EMERGING TRENDS: A HUMAN RESOURCE COLLABORATORY FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL AND EXTENSION EDUCATION

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Introduction
“Despite technological improvements, new tools, and guides, the Internet remains a somewhat primitive tool for collaboration, especially for those educators who cannot enjoy or do not have the time for learning. Achieving effective collaboration is not easy. In part, the situation reflects the basic training of scientists (who) have been educated to focus on individual activity and achievement” (Executive Summary, National Research Council, 1993).

A paradoxical situation of “publish or perish” versus “maximizing human effort” strains the very heart of most graduate-level courses. On one hand, educators must be concerned about their academic advancement; on the other hand, each educator knows that graduate-level courses should offer a diversity of scholarly perspectives. These and other human considerations shape and constrain the collaborations that do take place. In some instances, they influence the shape and duration of a collaborative relationship. Bottom-up motivation is an essential factor in the success of any collaboratory effort.

Creating an online collaboratory for International Agricultural and Extension Education is a multidimensional, intertwined project that on one level seeks to solve a problem common to all teaching disciplines and all institutions of higher education: the under-utilization of existing technologies, and on another level, seeks to study the creation, evolution and lifecycle of an online collaboratory that was formed to address the problem.

Purpose
The purpose is to demonstrate how an online educational collaboratory (AISE 8103) was formed to teach a graduate-level course in International Agricultural and Extension Education, while using the Internet as the primary means of collaboratory formation and teaching medium.

Major Points
The formation of an online educational collaboratory requires a groundswell of motivation for establishing contacts throughout several professional levels, create a focus of advanced study, solidify the purpose of the collaboratory, standardize the Web authoring process and provide follow-up and feedback to collaboratory members over the course of the project. The AISE 8103 collaboratory is a unique mix of educators, practitioners, and scholars who share a common bond of practical experience in International Agricultural and Extension Education. Students enrolled in this course benefit from participation in the collaboratory by gaining new perspectives in International Agricultural Development through the experiences, discussions, exercises, and relationships resulting from their interaction with collaboratory members. Contingency plans were developed to provide streamlined support of the online learning environment throughout the duration of this project.

Conclusions
Perspectives and experiences from Iran, Papua New Guinea, and the U.S.A. were intertwined to formulate a unique learning environment for graduate students enrolled in this course. Discussions centered on real-world case studies, experiences and research projects spanning the milieu that comprises International Agricultural and Extension Education. Professional contacts were formulated and strengthened between graduate students and collaboratory members, resulting in advanced understanding of the factors impacting International Agricultural and Extension Education programs across the U.S.A. and in selected countries/regions around the world.

Educational Importance
The major educational importance in this project is the maximization of Internet technologies used by students, practitioners, educators and the general public in their quest to learn about this collaboratory and take advantage of its curricular materials. It is expected that the unique collaborative efforts in creating and administering a graduate-level course in International Agricultural and Extension Education will stimulate future educational collaboratories throughout the profession.