Attracting Extension Agents to Participate in an International Experience

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Abstract
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Global and cross-cultural competencies are becoming increasingly important as the global community becomes more diverse and integrated (Zhai, L. & Scheer, S. D., 2002). Increased globalization elevates the need for professionals with a global perspective. As leaders in bringing research-based education to the general population, extension agents need to be educated about working with all segments of the population they serve. Increasingly, that population is likely to include residents from multiple countries and ethnic backgrounds (Hoorman, 2002).

International experiences abroad offer an excellent way to develop an individual both personally and professionally (McGowan, 2007). Unfortunately, only a small segment of the population has participated in an international experience. Ludwig (1994) stated direct experience with other countries and cultures is extremely limited for most of the world.

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of extension agents related to international extension experiences. Specifically, the study examined the ideal time frames, preferred locations, barriers to involvement, and the type of professional and personal development activities that attract extension agents to participate in an international extension experience.

This poster will show how many agents have participated in international extension experiences and what sources they used to inquire about participation. Ideal time frames, locations, barriers to participation, and the type of professional and personal development activities best suited for extension agents will be presented. It will then be related to personal characteristics including an agent’s program expertise, length of tenure in extension, location, educational level, and age.

Extension systems will be able to enhance agents’ interests in international extension experiences by utilizing the knowledge gained in this study. The development of international extension experiences which appeal to agents’ preferred timeframes, interests, and locations would be expected to increase participation. Similarly, decreasing barriers such as cost and financial obligations may increase participation.
Both domestic and international extension programs stand to benefit from an increase in the number of agents participating in an international extension experience. Domestic benefits may include an increase in agents’ global and multicultural competencies and an improved capacity to serve multi-national audiences. International programs can benefit from the technical expertise of
visiting agents. Through cultural immersion, extension agents will be able to tailor existing technology and ideas to suit the communities they are visiting.

With such strong potential benefits for both domestic and international programs, it is important for extension personnel to consider international experiences as an integral part of their professional development.

**Key Words:** international experience, extension agents, barriers, professional development