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Helping students become global citizens: Successful study abroad programs in the Iowa State University department of horticulture

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Helping students become global citizens: Successful study abroad programs in the Iowa State University department of horticulture

Abstract
Higher education is just one aspect of American society affected by globalization. Many colleges and universities, including Iowa State University, understand the need and accept the challenge of helping students become global citizens and thus, require an international perspectives course as part of their undergraduate curriculum. The Iowa State University Department of Horticulture has a long history of successfully offering study abroad opportunities. Since 1998, 326 students have participated in a study abroad experience offered by the department. These international experiences range from 12-day trips to semester long immersions in a service learning project associated with a school garden. In each case, students participate in a pre-trip preparation, the immersive experience in-country and a post-trip reflection. This structured approach has proven to be an effective pedagogy for preparing students, maximizing student and faculty investment and evaluating the effectiveness of study abroad offerings.

Disciplines
Higher Education | Horticulture | Online and Distance Education

Comments
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Higher education is just one aspect of American society affected by globalization. Many colleges and universities, including Iowa State University, understand the need and accept the challenge of helping students become global citizens and thus, require an international perspectives course as part of their undergraduate curriculum. The Iowa State University Department of Horticulture has a long history of successfully offering study abroad opportunities. Since 1998, 326 students have participated in a study abroad experience offered by the department. These international experiences range from 12-day trips to semester long immersions in a service learning project associated with a school garden. In each case, students participate in a pre-trip preparation, the immersive experience in-country and a post-trip reflection. This structured approach has proven to be an effective pedagogy for preparing students, maximizing student and faculty investment and evaluating the effectiveness of study abroad offerings.

Introduction

Throughout the past 20 years, globalization of the curriculum has become increasingly important at colleges and universities across the United States (Acker and Taylor, 2000; Ford Foundation, 1997; National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, Strategic Vision Committee, 2000; North Central Region Colleges of Agriculture Curricular Committee, 1989). By 2006, globalization had become such an important part of higher education that the U.S. Senate recognized the importance of study abroad programs and designated that year as the “Year of Study Abroad.” The resolution states “…ensuring that the citizens of the United States are globally literate is the responsibility of the educational system” (Durbin et al., 2005). To help meet their global literacy mission, many institutions of higher education include some form of an international perspectives requirement as part of the undergraduate curriculum (Crunkilton et al., 2003).

Although many institutions have long had an international perspectives requirement, how students use study abroad experiences to meet that requirement has changed dramatically in the past 60 years. For example, in 2003 only 7% of study abroad experiences were for the full academic year compared with an average of 72% in the 1950s and 1960s (Neppel, 2005). Recent literature suggests short-term study abroad experiences can still be a valuable learning opportunity for undergraduate students (Hovde, 2002). Examples of benefits attained from these short-term programs include: increased global and cultural awareness; opportunity for students to travel internationally who otherwise would be deterred due to cost, lack of self-confidence, or preparedness; and the ability to avoid class scheduling conflicts associated with longer term programs (Neppel, 2005).

Iowa State University encourages study abroad experiences as a means of fulfilling the university wide International Perspectives requirement (Iowa State University, 2013). Students can choose from a number of different programs across the university’s colleges, including programs sponsored by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has a long history of providing an extensive list of study abroad opportunities and historically has a large number of student participants (Woteki and Acker, 2004).