

Perceptions of College of Agriculture Students Regarding, Limitations, Preferences, and Importance of International Travel Experiences

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Introduction/Need for Research

Educators at the college or university level frequently realize the need to help students develop international perspectives through the curricula. In 2000 the College of Agriculture at one university undertook the challenge to broaden the international awareness of students through a cooperative project with the College of Education. This endeavor resulted in external funding for exploratory international travels by faculty and students. During the same year that College of Agriculture engaged another funded project providing an exchange of U.S. agriculture students with a university in South America. These travel experiences were effective, yet some students seemed reluctant to participate, which caused some faculty to wonder why.

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

There is evidence of the need for agriculture students to have knowledge of other countries and cultures (Wingenbach, Boyd, & Lindner, 2003). Although the 1997 report of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities was directed at Land Grants Universities, the comment that "...in a student-centered university, our tasks must include helping all students develop.....a multicultural and global perspective....." could be applied to any university having a similar mission (page 26). The institution at which this study was conducted shares this vision for increasing the global prospective of students.

The objective of this research was to gain an understanding of student perceptions and identify factors affecting international travel. Then strategies could be developed to encourage student participation in future international travel opportunities.

Methodology

Fall of 2005, researchers developed and administered a survey to 168 students enrolled in courses in the College of Agriculture to identify perceptions, interests, and limitations for participation in international travels. Data was analyzed using a computerized statistical software package called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

## Results/Findings

Data from 168 respondents were analyzed. Of the 162 students who responded to the question of gender, almost 66% were male and over 90% were 25 years old or less. Approximately 43% of the students had traveled outside the U.S.; of those who had traveled outside the U.S., 91.5% reported the experiences as “somewhat positive” or “very positive”. Although there was a total of 145 cumulative travel experiences reported by 73 students, only 11 experiences (7.6%) were for educational purposes.

When asked “how important do you think it is to have a knowledge or awareness of international agriculture?” only 7% of all respondents said it was of little or no importance. Only 11% reported no interest in international travel experiences for educational purposes. Students indicated that money was a “major limitation” (38.9%) with an additional 21% indicating money was “somewhat of a limitation”. The second and third most limiting factors were time (53.6%) and school schedule (53.3%). Security and dangers of travel represented the least concern, with only 11% of the respondents indicating this was either “somewhat of a limitation” or a “major limitation” to their interest in traveling internationally.

The greatest interest (39%) for international travel was for short term (7-9 day) for- credit experiences, followed closely by internship experiences abroad (36.3%). The least desirable (46%) was for long term travel experience of a year. Furthermore, respondents indicated Australia, Europe, and South/Central America as preferred destinations.

## Conclusions

The majority of the students realize the importance of having a knowledge or awareness of international agriculture. Almost 90% of the students indicate some level of interest in a for-credit international travel experience. Money was the most limiting factor; however, timing and school schedules also represent a major concern. Despite limitations, most respondents indicated interest in international travel for educational purposes and were not overly concerned for safety and security. Students had clear preferences for short term experiences in Australia, Europe, and South/Central America.

## Implications/Recommendations

Most factors affecting participation in travel can be impacted by institutional decisions through adapting timing and scheduling of travel experiences, selection of destinations and length of travel time. Based on this study, successful travel experiences should consist of for-credit, short term (7 to 9 days) opportunities, to preferred locations. Logically, destinations should be selected that satisfy instructional goals of international awareness and global understanding related to agriculture. The College of Agriculture should consider developing scholarships or other forms of cost reductions, or sponsorships, to encourage participation because, money was the most limiting factor.

## References

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