An Interdisciplinary Study Abroad Program Curriculum:  
Expanding the World with Connections

Ginger K. Larson  
The Pennsylvania State University  
009 Ferguson Building  
University Park, PA 16802  
Office: 814-863-0416  
Fax: 814-863-4753  
gkl110@psu.edu

Thomas H. Bruening  
The Pennsylvania State University  
Department of Agricultural and Extension Education

Abstract  
The world is simultaneously expanding and shrinking. In an increasingly interdependent world, young adults must become aware of international affairs. Nassar explained Friedman’s viewpoint that “globalization is not a passing phenomenon, but rather a definitive world system” (2004, p. 7). Food security, international trade and environmental sustainability set the agenda for companies worldwide, and United States college graduates must be knowledgeable and fully capable of participating in a global environment (Acker, 1999; Boyd, Felton & Dooley, 2004; Wingenbach, Boyd & Lindner, 2003; McGowan, 2007). Acker pointed out that “global skills, global perspectives, and global citizenship are now a fundamental prerequisite for success in agribusiness careers” (1999, p. 50). He further charged that agricultural programs in higher education needed to incorporate a curriculum with an international framework.

The purpose of this poster is to present an interdisciplinary study abroad curriculum. The course, Communicating Agricultural Development in South Africa, was designed specifically to bring students in communications and agriculture together. The objectives of the course included: (1) compare and contrast South African agriculture with U.S. and Pennsylvania agriculture regarding agricultural development, (2) identify and explain key challenges for emerging South African farmers utilizing news, photography, and journalistic articles, and (3) identify characteristics of South African culture through reflective writing. This poster also outlines the creation of a website that displays the students’ work from the course – photography, journalistic articles, multi-media, and reflective writing. The website serves two purposes: (1) to educate viewers on issues and concerns in South African agriculture, and (2) to serve as a promotional tool for future study abroad programs.

The preparation and implementation of the course consisted of four phases: recruitment, domestic education, international fieldwork and website development. An educational flyer and poster advertising the course and an informational meeting were designed in January and distributed throughout campus buildings most frequented by agricultural and journalism students. South Africa photographs, a tentative budget and itinerary, health and safety and passport information, and course applications were presented at the informational meeting.
The course began at the end of March with seven class meetings alternating with assignments and online readings prior to departure to South Africa. The lectures included: an introduction and orientation to the course, history of South Africa, South African agriculture, reflective writing, reporting, photography, and logistics.

The study abroad portion of the course began in Pretoria, South Africa with the students interviewing white commercial farmers. An important element to this course and in journalism is to present both sides of the story. The second segment of the in-country travel involved interviewing black emerging farmers in the Limpopo Province and working closely with the University of Limpopo. Finally, the trip concluded with a three-day excursion in Kruger National Park where students photographed South African wildlife. Throughout the abroad portion of the course, students were required to keep daily journals. Five journal submissions during the time abroad kept students accountable and provided opportunity for instructors to encourage deeper reflective journaling. Two class photography critiques were held in-country as well as five group discussions. Upon return to the United States, students submitted a series of rough draft submissions. The final products were compiled into a website using iWeb software.

Through the recruitment efforts, thirty students attended the informational meeting for the course, indicating a strong interest in study abroad and specifically in South Africa. Expenses, time and the application process narrowed the class size to eight students. The students interviewed and photographed commercial and emerging farmers in South Africa and effectively captured their observations and personal questions in reflective journals. The students’ work was compiled into a website linked to study abroad opportunities at Penn State.

If this course were to be taught again, arrangements would be made to visit a local farm prior to international departure in order to familiarize students to an agricultural scene and acquaint them with the interviewing process. The interdisciplinary approach enhanced the learning experience by allowing individuals to share technical knowledge from their respective fields, thereby strengthening agricultural comprehension and journalistic products. Furthermore, the dynamic transition witnessed in South Africa provides an opportunity for students to observe change. Partnerships need to be explored across disciplines in order to enhance study abroad programs. Universities need to consider other international arenas that provide opportunities for students to look at unique and evolving international agricultural issues. Finally, displaying students’ reflections, photographs, videos and articles from abroad in a website format should be evaluated for its impact in global education as well as study abroad promotion.

**Key Words:** study abroad curriculum, interdisciplinary, communications, agriculture, reflective writing