

# Global Awareness Map Assignment: An Effective Exercise for Enhancing Geographic Literacy

**F.G. Paul Clark**

*Gagardi School of Business and Economics, Thompson Rivers University, Canada*

**Jing Liu**

*Haile College of Business, Northern Kentucky University, USA*

**Abstract.** Despite the critical role of geography in international business, and the importance of geographic literacy for understanding related topics, business faculty teaching relevant courses are often challenged by students' lack of basic geographic knowledge. Confounding this issue is the scarcity of pedagogical research on how to improve geographic literacy in international business education. This article introduces the Global Awareness Map Assignment, a fun and easy-to-implement exercise that has proven effective in enhancing students' geographic literacy and global awareness. Originally developed for an introductory international business course, this challenging exercise can be readily adapted to meet specific learning objectives across a range of disciplines, such as strategy, management, marketing, political science, and environmental studies.

**Keywords:** geopolitical literacy, international business, international management, experiential learning.

## 1. Introduction

An individual's understanding of international commercial and political events and topics is heavily dependent on an appreciation of world geography (Hise et al., 2000). Geography plays a crucial role in international business by shaping how firms internationalize, where they choose to operate, and how they manage cross-border activities. It impacts a range of strategic decisions, such as firms' location choices (Alcácer & Chung, 2007; Beugelsdijk & Mudambi, 2013; McCann & Mudambi, 2005), market entry strategies (Boeh & Beamish, 2012; Malhotra & Gaur, 2014; Ragozzino, 2009), geopolitical risk assessments (Marshall, 2016; Saittakari et al., 2023), and supply chain deployment and management (Chopra & Sodhi, 2004; Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020).

*This shortened version of the article is for promotional purposes on publicly accessible databases.*

*Readers who wish to obtain the full text version of the article can order it via the url*

<https://www.neilsonjournals.com/JIBE/abstractjibe20clarkliu.html>

*Any enquiries, please contact the Publishing Editor, Peter Neilson [pneilson@neilsonjournals.com](mailto:pneilson@neilsonjournals.com)*

*© NeilsonJournals Publishing 2025.*

Scholars have long acknowledged the significant influence of geographic distance on international expansion and management (Boeh & Beamish, 2012; Hendriks, 2020; Li et al., 2020; Malhotra & Gaur, 2014; Ojala, 2015; Ragozzino, 2009). While geographic distance is commonly understood in terms of physical proximity, measured in kilometers or miles, it also encompasses a broader set of factors, including the physical size of a country, average within-country distances to borders, access to rivers and oceans, topographical features, the presence or absence of shared borders, transportation and communication links, and climatic differences (Ghemawat, 2001). In his influential article, *Distance Still Matters*, Ghemawat (2001) draws on prior research to emphasize the role of geographic distance in affecting both trade and investment flows.

Despite the critical role of geography and geographic distance in international business, faculty teaching international business courses are often challenged by students' lack of awareness of basic international geographic knowledge (Hise et al., 2000, 2004). In particular, students are unfamiliar with the country locations, sizes, and proximities to other countries. Additionally, students often lack knowledge of continent locations and sizes, major transportation routes, and key geopolitical chokepoints such as the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Panama and Suez Canals. These weaknesses in geographic literacy restrict students' ability to understand many topics related to international business and geopolitics.

Scholars such as Bednarz et al. (2013) have identified geographic illiteracy as a significant educational deficiency, arguing that many university students struggle with spatial thinking and place-based knowledge that are essential in an increasingly interconnected world. In the context of international business education, this deficiency is a concern as global awareness is a prerequisite for understanding for many topics, such as cultures, import/export patterns, and geopolitical risk (Knight, 2004).

Adding to these challenges is the lack of pedagogical guidance in the international business education literature on how to enhance students' geographic literacy. A major contributing factor appears to be the failure of business schools to recognize the value of teaching geographic knowledge (Hise et al., 2000, 2004; King & Arnette, 2011). This is surprising given the long-established significance of geography in international business research.

To address this gap in the literature, we introduce the Global Awareness Map Assignment, an exercise that has proven effective in substantially enhancing students' geographic literacy. Developed and refined over the past eight years (excluding the COVID-19 period) in an introductory international business course, this exercise asks students to draw a detailed, freehand map of the world from memory. The assignment promotes active engagement with world geography and supports the broader pedagogical goals of developing global awareness among business students (Leask, 2009).