Beyond Borders: The Importance of Global Experiences in Graduate Student Education

Since its emergence, industrial-organizational psychology has been required to adapt to market trends, industry demands, and the increasing capabilities of technology in order to remain competitive; a challenge within an increasingly globalized market. The issue of globalization has been a “hot topic” for years, and remains one of the top challenges for related fields, including human resources management (Vorhauser-Smith, 2016) and has been identified by leading I-O practitioners as one of the key future directions for our field (Silzer & Cober, 2010). Moreover, with the increasing need for a cross-cultural understanding of organizational phenomena, those in academia are also recognizing the importance of global considerations in both the design and application of research. As a result, globalization has become a key consideration within our field for both research and practice, and should become formalized within graduate students’ learning and experiences. We present this column to encourage more holistic and globally aware graduates in I-O.

For I-O, globalization refers to the shifting marketplace associated with the international expansion of many organizations. Along with this, the definition also includes increased cultural diversity associated with expanding workforces, and the increasing use of technology to support diverse work teams. This growth comes with the need for additional contextual knowledge in order to apply a nuanced approach to managing cultural expectations, preferences, and values in order for our unique expertise to resonate with foreign markets and clients. Moreover, international partnerships provide an opportunity to learn about the unique challenges facing various industries and improve our current practices. Without adequate adaptation, we risk our practices becoming outdated or irrelevant within the growing global market.

In order to promote the continued growth of our field in both research and practical streams, the value of global opportunities must be instilled throughout the graduate experience.
It is important to note that as we discuss the topic of globalization, we must also recognize our underlying assumptions and western-based ideologies that impact the way in which we perceive international relationships and opportunities, a topic that will be considered throughout the article.

**The Role of I-O in the Global Marketplace**

Much of the discussion surrounding globalization has focused on the implications for seasoned practitioners with many large consulting firms emphasizing global growth. For example, the Office of Career Strategy at Yale University highlighted the top consulting firms by industry in 2015 and noted that 22 out of the top 24 management consulting firms emphasize a global presence as a key part of their consulting practices. Within I-O, a global presence requires constantly questioning and testing our own assumptions as a dominantly North American-based discipline to ensure that our practices translate across cultures and result in meaningful, sustainable change. For I-O practitioners, this growth comes with an opportunity to support career development by working with, or managing, diverse teams of professionals in various locations around the world. These opportunities challenge oneself to succeed in an environment that may be outside one’s comfort zone, an opportunity that ultimately accelerates knowledge and skill development.

Based on the input from an experienced international consultant, it was recommended that I-O professionals develop skills that allow them to work more effectively on an international scale, specifically, improving the ability to adapt to practical constraints, manage language barriers, and understand cultural norms for doing business. Developing these skills allows you to work in new cultures where challenges are often unanticipated. Along the same lines, developing an understanding of relevant laws and regulations, in addition to the historical and cultural influences, allows practitioners to contextualize organizational issues and adapt practices to the relevant culture. Finally, well-rounded communication and persuasion skills are imperative to understanding client needs and constraints, communicating appropriate solutions, and selling our services and expertise to key decision makers around the world.

Despite the focus on practice, globalization does not only impact practitioners; academics and researchers within I-O also have an opportunity to engage in the global market by participating in diverse research teams or partnerships and sharing findings internationally. Not only does this opportunity allow researchers to improve their impact factor, it also provides the opportunity to question western ideologies and engage in meaningful discussions to challenge deeply held beliefs. Only by having these conversations can we begin to broaden our view, challenge our current approaches, and create meaningful changes to all aspects of our field. In this TIP-TOPics column we attempt to address how we as future researchers, academics, and practitioners can begin to appreciate the learning that stems from globalization and begin preparing for a career in a global market during graduate school.
Need for International Experiences in Grad School

With the number of demands facing graduate students, it’s likely that many of us have not considered engaging in international relationships or experiences, let alone researched what opportunities are available. However, given the growth of our field internationally, we suggest that you take the time to consider what international experiences could do for your career growth, future prospects, and personal skill development by taking learning beyond textbooks and classrooms. These opportunities allow us to challenge our current ways of thinking and underlying assumptions, including how we conduct research, disseminate findings, and implement practices. When we do not extend our learning internationally, we privilege certain views and knowledge over others in our field, which only serves to divide I-O rather than build a holistic literature. In turn, we potentially miss out on information from sources that do not conform to our backgrounds and our understanding of knowledge.

In addition to challenging our learning, we also encourage graduate students to expand their exposure to the world around them. It is common to talk about the graduate school “bubble,” but seldom do we attempt to burst it. Take some time to expose yourself to the world around you to become more informed about global issues (e.g., read an international newspaper or business journal, attend more globally minded conference sessions or a conference in a new country or a different field of study, purposefully seek research from other regions, or read something not published in your native language). Current global issues of food security, discrimination, and the refugee crisis (to name a few) could all benefit from greater involvement of I-O in generating solutions. As we become more aware of the issues around the world, we can find more opportunities to bring our research into global spheres and further help each of us with the question we asked you in our first column: What do you hope to contribute to society? Moreover, by keeping in touch with macro systems we are better able to create meaningful change through both research and practice, allowing I-O to be both proactive as well as reactive and allowing you to set yourself apart in today’s competitive market.

Practical Tips to Increase Your International Exposure in Graduate School

Each graduate program is unique; some schools have more formal opportunities for international exposure, such as exchanges or research partnerships, while others may provide financial support for students to engage in these experiences on their own. Gaining international experience does not have to be a large amount of work, but we contest that it is an important aspect of your training and development.

Conferences. One of the easiest ways for researchers and practitioners to connect with others internationally at conferences is by attending internationally receptions or talks and participating in available mentoring programs. If you are heading into research, focus on talks specifically geared towards cross-cultural research and make
a point to introduce yourself and connect with speakers that resonate with you. For those in practice, do your research before the conference to see what companies will be present that focus on international opportunities and be sure to network with them during the conference.

International conferences in particular are a fantastic opportunity if your goal is to immerse yourself in research, ideas, and connections from all around the world, as they highlight the unique facets of I-O that can differ from region to region (e.g., some regions prioritize different theories or methodologies, others emphasize a more empirical foundation to research compared to theoretical, etc.). Only by increasing our exposure to these differences can we create a more holistic understanding of I-O and what it can offer globally.

The annual SIOP conference is a fantastic opportunity to make some initial connections and begin that international network. Other major conferences within I-O that promote a global-orientation include the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology, Academy of Management, the Canadian Psychological Association, and the International Conference on Industrial and Organizational Psychology, among many others.

**Internships and research exchanges.** As you consider internships or practicums, we encourage you to expand your focus beyond your regional borders. By expanding the scope of your search, you open up opportunities to develop new skills and competencies, as well as diversifying your current abilities through the exploration of new environments. Opportunities exist around the world for graduate students in I-O programs, at both the master’s and doctoral levels, for practical work experience. We do caution that there are unique laws and regulations wherever you go with which you will need to comply. Make sure that as you investigate opportunities you also connect with others who have engaged in international experiences in your region of interest to ensure you are well-informed before you finalize any opportunity.

**How to deal with barriers.** One of the potential barriers to taking advantage of some of these opportunities is of course funding. Most departments have allowances for you to use for these reasons, but there are also other ways to help supplement this amount. Be sure to check what bursaries are available through your institution to help support conference travel or international research exchanges. You may also want to look into external scholarships, locally or nationally, as many organizations and countries offer small scholarships or bursaries for international academic exchanges.

Another challenge may be in terms of communicating your desire for international experiences with your supervisor. The key to managing this conversation is to come prepared and emphasize why these opportunities are particularly relevant to your development. Focus on what opportunities there are that you are particularly interested in, how this will impact your timeline, and what knowledge, skills, or abilities you
will develop as a result of participating. The more prepared you are, the better.

If international experiences are something that you are interested in learning more about, we highly encourage you to talk to other graduate students, faculty, and administrative contacts in your program to see what opportunities are available to you. SIOP also has an International Affairs Committee that you can engage with. Be sure to tailor your experiences based on your developmental goals, financial flexibility, and time available. Ultimately, how you incorporate globalization into your graduate training is up to you. In an ever-changing world, we encourage you to take advantage of every opportunity to learn, question, and strengthen your personal and professional skill set. These experiences can only serve to strengthen your personal brand within an increasingly competitive market.

**Article Teaser**

For our next TIP-TOPics article, we will be exploring issues surrounding the health and well-being of I-O graduate students. This topic is particularly important as the discussion of well-being in academic staff continues to rise around the world (e.g., Shaw & Ward, 2014). We hope to explore some of the issues particularly relevant to our readership by surveying students on their ability to manage their personal well-being amidst the demands of graduate school. For this article **we need your help**: Please complete our survey to help inform the column and be sure to share with your graduate student colleagues in various I-O programs. Through this column we hope to inspire discussions of health and well-being at various institutions and reinforce the notion that education should not come at the expense of personal well-being.

**Survey Link:**
https://uoguelph.eu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_2t5DhejGMZnU2jT

As always, feel free to send us any questions or comments regarding this or any of our columns to jsorenso@uoguelph.ca.

**References**


