a major focus of the U.S. government and businesses in the past few decades. In the last twenty years, in particular, the total amount of goods and services exported by U.S. companies and organizations has grown from $794 billion in 1995 to $2.3 trillion in 2018 (*U.S. Census—U.S. Trade in Goods and Services*, n.d.). Today, exports constitute a significant portion, about 13%, of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) ("The World Bank—Exports of goods and services (% of GDP) | Data," n.d.). Given the interest in global trade, companies increasingly search for new graduates to hire that have knowledge and experience in international business (Vibhakar & Smith, 2005). Complicating the situation even more, the changes imposed by globalization and internationalization are so rapid that the gap between the versatile job skills sought after by businesses and the skills current graduates can offer has widened even further (Radermacher,

Walia, & Knudson, 2014). This has forced higher education institutions to introduce more international business education components into the business school curricula (Lindsey & Berger, 2009; Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005).

Traditionally, lectures have been the staple teaching technique in business schools because business education relies mostly on concepts, theories, and beliefs (Hodge et al., 2014). But when it comes to international business education, as meticulously explained by Neiva de Figueiredo and Mauri (2013), experiential learning methods are very suitable teaching methods for a couple of reasons:

> First, a cross-cultural interaction has a strong tacit nature that is difficult to teach. Second, the occasional need to work outside one's comfort zone when dealing with individuals from a completely different cultural background leads to the desirability of techniques that stretch the envelope of each individual's definition of that very "comfort zone." Third, in international business training, there is a need to develop sensitivities that allow for ethical judgment calls and for maintaining constructive relationships despite very different points of view. Fourth, these are acquired skills, but skills of complex acquisition because they need several layers of internalization by an individual to be absorbed. (p. 372)

Consequently, higher education faculty members use many different experiential learning techniques while teaching international business; methods, such as case studies, study abroad programs, work-based activities, and field studies (Ahn, 2008; Hagan, 2012; McHann & Frost, 2010; Piercy, 2013; Varghese et al., 2012). Along with the teaching faculty, these experiential learning methods fascinated researchers, too; thus, the role of experiential learning has been studied extensively in business education settings. In almost every case, these techniques were

proved to be very successful in improving student learning outcomes when it comes to teaching international business-related topics (Alon, 2003; Krbec & Currie, 2010; Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2009; Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005; Valentine & Cheney, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

The methods of experiential learning in international business education that have been studied intensively are almost always related to courses, classes, and credits. Other approaches to international business education, which are not credit-based, such as extracurricular student consultancy jobs that employ student assistants, have barely been studied. However, compared to for-credit activity participation factors, the factors of student participation in non-credit activities have several unique features that may have significantly different impacts on student learning outcomes.

First, participation in NCAAs has always been voluntary, whereas involvement in for-credit activities has been chiefly mandatory and occurs due to a course or program requirement. According to research, due to voluntary participation, "extracurricular activities evoke levels of concentration that rival the intensity of classroom examinations" (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997, p. 180). Because of this distinction, the learning motivation, and thus the learning outcomes, for students who participate in NCAAs may be completely different than the learning motivation and outcomes for students participating in for-credit activities (Fujita-Starck, 1994).

Second, according to Thompson, Clark, Walker, and Whyatt (2013), student identity plays a huge role in NCAA selection. Hirano (2008) defines identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 34). Emphasizing the

relationship between learner identity and learning outcomes, Burden and Williams (1997) claim that "the ways in which individuals view the world and their perceptions of themselves within the world, particularly within a learning situation, will play a major part in their learning and construction of knowledge" (p. 96).

Furthermore, it is a fact that NCAAs have proven to be fundamental for higher education for many other reasons. NCAAs positively impact students' academic and post-academic outcomes at every age level (Derous & Ryan, 2008; Mahoney et al., 2003). In addition to the learning outcomes and experiences, students who are involved in extracurricular activities are perceived as those who stand out, defy expectations, and are otherwise unique among their peers (J. Kaufman & Gabler, 2004); which is something employers are very interested in when hiring new graduates. New graduates benefit from NCAAs because they usually lack the work experiences that could signal to employers that the graduate has qualities, such as interpersonal or communications skills, traits students cannot otherwise demonstrate on resumes (P. Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2004). Graduates with more NCAAs in their resumes are invited to interviews more often than those without NCAAs (M. S. Cole et al., 2007), and graduates who participated in NCAAs receive more job offers than their peers who did not (Ming Chia, 2005).

Considering the positive findings of all the research conducted on the role of experiential learning in for-credit or course-based methods, one can assume that the student consultancy job at the CIB, an experiential non-credit work (Gerber, Marie Olson, & Komarek, 2012), would also have positive impacts on students learning of international business-related skills. Even though common sense says that the outcomes would be similar, the number of studies on the role of experiential learning in international business through NCAAs is so limited that there is not enough evidence to assess the outcomes of experiential learning in international business

education at the CIB. Consequently, this research aims to study the role of experiential learning in international business education at the CIB and explore stakeholders' perceptions about the student learning outcomes related to international business skills. The research questions of this study will be as follows:

Research Questions

1- What is the role of experiential learning in international business education through NCAAs?

2- What, if any, international business-related skills do participants of an NCAA believe they have learned while working at the CIB?

Significance of the Study

Previous studies and global trends prove that globalization and internationalization are increasingly becoming more prevalent in changing how governments work and companies operate. For a more robust economy, employers are looking for new graduates with international business-related skills, and the gap between the skills required by employers and the skills offered by the new graduates is widening (Vibhakar & Smith, 2005). To adapt to the change and deliver all-around globally competent graduates, higher education institutions are also increasingly building more internationalized content into education in curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities. This trend is far from reaching its peak yet, though. Therefore, it is essential to study every aspect of international business education in various settings at higher education institutions, particularly in NCAAs.

Furthermore, there is not enough evidence and guidance to assess the role of experiential learning in international business education in NCAAs because the number of studies in this field

is minimal. However, because NCAAs are very popular and common in higher education in the U.S., it is essential to understand the role of experiential learning in these non-credit activities. In addition, understanding the stakeholders' perceptions of international business-related skills is also crucial. By finding the answers to the research questions, I hope to offer a case for business schools nationwide and encourage them to create similar programs with NCAAs for international business education. Consequently, I hope to help provide more students with an opportunity for hands-on learning of international business-related skills.

Regarding accountability, as a duty to the taxpayers, it is also essential to assess the role of experiential learning in international business education at a nationally recognized center, the CIB, which is funded by taxes. The findings of this research will help evaluate the efficiency of such programs nationwide and assist us in understanding the beneficial and disadvantageous features of similar programs.

Definitions of Terms and Concepts

Non-Credit Academic Activity (NCAA) – These are activities that are not built into the curriculum; activities such as student employment, clubs, student organizations, sports teams, fraternities, and sororities. Students voluntarily join these non-credit activities for knowledge acquisition, engagement, and retention. The terms "NCCAs" and "extracurricular activities" are used interchangeably in this paper.

Experiential Learning - Experiential learning is any learning that supports students in applying their knowledge and conceptual understanding to real-world problems or authentic situations where the instructor directs and facilitates learning (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2009). In short, it is

learning through reflection on doing. Kolb defines experiential learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (David A. Kolb, 2014).

International Business - International business encompasses all commercial activities that take place to promote the transfer of goods, services, resources, people, ideas, and technologies across national boundaries. International business occurs in many different formats:

- The movement of goods from country to another (exporting, importing, trade)

- Contractual agreements that allow foreign firms to use products, services, and processes from other nations (licensing, franchising)

- The formation and operations of sales, manufacturing, research and development, and distribution facilities in foreign markets

The study of international business involves understanding the effects that the above activities have on domestic and foreign markets, countries, governments, companies, and individuals.

International Business Skills – In general, these skills can be explained as having knowledge of international markets and industries and understanding the challenges of doing business in those remote locations. Somebody with international business skills should be able to understand the differences between economies, cultures, governments, regulations, risks, and supply chains globally.

International Market Research – Collecting information about new markets to understand the business potential of those markets for the goods and services a company seeks to sell.

International Trade – Trade conducted with other countries for goods and services. International trade can happen in two ways. Importing is purchasing goods and services from other nations, and exporting is selling goods and services to other countries.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review consists of six sections. The first section starts with an introduction to the idea of experiential learning and discusses two different approaches to explaining the phenomenon. What follows is the history of experiential learning section and it explores the earliest studies that examined the role of experience and reflection in learning. The history section discusses the main aspects of these previous research that formed the background for Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. In the third section, I discuss Kolb's theory in detail; how he developed it, the main features of it, the main steps of experiential learning theory according to Kolb, and the learning styles he defined.

After the section that explains Kolb's experiential theory (1984), in the fourth section, I review the literature on the utilization of experiential learning in the higher education. With this section, I demonstrate how widely experiential learning methods have been used in education across many fields and what the learning outcomes were. Narrowing down, I move to the use of experiential learning in business education and analyze the various experiential learning techniques used in the business field and their learning outcomes. Then, I narrow it down even further to the level of experiential learning in international business education and I argue that experiential learning is a very effective teaching method for international business topics. In this section, I discover the two most prevalent methods used by almost every institution; study abroad programs and internships. Particularly, the role of experiential learning in internships is important to understand because the characteristics of the job at the CIB resembles the characteristics of an internship. Finally, in the last section, I explore the research on the use of experiential learning methods in NCAAs when teaching international business concepts and discuss the scarcity of available research.

Experiential Learning at a Glance

Connecting the ideas of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget about thirty-three years ago, David Kolb (D. Kolb, 1984) developed the Experiential Learning Theory and defined the learning as a cyclical process that includes four main steps "whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (D. Kolb, 1984, p. 38). According to Kolb, optimum learning takes place through a cycle of concrete experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and experimentation. The theory moves the student or the learner to the center and emphasizes the importance of the learner focused teaching where the learner is not passive but active and productively involved. With this emphasis given to learner, Kolb has also identified four types of learners or learner types. Assimilators are those who learn better when presented with sound logical theories, convergers are learners who learn better with practical applications of concepts and theories, accommodators learn better when provided with "hands-on" experiences, and finally divergers are learners who are successful with observations (A. Y. Kolb, 2005; A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009a; D. Kolb, 1984; David A. Kolb, 2014). Kolb's theory has been studied in various fields by many others in about one thousand articles only until 2001 (David A. Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001). Certainly, the interest in experiential learning increased even more since then with the increased academic interest in learning styles and because of the requirements of businesses and community for work-ready graduates.

Although the term 'Experiential Learning' is used to explain the way of learning by doing, researchers in the field of experiential learning tended to use the term in two contrasting senses (Brookfield, 1984). The first one is an institutional approach in which students are provided with immediate, relevant, and meaningful settings to acquire and apply new knowledge and skills. In this approach, such an environment is created so that the learners can actively

participate and interact with the realities that are studied. Hence, Borzak asserts that experiential learning is about "direct encounter with the phenomena being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter, or only considering the possibility of doing something about it."(Brookfield, 1984, p. 16).

The second type of experiential learning, which is a non-institutional approach to the topic, is more concerned with the individual learner rather than the learning environment provided by an institution (Brookfield, 1984). In this sense, learning takes place as a result of the individual's direct participation in life events and involves deliberate actions. Boydell argues that this type of experiential learning is the main path of learning for the majority of learners (as cited in (Brookfield, 1984, p. 16).

Regardless of the courses chosen to explain the phenomena, experiential learning practices were used extensively in higher education since the early 1990s and experiential learning theory research has always been highly interdisciplinary, focusing on a variety of educational issues in a wide range of fields (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009b). David Kolb, who has written about it broadly for years, and his associate, Ronald Fry, can be considered as the developers of the concept of experiential learning because, even today, their work still provides the central reference point for the majority of the studies. (David Allen Kolb & Fry, 1974).

Nevertheless, it is a line of earlier studies around experience and its effects on learning that have guided Kolb and Fry's work. As Kolb also acknowledged (David A. Kolb, 2014), the origins of his Experiential Learning Theory and his Experiential Learning Cycle are mainly found in the works of three prominent twentieth century scholars; John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. In the following section, I will explore the history of experiential learning and

highlight the focal points of these main studies that inspired Kolb and Fry creating the theory of experiential learning.

History of Experiential Learning

John Dewey, a philosopher and psychologist, is regarded as the greatest educational reformer of the 20th century, and he was the first person who studied the relationship between experiences and learning. According to Dewey, education back in the 1030s was too strict and authoritarian where delivering knowledge was the main focus. He argued that educators did not have any understanding of student's experiences (Dewey, 1938). Inspired by the progressive education movement at the turn of the 20th century, Dewey became a strong advocate of the idea that education should have a societal moral purpose (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008). He argued that education should provide a continuous and interactive experience for the learners and develop citizens who would actively contribute to the society (Dewey, 1938). His three-stage learning model, which has been considered as the theoretical framework for service learning has included objective observation, reflection of experiences, and cognitive judgment (Miettinen, 2000).

Dewey (Dewey, 1938) believed that unlike animals who live and survive with pre-wired instincts, for survival, humans highly rely on experiences they accumulate during a lifetime. Whether it is a negative or a positive experience, humans always learn something with an experience. The idea of continuity, he asserts, is related to the fact that every experience and the learning that occurs through that experience is stored and carried on into the future as new experiences are added to the memory of an individual. Those experiences act as building blocks of one's learning journey and they are added on top of another.

Dewey (Dewey, 1938) also defended the notion of interaction between experiences. He asserted that experiences are not only stored and carried on into the future, but also past experiences affected future experiences. According to Dewey, experiences in one's life interact with each other, and every new experience is evaluated with a custom set of lenses formed from past experiences. This interaction between the past and current experiences, he suggested, is the main reason why the same experience may have different impacts on different people with different pasts.

Kurt Lewin was another psychologist who contributed to the subject with his research on group dynamics, which he studied with his field theory (Lewin, 1943). In his field theory, Lewin defines the 'field' as the "totality of coexisting facts which are conceived of as mutually interdependent" (Lewin, 1951, p. 240) and claims that totality of a person's situation, also known as life space, determines the behavior of that person. He formulizes this relation as $B=f(PE)$ where B represents behavior, f is a function, P is the person, and E is the environment. With his formula, he describes behavior as a function of the person and environment interaction (Lewin, 1943). In essence, field theory also suggests that the experiences in the life space have implications on a person's way of seeing the world (Hall & Lindzey, 1957).

Lewin studied the relationship between the experience and learning further with his group dynamics research. During a study conducted by Lewin and his associates in 1946, a group of employees was gathered for a two-week training program where the participants were encouraged to engage in group discussion and decision making. During the study, Lewin observed that some of the participants did not agree to what the observers of the group reported about their behavior. These disagreements created productive discussions around behaviors and their interpretations (Lippitt, 1949). Therefore, Lewin concluded that interpretation of events and

experiences differ from person to person. Later, Kolb (D. Kolb, 1984, p. 10) commented on Lewin's findings as follows:

> Thus, the discovery was made that learning is best facilitated in an environment where there is dialectic tension and conflict between immediate, concrete experience and analytic detachment. By bringing together the immediate experiences of the trainees and the conceptual models of the staff in an open atmosphere where inputs from each perspective could challenge and stimulate the other, a learning environment occurred with remarkable vitality and creativity. (p. 10)

Similar to what Dewey suggested, Lewin also argued that learning is a continuous and reflective process during which learner is active but not passive (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009b). His approach to 'action research', a term Lewin coined, is composed of planning, execution, and evaluation steps (Lewin, 1946) that highly resemble the three-stage learning model of Dewey, which consisted objective observation, reflection of experiences, and cognitive judgment.

Jean Piaget's research was also instrumental in the construction of the experiential learning theory (D. Kolb, 1984). In contrast to Dewey's and Lewin's circular learning processes, Piaget suggested a four-step linear learning model for children. Piaget's cognitive development model explains how a child constructs a mental model of the world and considers learning as a continuous process (Piaget, 1951). Although Piaget's learning model was slightly different than that of Dewey's and Lewin's, the main idea he suggested that knowledge is not natural but is obtained via actions has also greatly contributed Kolb's experiential learning theory (D. Kolb, 1984).

Although the relation of experience and learning has been studied for years, it was the year 1970 when the term *experiential learning* was introduced for the first time with the rise of adult education. As adult learners started to come back to the higher education, institutions were required to offer course credits for adults that have previously acquired skills from work experiences and the term was used to explain the lifelong skills and experiences these adult learners had gained prior to continuing higher education (Hoffmann & Michel, 2010). Although organizations, such as the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning and Association of Experiential Education, were established in the first half of the 1970s to set standards for research on life and workplace learning, experiential learning was not considered as an influence for the traditional college students until Kolb created his theory on experiential learning. In the following section, I will explore the main themes of Kolb's experiential learning theory (D. Kolb, 1984) and explain the four stages of Kolb's experiential learning cycle.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

Inspired by the earlier research explored in the history of experiential learning section, Kolb created a holistic learning theory in 1984 that suggests learning is an ongoing process guided by experiences (Passarelli & Kolb, 2011). In his experiential learning theory, Kolb emphasizes the impact of experience on learning and argues that "No two thoughts are ever the same since experience always intervenes." (D. Kolb, 1984, p. 26). Therefore, he defines experiential learning as the process of knowledge creation through experience and asserts that concepts and ideas emerge and they are repeatedly reformed with experiences (D. Kolb, 1984). This definition is important understanding the way of learning for the student assistants that work at the CIB and will be explored further for its details.

With the contribution of Dewey's, Lewin's, and Piaget's learning theories, Kolb (D. Kolb, 1984) situated his experiential learning theory on the following six propositions.

1. *Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes*: Learning is better understood and facilitated when it's perceived as a course of connected events and actions but not only an outcome. Therefore, learning in higher education can be improved by engaging students in a process that includes feedback on the effectiveness of their learning efforts (D. Kolb, 1984). "…education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience..."(Dewey & Small, 1897, p. 79).

2. *Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience*: The process of learning a topic is not a one-time occurrence and it is repeated over and over again by drawing out one's beliefs and ideas on that topic with new experiences. Every time these beliefs and ideas are brought into focus again, they are examined, tested, and integrated with newly formed and refined ideas (D. Kolb, 1984). Kolb argues that this is a process of self-reflection and it is an essential part of learning. He concludes as "Put simply, … all learning is relearning." (David A. Kolb, 2014, p. 39)

3. *The process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world*: When all the learning models offered by Dewey, Lewis, and Piaget are considered, Kolb asserts, learning reveals itself as a tension and conflict-filled process (D. Kolb, 1984). The disagreement and difference with the learner's current understanding that's provoked by new experiences and the need to resolve this conflict is the main driver of the learning process. In the process of conflict resolution (learning), the learner is

called upon to make evaluations between opposing modes of action, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation (D. Kolb, 1984)

4. *Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world*: Learning is not just the result of cognition but it also involves the process of adaptation to the world. Essentially, it is considered a holistic process because it incorporates the integrated functions of thinking, feeling, perception, and action too (D. Kolb, 1984).

5. *Learning involves transactions between the person and the environment*: Supporting the previous propositions, this argument states that learning occurs as a product of interactions and experiences learner has with the environment.

6. *Learning is the process of creating knowledge*: Experiential learning theory proposes a constructivist theory of learning whereby social knowledge is created and recreated in the personal knowledge of the learner.

With regards to the student research and consultancy job at the CIB, some of these propositions pose more important than the others in relation to the topic of this research. The first one is the fact that learning is a continuous process. At the CIB, the majority of student assistants start working at the center either in their freshman or sophomore years and continue working until they graduate from the college. For this reason, the amount of time spent at the center, therefore, the time of exposure to international business-related topics, is measured with years and it is continuous. Consequently, Kolb's proposition that experiential learning is a continuous process can be used as a lens to examine students' learning at the center.

The second essential point is the importance of experience on learning. Student assistants at the CIB work on research projects as they collaborate with peers, faculty, and company professionals, manage projects, attend to site visits, conduct research on international markets, and prepare reports. Therefore, the work itself is a highly hands-on experience from start to finish for all the students. Hence, the role of experience in student learning can be best studied with Kolb's experiential learning theory (D. Kolb, 1984).

The third proposition in consideration argues that learning involves transactions between the person and the environment. The environment is also another important aspect of the work at the CIB because the center provides a work-like office environment to the student assistants. Students work on their own workstations where they sit with their peers in the middle section of the center. The center's atmosphere resembles a workplace where many corporate meetings are held and other international business-related activities are conducted. Hence, the role of environment in learning will also guide this study while understanding the students' learning.

Kolb's experiential learning theory consists of four stages: concrete experience (feeling), reflective observation (watching), abstract conceptualization (thinking), and active experimentation (doing) (D. Kolb, 1984). This cycle of four stages is depicted in Figure 1 below. In the first step, learner encounters a new experience, in the second step, learner thinks about that experience and evaluates it from different perspectives, then the learner creates concepts out of that experience and its reflection, and finally putting what has been learned in practice, the learner uses this new piece of knowledge for making decisions. As can be seen in Figure 1, "this process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner "touches all the bases"—experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned (A. Y. Kolb, 2005, p. 2). According to Kolb

(1984), experiential learning can begin with any of these four stages the theory defines. Kolb's

experiential learning theory and cycle are essential to understand for the purposes of this research

in two main ways. First, the four steps of the learning process will help to create the interview

questions and prompts so that I can capture the perceptions of the participants about their work at

the center thoroughly. Second, the cycle of experiential learning theory will guide how the

collected data will be studied during coding, categorizing, and analysis.

Figure 1:

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle
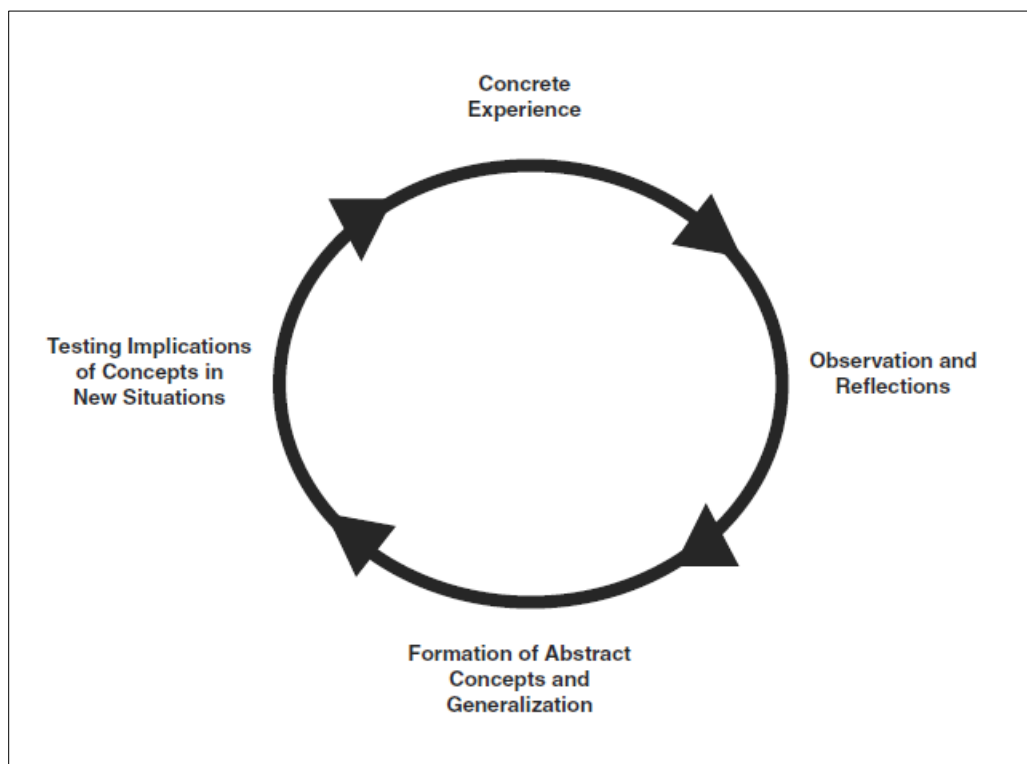
Based on illustration presented in "The Kolb learning style inventory-version 3.1 2005 technical specifications" by A. Kolb, 2005, Boston, MA: Hay Resource Direct, 200, 72. p.3

According to Kolb (1984), this cycle of idealized learning varies by learner's individual learning style and learning context (A. Y. Kolb, 2005). The idea of learning style is used to categorize the different learning approaches learners utilize. Depending on personality, past experiences, the environment, adaptive competencies, education and career, every individual tends to use a different learning style. With his research, Kolb (1984) categorized the learning styles in four different types: diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating.

Based on his research and clinical trial, Kolb (1984) explains the characteristics of these four learning styles as follows:

Diverging: A learner with diverging style has the concrete experience (feeling) and reflective observation (watching) as dominant learning abilities. These types of people tend to be more sensitive to their environment and they are good at looking at concrete situations from different perspectives. Kolb labeled this learning style as divergent because learners that use this style are generally better at generating new ideas and activities such as brainstorming; they have strong imaginative abilities and high awareness of meaning and values. Divergent learners are very interested in people, they have broad cultural interests, and they tend to be more emotional and imaginative (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009b). "In formal learning situations, people with the Diverging style prefer to work in groups, listening with an open mind to different points of view and receiving personalized feedback" (A. Y. Kolb, 2005, p. 5).

Assimilating: A learner with assimilating style has the reflective observation (watching) and abstract conceptualization (thinking) as dominant learning abilities. These types of learners are logical thinkers who are good at consuming large amounts of information and putting those into logical orders. In general, they are good at inductive reasoning and creating theoretical

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models. In contrast with the divergent learners, assimilators are less interested in people and more focused on ideas and abstract concepts (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009b). These types of people tend to be more successful in information and science careers. "In formal learning situations, people with this style prefer readings, lectures, exploring analytical models, and having time to think things through" (A. Y. Kolb, 2005, p. 5).

Converging: A learner with assimilating style has the abstract conceptualization (thinking) and active experimentation (doing) as dominant learning abilities. These types of learners are good at finding practical solutions to problems and applying ideas and theories. In general, converging type of learners are less interested in people and interpersonal aspects, therefore, they tend to be less interested in social issues and instead, they prefer technical tasks (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009b). These learners are successful in problem-solving, decision-making, and the practical application of ideas. "In formal learning situations, people with this style prefer to experiment with new ideas, simulations, laboratory assignments, and practical applications" (A. Y. Kolb, 2005, p. 5).

Accommodating: A learner with assimilating style has the active experimentation (doing) and concrete experience (feeling) as dominant learning abilities. In contrast with the assimilating type of learners, accommodating type of learners rely on logic much less and they tend to be more hands-on learners with higher levels of intuition. Rather than their own technical analysis, these types of learners rely more heavily on others for information and make decisions accordingly. Accommodating type of learners like to experiment new things with their gut feeling and in general, they are considered to be successful in professions such as sales and marketing (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009b). These learners are good at carrying out plans, completing tasks, and getting involved in new experiences. "In formal learning situations, people

with the Accommodating learning style prefer to work with others to get assignments done, to set goals, to do field work, and to test out different approaches to completing a project" (A. Y. Kolb, 2005, p. 5).

Since its development by Kolb (1984), experiential learning theory has been widely used by higher education institutions and practitioners in almost every discipline. In his article, Moore (Moore, 2010) explores the forms and issues in experiential learning and argues that "in certain circles, [Kolb's book] is a bible for practitioners" (p.4). Cantor (Cantor, 1997) also argues that experiential learning is an essential part of higher education for many reasons, thus, components of experiential learning practices can be found in almost every program and discipline. In this section, Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984) is explained in detail and his learning cycle will be used in this study as the theoretical framework for understanding learning during the consultancy job students conduct at the CIB. His learning styles are also included in this section only for the purposes of explaining the whole experiential learning theory. The importance of learning styles will be discussed for the future research once this study is completed. In the next section, I will explore the research conducted on experiential learning in higher education and explain how experiential learning has been utilized in some disciplines. This new section will provide a baseline for this study in terms of highlighting the common applications of experiential learning in higher education institutions.

Experiential Learning Applications

According to a study conducted by Trani (Trani, 1979) in five midwestern institutions and reached to more than four thousand students, the most frequently used teaching methods during the 1970s were lectures, discussions, laboratory, and audiovisual aids. However, the same

group of students also indicated that they would prefer a reduced number of formal lectures and more of the alternative teaching techniques. Although Kolb (1984) created the experiential learning theory only a couple of years after Trani's research, his focus was more on adult learners and the theory was not immediately applied to teaching in higher education. Luckily, the first research on the use of experiential learning theory in higher education was conducted only a few years after Kolb published his theory. Next section will explore the evolution of experiential learning in higher education and its applications in different proficiencies.

Higher Education. In a very early study, Certo (Certo, 1976) proposed the use of experiential activities for undergraduate management courses. He examined the use of experimentation in education and provided suggestions for instructors who aim to utilize experience as a teaching technique. In his design, he situated the instructor as the facilitator who encourages and initiates experimentation by "encouraging high levels of student participation; creating a learning environment conducive to learn new behaviors; providing theoretical clarification; and emphasizing both content and process" (Certo, 1976, p. 22).

It was Svinicki and Dixon (Svinicki & Dixon, 1987) who studied the theory of experiential learning with a focus on higher education for the first time. Their research suggested alternative ways to integrate experiential learning into higher education. They argued that experiential learning models can be used as a framework to organize classroom activities to improve instructional design. Svinicki and Dixon (1987) recommended using laboratories, observations, simulations, games, readings, and field work to create concrete experiences for students. They asserted that students can best reflect upon those experiences by keeping logs and journals, having discussions, and brainstorming. Furthermore, Svinicki and Dixon (1987) advised to instructors to use lectures, papers, model building, and projects for abstract

conceptualization. Finally, they indicated that simulations, case studies, projects, and homework would be beneficial for active experimentation.

In one of the earliest studies about the experiential learning in the counseling field, Sugarman (Sugarman, 1985) wrote an article on the benefits of using the experiential learning model for curriculum planning. According to Sugarman, students gain alternative learning skills with the use of experiential learning techniques. In another study, Pelsma and Borgers (Pelsma & Borgers, 1986) created an ethics course for counseling using the experiential learning theory. Basing their findings on the course outcomes, they suggested that the four steps of Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984) were instrumental in successfully promoting responsible and ethical reasoning skill development for students.

First-time adaption of the experiential learning theory in the engineering field also proved to be effective. According to James Stice (Stice, 1987), teaching in engineering fields mostly relied on abstract ideas and concepts without any room for practical testing of those concepts. He argued that because students were not able to test what they are lectured, they had issues with learning and knowledge retention in the engineering fields. To solve the problem, Stice redesigned a chemical engineering class incorporating Kolb's (1984) four stages of experiential learning. In his learning cycle, the first step started with the reflective observation; according to Kolb (1984), learning can start from any step in the cycle. In the reflective observation step, students listened to the lectures and later, thought about the lecture thoroughly to conceptualize abstracts. Following was the active experimentation stage where students completed their homework assignments. Finally, completing the learning cycle, students presented their work in the concrete experience stage. As an outcome, Stice has found out that students not only learned better but also gained more intellectual satisfaction from the course.

Higher education institutions were interested in reinvigorating engineering education in the 1980s. With this purpose, Brigham Young University started a training program in 1989 for its faculty in the College of Engineering and Technology. The program aimed to teach the basics of experiential learning to the faculty and promote the use of experiential learning techniques in their courses (Harb, Terry, Hurt, & Williamson, 1995). The program considered to be a success story as the majority of the faculty introduced the methods of experiential learning to their teaching. Some faculty even redesigned their courses to reflect upon all the steps of the experiential learning theory. Student feedback was also positive about the new teaching techniques and the program created a momentum that improved interest and enthusiasm for teaching among the faculty.

In another interesting research in the engineering field, Sharp (Sharp, 2001) studied the role of experiential learning in teaching teamwork communication to engineering students. Her work was based on a ten-year ongoing study of the learning styles of the engineering students. With her study, Sharp found that, although Kolb's all four learning style categories (1984) are represented in the engineering student sample she studied, the majority of the students were convergers and assimilators. She further discovered the positive effects of experiential learning on teamwork communication education. She concluded, "Classroom experience shows that students can improve teamwork skills with Kolb theory by recognizing and capitalizing on their strengths, respecting all styles, sending messages in various ways, and analyzing style differences to resolve conflict and communicate effectively with team members" (Sharp, 2001, p. 2).

The theory of experiential learning has been used in many other fields with success too. In mathematics, Travers (Travers, 1998) studied students' self-regulation of learning, which he

argues is one of the key elements for high academic success and found that experiential learning

stimulates self-regulation on students. In history, Sprau and Keig (Sprau, 2001) argued that

history courses are inherently uninteresting for the undergraduate students because of the way

courses are taught and the assignments are very boring. To overcome this problem, they

introduced experiential learning to history classes with success by integrating movies relevant to

the teaching topics and had the students watch, reflect upon, think, and write about the history

topics in the movies. In nursing, one of the first studies on experiential learning was conducted in

the second half of 1990. Stiernborg, Zaldivar, and Santiago (Stiernborg, Zaldivar, & Santiago,

1996) compared the outcomes of traditional didactic teaching and experiential learning

techniques in an HIV/AIDS training program for nursing students in the Philippines and found

that experiential learning techniques increased knowledge acquisition of the nursing students

significantly when compared to didactic teaching. In medicine, Cleave-Hogg and Morgan

(Cleave-Hogg & Morgan, 2002)studied the outcomes of experiential learning for undergraduate

medical students with the help of an anesthesia simulation and the students reported high levels

of satisfaction with the overall experience and practice. Furthermore, the experiential learning

theory has also been used in a wide range of fields to design group projects for undergraduate

students (e.g. Arbuckle et al., 2013; G. H. Brown, 1999; Facca-Miess, 2015; Mandeville, 1994),

to determine learning styles of students (e.g., Hertzog & Lieble, 1996; Manolis, Burns, Assudani,

& Chinta, 2013; Smith, 2002), and to help students develop key skills (Groves, Bowd, & Smith,

2010; Groves et al., 2010; e.g., Haigh & Kilmartin, 1999; Huerta-Wong & Schoech, 2010).

The purpose of this section was to explore how popular and widespread the use of

experiential learning theory has been among a range of higher education fields since the

introduction of the theory by Kolb (1986). The theory has not only been used in almost every

field in the realm of higher education but has also been studied interdisciplinary on many different higher education topics such as student engagement, retention and success, learning and teaching, faculty training, and course and curriculum design. The next section will focus on the literature about the applications of experiential learning theory in the business field and will review the studies.

Business Education. According to Hodge, Proudford, and Holt (2014), "Unlike other forms of education, such as medical schools, where students are trained in simulated real-world scenarios, business education relies mostly on concepts, theories, and beliefs." (p.2). Hence, teaching in business schools includes vast amounts of lectures. Although traditional classroom teaching is very important in laying the groundwork for concepts and theories, integration of experiential learning methods to the classroom offers "dramatic improvements in student skills and competencies." (Dolan & Stevens, 2006, p. 405). Supporting this idea, P. McCarthy and H. McCarthy (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006) also assert that experiential learning activities are "among the most powerful teaching and learning tools available" (p.204). Because of these reasons, experiential learning was being used in business education even before the introduction of experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) with success. Especially in this decade, there is even more interest in experiential learning in business schools and a growing consensus that experiential learning activities provide direct learning opportunities to the students (Hagan, 2012). Therefore, given the nature of content taught in business schools and the fact that lectures are commonly used while teaching business concepts, it is vital to use experiential learning techniques in business education to improve student learning.

Educators and researchers used and evaluated the outcomes of numerous experiential learning methods in business disciplines throughout the years. Out of all, written case studies and

active case studies, where students work on real business problems with real organizations (Burns, 1990), seems to be the most common techniques. Elam and Spotts (Elam & Spotts, 2004) introduced a live case study in their marketing class and provided guidelines to educators for successful implementation of live cases. Students who attended their study reported that live cases were more productive than listening to a lecture and their understanding of the marketing concepts was enhanced with the project. In a very recent and similar study, DeSimone & Buzza (DeSimone & Buzza, 2013) used a marketing incubator technique for a consumer behavior course and discovered that working with organizations to help with their marketing problems significantly increased students' critical thinking capabilities.

There were also some concerns about using only written case studies. For example, McCarthy and McCarthy (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006) asserted that, although there are benefits of using case studies, those benefits cannot "substitute for learning that occurs through experiential learning activities, which provide students with a direct, personal encounter" (p.201). As a result of a semester-long study conducted in a business communications course, they have found out that using job shadowing for business students has a higher impact on teaching when compared to using written case studies and job shadowing was preferred over case studies by a significant percentage of students. Another study on using work-based experiences in business education found positive educational outcomes as well. Students who attended work-based experiences reported that they learned better through hands-on experiences and real work practices when compared to learning only with lectures and textbooks (Lewis, 2004). It is important to emphasize the successful usage of work-based experiences in business education because the nature of work at the CIB is also a work based hands-on experience where students work on international business-related tasks. The only difference is the work at the CIB

is not related to any course credits whereas the examples given in the previous studies were all integrated with classes.

Field trips are also prominent methods of experiential learning highly utilized by business schools and they are also proved to be very effective teaching business concepts to students. For example, Sutton-Brady (Sutton-Brady, 2008) included a field trip to her marketing class in the form of visiting a tradeshow after which students prepared a marketing strategy for a company. Even though it was a very short experience for the students, her assessment of the student reports showed that the students "grasped and displayed the concepts way more effectively" (p.5) when compared to the students in the previous sessions who did not attend any field trips. Students feedback was also very positive. In another research, even virtual field trips were successfully used in a marketing class for undergraduate students (Mathews, Andrews, & Luck, 2012). During a four-semester long study, students attended 3D virtual field trips where branding practices were used for product promotion virtually. Despite the fact that there have been technological challenges and that some students chose not to participate the virtual field trips, overall student feedback was positive.

This section of the literature review explored the methods of case studies, work-based experiences, and field trips as experiential learning techniques. As the research reveals, all these methods are effective practices in teaching business topics to students and they highly contribute to the traditional classroom education. Even technology supported virtual tours seems to be a good addition to the classrooms.

International Business Education. International business education, the branch of business education this research is interested in, has increasingly been popular among students

and higher education institutions mainly in the last couple of decades due to the effects of globalization (Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005). Research that examined experiential learning theory as a whole in international business education can be considered relatively new as the earliest related research was conducted in the first half of 2000s; only about a decade ago. However, older studies were conducted on the role of specific experiential learning practices in international business education. This section of the literature review will examine the research conducted on two main techniques of experiential learning very commonly used in international business education; study abroad programs and internships. For the purposes of this study, it is particularly essential to understand the role of internships in international business education as an experiential learning method because the student work in CIB highly resembles an internship where students work on international business-related projects during daily shifts four or five days a week.

Study Abroad Programs. Study abroad programs are one of the oldest and most common practices used for business education; for international business education in particular. According to the Office for Education Abroad at the Michigan State University ("Office for Education Abroad: History," 2017), America's first officially credited study abroad program was launched by the University of Delaware in 1923 and followed by Smith College in 1925 and Mount Holyoke College in 1926. Certainly, the number of study abroad programs have grown significantly since then and during the academic year of 2015/16, 325,339 American students attended study abroad programs ("Institute of International Education Open Doors Report on International Education Exchange," 2017). While the expected learning outcomes of study abroad programs may change from one school to another, in general, academic and intercultural

competencies are considered to be common expected benefits for all institutions (Greenholtz, 2000; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003).

The learning outcomes of study abroad programs have been consistently positive. In a study that Ingraham and Peterson (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004) conducted at Michigan State University with more than 1,100 students from 295 study abroad programs in 40 countries, students reported that by attending to the study abroad programs they gained highly in the areas of intercultural awareness, personal growth, academic performance, language learning, and professional development. Later, Cory and Martinez (Cory & Martinez, 2008) suggested using a pre- and post-study abroad survey that will help evaluate the learning outcomes of students more efficiently. Moreover, they also recommended regularly assessing students during the study abroad experience to avoid any possible problems students may experience. Similarly, Anderson and Lawton (P. H. Anderson & Lawton, 2011) also asserted that both qualitative and quantitative tools must be used to measure the learning outcomes for students who attended study abroad programs.

Another research which examined students' attitudes toward study abroad programs also found interesting results. In their study, A. Kuzma, J. Kuzma, and Thiewes (Kuzma, Kuzma, & Thiewes, 2012) compared different business majors' preferences with regards to study abroad programs participation. Although the majority of students in business majors expressed interest in attending study abroad programs and believed that those programs provide great value, students from marketing and management majors were more willing to attend to study abroad programs than accounting and finance majors. In a long lasting research conducted over an eight-semester period, L. Engle and J. Engle (Engle & Engle, 2004) discovered that students who attended long-term (full year) study abroad programs demonstrated greater gain in cross-cultural

sensitivity when compared to students who attended to short-term (one semester) programs. Nevertheless, they observed an overall increase in cross-cultural sensitivity for all students regardless of the length of the study abroad programs they attended. Moreover, Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009) found that students who attended study abroad programs gained intercultural competence.

Internships. Classroom environment and job environment are completely different realms. As Quillien (Quillien, 1993) argued decades ago, traditional classroom teaching cannot demonstrate the facts and features of a real work environment. Because of this shortcoming, most of the skills students learn during internships cannot be taught with traditional classroom teaching (Barr & McNeilly, 2002). The internship is an experiential learning opportunity for students that "provide a student with the opportunity to experience a professional work setting while typically still enrolled at an academic institution" (P. A. Kaufman et al., 2011, p. 287).

A quick comparison of the characteristics of internships, field trips, and work-based experiences reveals that they are very similar in terms of student experience. Although there are differences in the level of experiences gained, all these three experiential learning techniques provide some level of exposure to real life environment to the students. As the previous sections of this literature review affirm, teaching outcomes of field trips and work-based experiences have always been positive. Therefore, one can argue that internships should also offer great learning opportunities for students. Although there seems to be a common consensus about this perception, Narayanan, Olk, and Fukami (Narayanan, Olk, & Fukami, 2010) assert that the "literature on internship experience is largely descriptive and anecdotal" (p.62). They claim, while experiential learning is believed to be the main learning mechanism in internships, there is

actually very limited empirical evidence to prove that experiential learning successfully takes place in internships.

However, there is a plethora of research on the student and employer perceptions about internships, the role of internships on employability, and the general benefits of internships for students. For example, in their study, Cole, Kolko, and Craddick (M. A. Cole, Kolko, & Craddick, 1981) found that internships provide a level of maturity and experience to students that reduce the level of school-to-job transitioning anxiety, which is known to be a real factor affecting the majority of new graduates (Le Maistre & Paré, 2004). Taylor (Taylor, 1988) found that internships help students refine career interests and values, which may eventually be contributing to reducing student anxiety too. Moreover, the experience internships offer to students provide significant advantages to them during employment, when compared with students who do not possess that level of experience, which is highly sought after by employers (Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000). In their study, Gault, Redington, and Schlager (2000) surveyed 500 undergraduate alumni and they have found out that alumni who had internships during school received job offers an average of 10 weeks earlier than their peers who did not attend to internships and the starting salaries were about 10% higher as well. Endorsing this employability advantage, recruiters also state that internships help students earn a competitive advantage over other potential employees (Raymond, McNabb, & Matthaei, 1993). Employers also take advantage of internships because as they work with the students during the internship period, they gain enough knowledge about the students' skills and therefore, make better decisions as to which students have a better fit for the job (Cook, Parker, & Pettijohn, 2004).

When it comes to students, Hergert (Hergert, 2009) examined the perceptions of students by analyzing 114 students' internship experiences. His study concluded that students place great

value on internships when the internships are designed to meet their career goals. Students also reported that internships are better teaching the following skills when compared to school: creative thinking, computer application usage, networking, interviewing, and relationships building (Gault et al., 2000). With regards to creating successful internship experiences for students, Rothman (Rothman, 2007) recommended providing supervision and mentoring to interns, giving them challenging tasks and communicating the expectations clearly.

Extracurricular Activities. The research on the role of experiential learning in extracurricular activities (ECAs) or non-credit activities is almost nonexistent. It almost feels like researchers do not see experiential learning as a part, or an important part, of NCAAs. Supporting this idea, The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) 1986 Memorandum recommends ECAs as an alternative to experiential learning (Gentry, 1990). The fact that there is no generally-accepted definition for ECAs (Bartkus, Nemelka, Nemelka, & Gardner, 2012) may be one of the reasons behind this research scarcity. As Abrams (Abrams, 2002) claims, generally-accepted definitions precede classification and classification enables analysis. Therefore, the lack of a generally accepted definition may be the main reason why the overlap of experiential learning and NCAAs were not studied in detail.

In one of the few studies available, R. Bell and H. Bell (Bell & Bell, 2016) examined the benefits of experiential learning for students in an extracurricular entrepreneurship competition. 29 students who attended this competition for a start-up funding reward were interviewed to understand their perceptions about the learning benefits of such an activity. Although this study claims to explore the role of experiential learning, no investigation was done to discover whether the students go through Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1986) or not. The interview questions were aimed at "focusing educational and skills-based benefits students believed they had

obtained as a result of their participation in the project" (p.757). At the end of the three-stage competition, students reported that they enjoyed the overall experience and they felt they experienced different feeling through the three stages. R. Bell and H. Bell (2016) summarized their findings as follows:

>The first stage of the process demystified the entrepreneurial process and helped students understand how an idea can become an enterprise. It helped students feel like they could someday be an entrepreneur, and gave them the affirmation that comes from feeling respected by mentors. In addition, it imparted the enterprising skills needed to complete a business plan. The second stage took students from feeling they could someday be an entrepreneur to feeling like it was a tangible action they would undertake. The role of working in a group and taking on a specific role to facilitate an overall outcome was also observed. The third stage imparted students with enterprising skills that students, in developing their entrepreneurial ideas, may have minimized. (p. 761)

On the other side, researchers Choi and Park (Choi & Park, 2017) studied the experiences of nursing students during a dementia-outreach program. Although not related to the business field, 21 students attended a two-month community-based experiential learning program serving people with dementia and researchers assessed the change in students' self-efficacy and competence after project participation. Pre- and post-participation surveys have found that students increased both self-efficacy and competence in their fields through this extracurricular program.

At the time of this literature review, no studies that examined solely the role of experiential learning in international business education with extracurricular activities were

located. As explained in Chapter 1, despite the fact that NCAAs are known to be beneficial for student learning outcomes and employability, there is no evidence to support that experiential learning takes place at an extracurricular activity; the proof for the existence of Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984) is missing in particular.

Summary of Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to examine experiential learning in general, explore the history or experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), and detail the main aspects of his theory and experiential learning cycle. The four main steps of this cycle, concrete experience (feeling), reflective observation (watching), abstract conceptualization (thinking), and active experimentation (doing) will guide this research as the main framework to prepare the interview questions, coding, and with the analysis of the data.

Another purpose of this literature review was to delve into the uses of experiential learning theory in higher education and in business schools to demonstrate how widely experiential learning is being used in almost in fields of higher education since its development. Moreover, the significance of using experiential learning methods in the business education field, which is also valid for international business education, is also explained.

In the final two sections, research on experiential learning in international business education and in NCAAs is investigated. Two main methods, study abroad programs and internships have emerged as the most common practices of teaching international business with experiential learning. The findings of research on internships, in particular, are essential to understand as the characteristics of the work at BIC highly resembles internships. In the last section, this literature review tried to depict the fact that there is very limited research on the role

of experiential learning in international business education with NCAAs. The purpose of this research is to examine an NCAA, the student work at CIB, and discover the role of experiential learning at this center, thus contribute to the literature and prepare a best practices case study for the other higher education institutions that would consider developing similar program.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Restatement of Problem, Purpose, and Questions

This research will explore the role of experiential learning in international business education with non-credit academic activities. One such activity is the student consultancy job conducted at CIB, a nationally recognized research and education center for international business. About 25 students work at the center every day of the week with an average of 10 hours a week. Collaborating with peers, faculty, and company professionals, students' work on international business-related tasks, such as conducting international market research, analyzing international trade statistics, writing blogs on international topics, and updating the center's online international portal with relevant content. In order to study the role of experiential learning at the center, the research will answer the following research questions:

1- What is the role of experiential learning in international business education through NCAAs?

2- What, if any, international business-related skills do participants of an NCAA believe they have learned while working at the CIB?

Method: Case Study

In order to successfully explore the guiding research questions, researchers should choose methods meticulously and then, implement those selected methods in the study (Duke & Mallette, 2011; Shavelson & Towne, 2002). After careful consideration, I decided to use an exploratory single case study to answer my research questions in this study. One of the most important advantages of using case studies is that "the detailed qualitative accounts often produced in case studies not only help to explore or describe the data in real-life environment but

also help to explain the complexities of real life situations which may not be captured through experimental or survey research" (Zainal, 2017, p. 4). Exploratory case studies are used to explore any given phenomenon in the unit studied (Zainal, 2017). With these types of case studies, researchers use more open-ended general questions to encourage participants to talk more about themselves. "These general questions are meant to open up the door for further examination of the phenomenon observed" (p. 3). In nature, this qualitative case study is a theory-guided case study. According to Levy (Levy, 2008), theory-guided case studies are "explicitly structured by a well-developed conceptual framework that focuses attention on some theoretically specified aspects of reality and neglects others" (p. 4). In this study, the unit of analysis will be the CIB. This research will examine CIB as a non-credit academic environment (NCAA) as a case to better understand the role of NCAAs in international business education so that the findings of this research can potentially inform future practice of teaching international business and the development and utilization of NCAAs across higher education institutions.

Research Paradigm

This study is conducted through the worldview of social constructivism. According to social constructivism, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meaning of their experiences. These meanings can vary from one to another individual. And the role of the researcher, in social constructivism, is to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas (Creswell, 2014). The purpose of the researcher is to examine the participants' views of the situation being studied and try to construct meaning out of the participants' views (Glesne, 2016).

For this study, I am particularly interested in the perceptions of the students previously employed in a non-credit academic environment and what they believe they have learned about international business working in this environment. With detailed interviews, I captured their understanding and perceptions of the topic. I also provided my personal experiences, thoughts, and ideas about the Center, its operations, and the student employee's work. Therefore, social constructivism approach is the most appropriate route to follow during the execution of this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

According to Yin (Yin, 2013), there are six possible sources of evidence for case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. Yin (2103) contends that case studies have a unique strength that other research methodologies may not have. He states the unique strength of a case study comes from "its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations" (p. 8). This research will use interviews and personal observations for data collection purposes.

Institutional Review Board. This study was conducted in line with the Michigan State University's institutional review board requirements and all applicable federal, state, and institutional policies are followed. Participants were contacted, and interviews were conducted until only after full permission has been successfully granted by the institutional review board.

Research Site. The research will be conducted in the CIB, an international business education and research center located under the roof of the business school of a large Midwestern higher education institution. The center is an autonomous unit with ten dedicated

staff members and about twenty-five student employees. The CIB is the member of a group of nationwide institutions appointed with the role of advancing international business education and research by the Department of Education, therefore, it is funded by the Department of Education and other state agencies. The center hosts a leading academic international business organization with thousands of members from about ninety countries, administers a state-wide known export growth program, provides international business education to the faculty of over one thousand community colleges nationwide, hosts an online international business portal with millions of users globally, and coordinates international business-related events and trainings for the state businesses and educators. Student employees at the center work a minimum of ten hours per week each. One group of students' responsibilities consist of conducting international market research and writing reports on international markets and industries. Another group of students mostly work on the online international business portal, and they update content, write daily blogs on international business topics, work on international trade statistics, create new sections and designs, and maintain the current sections of the portal. The students usually start working at the center during their freshman year and continue working until they graduate. The center is known for supporting local businesses, faculty, and students in the international business area.

Participants. This case study collected data through interviews of the thirteen former students who are currently pursuing their professional careers. Once approved by the IRB, participants were contacted via social networks, emails, and through other personal networks, and voluntary participation was requested via recruitment emails. A letter of consent was shared with all participants, and they are requested to select their own pseudonyms that are used throughout this dissertation to identify participants while respecting their privacy.

Interviews. A graduate student assistant is hired to organize and conduct the interviews on my behalf. Doing so offered a more comfortable environment for the participants, where they express their thoughts and ideas freely. Afterall, many of the participants worked under my supervision during their college years and they might find it hard to openly discuss their feelings and experiences about the Center with me. We conducted semi-structured interviews to allow participants to speak up their thoughts freely while guiding them slightly to ensure that the data collected answers the research questions. Although most of the interviews were planned as face-to-face meetings, all of them were conducted remotely over Zoom video conferencing tool due to the COVID-19 pandemic requirements.

Preparation of the interview questions were based on the elements of experiential learning theory and experiential learning cycle (D. Kolb, 1984). The four steps of the experiential learning cycle guided the questions. The questions were open-ended questions. Prompts were used as needed and encouraged participants to share their views freely about the phenomenon. Participants were provided a consent letter for information before the interviews.

Observations. Observations are suggested as an essential data collection technique for case studies (Yin, 2013). Therefore, I gathered my years of observations working at the Center and used them during my analysis. With my observations, I specifically focused on experiential learning theory with a purpose of capturing any student work and behavior that may help the guiding questions of this study. I also wrote a detailed portrait of the Center, which explains its history, current status, and projects and programs. With this portrait, I hope to help my audience to understand the setup of the Center, how it operates, and its purpose.

Data Analysis. In a case study, data collection and analysis are developed simultaneously in an iterative process. While doing so, describing data and developing categories out of the data to place behaviors or processes are the important steps to follow. Once categorization is complete, the data can be organized around certain topics, key themes, or central questions. As a final step, data must be analyzed to discover whether it fits or fails to match the previously formed categories (Hartley, 2004).

The interviews were transcribed automatically by the Zoom conferencing tool and cleared of mistakes by the graduate assistant who later went over the interview recordings and matched with the transciptions. The transcriptions were verbatim. No identifying information was included in any of the transcriptions and participants were referred to by the pseudonym they chose at the beginning of their interviews. Interviews were analyzed using open coding of the transcriptions and interview video recordings. Once the data was coded, it was grouped together based on similarities in the code to further analyze and uncover any themes among the interviews, as suggested by Creswell (2014).

Trustworthiness

"Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account" (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). Researchers can use various methods to assure reliability and data triangulation is one of them. To achieve credibility, I constructed my own triangulation structure to avoid any mistakes in data collection and interpretations. First, the existence of a second person, my student assistant, helped me double check all data to make sure the transcriptions were accurate and reflective of all interviews. Second, utilization of the Zoom

technology provided recorded interviews and automatically created transcripts, which reduced human error significantly. Moreover, I communicated the purpose of the study, the scope of the interviews, and the implications with the participants while requesting their involvements. The participants were also informed by the student researcher at the beginning of the interviews before they started answering the questions. On the other side, I also used my years of experience, keeping all the pitfalls I discussed in the 'Researchers Positionality" in mind, as a set of lenses to analyze what students shared in their interviews and to assure authentication.

Limitations

There are always limitations to research studies due to several factors, such as the available resources or the conditions of research subjects and their relationships with the researcher. In my research, the limitations involved my relationship to the participants and the fact that I needed to use a student researcher for the interviews. All the participants were former student researchers I supervised at the Center during their college years. The interviews might not deliver desired results if I conducted the interviews because the participants could hesitate to share their experiences and feeling openly with me due to our long-lasting relationship. To overcome that challenge and with the suggestion of my dissertation committee, I hired a student researcher to conduct the interviews on my behalf. Although my assistant was highly effective and efficient while working with the participants and delivering results, I felt there were things that limited the research.

While reviewing the interview recordings of some participants, there have been times I felt like my assistant could have asked better probing questions to investigate even further and deeper. I was able to notice these missed opportunities because of my extensive involvement

with the Center over a decade and my experiences. Furthermore, there have been times where my assistant was not as accurate as I would be while answering some questions of participants. For instance, in one case, the participant did not understand what the question was about and asked the student assistant for further elaboration. As an answer, my assistant told the participant what others gave as examples, which in my opinion might misled the participant during the interview.

Researcher Positionality

As one of the assistant directors of the CIB, which is the unit of analysis for this research, I am considered an insider researcher and it is important to discuss my role in this research and address possible concerns. Especially for any insider researcher utilizing qualitative methods, it is crucial to examine and understand the advantages and disadvantages of being an insider. By doing so, the insider researcher can avoid the possible pitfalls insiders are more likely to face and adopt the best practices while conducting research so that the research can be considered a credible one. To take advantage of the potential gains of being an insider researcher while staying away from the drawbacks, an insider must establish an explicit understanding of the possible effects of perceived bias on data collection and analysis, be conscientious about the elevated ethical issues related to the anonymity of the institution/organization and participants, and also recognize the complications of her influencer role as an insider on coercion, compliance, and access to privileged information (Smyth & Holian, 2008).

The challenges awaiting an insider may surface during different phases of the research process and create difficulties. Coghlan and Brannick (Coghlan & Brannick, 2009) have identified the following as three of the possible challenges an insider researcher may experience.

1- *Preunderstanding*. Every insider researcher is initially a member of the organization she

plans to conduct the research in. Therefore, she always possesses a prior knowledge of

the organization, its culture, processes, and members. This prior knowledge may blur

what the insider wants to learn, what she knows, and what she thinks she knows, thus,

may create a barrier between her research questions and the answers she looks for.

Coghlan and Brannick (Coghlan & Brannick, 2009) argue this challenge may be avoided

by holding closeness to the data while having distance from it.

2- *Role duality*. When the organizational and researcher roles of an insider collide, the

researcher is likely to experience role conflict and encounter loyalty tugs, identification

dilemmas, and behavioral claims.

3- *Managing organizational politics*. Insider researchers must clearly understand the

political issues pertaining to the organization in question so that informed decisions can

be made what topics to engage, in working the political system, in maintaining their

credibility as an effective driver of change and as an astute political player. Therefore, it

is essential to assess the power and interests of stakeholders relevant to the research.

Others have also identified additional possible challenges of being an insider researcher as overlooking certain routine behaviors, making assumptions about the meanings of events without seeking verification, overlooking some routine aspects of the unit of analysis, and not being able to see the bigger picture due to being too close to the research environment (Herrmann, 1989; Rooney, 2005; Sikes & Potts, 2008; Smyth & Holian, 2008). It is also possible that the participants of the research may assume that the insider already knows what they know and chose not to share those with the insider to avoid redundancy (Drever, 1995).

On the other hand, an insider researcher is also known to have certain advantages over an outsider researcher. As someone from inside the organization subject to research, the insider researcher speaks the organizational language, which may include acronyms and special terms that may slow down, if not hinder, the communication with the stakeholders and participants for any other researcher from out of the same organization. Moreover, all organizations use specific practices and tools that potentially may be included and discussed in the research. An insider who knows how those practices work or how to use those tools will certainly have some advantages over an outsider while asking the relevant questions and situating those practices and tools within the research.

Obviously, an insider researcher already knows the culture of the organization, values adopted by all members, and things considered as taboo by the members, all of which an outsider would not be able to fully understand without living and working in the same environment for a while (Herrmann, 1989). "Such researchers (*insiders*) have an opportunity to acquire '*understanding in use*' rather than '*reconstituted understanding*'" (Coghlan, 2003, p. 456). The insider also understands the formal and informal power structures among the members and it is easier for an insider to obtain the necessary permissions for accessing places, documentation, and records when compared to an outsider (Herrmann, 1989).

Being an insider researcher claimed to help the personal and professional development of an insider as well. Schön (2017) describes the notion of the *reflective practitioner* to explain the position of an insider researcher. Reflective practitioners are insider researchers who learn to learn their practice by studying it as a researcher. He asserts that reflective practitioners eventually become better practitioners because they do not only act like someone who does the

job but also use a lens of a researcher to better understand the what, how, and why of the context the work takes place.

In their book, Herr and Anderson (2014) argue that dissertations prepared by insider researchers create a valuable database of insider case studies of practitioners that archive both the process of professional development of those insider researchers and the steps they go through while they learn about being better practitioners in their professional contexts. Although some academics do not consider dissertations as reliable sources of knowledge due to the fact that dissertations are the products of novice researchers, such insider accounts have the potential of demonstrating both how one goes about learning her craft and what was learned during the research process (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

Besides the preceding advantages of insider research mentioned in this section, some researchers also claim that the research conducted by the insider is deemed more useful in some instances. According to some, there is a new tradition of insider research developing that may be considered superior to traditional research conducted only by an outsider (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Herr & Anderson, 2014). "Whether the research is designed and conducted by an outsider in collaboration with insiders or by an insider in collaboration with other insiders, the belief is that organizations gain most from this approach to change" (Grogan, Donaldson, & Simmons, 2007, p. 4).

Anderson and Jones (2000) conducted a detailed research to understand the potential of knowledge production by research done by insider administrators so that the research base and knowledge production in educational administration can be improved. For their research, they examined abstracts of 50 dissertation studies done by insider administrators, eight published

insider administrator research studies, and six full-length dissertations. They also interviewed 10 administrators who did dissertations within their own organizations and formed and worked with a focus group consisting of eight administrators who also conducted insider research. Anderson and Jones (G. L. Anderson & Jones, 2000) studied the topics insider researchers investigated, methods used, and the practical, epistemological, and political dilemmas they encountered. From the insider researchers' perspective, they found out that many of the administrators who conducted insider research believed their research is no different than outsider research. And finally, they concluded that "intentional, systematic, and disciplined inquiry on educational practice by "insiders," although fraught with unique epistemological, methodological, political, and ethical dilemmas, has great potential for challenging, confirming, and extending current theory and for identifying new dimensions of administrative practice for study." (G. L. Anderson & Jones, 2000, p. 430)

CHAPTER 4: CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

This chapter will provide a detailed portrait of the Center for International Business (CIB). The chapter will start with the history of the Center, which I partially gathered from the recollections of my memory and partially from the annual reports available on the CIB website. The history section will only give a brief timeline of the Center's past and highlight the noteworthy developments at the Center since its establishment. However, some of the projects will be described in depth later in the chapter because of their relevance to student assistants. At the end of the history section, I will explain how and when I joined the CIB team and how my role has changed over the years. Following the history section, I will explain how the CIB operates today. This section will describe the space, current work environment, initiatives, projects, collaboration partners, the way the Center is governed, and everything about the students, from hiring to training and working with them.

History of Center for International Business

1988-2000 Period. CIB is an organization with 34 years of history. According to its 2005 annual report, the Center was formed in 1988 by a marketing professor, and its purpose was twofold. The first objective was to produce research in the field of international business. This objective was pursued through several activities such as networking with and connecting researchers in the field, including doctoral students; participating in international business conferences to promote research; and informing field members about available resources. The second purpose was to organize study abroad activities for students to help them experience other cultures and learn how business is conducted worldwide. The Center advocated studying abroad at the business college to create more funding for these programs. Furthermore, CIB

encouraged college faculty to develop more programs for international destinations by consulting them about best practices and resources for information.

The Center formed its first advisory council in 1989 under the leadership of an MBA alumnus who had an executive position in one of the major automotive companies. Initially, the Council members convened monthly to formulate the mission, objectives, and desirable programs for the Center. Members included representatives from the university faculty and administration, businesses, local community college and business networks, and chambers of commerce. In the same year, International Business Club (IB-Club) (pseudonym used) was formed under CIB to serve as a critical bridge linking the state's exporters and allies with a wealth of university research-driven resources. The IB-Club started organizing events for local companies to help them start exporting and increase both their current exports and the number of new international markets entered.

Comparing the Center's initial scope to all the activities it coordinates today, the amount of work and the number of projects were narrower in size. Given that the Center was newly established, its resources were limited, and therefore, its scope was smaller. In addition to the founding faculty member, there was only one staff member, who worked on administrative tasks, and a few graduate student assistants to help with the routine activities of the Center. Therefore, during its first years, the Center was a small organization with a limited scope of work and did not provide any opportunities for undergraduate students. But that started to change significantly after the Center was recognized by the U.S. Government as a national resource center only a few years after its establishment.

In 1990, CIB won a U.S. Government grant and was designated as a National Resource Center for International Business Education (Center for International Business Education and Research — CIBER) by the U.S. Department of Education. Its CIBER designation dictated the introduction of more projects and activities in various areas, and the Center needed more employees to accomplish its goals. Therefore, CIB steadily increased its scope and size over the years, and soon the number of employees raised to 13, including full-time staff and student assistants. The CIBER designation increased CIB's national recognition and reach significantly.

The introduction of the World Wide Web (WWW) during the same years also provided new tools and opportunities for disseminating international business knowledge to many institutions, organizations, governments, and businesses across the nation and the globe. CIB joined the crowd of those who took advantage of these technological developments and added a new international business resources (IBR) section to their website in 1994 to catalog online international business websites and other resources developed globally. IBR began as a hub of consolidated global business knowledge for the Center's target audience. IBR was re-branded as KnowBase (pseudonym used) later in 2001. During the same period, CIB undertook the responsibility of creating the first website for the CIBER Network to connect 17 CIBER institutions, and established CIBERweb. The new website served as the central online location for all members, sharing information about the CIBER Network, disseminating international business knowledge, showcasing their activities, and connecting with everybody that was interested in the international business field.

Since its establishment, CIB has collaborated with community colleges and related organizations to internationalize community college business curricula nationwide. Leveraging its expertise, and with the help of the university faculty, CIB started the Community College

International Business Institute (CCIBI) (pseudonym used) in 1995. The CCIBI aimed to provide community college faculty with the knowledge, experience, and resources they needed to internationalize general business courses and develop specialized international business courses at the two-year college level. The biennial CCIBI workshops, which lasted a couple of days, were hosted locally on campus with the participation of many community college faculty members traveling from across the U.S.

CIBER Network. Congress created CIBERs under the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988 to increase and promote the nation's international understanding and competitiveness capacity. The U.S. Department of Education administers the CIBER Network under Title VI, Part B of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The network links the workforce and technological needs of the U.S. business community with the international education, language training, and research capacities of universities across the country. All of the CIBER-designated centers receive funding from the U.S. Department of Education to facilitate their activities.

All of the CIBERs are hosted by higher education institutions spread across the nation and are located in the business colleges of these universities. The centers serve as regional and national resource hubs for businesses, students, and teachers at all levels. Building on the strengths of their faculty and staff, each CIBER organizes various activities to advance the study and teaching of international business and to support applied research on U.S. competitiveness in the global marketplace. Although the network members have the same goals, their types and the areas their activities focus on may change slightly from one center to another, depending on the expertise and resources of the centers, hosting institution history and priorities, and needs of the

region they operate. Regardless of these characteristics, though, all of the CIBER activities carry similarities.

One of the most prominent objectives of the network has always been to internationalize the business curriculum. The centers collaboratively work on increasing the number of interdisciplinary courses and courses with international content, as well as study abroad and other international exchange opportunities for students. Faculty development is another area in which the CIBERs are pretty active. CIBERs organize faculty development and enrichment programs for business faculty across the nation, from all types of higher education institutions. These programs may be low-cost study abroad trips, intensive workshops in different settings, or networking and collaboration events. In addition, the CIBER Network closely works with small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). The network supports SMEs' global expansion endeavors by providing educational programs for business representatives, such as export training workshops, regulatory requirements coaching, company export roundtables, and expert speaker series. CIBERs also consult with SMEs by providing guidance, customized international market research analysis, and expertise in international trade. Additionally, CIBERs collaboratively partner with local U.S. Commercial Service offices, U.S. Small Business Administration representatives, local and regional economic development organizations, government agencies, and many other organizations to support local businesses' global expansion efforts. Other noteworthy activities of the centers include collaborating with foreign language units to develop business language courses for students, providing intensive language training programs for businesspersons, and funding research projects, events, and publications on issues of strategic national interest.

CIBER designation is renewed by the U.S. Department of Education every four years, and the number of CIBERs changes from one term to another for several reasons. First, the U.S. Department of Education pursues a rigorous reporting schedule. It monitors all the activities and outcomes of CIBERs over the four-year term to assure the purpose of the CIBERs is fulfilled. Centers that fail to deliver requirements may lose their designation in the following term. However, performance is not the only factor that affects the CIBER designation. Another important consideration is the government budget allocated for the CIBER Network, which may change from one term to another depending on the administration in charge and the foreign trade policies adopted. For example, although there have been 17 CIBERs in the network for a very long time, the number fell to 15 after the Trump administration was put in place, leading to the government's international trade policies being formulated with a protectionist perspective.

2000-2022 Period. In 2004, CIB took another big step toward being recognized globally and established the secretariat of a distinguished "researchers' academy" of international business (The Academy) (pseudonym is used) under its roof. The Academy is the leading association of international business scholars with about 3,000 members from more than 80 countries around the world. The Academy was founded in the 1950s by a close-knit group of like-minded scholars looking to share the ideas and resources that would help define the emerging field of international business. The Academy is dedicated to promoting impactful research, improving business education and practice, and collaborating with policy and interdisciplinary research leaders. In addition, the Academy organizes annual global conferences that attract more than 1,000 attendees yearly and publishes a leading journal for the international business field.

After winning the CIBER grant for the fourth consecutive term, the Center had grown to more than 30 staff members and student employees by 2004. CIB's advisory board had also increased in size and included 22 business and government representatives, 14 university representatives, and nine CIB representatives during the same period. During the fifth CIBER term, CIB started an export growth program (EGP) (pseudonym used) in 2009. EGP initially began with a seed grant from a local organization, which funds projects that meet community leads and creates student leaders while building sustainable communities and fostering community partnerships. The program aims to increase the state's export sales while providing students with experiential learning opportunities. To meet its goals, EGP offers customized international market research to small and medium-sized companies in the state for free.

Another accomplishment of CIB was winning a grant from a regional economic development organization (EDO) (pseudonym used) and becoming a partner with them in 2011. EDO is a public-private partnership agency and economic development corporation dedicated to creating jobs in the state, marketing the state as the best place to do business, and assisting businesses in their growth strategies. CIB partnered with the International Trade Services group of EDO to help identify and pursue global market opportunities for the state's companies. To achieve this goal, the partnership promotes exports through events, social media, and their channels, and organizes workshops to train companies to provides research to the businesses. Under this partnership, EDO started funding the EGP, which was started in 2009.

CCIBI workshops started in 1995 were hosted locally and converted to another format in 2015. In this new design, CIB faculty traveled across the country to offer similar seminars to community colleges four times a year. The duration of the workshops was also reduced from a couple of days to a half-day. This new format was offered in partnership with other CIBERs and

two of the most prominent community college organizations; Community Colleges for International Development (CCID) and the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship (NACCE). CCIBI continued successfully until 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic limited travel globally. Since then, the workshops have been conducted remotely via online video conferencing.

After years of successful projects and programs, CIB's contributions to the state's growing exports were recognized by the U.S. President. In 2019, the Center became a recipient of the prestigious President's "E" Award. U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross presented the award to CIB at a ceremony in Washington, D.C. The President's "E" Award is considered the highest recognition any U.S. entity can receive for making a significant contribution to the expansion of U.S. exports. During World War II, more than 4,000 "E" Pennants were presented to war plants in recognition of production excellence. The famous flag with the big "E" emblazoned on it became a badge of patriotism in action. President Kennedy revived the World War II "E" symbol of excellence to honor and provide recognition to America's exporters. Thus, the "E" Award Program was established by Executive Order 10978 on December 5, 1961.

My CIB History. Within this section, I will explain my history at the Center, from the time I started working as a student to when I became a full-time employee.

As a Student Assistant. I started working at CIB as a graduate assistant in September 2010, only two months after moving to the U.S., when I started the business college's full-time Master of Business Administration (MBA) program. I was aware of the Center even before moving to the U.S. through my network at the university, so I reached out to my contacts to look for a job there before I arrived in the U.S. I knew the Center's primary focus was international

business, but I did not know what it entailed. I was not particularly interested in international business back then, and my only intention was to find a part-time job to help transition to my new life. I believed I needed to maximize my exposure to the English language and American culture to shorten my adaptation to my new home. The additional income from such a job would be very beneficial while managing our family budget as well, especially in our situation; we had a two-year-old son, and my wife would be a stay-at-home mom at least until I graduated from my MBA program by mid-2012.

The Center had 25 student assistants when I started working, and only three of them were graduate students, including me. The graduate students were regarded as more experienced by the CIB staff. Therefore, more important projects would be assigned to these students. These projects required more maturity and proficiency, not necessarily in the field of international business, but in the sense of grasping the importance of those projects, understanding their full scope and impact, and delivering high-quality work. Hence, I started working on projects that would fit those criteria. For example, one of those projects was updating a fifteen-year-old ranking study, the Market Potential Study (MPS), which measures the market potential of various countries by using statistical data. MPS is updated on KnowBase annually, and the update project includes an intensive data collection process for the market indicators, replacing indicators that are no longer available with the most relevant ones, manipulating data in MS Excel using advanced features of the software, calculating the ratings, and publishing it on the website. As somebody that worked as a business professional in international companies for over 15 years before I started my MBA journey, I understood the differences between some countries and cultures. I knew using market indicators would be a good way of evaluating the market

potential of nations. However, I had never seen the larger picture of international business and the relevance of this data before working on the MPS.

The MPS project helped me understand a wide range of indicators that can be used to make such an assessment and taught me how to select the most relevant ones that would serve the study in an ideal way. I had access to the previous year's rankings since 1996; hence, I could trace the rankings of countries in the last 15 years and observe how their positions had changed compared to other nations. This analysis helped me grasp the world's largest economies' progress over the years and how they competed with other countries to attract more exporters and investors from around the world. Additionally, I answered questions about the study submitted by KnowBase users globally. That part of the project presented me with an experience I never would have gained through traditional coursework, lectures, reading textbooks, or writing assignments.

The KnowBase users were business professionals, students of every level, and instructors. They were trying to use the tool in the best way possible for their needs, and they all had different circumstances. The business professionals were gauging the market potential of certain countries for their products; therefore, they needed to understand MPS in depth to further its analysis by fitting it to their industry and products. The undergraduate students used it to complete their assignments and had many questions. The graduate students used the tool as a reference in their dissertations or tried to create similar evaluation tools for measuring other aspects of countries; therefore, they had questions about the methodologies, and needed ideas about identifying a different set of indicators for that purpose. And finally, instructors needed to understand it fully as well as how it is calculated, its methodology, data collection process, etc., to incorporate it into teaching. I was lucky to deal with all these queries through different

scenarios because it allowed me to discover another side of the MPI project, the user side, which I would not have had any exposure to otherwise. I realized who uses such tools, for what purposes, what challenges they face, and how they attempt to reproduce the study or modify it. And I argue that this part of my job offered me an experiential learning opportunity that is difficult to find in a traditional course setting.

During my two-year student employment with the Center, I continuously worked on creating new sections for KnowBase to enhance the website's content. For example, I designed an Export Tutorials section in 2012, which is still in use. Export Tutorials is a short guide for new exporters and offers information about the basics of exporting by describing some processes, answering questions, and providing external links for other resources, paperwork, and additional information. I had no exporting experience when I was assigned to this project, and creating a comprehensive tutorial would need more than reading from online sources and textbooks. I needed to speak with experts in this field and businesspeople who exported products overseas. Thus, I reached out to the local U.S Commercial Service representatives to learn more about the exporting process and gather resources. To learn about details of international trade and ask questions, I reached out to two exporting companies that the Center had contacts with. Talking with government officials and business professionals instead of only reading about exports or listening to an instructor was an invaluable experience. What made this experience unique was that during those meetings, I did not only learn about exports, but I also met with professionals, listened to their stories and perspectives, expanded my network in the field, and realized the potential impact and reach of the tutorial for the state's companies; all of which would not be possible through lectures.

While working as a student assistant, I often compared my part-time student work to my previous full-time job and noticed how similar they were. In my last position, I oversaw the back-office sales operations of 29 countries for a multinational company, Thomson Reuters. It was a high-level job with serious responsibilities in a global capacity. Of course, the working conditions were intense, and the weekly hours were longer compared to my student job, but many of the tasks I worked in both jobs had similarities. The level of exposure to partners and business professionals, projects with real-life implications, and a professional work environment were just a few examples of those similarities. Looking back on those days I worked as a student assistant at the CIB, I always wonder how much my student job would have prepared me for a professional corporate career if I did not have any prior work experience. And I believe my time at the Center provided me with a unique set of experiences I would have never encountered in a classroom.

As a Full-Time Staff Member. My student employment at CIB ended in May 2012 when I graduated from my master's program, and I immediately started working in a software company. However, six months later I noticed that I could not stop thinking about the university. Eventually, I started developing the idea of working full-time on campus and changing my career. Soon after, I resigned and started as a temporary employee at CIB in May 2013. During the first three years, I worked on various projects for many of the Center's programs. In a sense, this temporary role was an extension of my graduate assistantship because I worked on similar projects in a very similar capacity during these three years, and I got paid by the hour. I also did not supervise any students or other employees at the Center.

In the meantime, I wanted to enroll in a doctoral program because I planned to make a career change when I returned to the university. As somebody with more than 15 years of

business experience, and working in the business college, the most logical option seemed to be doing a Ph.D. in the business college. However, I was also working closely with students, so studying in a field that would help me understand the students in the higher education setting was also a viable option. After some research, I found out about a doctoral program in the College of Education about higher, adult, and lifelong education, and I started the program in the fall semester of 2014.

In May 2016, my status and responsibilities changed when the Center hired me as a full-time employee. I started overseeing the EGP and thus supervising about 10 of the student researchers working in that program. I was still working on several other projects as needed, but my primary focus would be the EGP. I will describe the work at the EGP and how students are involved with that program in detail later in the chapter. In 2018, the management department offered me the opportunity to teach a graduate-level class as an add-on, which I accepted. Over the years, my teaching load has increased to three courses in eight sections. Although teaching has increased my responsibilities and workload, I teach international business, which is directly related to my work. Consequently, my work and teaching assignments complement each other successfully. Finally, in 2019, I was promoted to one of the two assistant director positions at the Center. With that, I added the KnowBase website and its student researchers to my responsibilities, which I also will portray later in the chapter. My position at CIB has not changed since then.

Center for International Business Today

Currently, CIB is fully funded by federal and state grants. After years of successful operations, CIB is still designated as a CIBER by the U.S. Department of Education and has

managed to consistently renew its grant with the local economic development organization EDO since 2011. The programs I described in the history section are still active and in progress. The Center is directed by an international marketing professor and governed by an advisory board that includes nine business, 10 government and other institutions, 12 university, and 11 CIB representatives. Currently, the Center has 10 staff members and 25 student assistants.

Workspace. CIB resides in the university's business college and has a dedicated space in the building where its office rooms, student work area, waiting area, and kitchen/break room are located on the same floor. The Center's nine office rooms surround the student work area, and all rooms open to a connecting hallway. Office #2 is occupied by the program coordinator, who oversees student hiring and payments. Although all students are hired through the university's central human resources department, their point of contact for all employment-related issues is the program coordinator. CIB's associate director and the other assistant director use rooms #1 and #3. The Academy secretariat is hosted in offices #5-7, and the last two office rooms are unoccupied because of remote-work arrangements.

Figure 2:

CIB Office Layout
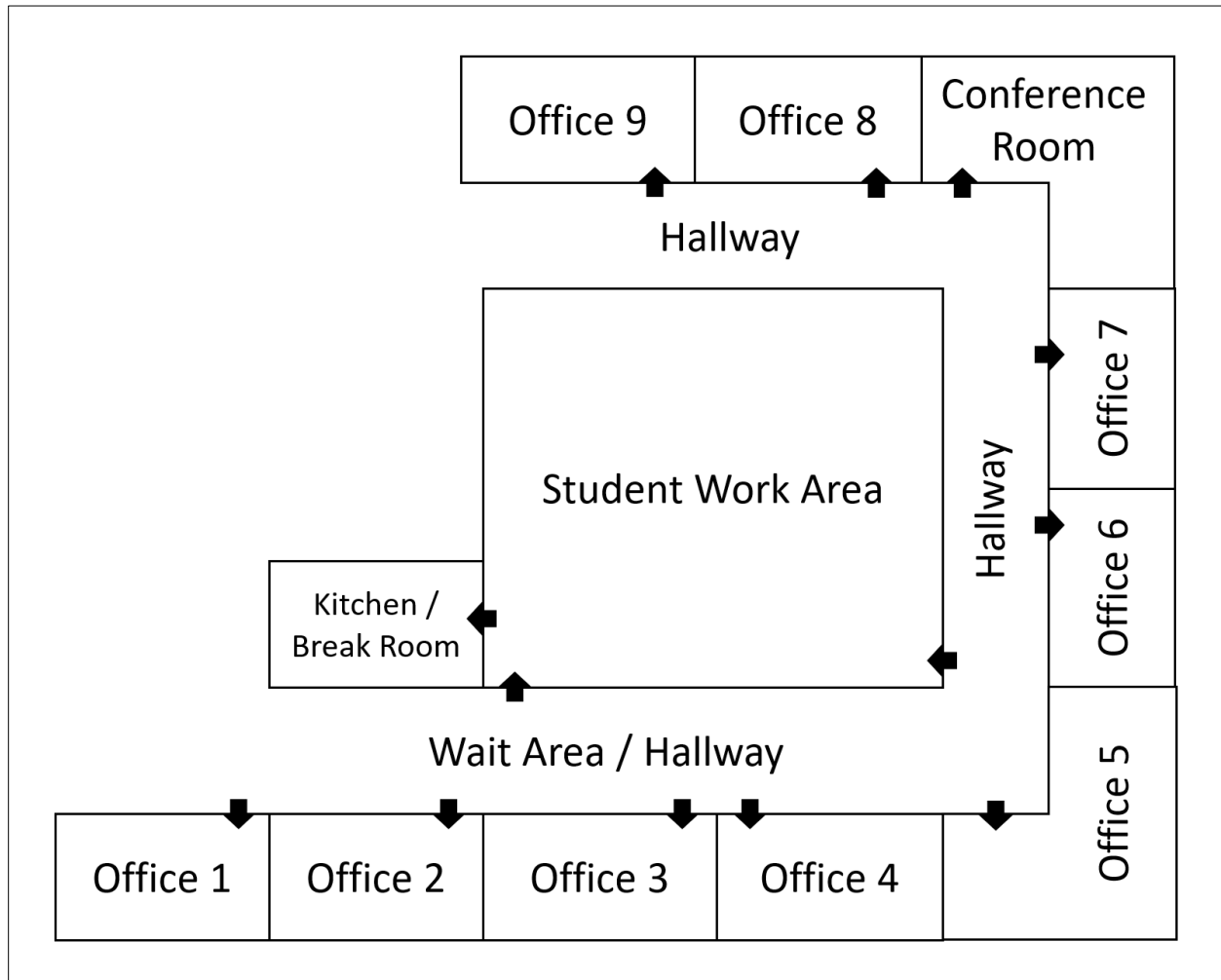
Note. Doors are marked with arrows.

   I work in office #4, just across one of the entrances to the student work area, where I can see the waiting area and the students walking in and out. The waiting area is equipped with a copier and several storage units for office supplies, all of which are available for student use. When you walk through the hallway towards the waiting area from Office #1, you first see the name of the Center at the entrance. This entrance and the sign indicate to visitors that they are entering a college unit with its own space. Immediately after the entrance, a big world globe sits

on the floor. I am not sure what the original purpose of placing it in the Center was, but I sometimes see students trying to locate a country on it or check where several countries' locations are, relative to each other. Just across the entrance, we have a sign that reads 'welcome' in sixty-three languages. Although there is nothing special about the selection of the languages, the purpose of this welcome is to signal that all languages and cultures are welcomed to the Center. The world globe and the welcome sign represent the spirit of the staff members and the Center itself. With these icons, we try to communicate to the students and visitors that international business is the primary focus of the Center, that we teach and research international business, and that everyone is accepted and welcomed to the Center.

Figure 3:

Welcome Sign at the BIC Waiting Area

The student work area is located at the center of the CIB and has two entrances from two different hallways. This location provides easy access to both the students and CIB staff members. Another advantage of the centrally located student work area is that CIB staff members can easily monitor students and provide support as needed. The area is also connected to a small kitchen and break room for office use. A refrigerator, a coffee machine, a microwave, a toaster, a water dispenser, and utensils are available for all CIB employees. Students believe having a kitchen is one of the significant advantages of working at the Center because they can bring their lunches and keep them in the refrigerator until lunchtime, which is very convenient compared to carrying their lunch from one class to another in their backpacks. We also provide a variety of tea options and hot chocolate to students to enjoy during their work at the Center.

Figure 4:

Kitchen and Break Room

Instead of individual office desks, the student work area is furnished with workstations with a flexible seating arrangement. In this setup, six students can sit at the same workstation. One group of three students faces another group. The seats are not dedicated and are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. As a result, students sit in different chairs each time they are in the office, allowing them to sit closer to another group of students every time. This mobility prevents students from getting stuck in a corner for the duration of their employment with the Center and helps them get closer to every student. This continuous rotation increases collaboration between students and eventually increases their work efficiencies.

Figure 5:

Student Work Area

Flexible workstations have become very popular in the business community in the last decade. The primary reason for companies to utilize these flexible seating arrangements was to

reduce the amount of workspace and its associated costs. With technological developments,

working remotely has become trendy and was accepted even before the COVID-19 pandemic,

especially in specific industries such as the information systems, software, and hardware

industries. Therefore, the number of employees coming to the office varied from one day to

another, and as a result, company offices had many unoccupied seats on some days. Also,

businesses with multiple locations needed extra space for traveling employees when those

employees visited other offices. Because of this, companies started using flexible workspaces. I

believe that offering a similar experience to the students during their time at CIB reduces the

adaptation time when they begin their careers in companies with flexible seating arrangements.

Although this does not seem like a significant benefit, it may reduce some stress during a

challenging time while students transition from their education to their professional lives.

CIB provides desktop computers to students that are equipped with dual 24-inch flat

screens. Two monitors double the screen estate students can use compared to having only one.

The students appreciate the technology provided because having two screens increases their

productivity. They often mention this fact to me and emphasize some of the difficulties that

working on their single-monitor laptops creates for them. All the desktop computers are

connected to a shared drive, where the Center keeps all of its files. Although the students cannot

access some private folders, they can access most of the files and folders needed for their work.

The computers are also connected to the Center's copier, where students can print work-related

materials. In addition to the desktop computers, students can work on their laptops if they wish.

Although this is not a common practice, offering some flexibility and letting them choose the

technology they want to use is essential for the Center because students work remotely

sometimes, and working on their devices prepares them for the remote work that may be required

from time to time. For example, during COVID-19, when students needed to quarantine due to close contact with someone sick or who had a positive test result, they worked remotely to fulfill their responsibilities. Some students prefer to work during the summer months, and when they do, they often prefer staying with their parents until the school starts, and therefore, they work remotely. Giving them the flexibility of working remotely is another way of offering them an opportunity to get ready for their future jobs, which may also require some level of remote work.

Figure 6:

Bean Bags at the Student Work Area

The student work area offers some other features for students to use. The first one is the two large bean bags at the back of the room. These bean bags were gifted to the Center by a local company a couple of years ago in return for international market research that students prepared for them. Because the research helped the company's global expansion immensely, they showed

their appreciation with this gift. The bean bags are used by students who want to leave their workstations for a while, move around, relax and rest, or keep working somewhere else for a change. But, of course, if they want to work while sitting on these bean bags, they continue working on their devices. Many companies offer these types of relaxed seating and break areas. They provide an environment for the employees to rest and reset while catching up with their colleagues on different topics.

The second feature is a large TV mounted on the wall on the opposite side of the bean bags. Although it is not used currently, the TV was installed for several reasons. Using it for meetings and presentations was one of the reasons. The TV can be connected to computers, laptops, and other devices via cables or wireless internet. Using it during video conferencing sessions was another idea. And although the TV is not connected to a cable provider, it is also capable of displaying content from internet content providers, such as YouTube, or streaming services, such as Netflix, through applications preinstalled on the TV.

Figure 7:

Digital Key Box for the Student Work Area
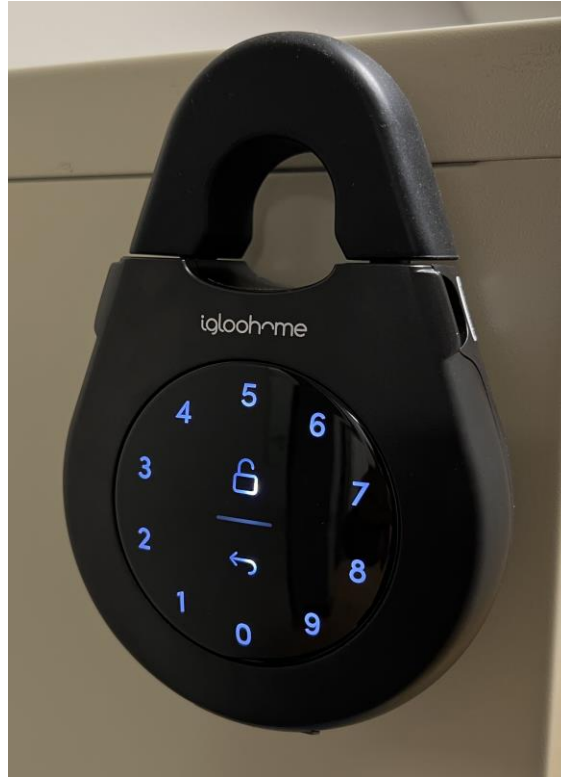
Finally, the student work area has a digital key box that allows the students easy access.

This state-of-the-art key box is controlled remotely by the supervisor's smartphone through a

mobile app. As the student supervisor, I can give permanent or temporary access to students or

revoke their access. I can also monitor who accessed the key box and when. Once students are

granted access, they bring their smartphones closer to the digital key box to open and get the key

to their work area. As a standard procedure, every student is granted access when they start

working at CIB. This digital key box was installed due to the working conditions of the COVID-

19 initially. Because there have been times we had no staff members in the office to lock and

unlock the student work area, and because it would be challenging to distribute keys to twenty-

five students, CIB decided to implement a solution for the students to open their work area when

no staff member was around. In addition to solving a problem, this key box offers added flexibility to students' work environment. Now they can freely enter their work area when needed, even on some weekends when they need to stop by for something, such as getting a document or a file they may need for work later.

As can be seen from the student workspace's design and features, CIB provides a professional, business-like working environment to the students with lots of flexibility and benefits. During their time at the Center, students gain experience working in a fully equipped office environment that offers similar benefits to those of their future jobs. This experience helps create individuals who transition from college to a professional career faster and smoother than others. The student work area itself also contributes to the experiential learning aspect of the CIB; maybe not in the international business area but in learning about business in general.

Students at CIB. From recruitment to orientation and training, students go through many phases at the Center. Each process is detailed in the below sections.

Recruitment. Most of the Center's student employees are undergraduates, except for one or two graduate students hired sporadically. In most cases, those graduate students are undergraduates who worked for several years at the Center and stayed as student employees when they graduated and started a master's degree at the university. The Center does not have a rule about not hiring graduate students; it just does not pursue graduate assistants as possible candidates. That being said, we do not promote the Center to potential candidates or post its job openings on the university-wide online job portal. As the student employees socialize with their peers out of the Center, they often talk about their work environment at the Center, the opportunities provided to students, and the benefits of experiential learning while working for a

fee. Therefore, occasionally, students reach out to the Center to obtain more information about its role and to ask for potential job openings.

The Center utilizes a scholarship program run by the business college as its primary student employee pipeline. This scholarship program with an intensive application process generally provides students with more intrinsic motivation, and these students tend to learn faster, take more initiative, and work more efficiently. Since CIB has many responsibilities due to the grants that fund the Center, it is essential to run all operations with the highest efficiency and quality possible. Consequently, students with more intrinsic motivation help the Center reach its targets faster with more efficiency. Another approach to student recruitment is through word of mouth with the help of current student employees. When new positions are available, current students reach out to others they know in the university who they believe would be an excellent fit for the Center and its student teams. Often, both of the recruitment options help CIB find great candidates.

CIB tries to hire students as soon as possible when they start college, from their first year when possible. Because it takes a while to train the students, and new student employees always have a learning curve that changes from student to student, there is always a less productive period when a student is hired until they start to perform fully. Whether the learning curve is longer or shorter, it is more beneficial for the Center to keep the students as employees longer for increased productivity. Hence, often the student employees stay with the Center until they graduate if both parties are satisfied with the work arrangements and performance.

Orientation and Training. We organize a two-hour student orientation at the beginning of the fall semester every school year. The new students attend the entire orientation, but the current students only attend the last hour. During the first hour, the students learn about the

Center, its staff members, and the projects and programs they will work on. During the second hour, we introduce the current student employees, and they share their experiences with the new students. We finish the orientation with a lunch delivered to the Center, during which students socialize and get to know each other. A typical orientation is facilitated with the following schedule:

- **1st Hour:**
    - New student introduction
    - Supervisor introduction
    - Staff members introduction
    - CIB introduction
    - Office rules and guidelines
    - CIB projects and programs
    - Q&A
- **2nd Hour:**
    - Current student introduction
    - Current student general tips and best practices
    - Current students project-specific tips and practice in project groups
    - Q&A during boxed lunches

During the first hour, new students receive a printed copy of the Center rules and guidelines, which we also cover during the meeting. These rules help students understand the working hours, expectations from students during work and in the Center, how to use the office resources, limitations to personal phone usage, etc. During the orientation, students also learn about recording their time and getting paid. CIB uses an in-house online time clock for students

to log their working hours. Before starting to work, they log in to this time clock and punch in to start the clock, and once they are done for the day, they punch out to stop it. As their supervisor, I can monitor in real-time who is currently working or how many hours any student worked in any given period in the past. Based on the reports we pull out of the time clock, we pay the students bi-weekly using the university payment schedules. An accurate time logging system is vital for the Center as we use our federal and state grants to pay the student assistants and, therefore, audited regularly to assure proper operations. On a side note, this tool helps students manage their time successfully by monitoring how many hours they worked during the week or the last month. The timeclock also emphasizes the importance of work hours, helping students focus on work-related tasks only during work hours.

Current students join new students in the second hour and introduce themselves. Then we hold a roundtable where current students share their thoughts with new students. They talk about the Center and students' roles while sharing tips and best practices about the office, general rules, logging time, and many other helpful topics for the new students. Then we introduce new students to their student mentors, who will guide them during their training and split them into two groups based on the projects they will work on: KnowBase and EGP. These two projects have different tasks and deliverables for students; therefore, the current students discuss their projects with the new students and explain the basics and the student work. While two project teams work, I walk around to answer any questions and share my thoughts on specific topics. During this session, we do not go into the details of the projects and daily tasks but rather give a high-level overview with tips and best practices. Because both projects are complex and need more time to learn, we begin the 'official' training on the first day new students are at the office.

After that, the training continues for a couple of months, depending on the student's capabilities and weekly hours logged.

On the first day of their job, new students receive welcome documentation for their respective projects, which lays out the details of their projects and the first steps they need to follow. The first steps include familiarizing themselves with the shared folders, documentation, websites, and resources, which students usually complete in the first week or the one after. Then, depending on the projects, they start working on small tasks in collaboration with their mentors and student team leaders. Each project has a student team leader that helps the supervisor with the team's management and the students' day-to-day activities. Mentors report the new students' progress to the team leaders, and the team leaders report it to the supervisor. Based on the individual's needs, I sometimes get involved in helping with problematic issues and resolving concerns. In general terms, we can say the total training for students lasts about a semester for both projects. The students' efficiency increases systematically during this first semester until they reach their full capacity.

Main Student Projects and Programs. Although there are many ongoing projects at the CIB, two of those are the main projects that the students work on.

KnowBase Website. KnowBase is an online international business portal that aims to provide knowledge and research tools to students, instructors, and businesses interested in international business and trade. The website is managed entirely by a team of about ten students under my supervision. As explained in the history section, the website was initially built in 1994 as a resource directory page on the Center's website and expanded to a complete website in 2001. Currently, the site attracts two million visitors annually with five million page views from

235 countries, islands, and geographic territories. KnowBase content is categorized under five primary tabs on the website. The Global Insights section offers country, industry, trade bloc, and state profiles. These profiles contain details about their history, government, economy, statistics, culture, as well as additional external resources. The Reference Desk provides a detailed list of online international business and trade resources, some course modules, and a glossary. The Tools and Data section includes a market potential study, a statistical database, and country comparison tools. The international business blogs students write are listed under the Get Connected section, and finally, the Academy tab offers a plethora of resources for the instructors.

Figure 8:

KnowBase Main Categories

About 90% of the website content is collected from other online resources that are publicly available, and the students create only about 10% of the content. The website operates as a consolidator and provides thousands of external links as well as data collected from other sources. Therefore, students continuously check and update the links to make sure they work, download data from resources, manipulate the data, upload it to the website databases, and review and update other sections, such as the government pages on the website. Arguably, some of these tasks may become monotonous and not have a significant impact on students' learning. For example, going over thousands of external links to check whether they still work or not is a mundane task for students. Checking the spelling and grammar on every page repeatedly to

avoid errors on the site may also be very tedious at times. Consequently, students sometimes feel demotivated working on some of these assignments. However, I see these everyday activities as vital to the student's personal and professional development. Some may argue students do not learn much while working on these tasks. To a certain point, that argument holds valid as students do not learn about new subjects, countries, or cultures through these tasks. However, I believe students gain habits and discover certain behaviors that will come in handy in their careers. By working on these assignments, they learn to be patient and work diligently, understand the importance of attention to detail, and see that every job may have fewer exciting tasks.

On the other hand, some aspects of their jobs teach them about international business at different levels depending on how much they know when they become an employee at the Center. Interestingly, many of these students know very little about the topic. For example, when students start working with the Center, many do not know how many countries exist. They cannot name a few countries in the European Union, or they do not know what a free trade agreement is and if the U.S. has any free trade agreements signed with other countries. To me, these are the simplest of facts about the world and global trade every citizen should know something about, and thankfully, their jobs at KnowBase help them learn these essential points and many more while working with us. One good example of those tasks is writing regular international business blogs for the site.

KnowBase publishes international business blogs during the school year that start with the first week of September and end with the last week of April of the following year. The student team leader creates a blog schedule before the school begins to give enough time to those who will write the first couple of blogs. Throughout the year, every student writes a blog every

two weeks, so they each write about fourteen blogs during a school year. These blogs can be about anything as long as they cover an international business and trade topic and do not focus on one company only. The blogging assignment is one of the highlights of the student job at the Center because student employees choose their topics based on their interests or research. As they research new issues, they habitually follow daily global news to learn about new developments, issues, and conflicts around the world. When they find something of interest, they research and read about the topic from several resources to learn more and write about it. Being aware of global issues and understanding the details of them helps students learn about international business and eventually may help with their coursework, as some of the research can be leveraged for class assignments.

Potentially, the flexibility of writing about a topic of interest offers students immense learning opportunities because of how they approach their work. John Tagg (2003) describes two approaches students use to learn: the surface approach and the deep approach. Students who learn through a surface approach focus on the signs while reading. In the CIB context, they focus on the words of the articles they find and read through research. In contrast, those that utilize a deep approach focus on the signs and the meaning. According to Ramsden (2003) surface learning is superficial; it is about quantity without quality, and students cannot fully comprehend through surface learning. In comparison, students use deep learning for the sake of understanding. It is about quantity and quality. Tagg (2003) argues that students are more likely to use the deep approach for a subject they are interested in. Therefore, CIB students are more likely to learn better when they research blog topics they find interesting and write about them.

Another KnowBase effort students often work on is designing new pages and sections for the website. I believe this is where experiential learning emerges as the primary learning method.

For instance, the student team is currently working on designing a new culture page for the country section on the site. Today, the culture page has only two external links to other websites where country culture information can be accessed. In contrast, the other KnowBase country pages carry detailed information with numbers, graphs, and images collected and organized by the students. These pages provide a richer experience to the site visitors because the information is gathered from various resources, consolidated, and organized in the most readable way. Moreover, providing a piece of particular information on KnowBase, instead of an external link to where the information can be found, helps the visitors stay on our site longer and discover more, which increases site pageviews, which improves the site statistics in return.

When the student team approached me with the idea of creating a new culture page, which I believed was an excellent idea for the reason I have just highlighted, I agreed. The project includes several steps, such as deciding what type of cultural information students want to provide, what format and design they want to display it all in on the site, and which resources they can use to gather cultural information on more than two hundred countries. To make these decisions, students will need to read and learn about culture, visit other websites that offer similar information to see how others do it, research cultural aspects of countries, and engage in lengthy discussions with everybody involved. And once they finish making these decisions, they must collect the cultural information for all the countries and design a page mock-up to review with the web developer and me. As you can see, the project consists of many hands-on activities in addition to traditional reading and research. Creating new designs, working with their supervisor to discuss steps, and collaborating with a web developer to implement this new design are great experiences for the CIB students.

Export Growth Program (EGP). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are

significant contributors to U.S. job creation and economic development, accounting for most of

the businesses nationwide. Of all the exporting U.S. companies, about 97% are small and

medium-sized enterprises. In the state that CIB resides in, SMEs are defined as companies with

less than 500 employees. The revenues of these companies are also less compared to larger

businesses. Therefore, SMEs' human and financial resources are often limited, especially those in

the lower range. However, expanding to international markets requires many resources, such as

additional funds and dedicated employees. A company can still start exporting and grow

incrementally with limited resources. But there stands a big hurdle in front of many: finding the

right market with the highest potential and understanding the conditions in that market to

strategize an efficient market entry. Because of scarce resources, SMEs often have limited

chances to target the right markets. If they cannot find a lucrative market on their first try, they

may jeopardize their global expansion endeavors altogether. Therefore, the state economy needs

to help SMEs find the right markets to start their international expansion, and the Export Growth

Program (EGP) was created to achieve that goal.

EGP has been one of the primary outreach programs of the CIB since 2009. Through

EGP, we provide free and customized international market research to the SMEs that are ready

and have the potential to export. Currently, the program is funded by the local development

agency EDO. EDO's staff members work with SMEs to assist them with many aspects of

economic development. When there is a need for international market research, they refer the

companies to EGP. We serve companies from various industries, such as advanced

manufacturing, medical devices, automotive, food and beverages, education, and other business

services. As can be seen from these industries, EGP assists both tangible goods and services exporters.

A team of student employees facilitates EGP. The student team oversees every step of the EGP projects they work on. Once a company is referred to us, I assign one of the student employees as the project leader, and this student coordinates an initial meeting with the company. This meeting can be a virtual one or a visit to the company. During this meeting, students introduce the EGP program and learn about the company and its products, international expansion plans, and market research needs. After this initial meeting, the project leader prepares a report outline for the company and asks for company approval before starting research. After the company confirms the outline, the project leader forms a project team of two to four students, and they start the research. In about four to six weeks, the project team finalizes and delivers the report to the company. From start to finish, students are involved with EGP as though they are the employees of a professional consultancy firm, and they carry out tasks that are no different than those of business life.

While working at EGP, students can learn about international business and gain general business skills that are highly sought-after in the job market. For example, the project leader learns about ways of professional communication while working directly with the company representatives. During those initial communications, project leaders write emails using the business jargon, reply to various company questions, set up meetings and send calendar invitations to stakeholders, and keep the communication line open until after the report is delivered. Being in touch with business professionals while still an undergraduate offers plenty of experiences for these students. Many undergraduate students do not have a chance to communicate with business professionals during their college years. Although it does not seem

like a significant task, learning to use the business vocabulary and drafting communications in a business style certainly requires time and effort. Learning these communication skills during school provides an advantage to these students when they start their careers by reducing the learning curve and speeding up the school-work transition. Furthermore, project leaders learn about forming teams, coordinating team members, and managing projects.

During their research, student employees use many resources to collect information from any channels available. One of those resources is the university business library, which offers a plethora of sources that are accessible online. These are subscriptions to statistical data and market report providers, which SMEs cannot access due to high subscription costs. Student researchers at CIB utilize these resources to find information that may help the companies they consult. Students read many reports and summarize the most relevant content while respecting the licensing rights of these sources. They also collect statistical data, such as annual revenues in an industry or the number of products sold in a year and manipulate it in the most meaningful way that can be incorporated into the reports. While working on the market research, students learn about new business sources, new industries, how they operate differently in each country, the best indicators to assess market conditions, legal and licensing requirements, export regulations, and more. And while putting all their research into the report, they learn to summarize the most relevant information that would fit the company's needs and to use the business terminology.

Company Site Visits. During the interviews, many students vividly recalled company site visits they attended during their work at CIB. Indeed, company site visits were emphasized as one of the most valuable experiences students had the chance of having. For this reason, I will

explain the details of site visits in this part of the chapter to help understand the importance of these site visits for the work we do at CIB and for student learning.

I mentioned that the initial company meetings for EGP can be virtual or in-person. With the developments in technology, meeting virtually through a video conferencing tool has become very popular and efficient. If we meet with the companies using these tools, we can see and talk to each other, share files, send immediate information, such as an URL of a site, through the chat function, and gather enough information to start the research. However, visiting a company offers additional benefits. For example, when students visit a company, meeting with the company representatives tends to be more productive and sincere than a virtual meeting. Students who are quiet in virtual meetings often participate in conversations during site visits. I believe that being in the company office, seeing and touching the products, and observing how products are manufactured give the students more confidence. They understand the company's business and, therefore, feel more comfortable joining the conversation by asking questions and commenting. Students also have the opportunity of visiting companies with interesting businesses that enhance their understanding of the business world. For instance, we visited a company that manufactures drones to deliver medical supplies in rural parts of the world. The company office was in an old hangar in an airport. In addition to many drones across the premises, there was an old turboprop aircraft right where students were instructed about the company. Students were highly impressed with that site visit and discussed it for a very long time. On another site visit, students visited a large facility where old computers were refurbished to be sold to developing countries. The company processed many computers, including laptops, desktops, processing units of scientific equipment, and tablets in a long process line. It was not

only an interesting place to see, but the business idea was so unique that students were impressed with that site visit.

In addition to these benefits, students also live a part of a day in business life. They wear business attire, discuss international expansion with professionals, and ask questions and make suggestions. They meet with representatives from different departments, such as supply chain, sales, and manufacturing, and have an immersive breadth of experience. The students also keep in touch with some of these company representatives even after the project completion to seek job opportunities or career advice. Therefore, company site visits provide a great networking opportunity for the students.

Ideally, we wish to start every EGP project with a company site visit. After all, the site visits help students understand the project better and engage more. However, organizing site visits is challenging due to many reasons. Often, these companies are very interested in inviting students to their premises, but the company representatives are always so busy that they cannot spare time easily. Also, scheduling conflict is a big issue with the site visits. Students' class schedules make it challenging to find the best time that would work for everyone. Because students have fewer or no classes on Fridays, we usually try to plan these visits on Fridays. However, Fridays are as busy as any other weekday for the companies. Therefore, it becomes difficult to find a good match for both parties. For these reasons, we can only visit one or two of the twenty companies we help every year, and we discuss new ideas at the end of each school year to improve the numbers the following year.

Due to these challenges and additional planning requirements, such as the logistics of trips, it takes a few weeks to organize a company site visit. As explained before, they usually

take place on Fridays. The companies visited are generally no farther than two hours drive. We open the company visits to not only the project team but to all interested students. Since the number of site visits is only a few, this gives every student to participate in at least one company visit. And as their supervisor, I always join the students when organizing these visits.

When we arrive at the company, the visit usually starts in the office of the company representative we are visiting. This first part takes about 15 minutes, and we complete the introductions during this time. Sometimes, they walk us through the basics of their business before taking us to the facilities. If the student team is crowded, we may also complete the introductions in a conference room or the company's lobby. During this initial meeting, the company official also briefs the students on the safety rules during the visit. Once this first part is complete, the person we are visiting takes us to the area where the manufacturing or other processes occur. This part takes about 30 to 45 minutes, and the students are engaged the most during this time because it turns out to be the most exciting part of the visit.

Walking through the plant, students have the chance to ask as many questions as they want. They ask about the product, the raw material, the process, the people that work in manufacturing or processing, the customer, the challenges, and many other things. Although many of these questions are not related to international business, it gives them the unique opportunity of understanding the company and its product, which is an essential step to complete before the market research. Although companies are open to answering many of these questions, sometimes they prefer not to due to privacy issues and intellectual property protection reasons. We also try to take as many pictures as possible during these visits. While some companies are comfortable with that, some do not want us to take pictures everywhere for similar reasons. For example, when we visited the company that manufactured drones we suggested having a team

picture in front of the drone prototypes the company was working on because it would be exciting and memorable. We also use these photos to promote the Center and our services, and such a picture would be fascinating for our audience. But the company representatives did not want us to take a picture of their prototypes because they were concerned about their competitors seeing those photos.

As much as these site visits are beneficial for the students, they are also very advantageous for the companies. Because these companies are referred to us through our partner economic development organization, sometimes the companies do not know CIB well or understand what we do. During these visits, companies also have the opportunity to ask questions to understand what students do and how much information they can provide with the research. This opportunity helps us set company expectations properly. In addition, because the students understand the company and products better during visits, the outcome of the reports also tends to be more satisfactory for the companies; hence, the companies are always willing to host CIB students when they can.

An Experiential Learning Focused Design

Brookfield (1984) mentioned that experiential learning is defined and understood in two contrasting senses, institutional and non-institutional approaches. From both perspectives, the CIB offers an excellent environment to students for learning international business through experience. In the institutional approach, the focus is on the environment students study and learn. With this approach, students are provided with immediate, relevant, and meaningful settings to acquire and apply new knowledge and skills. Kolb (1984) also emphasizes the importance of the learning environment in one of the six propositions in his experiential learning

theory. In his proposition, Kolb argues that learning involves transactions between the person and the environment and claims the environment is an essential part of learning, thus impacting how and what students learn. Based on these arguments, one can claim that a properly designed learning environment with relevant resources and opportunities is crucial for teaching students international business concepts and skills through experience.

The CIB offers an environment to the students that fit these criteria, where they can actively participate and interact with the international business concepts and realities. The Center's atmosphere resembles a workplace where many corporate meetings are held and other international business-related activities are conducted. The projects students work on, the rotating project teams they operate in, the company meetings and visits they participate, etc., offer a perfect environment for the students to learn international business concepts. With the modern seating setup, dedicated double-monitor student workstations, break and conference rooms, and staff members to collaborate with, the office-like work environment CIB offers students is also instrumental in shaping how students perceive the international business world. As Lewin (1951) argues in his Field Theory, the environment students learn affects the students' behavior and has implications on the students' way of seeing the business world. With all the opportunities offered to students to interact with companies doing business internationally, network with business professionals, and utilize international business resources, the Center helps students shape their realm of international business.

Another proposition of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory asserts that learning is a continuous process. According to this proposition, the process of learning a topic is not a one-time occurrence and is repeated over and over again. At the CIB, most student assistants start working at the Center either in their first or second years and continue working until they

graduate from college. For this reason, the time spent at the Center, therefore, the time of exposure to international business-related topics, is measured not with months but with years. This fact also is vital from Dewey's (1938) perspective of continuity. According to him, every experience and the learning that occurs through that experience is stored and carried on into the future as new experiences are added to the memory of an individual. Those experiences act as building blocks of one's learning journey and are added on top of another. Therefore, CIB students keep stacking international business experiences, which they learn from, year over year until they graduate. And this continuous learning environment provides the students a unique opportunity where they bolster their international business knowledge and skills over the years.

On the other hand, the second experiential learning perspective Brookfield (1984) mentioned, the non-institutional approach, is more concerned with the individual learner than the learning environment provided by an institution. The student work at CIB demonstrates many similarities to this definition. For example, the Center staff and faculty supervise students and provide mentorship during students' time at the Center, which offers guidance to students at the individual level. Students frequently discuss global issues and international developments with their mentors and staff members, work on various projects together to tackle challenges, and conduct research with their peers and mentors, during which they learn new resources, concepts, and skills. Similarly, the students are given the opportunity to identify and choose the international business topics they want to write blogs about, which helps them learn more about the issues they are interested in and develop themselves in the direction they choose.

Another important aspect of student work at the Center is that the Center initiates group dynamics among the student researchers, which improves learning. According to Lewin (1951), interpretation of events and experiences differ from person to person, creating productive

discussions around experiences and their interpretations. Naturally, the group work setup offered to students at the Center sometimes creates disagreements on various issues. For example, students brainstorm at the beginning of each Export Growth Program project to decide on the best approach to international market research for the company, industry, and product. They discuss identifying the best potential customer groups and how they can gather information in global markets about those groups. They debate what type of statistical data would benefit the company and brainstorm the best sources of data and information for that project. During these sessions, students share their thoughts and arguments, question others' opinions, justify their ideas, and try to resolve the disagreements altogether. Therefore, these meetings and many other group work activities at the Center help them engage in discussions that create experiential learning opportunities and enrich learning for all.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter will present the finding of the study, which are thematically organized. The themes were identified during the data analysis and were reflected in the participants' stories. The data coding table (Table 1) created while identifying the themes is provided below. These themes are organized in such a way as to pave the road towards understanding the outcomes of participating in NCAAs for students, and to guide the analysis. The chapter will focus on five main themes aiming to answer the following research questions:

1- What is the role of experiential learning in international business education through NCAAs?

2- What, if any, international business-related skills do participants of an NCAA believe they have learned while working at the CIB?

The Themes that emerged from the research findings are as follows:

Theme One: Learning Through Experience

Theme Two: Impactful Experiential Learning Activities

Theme Three: Personal Development and Self-Confidence

Theme Four: Employment

Theme Five: Learning International Business

Table 1:

The Code Book

Participant Name	T1: Learning Through Experience	T2: Impactful Experiential Learning Activities	T3: Personal Development and Self-Confidence	T4: Employment	T5: Learning International Business
Addie	x			x	x
Katie	x	x	x		x
Louise	x	x	x		x
Brooke	x			x	
Jessie	x	x	x	x	x
Jessica	x	x	x		x
Michael	x	x	x	x	x
Chad					x
Zach	x	x		x	x
Joe		x	x	x	x
Mike	x		x		x
David	x		x	x	x
Luke	x		x		x

Theme One: Learning Through Experience

Learning through experience was something students mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews. It was clear that most of them valued hands-on learning highly. While talking about their experiences at CIB, students used different perspectives to explain how they felt about their work and what they thought of learning through experience. For some, the hands-on work had always been more impactful than reading textbooks for learning, even before they joined CIB. For example, Michael said, "For me, I'm much more of an experienced guy based off of instead of like, reading about it, that's just something that I've been accustomed to." Mike was even more enthusiastic about experiential learning, and he argued that most of what he learned during his college years had been through the experiences he had. He expressed his feelings with the following:

> Four-and-a-half years in school, I have barely read a textbook; things do not stick to me through textbook, Lord. And, like, unless it's just a reading assignment and I have to basically look up something from it. Like, textbook learning does not help out at all, most of what I have learned, especially in business education, has been through experience. So this, the whole experience of working at CIB, technically works much more for me than pretty much any of my classes that I have had at school.

Jessi argued reading from books alone would not be enough to learn concepts successfully.

> It [reading from books only] would have been completely useless and it [*sic*] just not, I mean you, like, have to put it into practice, you have to do these things. So that is what was really great about it. You got to figure it out on your own and apply it to like, an actual scenario.

Like Jessi, Luke also believed learning through experience was more valuable than reading from books alone.

> I think the biggest thing, the international aspect of it [working at CIB] was doing it in person; the fact that you are always seeking out information [while working on NCAA], instead of a textbook where it is kind of presented to you.

Brooke believed that the hands-on experiences at the Center were one of the main reasons she successfully learned international business concepts. She reported, "I feel like it [international business concepts] just would not resonate as much with me personally. I would need to experience it [international business concepts] in order to learn."

Jessica was another student that believed she learned more by doing instead of just reading.

> Probably [I] would not pay attention as much. I feel like when you read something it is just a lot less immersive, and it does not impact you the same way. It is harder to visualize and like, truly understand it in your brain, it is more fictional.

> David elaborated more and claimed having work-like experiences in international business, compared to reading only, teaches students the main topics more clearly, leaving ambiguity out of the picture. He used the following example from his current job to prove how impactful the hands-on work at CIB is for learning international business:

> You can read about things. I have read about a lot of stuff, and that is helpful, but I mean you need to experience that. I guess, like, if I read about it, you know, maybe I have some idea but, I do not know. I don't think it would have been nearly as effective, just like if I read something that says like 'Oh, the German business culture is very direct' I would be like 'What does that mean,' but until you know, now I am conversing with teams in Germany on a weekly or even more frequent basis. Now it is definitely easier to give

some context, like 'What do you mean by more direct business culture,' and now you know and understand that means hey you know, one of the ways that might manifest is less small talk at the beginning of calls.

Others appreciated the projects they worked on at CIB and used their job to practice what they had learned in their courses. Addie said her experience at CIB helped her put everything she learned at college into perspective. She added that her work enhanced her college learnings "at a really high level." By working with companies at CIB, she claimed she understood better "how a business works and how everyone is so connected;" something she did not realize during her courses. She summarized her experience with the following: "It was just applying everything that we learned in class into a real project, nothing simulated, nothing just from the books or reenacting a case study." Katie thought the same way and said she was able to learn some in class but working on projects hands-on at CIB helped her understand some concepts better. She also emphasized that, during her work at CIB, she was able to research countries she had never explored before in her classes.

Katie was able to learn so much through the experiences she gained at the Center that she expressed her feelings as below:

> I think for me personally, starting my senior year it [working at CIB] was a great experience, I wish I had known about it earlier on in my college career. I think I could have learned a lot more, gained a lot more experience. For me personally, I would have loved to start my freshman/sophomore year and really worked there [CIB] throughout college and get me more projects and learn more different companies and learn about more countries.

For Addie, her hands-on experiences at CIB offered insights on international business that no textbook was able to provide.

> If I just read it [international business-related topics] on the textbook, I would probably have forgotten about it once the class was over. And you know I would acknowledge like "Oh, it looks like a big deal; great!", but actually applying it [what I have read] to the business world has helped me be a reliable source to some of my colleagues, and to just maintain some curiosity, to expand my perspective on things.

She believed that working on real-life projects with companies provided her with an excellent opportunity to learn. Then she bluntly said, "so not only did I simply learn the material, but I applied it, and I remember it now, *so I truly learned it!* [emphasis added]" She even compared her work at CIB to a real job and commented: "It [her job at CIB] was very much real; it was a good student job because it felt like a real job."

Jessica is another student who valued real-life experiences at CIB highly, and she mentioned something unique other students did not. She felt like she could use the other side of her brain that she did not utilize as much during coursework while working on company projects at CIB because those real-life experiences encouraged students to approach problems from different perspectives.

> [Working on company projects was] kind of just getting creative and thinking outside the box and using a different side of your brain than you would maybe in school. Because a lot of times in school you have a textbook right in front of you that has the answers, whereas this [company projects] is a lot more ambiguous and sometimes you do not feel like there is a right answer so, just getting creative there.

Moreover, the required responsibilities at CIB created another opportunity for students to get out of their comfort zones, experience new business-related activities, and grow both personally and professionally. When Jessica started working at CIB, she found running conference calls with companies challenging and nerve-wracking, something students do not experience in courses and every business professional should be comfortable with. But with time, she felt more comfortable talking to company representatives.

> And from more of like, a business aspect personal development, definitely what we would call, like, our [project] kickoff calls … It was really nerve-wracking to get on the phone with someone you had never met before, who just wanted our help with their business, and, like, frankly, as a student you do not feel qualified to help them. I am like, 'How am I qualified to do this?' . . . I don't know something that was helpful for my development as a professional.

Furthermore, the company projects students worked on at CIB also helped them get exposure to some international business concepts that were not introduced to them in courses. One example was the Harmonized System Codes (HS Codes) used for global trade statistics by the U.S. Department of Commerce and other countries. Zach talked about his experience working with HS Codes while conducting international market research and explained how he identified the correct HS Codes for a particular product group. Then, he examined international trade statistics to find which countries were importing the highest amount of that product. Referring to the company project he worked on, he concluded:

> So, that is kind of an example of one day-to-day thing that we would do is research which countries specifically could be tailored best to the companies that we were working with

their industry. So, it is kind of unique to learn about which countries in the world specialize in what type of industry and see how they export globally.

Michael made another interesting comment about a habit he gained while working at CIB. He claimed that learning through experience at CIB "even translates to, like, my work nowadays. I do not want to read about doing certain things. I must do it, like, involve me and stuff, show me or like, tell me."

Overall, many students appreciated the work-like environment and the experiences CIB offered them during their employment. Katie concluded that work at CIB "was really cool because we got to work hands on, actually, like, meet the people who we were doing the research for, understand what their product was, and then really dig into it." Brooke acknowledged her work experience at CIB like no other.

> I think it [CIB] was, like, the best place to work as a student that was going into business. I feel like it really gave me a good foundation of skills to use, like, in the business world now. And I guess just describing working there, it was very collaborative. We were constantly learning new information with every company that wanted our services.

She also added, "the most rewarding part, I would just say, the experience that I got because I feel like it definitely gave me a leg up compared to other students at MSU."

And finally, Zach expressed his feelings about this work and his experiences at CIB: "The experience is one that I would not change for the world!"

Theme Two: Impactful Experiential Learning Activities

During the interviews, I asked the students to describe the details of a significant and unique experience they recalled having while working on the international business-related tasks

and projects at CIB. Although the students mentioned various activities, seven of the 13 students mentioned the same activity as the most significant and unique experience: the company visits. Michael reported the site visits as something he remembered distinctly. "One of the really cool things about that [working at CIB] is, we had the chance to do a couple site visits with certain companies. There were, like, two in particular that *I remember pretty vividly.* [emphasis added]" Joe argued that "the easy answer [to the questions mentioned above] is one where we did a site visit. Just because it just kind of brought it all to life."

Jessi agreed that the site visit was a unique activity at the Center. "One of the best parts about working there [at CIB] was the site visits. So, we got to actually see the companies firsthand, so that was not necessarily international related, it was more of like a field trip." Katie felt the same way as Jessi. "It was really cool to be able to actually go to some of these companies and experience what they were doing." The company visit made a huge impact on Michael too.

> And that [company visit] was an experience of no other, and . . . I just think that was something that really stuck out to me overall. Just the communication aspect between business leaders, that was great. Being able to go and see how certain things are, how it actually looks in production, that was really cool as well. You know, ultimately, as I said, it really just comes back to connecting a lot of those dots and that's exactly what it [the company visit] did there.

Louise was another student who remembered the details of the company visit once she participated while working at the CIB.

> We set up a tour of their [the company's], it was not necessarily a warehouse it was like a space in the hangar at Willow Run airport, and we all took a trip down there and visited.

We got to see their drones, we got to talk with the company, the people from the

company to kind of go over the report and kind of have a follow up which we did not

necessarily always get to do either. So, that was really cool.

Jessica recalled the same company visit, and she provided more details about the company and

the project.

There was one project where we actually visited their headquarters, and so it was a

project related to drones, and I believe that these drones were supposed to bring medical

supplies and other things to hard to reach Third World countries, or at least parts of Third

World countries that were difficult to reach by like, normal means of transportation.

Zach reaffirmed the impact of company visits and gave an example of an in-person

interview he conducted with a company for a project he was leading.

I actually interviewed for an airplane company and did a market report for them. I think

that was most useful because I spent the most time with them one-on-one, I actually got

to meet them a couple times at different events that the CIB put on. So, it was great to

learn firsthand about their business in person. Them specifically telling me "here is what

we do, here is exactly what we are looking for." So, the in-person interactions with them

were something that stood out.

Another vital fact Joe emphasized was the impact of those site visits on his job

performance and motivation.

[Our CIB supervisor] was one of the people that really . . . encouraging us to kind of go

to these site visits and see the clients that we were helping, and that is when it really hit

home that we were kind of doing something that was actually taking impact. So, the best

trip was we went to a chocolate manufacturer, and we got a bunch of samples and saw

how they did business. But just seeing how we could actually make an impact, I think,

really kind of boosted my interest in my work.

Referring to the site visit he attended, Joe argued, "that was more meaningful and then there

were just ones that were cooler to research to be completely honest." Jessi also acknowledged

that sense of feeling like his job at CIB was a rewarding one.

> So, we completed the report and then we had the chance to go actually to where they
>
> were making these drones and visit the company and [it] was really cool getting the
>
> chance to talk with the CEO, learn about his mission, have him ask us questions, and
>
> actually feel that we made an important contribution to their company. It was a really
>
> cool experience being that I was 18-19 at the time. So, it was cool to have helped out in
>
> that way.

According to David, company visits provided an essential opportunity for the students to

understand better the companies they help, their products, and processes. He asserted that "it's

much more effective to have experienced that [company visit] before, and you know, once you

experience something [like that] you kind of get much better context than just reading about it."

Theme Three: Personal Development and Self-Confidence

This theme was one of the themes that surfaced more than others during the interviews

with participants. Nine of the 13 students mentioned they gained some level of personal

development, a sense of growing up, and took on responsibilities their peers in the college were

not able to experience. When Michael was talking about his experience at CIB, he argued it was

insightful.

Incredibly insightful and rewarding. And I am happy to use insightful because insightful is, you know very broad, in the sense of all the ways that it lifted me up. Rewarding in the sense of, like, the knowledge that was gained, opening my eyes to international business, and the whole idea of globalization, how everything is connected.

Michael was very fond of his experiences at the CIB, and he argued his job at the CIB helped him grow both personally and professionally. "I really came out of my shell, as far as, like, professionally, here's what I want to do, here the conversations I want to have, here are the right people to talk to, and all of that." He continued and elaborated more.

I was very fortunate to have had that [working at the CIB] experience because you come from a high school as a triplet you know, I was very much like, average with it, and I felt like with CIB, it really propelled me to something that was at a much higher level than what I was used to before.

Jessica also felt that she grew personally and suggested that "the most rewarding part was just feeling as a student I could have an impact on businesses in Michigan and help them out."

Luke reported similar feelings referring to his time at the CIB and believed that he grew internally. He said:

And then on the internal side, I thought it was cool watching myself go from someone who started there as a sophomore, to leading projects as a senior and kind of bringing people underneath you that you knew were going to backfill when you left, I thought was pretty cool.

Something different with Luke was that he also argued he was able to observe his peers at the Center grow personally and professionally as well.

Especially, I mean, I remember working with some younger staff at the center and the very first research report as expected, was never really good or what you are looking for sometimes at all. But after some feedback and after a few more reports underneath someone's belt, you can see the growth and it was always pretty cool to watch. Maybe the first report looked terrible, maybe the second report they are doing it just as good as you were, so I thought that was that was really cool as well.

Some participants explained their work at the CIB as an empowering experience. They asserted that they could see some of the projects and tasks from the business professionals' perspective. Jessi was one of them.

When you work as a market researcher there [at CIB], you are like, basically putting yourself in the business issues, like the business owner, so, like, you are basically doing the research that they should probably be doing and they probably are, but, like, you could put it into expanding your own business because you are doing the research for said company.

Louise was fascinated with her experiences at the CIB. She was also grateful for everything the Center had provided for her development.

Some 20-some-year-old kids who are putting together these reports for businesses that these are their livelihoods. We were acting as consultants and thinking independently for ourselves and coming up with solutions to problems to issues that people much older than us were having, who have these businesses. I think it really gave me a confidence that like, 'Oh, I do know what I am doing and like, that can be true.' Especially as a young woman entering the workforce, that sense of like, not second-guessing myself. I am sure when I am sure. *That is, like, honestly, one of my favorite things, just having had the*

respect and ability to kind of show that we could do these things, even though we were

kind of young and we were still students, it was very empowering. [emphasis added]"

She elaborated more and added:

Whatever the list of like reports I did, I can say 'here, I did this published report.' So that

is like, really cool to be able to have something, even if my name is not on it, I still did

that work, I still wrote that report and everything.

During his years at the CIB, David had the opportunity of leading the team he was a part

of. He described that experience in detail as overseeing a student team helped him gain self-

confidence.

I was also in charge of you know, a staff of 10-15 other undergraduate contributors, so

coordinating with them on you know the best topics and international business to cover

on the website, coordinating schedules, making sure we do not have to blogs on the same

topic every day, making sure following the news if there is something important that

comes out, making sure that it is you know covered in an article in the next week or so.

David continued and concluded as, "I think it was a rewarding experience. I think it was a job,

where you got out of it what you put in."

Joe dug through his memories and described the work environment at the CIB as a

nurturing climate. "I think we just were a great team, and everybody was very welcoming." He

remembered that many students who worked at the Center would come to work the following

year again.

It was just great to have people that are doing similar things as you were. We were all in

the business school. So, if any of us had similar classes, we could study together, we

could give each other advice. I mean it was like a go-to spot for anything that was going

on in our kind of school careers. We could share it amongst each other and just kind of

work as peers, and it was a great resource to me. I met a lot of people through the

program [CIB].

Mike was another participant that learned a lot at the CIB, which helped him develop

personally and professionally. In addition, his experiences at the Center provoked him to re-

consider his college major and make changes. Referring to his experiences at the CIB, he

explains what he has been through during those times.

Because, if not [worked at the CIB], I would not have decided to get my additional

minors in international business and economics. I would have just gone for marketing and

entrepreneurship because that was the track I was on at that point. After working at CIB, I

learned that there is a lot more that goes into business, especially international business,

and with my overall experience just living as an international student in the U.S., and

then learning at the CIB, that is going to be very, very helpful for anything that I am

looking forward to working in later.

Joe concluded the topic with the following: "I would just say it was a valuable professional

experience that helped me grow my career and kind of jumpstart it."

Theme Four: Employment

Many of the students talked about how their involvement with CIB helped them with

their employment in various ways. They emphasized the importance of their CIB experiences in

finding internships and jobs. For example, Brooke explained how her experiences at CIB helped

her find internships. During her work at the Center, as all the other students did, Brooke worked

on many research projects that exposed her to many international business topics such as current

global issues, foreign government matters, and international industry trends. Therefore, Brooke argued that she was so well-informed on international business topics that she could use them as speaking points during her interviews, which eventually gave her an advantage over other candidates.

Joe had a similar experience, and he remembered the details of his conversation with the company representatives during an internship interview.

There was a specific internship offer from Whirlpool, and Brexit was recently announced, and it was a hot topic and I had known about it primarily through my research at work [CIB], and I was able to speak to it in an interview. I think it really helped me kind of stand out from the crowd, so it [my work experiences] has helped me tremendously.

Jessie insisted that his experiences at the Center and his responsibilities prepared him for the future after graduation: "Yes, absolutely! Just having so much responsibility at a young age, and just having to work on time specific deadlines with real world consequences and work with the team have been very helpful in my career so far." Addie believed she left the Center with a similar outcome. "That [my job at CIB] has helped me a lot because when I was doing those reports, the culture and the psychology behind people doing business was a big thing that I learned from the international business center."

Students also discussed how their experiences in CIB provided them leverage during full-time employment. In addition to securing an internship, Joe also believed that his job at the CIB and all the experiences he gained at CIB gave him an advantage while finding his post-graduation job. "I would just say it was valuable professional experience that helped me grow my career and kind of jumpstart it." Brooke agreed with Joe as she had similar thoughts. "I think

it [my work at CIB] really set me up for success post-grad." Zach highlighted another advantage

his experiences at the CIB provided him. He claimed, while working at the Center, he was "able

to connect with people and find out information and more strategic ways [about business]," and

he argued these are important benefits because "the better your relationships are at any position

in business, the more information you'll get and the better advantage you will have."

> Especially dealing with international suppliers now, or any companies domestically, since
>
> I had that job at the [CIB] and I would go to these events and learn from companies and
>
> meet with companies, it kind of takes the stress away and you are glad you had an
>
> opportunity in college to network and understand how you do that in the real world.

During the interviews, some students also mentioned how their job at the CIB helped

them shape their careers and plan accordingly. For example, Addie asserted that her job at the

Center assisted her in figuring out what she wanted after graduation.

> So, it really has impacted me in many ways, and I would think any student who was able
>
> to get into the [CIB] and have that position. It [my job at CIB] is so beneficial because it
>
> has helped me figure out what I want to do the long term, instead of just hop from one job
>
> to the next and see what I like.

David believed that all his conversations with his peers and supervisors at CIB helped

him plan and prepare for this future career.

> Whether it is small talk when I would get into the office [at CIB] and you are talking with
>
> [your supervisors], talking with anyone else at the Center. Or you know more formal like
>
> performance type reviews, where we have kind of discussions about my development on
>
> both in the Center and just sort of like career advice in general.

Many students also reported that their work-related experiences at the Center helped and continue to help them in their current jobs. Jessi believed that his experiences at CIB provided many advantages in his current job. Addie argued some non-international business skills she gained at the Center offers her significant leverage in her current job. "But with my current role as a market or a target audience analyst, I definitely use the data skills that I developed there with the [CIB] and a lot of the light statistical skills that I can still remember." And finally, Zach strongly agreed that his experiences at the CIB helped him bolster his current job.

> Yeah, definitely! I work for a tool company in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and I'm in procurement, so I deal with international suppliers pretty much daily. A lot of it is discussing certain supply chain topics with people from Taiwan, China, and Hong Kong. So, it is [an] international job. And I can definitely say that what I have learned in the [CIB] has helped put me ahead in my job currently.

Theme Five: Learning International Business

Of all the themes identified during the interview analysis, this theme was the most common among all the participants. Almost all participants reported learning about international business at the Center and gaining specific international business skills. Although some participants were certain in enunciating their learned skills, some were somewhat less clear about the exact skills learned. Although they could not articulate the actual skills they may have gained at the Center, those participants were sure that they learned immensely about globalization and international business during their time at the CIB. Because almost all participants commented on this theme, this section will present the findings categorized by participant.

Addie. Addie was born and raised in another country. Hence, her experiences at the Center and how she perceived what she had learned working at the CIB were unique. Because her parents moved to the U.S. years ago, she traveled to the country she was born and others many times over the years, which helped her gain a certain understanding of the world. However, she argued that all her international travels and experiences became meaningful when she started working at the Center. According to Addie, her experiences at the Center stimulated a better understanding of the international business field when combined with her background.

> But going to the international business center, kind of put all of my perspectives into
> place and enhanced it at a really high level just learning about basically, how a business
> works and how everyone is so connected but it is not something that everyone realizes.
> So, I guess it just gave me a well-rounded experience with learning about international
> business and how it is so important to everybody's economy.

Furthermore, Addie gave examples of what kind of international business skills she had learned at the Center and how she leverages them in her career.

> I think another impact that in my current role, so, I am a target audience analyst, so I help
> with brand strategies and advertising campaigns. So, with let's say ethnic grocery stores,
> or looking at a niche market, that [skills learned at CIB] has helped me a lot because
> when I was doing those reports [at CIB], the culture and the psychology behind people
> doing business was a big thing that I learned from the CIB.

Chad. Chad believed he was able to learn new international business topics during his time at the CIB. In addition to other skills, he had gained at the Center, he explained his international business-related learnings as follows.

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I would say that it [CIB] is an international business learning focused environment, in the

sense that I was able to pick up things I did not know before just by researching and

writing. When you are doing write-up [*sic*] about a country or event, you are kind of

immersing yourself and whatever is going on there at a high level, and so I thought that

was really cool.

In addition, Chad referred to a specific project he was involved in at the Center. During

this project, he supported one of the faculty who also worked at the CIB. Chad helped this

faculty member prepare student practice questions for each chapter of an international business

book the faculty wrote.

It [working with the faculty member] was different learning his opinion on corporate

strategies with international business, kind of like in the forefront, to get the strategies

behind that. That is kind of what my number one learning point was. And we would kind

of discuss situations where different investment styles or different marketing strategies

might work over something else. And actively trying to take the book and find like a real-

world event that may or may not directly correlate.

David. David was one of the participants that often emphasized what he had learned at

the Center, and while doing that, he provided a typical student researcher's job details at CIB

with absolute detail.

[Referring to his CIB responsibilities] whereas a lot of the blog post [*sic*] where I am

researching current topics in international business and writing, you know, a brief article

on. That is definitely international business focused. Updating resources is very

international business focused. For background, the website has a dedicated page to every

country in the world and a few territories, so there's like 200-some countries that, you

know, we keep updated with important business statistics, important business and government leaders, and things of that nature. So, you know, updating those websites is very international business focused. You know, I am going to their government webpages, I am reading articles about that country, how they do business, you know culturally, procedurally, you know, all those tasks. So I think pretty much everything is geared towards international business in some way, but a lot of the blog post writing, resource checks, updates and updating the web pages is very international business focused.

Moreover, while working on his tasks at the Center, David picked up an excellent habit that provides some advantages in his daily life.

Writing blog posts and articles on current international events been useful background knowledge, so, you know, that is something, obviously. When it was part of my job, I was reading news and specifically international business news religiously. You know every day I am reading, like, Wall Street Journal and a few other sites like, almost cover to cover as part of my job, and now that is not part of my job, but I still stay up to date on current events, because I think I recognize the value of following the news, following what is going on in other countries and things of that nature.

Besides, David was one of the participants who undoubtedly supported one of the main ideas of this dissertation, which argues that international business can be taught more efficiently through experiences compared to using lectures and books only.

I think especially for something like international business because it is so cultural. How do you write about a culture? It is very difficult. There are nuances in our culture. . . . So, I think international business, especially, you have to almost experience it because, you

know, I can read about something, but the culture does not necessarily apply to just one person.

David also mentioned a unique advantage of working at the Center was that it helped him gain a better understanding of the world cultures and working with people from different cultures.

> At [CIB], as you may know, we have a lot of international employees. I mean I worked with a lot of international students or people who spent some significant time living in other countries. I had colleagues at the [CIB] from Syria, from Lebanon, Brazil, Spain. So kind of working with these people and obviously Erkan comes from Turkey. Some of the other professors were from different countries as well, so, you know, working with these different cultures I have gotten a little bit of a better sense of kind of the working environment. So, I think there is kind of two aspects, you know, technical side, reading about international business every day definitely helps build the background knowledge that I use in my job. And then also, you know, working alongside colleagues from different countries and cultures helps me get a better understanding of sort of how these different cultures operate, business-wise, which has also been helpful.

Indeed, David elaborated on working with people from different cultures and backgrounds at the CIB and explained what it taught him as a skill.

> For a while we had a programmer at the [CIB], who is from China. His English was, I mean it was great, but you know, obviously English as a second language. So I think communication has been very important, you know, learning how to effectively communicate with people who are from other countries; maybe English is not their first language, and you know being clear, providing good written instructions, maybe using

different verbiage than I would if I am talking to a native speaker where I might use some

bigger words or just kind of talking a little different way, just to make things a little

clearer and better understood. I just learned the kind of importance of making sure

nothing gets confused and just having things in writing. So I guess communication with

foreign teams, I think, in my current job is one of the most important aspects of what I

do, and I think that is a skill that I have learned starting at the [CIB].

In conclusion, David finished his interview with the below quote that elegantly explains

what it was like working at the Center and what he had learned there. One crucial thing he

mentioned was that he found it difficult to name the exact tangible skills he gained working at

CIB. Instead, he explained a gain of general understanding of the world and different cultures.

… just to put a cap on everything, . . . everything there [at CIB] has a slant towards

international business. Being around that for every day for five years and now going into

a job, where I work with people in other countries on a daily basis, I think it has been

very helpful. Whether or not it has been direct like technical, maybe technical is not the

right word, but, you know, directly applicable knowledge or just, you know, that general

understanding of 'hey people do business and there are different business cultures in

different countries' and recognizing that and trying to work in the best manner to

collaborate with those people versus do it 'my way or the highway' type of deal. I think

that is kind of my biggest takeaway from [CIB]. Just understanding there are different

business cultures and different countries and that you know we are finding the best way

to work with them.

Jessica. Jessica worked at the Center as a research assistant during her first three years, and she was promoted to a team leader position in her last year at CIB. She argued that her work at the Center gave her great insights into the complexities of working globally.

> I feel like a lot of it [experiences at CIB] just went into understanding the complexity of it. There are so many different moving parts and like, taxes and just regulations in different countries. So, I think a lot of what I learned is just the types of things that you need to know before you want to sell in a different country, and so that was like, my main takeaway.

And she added, "Baseline understanding of the complexities of doing business in other countries. So, I think [CIB] helped get me at least a sense of what it would be like as a company trying to sell their product in a different country."

In another part of her interview, Jessica also emphasized another realization she had while working at CIB, a global worldview. She argued the work principles of CIB taught the student researchers to become more involved with their communities.

> Michigan has a lot of cool businesses that do a lot of different things, and it is important to support smaller businesses. And I was really glad that we were able to play a role in something that seemed so impactful to a place outside of Michigan. It is easy to be in a little bubble, like, 'Oh we are just here in Michigan living our day-to-day lives.' And so, it is really cool to see that a company that we worked with was making such a big impact worldwide.

Jessie. In his interview, Jessie provided a detailed list of experiential activities he worked on at CIB, which eventually provided him with a lifelong understanding of the elements of conducting business globally.

Basically, creating and filtering out distributor lists, exporter lists, being able to collect

data on trade shows, being able to create reports that have very specific information

regarding the industry that you are researching, the people … Being able to speak and

figure out what these business owners and CEOs are trying to do abroad and

communicating with them to best fit their needs.

Furthermore, he detailed what he had learned about the different aspects of doing

business internationally throughout those experiential activities.

It [international business] is just a lot more complex than, like, what I had originally

anticipated and that you need to do some serious research about, if you should ever start a

company or business and you want to go and expand abroad. Like, there is a lot of

research that goes into it and it is not just hunky-dory 'oh we are going to go and export

Air Pods to Zimbabwe' or something like that. There are a lot of different things you

have to consider.

When Jessie was asked to explain his prior international business knowledge and what he

has learned at the Center, he provided additional details and provided a substantial list of

elements he learned at the Center that the international business field utilizes.

Prior to that [working at CIB], I did not really have, like, I did not know what a trade

show was, I never considered when doing business there are different regulations, and

how to export something, what laws are in place there, how to cite out who are legit

distributors and exporters and suppliers.

He concluded his learning journey at CIB with the following: "I had a better

understanding of supply chain, marketing, just internationally taking international business

classes, like a lot of the stuff that they were teaching was already being put into practice at the CIB.

Joe. Joe was another participant that emphasized the intangible aspects of international business. What he had learned at the Center was partially intangible, in his opinion, which he explained with: "It [what he had learned at CIB] was more of knowledge than a specific skill." Regardless, he was able to elaborate on what he had learned in detail.

> I have a little bit better idea of what is going on in those countries, sometimes the way they do business, the way their economy might be different than ours. And that was kind of first [what I had] learned at Michigan state and through the [CIB]. . . . I have a little bit better idea for the various different countries' economies, and developing versus developed nations, and kind of what their economies, like, how far into the developing stage they are. So, I think it just kind of shortened the learning curve, in a sense, in my current job as far as, you know, learning the global economy and kind of breaking down individual countrys' development really, and their different contributions to the global economy.

Katie. Katie was one of the participants who wished she had known CIB sooner and had started working there in the earlier years of her college life. However, she was profoundly satisfied with the learning and research resources CIB provided to the students. She explained her satisfaction with the following: "Most of these [resources], I have never seen them before or worked with them before. I studied international relations, but I never did the research on different countries so the websites that they had were phenomenal." She continued her comments by explaining how much she believed she missed by not joining the CIB earlier in her college education.

I think for me personally, starting my senior year it was a great experience. I wish I had known about it [CIB] earlier on in my college career. I think I could have learned a lot more, gained a lot more experience. For me personally, I would have loved to start my freshman/sophomore year and really worked there [at CIB] throughout college and get me more projects and learn more different companies and learn about more countries.

Louise. Louise was the only non-business student researcher that worked at the CIB during her time. Her perspective about what she had learned about international business while working at the Center was broad. She explained her opinion on this with the following:

And so, it is kind of figuring out what that data means and being able to kind of parse out meaning from like, huge amount of information. International business specifically. . . . I already kind of knew that everything is connected, but doing the actual legwork to find all these answers, or to try at least, was very helpful. It helped to truly see the scope of everything, and all of our research was non-U.S.-based so it kind of challenged us to think, like, decentralized from, like, a lot of our American-focused biases if that makes sense. Well, everything is globally interconnected and the data.

Luke. Luke was a finance student at the college, and therefore, he used a financial lens when he commented on what he had learned working at the Center.

I guess the most international exposure is looking at foreign equity and fixed income markets and you are still looking at kind of those global trends of different things that might impact the credit markets or what different regulations might impact on financial securities. But I also think even looking at US companies just kind of how global policies and regulations might impact the market for domestic products here to get exported over there.

Following his initial thoughts, Luke elaborated on his overall gains from his experiences at the Center. "I gained a pretty good understanding of how to maybe prioritize different international markets based on what qualities the client is looking for."

Michael. Michael was one of the other participants that valued working with international student researchers at the CIB.

> But something that honestly, I do not necessarily think about often, but, you know, comes to mind, is like, the international peers that I interact with. And that is something that I think really does stand out, is that I was prepared for those conversations and what to expect based off of some of the stuff that we did at the [CIB].

Michael continued his comments by explaining critical thinking as a tangible skill he gained at the Center.

> The second in all honesty that I was thinking about as far as, like, specific skills that apply to that domain, would probably be actually kind of like a critical thinking piece. So, I would say critical thinking in the sense of connecting the dots between, like, maybe a domestic business to an international strategy, instead of just thinking kind of like one to one it is like a one-to-many kind of aspect. Especially because a lot of those projects dealt with "hey there are multiple countries that we are interested in, not just one."

Mike. Like Joe and David, Mike had a broader perspective on what he had learned at the Center. Instead of naming specific international business skills, he started by explaining the broader global perspective he gained while working at the Center.

> Can be hard to put a directly in words. I likely will not be able to find a word that fits into the skills, but I can probably mention sequences of actions that have helped me

understand international business better and that mainly comes from working in the

[CIB].

Moreover, Mike argued that working at CIB changed his worldview.

Then we also have to factor in that prior to this, I would have somewhat of an

ethnocentric point of view when it came to business overall. The work over here [at CIB]

helped me understand that business is business, there are things that are different then we

kind of have to look at it from that particular place's business culture. [It] kind of was an

integral part of all of our reports that came into our country and business culture

briefings.

Mike concluded his thoughts on what he gained working at the CIB with the following

examples.

I believe that one of my most important skills [learned at CIB] is like, I tried to attempt to

figure out what a particular client is looking for and once I do have that mind, I try to

help them out in any way that I can. So if we have to look at it from the [international]

market overview perspective and how that helped me, overall I think it is just that, when

it comes to me looking for other [international] opportunities later on in my career, I am

basically looking for something where I get to work with clients and even if it is like, just

from one simple product that we are trying to provide, I ensure that it is not just going to

be like a transactional thing going on.

Zach. Zach was one of the participants that believed he learned significantly about

international business at the Center.

I think wholeheartedly the detail is something that I really learned, actually understanding

that a lot of this stuff in America is made overseas, and the whole process and how it is

made, how it is transported over here, the extent and the details and everything that has to

be done correctly. U.S. Customs has to verify everything, and it is just the whole process

of actual supply chain overseas is something that I have learned greatly. . . [By working

at CIB] you have a good grasp of learning how different countries do business in the

world, you get taught on how to do reports and analyze data throughout the world, as well

as how each country kind of interact [*sic*] with each other and the global marketplace.

Finally, Zach argued that working at the CIB and his experiences there taught him a

different perspective when analyzing international data, and he elaborated with the following:

I would say the skill of analyzing international data. Piecing together and being able to read

patterns, I would say, of data. So, taking a big data set like, for example, meat industry and

finding not just which countries import the most meat, but specifically what kinds of meat, and

digging down really analyzing data into your favor I would say internationally.

CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Overview of the Study

This research is designed as a case study that uses social constructivism as the research paradigm. Research data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 13 former student researchers that worked at CIB, a perfect example of an NCAA. Although all participants had different backgrounds and experiences, there were similarities among their accounts, which are described as "themes." After a comprehensive review of the interviews, I identified five main themes across all participants. These five themes were: learning through experience, preferred experiential learning activities, personal development and self-confidence, employment, and learning international business. The analysis of these five themes will guide the study in answering the following two research questions:

1- What is the role of experiential learning in international business education through NCAAs?

2- What, if any, international business-related skills do participants of an NCAA believe they have learned while working at the CIB?

The previous chapter offered participant narratives that helped us understand former students' perceptions about their experiences at an NCAA. This chapter will begin with analyzing the findings, highlighted in the previous chapter as "themes." Based on this analysis, I will then provide my recommendations for designing future NCAAs that will offer exceptional experiential learning opportunities to students. Finally, I will offer my suggestions for future

research centered on the findings of this study and how exploring other aspects of NCAAs can aid higher education institutions in providing impactful teaching practices through experience.

Student Preferences About Learning

One way or another, most participants in this study argued learning through experience is highly effective compared to learning with traditional methods such as reading from texts or listening to lectures. Some of these students have always been more comfortable learning through hands-on activities, even before they started working at the Center. For example, Mike was very straightforward with his thoughts on this subject and claimed he had barely read a textbook since he began college because he could not learn by reading only and that he needed experience to grasp topics fully. Although his argument is somewhat at the very far end of the spectrum, other participants echoed his preference. While most students still considered reading an essential part of learning, they also expressed the necessity of hands-on experiences for a more comprehensive approach to learning.

When it comes to deciding which method to use primarily, there were different opinions among participants. As explained above, many students choose to learn through trying and hands-on activities over other ways. There may be various factors that influence these participants' preferred learning styles. For example, prior educational experiences may have formed a habit of learning through practice in some participants. Given the fact that the backgrounds of the participants are different, and some of them completed their high school education in other countries that likely offer various teaching methods, it is understandable that some students prefer hands-on practices while learning. The social environment students come from may also impact their learning choices. The various elements of their social settings can be

listed as the conditions and communities they lived in, the ethnic groups they belong to, their

work and education-related experiences, relationships, families, the culture they are from, and

more. This complex net of variables in a student's life forms a unique set of conditions for every

individual, most likely influencing life choices on many things, and learning is only one of them.

Another influence in a student's learning style selection may be the basic cognitive structure of

the individual that naturally propels the person towards a specific approach to learning.

For some participants, learning through experience was a complementary approach to the

traditional learning methods they are accustomed to using. These students believed reading and

listening to lectures were still needed to learn the fundamentals of what was being taught.

However, they also emphasized the importance of practicing those subjects with experiments as

the next step to complete the learning process and bolster better learning outcomes. David was

one of those students who expressed his thoughts by saying, "You can read about things, I have

read about a lot of stuff, and that is helpful, but I mean, you need to experience that." The lack of

suitable prior opportunities in the students' lives may be one of the main reasons some of these

participants did not prioritize learning through experience as much as others. In fact, one of the

students, Jessica, interpreted her experiences in the Center as learning to use a different side of

her brain that she did not have a chance to use before. Referring to her work at CIB, she

explained her perspective as "kind of just getting creative and thinking outside the box and using

a different side of your brain than you would maybe in school."

Another preference participants emphasized multiple times during their interviews was

the types of experiential learning activities they deemed most impactful. The work at the CIB is

designed to expose students to a variety of hands-on activities through different programs and

projects. We can categorize these activities into two main groups. The first group is mostly based

on student research and project management. Working on this first group of activities, students lead project teams to conduct market research for companies and collect international business-related information for the CIB's online business portal. These activities include visiting online sources to gather statistics, learning about foreign market conditions, comparing different industries, finding potential customers and distributors, identifying foreign trade missions, researching foreign government trade regulations, and understanding customs requirements. When asked, students expressed positive feelings about this first group of activities and asserted that they learned tremendously through these real-life practices.

However, participants expressed more favorable feelings toward the second category of activities, which allowed them to reach out to companies and work with company representatives and managers in close contact during different stages of the CIB projects. The hands-on activity that was singled out as the one that left a significant impression on many participants was the company site visits. Numerous times, students brought to our attention how much they appreciated site visits to the companies CIB did projects with. With many examples, participants talked about the details of these visits, vividly remembering all the features of the places visited, discussions made, and experiences gained. For instance, Joe spoke about the site visits he participated in in detail when he was asked about a unique experience he remembers working at the Center.

> I think the easy answer is any one where we did a site visit. Just because it just kind of
> brought it all to life and we saw the people we were working for, we saw the factory. . . .
> We would go to for the chocolate [manufacturing facility], or there was a different one
> where this guy would take these old computers from basically mostly like government
> funded businesses, that it was like a hospital or if it was like a government office. They

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take the computers, erase all the data and then recycle all that metal and they would either

still like use the computer or just sell the actual metal internationally. So that was a [*sic*]

pretty cool.

Louise discussed another example where she visited an airport hangar to meet with a company

that manufactured drones to deliver medical supplies to the rural parts of countries.

We set up a tour of their, it was not necessarily a warehouse. It was like a space in the

hangar at Willow Run airport and we all took a trip down there and visited. We got to see

their drones, we got to talk with the company, the people from the company, to kind of go

over the report and kind of have a follow up which we did not necessarily always get to

do either, so that was really cool.

Company site visits were regarded as the most favorable and rewarding learning activity

for several reasons. First, these visits took the overall experiential learning operation CIB

designed to the next level by providing first-hand real-life exposure to businesses for the

students. Although students learned about the companies during the traditional conference calls

over the phone, and the amount of information collected from company representatives during

those calls was plentiful enough to run successful projects, participants argued that they learned

substantially more and better about the companies during actual visits. Students reported that

seeing the operations and the products, and talking to people face-to-face to understand their

needs and challenges in international markets made them grasp the project needs and scope much

more clearly. Another benefit of site visits was that they increased student motivation. Students

saw the impact they made in helping these companies when they saw the people who worked

there and the products produced. These site visits eventually became a rewarding experience for

students, because they tied what students did at their job at CIB to the real world, and made

students understand the contribution they made to the very society they lived in. Company visits also paved a road for the students to their future careers by providing them with in-depth experiences in the real corporate world and offering students further networking opportunities.

Experiential Learning at CIB

Based on my years of experience working at the Center, I can comfortably argue that the student work at the CIB was designed to provide an experiential learning environment for the student researchers that work on CIB projects and programs. I can also use my observations to attest to the fact that student work was also conducted in a certain way to encourage students to engage in hands-on activities, such as working directly with corporate executives and representatives, or participating in company visits. Therefore, it would not be wrong to assume that experiential learning occurs at the Center. However, what did the participants think about it? For the first time in the history of the Center, participant accounts also confirm that experiential learning is an integral part of work at CIB.

Students' Perspective. Although the students' social environment, prior educational experiences, and cognitive frameworks may be different, the fact that they were inclined to use hands-on experiences to reinforce learning when they were given the opportunity at the CIB supports the idea that Kolb's experiential learning cycle (D. Kolb, 1984) embodies itself in the working environment of the Center. Moreover, when describing their work at the Center, participants repeatedly mentioned that they had real-life experiences with many projects, which they reflected on later on different occasions, to create concrete learning, and had the opportunity to apply that knowledge in different settings and tasks. Therefore, using Kolb's experiential

learning cycle as the main framework of analysis, I argue that participants went through the steps

of experiential learning on multiple occasions.

For example, while disclosing the details of a company project she worked on, Katie

pointed out that she researched firefighter helmets in international markets, which corresponds to

the "concrete experience" step of Kolb's cycle.

[learning about different products in international markets] just kind of opens your eyes.

There is so much more to the business world and to the international world and that

something that might have no impact on my life, would have a huge impact, say, in a

firefighter's life where they can breathe better through their helmets.

Later in the process, after she found some relevant information on a similar product, she

completed the "reflection" step by making the connection between the similar product she found

information on and the actual one she recalled from the project. Following this step, she

determined through critical thinking that she could use the information about the similar product

she found as an indicator for the market status of the actual product in the project. Consequently,

she completed the third step of Kolb's learning cycle, "abstract conceptualization."

So, I used Export.gov a lot because it kind of gave you an overall view of the market and

the different things that were going on in each country, what their strongest markets were,

what a lot of their exports and imports were and then I could go from there. "Okay I

notice they have a bunch of exports in fire hoses," again going back to that example

[referring to the firefighter helmets project], "let me see what we can do like these

helmets now."

Finally, she had the opportunity of experimenting with the same (or a similar) process during the projects she worked on after the one she explained in her account, which helped her complete the learning cycle with "active experimentation."

Participants' stories offered examples of occurrences that fit perfectly with Kolb's experiential learning cycle throughout the interviews. I organized some of the student feedback in the below table to showcase how those occurrences overlap with the actual learning cycle steps.

Table 2:

Experiential Learning Cycle – Student Narratives Mapping

ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION	CONCRETE EXPERIENCE
Worked on a market potential index last year and created another for a company this year	Company calls and site visits
"I had a problem that we're kind of like "what are we going to do?" And then, based on my other past experiences, I was like "Oh well, what about this?""	Communicating with third parties
	Finding foreign customers and distributors
	Researching foreign markets and industries
	Foreign market potential analysis
"We would kind of discuss situations where different investment styles or different marketing strategies might work over something else."	Researching foreign government regulations
	Analyzing trade statistics
"[The] thing that [I] have learned working at CIB has come in handy and well at schoolwork."	Writing international market research reports
	Writing international business blogs
"Sometimes it's like pretty topical and specific knowledge, it does play its part and I know someday I'll probably find it useful in some capacity."	Leading projects and teams
	"Just applying everything that we learned in class into a real project, nothing simulated, nothing just from the books or reenacting a case study."
ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALISATION	**REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION**
" [referring to the previous experiences] structuring that out and breaking stuff down"	"Thinking about it in a holistic sense after going and having that experience, that was super helpful."
"It's not always readily available so you have to get creative."	"We had a weekly stand-up meeting where we would go through a lot of our projects."
"I gained a pretty good understanding of how to maybe prioritize different international market based on what qualities the client looking for."	"There was a team of us that would be going through the [project], so we were actively discussing and kind of debating."
"Understanding the real-world impact of it"	"I remember discussing it quite a bit with our team."
"Learning that and understanding how big of an impact they can have."	
"Based on our results, I did research and then kind of analyzed into what these trends would be for these different industries."	"I was volunteering at a nursing home for my business fraternity, and I remember seeing that product there."

My Perspective. Below, I will analyze experiential learning at the Center from two perspectives and detail an interesting finding about students' way of working.

Two Different Experiential Learning Angles. I agree that experiential learning activities can be designed and incorporated into any learning environment successfully. However, I also believe doing so is not equally straightforward in every field. For example, combining, observing, and reporting experiential learning in engineering, medical, or some science domains seems less challenging compared to other areas of study, such as business. Studying in these fields often requires many physical tasks that students can experience first-hand in order to learn a topic. Hence, designing and incorporating experiential learning activities into these fields is a more obvious process for educators. To encounter experiential learning exercises, students in these fields can work at construction sites, scientific laboratories, or hospitals to try what is being taught in class with their hands, and to accompany their education. One could confidently determine the presence or absence of experiential learning in these fields by analyzing those activities.

In contrast, it is more challenging to incorporate experiential learning into business education because of the nature of this field. Teaching business and international business includes limited amounts of physical activities, if any, but do involve demonstrating many theories and discussing concepts. Therefore, I assert that it is more complicated to incorporate hands-on experiences that students can "learn by doing" while studying international business and examining their impacts.

For this reason, we can examine experiential learning in CIB more efficiently and observe its impact clearly if we approach it from two angles and inspect two types of experiences: the physical experiences that involve hands-on activities, and the nonphysical

experiences that are directly related to consequences and outcomes. Obviously, hands-on activities are the most used and well-known aspect of experiential learning. We at the Center also incorporate as much hands-on work as possible into our student employees' daily activities, which I believe helps them learn through experience. For example, as explained in Chapter 4, KnowBase students design and implement new sections on the website, collect and modify international data for those new sections, and track user acquisition to assess the sections' success. By conducting intensive research to find interesting, current global news, these students also write international business blogs periodically, track user access to see how their blogs performed, and monitor user interaction on social media. Through these experiences, students learn new international business topics and see how much attention they attract from the international business community. In addition, they learn the fundamentals of designing sections for websites and organizing data in the most readable and understandable ways.

Similarly, EGP students also work on hands-on activities during their time at the Center. They actively communicate with company professionals and facilitate conference calls, which helps them gain communication skills and learn business etiquette and terminology. As another physical activity, students attend company site visits, which help tremendously to teach them various concepts about the business world. These students walk through assembly lines and witness different manufacturing processes. During these visits, they experiment with many products, compare prototypes with finished products, and listen to product development stories from the company representatives, which help them understand the concept of innovation and product design for international markets. In addition, the students ask and answer questions about company operations while visiting these facilities and experience the working details of

companies from different industries. In conclusion, these physical activities help CIB students gain specific skills and learn about international business subjects through experience.

However, we cannot possibly convert every experience in the business field into physical activity or something tangible that students can try. Some of these experiences are less visible to the naked eye, yet they teach a lot to the students. These happenings are valuable experiences because they create reactions, have consequences, and produce outcomes that students cannot encounter through lectures and other traditional teaching methods. For instance, EGP students understand that they must filter out the most relevant information from the industry reports they find so that their research is beneficial for the companies we help. However, when they fail, the company representatives reach out to me to express their dissatisfaction, forcing me to have serious conversations with those students. Similarly, during the company email exchanges, if a student fails to reply to a company email or delays the delivery of a report, this misstep creates a reaction from the company representatives, which eventually returns to the student. Or during their first couple of company calls or site visits, new students usually stay quiet and observe the questions more experienced students and I ask the company representatives, how the facilitator leads the conversation, and the order of topics discussed. While doing so, these new students learn to ask the best questions, the order of speech, the possible reactions of company representatives, and more.

Another nonphysical experience students live through happens when they learn about the performances of the companies they helped. For example, our partner economic development organization collects export sales reports from the companies they assist and shares those results with us yearly. Through these reports, students see the increase or decrease in the export sales of the companies they helped. In addition, they know the number of new employees these

companies hired and the new markets they entered. Eventually, the students reflect on the reports they delivered to these companies, how much effort they put into those reports, and the perceived quality, and make connections between the quality of their work and the company outcomes. These occurrences deliver a variety of knowledge, both in general and international business, to the CIB students through experience.

An Anomaly: Experiential Learning Through Traditional Methods. When I shared my notes with my advisor for the first time, he was surprised to learn that CIB students spent significant time on traditional activities one may not consider as experiential as some other tasks at the center. For example, students often mentioned how much they needed to read and write for the KnowBase website and the EGP research in their accounts. Indeed, the amount of time they had spent on these tasks often surpassed the amount of time they had spent on activities that we could consider more experiential in nature. This fact, of course, raises some questions. First and foremost, can reading and writing teach international business to students through experience? Also, how is reading and writing at CIB different from reading textbooks and writing assignments for a course? To answer these questions, let us focus on learning first.

We can assess learning by checking if we can recall something from our memory. If we cannot remember something we read or wrote a while ago, it means we did not learn it (Tagg, 2003). Of course, if we read or wrote it just recently, there is a high probability of remembering it, but that does not mean that we know it. As cited by Tagg (2003) in his book, we remember using our episodic memory, and we know things via our semantic memory (Conway et al., 1997). In the simplest description, episodic memory remembers by replaying the episode of learning, but semantic memory works differently; it stores information as concepts and by meaning. It does not need to recall anything, but it just makes you know. What you keep in your

episodic memory may vanish, but you do not lose what you store in your semantic memory. If this is the case, we can argue students can learn better if they can assign meanings to what they read and write, because only then they can store that information in their semantic memory. Let me give an example from my observations to help understand if students are learning everything presented to them.

As I explained in Chapter 4, CIB students often utilize online sources in the business library. To my surprise, though, many CIB student employees do not know any of these sources when they join the Center. Admittedly, some of these students are first-year students, and, understandably, they have not had a chance to use those sources yet. However, it is shocking to see that even the 'seasoned' students often do not know what sources the library offers. In fact, the business library shows every effort to communicate the available sources to the students and faculty through various communications, such as newsletters and regular library updates via email. In addition, some instructors organize meetings with the business librarians and invite them to their classes to introduce the sources to the students. Those who cannot bring the librarians to their classrooms personally introduce some of these sources to their students in the first couple of weeks of the semester. Moreover, students complete numerous research assignments for their courses that would require utilizing these library sources. Yet, there seems to be a missing link between the students and the library sources introduced earlier; hence, students do not remember some of those resources.

In my opinion, students cannot remember these library resources because they do not see much meaning in those resources when they are presented. Students develop an interest only when the time comes to use those resources for assignments or research. They most likely learn about those resources once they use them because they know the consequences of not completing

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those tasks and projects. I believe the disconnect between students and what is being taught to them is caused by the disconnect between the material taught and the consequences that may follow. If the students do not see and understand the consequences of not reading and writing about something, they may think, 'why should I care?' On the other hand, if the outcomes of studying or not are clear, the students may develop more interest in what they read and write. As discussed earlier, students who work on subjects they are not interested in are more likely to use a surface learning approach (Tagg, 2003), which does not deliver high-quality learning results.

Whether reading and writing are obligatory or not also seems to have an impact on student motivation and potentially on learning as well. For instance, Researchers studied students' motivation and attention in different settings (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1997a). In the classroom, students were highly focused on the topics presented; however, their motivation was shallow; "three fourths of the time, these (students) reported from the classroom they did not want to do what they were doing." (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1997b, p. 180) Surprisingly, when the researchers measured the feelings of the same students in an extracurricular activity, they found that both attention and motivation were very high in these students. And one of the critical things the researchers highlighted was the adverse effects of obligatory assignments. "When classwork was experienced as obligatory … students reported feeling worse … than how they felt when involved in either voluntary classwork or extracurricular activities." (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1997b, p. 180)

As an NCAA, CIB offers a voluntary working and learning environment to the students, and CIB projects connect the students' work and experiences to the real world. What they read and write at the Center becomes meaningful and creates interest, which prevents the disconnect I explained. And this is where experiential learning comes into the picture. Students know that

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their work will have real-life consequences. They realize companies will base their international expansion decisions on the reports delivered. Students understand these decisions will eventually affect the success of the companies, their owners and employees, their families, the number of new jobs created, and the amount of U.S. dollars brought to our country. In addition, students expect KnowBase users to react to their international business blogs published on the site and comment about their blogs on social media. Consequently, student employees associate themselves with their work, the companies and business representatives they assist, and the website users from around the globe. Thus, their work makes them feel connected to the world outside the school.

The Role of NCAAs

In this part of my analysis, first I will share some of my experiences at the Center and describe my observations to depict the work environment at CIB for students. Portraying my views of the Center as somebody who supervised the students and designed the projects and programs will help explain what is offered to the students and the purpose of it. Later, I will discuss students' thoughts on their perceptions about working at an NCAA and the role of NCAA participation in students' lives. I hope to produce a comprehensive and in-depth analysis by providing perspectives from two angles.

When the participants worked as student researchers, the CIB was located on the ground floor of the business college in its private area with an entrance. There was a waiting area and reception at the entrance before one could reach the student work area, which was isolated with office separators from the door to provide privacy and a quiet working environment for the students. The student work area was centrally located and surrounded by the Center staff offices

on one side and a small conference room and a break room on the other. As the student supervisor, my room faced the student workstations directly and was close to help me hear what students said and make my voice heard when I had a question for them. The student work area did not have any high separators, and the students sat side by side at the workstations provided by the Center. The student workplace's open space offered a flexible work environment to the students where they could communicate and collaborate with their peers freely, move their chairs closer to others to work on projects together, and randomly sit in any place available. The clustered sitting groups also provided the students with an intimate work environment. The students could freely visit any CIB staff member's offices to ask questions, discuss projects, and share ideas. The students were perceived as members of the office and as any other employee and were regarded accordingly.

Other parts of the Center were open to students to offer them additional resources. Students could use the small conference room for team meetings, project collaboration, company calls, etc. Students could also use this room for their personal needs, such as internship or job interviews with potential employers. The conference room was equipped with a big-screen TV connected to a computer, a webcam for conference calls, a phone line, and a whiteboard to increase the efficiencies of the workspace. The break area had a refrigerator for everyday use, a coffee machine, a hot and cold-water dispenser, and many kitchen utensils. The Center would also supply a variety of teas, hot chocolate, and pretzels to students. One side of the break room was allocated for all of the office supplies.

The programs that students worked on were designed to provide a structure and routine to them. When the students arrived in the office during their scheduled work hours, they would start an online clock to record their time and stop it when they left. While employed by the CIB,

students were required to obey a set of workplace rules that were communicated to them during their job orientation. Guideline documentation and other resources were provided for all of the projects and programs students worked on to speed up the learning curve and ensure consistency and high quality. Not only I, as the student supervisor, but all of the staff members assisted students on projects, offered them mentorship, and discussed non-work-related issues such as course selection, career development, etc., with the students.

The Center offered a free and flexible working environment for the students to learn and grow. All of the work resembled any other office work they could have experienced in the corporate world. All of the activities were hands-on and very experiential by nature. The students would take the initiative, lead big projects, communicate with third parties such as the company representatives or the government agencies the CIB works with, and were allowed to make decisions. Most importantly, the students were allowed to make mistakes, and they never received a backlash when they did. Instead, those mistakes were leveraged as learning opportunities and followed by positive feedback and guidance. Student work at CIB was specifically designed to offer a nurturing environment to the students where they felt comfortable, creative, accepted, and like they belonged. And the student accounts confirmed that the Center provided on these promises.

As Addie expressed precisely, the work at CIB was "very much a real, it was a good student job because it was, it felt like a real job." Many students agreed with her thoughts and argued that the Center provided them with a nurturing place to grow personally and professionally. Besides their development, some students reported that they observed their peers' development over the years. Some explained the overall experience at CIB as an empowering occurrence and believed the work environment felt very inviting, and they felt comfortable,

maybe at home, at times. This feeling may arise due to two unique features of the Center. One is the way the physical office was set up. It was just like any other company office and like a home, a cozy place where you can work with same-minded people, learn together, and laugh at times. The resources offered at the Center, such as the break room and everything in it, must also have enforced this feeling. Students often came to the Center between their courses to have their lunch while studying or relaxing with their peers. And the other feature is related to the way the students were behaved and allowed to work, where they felt free but guided.

Another critical development students reported was how they felt about themselves. As they gained more experience working at the Center and matured, many argued that they gained a high level of self-esteem. As they felt more confident, they believed they could take on new and more complex projects at work. Possibly, the self-confidence they started developing at the Center helped students outside of the Center with their coursework, student organization participation, job search, friendships, and more.

Furthermore, this level of self-esteem and the sense of belonging, developed due to NCAA participation, may have offered benefits to students when it comes to college engagement and retention. Most of the students start working at the Center during their first year at the college. The CIB tries to hire students as soon as they start their college life because the sooner you hire a student researcher and train them, the longer that student can contribute to the Center before they graduate. According to Tinto (1987) the most problematic years for student retention in higher education institutions are the first year and the beginning of the second year. The first year of college is considered the most vulnerable period in a student's academic career because students try to transition from home to college, which must be a significant change for most. During this period, many students are separated from their parents and are coping with their new

lives as young adults, making decisions themselves. CIB offers a caring and comfortable environment to the students during these most critical years where they feel secure and relaxed.

On another note, participants argued that their NCAA experience was valuable due to the strong guidance and mentorship provided by the Center staff members. Students perceived mentorship as an essential part of their work at CIB due to the many challenges they needed to deal with during the Center projects and their personal and professional lives. In many instances, participants described positive feelings about their mentor's involvement. For example, Luke mentioned how his discussions with his mentors helped him with his career planning, and Jessie appreciated her mentor's help and support on Center projects. Many other students echoed their feelings. Since the Center was designed to work as a professional company, it offered a practice place for the students where they got ready for their careers. Therefore, the existence and guidance of mentors was deemed essential and perceived as very helpful by the students. In summary, NCAA participation seems more impactful for students when there is continuous guidance is provided by educated mentors.

According to participants, CIB was instrumental during student employment for many reasons. Students gained real-life experiences at the Center and prepared for transitioning to their post-college careers. They learned about current international business topics while working on CIB projects, which helped them with their interviews and job search. In addition, the experiences they gained working at the Center and the skills they had learned offered them leverage in their current jobs. Hence, a well-structured NCAA, such as the CIB, that provides a professional experiential learning environment to the students is likely to help their career planning and employment while also providing lasting benefits for their future careers. According to Brooke, her job at CIB helped her find an internship, which then converted to her

full-time job. "This role [referring to her job at CIB] gave me a lot to talk about when I was interviewing . . . for internships or for an interview for full-time jobs. Well, I ended up working at my internship company." Considering the way that the student work at the Center is structured, it is expected that students became proficient in international business topics and gained relevant experiences that helped them during their job search in various ways.

Finally, participants reported that their involvement with the CIB taught international business-related skills to them. Some of the skills participants mentioned were cross-cultural intelligence and communication, a better and broader worldview, and an understanding of the differences between foreign markets and industries. However, the participants who successfully named specific international business skills were limited. From the narratives, it was clear that they believed they had learned a lot about international business in general during their time at the Center. Still, when it came to articulating those skills, they had challenges. Mike said, naming a specific skill "can be hard to put directly in words" and added that he "can probably mention sequences of actions that have helped [him] understand international business better." Joe mentioned, "it [what was learned] was more of knowledge than a specific skill." Indeed, David commented: "especially for something like international business, because it is so cultural, how do you write about a culture?" For some, the Center's work helped them connect the real world with what they studied in their courses. The existence of intangible skills that are unique to the international business field and the difficulty of teaching them was highlighted in my problem background statement. My argument was that teaching these intangible international business skills only with traditional methods, such as lectures, would be difficult. Therefore, I asserted that experiential learning activities, primarily through NCAAs, should be considered as supplemental tools for teaching international business to students.

What Was Missing. The interviews and my analysis successfully captured many of the answers this research tries to answer. However, there were a few things I was expecting to see in my findings but were not there. For example, with my questions to the former students, I also hoped to see the impact of the NCAA experiences on students' current careers. I thought since almost all students who apply to work at the Center are interested in international business, many of them would be working at jobs that mostly had global components. To my surprise, though, only one student out of thirteen chose a career that can be categorized as a fully international job.

Nevertheless, that student successfully applied what he learned at the Center in his current job and understood many of the complexities of doing business globally. On the other hand, many of the students had more domestic positions. As a result, only some aspects of their roles required some international knowledge, and they were able to leverage some of what they had learned working at the Center. Still, overall, the level of global knowledge required for their current jobs could easily be acquired while working in those positions without the need to participate in an NCAA.

In addition, I was also hoping to hear more stories about the impact of their NCAA experiences on their current jobs. While working as a student researcher at the Center, I have learned a great deal about international business and many different nations, and I became more aware of what is happening around the globe. When I started working at the Center after graduation, I immediately noticed the leverage the previous experiences I gained as a student assistant provided to me. I felt like I had already completed a lengthy onboarding process for the job and could apply what I had already known to my new job without any delay. If someone had asked me, I would have had many talking points about how my NCAA experiences helped me and how they significantly shortened my learning curve when I started my job. Granted, my

student and full-time employment were at the same workplace, but the roles and responsibilities were completely different, yet I felt I was trained and ready for my new job when I was out of my student role. When I started reviewing student interviews for this study, I expected to find many similar narratives, but to my surprise, there were only a few of them.

Another missing piece was the level of depth I was hoping to capture when students talked about their reflections following the experiences they have been through. The interview questionnaire was well designed, and the questions that captured the stories of how students reflected on what they have experienced were well written. And they served their purpose to a certain point and provided details about those reflections. But either because of the way the questions were written or the way they were asked, or the probe questions failed to follow, I could not capture the level of detail I hoped I would get.

Experiential Learning as a Supplemental Tool

During our conversations with students, some were convinced that experiential learning is the only and the best way for them to learn. Some claimed they would prefer learning through experiences to learning in courses with lectures. I think dismissing college courses and minimizing their value in students' college journey would be incorrect and unfair. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the field of international business includes many theories and concepts that the students must fully grasp before considering experiencing them through various activities. These theories and concepts are best taught with lectures, and the instructors are capable of teaching them. What is being taught in the classroom, discussions around world topics, and the rich atmosphere of a classroom setting are essential for teaching international business to students and cannot be replaced. However, I agree with the students that what is

being taught in the classroom should be supplemented with experiences that will bolster those concepts in students' minds.

I believe the experiential activities CIB offers help students bolster those concepts and supplement them in various ways. First, the activities at the Center allow the students to try and experiment with some of the concepts they have learned in the classroom. For example, the course topics cover differences in market conditions and how they may affect the company's global expansion plans. With the introduction of some cases or articles, the classwork also can provide examples of these implications. However, when students have a chance to work on projects for actual companies in an environment like the CIB, they apply these concepts to their research, see the implications from the company's perspective, and learn about the impact on different industries and products, and more. With every new project, they get to experiment with some parts of the topics covered in the classroom.

Also, the experiential activities offered at the Center provide a cognitional supplement to the students by helping them connect what they have learned in class to the real world and feel more like a part of the business world. This fact is crucial and beneficial, considering these students will transition from college to the business world in a few years. By working with companies at the Center and applying the concepts they have learned in the classroom to their company projects and research, the students see the implications of these international business concepts in the companies' operations and global expansion plans. In addition, they understand the relevance of those concepts to the industries, whether all concepts equally apply to all product groups, and if they matter for all new markets a company enters. Eventually, when students manage to connect what they have learned in the classroom to actual experiences at the Center, they form a more comprehensive understanding of the international business world.

Acknowledgments

There are several acknowledgments I would like to emphasize that should be considered while reading the results of my research. The first one is about my position concerning the Center and its students due to my long employment there. I started working at CIB as a student researcher and worked on student projects for two years during my master's program. Later, the Center hired me as a temporary employee and converted my position to a full-time job about six years ago. In total, I have been working at the Center for the last ten years. In these ten years, I have accumulated many experiences and memories at the Center during my work. I strongly connect to the Center, its students, and its employees. It is a connection so strong that I feel emotional about my work and the people I work with. Believing in our work at the Center, I want to think that we offer an excellent opportunity for our students. One side of me strongly believes the Center successfully provides an experiential learning environment for our students. Still, another side of me reminds me that I must remove my biases and be fair in my analysis.

This research taught me two things to consider while choosing a program or unit for your academic research. First, if you are an insider, you have many advantages when collecting data, understanding the daily operations, and accessing people and other materials. This first point provides an advantage to the insider as a researcher. However, the second point creates a challenge that cannot be avoided. As someone from inside, you connect to the work and people at the program you study. Unfortunately, that connection comes with feelings and presumptions about the work. And these beliefs you have even before you start your research make your job more difficult as a researcher because you are inclined to see the positive aspects of the unit studied more than its negatives. Although I believe I managed to stay unbiased in my analysis during my study, I also feel like I have sometimes been overly enthusiastic in my narratives

while I was explaining the work at the Center, telling success stories of students, and explaining the benefits of the programs and projects it hosts. At the end of the day, however, I believe I have gained a good understanding of the challenges and pitfalls of studying something very close to your heart, and you feel very emotional about. I will certainly carry over my takeaways from this research to my future studies. My passion for my work and the hopes of providing the best to our students are the main reasons behind my excitement, and I trust my work is regarded as an honest and sincere study.

The second acknowledgment I would like to make is about the backgrounds of the former students who participated in this research. The thirteen students I interviewed were from different states and countries. The schools they graduated from before college, the countries they visited, their interests, family structures, social statuses, the class level they were at when they joined the Center, and many other aspects of their backgrounds were different in many ways. Due to these various circumstances, these students possibly came to the Center with varying levels of international business knowledge. However, the analysis of this research assumes that all these students had the same level of knowledge and understanding of the international business concepts when the students started working at the Center. Similarly, these students possibly had different learning preferences and approaches they were accustomed to when they began working at the Center. Therefore, each student's transition to the processes of the Center may have followed a different path that is also different in length.

Finally, I would like to highlight how students participate in the Center. During my analysis, I often emphasized that the students participate in CIB voluntarily because of their interest in learning international business. All the students we hire indeed claim that they are very interested in international business and want to learn more about it. As mentioned before,

many students reach out to me to ask for voluntary work so that they can participate in the research we do at the Center and expand their understanding of global issues. However, it is also a fact that all these students, whether they want to join voluntarily or join because they are looking for a job, are added to the payroll of the Center and paid a stipend for their work. Although working on a campus job is a student's decision, and although the students use their free will to choose the job they want, the fact that they are compensated for their work at the Center complicates voluntary participation condition. Some students may spend hours working at the Center to increase their income. And reviewing international business topics for hours and thus repetition may also have an impact on what students learn and how they learn at the Center.

Recommendations

This research provides many insights that guide us to understand the benefits of teaching international business through experience in an NCAA environment. The hands-on activities offer students invaluable experiences, translating into a plethora of benefits for students' personal and professional development, career planning and employment, and college engagement and retention. The research also helps us exhibit the international business skills and knowledge that students believed they have learned while working at an NCAA. While some students reported learning specific skills, some argued they learned more holistically about international business and the processes utilized in global markets. The research has positive findings that may help other institutions' student success and employment initiatives.

As evidenced, designing impactful NCAAs and offering them to college students through various channels would benefit institutions and students. However, building such programs requires resources, institution support, and understanding and experience in these programs. Student participation in NCAAs may be offered as a paid campus job or a voluntary

involvement. Still, a dedicated budget would be necessary to establish and execute a program in any case. There may be numerous cost items for NCAAs, such as student and staff salaries, subscriptions to databases or online services, office space, furniture, supplies, computer costs, travel expenses, etc. Luckily, colleges and even departments, universities, and state and national governments may offer grants and other types of funding for such programs.

Undoubtedly, since funding, staffing, and other resources are needed for designing and operating NCAAs, whole-level support of institutions and their directors would also be essential. Planning for and designing such programs, coordination during the creation, and the ongoing administrative burden of NCAAs could only be successfully managed with adequate support. Staffing is another resource that needs to be addressed while building these programs, demanding institutional and director-level support. Staffing of academic personnel that would design projects and programs to enhance the student experience in NCAAs especially requires attention. Staff members with company, government, or other organization experiences can provide a perspective of understanding both the university and these other entities, which would offer benefits to these NCAAs and students participating in them. Naturally, academic personnel with a spectrum of career experiences would likely offer mentorship that could support students both in college and during their transition to their careers.

NCAAs can also be utilized for other fields where the topic features have similarities to international business and are more efficient to teach through experience than teaching with traditional methods. Social sciences may be an excellent example of such fields. In addition, higher education institutions can collaborate with other organizations and government agencies, such as government development offices, and companies to enrich the offerings of such NCAAs to students. These external connections would form a much-needed bridge between the

university and the "outer" world that would enhance the student experience and provide channels and opportunities to students for networking, internship, and full-time employment. If designed as a bridge between the university and community, an NCAA would also provide a habitat for the students where they can start transitioning from being a student to being full-time employees and responsible members of society.

Implications For Future Research

This research's positive findings demand future research to enhance the current results. Teaching international business through NCAAs with hands-on activities seems more effective, but in what other fields can we use similar programs to improve teaching and learning outcomes? The tacit nature of international business topics makes the field very suitable for NCAAs. If researchers can identify other areas or topics, we can use experiential learning in the NCAA setting to improve outcomes elsewhere. Therefore, future research should investigate other fields with similar features in their subjects, and whether utilizing NCAAs can improve teaching and learning with hands-on activities in those fields as well.

Furthermore, studying the individual experiential learning activities and understanding the impact of each one on students' learning would be very beneficial. For example, the participants of this study mainly emphasized the importance of company site visits and how they believed they benefited from those activities. However, there may be other impactful experiential activities that are not discussed in this research, but that can potentially improve student learning in similar fields. Moreover, finding the special activities and understanding the level of impact each activity offers would be beneficial. If the degree of impact of each activity can be measured

precisely, NCAA design and execution can be managed with higher precision, offering students a more customized experience suitable for their needs and the fields being taught.

Finally, additional research with a longitudinal approach to examine the job experiences of former NCAA participants even further in their careers would offer extra benefits. All the participants in this study had limited work experience after graduation. Although some of them claimed they could leverage their NCAA experiences and learning since they graduated, some did not have any international business aspects in their current roles yet, and therefore were not able to comment. As the inescapable effects of globalization inspire more businesses, more NCAA participants will work in jobs that would require international business skills throughout their careers. Studying these participants later in their careers may offer other insights into how their NCAA participation benefited them in their jobs and what advantages these NCAA experiences provided them in the longer term. The results of such studies can be used to design more impactful NCAAs for college students not only teaching international business but also teaching other fields.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – Initial Recruitment Email

Hi,

I hope this email finds you well and you are staying safe and healthy during the pandemic!

Since March last year, we have been working remotely, and everything has been moving smoothly for the most part. Sometimes, it is not easy to coordinate and collaborate with all students, but we are getting better.

I am writing you to ask for your help with my dissertation, and we may have discussed this when you were working with us. You may remember that I was getting close to working on my dissertation. Although there have been some delays, I am now ready to move on, and my first step is conducting interviews with CIB's former student employees. As requested by my committee, a graduate student will do the interviews on my behalf.

If you have some time, would you be able to spare about an hour in the next month or so for an interview? Since you are a full-time employee now, you may not be able to talk during work hours. Therefore, the graduate student will accommodate your needs if you decide to help.

I understand you may be busy, so please do not worry if you cannot.

Thanks,

APPENDIX B - Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Dear former Center for International Business (CIB) student employee,

You are being asked to participate in a research study that will allow me to explore the role of non-credit academic activities in international business education. Your participation will offer a better understanding of students' experiences at CIB, a school environment where non-credit academic activities are conducted while working and learning international business-related topics.

You will participate in an individual in-depth semi-structured interview that will last for about an hour, and that is the only requirement from the participants. The interviews will be conducted by a graduate student assistant, Olivia Moliassa, on my behalf and audio & video recorded via Zoom.

Participants' identities will be protected to the maximum extent possible, and Erkan Kocas and Olivia Moliassa will be the only two researchers that will have access to this information. Each participant will choose pseudonyms after the one-on-one interviews, and all identifying information will be changed to the pseudonyms before data analysis. The analysis will be conducted by Erkan Kocas.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. A signature is not a required element of this consent form. You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by joining the call for the interview.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or report an issue, please contact the researcher, Erkan Kocas, International Business Center, 667 N. Shaw Ln. Rm 7, East Lansing, MI 48824, kocaserk@msu.edu, (517) 884-1667. Alternatively, you can contact Dr. Steven Wieland, College of Education, Department of Educational Administration, 410 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, weiland@msu.edu, (517) 355-2395.

If you have additional questions or concerns regarding your rights and role as a research participant, if you want to obtain information or offer input, register a complaint about a specific study, or if you need more information on human research subject protections, you may contact Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at Michigan State University, Human Research Protection Program, 4000 Collins Road, Lansing, MI 48910, irb@msu.edu, Tel: (517) 355-2180, Fax: (517) 432-4503.

Thank you,

APPENDIX C - Student Interview Protocol

"Hi [*Alumni's Name*], may name is [*Interviewer's Name*] and I'm helping Erkan Kocas, the researcher, conducting these interviews. Currently, Erkan is pursuing a Ph.D. at the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program at the College of Education. As his dissertation project, he plans to study the work students do at the Center for International Business (CIB) where you used to work as a student employee. The main characteristics of the student work at the center is that it is highly experience based. With his research, he aims to explore whether if former students who worked at the center have learned international business-related topics through experience, and if any, what international business-related skills they have learned.

I planned this interview as a 30 to 45-minute conversation. During this interview, I am going to ask you a series of questions to learn more about your role at the center, the work you did as a student researcher, the experiences you had, and your perceptions about those experiences. Please consider me as somebody who does not know the center and the work conducted at the center, and try to answer my questions as if you are talking to somebody who is out of the center so that we make sure you do not skip any details assuming that I already know the details of the work at CIB. It's important for me to capture your side of the story and your perceptions.

As we speak, I will take notes and record our interview to capture all the details of our conversation so that later Erkan can transcribe our conversation and study the experiences you have highlighted during our interview. Did you read and sign the consent form provided to you? Are you okay with me taking notes and digitally recording our conversation? Do you have any questions or concerns?

APPENDIX D - Interview Questions

Introduction Questions

1- For how long did you work at CIB while you were a student at the university?

2- In average, how many hours per week did you work at the center?

3- What was your standing at the university at the time you were a student researcher? Junior? Senior? Graduate student?

4- Can you please tell me about the work you did at the center? What was your role and what were your responsibilities?

5- How much of this work can be categorized as international business-related tasks?

    a. Probe: Why would you categorize these as international business-related?

    b. Probe: Why would you categorize these as non-international business-related?

6- What percentage of your total working hours did you spend on these international business-related tasks?

Primary Research Questions

1- During your work at the center, what types of experiences did you encounter?

    a. Probe: How about things you have read or listened to?

    b. Probe: How about meetings or events you have participated?

    c. Probe: How about some observations you have made about the office, people that work at the center, and its visitors?

    d. Probe: How about the resources that were available to you?

    e. Probe: How about the site visits you have made to the companies?

    f. Probe: Were any of these experiences related to international business and how?

g. Probe: Were you familiar with these experiences in any way or were they new to you?

2- Did you reflect on some of those experiences later in time? Can you give me some examples?

    a. Probe: How often would you reflect on your experiences?

    b. Probe: What was your way of thinking about them?

    c. Probe: Did you link those experiences to other previous memories, experiences, or knowledge you have gained in the past?

3- If you reflected on those experiences later in time, what types of conclusions did you make about those experiences?

    a. Probe: Do you believe you have learned through some of those experiences? How so?

    b. Probe: What are some skills you believe you have learned and knowledge you have gained though those experiences?

4- If you have learned some skills through those experiences and reflecting on them, did you try to use those skills or knowledge somewhere?

    a. Prove: If you tried to use those, how soon was that after the first experience?

    b. Probe: What was the outcome? Were you able to utilize those skills and knowledge successfully?

5- If you believe you have learned some skills through those experiences and gained some knowledge, which of those you think are related to international business?

    a. Probe: Did you have a chance to use those skills and knowledge during your career after graduation? How?

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