Global Perspectives in Purdue Cooperative Extension: A Case Study

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Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service, in collaboration with the Purdue office of International Programs in Agriculture, launched an effort in 1998 to build an international dimension into the statewide Extension endeavor. This poster will present a case study and chronological summary of our approach.

Our first activity was an in-service workshop to discern needs and interests for building international awareness into the state’s programs pertinent to state clientele needs. The group of Extension leaders who participated in that workshop identified three principal components for an international agenda for the state’s Extension programs: 1) improving Extension’s capacity to better serve a rapidly changing ethnic and multicultural population profile in the state; 2) strengthening the contribution of Purdue Extension to Indiana’s position and success in the global marketplace; 3) providing opportunities for Purdue Extension educators to participate in international activities both to contribute to the development of Extension systems overseas and to learn more about Extension delivery in other cultures to benefit the state’s programs.

In order to build the capacity and confidence of Extension educators to take roles in this three-part agenda, it was decided that there was a need for: 1) better information about the state’s multicultural diversity and global economic position; 2) more professional training options for staff on international issues pertinent to their work, and; 3) more opportunities for educators to increase their international awareness and competence through participation in international exchanges. Small groups of Extension educators were formed to provide leadership in each of these arenas.

In September 2000, a second in-service workshop was convened to build on these themes. The outcome of this second workshop was the development of a list of eight key needs to “make it happen” in the international arena for Purdue Extension. Among the needs identified were: programmatic leadership either in the form of an International Extension Committee or a designated program leader for international Extension; continued international capacity development opportunities for Extension educators; development of model international Extension programs in the state; better communication about existing internationally-related opportunities and needs in the state; resources to build programmatic elements with an international component; and clear professional recognition for involvement in this dimension of the Extension mission. Selection of a global theme for the next Purdue Extension Professional Development Conference was also proposed at this workshop as a follow-up activity.

As a result, Globalization was chosen as the theme for the Professional Development Conference in 2001. Speakers and consultants were brought in from across the United States. The keynote speaker addressed the theme: “Globalization: What’s This All About and What Does it Mean to Me?” A series of panels permitted discussion with the keynote speaker and consultants on challenges and opportunities for implementation of international content in Extension programming. The closing speaker addressed the theme: “Opportunities and Barriers to Globalizing Extension.”

Taken together, this series of events over the past four years has identified a clear need to be proactive in internationalizing the Extension program in the state of Indiana and has elucidated elements of a roadmap for so doing. In the Spring of 2003, an Intercultural Action Committee for Extension was appointed by the Director and charged with coordination for both the international and multicultural dimensions in Extension. In addition, a graduate assistantship has been awarded to a student who will work on the development of an internationally-themed professional development curriculum for Extension educators. Also, a statewide series of workshops are planned for October 2003. These workshops, which will focus on multiculturalism and international Extension professional development, are supported by a grant from the national Epsilon Sigma Phi organization.