Growing Global: Intercultural Communications in Agriculture

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Abstract
Today’s fast paced world requires more than the simple rhetoric of “think globally, act locally”. Our dynamic societies demand that our students are not only technically savvy and academically talented, but equally culturally literate and effective in communication. This paper will discuss the need for agricultural and extension to embrace not only the high tech and cutting edge techniques used for production, research and marketing but also the importance of knowing how to effectively communicate in all fields, through innovative programs such as the Intercultural Communications through Agriculture program at the University of Arizona.

The Intercultural Communications through Agriculture program (I.C.A.) prepares students to address problems that arise from cultural differences in values, assumptions, and modes of interaction and to work in educational, social service, and governmental or intergovernmental agency settings, as well as the new global perspective of agricultural industry. Students learn to analyze cultural and behavioral issues encountered in the interaction of individuals from different ethnic and national backgrounds. Career opportunities include international student advising, educational/cultural exchange, extension and environmental education, international development and consultancies in business, industry, social service and agricultural fields.

In addition to highlighting global technology, research and communication fundamentals, students draw from the fields of linguistics, psychology, and anthropology as well as from their agricultural filed of specialization. Practical experience is also an integral part of the program. Faculty members serve as mentors enabling students to complete supervised internships in their choice of local, national or international environments in educational, production or research based settings. The Intercultural Communications through Agriculture certificate program includes 6-9 units (2-3 classes) of required graduate level courses focusing on essentials of culture and communication. Students complete 9 units of course work, and through their internship (another 9 units) establish a research focus which they cultivate into a thesis or professional report.

Students completing this program will have additional skills and experiences that will improve their ability to communicate with persons from different cultural backgrounds in whatever their chosen field of study includes. Participants in the certification program are
awarded certification upon successful completion of a comprehensive exam, yet they leave the program with the experience of a lifetime! This program is not a substitute for a masters or doctoral program. Instead it is designed to provide a value-added component for students interested in interacting in a broader, more diverse world.

As we prepare our students to become leaders and educators in agriculture, we must also broaden their world views and provide them with resources to analyze, interpret and articulate today’s complex agricultural and environmental challenges. A university level certification program which emphasizes intercultural elements while simultaneously addressing the areas of communication, research and technology serves as an excellent forum in which students, faculty and staff may enhance their professional development and receive an accredited certification. An Intercultural Communications Certification Program also acts as a vehicle for improving understanding of other cultures and promotes leadership and stewardship skills that all of us need to be successful in a “growing,” global society.