Your research finds that international business managers “think differently.” What inspired you to investigate this?

I was interested in bringing the fields of cognitive science and international business together. My work focuses on international markets and my research gravitated to cognitive science and cognitive structures. My efforts have shown me that experts in a given field bring a distinct way of thinking about problems and opportunities that novices do not.

If you or I saw a burning building, we would suggest a completely different approach than would a trained firefighter. Why? Because the fire-fighter has a highly developed cognitive structure that arranges information in a manner that reflects his expertise. Literally, he has a “mental map” with distinct groupings of cerebral information that are more acute, focused and parsimonious. Experts bring more distinct organization of relevant constructs and concepts related to their professional interests.

I was interested in seeing if individuals with extensive experience in international business, particularly international market selection, had distinct cognitive structures that were not only different from non-experts,’ but were logical, hierarchical and focused. The answer, based on my research, is yes – international business experts have a more highly developed cognitive structure when analyzing international markets than do novices or business people who have dealt exclusively with domestic markets.

You and Dr. Frank Franzak collaborated on an article titled, “Global Umbrella Brands: Understanding Brand America and Its Competitors.” What is “Brand America”? Who (or what) are its chief competitors?

Global umbrella brands represent consumer and other’s perceptions associated with regions or countries of our world. They are used by people around the world to associate certain products, services or ideas with specific “countries or regions of origin.” Disney or Coke or McDonalds are associated with the U.S. and thus are under the “Brand America” umbrella. Brand America can connote positive attributes (freedom, equality, individualism, tolerance) or negative attributes (cultural hegemony, ramped consumption, global bully) depending on one’s learned pre-disposition. And these connotations can have significant impact on American manufactures and
service providers that market internationally. Brand America is in competition around the world with Brand China, Brand Nippon (Japan), Euro Brand and what some call Radical-Brand-Islam, to name a few. All seek their share of peoples’ “mind space” and approval of those they seek to influence.

**How about your current research?**

I’m interested in global education in general and global business education in particular. Who’s doing it, who’s doing it best, and why? How does “good” education lead to desired outcomes (peace, prosperity, wealth creation) and how do cultural, social, political, technological and other variables influence the relationship between education and desired outcomes? Working with colleagues throughout the world is allowing me and my colleagues at VCU and other universities in the U.S. to explore these issues in unique ways. I know I’m tooting my own horn, but I believe education is a most important antidote to poverty, bigotry, intolerance and aggression in our world. Studying it might offer ways to enhance this antidote.

**What is the biggest shift in global trade that you have seen?**

By far the most significant is the end of the Cold War (typically dated by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989) and the rise of “globalization.” Globalization is the super story of our time and it’s reaching new depth and breath as we see “big emerging” markets come onto the global trade and marketing stage. It’s a fascinating story that is just beginning to unfold. It is not going away, so I recommend that we learn as much as possible about the phenomenon.

**What trends in international business most interest you now?**

The movement toward “sustainable” products, services and societies is very interesting. The impact this will have on our ways of thinking is pretty profound, and I believe it will change the world as we know it. Closely related to this is the educational trend toward cultivating “boundary spanners” who can speak and relate to experts in other fields than their own. There’s a not-so-old saying that “new knowledge lies in the cracks that separate silos of information and expertise.” Much of tomorrow’s new knowledge will come from boundary spanners that understand this notion.

**How many stamps are on your current passport?**

I don’t know how many stamps I have; some run together and I just got a new passport. I know that my life has been blessed by having traveled, worked or lived in over 90 countries. I’m often asked, “So, what’s your favorite country?” I have a standard answer to this question, namely – “The next one that’s my favorite!”