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Through Students' Eyes: Perceptions and Aspirations of College of Agriculture and Life Science Students Regarding International Educational Experiences

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Abstract

This study examined perceptions and aspirations of 956 students concerning international educational experiences. Drawn as a purposive critical case, respondents were enrolled across 29 undergraduate majors and 24 graduate majors in Texas A&M University, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (COALS) during 2009. Sample demographics were consistent with the student population (N=6,470) of COALS. Questionnaires were administered across 13 academic departments. Respondents revealed strong interests in international educational experiences. Two-thirds of respondents held positive perceptions of international experiences and identified preferred countries. Students preferred faculty-led programs or similar campus-originated and directed experiences. Students were receptive to a variety of other international experiences. Respondents sought international experience to enhance their overall life experience, for the opportunity to live in another culture, and to increase their employability. Influencing factors included affordability, the country itself, and subject matter. Financial issues were perceived as difficulties. Pragmatically, students recognized challenges in paying for programs and added living expenses. Despite these challenges, 70% of the students believed that international experiences would improve their competitiveness. A positive relationship existed between willingness and competitiveness. The authors posit four deductive recommendations: COALS provides experiences that prepare students for their future. Consequently, a global curriculum will result in a better-prepared person. Faculty members communicate values. Consequently, faculty should provide early and consistent messages that help students actualize their plans. Learning transitions from safe environments to real-world experiences. Consequently, applying simulations within traditional courses will facilitate global engagements. Simplifying the international experience is crucial. Consequently, accessible assistance will encourage broader experiences.

Keywords: Aspirations, Curriculum Reforms, Experience and Education, Faculty Roles, International Education, Student Mobility, Student Perceptions, Study Abroad

Introduction

Perception is reality. The conventional wisdom that said “I’ll believe it when I see it” is being challenged by “I’ll see it when I believe it” (Yariv, 2002, p. 2). In today’s electronic wizardry, what we see is often our reality. Halberstadt, Winkielman, Niedenthal, and Dalle (2009) concluded that “our findings indicate that what we think has a noticeable effect on our perceptions” (para. 3). And what we think is shaped by our personal experience. Dewey (1938/1997) argued that past experiences influence present influence and that present experiences arise from the interaction between past experience and present situation. Further, Dewey posited that “the main purpose or objective [of education] is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life, by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of information and prepared forms of skill which comprehend the material of instruction” (p. 18). Further, “every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had” (p. 39). Dewey argued that the educator “. . . must be aware of the potentialities for leading students into new fields which belong to experiences already had, and must use this knowledge as his criterion for selection and arrangement of the conditions that influence their present experience” (p. 76). In his closing arguments, Dewey warned that “. . . the road of the new education is not an easier one to follow. . . [rather] . . . I have confined myself to showing certain conditions which must be fulfilled if it is to have the successful career which by right belongs to it” (p. 90).

Today’s university students—often described as millennials—have unique experiences that have shaped their perceptions and thinking. This generational cohort, born after 1982, described their defining experiences as the Oklahoma City bombing (1995), the death of Princess Diana

(1997), Columbine (1999), the 9/11 terrorist attack (2001), and a world at war (2003). When compared with previous generations, millennials are exposed to “terabytes” of information and are very savvy of technology and social networking (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Another defining characteristic of today’s university students is their propensity to construct knowledge out of their experiences. This social constructivism molds a learner as an individual who is motivated, self-confident, and independent yet collaborative. They tweet using social networks and use IM as a constant connection with their peer group (Thomas, 2009).

Concurrently, there are global trends that Walker (2007) described as “Globalization 3.0” and Friedman (2005) called a flat world that are superimposed on the millennial’s world. Megatrends that influence the future of today’s university student include increasing migration-immigration, climate change, population growth, global economics, and the impact of technologies (Catlett, 2007; Friedman, 2005; Kennedy, 1994; Walker, 2007).

Largely a nation of immigrants, America has a diverse history of mobility in search of economic prosperity and quality of life. Horace Greeley’s 1864 *New York Tribune* editorial encouraged to “go west young man.” This culture created a melting pot society with immigrants from around the world. The Global Commission on International Migration (2005) reported that “there are nearly 200 million international migrants in 2005, counting only those who have lived outside their country for more than one year and including 9.2 million refugees” (p. 83). Further, they noted that “this is equivalent to the population of the 5th largest country – Brazil” (p. 83). During the millennials’ generation—1980 until 2000—the number of migrants living in the developed world increased from 48 million to 110 million. Migrants represent

approximately 13% of the population of North America, and the 35 million migrants living in the US in 2000 represented 20% of the world migrant population.

Today's student lives in a challenging and changing world. To paraphrase John Dewey's words, the university experience "provides them with experiences which will help to open up, rather than shut down, a person's access to future growth experiences, thereby expanding the person's likely contribution to society" (Neill, 2005, para. 11). This paper seeks to understand the international educational perceptions of today's Texas A&M University students who are enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (COALS).

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine perceptions and aspirations of students in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M University concerning international educational experiences during their college careers. Specific objectives were as follows:

1. Determine students' interests in getting international educational experiences and, if so, their preferences for the kinds of experiences and the countries in which they would prefer to study;
2. Characterize students' ratings of selected factors that may motivate them to study abroad;
3. Describe students' ratings of the importance of selected factors as they consider study abroad options;
4. Determine students' ratings of factors that may pose a difficulty when preparing to study abroad or while studying abroad; and
5. Examine relationships between selected personal characteristics of the students, their perceptions, and their aspirations.

Methods

The researchers used survey research methods to explore and describe the perceptions and aspirations of resident undergraduate and graduate students attending Texas A&M University in fall semester 2009. An instrument was developed based on two earlier, related student questionnaires. The original instrument was an online questionnaire used to ascertain attributes of European Union students (Plompen, 2006). Then, that instrument was modified as a paper copy student questionnaire, translated into Armenian, and used to survey students at Armenian State Agrarian University (Shinn, Briers, Navarro, Peake, Duncan, Parr, & Galoyan, 2008; Shinn, Briers, Navarro, Peake, Parr, Ter-Mkrtychyan, & Duncan, 2009). Thus, the instrument used in this study was a third iteration. The instrument included items to assess motivational factors that influence students' decisions to study abroad, factors that influence the choice of a foreign institution for study, and perceived challenges for students associated with studying abroad. The descriptors for the "motivation" scale were "Does not motivate" (1), "Motivates a little" (2), "Motivates" (3), and "Motivates a lot" (4). The descriptors for factors that influence the choice of a foreign institution for study were "Not important" (1), "Somewhat important" (2), "Important" (3), and "Very important" (4). The descriptors for the "difficulty" scale concerning the perceived challenges for students associated with studying abroad were "Not difficult" (1), "A little difficult" (2), "Difficult" (3), and "Very difficult" (4). Opportunities for open-ended responses were provided for students to indicate their desire to study abroad, and if so, the kind of study abroad programs in which they would be interested, the country (ies) in which they would prefer to study, and other future plans. In addition, students were asked to respond to demographic questions

concerning their gender, year of birth, degree pursued, major course of study, grades, and methods of financing their education.

Thirteen of the fourteen departments in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M University agreed to assist in data collection. The associate head for academic programs in each department selected a class or classes, graduate student groups, or individual students to complete the questionnaires. As researchers, we distributed questionnaires to each academic department with an ample supply to meet the enrollment roster of the selected courses and selected student groups. Departments collected data from students in their classes; these classes were chosen by the departments—some graduate classes, some lower-level undergraduate classes, some upper-level undergraduate classes, some classes of departmental majors only, and others with a wide range of majors enrolled. So, the responding sample was a sample clustered by department or course as a purposive, critical case sample of 1,396 students. The procedure was used to get representation of departments, majors, student levels, and degrees; however, this was not a random sample. Data were collected from September 21 to October 16, 2009. Data were coded and entered as an Excel spreadsheet, imported into a PASW

Statistics 18 data file, and analyzed using PASW Statistics 18. Calculations were of frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, cross-tabulations, and correlations.

Findings

The responding sample comprised 1,396 students. Undergraduate student respondents totaled 1,215; graduate students, 172. Of the sample, 956 indicated majors in COALS; 407 responded with majors outside COALS. Because the purpose of the study was to describe COALS students, the researchers selected for analysis those 956 students who identified themselves with COALS majors.

Of those students with COALS majors, 844 were undergraduates and 112 were graduate students. Fifty-five percent of the respondents were male; 45%, female. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents classified themselves as Caucasian/White; twelve percent, Hispanic; three percent, multi-ethnic; three percent, Asian; two percent, African American; and less than one percent, Native American. Eleven percent of the respondents were 19 years of age or younger; fifteen percent were 20 years old; twenty-six percent, 21; twenty-three percent, 22; ten percent, 23; eleven percent, 24–29; and four percent, 30 or older (Table 1).

Table 1
*Demographics of COALS Student Respondents, N=956**

		<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Male	521	55.1
	Female	425	44.9
Ethnicity	Caucasian/White	741	79.1
	Hispanic/Latino	111	11.8
	Multi-ethnic	34	3.6
	Asian	24	2.6
	African-American	23	2.5
	Indian/Alaska Native	4	0.4
Age	19 years old or younger	104	11.0
	20 years old	142	15.0
	21 years old	246	25.9
	22 years old	215	22.7
	23 years old	92	9.7
	24 – 29 years old	114	12.0
	30 years old or older	35	3.7
Degree level	Undergraduate	844	88.3
	Graduate	112	11.7
Grade point average	3.50 – 4.00	201	21.7
	3.00 – 3.49	311	33.5
	2.50 – 2.99	258	27.8
	2.00 – 2.49	138	14.9
	Less than 2.00	20	2.2
Residence(s)	Lived only in Texas	659	69.8
	Lived outside Texas 1 year or more	285	30.2
	Lived only in the U.S.	827	87.9
	Lived outside the U.S. 1 year or more	114	12.1

*Frequencies may not total 956 because of missing data.

The 956 COALS students came from a wide range of majors—29 different undergraduate majors and 24 graduate majors. Although this was not a random sample statistically, the sample did represent a wide array of students in COALS. What did we want to learn from this sample of students in COALS? First, we were interested in their interest in study abroad. So, we asked them if they would consider an

international educational experience. If they responded yes, they would consider an international experience. We asked them to indicate their preferences for six kinds of study abroad experiences. Or, if they would not consider that kind of experience, then they should not respond with a ranking for that kind of experience. Their responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
*Interests and Preferences of COALS Students in International Education Experience, N=956**

Would you consider studying abroad?	<i>f</i>	%
I would consider an international experience.	618	66.5
No, I do not want to study abroad.	311	33.5

Preferences of those who would consider studying abroad*:	<i>f</i>	Mean Rank** (1= highest rank; 6= lowest rank)
Register for a TAMU faculty-led study abroad spending 1 to 10 weeks abroad	577	2.56
Register for a TAMU study abroad course or program as an internship, directed study, research project, or similar experience	573	2.46
Register for TAMU courses at a TAMU Study Center (e.g., Costa Rica, Mexico, Italy)	543	3.02
Register for courses at a foreign university, with transfer credits back to TAMU	501	3.88
Register for courses from a study abroad program from another U.S. university, with transfer credits back to TAMU	490	3.66
Register for a program at a foreign university and complete the degree from that university	434	5.09

*Note: Preferences are listed in order of frequency. Frequencies represent the total number of students who ranked an experience with 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. **Mean rank is the arithmetic average of the rankings assigned by the students who ranked that experience.

We also asked the students if they had participated in a study abroad program previously. Slightly more than eight percent (84 students) had done so. Of those 84 students, 74 reported that the experience “was very satisfying.”

Students who indicated that they would consider an international experience were asked in which specific country or countries they would most like to study abroad. Respondents listed 98 countries

among their four choices. Australia was named most frequently—by 255 respondents. Italy was chosen by 238 respondents, and those respondents ranked Italy on average higher than did the respondents who ranked Australia. In addition to Italy, other European countries preferred were the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, and France. Latin American countries preferred were Costa Rica, Brazil, and Mexico (Table 3).

Table 3
Countries in Which COALS Majors Prefer to Study Abroad

Country*	1st Choice (n=611)		2nd Choice (n=589)		3rd Choice (n=528)		4th Choice (n=422)	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Australia	98	16.0	61	10.4	59	11.2	37	8.8
Italy	85	13.9	74	12.6	50	9.5	29	6.9
United Kingdom	55	9.0	42	7.1	48	9.1	33	7.8
Spain	52	8.5	55	9.3	34	6.4	34	8.1
Germany	42	6.9	34	5.8	30	5.7	26	6.2
Costa Rica	37	6.1	32	5.4	35	6.6	18	4.3
Brazil	30	4.9	29	4.9	26	4.9	25	5.9
France	16	2.6	36	6.1	24	4.5	22	5.2
Mexico	34	5.6	26	4.4	19	3.6	14	3.3

*Note: Countries are listed in order of the number of respondents who listed the country as one of their preferred countries for studying abroad.

What factors motivate students to study abroad? Students rated 10 factors in terms of how much each factor motivates them to study abroad. They rated the factors as “Does not motivate” (1), “Motivates a little” (2), “Motivates” (3), and “Motivates a lot” (4). Data in the table below summarize their responses. Students are motivated mostly by the international experience’s contribution to their overall life experience and by the opportunity to live in another country or culture. To a somewhat lesser extent, they are motivated by their increased employability because of studying abroad and because studying abroad looks good on their résumés (Table 4). All 10 of the factors, on average, motivate students more than “a little.”

As students begin to consider more carefully the possibility of studying abroad, there are numerous factors that may be important to them when making a choice about a specific study program or foreign university. Fourteen of those factors from the literature served as the basis for the

following question: “If you were considering the possibility of studying abroad, how important would the following be when making a choice about a specific study program or foreign university? To each of the 14 factors, students indicated if the factor would be “Not important” (1), “Somewhat important” (2), “Important” (3), or “Very important” (4). See Table 5 for a summary of students’ responses.

Affordability was the most important factor that they would consider. Rated as important to very important were the country itself, the subject matter specialty of the program, and the language spoken in the country or the university. Cultural attractions and the reputation of the foreign university (if studying in a foreign university) or the specific program (if a TAMU program) were also important factors as rated by respondents. Accessibility to and from the U.S. and weather conditions/climate of the study abroad location were rated between “somewhat important” and “important.”

Table 4

Students' Ratings of Selected Factors That May Motivate Them to Study Abroad

Factor	1	2	3	4	<u>Mean</u> <u>SD</u>
	Does not motivate <i>f</i>	Motivates a little <i>f</i>	Motivates <i>f</i>	Motivates a lot <i>f</i>	
Overall life experience	14	38	168	418	<u>3.55</u> .71
Opportunity to live in another country or culture	20	75	191	350	<u>3.37</u> .81
Increased employability	31	118	211	276	<u>3.15</u> .89
Looks good on a résumé	49	141	228	214	<u>2.96</u> .93
Important stage in my personal development	40	153	242	202	<u>2.95</u> .90
Learn more about my academic specialization	58	162	266	149	<u>2.80</u> .90
Opportunity to work in another country after completing current degree	93	156	198	189	<u>2.76</u> 1.03
Learn another language	49	57	58	164	<u>2.71</u> .98
Get a graduate degree	123	200	196	117	<u>2.48</u> 1.00
Importance placed by academic advisor/department	169	230	155	78	<u>2.22</u> .98

Just as there may be factors that motivate students to consider studying abroad and other factors that may be important considerations as they weigh options for studying abroad, there may be still other factors that discourage or challenge them as they consider studying abroad or while they are studying abroad. The researchers identified 14 potential challenges or difficulties with studying abroad. Students were requested to indicate the degree to which they thought each of these 14 factors may be difficult when preparing to study abroad or while studying abroad; they responded using a scale of “Not

difficult” (1), “A little difficult” (2), “Difficult” (3), and “Very difficult” (4). Data in the table below summarize their responses (Table 6).

Students rated “paying for the program or funding my living expenses and studies during the study abroad” as the factor that they believed would be most challenging or difficult. “Finding affordable and adequate housing” and “other financial constraints” were also rated as posing a difficulty. These three factors suggest that financial concerns are viewed as the most challenging factors. Another perceived difficulty was “dealing with the language barrier.”

Table 5
Students' Ratings of Importance of Selected Factors as They Consider Study Abroad Options

Factor	1	2	3	4	Mean SD
	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	
	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	
Affordability	19	52	133	429	<u>3.54</u> .77
The country itself	12	40	211	372	<u>3.49</u> .70
The subject matter specialty of the program	20	74	255	281	<u>3.27</u> .79
The language spoken in the country and/or the university	23	119	264	228	<u>3.10</u> .83
Information available about the country, university, and program	27	112	277	205	<u>3.06</u> .83
Cultural attractions in the area	28	130	265	207	<u>3.03</u> .84
For study in foreign universities, the reputation of the foreign university	30	120	296	186	<u>3.01</u> .82
For TAMU programs, the reputation of the specific program	25	126	297	181	<u>3.01</u> .81
For U.S. study abroad programs, the reputation of the foreign university	35	134	274	190	<u>2.98</u> .86
Accessibility to and from the U.S.	87	140	191	212	<u>2.84</u> 1.04
Weather conditions/climate	92	185	217	137	<u>2.63</u> .98
Having friends accompany me on the study abroad (for U.S. study abroad programs)	163	226	155	83	<u>2.25</u> .99
Having friends who study at that university (for study in foreign universities)	218	241	117	55	<u>2.01</u> .94
Having friends and family in the area or region	305	221	73	33	<u>1.74</u> .86

Table 6
Students' Ratings of Factors That May Pose a Difficulty When Preparing to Study Abroad or While Studying Abroad

Factor	Not applicable	1 Not difficult	2 A little difficult	3 Difficult	4 Very difficult	Mean
	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	SD
Paying for the program or funding my living expenses and studies during the study abroad	5	30	66	179	346	<u>3.35</u> .86
Finding affordable and adequate housing	5	25	100	246	248	<u>3.16</u> .84
Other financial constraints	7	38	97	232	246	<u>3.12</u> .89
Dealing with the language barrier	7	27	158	263	175	<u>2.94</u> .84
Graduating on time	17	102	171	170	165	<u>2.65</u> 1.05
Time required to make all the preparations	5	68	217	244	92	<u>2.58</u> .87
Gaining admission or being accepted where I want to study	9	84	239	224	69	<u>2.45</u> .86
It is stressful to prepare, organize, and implement	7	115	199	225	76	<u>2.43</u> .93
Transferring course credits	8	100	241	199	77	<u>2.41</u> .90
Paperwork required for studying abroad	6	103	260	190	63	<u>2.35</u> .88
Being allowed to study abroad by my major	9	155	196	179	87	<u>2.32</u> 1.00
My family situation makes it difficult for me to consider the opportunity	26	248	154	109	84	<u>2.05</u> 1.08
I may lose opportunities in the U.S. if I leave for a long period of time	17	262	163	110	72	<u>1.99</u> 1.04
It would be difficult for me to leave the U.S. and my family for a long period of time	11	278	170	99	66	<u>1.92</u> 1.02

We asked students a summary question relating to the perceived value of their participation in a study abroad program: “Do you believe that participating in a study abroad program would improve your competitiveness in the global marketplace? Seventy percent of the students responded with “yes,” 26% with “neutral, unsure,” and 4%, “no.”

Finally, we examined selected relationships. There was a moderate,

statistically significant, positive relationship between students’ willingness to study abroad and their beliefs that participating in a study abroad program would improve their competitiveness in the global marketplace. A large majority (83.4%) of those who wanted to study abroad believed that the experience would increase their competitiveness; fewer than 50% of those who would not consider studying abroad believed that (Table 7).

Table 7
*Relationship Between Willingness to Study Abroad and Belief in Increased Competitiveness in the Global Market, N=956**

Do you believe that participating in study abroad programs would improve your competitiveness in the global market?	Would you consider studying abroad?			
	Yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	501	83.4	147	47.7
Unsure	86	14.3	126	40.9
No	14	2.3	35	11.4

Cramer’s V = .38, *p* < .01. *Frequencies may not total 956 because of missing data.

We also looked at relationships between selected student characteristics and their interests in and concerns with studying abroad. For example, was student classification (graduate or undergraduate) related to their aspirations for study abroad? Similar percentages—65% of the

undergraduate population and 72% of the graduate population—indicated that they wanted to study abroad. So, as a whole, about two-thirds of student respondents aspire to study abroad, which demonstrates a need for further internationalization of the curriculum (Table 8).

Table 8
*Relationship Between Student Classification and Their Aspiration to Study Abroad, N=956**

	Undergraduate		Graduate	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Consider studying abroad	531	65.6	77	72.0
Do not want to study abroad	279	34.4	30	28.0
Total	810	100.0	107	100.0

Cramer’s V = .04, *p* = .19 (*ns*). *Frequencies may not total 956 because of missing data.

Another relationship examined was interest in studying abroad and year of study. Because year of study is inherently different by degree sought, undergraduate and graduate students were examined separately. There was no relationship

between year of study and desire to study abroad for graduate students. But there was a small, statistically significant relationship between year of study and desire to study abroad for undergraduate students, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9
*Relationship Between Year in Undergraduate Study and Willingness to Study Abroad, N=844**

Year of study	Would you consider studying abroad?			
	Yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Freshman	38	61.3	24	38.7
Sophomore	63	79.7	16	20.3
Junior	157	68.0	74	32.0
Senior	273	62.3	165	37.7

Cramer's $V = .11, p = .04$. *Frequencies may not total 844 because of missing data.

There was also a statistically significant relationship between gender and willingness to study abroad. Females

(77.2%) were more likely to consider studying abroad than were males (56.7%), as shown in the Table 10.

Table 10
*Relationship Between Gender and Willingness to Study Abroad, N=956**

Gender	Would you consider studying abroad?			
	Yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Male	283	56.7	216	43.3
Female	318	77.2	94	22.8

Cramer's $V = .22, p < .01$. *Frequencies may not total 956 because of missing data.

There was no relationship between willingness to study abroad and grade point average (Cramer's $V = .07, ns$), or degree sought (Cramer's $V = .05, ns$).

Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Drucker (1994) advanced the idea of the knowledge worker and said, "we can

also predict with confidence that we will redefine what it means to be an educated

person" (para. 2). Drucker (2008) explained that the educated person must "understand the world's cultures, religions, and traditions . . ." and "will have to be trained in perception fully as much as in analysis" (p. 530). He concluded that this integration "requires continuous learning and teaching" (p. 530). Glanville (2006) noted that "all

higher education institutions should aspire to improve and enhance the education they offer their students” (p. 48).

This study determined the perceptions and aspirations of 956 students concerning international educational experiences. The respondents were enrolled in 29 academic undergraduate majors and 24 graduate majors in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M University name during the fall 2009 semester. Although drawn as a purposive critical case sample, the demographics were consistent with the larger student body. This sample of 956 students revealed a strong interest in acquiring international educational experiences, with two-thirds of students holding positive perceptions of international experiences and identified a wide array of countries in which to experience internationalization. This is congruent with the findings of Place, Irani, and Friedel (2004). Students said they preferred a faculty-led program or an internship, directed study, research project, or similar experiences. However, students were receptive to a variety of other international educational experiences. Like their international counterparts (Shinn et al., 2008; Shinn et al., 2009), Texas A&M University students seek international experience to enhance their overall life experience, for the opportunity to live in another country or culture, and to increase their employability. From a realistic perspective, students recognized the challenges in paying for the program and funding the additional living expenses and studies. This is consistent with the findings of Irani, Place, and Friedel (2005); Shinn et al. (2008); and Shinn et al. (2009). However, in the face of these challenges, more than 70% of the students felt that participating in a study abroad program would improve their competitiveness in the global marketplace. Ironically, Siaya (2002) reported that “forty-eight percent of the students said they wanted to study abroad, and yet we know

that it is likely that only 3 percent actually will by the time they graduate” (para. 12). Respondents reported that affordability, the country itself, and subject matter were important considerations. They reported various financial issues as the top three perceived difficulties. “Approximately 79% of currently enrolled Aggies receive some type of financial assistance to cover their college costs” (New Student Programs, 2009, p. 47).

Conclusions

Students in COALS at Texas A&M University hold positive perceptions of their world and demonstrate an assertive global view. COALS faculty also recognize the value of global experiences for students (College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Task Force on Internationalization of the Curriculum, 2009). These viewpoints are congruent with the findings of the American Council on Education (2005), Irani et al. (2005), and Place et al. (2004). Andreasen (2003) concluded that “efforts to increase faculty participation in international endeavors should be of great importance for Colleges of Agriculture around the world” (p. 68). Consequently, faculty and advisors should be committed to organizing experiences that open windows to a global world.

Implications

If a majority of today’s university students hold positive perceptions regarding the value of international educational experiences, then it is important to identify experiences that contribute most to their education. Contributions should address the nature and structure of knowledge, the needs of society, and the needs of the learner (Madeus & Stufflebeam, 1989; Tyler, 1949). If students are open to a variety of structured experiences, such as faculty-led studies and transferring foreign university credits, then the organization, scope, and sequence of curriculum should be examined. Students

implied a readiness for international educational experiences that move from structured experiences to self-directed learning in foreign environments. This is consistent with the work of Shulman (2002). If student's acquisition of information about these experiences follows Rogers's (2003) communication channels, then information should be provided early and often. Glanville (2006) noted that the university has a responsibility to encourage experiences that will prepare students for global leadership roles.

Recommendations

While today's Texas A&M University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences millennial generation students are flooded with information, they are frequently starved for facts that are timely for decision-making. As a result of this study, the authors posit four recommendations:

1. The university can serve as an incubator to nurture experiences that prepare students for global leadership roles. The curriculum should engage the learner and result in an educated person with global knowledge coupled with perceptual and analytic skills (Drucker, 2008).
2. Faculty members and advisors often regulate the incubator—the environment that melds perceptions and analysis into action, collaboration, and problem-solving. Early and consistent messages help students to actualize their plans. Integrating international experiences into the curriculum is essential—both on and off the campus.
3. By applying simulations and case studies within traditional courses, students will transition from a safe, comfortable learning environment to real-world experiences that foster analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Anderson et al., 2001).
4. Simplifying planning and preparation for an international experience is crucial—with technical “one-stop” assistance for students, parents, and faculty members. Particularly important are encouraging early experiences, facilitating student loans, providing financial assistance, and assisting with travel logistics.

This combination of strategies will lead to a framework for action—a triple convergence of engaged students, committed university guidance, and a world that seeks crucial global leadership for agriculture and the life sciences in a hungry world.

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