

Let Numbers Speak: Cultural Awareness, Job Opportunity and the International Student Exchange Program between Maritime Universities

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For six years, Massachusetts Maritime Academy (MMA) of the USA has been facilitating a student exchange program with Shanghai Maritime University (SMU) of China. The program, conducted in two countries that differ massively in culture, history, social values, economic systems and governmental structures, imposes huge challenges on the participants. The exchange students need to survive cultural shocks, overcome language barriers and adapt successfully to the new environment. Presently the exchange program has become increasingly popular at MMA; the number of participating cadets has risen from 11 in the year of 2010 to 27 in 2013. The participating students, who have been “gold gilded” in China, tend to stand out in the job market upon graduation, especially in comparison to their peers who have not participated in the international program.

The paper presents an empirical analysis of how the international student exchange program affects future job opportunities and enhances outstanding qualities of participating cadets. Applying a case study methodology, drawing on school-wide surveys, analyzing questionnaires, and applying data collected over the course of six years, the paper examines the relationships between the international experiences and job market success for participating students upon graduation and their subsequent career development after graduation.

The findings indicate that MMA cadets who went to China obtain more lucrative job offers than those who did not. Maritime companies hiring cadets who traveled to China tend to be larger in terms of their asset values or multinational corporations with branches in many parts of the world. The results also show that the exemplary qualities needed of exchange students, such as language proficiency, cultural adaptability, flexibility, initiative, world vision, genuine curiosity, and perseverance, are displayed and encouraged, allowing the participating students to reach their full potential. Furthermore, it is clearly demonstrated that the program-participating students are more successful in their career development after graduating from the institution.

Keywords: international exchange program, labor market competitiveness, entry level salary, cultural adaptability, international experiences and job offers.

I. Introduction

As the world has become increasingly interdependent, especially in the maritime industry, more and more maritime institutes are engaged in various exchange programs in the hope to broaden their cadets' international views, enhance their capabilities of conducting cross-cultural business and their abilities to get along with the more diversified workforce of the maritime industry. For 6 years, Massachusetts Maritime Academy (MMA) of the USA has been conducting a student exchange program with Shanghai Maritime University (SMU) of China. Every spring term, about twenty cadets are selected from each institution and sent to the other campus to study for one semester. Strictly speaking, it is an exchange of Maritime Training and Education (MET) between two maritime institutions, since the participating

students pay tuition, room and board to their home school while studying at the host university. The program, conducted in two countries that differ massively in culture, history, social values, economic systems and governmental structures, imposes huge challenges on the participants. The exchange students need to survive cultural shocks, overcome language barriers and adapt successfully to the new environment. Presently the exchange program has become increasingly popular at MMA; the number of participating cadets has risen from 11 in the year of 2010 to 27 in 2013 and 23 in 2014. The participating students, who have been “gold gilded” in China, tend to stand out in the job market upon graduation, especially in comparison to their peers who have not participated in the international program.

The paper presents an empirical analysis of how the international student exchange program affects future job opportunities and enhances outstanding qualities of participating cadets. Applying a case study methodology, drawing on school-wide surveys and applying data collected over the course of six years, the paper examines the relationships between the international experiences and job market success for participating students upon graduation and their subsequent career development after graduation.

The paper is structured as follows: Section II describes the fast growth of the MMA-SMU exchange program. Section III presents the changes brought about to the MMA campus due to the international program and the underlying reasons that account for the success of cadets participating in the program. Section IV looks into the fact that the fast growth in both the shipping industry and Chinese economy creates great opportunities for American maritime students. Section IV offers a conclusion.

II. Cultural Awareness and the International Exchange Program

The MMA-SMU student exchange program started with 11 cadets of two majors, Marine Transportation and Marine Business in 2010. Now it has expanded to well over 20 cadets from 5 majors, adding Marine Engineering, Marine Protection and Facility Engineering to the list. Table 1 shows how quickly the number of MMA cadets participating in the exchange program has grown over the course of 5 years. We will then present some explanations which account for the popularity and success of the exchange program.

Table 1. Participation number of MMA cadets in the MMA-SMU/DMU exchange program 2010-2014¹

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Female cadets	1	2	2	6	7
Male cadets	10	14	16	21	16
Total	11	16	18	27 ²	23 ³

¹ Starting from the Spring term of 2013, MMA began to send five cadets over to Dalian Maritime University (DMU) of China and receive the equal amount of DMU cadets each year. The data was obtained from MMA registrar’s Office

² 22 MMA cadets going to SMU, while 5 to DMU in 2013

³ 19 cadets going to SMU, while 4 to DMU in 2014

2.1 The basic facts about MMA

Massachusetts Maritime Academy is a principal maritime educational institute in the US with a focus on excellent ocean centric majors like Marine Engineering and Marine Transportation. However, as a state college, the great majority of cadets enrolled are from Massachusetts and other local areas in New England, a region in the northeastern corner of the United States. The academy has shown, more or less, the features of homogeneity and conservativeness. Thanks to the vision and courage of President Gurnon, MMA has stepped out of its comfort zone in response to the proposal of SMU in China and set up the MMA-SMU exchange program in 2008. The exchange program was the first international exchange program at MMA and is still the only successful international exchange program with Chinese maritime universities among all American maritime institutes. The following school-wide survey of 109 cadets in 2011 how prepared they were in regards to international travel.

Table 2. The world travelling by MMA cadets

Destination of travel	Percentage of survey participants
China	3%
Asian Countries (except China)	7%
European Countries	31%
Caribbean, South & Latin American Countries	97%
Canada	78%

Table 2 indicates how extensively (or not quite) American students travelled outside US and places they felt comfortable going to. Only a few American students had gone to Asian countries (except China), such as Israel, Jordan, India, Japan, etc. and three had visited China, including one American-born Vietnamese. Around three-fourths of responding cadets made trips to Canada; a country that holds similar political, economic, social and cultural systems to the USA. And yet out of the eighty five students who had visited Canada, all of them went to English speaking areas like Toronto, Vancouver and Ottawa, and only one third had gone to French speaking areas like Montreal and Quebec City. About 31% of the respondents toured European countries, and the highly frequented destinations were Italy, Ireland, Portugal and England. To a great extent, this is due to the fact that many of the respondents are descendant of the British, Italian, Portuguese and Irish, can still speak the language, or have family members living in Europe. One cadet explained that his grandfather lived in a village outside of Rome and has more than 20 Italian cousins.

The statistics in Table 1 also shows that nearly all of the MMA cadets paid visits to Caribbean, South and Latin American countries, such as Mexico, Barbados, Puerto Rico, Evader, Panama, Costa Rica and Tortola. That is mainly because cadets at MMA are required to take sea destination when the cadets take voyages with the school training ship.

2.2 Cultural Awareness and the Exchange Program

With the on-going exchange program, 2 surveys were conducted at MMA in 2011⁴ and 2013⁵ respectively to see how MMA cadets perceive the exchange program.

Table 3 . Answers to questionnaires (2011 &2013)

Survey Questions/ Answers	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Year
The impact the China program would impose on MMA?	81.9%	0.9%	17.4%	2011
	84.5%	0%	15.5%	2013
How will the China program influence you?	33%	2.8%	64. 2%	2011
	39%	1.5%	59.5%	2013
Do you want to go abroad for jobs or studies?	56%	22.9%	21.1%	2011
	63%	15.1%	21.9%	2013
What do you think of the Chinese students?	75.2%	0%	24.8%	2011
	78.1%	0%	21.9%	2013
Do you want to be the roommate of a Chinese cadet?	19.3%	71.5%	9.2%	2011
	21.2%	69.4%	9.4%	2013

Table 3 presents the 5 principal questions raised in the survey and the answers the participating cadets selected. For each of the 5 above-listed questions, the cadets have 3 choices, “positive”, “negative” or “not much either way”, and they can only pick one choice to each question. For the second question “how would the China program influence you?”, one third of the respondents selected “positively”, about two thirds (64.2%) picked “not much either way” and only 3 students chose “negatively” .

The MMA cadets expressing positive opinion about the program focused mainly on the three points: developing good relations between countries and people, allowing MMA students to gain experiences of different cultures and a great opportunity to meet the cadets of the same major from other countries.

We can see that, though 81.7% of the MMA cadets believe that the China program would bring positive effects on MMA, and none have negative opinions about Chinese students (see the answers to the 4th question), most MMA cadets would prefer not to have too much involvement with China program/students at the personal level, such as becoming a roommate of a Chinese visiting student. When being asked the reason, several MMA students said that they would like to have a roommate who could be quite similar to themselves, same personalities, same background, and same hobbies, as one student put it, “I want to room with one of my friends.” Some others were worried that rooming with a Chinese exchange student would be a big, time consuming responsibility, since they would be expected to introduce SMU students to American culture and show them around.

Both Table 2 and Table 3 clearly state that many MMA cadets did not go too far away from their comfortable zones, and they were still looking for, as much as possible, similarities rather than differences.

⁴ 109 respondents from all majors at MMA

⁵ 102 respondents from all majors at MMA

The exchange program prepares MMA students to meet the challenges of the increasingly cross-cultural maritime industry, and encourage them to take that extra step to embrace the different.

It is also worth mentioning that over the course of four years, each group of Chinese students has brought the fine qualifications of diligence, strong work ethic, and determination to succeed; many MMA cadets and faculty members have been greatly impressed. Though Chinese exchange students would experience cultural shocks and language barriers, they have made impressive efforts to blend in and excel in the classrooms. One MMA professor of Internal Combustion Engine said: “It is a pleasure to have the Chinese students in my class. They work so hard and get the best grades.”

On the first day of the Spring term of 2014, one questionnaire was conducted in the Chinese Economy class. The following two tables sum up the answers from 20 participating cadets registered for the class, which shows how much MMA cadets, mostly seniors and a few juniors, knew about China when they sign up for the class, and how eagerly they would like to learn about the country.

Table 4. Answers to the question: list five things you know about China (March 2014)

Categories of answers	Answers
Politics	communist government, internet control
Economy	fast economic growth, high ranking in merchant fleet, big trading partner of US, big shipping industry,
Society	long history, rich culture, lots of ethnic minorities, good food, most populated country, 2008 Olympics, small families
Geography	capital is Beijing, the Great Wall,
People	Confucius, Mao Ze Dong

The answers to the question “Please list five things you know about China” can be put into five categories, politics, economy, society, geography and people. Table 4 tells that MMA cadets knew some general information about China, such as political structure, rapid economic growth, maritime industry in China, culturally rich society and good food. However, they only have some general ideas about the country, not much in the way of details.

Table 5. Answers to the questionnaires (March 2014)

Answers to the question: Why would you take the Chinese Economy Class?	Percentage of cadets surveyed
To know more about the country and its economic growth	30%
To fulfil the requirement of an elective course	20%
Both of the above	45%
Other reasons, such as to know more about Asian culture, seems to be an interesting class, etc.	5%

Table 5 shows that 75% of the registered cadets for the Chinese Economy class intended to know more about the country and its rapid economic growth. One student wrote that the reason he signed up for the course was “to learn more about one of the most growing countries in the world”. Another one wanted to know more about “US and Chinese trade regulations and differences in culture that may affect

economy”. One cadet would like to find a job in China after graduating from MMA, as he loved the country after spending one semester as an exchange student at DMU. One cadet even wanted to “discover whether it is good to invest in China”.

III. Job Market Success for MMA Cadets Participating in the Exchange Program

Most of MMA exchange students are juniors, only a few would go as sophmores. Usually they will graduate the following year after spending one spring term in China. At this point we only have four groups of MMA cadets graduating from the academy since the exchange program started in 2010 and most received good job offers upon graduation. In this section, we will look at the companies who offered the exchange cadets jobs during their senior year and how much their experiences in China contributed to their current jobs and later promotions. We see three trends clearly from the available data collected by the Office of Career and Professional Services of the academy: companies that employed the cadets tended to be large with many international elements, cadets received decent salary offers, and they are on steady rising track of career development.

The first group of 11 MMA exchange students went to SMU in the spring term of 2010, nine of them graduated in June 2011 and two in June of 2012. Five cadets responded to the school survey with jobs, and they happened to be all maritime business majors.

Myra, the first female who went to China in 2010, received a job with SpecTec upon her graduation as a regional sales manager. SpecTec is a premier provider of asset management solutions for the marine, offshore & energy, defense and yachting industries all over the world . Her responsibility is to identify and evaluate sales opportunities in the United States, Canada, and Latin America. After working at SpecTec for two and half years, Myra switched to DNV GL Group, the world’s largest ship and offshore classification society of the maritime industry, a leading technical advisor to the oil & gas industry, and a leading expert in the energy value chain including renewables. The company has 16,000 employees across 300 sites in more than 100 countries and gains revenue of EUR 2,500 million per year. Myra works as Sales Support Manager and she loves her challenging and rewarding job.

Johnathan was offered a job as a techinal coodinator by Canada Steamship Lines (CSL). CSL is a Montreal based company which brings highly-efficient, gravity-fed, self-unloading capability to bulk shipping and transhipment markets throughout the world. Only two years out of college, White has completed project work in China for CSL International and is now based in England, working for CSL Europe and their Technical Operations Director conducting analysis and development of fleet wide operational, financial and energy efficiency improvements. The young gradute also assists in development of a monitoring system to improve the CSL Europe safety program. As the front page article of MMA website put, “this young grad hopped on CSL’s sturdy corporate ladder and started climbing!”

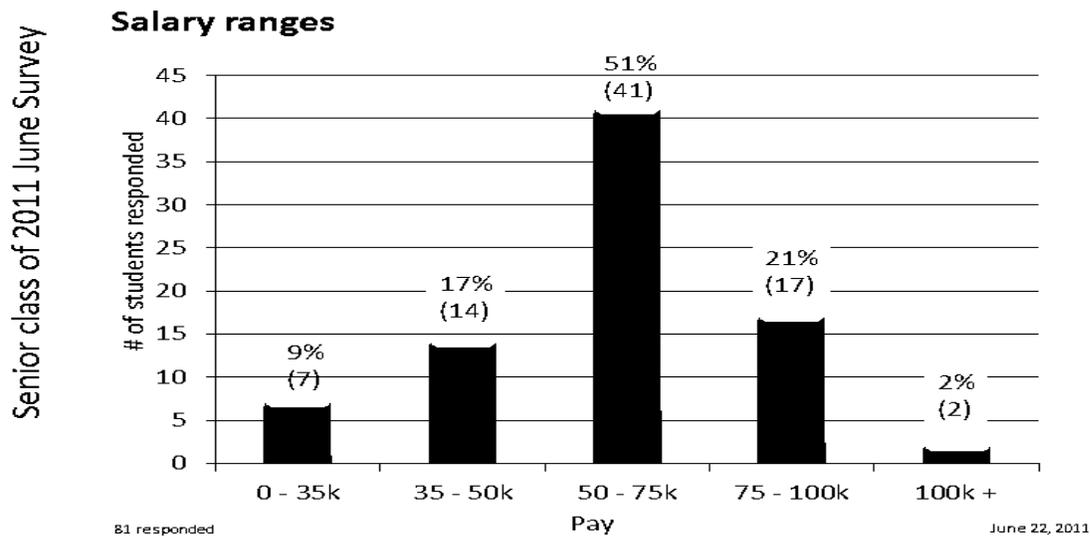
Two cadets received jobs at Back Office Associates (non-maritime ashore), which is a Massachusetts based software and services company focused on data migration, information governance, master data management (MDM) and data quality for enterprise systems. The two cadets work as Data Migration Analysit and Consultant with salary range of \$50,000-\$75,000 and \$75,000-\$100,000 respectively.

Two cadets worked for maritime related on-shore jobs upon graduation. One works as a Freight Trader at Heidmar with entry level salary in the \$50,000-\$75,000 range. Heidmar is one of the world’s

leading commercial tanker operators with a fleet of approximately 100 vessels. From offices in the U.S., U.K., and Singapore, our staff provides around-the-clock service to major oil companies and oil traders on a world-wide basis. Another was hired as assistant to marine operations at APM Terminals upon graduation with salary range of \$50,000-\$75,000. APM Terminals is an international container terminal operating company headquartered in Hague, Netherlands. Starting from January 2014, the graduate works as Sr. Outbound Analyst at Johnson & Johnson. Johnson & Johnson is an American multinational medical devices, pharmaceutical and consumer packaged goods manufacturer founded in 1886. Its common stock is a component of the Dow Jones Industrial Average and the company is listed among the Fortune 500.

The salary range of the 5 responding cadets from the first group has the following distribution, one in the range of \$35,000-\$50,000, three in the \$50,000-\$75,000 and one in the \$75,000-\$100,000. And these 5 cadets happened to be Marine Business Majors and customarily, non-sea-going majors receive 15%-20% less than sea-going majors at MMA. When we compare the whole academy's salary range reported for the year of 2011, which includes the seagoing and nonseagoing graduating cadets, it is obvious that the 5 cadets stand out for not only the prestigious companies they work for, but also the salaries they received upon graduation. The following graph shows the salary range from 81 MMA seniors graduating in the year of 2011.

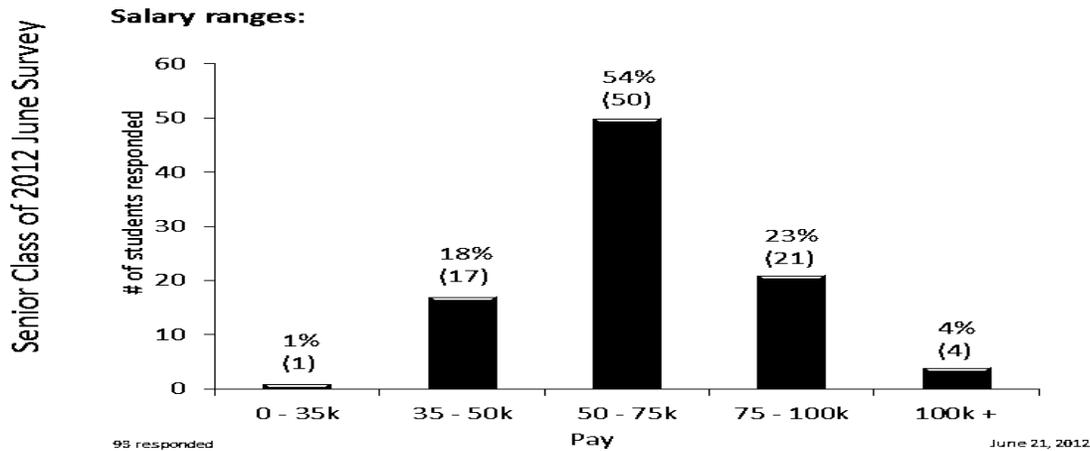
Graph 1: Salary ranges of MMA seniors in 2011



The second group of MMA cadets that went to China graduated in June of 2012 with two majoring in Marine Transportation (MT) and eight majoring in Marine Business. For the two MT cadets, one was hired by Military Sealift Command as 3rd Mate and the other at Hanjin Shipping Company as 3rd Mate and both received the entry level salary in the \$50,000-\$75,000 range. Military Sealift Command, part of US Navy forces, is the leading provider of ocean transportation for the Navy and the rest of the Department of Defense – operating approximately 110 ships daily around the globe. Hanjin Shipping is a South Korea based global shipping and logistic company and one of the top ten container carriers in the world. The eight Marine Business (MB) graduates got jobs as either maritime ashore or non-maritime ashore. Two female cadets work for Canada Steamship Lines (CSL), and the others work

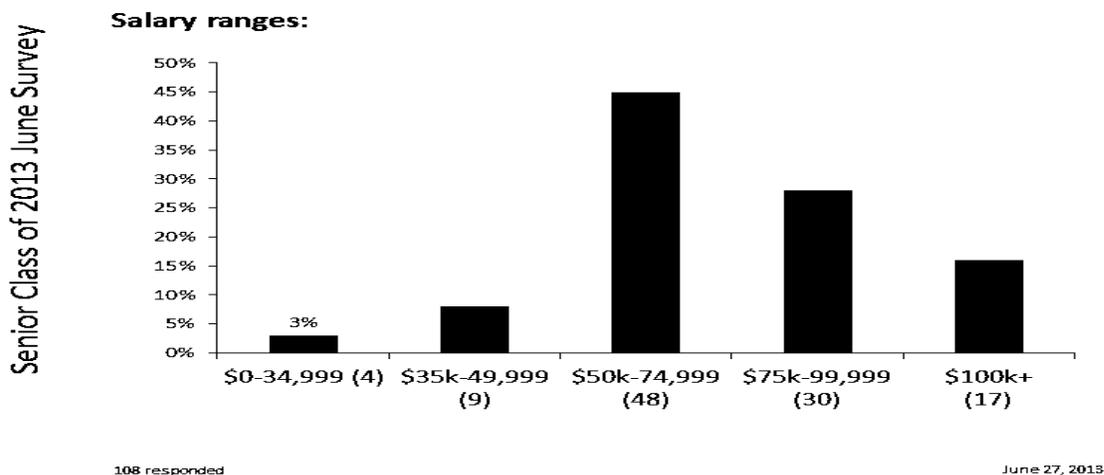
for respectable companies. Five MB cadets reported their salaries; two receive the range of \$35,000-\$50,000 and three at the \$50,000-\$75,000. In comparison to the salary range at MMA, as reported in the following graph, the exchange students certainly had an edge over the peers who did not participate in the program.

Graph 2: Salary ranges of MMA seniors in 2012



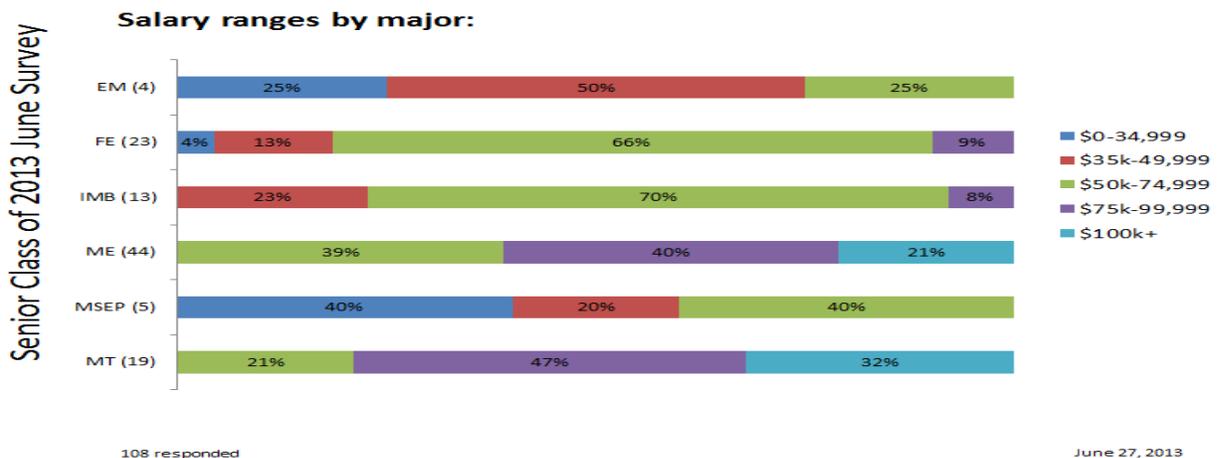
There are 6 MMA exchange cadets who responded fully to the survey conducted by the Career & Placement Office in June of 2013. The six cadets were hired as good entry level positions, and by the huge multinational companies. Four MB cadets worked for BP, GE, General Dynamics, and McLaughlin, One MT cadets at Military Sealift Command as the third mate and one MSEP at Able Services as regional Safety manager. The salaries were reported as the following: one falling in the range of \$35,000 - \$50,000, four in the ranges of \$50,000-\$75,000 and one in the range of \$75,000-\$99,000. In comparison to the seniors of the whole cohort at MMA, the cadets participating in the MMA-SMU exchange program were obviously in advantageous positions.

Graph 3: Salary ranges of MMA seniors in 2013



Since the year of 2013, the MMA Career and Placement Office added one more category in data collection to put the salaries seniors receive into different ranges according to their majors. Graph 4 shows in details the salary ranges for six majors at MMA. Two seagoing majors like Marine Transportation and Marine Engineering get higher entry level salaries than non-sea going majors like MB, Emergency Management (EM), MSEP and Facility Engineering (FE).

Graph 4. Salary range by majors in 2013



The MMA cadets going to China certainly gain an edge in the job market upon graduation and their later career paths. MMA President Gurnon made the comments: “The unique international experience adds an extra level of value to the job applicants. Big companies would be greatly impressed when they see our qualified cadets have the courage to travel to another country and be successful in a different environment.” The director of Career and Placement Office has the similar observation, “in job market, the cadets make themselves stand out among many applicants when they add the China experiences to their resumes. Big companies love the students who have overseas experiences.”

III. Positive Experiences and Great Opportunities in China

3.1 Positive experience of American students gain in China

Each year the participating cadets from the academy gained very positive experiences during their stay in China. They believed the program helped them in the following three areas: developing good relations with Chinese people by experiencing the country first hand, putting them in more advantageous positions in different cultures and among different people, and meeting cadets of the same major from other countries. One student wrote in his report of the exchange program: “It is a great opportunity to meet people from other countries in similar fields of study.” Another cadet said that “It allows exchange of cultures and offers a new unique experience. It also helps educate everyone in the school about the Chinese culture, not just those who get to go.”

Many participating cadets from the first groups became strong advocates of the exchange program and promote the program in every possible way. The cadets present papers about the program and their own personal experiences at international and domestic maritime conferences, hold positions in the student council, serve as cadet officers of foreign exchange program, give talks to cadets’ parents, and encourage other MMA students to join the program.

To participate the MMA-SMU student exchange program, the cadets not only show their fine academic qualities by expressing language proficiency, intuitive vision, and genuine curiosity and perseverance, but also their spirit and personality through determination, cultural adaptability, flexibility, and the capability to overcome all difficulty which goes above and beyond the expectations the Chinese would have for the first overseas students. Here is a good example: Myra was the only female cadet going to China in the first year. On top of being the best student in the class, averaging 85.2, while the class mean was an 82, Myra joined the soccer team as the eleventh member representing MMA to play against SMU and other university teams in Shanghai. It turns out that she scored the most in the games, and although she was once injured badly on the field and rushed to the hospital in an ambulance, her optimism and determination made a deep impression on her teammates, the Chinese cadets, and the doctors who treated her in the hospital. One Chinese faculty at SMU exclaimed, “Wow, fragility, your name is not American women.”

The cadets from all these years have been trying to maximize their time in China. They travelled extensively to gain first-hand experience of Chinese tradition, history, culture, and society. They sampled various types of Chinese foods, learned unique customs, met people from other parts of the world, and built life-long friendships.

3.2 Fast Growth in China and Opportunities for Maritime Cadets

For three decades, China has developed tremendously and despite the Asian financial economic crisis in the late 1990s, the Chinese economy continued to grow at rapid pace, with an average annual growth rate of almost 10% between 1991 and 2010. China’s total international trade of goods in 2013 reached \$3,982 billion, surpassed USA’s \$3,848 billion, and made China the largest trading country in the world. In 2012, China’s GDP, valued at \$8.358 trillion, surpassed Japan’s \$5.96 trillion dollars and became the second largest economy in the world, just next to USA (\$16.245 trillion).

During the same period of time, there has been a dramatic development in the Chinese shipping industry. In 2013, eight Chinese ports were on the top ten of the global cargo throughput rankings.

Table 6: Global cargo throughput rankings (in 10 thousand T) ⁶

Year	Ports	Port Cargo Throughput (10 thousand T)
2013	Ningbo-Zhoushan	80,978.00
2013	Shanghai	77,600.00
2013	Singapore	55,958.00
2013	Tianjin	50,000.00
2013	Guangzhou	45,512.00
2013	Suzhou	45,430.00
2013	Qingdao	45,000.00
2013	Tangshan	44,620.00
2013	Rotterdam	44,046.00
2013	Dalian	40,840.00

⁶ China Shipping Database, Port Throughput Ranking
<http://www.shippingdata.cn/free/item.do?toplmid=6354E42BC8844DB7B0874F603935CAAB&lmid=CCC4347CA99345E7B47A6AE90D7761BF>

China's shipping industry and container transportation has reached international standards both in handling efficiency and building networks. In 2009, China reached 26.1 million TEUS in containerized cargo shipping, surpassing the USA, and has been ranked the largest exporter of containerized cargo shipping country ever since.⁷ The Chinese government has not only set up massive shipping companies like China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO), but has also invested heavily in the water transport infrastructure, constructing new ports and rebuilding and enlarging older facilities.

Shanghai is the largest city in China and has become the center of international finance and global shipping. Many international corporates set up branches in Shanghai and intend to hire personnel with training in their own field and with a world vision. The MMA cadets with China experiences would be considered as highly valued candidates to work for the international companies. For instance, a couple of years ago, an American waste management company (Wheelabrator Technologies) announced plans to construct five waste-to-energy facilities in the suburbs of Shanghai and intended to hire MMA cadets with China experience and with training in marine engineering and environment protection to work in Shanghai, and would offer internships to MMA cadets even before graduation.

In late May of 2014, the Deputy Chairman of Foremost Group visited MMA and intended to hire graduates who were familiar with China. Foremost Group is a New York-based shipping, trading, and finance enterprise that have recently expanded their business to Asian countries, including Hong Kong and Shanghai. All potential job opportunities greatly encourage the MMA cadets to participate in the international exchange program and gain foreign experiences.

IV. Conclusion

Looking at the available data, it is clear that the exchange students are given an edge over their peers. In regards to international experience that can easily be applied to future jobs, cadets who choose to take this opportunity find themselves much better candidates within a rapidly expanding market. When combined with qualities of leadership, risk-taking, language proficiency and cultural adaptability, it becomes an invaluable tool to help exchange cadets stand out in the increasingly competitive job market.

The international corporation between two maritime institutes, such as the MMA-SMU student Exchange program, would be very effective to help the participating cadets enhance their self-confidence, broaden global vision, and adapt to a new environment with ease and grace. The successful experiences of the MMA-SMU program are applicable not only to the maritime universities of USA and China, but also to the institutions located in two other culturally diverse countries, like the UK and Vietnam. When the participating cadets prove that they can survive and perform well in two completely different cultures, they demonstrate that they have all the necessary and sufficient skills to be successful within any type of job they are offered. And this is exactly what the potential employers are seeking of all graduating maritime cadets nowadays.

With the on-going development of the exchange program and availability of additional data of the female cadets at MMA, more rigorous statistical analysis could be applied to the research, generating more significant conclusions. To do so will unquestionably help us to see how the exchange program

⁷ World Shipping Council, <http://www.worldshipping.org/about-the-industry/global-trade/trade-statistics>

enhances cultural awareness, educates maritime cadets to embrace the differences, and fosters leadership qualification of cadets of maritime institutions.

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