The EARTH-Cal Poly Internship Program: A Model of Multi-Functional Agricultural Education

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Introduction

In the mid 1980s, leaders of the agricultural, government and educational sectors throughout Latin America and the United States met to discuss the plan to create a new type of institution: EARTH College. With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and USAID, EARTH was built in 1990 on 8,100 acres of humid, tropical land in Guacimo, Costa Rica and the first class of 60 Latin American students began studies. Now known as EARTH University, this highly competitive, bachelor’s degree-granting institution emphasizes experiential learning in many aspects of agriculture and environmental studies, and requires a significant amount of vocationally related service from its students. EARTH’s curriculum was modeled after that in Cal Poly’s College of Agriculture, emphasizing hands-on, entrepreneurial projects in food and fiber production, processing, and such small business ventures as aquaculture (Tilapia), banana paper production, and vermiculture. Since 1992, Cal Poly and EARTH have exchanged internship students in order to provide learning experiences unavailable on the home campuses.

Purpose of Poster

This poster will illustrate (with color photos, text and graphics) the organization, variety and impact of internships experienced in the U.S. and Costa Rica by EARTH and Cal Poly students, respectively.

Major Points to be Shared

• Structure of EARTH-Cal Poly Internship program
• Examples of internships in California and Costa Rica
• Data summary on internships since inception – e.g. intern’s country of origin, place and activities of internship, current career location (if degree complete) and impact of internship

Conclusions

The EARTH-Cal Poly Internship program is a model of international cooperation, with the goal of developing agricultural and cross-cultural understanding among U.S. and Latin American university students. Beyond the practical value of vocational experience, interns gain language and cultural understanding which prepares them to contribute positively to society.

Educational Importance

The poster will illustrate the vital role that internships play in the education of Cal Poly and EARTH university students, and how these experiences have led to positive change in both the U.S. and Latin America.