

Outback Wildcat: Teaching Agricultural Education in the Land Down Under

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Innovative Idea Poster

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

The Institute of International Education (2010) reported that the United States is behind several countries with similar economic stature in developing a sense of global competence in college students. Though the number of American students studying abroad is still limited, it has more than doubled from 1991/1992 to 2005//2006 (Institute of International Education, 2006). Reasons for the lack of interest or involvement in study abroad at the undergraduate level vary. Dolby (2005) found that US students' strong national identity prevents them from exploring the possibility of global experiences while Salisbury et al. (2009) believed it was the socio-economic status and the amount of capital resources retained prior to college admission. However, Bunch et al. (2013) believed the barriers and motivators were different at every university after comparing students between two land grant institutions.

Nonetheless, positive attributes are acknowledged when students expand their travels and scholastic studies internationally. Research in 2004 revealed study abroad having a significant impact on students' continued language use, academic attainment measures, intercultural and personal development, and career choices (Dwyer, 2004). Agricultural education is no different. In a study conducted by Foster et al. (2014), positive results were found in students participating in an established study abroad course. Some of the results were: sustained change in the cultural knowledge, perceptions of knowledge, perceptions of skills, and perceptions of dispositions related to global competency.

How it Works/Methodology

A partnership was established with Charles Sturt University in the New South Wales state of Australia and The Scots School in Bathurst, Australia. In a program coined, "Outback Wildcat" agricultural education students are selected to student teach for half of their capstone semester in Australia under the supervision of trained teacher education faculty at Charles Sturt University. Participating student teachers from the University of Kentucky will pay their normal tuition cost. Furthermore, students at Charles Sturt University are allowed to attend the University of Kentucky (UK) at the cost of their own university's set tuition. The partnership is set up on a 1:1 attendance ratio.

Agricultural Education students interested in the student teaching experience will complete an application, participate in an interview, and be expected to meet a variety of expectations (3.2 cumulative grade point average, record of leadership success, maturity growth, etc.). Considering the academic calendar in Australia, UK student teachers are assigned a domestic cooperating teacher for their first two months (January & February) and complete their final two months (March & April) at the assigned agricultural education program in Australia. Cultural growth and competency evaluations are collected three times during the international experience and qualitative data is collected on a weekly basis.

Results to Date/Implications

Two students participated and completed the pilot program during the spring 2014 academic semester. In addition, a faculty member within the College of Education at Charles Sturt University received training necessary for the successful completion and teacher certification of all Kentucky post-secondary students.

Ninety secondary youth received Agricultural Science instruction from the two pre-service teachers. During the international student teaching experience, the pre-service teachers participated in five Supervised Agricultural Experience home visits; three regional and national livestock shows; two regional equestrian competitions, and numerous extracurricular school activities. Student teachers maintained daily and weekly journals to highlight their experiences and document the multicultural growth and understanding of the cultural dynamic observed and taught. Finally, five students have completed applications and participated in interviews for the upcoming 2015 “Outback Wildcat” agricultural education student teaching experience.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Future goals of the “Outback Wildcat” program as it relates to the student teachers includes: (a) expansion into the fall semester and (b) growth of agricultural education student teacher placements throughout the Bathurst region. Once the partnership is secure and quality relationships are established it is the intent of the UK agricultural education program to (c) establish a secondary agricultural education teacher exchange during each countries summer break and (d) create a two-week international course for undergraduate agricultural education students to participate in field experience observations. Finally, throughout the exchange the professors at each partnering university look to (e) evaluate cultural awareness gained and transition of cultural competence to secondary domestic classrooms.

Cost/Resources Needed

The “Outback Wildcat” program entailed a variety of expenses. Each participating student in the pilot project received a \$1000 scholarship toward his or her tuition cost. Nonetheless, each student was responsible for their transportation to and from countries (~\$1600); room and board provided by The Scots School (\$3200); study abroad fees (~\$200); and incidentals (\$500). The Scots School provided the student teachers with transportation while living in Bathurst. Charles Sturt University provided housing during the Easter break and weekend activities when school were not in session. In the future, participating student teachers are eligible for scholarships from the University’s study abroad office and College of Agriculture, Food and Environment. It is the intent of the program faculty to establish an endowment to assist students with travel expenses.

Costs and Funding Sources Associated with Participation

There are several noteworthy features of mechanism to fund students who participated in the pilot project. Each participating student received a \$1000 scholarship toward tuition cost. Nonetheless, each student was responsible for her own transportation to and from Australia (~\$1600); room and board provided by The Scots School (\$3200); study abroad fees (~\$200); and incidentals (\$500). The Scots School provided the student teachers with transportation while living in Bathurst. Charles Sturt University provided housing during the Easter break and weekend activities when school were not in session. We anticipate that, in the future, participating student teachers will be eligible for scholarships from the University’s Education Abroad office and College of Agriculture, Food and Environment. It is the intent of the program faculty to establish an endowment to assist students with travel expenses.

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