

Argentinian Agricultural Teachers Experience NC Agricultural Education

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Introduction/Need for Innovative Idea

When one thinks of studying abroad, we immediately think of the college student who decides to spend their spring break or summer in another country enrolling in courses or experiencing a new culture. However, study abroad opportunities are not limited to only college students. Many universities offer global and international programs for working adults seeking to expand their professional development. While several aspects of these experiences may differ between the various groups (youth, college students, adults), some of the motivations for traveling abroad are similar including personal growth, increase in life skills, and gain in knowledge (Besili, Warner, Kirby, & Jones, 2016; Stone & Petrick, 2013).

At NC State University through a global training initiative, 24 educators from agriculture high schools across Argentina spent two weeks engaging in workshops, field trips, and policy exploration in North Carolina and Washington, D.C. The main purpose of this innovative field experience in international agricultural education was to showcase exemplary secondary agricultural education programs in North Carolina to the Argentinian group. In addition, university faculty sought to provide opportunities for discussions and collaboration between North Carolina agriculture teachers and the visiting Argentinian teachers.

How It Works

An initial meeting was held between program coordinators in the campus international and global engagement office and university agricultural education faculty to discuss the program objectives and the goals of the Argentinian agricultural educators. The content specific interests of the visiting educators were used to identify local secondary agricultural education programs with those areas of focus for site visits. University faculty also sought the involvement of current undergraduate agricultural education students who were fluent in Spanish. This provided a unique opportunity for NC State University students to share their experiences in high school agriculture education programs and their desire to return to the classroom as an educator. At each school visit, the Argentinian educators were given a tour of the school and facilities and provided an opportunity to engage with current FFA officers and students, school administrators, and agriculture teachers. In addition, one field trip took the Argentinian educators to a farm specifically focused on promoting agriculture to minority urban youth. Following the visits, the educators completed an evaluation survey. Professional translators were provided and assisted the group on all visits since most of the Argentinian group did not speak English, nor did the majority of the North Carolina teachers speak Spanish.

Results to Date/Implications

From the evaluation forms completed by the Argentinian agricultural teachers, they were collectively impressed with the motivation and passion of the students that they interacted with during the secondary agricultural education program tours. They also emphasized that the

students demonstrated strong leadership skills and confidence in their desire to enroll in agricultural education and FFA. In comparison to their schools in Argentina, facilities and program focus were different than the North Carolina agricultural education programs visited. Argentine agricultural schools focus more on production agriculture and the entire process from start to finish in agricultural production and processing whereas the Argentinian agricultural teachers did not seem to observe this focus in the local North Carolina programs. Another difference that was shared from the Argentinian agricultural teachers was the autonomy that American students have in choosing the agricultural courses that they want to take as students in Argentina completed predetermined course pathways.

In addition, one of the unexpected results observed by university faculty was the positive rapport that was built between the native Spanish speaking students and the Argentinian group. One of the students even took a small group of the visiting educators to the local farmers market on the weekend because he enjoyed the personal interaction with the group.

The North Carolina agriculture teachers also benefited from this experience. They echoed that it was a unique opportunity to provide their native Spanish speaking FFA members a chance to interact with groups who had similar cultures. Through the discussions between both groups of teachers, university faculty have been charged with developing a similar experience for North Carolina agriculture teachers to visit Argentinian agriculture programs.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Based on the experiences of program coordinators, program participants, and agricultural education programs, incorporating international and culturally diverse components into agricultural education programs has great value and interest among students and educators. Opportunities to collaborate and host international agricultural education professionals should be pursued by secondary and post-secondary agricultural education programs. Currently, the university faculty are working with the Office of Global Engagement to further explore this opportunity for a study abroad opportunity for our North Carolina agricultural educators.

One important piece of advice related to the school visits is the importance of planning. To assist with the check-in process at each school, names of each individual visiting was submitted to the school two weeks ahead of time. This allowed for the pre-printing of name badges and made the check-in security process smoother.

Costs/Resources Needed

The cost associated with this project were minimal to the departmental faculty largely due to the involvement of the Office of Global Engagement. All costs were coordinated through their office related to the Argentinian group's visit. Speaking solely on the visits to the schools, the cost was minimal. Departmental university vans were used to transport participants to the schools. Translators were provided as a part of the program, and our Spanish speaking students volunteered their time. Lunch during the visits was paid for by the Office of Global Engagement.

References

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