

Grab Your Passport: An Interactive Course Dynamic for Internationalization of Agriculture
Education

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Introduction

In today's globalized climate, it is essential to develop students, or global citizens, who are capable and knowledgeable about current world issues and confident working with individuals of various backgrounds and cultures. Moore et al. (2009) suggested undergraduate students in agriculture lack competencies in "agricultural policies, products, peoples, and cultures." Previous research suggests that studying away, studying abroad, or similar international experiences aid in developing these global competencies among students (Bletscher et al., 2022; Calley, 2021). However, study away and international experiences have barriers for many undergraduate and graduate students, including money, distance from home, language, and safety concerns (Heinert & Roberts, 2016). Thus, increasing internationalization through domestic or community-based measures will be an essential addition to university curriculum to continue meeting the workforce demands for global competitiveness (Bagayawa et al., 2024). Our team at Texas A&M University conducted an innovative, interactive activity for undergraduate students that addressed the need to internationalize agriculture education, especially for students unable to participate in activities abroad.

How It Works

The "Grab your Passport Activity" is part of the ALEC 350 Global Agricultural Issues course at Texas A&M University. During the Fall of 2022 and Spring of 2023, 58 undergraduate students from majors across Texas A&M University completed the course and were part of this study. Each student received a passport book at the beginning of the semester and were requested to complete at least three engagement and four education activities. While engagement activities were focused on students' active interaction and immersion in international dimensions of agriculture, educational activities were focused on increasing their knowledge and awareness about some of the most pressing agricultural issues. Engagement activities included but were not limited to interviewing an international scholar, eating at an international restaurant, volunteering at local partner organizations, and engaging in cross-cultural events across campus. On the other hand, educational activities included previously selected documentaries on streaming platforms, online and in-person conferences, and virtual farm tours. Students were requested to document their passports with proof of activities completed and a reflective journal of their experiences, including their learning outcomes and perceived academic gains.

Results & Implications

Most students acknowledged their unfamiliarity with many organizations and activities available within the community and campus focused on international agriculture. Students were able to interact with the broad scientific community at Texas A&M University by interviewing an international scientist, in which students expanded their understanding of the role of research in agriculture worldwide. Similarly, undergraduate students affirmed that they should increase their awareness of contemporary agriculture issues through global lenses. For example, several students learned how agricultural innovations vary across geographic areas and how contextual factors influence the development and adoption of agricultural innovations. In their passport, one student detailed a documentary, "[it] was a powerful look into Indigenous American movements

to reclaim identity through agriculture.” Likewise, engagement activities cultivate a sense of belonging in the students' community. “This has been some of the most rewarding work I’ve done. I love giving back and bettering the community I love so much,” wrote one student. Several students felt more integrated in their community through volunteering opportunities and exploring multicultural gastronomic and cultural experiences. Overall, students rated the Grab Your Passport activity as highly positive and influential in their development as global citizens; many affirmed never having previous exposure to global contexts and having developed an interest in international agricultural issues.

Future Plans & Advice to Others

This activity is just one example of opportunities for students to engage in cultural and internationally focused experiences from within their university location. Future plans for this activity include collaborating with even more community partners, institutional staff, or international offices, or even including an international partner class or pen pals to meet with virtually or through written form so students can learn from each other's cultures. Advice for hosting this activity would be to confirm your community has a broad range of cultural experiences, diverse gastronomic offerings, volunteer opportunities, and cross-cultural events for students to engage in. Understanding the resources available to your students before administering the course activity will be essential to ensure students find success through the project. Likewise, purchasing passport booklets for students to log their experiences is an ideal way to connect the international piece of the experiences paired with reflection. Lamm et al. (2013) confirmed, “The goal is to create an international experience which encourages discussion, reflection, and integration of key cultural aspects into U.S.-based classrooms,” (p. 17). Thus, identifying other activities and resources that are digitally and physically accessible to students and faculty will continue to expand opportunities to increase global competence and develop global citizens.

Cost & Resources Needed

Costs endured by the professor throughout this project included the initial purchase of passport booklets from an online craft or supplies store, which averaged from .50 cents to \$1.00 per passport. Thus, the total cost spent to employ the activity for this course was approximately \$50.00. However, students might encounter other costs due to the nature of the activities, including eating at restaurants or other interactive experiences. In general, though, due to the low-cost nature of this activity, there is potential for students to yield high experiential outcomes and have a favorable opportunity cost by gaining global competencies not easily gained from another classroom curriculum.

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