International Study Tour Programs at Michigan State University:
Focusing on Belize and Guatemala

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Study tours provide an opportunity for Michigan citizens to experience the world through experiential learning in a different country. Michigan State University offers more than 140 study abroad and study tour programs throughout the summer and academic year. The following is a program that combines both a credit and non-credit program in the subject area of Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment.

This unique Belize and Guatemala Study Tour focused on understanding the people, natural resources, agriculture practices and development in a highly sensitive environment in Central America. Belize and Guatemala provide a microcosm of the conflicts, which can arise as affluent tourists, and foreign developers impose themselves on unsophisticated economy and fragile environment. Many elements compete for the fragile resource base of Belize, and create possibilities for social conflict as development proceeds.

Activities ranged from exploring historical sites to interacting with students and professionals at the local university. The emphasis was placed on exposure as well as active learning and participation. Many of the sites chosen provided a broad perspective of the issues, allowing participants to ask questions and formulate ideas. This served as an integral part of the program because each evening we debriefed and discussed events of the day.

The format of the program similar to other studies encouraged participants to probe current issues and ask questions of the presenters. Prior to departure, participants were given reading materials of current events that directly related to the daily topics. Daily leaders were assigned to lead group discussions. The desired effect was to inspire individuals to become aware of issues while expanding their scope of Central America.

Future study tours designed to globalize Michigan citizens include Brazil and Chile: Agriculture Production, Policy, and Marketing of Fruit, Livestock, and Crops; New Zealand: Sheep Production and Marketing; China: Agricultural Trade; and Germany and Ireland: European Union Agricultural Practices.

Evaluation of study tour participants indicates that participation in study tours is highly effective in developing an appreciation of complex global organizations, industries, environmental issues, understanding other cultures, and providing an opportunity for Michigan citizens to interact with people throughout the world. These programs have now been incorporated into statewide leadership programs for Michigan Agriculture Commodity Groups including the Farm Bureau and the Sheep Breeders Association.