Cultural Competence and Global Competitiveness: An Educational Approach

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Abstract
An important challenge to Purdue University’s College of Agriculture (COA) is to prepare its faculty, staff, and students to function professionally in culturally diverse communities and in an increasingly global economy. All of our missions – learning, discovery, and engagement – must be informed by the global imperative. The COA must graduate individuals who know and appreciate other cultural histories, languages, and institutions and who can function effectively and appropriately in this new context. These educational outcomes cannot be effectively achieved within the confines of classrooms, libraries and laboratories; faculty, staff and students must be afforded opportunities for meaningful learning in international settings. In addition, these international experiences must be shared with colleagues, communities, and clientele in which Purdue University serves in order to engage the state of Indiana in the global world.

Under the support of an external grant, faculty and staff from the COA developed an innovative educational program to do just that. Set at CATIE in Costa Rica, the ten-day research program linked Purdue graduate students, extension educators and Indiana high school agriculture and science teachers to Indiana agribusinesses interested in exploring the Costa Rican market for their respective products. Each participant was paired with an agribusiness with the responsibility of performing background market research prior to traveling, and then completing a market analysis while in Costa Rica. Upon return, the participants composed reports outlining the markets and potential economic benefits for their respective business’s products and/or interests and presented the reports to the businesses. In addition to the experience they gained as international market researchers, students noted that the experience gave them a new perspective on the differences between Costa Rica and the United States, and the roles that culture and environment play in making business decisions.

Keywords: Cross-cultural understanding, Cultural competence, Global competitiveness, International extension, Study abroad