

International Business Major Experience

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In this article, Jessica Pina Santos demonstrates how she chose her major, International Business. She presents the importance of cultivating particular skills and genres of writing in this field, and how cultural-historical activity theory is applied in understanding crucial elements of these forms of writing and their advantages to her major.

Choosing My Major

It was December 2018, I was almost graduating from high school, and I still was unsure what major to study in college. I think it is important to mention that I was born and raised in Mexico, and I have studied and live in Mexico all this time. However, I've always had one goal clear in life; to share my culture with others, as well as to open my horizons and incorporate different perspectives in my life, along with learning from others.

During those days, I remembered being stressed about choosing my major right away. In Mexico, once you start college there is no opportunity to change majors, unless you drop from school, and start over again. So, you can imagine how desperate I was to find the perfect field, the field I'd want to work in for the rest of my life. I found that applying **pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory**, also known as P-CHAT, has helped me make important decisions for my career. P-CHAT represents the combination of three bodies of theory, that is, three ways to think about the world—cultural theory, historical theory, and activity theory. P-CHAT helps to understand complex practices and how activity systems assess cultural and historical

evolution. Specifically, the Illinois State University Writing Program uses P-CHAT as a way to focus on helping writers think about complex ways that writing works in the world.

To learn more about potential majors I had in mind, such as law, accounting, and finance, I did general research on Google. I looked into what skills I should possess in order to succeed in these majors, what different jobs I could get, and I read more articles related to the different majors. As I read, I found out that the writers of these articles were applying one of the seven P-CHAT terms, **representation**. According to Joyce Walker, representation, “highlights issues related to the way that the people who produce a text conceptualize and plan it,” meaning that writers had ideologies, frameworks, and ideas that influenced them while writing these articles (75). I had to be very careful about what articles to read to base my choice of major on because people tend to write from their personal experience, which can be different from mine.

However, after days of research and hundreds of personality tests taken, I went back to my life goal and thought about the skills I already possessed, and I chose International Business as my major, and I am still happy with the decision I made in 2018.

How to Get the “International” Experience from International Business?

After high school, I decided to attend EBC College, in Merida, Mexico, for the early years of my college career. I was having an amazing experience. I had made it through freshman year almost all of sophomore year when all the International Business major students had to attend a study abroad meeting. At the meeting, we were told studying abroad was not a requirement, but we would gain a lot of experience if we studied abroad anywhere, if we wanted to.

I became extremely excited, and I was determined to study abroad, it had always been my dream. I talked to my parents that night, and they said yes! The week after I started my application, I had to choose three possible destinations. Using my grades, the school would decide if I got to go on my first, second, or third choice.

After months of waiting, the school’s international department had a big event, where they revealed what country all the students that had applied would be traveling to next semester. After the big reveal, I was extremely happy to learn I got my first choice: Millikin University.

Upon discovery, my heart was beating very fast, I was so excited that the first thing I did, was to search “Millikin University” on Google. Here is where another term of P-CHAT, **socialization**, is applied. Socialization is when people, companies, or even institutions interact and get together to produce, distribute, and use texts. In this case, Millikin University gathered several people to create Millikin’s web page, the one I was reading at that very moment when I got the exciting news.

After months of preparation and packing, I moved to Decatur, IL. I lived such an amazing experience that I decided to transfer there that same year.

At Millikin University I have not only been able to share my culture, but also to learn a lot about international business, and how important writing, reading, and research can be in my chosen field. I also have come to understand and learned about the forms of writing that I would be using when I graduate, and all the elements these different genres should possess.



Figure 1: Jessy sharing her culture by showing an altar at Millikin University on the Day of the Dead.

Important Skills to Succeed in International Business

International business is the discipline that designs and manages strategies for international commercial operations. International business also analyzes the best options for negotiating deliveries of goods or services. This major allows a person to manage export programs, implement innovation projects, and design commercial exchange strategies.

Transcultural and translingual are writing skills, which relate to more than one culture and language, have been extremely important for me, especially in the international business field. They will definitely help me master the ability to conduct in business from one country to another country by applying international treaties, exchange agreements, and economic agreements that facilitate commercial exchange. These skills will also help me acquire a global vision of the economy and international business, not only from commercial knowledge but also from logistics and

customs knowledge, because in order to communicate effectively customs and languages differences should be taken into consideration. To be able to succeed in this major, and the possible jobs in this field, such as supply chain and logistics, international finance, international marketing, human resources, and many others certain capabilities might be needed to do so. Subsequently, I am going to talk more about the skills I found that got my attention.

The first skill listed is “talent for languages.” This indicates to me that I need know more than one language and be good at it. It also indicates I should enjoy learning different languages. Knowing more than one language will help me communicate effectively with the buyer, supplier, investor, and so many other important people in order to generate commercial agreements with companies and brands around the world, and I must have the ability to express myself and understand others who speak a language other than mine. Here is where the next term of P-CHAT comes in place. According to Joyce Walker’s article “Just CHATting,” **reception**, “deals with how a text is taken up and used by others” (75). In the language context, it is very important to make sure to understand the language correctly and make sure you are getting exactly what the other person is trying to say. It is very easy to just think from singular perspectives and hear what we want to hear, however, in business, this is not an ideal practice. We have to be 110% sure of what the other person is saying. This is where I think transcultural and translingual writing come into place. Knowing how to express yourself in written form across cultural and national boundaries, helps you have an effective communication style with people from different countries. It is important to know the differences in writing style of different cultures because they do vary, and it is important to understand the particular context.

The second skill listed is “capacity for analysis and synthesis.” To promote commercial agreements and create business proposals, professionals in this career must be able to analyze, manage, and interpret information, as well as synthesize and present information. The third skill listed is “Leadership.” Although some people believe that leadership refers only to the ability to make other people follow them, this skill involves much more than this. Leadership involves motivating those around you, being persuasive, setting viable, specific, relevant, and measurable goals, and above all, getting a team of professionals to work together.

Last but not least, a person in this field must have a “taste for the business world and cultural knowledge.” A characteristic that distinguishes those who study international business is their passion for the business environment, entrepreneurship, and business models, and appreciation for cultural



Figure 2: Business meetings in Mexico are usually in restaurants; portraying culture difference.

customs and traditions. Cultural customs and traditions in international negotiations are essential to achieve the stated objectives. What is functional in one culture may not be so in another. In Mexico, when you are going to close a business deal with someone it is usual to give your partner and expensive gift as a symbol of loyalty; however, in the US that can be taken as a rude act. The idea that language use is essentially social also underlies current work in literary theory and sociolinguistics. This makes the P-CHAT concept of **ecology** very important, because ecology focuses on how texts and humans and tools work together in the material world. Ecology enriches our environment and is important to the well-being and welfare of humanity. It offers new awareness of the interdependence between people and nature, which is vital. It is important to consider the cultural differences between the countries that intend to commercialize or establish an agreement. Such differences help to identify the preferences of potential consumers, as well as to identify their different needs. Because business differs in every country, people might approve of your business model or you as a partner depending on the way you act, and if they can truly trust you. This is why cultural differences require a different approach.

International Business and Its Genres of Writing

International Documentation is the set of representative documents of the export/import operation in general and the compliance of the intervening parties with regulations of the exchange market, credit, fiscal, customs, and so on, applied in each country in particular. These documents are of vital importance since they confer the ownership of the merchandise, they

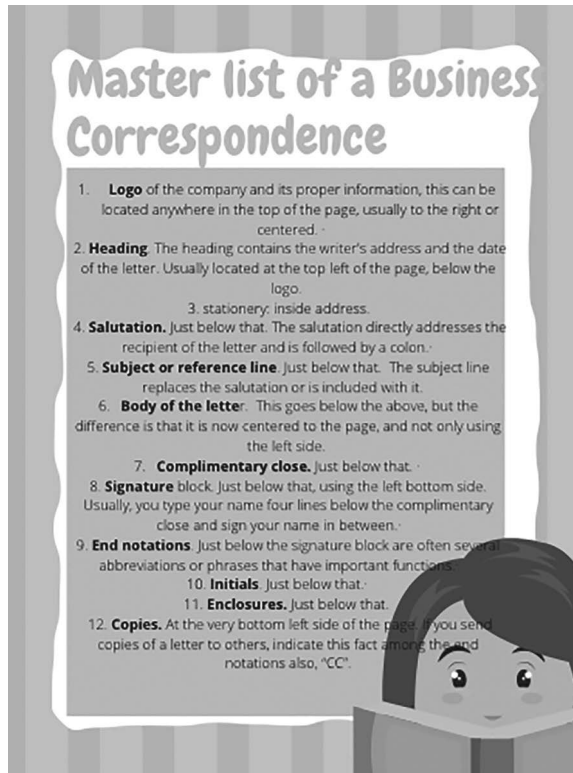


Figure 3: An example of a complete list of a Business Correspondence created by the author.

show that it is insured against possible risks, and they attest to its quality or quantities. Through interviews and research, I was able to find out more about three important kinds of documents that are used in international business.

I thought that interviewing Dr. Mark Munoz, would help me gain a better understanding of the writing styles and documents needed in my field. He is a well-known professor of international business at the Tabor School of Business at Millikin University, and editor/author of over 20 business books, including *Global Business Intelligence*, based on a multi-country study on the impact of globalization on the travel industry. During our interview he emphasized the importance **business correspondence**, because “this is a way to start any negotiation, and it is extremely important to communicate effectively with the person or company we are going to be working with.” Business correspondence, which can be in print (letters) or digital forms (e-mails, texts), have a huge range of important functions in international business. Its most important feature is the ease of reaching and communicating with different parties, especially since in international

business it is not always possible to meet people face-to-face. Before writing a business correspondence or any other form of writing, it is important to generate a complete list of the general conventions of that document, meaning that you should list all its elements and characteristics of elements to fill the document or write it successfully. Like earlier mentioned, reception is P-CHAT term that “highlights issues related to the way people who produce a text conceptualize and plan it as well as all the activities and materials that help to shape how people do this” (Key Terms & Concepts for the ISU Writing Program). The complete list definitely helps you get a better understanding and outline of what you have to do, creating an effective and concise business document, including thinking carefully about how a reader will perceive the document, and what they might use it for.

The next genre I found in my research is the **proforma invoice**. The proforma invoice is a provisional invoice that the company delivers to the client, and it specifies the details of future commercial activity. A proforma invoice has no commercial value, it is simply a document in which the details of a future final invoice will be specified. In the document, the price, a base, and taxes that correspond to the services or products required should be included. It is similar to a budget proposal, but with more specific information about the transaction.

And the third document I will talk about is the **packing list**. The packing list should inform about the contents of the package; this information should complete the information on the invoice and must be issued by the person who makes the shipment, the sender. This document is mandatory because it facilitates selective recognition by the customs authorities and is of great importance, especially in physical customs clearance. It also works as proof for damage and loss of items in the package when they have been broken.

My Experience

Being able to export and import one product or service to another country has always fascinated me. It is a way to share your culture, tastes, and beliefs with another society. Doing this research, I found out that soft skills are an important part of the international business major. Soft skills are non-technical skills that relate to how you work. They include how you interact with colleagues, how you solve problems, and how you manage your work. These skills will help me communicate effectively and succeed in business wherever I go. It is also very important to know and understand its forms in writing to be able to succeed in this field, and P-CHAT has not only allowed

me to find my major but has also helped me navigate and comprehend all these complex genres related to the international business field, preparing me for the future.

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Jessica Pina Santos is seeking her undergraduate degree in international business at Millikin University. She loves classical dance and tacos. She enjoys learning about other cultures and other people's perspectives. Her goal is to reach out to the Latino market in the United States.

