

A COMPARISON OF BUSINESS SCHOOL PEDAGOGY BETWEEN MOLDOVA AND THE US

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study comparison of the Perspectives of a Moldovan Fulbright Scholar on teaching pedagogy in the United States and a United States Fulbright Scholar on teaching pedagogy in Moldova. The Moldovan Fulbright Scholar studied faculty on the campus of a private, Christian, regional university in the US. The United States Fulbright Scholar studied faculty at a public, national university in Moldova.

Keywords: Moldova • pedagogy • teaching methods • assessment techniques • faith integration



During the spring semester of 2024, the lead author was a Fulbright scholar in the US from the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM).

The scholar was hosted by the Anderson University College of Business in South Carolina (AUCOB). The co-author was a Fulbright scholar in Moldova during the 2021-2022 academic year and served as host to the lead author for their Fulbright. This paper offers a comparison of similarities and differences in the teaching pedagogy of business disciplines between the two countries. Syllabi were reviewed, full-time faculty were surveyed, and class sessions of full-time faculty across the business curriculum were observed.

UNIVERSITY COMPARISONS

ASEM is a public, national university focused on the study of economics located in Chisinau which is the capital of Moldova. Anderson University is a private, Christian, regional university affiliated with the South Carolina Baptist Convention in the US. Although ASEM is a national university, the population of Moldova (approximately 3.4 million) is smaller than the population of South Carolina (approximately 5.4 million). However, student enrollment and the number of business faculty is larger at ASEM. ASEM offers bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees to approximately 8,000 students with 178 full-time faculty. Anderson University offers bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees to approximately 4,200 students and the College of Business serves approximately 740 students with eighteen full time faculty.

Along with a larger student population, ASEM offers more study programs. ASEM offers seventeen different undergraduate study programs (majors) within six different faculty areas. Unlike most undergraduate degrees in the US, the study programs at ASEM do not include a liberal arts core (e.g., art, literature, history, science, etc.). Thus, most (15/17) of the study programs are completed in three years. All but one of the ASEM study programs are offered in Romanian. Thirteen of the study programs are also offered in Russian, four of the programs are offered in full or in part in English, and two of the programs are offered in full or in part in French. The AUCOB undergraduate program offers seven major programs of study. All the AUCOB majors require a university wide core curriculum of 41-43 credit hours and a business core of forty credit hours. All the AUCOB 128-hour major programs are designed to be completed in four years and all majors are offered exclusively in English.

An interesting feature of the ASEM study programs is the requirement of multiple internships. Two specialty internships are required for the three-year study programs and three specialty internships are required for four-year programs. For a three-year study program, the first five-week internship takes place at the end of the second year of study at the end of a condensed spring semester. Additional internships take place at the end of condensed spring semesters for the third/fourth year in the program. Like ASEM, all AUCOB majors are required to complete an internship as part of their business core. Although AUCOB majors are only required to complete one internship.

FACULTY CHARACTERISTIC COMPARISONS

The most striking difference between faculty is the percentage of faculty who are women. At ASEM over seventy percent ($127/178 = 71.4\%$) of the faculty are women. Whereas only 22 percent ($4/18 = 22.2\%$) of the business faculty are women in the AUCOB. The overrepresentation of women at ASEM is like the gender composition of K-12 schools in the US but was surprising to the co-author for a university. The underrepresentation of women in university business faculty is a common finding in the US.

Another interesting faculty comparison between the two schools was the distribution of academic rank. Of the twenty-five representative ASEM business faculty surveyed in the spring of 2024, twenty-two were associate professors and three were full professors. To achieve the rank of full professor at ASEM a habilitatus process (earning a second PhD) is required. The habilitatus process in Eastern Europe is different from the promotion process in the US. In the AUCOB there was more variety in academic rank. The AUCOB had two instructors, six assistant professors, three associate professors, and seven full professors.

There was more variety in the terminal degree amongst the AUCOB faculty compared to ASEM faculty. All 25 ASEM survey respondents have earned at least one PhD. In the AUCOB there are eight PhDs, five DBAs, one EdD, one JD, and two faculty with a master's degree as their terminal degree. Conversely, the AUCOB faculty has more professional credentials compared to the ASEM faculty. Eight of the 18 AUCOB reported a professional credential (e.g., Certified Public Accountant, Six Sigma Black Belt, etc.) compared to only one of the 25 ASEM faculty.

UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING METHODS AND ASSESSMENT COMPARISONS

Over the course of the spring semester the lead author observed in-person teaching and discussed pedagogy and assessment techniques with all eighteen full-time AUCOB faculty. A variety of teaching methods were observed. For both the AUCOB and ASEM faculty, instructor lectures are the primary teaching method. Overall, instructor led methods (i.e., lecture, case study, discussion, problem solving, software applications) made up 75% of class time in the AUCOB compared to 82% of class time at ASEM. Students were more active in the classroom and professors used more experiential learning techniques in the AUCOB compared to ASEM. For example, in the AUCOB students were called upon to answer questions and/or provide their opinion, grade each other's homework, worked in small groups to solve problems, and gave presentations individually and in groups more often than ASEM students. In the AUCOB, 23% of class time was devoted to student led and group activities compared to 13% of class time at ASEM.

In terms of assessment, individual exams are the primary assessment method for both AUCOB (38% of the overall course grade) and ASEM (40% of the overall course grade). However, individual assessments make up a much larger percentage of the overall course grade at ASEM compared to AUCOB. Overall, 97% of the course grade at ASEM is determined by individual assessments compared to 79% at AUCOB. Various group assessments (i.e., group homework, papers/projects/reports, case studies/simulations, presentations) make up 21% of the overall course grade at AUCOB compared to only 3% at ASEM.

An example of a unique student led activity in the AUCOB was finance students' participation in the student managed Cauthen Investment Fund that enabled students to manage real financial assets. The AUCOB curriculum included multiple student competitions. Marketing students competed in the great American pitch, save the brand competition, and shark tank competition. Supply chain students competed in an annual great package race. The competitions were an exciting way to encourage student learning and stimulate involvement in the course material.

FAITH INTEGRATION COMPARISONS

Moldova is a Christian country where about 90% of the population considers themselves to be Orthodox Christian. ASEM does allow faith integration; yet explicit faith integration is not encouraged at ASEM. The lead author has never experienced or used faith integration as either an ASEM student or as an ASEM faculty member. Anderson University is affiliated with the South Carolina Baptist Convention and faith integration is highly encouraged. Thus, the prevalence of faith integration in the curriculum in the AUCOB is a distinct difference from the curriculum at ASEM.

All the AUCOB faculty were comfortable integrating faith into their classes. The lead author witnessed the use of prayer, devotions, papers, start of class Bible readings, and even top ten lists to integrate faith into class sessions. Of the faculty who started class with prayer or a devotion, sometimes the prayer or devotion was given by a student and sometimes given by a faculty member.

COMMUNITY SERVICE COMPARISONS

Both ASEM and AUCOB integrate the wider community into the learning experience through guest speakers and dedicated events (e.g., seminars, forums, conferences, etc.). A notable distinctive embedded into the curriculum of the AUCOB was community service projects. For example, computing and data analytics students constructed data warehouses and visualization tools for local churches and charter schools. Human resource management students participated in a research project on inclusive employment practices for individuals with disabilities. Management students formed consulting groups to create, implement, and assess training and development exercises for local family-owned businesses and non-profit organizations. The lead author found the level of outside of class community involvement to be aspiring and hopes to integrate similar projects at their home institution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this paper is a case study involving only one school in each country, we feel that there are findings of larger importance for business schools worldwide. Based on our experience through both the Fulbright program and our academic careers, we have noticed more active learning exercises integrated directly into the teaching pedagogy in the US relative to Eastern Europe. While ASEM integrates experiential learning through increased internships relative to the AUCOB, we feel that academicians should strive to integrate theory with practical applications more explicitly into their own teaching methods and assessment techniques. We recommend spending less class time lecturing and devoting more time to the integration of case studies, simulations, and experiential learning opportunities to complement theoretical knowledge with practical skills and real-world applications.

Another broader recommendation we have for business faculty is to increase awareness and find spaces to teach business more holistically. Through our study of the entire business curriculum in each of our respective schools, we learned things from outside of our discipline at both our own school and the school hosting our Fulbright. Business is comprised of multiple sub-disciplines (e.g., accounting, economics, finance, management, marketing, etc.) and as faculty we tend to become too focused on our own silo of concentration within the overall discipline of business. Over time, as the knowledge base of each individual sub-discipline has increased, there has been a tendency to remove general business courses from the curriculum. A curriculum that includes both an introductory course and a capstone course focusing on the overall purpose of business is a great start. Additionally, teaching faculty need to provide subject expertise while connecting that specific expertise to the broader overall role of business in our global economy.

The final recommendation we have for business schools in general is to emphasize the importance of and foster ethical leadership. It is crucial for future business leaders to understand the global implications of their decisions and to prioritize values such as integrity, transparency, and social responsibility. The pursuit of profit can lead to the production of goods and services that enable growth but only when the long-term ramifications of decisions are considered. Business leaders need to recognize the vital role that their organizations play in promoting sustainability, addressing social challenges, and providing the goods and services that lead to human flourishing.

CONCLUSION

The Fulbright experience was life changing for both authors. The knowledge and experience obtained has and will continue to improve our ability to teach in our respective home universities. Living and working internationally in a different culture challenged us to adapt, problem-solve, and navigate unfamiliar situations. Relatively small things that we took for granted in our home countries required some adjustment. For instance, transportation in rural upstate South Carolina is much different than transportation in Moldova's capital city of Chisinau which has a vast public transportation system. Similarly, becoming familiar with the items available in grocery stores and adapting eating habits accordingly was a challenge. The Fulbright program fostered personal resilience, independence, and generated confidence.

For the lead author, taking part in the AUCOB community service projects where students volunteered personal time to help people affected by social problems and worked directly with different non-governmental organizations inspired a sense of purpose and motivation for future endeavors. The lead

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author plans to create and integrate similar outside of class activities to encourage active student participation with goals to green the city of Chisinau and the country of Moldova, improve the quality of life of the inhabitants, as well as to protect and preserve the environment for future generations.

For the co-author, the Fulbright experience allowed them to learn more about themselves, about people, about language, about culture, and about history. As a result of their experience, they are making a conscious effort to reduce their use of language specific acronyms, increase their use of low-cost learning aids, and integrate international examples into their teaching methods and assessment techniques.

Our Fulbright experiences provided both of us the opportunity to interact with the next generation of young adults. We were able to learn from and impart knowledge to students and faculty by acting as a bridge between our cultures. For example, one ASEM student remarked that “having a foreign professor brought a unique perspective to our class in Moldova. Professor Saunders diverse teaching methods and global insights enriched our learning experience, broadened our horizons, and inspired us to think beyond local contexts.” Additionally, the Anderson University Provost stated that “hosting an international scholar greatly benefited our faculty, students, and campus community. Professor Mistrean’s classroom visits, Teaching Center presentation for faculty, and her Curriculum Enhancement Program presentation for students were all widely attended and sparked animated discussions.” We plan to continue to provide this connection to future students and faculty through our own teaching, workshops, and other collaborative research projects.

NOTES

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Dr Mistrean (far right) and Dr Saunders (far left) along with undergraduate business students framing walls during a Habitat for Humanity workday in March 2024.

BIOGRAPHY

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