Learn More Than a Language Through International Studies

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Abstract

Nearly 40% of Osceola County, Florida’s population is of Hispanic origin. Current extension outreach efforts have not been effective in reaching this rapidly growing target audience. Familiarity with different cultures provides insight that can lead to better understanding. The objective is to continue to learn more about Hispanic culture as a starting point for designing effective natural resources extension education programs to meet their needs. The author participated in three UF Spring Break study tours and attending six weeks of intensive Spanish language school while living with a Costa Rican family.

Participation in an international experience provides much more than language training. There were many lessons learned including a greater respect and appreciation for newcomers to our culture. Nature-based tourism has brought economic growth as well as challenges as people work to preserve their land and culture, a scenario similar to Central Florida. Family, food, strong work ethic and religion are key components of Costa Rican culture. The US and Costa Rica have opportunities to work together in an expanding global market. Contacts were established for continued extension program planning in aquatic science education, sustainable development and green construction. Future plans include extension educational programs for local Hispanic radio and additional international extension training and travel. Extension faculty should participate in international studies programs. Such participation may offer many lessons and provide valuable professional as well as personal development experiences.

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