WHAT CHARACTERIZES AN INTERNATIONALIZED U.S. EXTENSION SYSTEM?

Barbara G. Ludwig, District Director
Ohio State University Extension
Wooster, Ohio

Outstanding Research Presentation

This paper is one of five outstanding research papers from the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education, Little Rock, Arkansas, U.S.A., March 23, 24 & 25, 1995.

Introduction

What characterizes an internationalized extension system in the U.S.? A seemingly simple question, but one which few individuals have sought to address through research. Henson (1990) in his study of university internationalization stated that internationalization was frequently viewed in general, rather amorphous terms that were difficult for some to understand and comprehend. Arum and Van de Water (1992) in their book Bridges to the Future: Strategies for Internationalizing Higher Education supported this view. In article after article, report after report, and at conference after conference the terms used to characterize the international dimension of education vary tremendously.

A review of literature revealed broad, but often ambiguous goal statements related to internationalization of Extension (ES-USDA, 1989; Ingle, 1990; King & Martin, 1991). Some ideas have been formulated for internationalizing (Somersan, 1992; Henson, Noel, Gilrad-Byers, Ingle, 1991; ES-USDA, 1989; Knox, 1987; York, 1984; Patton, 1984), but there has been little emphasis on implementation by Extension systems across the country (Rosson & Sanders, 1991; Poston & O'Roarke, 1991; Andrews & Lambur, 1986). Few studies have been conducted related to internationalization of the Extension component of the land-grant university system.

None defined internationalizing in terms of objectively verifiable indicators of success. A need to examine and improve the understanding of internationalizing of a state university Extension system became apparent through a review of literature. If the characteristics of an internationalized extension system could be identified, then an organization might focus available resources to create changes needed to achieve internationalization.

Kaufman (1982, 1992) suggested putting problems into the context of what is and what should be when dealing with organizations. The Organizational Elements Model (OEM) developed by Kaufman (1982, 1992) provided a framework for the study. Kaufman's model used a holistic framework in looking at organizations and what those organizations use, do and deliver as well as the impact on clients and society in general. The current study was limited to examining organizational efforts comprised of inputs and processes and organizational results comprised of products and outputs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify characteristics that will describe an internationalized state extension system.

Methodology

The study used a three-round, modified Delphi technique to explore and describe the characteristics of an internationalized state Extension system. Delphi, a group process,
utilized individual written responses to three researcher developed instruments as opposed to bringing individuals together for oral discussion. The process was further characterized by multiple iterations or feedback designed to accomplish convergence of opinion. The Delphi Panel members were purposefully selected following a nomination process. A total of 15 individuals, well known and respected for their contributions to Extension or land-grant colleges or universities in the area of internationalization, were identified. The Delphi Panel was asked to identify the degree to which they believed each item on the instrument contributed to the internationalization of a state university Extension system. A seven point Likert-type scale was used with 0 indicating "no importance" and 6 indicating "critical importance".

The initial instrument contained 39 position statements derived from the literature and structured interviews with international experts. Face and content validity of the initial instrument were assured through the use of a content validity panel. Given the nature of the Delphi technique, additional types of validity and reliability estimates were not appropriate for the instrument (Hughes, 1993; Dalkey, Rourke, Lewis and Snyder, 1972). During Round II, based on suggestions from the Delphi Panel, 12 new items were added and nine items were reworded. The instruments used in the second and third rounds contained items on which a predetermined level of consensus was not achieved during the previous round.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each round. The computer program SPSS was used for data analysis. For each round, items on which consensus was reached were identified. Consensus on an item was considered to have been reached when 80% of the ratings fell within two categories on a seven-point scale. Following Round III, statistics of central tendency and variability were calculated for all items on which consensus had been reached. The mean was used to describe the level of importance of the item to an internationalized state Extension system as determined by consensus of the Delphi Panel.

**Results**

The results of the study represent the collective opinion of the experts participating in the Delphi Panel at a single point in time and cannot be construed to be representative of any other population or situation. Fourteen of the 15 participants responded to each round, a 93% response rate. Fifty-one items were considered during the three rounds of the Delphi. Consensus was achieved on 38 items which were identified as having moderately high importance to critical importance for the internationalization of a state university Extension system. Consensus was not achieved on thirteen items after three rounds. Comments made by the Delphi Panel during each round and reported anonymously provided additional information to describe the ratings and clarify issues. Three hundred and sixteen comments were received. Following Kaufman's model (1982, 1992), the results were categorized as Organizational Efforts and Organizational Results. Organizational efforts were comprised of inputs and processes. Inputs were identified as the existing starting conditions effecting organizational activities and processes as the means, methods and procedures necessary for managing inputs. Organizational results were comprised of products and outputs. Products were defined as the internal results accomplished through the application of inputs and processes; outputs were the products the organization delivered to external clients.

**Organizational Efforts**

Organizational Efforts were comprised of inputs and processes (Kaufman, 1982, 1992). An input of critical importance to the internationalization of Extension systems was recognition by faculty and agents of the relationship between international issues and the Extension mission. Panel members suggested that recognition of this relationship should be the first step in the process of internationalizing. The international issues
would include, but not be limited to knowledge of international agriculture, commitment to human development, the significance of the debate on "privatization" and the experiences of Extension services in seeking new ways of funding services. A commitment to international education as a part of the Extension mission, an organizational culture that expects international activity and administrators who communicated support for internationalization were also viewed as highly important inputs.

Institutional commitment would be evidenced through three processes: the development of a personnel evaluation system which recognized international efforts had critical importance. Policies and procedures which facilitated international program efforts and a reward structure which recognized and rewarded internationalization were viewed as highly important. The system of rewards would include merit adjustments, tenure, promotion and peer recognition.

Organizational Results

Products identified as having critical importance to the internationalization of an Extension system included: educational programs offered in the United States that stress the impact of international economic forces on agricultural markets and Extension educators incorporating international perspectives into on-going educational activities. Incorporation of international dimensions into domestic programs to prepare students and citizens to be active participants in society and the economy was emphasized by panel members. An opinion expressed by a panel member was "one of the major problems with the successful internationalization of Cooperative Extension is lack of recognition that international content, activities, etc., are an integral part of what clientele need. Instead the development assistance mentality prevails which continues to identify within Extension, international as something separate and different from what faculty are supposed to do... Faculty need to know and learn about the potentials of international programs and activities to enhance the quality, relevance and impact of their programs and responsibilities."

By consensus of the Delphi Panel, the most critical characteristic of a state university extension system which had internationalized was the output or end product of clientele who developed a fundamental understanding of global and national interdependence. Educational programming efforts having high importance to internationalization included programs that help clientele understand complex worldwide issues, programs that train local business persons for participation in international markets and interdisciplinary international experiences for key leaders. The Delphi Panel placed high importance on targeting commodity groups for public policy education on global decision making and rural clientele for education on the international marketplace.

Critical Elements

Five critical elements were identified by the Delphi Panel as being present in an internationalized state university Extension system:

- Clientele develop a fundamental understanding of global and national interdependence.
- Extension educational programs within the U.S. stress the impact of international economic forces on agricultural markets.
- Extension educators incorporate international perspectives into on-going activities.
- Extension faculty/agents recognize the relationship between basic international issues and the Extension mission.
- Personnel evaluation systems recognize international efforts.

The absence of any one of these critical elements would mean that the Extension system could not...
be considered to be internationalized. An internationalized state university Extension system would exhibit other important characteristics as described in Table 1. Not all the important characteristics identified by the Delphi Panel need to be present for the Extension system to be considered to be internationalized, but many are likely to be evident. Each important characteristic provides a building block, process or programming goal which will enable the Extension system to develop and maintain the five critical elements identified.

**Educational Importance**

The study brought greater clarity and focus to the definition of internationalization of an Extension system. Using the definition of university internationalization developed by Henson and Noel (1989) as a starting point, a three-part definition of Extension Internationalization is proposed for discussion and debate.

The definition supports Ping's (1990) assertion that internationalization is not simply a program or an activity or even an emphasis or theme in the life of the university. It is all of these things and more. The definition is based on results of the current study and reflects the five critical elements identified:

- Internationalization of Extension is the incorporation of international dimension, content and considerations into Extension teaching, research and service to enhance their relevance in an increasingly interdependent world.

- Participation in Extension educational activities assist clientele to develop a fundamental understanding of global interdependence and international economic forces as they relate to the issue areas within Extension's mission.

- Institutional commitment is evidenced by the development of a structure and capacity to support staff development and reward accomplishments.

- Poston and O'Rourke (1991) reported 80% of Extension directors indicated their state had achieved either a low level or had not achieved any level of globalization. For these Extension systems, internationalization will represent a significant organizational change. Identification of characteristics essential to an internationalized Extension system can assist Extension leaders and university administrators to identify and focus available resources where the greatest impact or change can be realized. A clear sense of direction, strong leadership in internationalizing and enthusiasm from leaders of the organization will help to ensure concerted and sustained action. Policy and resource decisions such as the incorporation of fiscal support into the ongoing Extension budget and placing a person "in change" of internationalization to support and coordinate Extension program and activities, are necessary implementation strategies. Assessment must focus on the outcomes achieved. Organizational change is a slow and often discontinuous process in a complex organization. Ongoing assessment of the progress being made will be necessary.

- Extension educators have the responsibility to help clientele develop a better understanding of the complexity of global issues. Issues that might be initially targeted include human health, the environment, diversity, renewable resources, and the agricultural market. Extension "typically tries to be responsive to local needs. But few people recognize a need for international education. This is where international education needs leadership from Extension programmers who can see a need that may be invisible to the general population" was a comment made by a panel member. Extension may have a unique role to play in helping traditional rural and agricultural clientele to recognize the need for education on international issues.

- One outcome of the current study was the generation of additional questions and avenues for research. Research in the area of internationalization of Extension has been limited and the current study has perhaps raised as many questions as it has provided answers.
Replication of the current study is suggested. The Delphi Study concluded with 13 items where consensus was not reached by the Delphi Panel. Further examination and exploration of these items is needed. The instrument, developed and refined through three rounds of the Delphi, might be adapted and used to survey other populations to determine and compare their attitudes toward characteristics of an internationalized Extension system. Other issues to be explored include: Can the factor(s) which stimulated an uninvolved Extension system to change and begin the process of becoming internationalized be identified? What characteristics do state Extension systems, which by reputation are considered internationalized, exhibit? How do these characteristics compare with the characteristics identified by the current study?

Internationalization produces citizens and leaders better able to compete and to cooperate with others. Trends and events highlight the interdependence of the world community which moves year by year toward economic, political and social interdependence. (Ping, 1990; Somersan, 1992; Firebaugh, 1990; Haverner, 1988). Internationalization efforts undertaken by Extension will produce leaders and a citizenry sensitive to other cultures and global issues. Extension internationalization efforts will enable communities and nations to live and work more productively. Finally, internationalization should not be viewed as a fourth dimension: teaching, research, service and international. Instead, successful internationalization efforts will integrate global perspectives into the basic mission and mandate of Extension.

References


Table 1

Characteristics Having High to Critical Importance to Extension Internationalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clientele develop a fundamental understanding of global and national interdependence.</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension educational programs within in the U.S. stress the impact of international economic forces on agricultural markets.</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension educators incorporate international perspectives into on-going educational activities.</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension faculty/agents recognize the relationships between basic international issues (e.g. knowledge of international agriculture, commitment to human development, significance of privatization) and the Extension mission.</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel evaluation systems recognize international efforts.</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key leaders participate in interdisciplinary international experiences.</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to diversity issues by Extension clientele is enhanced.</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward structure recognizes internationalization in its system of rewards. These include merit adjustments, tenure, promotion, and peer recognition.</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support for internationalizing activities is available.</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators clearly communicate support for internationalization.</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person(s) is identified to provide leadership to internationalizing efforts.</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International experiences are provided for county agents who do not have faculty status.</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy and operating procedures facilitate international program efforts.</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization culture expects international activity.</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension educators assist communities in building a sense of responsibility for wise use of natural resources in the context of global trends.</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty increase their expertise by interacting with faculty and scholars from other cultures.</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human and physical resources are allocated to support the integration of international activities in the overall institution effort.</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for international experiences are provided for administrators.</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The central mission of the Extension system includes a commitment to international education.</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 0 = No Importance; 1 = Slight Importance; 2 = Limited Importance; 3 = Moderate Importance; 4 = Moderately High Importance; 5 = High Importance; 6 = Critical Importance