

# International Experiences of Agricultural Leadership and Development Seniors

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## Abstract

*This study sought to examine the international experiences and attitudes of seniors in an Agricultural Leadership and Development major at a land-grant university. One hundred and seventy two participants from the population frame of 293 senior students enrolled in the senior capstone class during the 2009 calendar year completed a researcher developed instrument for an overall response rate of 58.7 percent. Findings revealed 73.8% (n=127%) have traveled abroad on their own or with family and almost half, (n=85, 49.42%) have had two or more types of international traveling/living experiences. Less than five percent (n=4, 4.1%) had participated in a university sponsored study abroad program. The majority of participants (80.2%, n=138) do not read National Geographic magazine but slightly more than half (n=102, 59.3%) watch international news on television.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Globalization means different things to different individuals. However, the need for colleges and universities to prepare graduates who can survive, and even thrive, in the world today is of less dispute. In 1997, the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) issued a report entitled *Globalizing Agricultural Science and Education Programs for America* that outlined what college graduates will need to be effective.

According to the report, In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an educated person will need to function effectively and responsibly in a global environment both in day-to-day work and in social interactions. Providing this capacity is at the core of the educational mission of NASULGC member institutions and allied baccalaureate-granting institutions offering programs in food, agriculture, and natural resources (AASCARR members), human sciences, forestry, and veterinary medicine. College graduates of today must have a global perspective and to be true "society ready graduates." (NASULGC, 1997, p.5)

Similarly, Siaya (2002) noted, Knowledge of the international system, intercultural skills, and the flexibility to function in diverse environments is no longer the purview of just a few area studies or international relations majors. These are skills and knowledge essential for every undergraduate." (p. 14)  
Unfortunately, "most colleges and universities are not adequately preparing students for these new challenges" (Siaya, 2002, p. 14).

More recent reports reiterate such notions. The Report of NAFSA's Task Force of the Institutional Management of Study Abroad (2008) stated,  
In order to thrive in the global marketplace and lead effectively in a global context, college graduates must learn foreign languages, experience other cultures and societies, and have an understanding of how the international system functions at both the macro and micro level. (NASFA: Association of International Educators, 2008, p. 13)

Not all voices are as supportive of internationalizing the higher education curriculum however. Navarro and Edwards (2008) concluded that when compared to other skills, competencies, and experiences College of Agriculture faculty members from two institutions ranked international awareness or experience last in terms of priority. It is interesting to note, however, that as compared to life sciences faculty, social science faculty members had significantly higher perceptions of the degree of relevance of internationalization of the curriculum at the undergraduate level (Navarro & Edwards, 2009).

Nevertheless, as Byrne (2006) noted, Today, more and more universities are expanding opportunities for American students to experience other cultures, learn other languages, and appreciate the global dimensions of social, political, economic, and environmental issues, and more and more American students are taking advantage of these opportunities. (p. 4-5)

In an effort to satisfy the need and prepare “society ready graduates,” the university core curriculum at a land-grant university in the south even requires course credit. Each student is required to complete six credit hours of what are designated as International and Cultural Diversity courses. According to the 2009-2010 Undergraduate Catalog,

As individual and national destinies become progressively more interconnected, the ability to survive and succeed is increasingly linked to the development of a more pluralistic, diverse, and globally-aware populace. Two courses from the following list are to be taken by the student. (p.19)

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the same land-grant university has recently affirmed that “Globalization should be a priority of the College” (COALS, 2009, p. 1). Despite the fact that the College has made globalization a priority, there are several noted areas in which change is needed. In the *Task Force Report on Internationalization of the Curriculum* (COALS, 2009), it was noted that, “the current level of involvement of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences students and faculty in international experiences is not commensurate with [University] ambition to become a top 20 university by the year 2020” (p. 2).

To help address this problem, much emphasis has been placed on the value of study abroad and international experiences. In fact, the task force identified four objectives to help address the problem. The first two had to do with student experiences. Objective 1 was “at least 25% of College students will have a credit-bearing experience abroad by AY 2020” and Objective 2 was “at least 50% of College graduate and undergraduate students will report that they have had a significant international experience prior to their graduation by AY 2020” (COALS, 2009, p. 2). However, less attention was paid by the task force to other experiences that might be successful at increasing students’ global perspectives. While it is important for instructors to include significant international content in their curriculum, it is equally important to look at learning more holistically and identify activities both in and out of the classroom that may influence students’ attitudes and perceptions towards the global society.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Internationalization of curriculum in institutes of higher education has been gaining priority since the 1990s. In 2000, the American Council on Education (as cited in Siaya, 2002) conducted two surveys to examine the state of internationalization. The first examined the general public’s internationalization using a national sample of 1,000 individuals 18 years or older while the second included a national sample of 500 high school seniors starting at a four-year college or university in the fall of 2000. “To gauge international experiences the respondents were asked about their experiences traveling outside the United States, foreign language ability, and interest in international news” (Siaya, 2002, p. 15). When looking at the percentage of individuals who had traveled outside the United States, findings showed that more than 55 percent of the public sample and 62 percent of the student sample had traveled internationally. Siaya (2002) concluded that, “the majority of respondents in both surveys had direct experience with another culture through their travels outside the United States” (p. 15).

More recently, Briers, Shinn, and Nguyen (2010) examined College of Agriculture and Life Sciences students’ perceptions towards international educational experiences. They found that respondents in their study of 956 undergraduates had strong interests in international educational experience to enhance their overall life experience, for the opportunity to live in another culture, and to increase their employability. Findings showed that “70% of the students believed participating in a study abroad program would improve their competitiveness in the global market” (Briers, Shinn, & Nguyen, 2010). Based on their findings, Briers, Shinn, & Nguyen (2010) recommended that, “the university can serve as an incubator to nurture experiences that prepare students for global leadership roles” and “Integrating international experiences into the curriculum is essential – both on and off the campus” (p. 18).

Programs of leadership education are not an exception to internationalization of curriculum phenomenon. Seminal work on global leadership by Hofstede (1980) and House (2004) are typically incorporated in leadership education courses and programs. The push for global leaders, or students with a global mind-set, comes from industry struggling to find enough leaders with the global competencies needed to be a successful international leader (Suutari, 2002).

Flaum (2002) stated that leadership is truly learned in the leadership moment. If Flaum’s conclusion is correct, students must experience international leadership in order to gain a global mindset. Students in leadership education programs should be exposed to diverse leadership theories in order to gain a global

perspective. "To date more than 90% of the organizational behavior literature reflects U.S.-based research and theory" (House, 2004, p. xxv). In traditional leadership education programs, there is sometimes a disconnect between theory and international application because of the original populations (US) studied to develop the mainstream leadership theories, such as transformational leadership.

In 2009, Caligiuri and Tarique studied leaders in a multi-national organization who were identified as global leaders. In their study, 313 participants were asked about their global leadership development. Two factors were addressed: personality traits and experience. Based on a literature review, the Big Five personality model was used to guide participants to identify traits needed to be a competent global leader. Caligiuri and Tarique found extroversion and openness to experience as the two personality types most identified as imperative for global leaders. The study also concluded while the means for these two personality types were highest, participants in the study ranked them lower than international exposure and experience. When factored together, "the number of high contact cross-cultural leadership development experiences predicted higher global leadership effectiveness when leaders had greater extroversion" (p. 343). The implications for leadership educators include personality typology integration into personal leadership development courses as well as international experiences in leadership development programs.

In their study, DiStefano and Maznevski (2003) found similar results to Caligiuri and Tarique (2009). They found undergraduate as well as MBA students came into the programs and advanced through them without a significant amount of global experiences. Faculty members in this business program found integrating international cases, situations, experiential learning, and problem based learning which focused on cultural aspects as well as moving students past ethnocentrism increased students' self perceived global mindset. DiStefano and Maznevski stress integration as the key to potential impact on the students becoming global leaders. "Initial orientation of participants, development of mind mapping, bridging and integrating skills, and the transition from a learning experience to applying the knowledge in the real world" (pp. 366-367) are imperative to programs wanting to produce global leaders.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was guided by the theory of experiential learning (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning theory posits that learning is a cyclical process that is rooted in experience (Kolb, 1984). Dewey (1938) noted that "there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education" (p. 20). Kolb (1984) simply stated, "people do learn from their experiences" (p. 6). Kolb went on to note that learning "occurs in all human setting, from schools to the workplace, from the research laboratory to the management board room, in personal relationships and in the aisles of the local grocery" (p. 32). In other words, "learning is considerably broader than that commonly associated with the school classroom" (Kolb, p. 32).

Ultimately, Kolb (1984) defined learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). Citing the learning models of Kurt Lewin, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget, Kolb proposed an experiential learning model consisting of two primary dimensions yielding four stages. The first dimension, grasping experience, has concrete experience at one end and abstract conceptualization at the other. Within the concrete experience stage, learners "must be able to involve themselves fully, openly, and without bias in new experiences" (Kolb, 1984, p. 30). Within the abstract conceptualization stage, learners "must be able to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories" (Kolb, 1984, p. 30). The second dimension, transforming experience, has active experimentation at one end and reflective observation at the other. Within the active experimentation stage, learners must be able to use the theories created in the abstract conceptualization phase in decision making and problem solving (Kolb, 1984). Within the reflective observation stage, learners "must be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives" (Kolb, 1984, p. 30). "Thus, in the process of learning, one moves in varying degrees from actor to observer, and from specific involvement to general analytic detachment" (Kolb, 1984, p. 31).

The frame for this study lies in the concrete experience stage of Kolb's model. While it is important to note, as Dewey (1938) did, "the belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative" (p. 25), this study sought to identify the types of concrete experiences seniors in an agricultural leadership major reported to establish baseline data to be used in future studies that take into account the effects of such experiences on student learning.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this study, conducted as part of a larger study, was to examine the international experiences and attitudes of seniors in an agricultural leadership major at a land-grant university. Specific objectives of the study included:

1. Describe senior Agricultural Leadership and Development majors in terms of selected student demographics; and
2. Describe the international activities and experiences of senior Agricultural Leadership and Development majors.

## METHODOLOGY

### Population and Sample

The population frame for this descriptive study was all students enrolled in the senior seminar class, a capstone class for students at or close to graduating from an agricultural leadership degree program during the 2009 calendar year. Therefore, all students enrolled in the class during the Spring (148 students), Summer I (29 students), Summer II (33 students), and Fall (83 students) semesters were included yielding a population frame of 293 students.

### Instrumentation

Data was collected using a single-researcher designed instrument. The instrument was initially based on a review of literature and was evaluated for content and face validity by a panel of experts prior to use. The instrument consisted of three sections. The first part was designed to collect data related to participants' international activities and experiences. The second part of the instrument was designed to collect data related to participant attitudes towards the importance of international perspectives and experiences on personal and career development. The final section of the instrument collected selected demographic information from participants.

### Data Collection and Analysis

In an effort to reach the largest number of participants possible, instruments were administered within the senior seminar course each semester. A total of 172 instruments were returned for an overall response rate of 58.7%.

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to accomplish objectives one and two.

## FINDINGS

Objective one sought to describe senior Agricultural Leadership and Development majors in terms of selected student demographics. Of the 172 participants, the majority ( $n=99$ , 57.6%) were male. The majority of the 169 participants who responded to the question about ethnicity were white ( $n=146$ , 86.4%), 7.7% were Hispanic or Latino ( $n=13$ ), 3.0% were Black or African American ( $n=5$ ), 1.2% were American Indian or Alaska Native ( $n=2$ ), 1.2% were two or more races ( $n=2$ ), and 0.6% were Asian ( $n=1$ ). Table 1 shows the gender of participants by ethnicity.

**Table 1**

Gender of Capstone Course Participants by Ethnicity ( $n=169$ )

Ethnicity	Gender					
	Male		Female		Total	
	n	% of total	n	% of total	n	%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0	0.0	2	1.2	2	1.2
Asian	1	0.6	0	0.0	1	0.6
Black or African American	5	3.0	0	0.0	5	3.0
Hispanic or Latino	8	4.7	5	3.0	13	7.7
White	80	47.3	66	39.1	146	86.4
Two or more races	2	1.2	0	0.0	2	1.2
Total	96	56.8	73	43.2	169	100.0

Note. 3 participants did not report ethnicity.

Almost half of the participants ( $n=76$ , 44.2%) were transfer students. Almost two thirds of participants did not speak another language ( $n=108$ , 63.2%). One participant did not answer the question about speaking another language. Of the 63 participants who reported speaking another language, 25.4% ( $n=16$ ) reported their level of proficiency in speaking the other language was minimal, 39.7% ( $n=25$ ) rated their proficiency as basic, 20.6% ( $n=13$ ) rated their level of proficiency as conversant, and 14.3% ( $n=9$ ) rated themselves as fluent. Two participants (1.2%) were foreign exchange students in high school.

Objective two sought to describe the international activities and experiences of senior Agricultural Leadership and Development majors. Responses to the questions about international activities and experiences are presented in Table 2. The majority of participants (80.2%,  $n=138$ ) do not read National Geographic magazine on a regular basis, but slightly more than half ( $n=102$ , 59.3%) reported watching international news on television. Two-thirds ( $n=115$ , 66.9%) knew a foreign exchange student in high school. The majority were not involved in the international activities of the FFA ( $n=156$ , 90.7%) or 4-H ( $n=159$ , 92.4%). Almost two thirds ( $n=111$ , 64.5%) have not participated in an on-campus activity such as taking a foreign language. However, almost half ( $n=77$ , 44.8%) have participated in an on campus or community activity such as attending a cultural event or lecture with an international focus. Additionally, almost two-thirds ( $n=113$ , 65.7%) have taken a class with international content or an international focus. Almost three quarters ( $n=127$ , 73.8%) of participants have traveled outside the U.S. on their own or with their family. However, the majority have not traveled outside the U.S. with other students while in high school ( $n=107$ , 62.2%), with a church or mission organization ( $n=132$ , 76.7%), or with other university students ( $n=131$ , 78.2%), nor have they taken a university class outside the U.S. ( $n=157$ , 91.3%). Furthermore, only 9.9% ( $n=17$ ) have lived abroad. Only 4.1% ( $n=7$ ) have participated in a university study abroad program. When analyzed by how many different types of international travel/living experiences (such as travel outside the U.S. on their own or with family, travel outside the U.S. with a church or other mission group, taken a university class outside the U.S., etc.), almost one quarter ( $n=41$ , 23.84%) have no international travel/living experience, another quarter ( $n=46$ , 26.74%) have had only one international travel/living experience, and almost half ( $n=85$ , 49.42%) have two or more international travel experiences.

**Table 2**  
Capstone Course Participants' Involvement in International Activities (N=172)

<i><b>International Activity/Experience</b></i>	<i><b>Response</b></i>			
	<i><b>No</b></i>		<i><b>Yes</b></i>	
	<i><b>n</b></i>	<i><b>% of total</b></i>	<i><b>n</b></i>	<i><b>% of total</b></i>
Reading National Geographic Magazine Regularly	138	80.2	34	19.8
Watch international news on television	70	40.7	102	59.3
Knew a foreign exchange student in high school	57	33.1	115	66.9
Work Experience Abroad (FFA)	156	90.7	16	9.3
International Foreign Youth Exchange (4-H)	159	92.4	13	7.6
On campus activity such as taking a foreign language	111	64.5	61	35.5
On campus/community activities such as attending a cultural event or lecture with an international focus	95	55.2	77	44.8
Taken a class with international content/focus	59	34.3	113	65.7
Traveled outside the U.S. on own or with family	45	26.2	127	73.8
Traveled outside the U.S. with other students in high school	107	62.2	65	37.8
Traveled outside the U.S. with church or other mission organization	132	76.7	40	23.3
Traveled outside the U.S. with other university students	131	76.2	41	23.8
Taken university classes outside the U.S.	157	91.3	15	8.7
Lived outside the U.S.	155	90.1	17	9.9
Participated in a University study abroad program	162	95.9	7	4.1

Note. Three participants did not respond to the question about participating in a University study abroad program.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Less than five percent of senior Agricultural Leadership and Development majors have participated in a university sponsored study abroad program. In the 2009 Report of the Task Force on Internationalization of the Curriculum for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at (UNIVERSITY NAME), the Dean's Charge affirmed that globalization should be a priority of the college. This charge is not only at (UNIVERSITY NAME). Most institutions of higher education are beginning or have begun comprehensive initiatives for internationalization. Studies have been and are currently being conducted looking at student perceived barriers of study abroad programs to make these experiences more accessible to general student populations (Briers, Shinn, & Nguyen, 2010; Irani, Place, & Friedel, 2006). While the percentage may appear to be low, it is comparable with national averages for students in Colleges of Agriculture (Brooks, Frick, & Bruening, 2006). Faculty in Agricultural Leadership Education, and Communications at (UNIVERSITY) are creating study abroad opportunities which focus on developing global-minded leaders. As a result of this study, they are beginning to work with established study abroad programs in the integration of personal leadership development, by means of service-learning. Creating opportunities for students to apply their theoretical knowledge of leadership could increase the number of students willing to participate in international experiences (DiStefano & Maznevski, 2003).

Because the university core curriculum requires students to complete six credit hours of International and Cultural Diversity courses, it is not surprising that almost two-thirds of the students ( $n=113$ , 65.7%) reported having taken a class with international content or an international focus. It is surprising, however, that slightly more than one third ( $n=59$ , 34.3%) reported not having completed a course with such an emphasis. Many of these students are in their last semester prior to graduation. The question must be asked, did the courses they took to receive the International and Cultural Diversity credits really focus on international content? Upon examining approved courses for this requirement, there are several examples of courses which are culturally diverse, but have no international aspects (ie Urban Sociology and Music in the United States). If incorporating global examples into courses is a priority of the university and an integral part of building effective global leaders (DiStefano & Maznevski, 2003), a closer look at approved courses and appropriate conjunctions should be reconsidered. The finding which revealed almost half of the leadership majors have attended some kind of international or cultural event does show the impact of increased university support for international awareness opportunities.

The researchers were encouraged by the 73% ( $n=127$ ) of students who have traveled outside of the United States. These findings are consistent with those reported by Siaya (2002). In fact, the percentage of participants in this study that have traveled outside of the United States is greater than the percentages Siaya reported. The more exposure students are given to other cultures, the less likely they will use ethnocentrism in their leadership practices (Pojman & Fieser, 2009). While traveling abroad and having that experience is a great beginning step in developing a global mindset, students are best prepared to become global leaders when there is the integration of knowledge with application (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2009). It is recommended that future research focus on what impact the different types of travel have on students. For example, does just traveling within another country on vacation really expose students to enough of the local culture that their views might be changed? Once we know the answer to that question, perhaps we can devise methods of capitalizing on students' previous travel experiences.

While more and continual data needs to be collected on the international experiences of agricultural leadership students, this study provides a glimpse of where students are today, which can be used to develop international experiences for leadership students as well as give insight into the internationalization of the leadership curriculum. As the need for leaders with a global mindset and international leadership skills grows, it is imperative for programs which develop students as leaders continue to grow, develop, and improve not only curriculum, but student experiences which will drive the internalization of content knowledge.

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