Helping Foreign Students Adapt Knowledge from Classrooms

To Be Useful in Their Own Countries

by Vivian Roberts

To train International students is both a privilege and a responsibility. We learn along with the students; it is an experience of working together and of learning to understand and trust one another. To develop an awareness of the cultural similarities and differences of our students, and to learn about their families, their religious beliefs and practices, their homes, their interests, and their arts, crafts, and industries are exhilarating experiences to all of us.

At Ohio University we have been fortunate, for the most part, in terms of the students who come to study home economics. They have been serious students, eager to learn. Most of the participants are training for teaching or extension service, and feel dedicated to serve their native countries when they return.

The question arises on our campus as it has many times during this conference, "Do we maintain the same academic standards for our international students as we hold for our own students?" The answer is, "Yes, we do." Courses in general education, including the natural sciences, mathematics, the social sciences, the humanities, and communications, make up about 50 per cent of the curriculum. Basic and advanced courses in home economics, along with supporting courses in the professional field, constitute the other half.

It is our belief, however, that if we stopped at this point in the training of students from other countries we would not be fulfilling our responsibility to the student, nor to the government or agency sending these students to us. A program developed solely along traditional western lines certainly will not suffice.

Most of the students are able to maintain high academic standards in the classroom. However, as undergraduate students without experience in the professional field, they need guidance in interpreting and adapting the knowledge gained in the classroom to be useful in their own countries. One must devise a favorable climate for understanding basic needs in the new countries, and for the promotion of mutual aid to help them solve their problems.

I shall cite some of the experiences we give our students so that they may put to practical use in their homelands the basic principles learned in the classroom.

1. Special projects and reports in some courses may be directed toward the participant's home country. Let me cite the study of nutrition as an example. The student studies health problems and nutritional diseases
found in her country. She may develop basic food plans and charts using native foods available, and make plans for teaching the use of these foods. This experience serves a dual purpose: first, the international student is learning to apply her knowledge where it can be useful, and second, our American students are acquiring a broader perspective as to the life and feeding habits of peoples in other parts of the world.

2. Seminars are developed for international students in home economics, which again relate technical knowledge to the practical problems. The major purpose of these seminars is two-fold:

a. To help the students to evaluate experiences which they have had in this country and synthesize information pertinent to their respective countries.

b. To help them see ways in which they might adapt and apply this information when developing home economics programs in their country.

The study of bacteriology may be cited as an example. This subject has many applications in developing countries. Sanitation, waste disposal, water supply, food storage, insects, food preservation, health practices, and personal hygiene can all be discussed freely, for the students are able to share ideas of mutual concern.

In one seminar there was a group of students from a country where home economics was not well accepted. These participants spent considerable time in devising ways to promote home economics among educators, the government administration, and the general public. They have returned home with master's degrees to help develop a program for training teachers for the secondary schools. Through this seminar, they gained confidence that a great deal could be done, even though they may run into some obstacles.

Other seminars of equal value may be concerned with health and home care of the sick, infant and child care, housing and home management, food habits and nutrition, or clothing the family.

It is unfortunate that we do not have sufficient staff oriented to teaching these seminars to international students so we can offer the course each semester. We are confident that such seminars serve our international students in a way we cannot always do in the classroom.

Another project, developed cooperatively with the Agency for International Development, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Ohio University has been a seminar and workshop on home improvement. This started as a pilot study in 1963, with 12 participants from six countries. Over an eight-week period, these women were taught how to make simple home improvements and equipment which would lead to more comfortable and healthful living. Stress was also put on program planning, development of leadership within a community, a variety of good teaching methods, and the development of visual aids.
Last year there were 19 participants from 9 different countries representing the Far East, Africa, South America and Europe. International understanding and appreciation of other cultures were demonstrated throughout the six-week period in which the participants lived and worked together. In addition to classroom and laboratory experiences, they participated in many field trips. A village kitchen and laundry were built, complete with range, sink, storage units, iceless cooler, work benches, shower, etc.

The Ohio University administration was very generous in providing greater facilities for the workshop in 1965. A small village home of stone block, with a tin roof, was built. The floor is cement; windows and doors are screened. There are no furnishings or partitions, for it is to be used as a demonstration house for students to create a home suitable for the needs of their country. An adjoining arbor may serve as an outdoor kitchen or laundry. There is plenty of surrounding space where a garden may be developed, or an outside area for the children to play. Some participants suggest an area to keep the poultry and animals from running wild.

The 1965 workshop was planned to include 42 participants from 13 different countries, with representatives of French speaking African countries being taught through interpreters.

**Other Comments of Panel Members**

Miss Drinker: Who is doing something to help the wives who do not speak English to learn English?

Mr. Clubine: In my mind, we as educators must keep wives of foreign students in mind when planning a total program for foreign students. This is important from at least two aspects. First, for the welfare and happiness of the foreign wife and second to allow as much freedom as possible for the foreign student to pursue his academic course work.

One program which should be seriously considered is English as a second language course for wives. It is as important for wives as for their husbands to know English. If the wife does not know English the husband is likely to speak in his native tongue when at home. This does not help the husband improve his English, which is so essential in his academic achievement. If the wife knows English it will allow her to participate more freely in the academic community, both socially and intellectually. This will lend to her security and happiness as well as allow her to function separately from her husband, thus giving him more freedom for academic pursuits.

Many universities have developed orientation programs for foreign students. But what about wives and their problems? Problems of grocery buying, operating the automatic washer, what soap to buy, pre-rinsing diapers before putting them in the washer, money management, etc. -- all of these problems may help make the position of the foreign student very uncomfortable if his wife cannot handle them in stride.