

Increasing Global Competence of Future Educators and Communicators through an Experiential Study Tour of South Korea

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Introduction/Need for Innovative Idea

Students preparing to become agricultural educators and communicators need experiential learning opportunities to understand international factors that affect the United States food and agricultural system. Undergraduate agriculture students have limited world views of agriculture policy, products, geography, people and cultures (Zhai & Scheer, 2004). Intensive, real-world agriculturally based international internships and study abroad experiences have been shown to increase the international competencies of students attending land-grant institutions of higher learning (Bruening & Frick, 2004). Students have increased understanding of cultures, improved language skills, growth in knowledge of international agriculture markets, enhanced interpersonal skills and awareness of international community dynamics because of field-based international courses and experiences (Bruening & Frick). Enhanced interpersonal skills also translate into agricultural educators and communicators who are better prepared to meet the challenges of working and living in America's increasingly diverse communities. A faculty-led experiential study tour of the Republic of South Korea was developed to provide a group of undergraduate agricultural education and communication students with opportunities to experience interactions with South Korean people and culture through a student-centered program that placed students in direct contact with people and resources related to issues of concern in agriculture and agricultural education.

Program Phases

Pre-departure Instructional Course: Undergraduate students attended an eight-week instructional course to study the geography of South East Asia, political history of the North and South Korea, Confucian Korean society and social relationships, basic principles of teaching and learning, and agricultural-economic systems of Korea. American students interacted with Korean study abroad students in the course. Students read and reacted to the course text, The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History, by Don Oberdorfer. Students were also asked to create lesson plans and education kits to be used while in South Korea.

Cultural Immersion: The first two weeks were spent in urban Seoul, South Korea where faculty and students lived in international dorms at Konkuk University. During Week 1 faculty and students toured culturally significant and historical sites. Sites included: a model traditional Korean village, Bong Un Sa Buddhist Temple, the De-Militarized Zone, Seoul Tower, the Korean War Museum, street markets and vendors, a contemporary Tae-Kwon-Do performance and an urban agricultural high school. During Week 2 faculty and students met and toured agri-businesses and national research facilities with Konkuk University and Seoul National University students. Agri-businesses and research facilities visited included: Rural Development Administration, Agro-trade Exhibition Center, Korean Export Trade-center, Nohn Shim Snack Factory and Seoul Fish Market.

Teaching Experiences: During the third week, faculty and students traveled to Yeosu Agricultural Management High School in rural Yeosu, South Korea. Here faculty and students lived and interacted with high school students daily on the Yeosu boarding campus. Each student gave individual presentations about themselves and their lives in America to Yeosu High School's English classes. Students also developed, implemented, facilitated and chaperoned a weekend English camp for 50 urban middle school students, offered through Yeosu High School. The weekend camp was conducted in English and offered horseback riding, cow milking and feeding, and transplanting flowers.

Host Family Experience: During the fourth and final week, pairs of students spent two to three days with a Korean host family who farmed. Students lived, worked and exchanged cultural dialogue with their host families. During this final week students also went on a rafting trip, visited a national park, and visited a local traditional palace.

Reflections: Students kept daily journals and participated in three focus group reflection sessions during the 25-day tour. Sessions were held at the beginning, middle and end of the trip. Upon returning home, students created multimedia presentations on one aspect of Korean culture that could be used as a teaching resource by high school agriculture teachers in the state. Students completed an in-depth reflection on their perceptions and interpretations based on the beliefs, schemas, and experiences they gained on the study tour.

Results to Date

Because of this global experience, students experienced *personal development* by pushing previously constructed social comfort zones through the daily interactions had with new people in different cultural settings. Students felt they learned how to better use *experiential teaching methods* because of different learning styles or overcoming language barriers of the Korean students. Students learned how to *communicate and interact within a group* to best facilitate a healthy team dynamic. Students gained a better understanding and knowledge of *Korean and Eastern Asian culture and history* through the hands-on activities and experiences gained through the study tour. Students also felt that they gained a greater understanding of the *international agricultural system* and how Korea and the United States fit within that system. Students *felt more comfortable* communicating these relationships in both the formal and non-formal classroom setting. Students strongly valued *lasting personal contacts* made with Korean faculty, students and international teachers. These findings supported Bruening and Frick's (2004) study.

Future Plans, Advice to Others & Costs

A second experiential study tour to South Korea is planned for May, 2008. The relationships between the [U.S.] University and their hosts, Konkuk University and Seoul National University, were important to the success of this study tour. Host faculty and students were valuable resources during and after the study tour. Students should read a book addressing communications in a foreign culture and language, and practice communications with international students prior to the trip. A rigorous application processes, including in-depth interviews with each applicant, should be conducted to selected students with objectives that fit the purpose of the study tour. The cost of the trip was \$2,760 per person, but because of three grants totaling \$16,000, the cost per participant was less than \$800.

References

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