Experiential Education Across Borders: Perceived Barriers to Participation

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Introduction
Many universities, and particularly Agricultural Education departments, have incorporated international components in their curricula to gain the benefits of cross-cultural experiences for their students. However, many students do not even consider attending an event outside their native country. Of those that do consider it, many choose not to participate. Various perceptions are involved in making the decision not to attend an international educational event, although most students have difficulty expressing exactly why they would not consider such a program.

Purpose
International experiential educational events can be eye-opening, and even life-changing for the participants. The researchers believe that a valuable goal is to identify the root beliefs and perceptions that keep students from participating. The research underlying this poster has as its purpose to discover which beliefs, myths, and facts act as barriers. Further work can then be done to counter them, allowing the highest number of students possible to gain from these valuable experiences.

Major Points to be Shared
This poster presentation will summarize conclusions made from analyzing the pre-event and post-event reflections that students made during several trips from Texas to Mexico as a part of the Texas/Mexico Initiative, a bi-national project designed to prepare food systems professionals to interact in dual cultures. Prior to their international experience, students benchmarked their attitudes and cultural awareness of Mexico, relating specifically to agricultural and socioeconomic issues. The poster will depict the changes in attitudes which resulted as a direct consequence of on-site, hands-on work with foreign nationals, in a foreign country. Further, the poster will identify general ways that educators can attempt to mitigate the pre-decision biases and thus encourage more students to take part.

Conclusions and Educational Importance
The educational importance of this poster focuses on two distinct areas. First, awareness of the internal and external barriers which preclude participation in what could be life changing events
is necessary so that programs and educational material can be developed to counteract these obstacles. Furthermore, understanding the process by which these barriers come down and are replaced by attitudes of cultural understanding and sensitivity is paramount, so that experiential education events like the ones studied here can be more effective.

**Keywords:** International education, Texas-Mexico initiative, experiential education, barriers