Impact of Yearlong 4-H Japanese Internship Experience on United States Participants

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Abstract

The importance of cultural understanding, intercultural communication skills, and foreign language ability is being echoed from a variety of different platforms including the business, governmental, and educational arenas. For the past 15 years, the States’ 4-H International Programs Committee has collaborated with Japanese youth development organizations to provide year-long internship experiences for young adults who have previously participated in the 4-H Program. Using survey research, this descriptive study was conducted to explore the benefits of the internship program on the lives and career choices of the former interns. Among the many benefits described by the former interns, gains in personal growth were clearly expressed. Increased self-confidence, flexibility, tolerance and adaptability were evident. Values learned by the interns are being passed on to their children. Recommendations to strengthen the internship program included a more strategic use of former interns in preparing new interns for their positions.

Keywords: International internship, Study Abroad, Intercultural communication, 4-H, Young adults
Introduction

For more than 30 years, the 4-H/youth development program has provided an opportunity for American youth and Japanese youth to learn about each other’s culture through a cultural homestay experience. 4-H youth have traveled to Japan to stay in the homes of Japanese families and Japanese youth have traveled to the United States to stay in the homes of American families. The goals of this program have been to help youth from both countries increase their global and cultural competence. 4-H has worked with three Japanese youth development organizations: Labo, Lex and Utrek.

Since 1987, an internship component has been added to the program. Each Japanese organization hires between one and three college-aged young adults from the United States to work in their organization for one year. These young adults are former 4-H members and have participated in the month long exchange programs.

The interns live with host families during their stay. They assist the organization with responsibilities related to the exchange program and they work with youth groups in Japan. In addition, they engage in a cultural project of their choosing, and have some opportunity to engage in cultural experiences in Japan. To date, no study has been conducted to explore the benefits of the internship program on the lives and career choices of the interns. Information gained from this study may be used to help inform and improve the program for future interns, as well as, provide insights useful in the development of other agricultural and extension education international experiences.

Conceptual Framework

The importance of cultural understanding, intercultural communication skills, and foreign language ability is being echoed from a variety of different platforms including the business, governmental, and educational arenas (Dienhart, 2004; Nahavandi, 2003; Williams, 2005).

Over the next 40 years, the average five-year growth rates in the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) are expected to be below 2% while the GDP in many other countries around the globe is predicted to grow in the range of 4% to more than 11% (Crain Communications, 2007). “Opportunities for entrepreneurial growth abound in the global market. In a global economy, our national well-being hinges on future CEO’s, managers, professionals, and entrepreneurs who are competent to conduct business in a global environment” (Kaufman & Johnson, 2005, p.3).

Douglass H. Daft, former Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of The Coca Cola Company stresses that understanding other people and their perspectives is essential to success in our increasingly diverse world (Center for Global Education, 2006). On the other hand, the lack of awareness of other countries’ customs, culture or manners, and etiquette can offend foreign associates and jeopardize business deals (Stoller, 2007). The importance of global education is recognized at both the secondary and higher education levels. According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, “If today’s educated people are to be able to move comfortably in many different cultures, they must have the advantage of a global education.” (Final Report, 2006, p. 6). Acker and Scanes (1998) argue that an international experience is part of a quality education.

Educational institutions at both the secondary and college levels provide important opportunities for students to gain valuable experiences and skills while studying in foreign countries. Although there is a dearth of research which focuses on the benefits of study abroad programs (Langley & Breese, 2005), a number of studies report important benefits. A study conducted by Dwyer and Peters (2004) of alumni of the International Education of
Students Study Abroad Programs found that high school students gained a number of important benefits from the experience. Responses from more than 3,400 alumni who studied in a variety of countries all over the world between 1950 and 1999, indicated that their experience helped them better understand their own cultural values and biases, enabled them to tolerate ambiguity, gave them the ability to view the world and its issues from several perspectives, and impacted their career paths, among other benefits. An impact assessment of the International 4-H Youth Exchange Program (IFYE) found that participants in study abroad programs perceived they were more sensitive to other cultures, more aware of global events, and more involved in community activities than prior to their participation (Boyd et al., 2001). Students in a yearlong study abroad program to Ireland reported a more critical, yet more appreciative view of their own culture (Langley & Breese, 2005). Additionally, as reported by Radhakrishna and Ingram (2005), other researchers have found that study abroad students have increased their awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity, experienced personal growth, and developed skills and attitudes that will allow them to function successfully in an interdependent world.

Living and working in a foreign country places the student in an environment surrounded by models and opportunities to observe behavior considered appropriate for that environment. The process of knowledge acquisition or learning directly correlated to the observation of models is supported by social cognitive theory. According to social cognitive theory, a person’s experiences, environments and behaviors affect how they learn. Effective modeling teaches general rules and strategies for dealing with different situations (Bandura, 1988). As the student evaluates the new experiences through his or her past experiences, new knowledge is acquired which guides his or her behavior in the new setting. The study described here attempted to assess the impact of the 4-H Japanese Internship Program on its participants.

### Purpose and Objectives

The overall purpose of this study was to assess the impact of the 4-H Japanese Intern Program on United States college students who served in the States’ 4-H Japanese Internship Program. The study sought to address the following objectives:

1. To determine the source of motivation for participation in the internship program.
2. To determine how helpful the pre-departure activities were in preparing former interns for the internship experience.
3. To determine the perceived benefits and impact of the internship program on the lives and career choices of former interns.
4. To offer recommendations that may be useful in improving the program for future interns.

### Methodology and Procedures

#### Population, Selection of Sample, and Data Collection

This descriptive study utilized purposive sampling (Henry, 1990). The target population was former interns in the States’ 4-H International Exchange Programs. The accessible population was identified by the three Japanese partner organizations that hired the young adults as interns. The names of current and former interns were requested from Labo, Lex, and Utrek organizations.

Each of the three partner organizations was asked to provide a list of the names and contact information of all interns who had served in their organization since 1987 when the internship program first began. Lists were forwarded to the researcher electronically. One hundred (100) names were received, however all names did
not include contact information. An attempt
was made to locate missing contact
information by contacting the 4-H Youth
Development Educator in each participating
state for contact information. In six cases,
current contact information was obtained. In
total, contact information was obtained for
71 former interns.

Correspondence was sent to each
intern with available contact information.
Due to the fact that some of the available
contact information was likely to be out-
dated, the following procedure was used.
The correspondence was addressed to the
“Name of the Former Intern or Parent of.” If
the correspondence went to the home of the
intern’s parent, it was hoped that the parent
would deliver the letter to the intern at their
current address. The correspondence
included a letter briefly describing the
research study and a Former 4-H Japanese
Intern Interest Form to be completed and
returned to indicate interest in participating
in the study. Those who agreed to participate
were asked to provide their current address
and contact information.

Thirty (30) forms were returned
indicating a desire to participate in the study.
An informed consent form and a copy of the
survey questionnaire were then mailed to the
participant with a self-addressed stamped
return envelope. Returned questionnaires did
not request names or other identifying
information. Three weeks after the initial
mailing, an email reminder was sent to those
who had not yet returned the questionnaire.
Twenty five questionnaires were returned.
An attempt was made to reach the remaining
non-responders by phone. After numerous
attempts, responses to key questions from
the questionnaire were answered by phone
by two additional non-responders. When
phone responses were compared to those
received by mail survey, the responses were
very similar.

Instrumentation

The Marist Abroad Program
Evaluation (Marist College, 2007) was
adapted for use in this study. The 27 item
questionnaire contained a variety of items
measured using: rank-order, forced choice,
5-point Likert-type scale, and open-ended
questions. Items and questions related to the
following topics: motivation and
preparation for participation in the
internship program, positive and difficult
experiences of the internship, benefits of the
internship, advice to others, and
demographic items (gender, age, academic
major and minor, state of residence during
internship, employment status and position).

The instrument was assessed for
content and face validity by a panel of 10
experts consisting of two faculty members
with expertise in research methods, one
faculty member with expertise in diversity
and multiculturalism, one faculty member
with expertise in youth development, one
graduate student in the department of
agricultural and extension education, and
five representatives from the three Japanese
partner organizations. Minor changes were
made to the instrument to increase clarity.
The reliability for the Likert-type scale
portion of the instrument on potential
benefits from the internship experience was
.60. An intraclass correlation coefficient .60
to .79 reflects moderate reliability
(Richman, Makrides, & Prince, 1980).

Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative
methods were used to analyze the data.
SPSS (version 14.0) was used to provide
descriptive statistics for the quantitative data
including frequencies, percentages, means,
and standard deviations.

Responses to open-ended questions
were analyzed using an open coding content
analysis technique. “Content analysis is a
“qualitative data reduction and sense-
making effort that takes a volume of
qualitative material and attempts to identify
core consistencies and meanings.” (Patton,
2002, p. 453). The unit of analysis was
words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs
written in response to the open – ended
questions. Each open-ended response was carefully read to determine the concepts and themes that emerged. Every assertion made in the analysis was documented with no fewer than three examples. The codes that appeared in only one response were eliminated from consideration. To increase consistency in results, three independent reviewers coded the data. Coding among the three reviewers were compared for consistency. The inter-rater reliability rate was approximately 90%.

**Findings**

**Demographics**

A total of twenty-five (25) completed questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 83% of respondents who returned the Former 4-H Japanese Intern Interest Form. The majority (64%) of respondents had internships with the Labo organization, 20% worked with Utrek, and 16% worked with Lex. Most (80%) were male, 20% were female, and the majority (60%) had completed their internship experience more than 8 years ago. Thirty-two percent (32%) served as an intern between three and eight years prior to this study, while eight percent (8%) were interns within the last three years. The age of interns ranged from 16 to 25 years old. The majority were 19, 20 or 21 years old. Interns represented 12 different states covering all regions of the United States.

**Objective 1. Motivation to Participate in the Internship Experience**

Respondents were presented with a list of 13 reasons for going abroad. They were asked to rank up to five objectives from 1 to 5 (1 = highest). The reasons which were ranked highest were: “learn about the host country and culture,” “master a foreign language,” “know myself better/personal growth,” and “adventure.” “Getting away from campus,” “pleasing my parents/relatives,” and “improving my self-confidence” were ranked least important as reasons for traveling abroad. See Table 1.

Table 1

**Intern Rankings of Objectives for Going Abroad (N=25)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>R#1</th>
<th>R#2</th>
<th>R#3</th>
<th>R#4</th>
<th>R#5</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learn about host country/culture</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master a foreign language</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know myself better/personal growth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a work/intern experience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance my resume/transcript</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make new friends</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become multicultural</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be an ambassador for my country</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve self-confidence</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please my parents/relatives</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get away from campus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When asked whether or not their objectives changed while they were abroad, nearly one-half (48%) said their objectives changed “a little.” Several specifically stated that their objectives changed to include learning more about themselves and experiencing personal growth. Others stated they gained more interest in helping others while abroad.

Interns were most likely to learn about the internship program through the 4-H Educator in their state or a previous travel abroad experience. However, when asked who or what most encouraged them to participate in the internships, the most frequent response was “self-motivation/curiosity.” Eighty percent (80%) selected this response. Previous travel abroad (48%), parents (36%), and 4-H Educator (32%) were also mentioned frequently. “Other” responses (3) included a college major in Japanese, and a requirement for an international college program. See Table 2.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Ways intern learned about internship</th>
<th>Who or what most encouraged intern to participate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-H Educator</td>
<td>17 (68)</td>
<td>8 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous travel abroad experience</td>
<td>16 (64)</td>
<td>12 (48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program brochures</td>
<td>8 (32)</td>
<td>4 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-motivation/curiosity</td>
<td>8 (32)</td>
<td>20 (80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned interns</td>
<td>4 (16)</td>
<td>1 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4 (16)</td>
<td>3 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Sibling/Relative</td>
<td>2 (8)</td>
<td>9 (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 25. Percentages do not all add to 100% because of multiple responses

Objective 2. Preparation for Internship

Most interns felt the pre-departure phone meetings and information handouts were either “moderately helpful” (36%) or “very helpful” (28%) (See Table 3). However, more than one-quarter rated these forms of preparation as “slightly helpful” (16%) or “not helpful” (12%). Several open-ended comments were offered to explain the ratings. Several interns indicated that they did not have or remember a pre-departure orientation. It should be noted that the pre-departure orientation was very informal and less structured when the internship program first began. Therefore, early interns may not remember having a “formal” orientation.

A few responses suggested that “it is difficult to learn about the program until you are in Japan experiencing it.” While some respondents stated that they were very prepared, others felt the orientation facilitated by 4-H ended too close to departure, allowing too little time to prepare anything differently.

Labo and Utrek interns received an in-person orientation upon arrival in Japan. The in-person orientation was held in Boston, prior to arrival in Japan for Lex interns. The in-person orientations were rated as “very helpful” by most (56%) and “moderately helpful” by an additional 20%. Fewer (16%) rated the in-person orientation as “slightly helpful” and no one felt it was “not helpful.”
Table 3

Degree of Helpfulness of Pre-Departure and In-Person Orientations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Helpfulness of pre-departure meetings and info handouts</th>
<th>Helpfulness of in-person orientation in Japan or Boston</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Helpful</td>
<td>7 (28%)</td>
<td>14 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Helpful</td>
<td>9 (36%)</td>
<td>5 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Helpful</td>
<td>4 (16%)</td>
<td>4 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not helpful</td>
<td>3 (12%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Respond</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = 25*

When asked what improvements/changes interns would suggest for the orientation/preparation program, the most frequent responses suggested incorporating the previous interns in the orientation process.

*I appreciated the ‘mentor’ the current intern was to me. We were together for about a month before she returned to the U.S. Her experience was good support, and very educational for me.*

*Have past interns from each program at pre-departure orientation so you can get advice/answers from someone who has been there.*

A number of other recommendations were offered by respondents. These included: providing the intern with the handbook prior to leaving the states, providing the interns with a typical day’s schedule, additional in-Japan orientation, holding the orientation at least three weeks before departure, and helping to prepare interns for dealing with culture shock. Additionally, one respondent suggested that interns be given more information on the type of dress they would be expected to wear while working in the office.

Respondents selected the following items most frequently as personal planning activities in preparation for the internship experience: asking questions (60%), studying guidebooks (56%), and speaking to returned interns (32%). Additional beneficial planning activities are listed in Table 4. Those who selected “Other,” listed Japanese language and culture classes, and consultation with university professors as personal planning activities.

Interns were asked for suggestions to help future interns prepare for the internship experience. Three themes emerged from the open-ended responses. The most frequently mentioned suggestions related to learning from the experience of previous and current interns. Typical statements included:

*Match them with a previous intern for a mentoring relationship.*

*Have orientation with previous interns. Have current interns write about their job descriptions.*

Two other themes surfaced as popular suggestions for future interns. These included learning the Japanese language and coming with an open mind, prepared to be flexible. Recommendations on the level of Japanese language study varied among respondents. Specific comments ranged from “study Japanese before going (it’s ok not to know much)” to “learn as much of the language as possible” to “study Japanese intensely prior to leaving!”
The words “open minded,” “flexible,” and “go with the flow” were mentioned many times. Some of the reasons for these suggestions included: “plans can change quickly and unexpectedly,” and “know that you will be surprised by many things (culture and job-related).” A few respondents advised future interns to learn as much as possible about the Japanese culture before going to Japan.

Program Length and Internship Experience

Most interns were satisfied with the length of the program. Eighty percent (80%) said it was “just right.” No one felt the program was “too long,” however, 20% felt it was “too short.” Three respondents (12%) returned home early from their internship. The reasons given were to start classes on time, family problems, and one intern was home sick.

Respondents were asked to describe both the part of the internship that stood out as most positive and as most difficult. Several themes emerged.

Most positive part of the internship

Overwhelmingly, interns felt that the “people experience” was the most positive part of the internship. “People” included host families, new friends, office staff, and the youth they worked with. Relationships and friendships with host families were themes mentioned most often.

My time with my host families. I became really close to them over the year. Becoming a member of a new family made me feel a part of the community and country.

My host family! I loved being part of a family and I still keep in touch with them 14 years later.

Other comments mentioned Japanese people in general.

Great people! I will never forget the specific individuals who impacted my life or the general acceptance or tolerance I felt from the Japanese people.

Part of the internship responsibilities included working with youth groups. Several interns specifically mentioned working with the youth as being a positive experience.

In addition to enjoying the people, the personal growth gained during the internship was another theme that emerged. “Personal growth,” “self-confidence,” and “learning about myself” were some of the
words used to answer this question. The following is a statement from one respondent:

*It is truly amazing how much you change during the year. You see everything from a different perspective, you learn about your own culture, and your values, beliefs, and opinions are tested. You have time to think about things you never thought about before.*

Other aspects mentioned by fewer respondents as the best part of the internship were the ability to travel, explore, and see so much of the country, and the relationships they built with the office staffs.

**Most difficult part of the internship**

The work schedule was a theme that emerged as a most difficult part of the internship. Changing schedules and frequent moves were difficult for some interns. Additional difficulties included: longer work days than many interns were accustomed to; more lengthy work schedules between days off; and frequent changes of host families.

It should be noted that intern schedules vary between the three Japanese partner organizations, and within various districts in the same organization. Therefore, the experiences with schedules and changes of host families are not the same for all interns. Some of the comments below do not apply in every situation. However comments similar to the ones below were made by several respondents.

*Weekly overnight stays with various host families. For instance, for almost one month I was moving around traveling everyday to a new location for my next [assignment]. That means – no breaks from work 24/7 for 30 days at a time.*

*Once in a while having a completely full schedule for weeks was tough.* One respondent added however, *I grew a lot from those trying schedules!*

**Meeting Expectations**

Respondents were asked if the internship met their expectations. Overwhelmingly the answer was “yes.” Of the twenty-three (23) respondents who answered this question, 91% gave an affirmative response. Of these 21, 11 (55%) said the internship had exceeded their expectations. Several specifically mentioned that the internship had a significant impact on their lives.

*It met and exceeded my expectations.*

*It impacted every aspect of my life.*

*It was more than I could ever imagine.*

Several comments stressed the personal growth gained from the experience.

*The confidence and self-insight I gained was priceless.*

*I couldn’t have anticipated that I would grow so much during that year.*

The number of comments about improved Japanese language skills closely matched the number of comments about personal growth. Additionally, several respondents mentioned the rewarding experience of learning about the Japanese culture.

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate how their internship could have been of more value. Several respondents said there was nothing that could have made the experience more valuable, *“It already was one of the most important things I have ever done.”* Learning the Japanese language was another theme which emerged. Several interns would like to have spent more time, or worked harder, at developing their language skills while in Japan. This finding was similar to the findings of Tritz & Martin (1997) who reported on a Slovak Student Exchange.
Benefits of the Internship

Choice of College Major and Career. The internship experience had a direct or indirect impact on the college major or career choice of many of the respondents. For some, the impact was very large. The following responses reflect that impact:

*It had a 100% impact! When I returned I wanted to continue practicing Japanese and help international travelers. So, I went to work as a hotel concierge which evolved into an international travel sales position.*

*I am currently pursuing my Master’s in Counseling because of the opportunity I had to counsel year-long exchange students in Japan.*

*By working with so many students preparing to study abroad as well as those in schools, I realized I wanted to work in education.*

Current employment reported by former interns includes the following: After-School Coordinator for at-risk immigrant youth, 4-H Youth Development Coordinator, High School Japanese teacher, Manager for a Tokyo business, and Event/Program Coordinator. For some respondents, the impact was more indirect such as: working with people of diverse backgrounds, a major in Diplomacy and World Affairs, and a degree in International Marketing.

Long Term Impact and Benefit From Internship Experience. Respondents were asked to think back over the years since they were interns and describe the ways the internship has impacted their life and the life of their family. Additionally, they were asked to explain how they most benefited from their internship experience. Themes related to personal growth emerged. A frequent response was the gain in self-confidence. Descriptors such as “far more confident and adventurous,” “not afraid of anything,” “no goal or challenge seems too difficult anymore,” “to be independent!” were offered.

Another area of personal growth was in increased sensitivity, awareness and acceptance of differences. Some phrases included: “broader perspective,” “more open to the world and new ideas,” “improved my awareness and sensitivity towards others,” “it made me more compassionate to different cultures,” “more aware and empathetic to visitors to the U.S.”

Additionally, the internship experience helped interns learn more about themselves. Typical comments were: “I have benefited from learning whom I want to be instead of what American society has pre-selected for my future.” “...knowing/realizing who I am and my innate worth.”

Several respondents discussed ways that the internship has had a continuing impact on their families. The children of these interns are now hosting Japanese youth in their homes. Others host Japanese chaperones. Values that were learned by the interns are being passed on to their children and other family members. “My family is more culturally aware than most families around and we believe in reaching towards world peace.” “I teach my children that there are many differences in language and culture, but there is not just one right way.”

Respondents were asked to rate a series of statements regarding the benefits of their internship experience using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree. The statements that received the highest percentages of “strongly agree” included: know myself better, am more independent, am more self-confident, am more adaptable to new situations, and have greater respect for other cultures. Responses for all statements are included in Table 5.

Additionally, due to the extended time period between the internship
experience and data collection for some of the respondents, an attempt was made to disaggregate data on this key survey item based on the number of years since the respondent served as an intern, less than 8 years ago or greater than 8 years ago. Items in Table 5 were categorized into three groups based on content of the question: items that related to self, items that related to cultural awareness, and items that related to career plans. An anova was conducted to determine differences in responses based on length of time since the respondent served as an intern. No significant differences were found at the .05 alpha level.

Interns were asked to rate their overall internship experience. Possible response choices included: “no value,” “very little value,” “some value,” “much value” and “of great value.” All (100%) of respondents rated their overall internship experience as being “of great value.”

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating of Potential Benefits From Internship Experience By Interns (N = 25)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am more independent</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have greater respect for other cultures</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know myself better</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more self-confident</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more adaptable to new situations</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have improved my public speaking skills</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more accepting of other’s ideas</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have improved foreign language proficiency in Japanese</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more interested in social issues</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was better prepared to enter the world of work</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am/was more confident about my career plans</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have changed priorities</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had a better relationship with my family</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more interested in the Arts (1=NR)</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have improved foreign language proficiency in languages other than Jap (1=NR)</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NR = No Response; Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 6 = Strongly Agree

Cultural Project

As a part of the internship experience, interns were expected to complete a major independent study project or other structured learning experience involving one or more areas of Japanese culture. Examples of cultural project topics include the study of: anime and manga styles of drawing and animation, the Shamisen and Taiko musical instruments, Japanese cooking, Buddhism and Shinto religions, judo and other martial arts, Japanese literature, and Japanese art forms including pottery.

Several interns stated that the cultural project played a valuable role in increasing their understanding of the Japanese culture and values. “Without understanding more of sport and entertainment aspects, I could not understand Japanese culture as a whole.” “I was able to develop an in-depth knowledge of a particular part of the culture, which in turn helped me understand other parts as well.” Others spoke to the importance of the cultural project in helping them to reflect on their experiences and to share them with others.
In addition to their cultural project, interns were asked to rate the extent to which other activities contributed to their new understanding. Of the choices provided, program activities, informal settings in home stays and social life, and independent travel were rated as having the biggest contributions to their understanding about new cultures, countries, regions, and global issues. The cultural project and organized travel made a smaller contribution to their learning. It should be noted that the requirement of a cultural project was not in place during the early years of the internship program, therefore several interns indicated that they had not completed a cultural project. See Table 6.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating of Extent to Which Activities Contributed to New Understanding</th>
<th>Not At all</th>
<th>Limited Extent</th>
<th>Some Extent</th>
<th>Moderate Extent</th>
<th>Great Extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In informal settings, home stays, and social life</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through independent travel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through program activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through cultural project</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized travel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advice to Future Interns

Advice to future interns encouraged candidates to prepare for both the joys and the stresses of the experience. Be prepared for hard work was one type of advice. “This is a hard job...not just 9-5 each day. Plus, it’s a one-year contract – No Christmas vacation since you will be working.” Other suggestions included finding someone to confide in and building a network to help you during the “challenging times.” “Have another intern on speed dial.”

The majority of suggestions however, encouraged future interns to be open, flexible and willing to “try everything”. Further they were encouraged to “have fun, relax, and enjoy the experience. “Don’t sit at home on weekends! Get a really good subway/train map and learn your way around.” Finally, future interns were advised to immerse themselves in the culture, try to understand the values of the host culture, and to try to “see things from other people’s perspectives.”

When asked if they would recommend this internship to other students, 100% of respondents said “yes.” “Life changing,” “amazing,” and “enhancing experience” were some of the terms used to support their response.

Discussion

The results of this study provide evidence that the 4-H Internship Program with Japanese youth development organizations (Labo, Lex, and Utrek) has important benefits for young adults who participate in the year-long experience. One area of benefits expressed by participants was in the area of personal growth gained while immersed in a different culture.

Most of the time culture is like the air we breathe. We typically take it for granted and rarely think about it consciously. However, immersion in a different culture forces one to consider the
values and beliefs one holds when they come into conflict with the values and beliefs of a different culture. Immersion in a different culture provided interns an opportunity to learn and gain insights about themselves.

Researchers have found several dimensions known to be associated with cross-cultural success and effectiveness. These include among others, flexibility, open-mindedness, self-confidence, tolerance, and adaptability (Kealey, D. J., 1996; Kelly & Meyers, 1995; Williams, 2005). The interns in this study reported benefits in each of these areas as a result of their internship experience. Interestingly, “improving self-confidence” was ranked low as a motivator for participation in the program. However, it clearly was a benefit recognized after the internship experience.

Other skills such as self-reliance, problem-solving, and coping with stress were evident in the experiences shared by interns. Traveling to locations that were new to the interns, across a foreign country, and maintaining demanding schedules all contributed to their personal growth. Additionally, the ability to develop friendships and communicate across cultural differences may benefit former interns as they interact with various cultural groups here in the United States.

This internship program provides young adults with an opportunity to be truly immersed in another culture. A study conducted by Williams (2005) confirmed that “the experience of being abroad in and of itself is not enough – students must interact in the culture to receive the gain of increased intercultural communication skills” (p. 369). Bruening and Frick (2004) also support the importance of experiences in which students have direct contact with different cultures. The interns in this program lived with host families from a different culture and worked in organizations of a different culture for an entire year. This type of program provides the greatest opportunity for interaction with a different culture.

The internship experience has had a continuing impact on the lives of these former interns. For many, it had a direct or indirect impact on their choice of a major and career. And for others, they continue to engage in intercultural activities and share values of tolerance and “appreciation of differences” with their children and other family members.

**Recommendations/Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the present study, the following recommendations are offered for the States’ 4-H Japanese Internship Program:

1. Take advantage of the experiences and expertise of former interns in preparing and transitioning new interns into their positions. Include former interns during the pre-departure orientation.
   - Encourage communication between the current interns and incoming interns. Provide contact information.
   - If possible, bring new interns into their positions a few weeks prior to the return of the current interns to the United States.

2. Hold pre-departure orientation meetings earlier, allowing more time for new interns to make preparations based on the information they receive during the orientation.

3. Incorporate a language skills training/workshop for interns at the beginning of the internship experience to strengthen language skills and prepare interns for immersion into the Japanese speaking environment. The length of the training could vary from one day to one week, depending on the language skill level of the interns.

4. Research should be conducted with the host families in Japan to determine the benefits these families gain from the hosting experience. A
comparison of results from this study and a study of host families can strengthen understanding between the two cultures and help to foster increased positive relationships across the ocean.

5. Recently, the States’ 4-H International Programs Committee has expanded its exchange program to include other countries in addition to Japan. In the future, there may be internship opportunities for these other countries. Results from this study may be useful in the development of future potential internships with other countries.

With the growing demand for cross cultural adaptability in employees in a world where our interests in global issues continue to grow, the 4-H Japanese Internship Program is a valuable opportunity to strengthen the skills of young adults for success in today and tomorrow’s increasingly interdependent world.

The findings of this study support the conceptual value of incorporating international experiences in the educational program of today’s students. These findings are relevant not only for international 4-H programs. The importance of international experiences are applicable to the broader field of agricultural and extension education. Connors (2004) states that as the food, fiber and natural resources system becomes increasingly international, it becomes more vital that future agriculture leaders have the necessary experiences to compete in the global marketplace. In a study by Bruening and Shao (2005), members of the Association for International Agriculture and Extension Education rated internships as one of the most effective teaching methods to enhance learning in international settings. Colleges of agricultural and extension education should explore the feasibility of incorporating internship experiences into the educational program for agricultural and extension education students and faculty. Incorporating international experiences such as these into the classes we teach and curriculum we develop is of paramount importance to make progress toward internationalizing agricultural and extension education.

References


