

## COURSES IN FOREIGN TRADE

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During recent years there has been a considerable growth of interest in the question of our foreign trade. The changing nature of our exports, the abnormal activity of the war period, and the post-war readjustment have all combined to increase attention to our commercial relations with other countries. As the problem has taken on new aspects and new developments have added to its complexity, the demand for trained men has become more and more insistent. In response to this demand certain of our colleges and universities have been offering courses of study in foreign-trade subjects. The desire to ascertain what is actually being accomplished, and the feeling that a comparison and correlation of experiences might make possible certain helpful conclusions for future guidance may be given as the chief reasons for the present paper. Other investigations have been carried on, and are being carried on in this field. This study, however, has one distinctive feature, in that the subject is treated from the teacher's point of view.

In securing the information for the present study the questionnaire method was used. Copies of the questionnaire were forwarded to all of the institutions named in the list sent out by the Bureau of Education, Washington, D.C., in October, 1921.<sup>1</sup> Replies were received from fifty (over 70 per cent) of the seventy-one schools listed.

In offering the results of the investigation it has appeared best to present most of the material in the form of percentages. Two reasons for this may be given. In the first place the answers received, while not covering all the institutions offering foreign-trade courses, are nevertheless considered to be truly representative of the group. Considering both size and geographical location of the institutions reporting, it seems reasonable to believe that the facts regarding the minority not heard from would correspond in all important points with the conclusions drawn from the reports received. Secondly, it is believed that the results will be briefer in form and more definite

<sup>1</sup> List of seventy-one colleges and universities reporting June, 1921, courses of study in preparation for foreign service, foreign trade in particular.

if stated as percentages. It should be noted that the percentages given with reference to any question refer to the number of answers received to the particular question.<sup>1</sup> The percentages have been carried to one decimal place, which gives sufficient accuracy for our purpose.

The first point raised by the questionnaire had to do with the length of time the institutions have been offering courses in foreign trade. The replies received show clearly the comparative newness of the subject. The average length of time for all cases reporting is four and one-half years. This average, however, is somewhat misleading because of the influence of a small number of schools that have been pioneers in the field. The median is three years and the mode two years. It may be added that 42 per cent have been offering courses two years or less; over 54 per cent three years or less; and over 88 per cent less than ten years. The longest time stated by any institution is twenty-one years.

The number of courses offered also suggests the experimental stage in development. As in the first question the simple average of the number of courses offered, which is three, is greatly affected by a very small number of schools giving a wide variety of courses, the median and the mode both being one. Fifty-six per cent of the schools reporting offer only one course, while over 77 per cent are offering three or less. The greatest number of courses reported by any school is twenty.

The number of semester credit hours given for foreign-trade subjects naturally follows closely the number of courses offered. In this case the simple average is eight hours, the median four, and the mode three. It is interesting to note that approximately one-third of the institutions reporting offer one three-hour course. Seventy-five per cent give six credit hours or less, while the remaining 25 per cent offer various numbers running from eight to sixty.

The reports on enrolment of students in foreign-trade courses show an average of 105 per school. Here again there is a marked difference between the average and the median, which is 65. The mode has little meaning in this case, the highest number of similar

<sup>1</sup> The figures given do not take account of courses, credit hours, or enrolments in commercial geography, history of commerce, or languages. There is no doubt of the value and importance of these subjects for foreign-trade students, but on account of their being taught in so many schools where no attention is given to training for foreign trade the necessity of omitting them from this study is obvious.

cases being only 3. The smallest number of students reported is 9, while four reports give enrolments of 300 or over.<sup>1</sup>

A question asking for information concerning the text or texts used for the courses in foreign trade brought a wide variety of replies. A simple classification of answers may be given as follows: percentage of schools reporting use of regular text, 46.3; percentage of schools reporting use of combination of texts, 46.3; percentage of schools reporting no regular text, 7.4. More striking than the figures given, however, are the comments appearing in the different replies. The great majority of replies show clearly that the securing of satisfactory texts offers considerable difficulty. In many cases the answers state that some other text will probably be used next year. The chief point of criticism appears to be that the present available texts are not sufficiently comprehensive. This probably explains the high percentage of cases where a combination of texts is being used.

In many quarters the question is being raised regarding the importance of introducing paper work in foreign-trade courses. Many exporters claim that with the variety of foreign markets and the complexity of details peculiar to each market training in foreign trade requires a working knowledge of the use of the commercial and legal documents. The plan generally proposed is that of having the student work out a number of definite export problems, using blank forms similar to those in actual use in the export business. Our investigation shows a rapid development along this line. Of the schools reporting, 57.2 per cent have introduced paper work as a regular part of the training.<sup>2</sup>

The question of the use of practice forms is closely linked with the general problem of purpose and method in our courses in foreign trade. An attempt was made to ascertain the attention given to the technical phases of the subject as distinguished from the general and descriptive. The answers show the following division: percentage of schools emphasizing the descriptive, 44.4; percentage of schools emphasizing the technical, 27.8; percentage of schools dividing attention between the two, 27.8. In general it may be said that there is a marked tendency for the emphasis to shift to the technical. The

<sup>1</sup> The figures represent total enrolments in all foreign-trade courses. In cases where a number of courses are given allowance should be made for considerable duplication.

<sup>2</sup> Ninety-five per cent of the schools reporting the introduction of paper work are making use of "Miscellaneous Series," No. 85, *Paper Work in Export Trade*, published by the Department of Commerce.

present higher percentage of descriptive courses is due to the large proportion of schools offering only one course. When only one course is given it must almost of necessity be somewhat general and descriptive in nature.

It is of course highly important to know how well the schools of the country are meeting the demand for trained men in the export field. This raises the question concerning the number of foreign-trade students who actually enter work in foreign trade. The answers to this question are rather discouraging. Sixty-one per cent of the schools reporting state that few if any of their students actually enter foreign-trade activities after leaving school. The other 39 per cent report that a considerable number, running 10 per cent and over, secure foreign-trade positions. The highest number reported by any school is 50 per cent; but this is far above the average.

One of the chief reasons why so few students turn foreign-trade training to practical use seems to lie in the lack of adequate machinery for connecting the man with the place. Of the schools reporting on this point it appears that 84.5 per cent have no definite arrangements for facilitating the placing of students in foreign-trade positions. Of the other 15.5 per cent it may be said that, while some definite action has been taken, it has in most cases been confined to establishing connections with one or more export corporations or steamship companies. While such arrangements are undoubtedly valuable, it frequently happens that the particular line of export work done by the company or companies entering into the agreement may not appeal to any considerable number of students. It is also true that in most cases the number of men required by any single concern will be somewhat limited.

There is, of course, no line of teaching which does not present its own peculiar problems. During several years of experience in teaching classes in foreign trade the writer has found several very definite difficulties. An attempt was made to weigh the importance of different problems by submitting a list to be passed upon by the various teachers in the field. Three problems were stated, and those receiving the questionnaire were asked to number them as first, second, and third in order of importance. The problems submitted were as follows:

- A. Securing satisfactory texts.
- B. Placing graduates in foreign-trade positions.
- C. Obtaining reliable and satisfactory statistical and descriptive course material.

The results of the vote are given in the table below:

Problem	First	Second	Third
A* .....	35.2	40.5	24.3
B .....	32.4	16.2	51.4
C .....	32.4	43.3	24.3

\*Two teachers named problems which they ranked more important than those listed. One named the scarcity of teachers; the other the securing of practical problems for class work.

Several points in the table are worthy of comment. It is significant that the first choices are so evenly distributed. The general distribution suggests that the problems named are widespread. The relatively small percentage of second choices for problem B suggests the importance of the geographical location of the institutions reporting. In other words, for the school located at or near an export center problem B offers little difficulty and thus is rated third in importance. On the other hand, schools located far from coast or export cities find it extremely difficult to place their men.<sup>1</sup>

In order to secure further information each school was asked to report any serious difficulties not mentioned in the preceding questions. Sixty-nine and six-tenths per cent of the answers report special problems, the remainder answering definitely in the negative. Of those who report having problems, 50 per cent name the inland location of their institutions. Of the others, no two name the same difficulty, the variety running all the way from the present slump in export business to the lack of funds with which to secure teachers.

We may in closing present in the form of a short summary, the conclusions drawn from this study:

1. The teaching of foreign-trade courses is, with very few exceptions, a comparatively recent development in our colleges and universities.
2. As yet such courses are being given in a very limited number of schools.
3. While in a few institutions division and specialization have made considerable progress, in the great majority of cases the work is still confined to one or two general courses.

<sup>1</sup> The percentage of third choices for problem B is also affected by the fact that a considerable number of inland schools offering only one or two general courses have no difficulty because they do not attempt to place students in foreign-trade positions.

4. The number of enrolments in foreign-trade subjects shows extremely rapid growth of interest in the foreign-trade field.

5. It is still extremely difficult to secure texts that are sufficiently comprehensive for general courses. There is especially a distinct demand for texts of such a nature as to make possible the adoption of the problem or case method.

6. The teaching of foreign-trade subjects is still largely in the experimental stage. As yet we find a serious lack of standardization or uniformity of courses. Here there should be a fertile field for discussion and comparing of notes. Much might be accomplished by a foreign-trade teacher's convention or institute.

7. There is a serious need of some adequate plan for the placing of students in foreign-trade positions. With the present lack of facilities the inland school is, in most cases, at a serious disadvantage and many students are thus bitterly disappointed. The solution might be found in some form of nation-wide organization, perhaps under the direction of the Department of Commerce, to function as a sort of clearing-house in supplying our exporters with needed recruits and in placing our students where their training can best be utilized.

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