Can You See Me Now?  
The Use of Video Conferencing in International Research Projects

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Introduction
Video technologies are no longer reserved for entertainment or educational purposes. Advances in technology allow researchers to cross borders and thousands of miles to collaborate with their counterparts in different countries on innovative research projects, all while sitting in their own offices. One such technology, video conferencing, brings researchers together, face-to-face, despite being separated by distance (Olsen, 2003).

The real-time collaboration capabilities of video conferencing allow researchers to see and discuss issues simultaneously through two-way video and two-way audio (Ianace, 2005). Researchers from different countries working together on a project can have more efficient and productive meetings with video conferencing (Ianace, 2005; Szente, 2003). The electronic exchange of information fosters international cooperation (Son, 2001). In addition, the use of video conferencing technologies significantly reduces travel time (Miller, McKenna, & Ramsey, 1993).

Purpose
Researchers working together on a United States Department of Agriculture Enhancing Science and Teaching project tested videoconferencing on multiple occasions as an alternative to meeting face-to-face. This poster will illustrate the researchers’ perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of using videoconferencing as a tool for facilitating collaborative international projects.
**Information to be Shared**

The poster will portray the perceptions of researchers from Texas A&M University, USA, and the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Mexico. Participants stated video conferencing: (a) was preferred over conference calls, (b) saved time, (c) decreased travel expenses, (d) enabled audio and visual connections unlike phone or e-mail, and (e) was a good alternative for face-to-face meetings. However, a face-to-face format was considered to be the best way to communicate. Difficulties associated with video conferencing included: (a) sharing documents, (b) small group discussion, (c) impersonal format, (d) technology delays, and (e) less active interaction between participants.

**Conclusion and Educational Importance**

Video conferencing offers several advantages for users when compared to other methods for communicating from international locations, such as e-mail or conference calls. The use of video conferencing alleviates the percentage of project budgets that must be devoted to travel. However, researchers have not yet attained the same level of satisfaction with video conferencing as is achieved with a traditional face-to-face format.

Video conferencing is an important tool for facilitating collaborative international projects. Individuals currently involved in or considering such projects should evaluate the potential for using video conferencing in their own work. Although video conferencing is not a perfect replacement for face-to-face meetings, its use may make it easier for international agricultural and extension educators to work together more productively and more often.