

# Investigating Barriers to International Experiences through Experiential Education

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# Background

- International study in agricultural education began in the 1970s.
- The 1982 Florida Task Force found that global education has been defined as a process that provides students and individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for them to meet their responsibilities as citizens of their community, state, and nation in an increasingly interdependent and complex global society (Ibezim & McCracken, 1994).



# Literary Review

- Acker & Scanes (1998) noted the primary reason for the existence of a college of agriculture is to provide a quality education as a foundation for lifelong learning.
- Bruening and Frick (2004) identified what companies want today: graduates with cross-cultural experiences and foreign language skills.



# Literary Review

- Zhai (2004) identified cultural interaction as the underlying theme to creating cultural sensitivity and respect among students.
- Bruening and Shao's (2005) study supported the notion that experiential education is beneficial in international instruction.



# Purpose

- The purpose of this qualitative case-study was to benchmark students' beliefs and reactions to participating in an international research setting in South Texas and Northeastern Mexico.



# Texas A&M Students at Arrowhead Ranch, South Texas



# Objectives

- Assess students' pre-experience cultural awareness and beliefs about agriculture, socioeconomics, and environmental issues in Mexico.
- Record students' post-experience cultural awareness and beliefs about agriculture, socioeconomics, and environmental issues in Mexico.
- Compare and contrast initial beliefs with actual reported experiences.



# Methods

- Students traveled to Texas-Mexico border locations.
- Students observed natural resource experts from Mexico.
- Students visited several “colonias” to observe living conditions in south Texas.





# Methods

- Pre-trip: students participated in a pre-reflection exercise to benchmark their cultural awareness, and beliefs about agriculture, socioeconomic, environment, and politics in Mexico.
- Post-trip: students participated in a post-reflection exercise to compare and contrast initial beliefs with their actual experiences.



# Results

- Initial Beliefs About Mexico
- Initial Beliefs About Mexican Agriculture Systems
- Barriers to International Participation



# Initial Beliefs About Mexico

- **Pre-Reflection**

- Safety
- Language Barrier
- Poorly Educated
- Strong Faith & Family
- Little or No Technology
- Distinct Social Classes
- Not Accepting of U. S.

- **Post-Reflection**

- Distinct Social Classes
- Migrant Workers Important to U. S. Economy
- Colonias Equivalent to U. S. Neighborhoods
- Very Hospitable People, Willing to Learn and Teach



# Initial Beliefs About Mexican Agriculture Systems

- **Pre-Reflection**

- Old Farming Techniques
- Family Ranches
- Inferior Product Quality
- Minimum Manual Expenses
- Traditional Practices (lack of technology)
- No Regulations

- **Post-Reflection**

- Technologically Advanced
- Lots of Knowledge
- Same Equip., Practices & Worries as U. S.
- Willing to Change and Adapt Accordingly
- Lack of Educational Measures



A man in a red and white shirt is seen from behind, spraying a green plant in a field. Two other people are standing nearby, one in a light green shirt and one in a white shirt. The background is a grassy field with trees.

**Individual Plant  
Treatment  
Demonstration at  
Los Novillos Ranch,  
South Texas**

# Internal Barriers

*Those attitudes a student feels would hinder his ability to effectively embrace and assimilate into that culture or environment, preventing him from participating in international agricultural development activities.*

- **Pre-Reflection**

- Language Barrier
- Safety
- Being away from family and friends

- **Post-Reflection**

- Language Barrier
- Safety
- Cultural Barrier



# External Barriers

*Those factors that a student has no control over that would prevent him from participating in international agricultural development activities.*

- **Pre-Reflection**

- Safety
- Language Barrier
- Money
- Time/distance

- **Post-Reflection**

- Language Barrier
- Money
- Cultural Barrier



# Texas Mexico Field Demonstrations at La Reforma Ranch, Tamaulipas, Mexico





# Conclusion

- Students initial beliefs of Mexico changed significantly once the students crossed the border and interacted with the Mexican culture.
- Students changed their initial beliefs about Mexican Agriculture Systems once the students interacted with Mexican producers, visited their ranches and viewed agricultural demonstrations.



# Conclusion

- Students internal and external barriers remained the same, for the most part, noting that the barriers can be easily remedied.
  - The major barrier to me taking a long-term trip or job in Mexico is obviously the language barrier; however, that is something that could be easily remedied. --Student 001
  - The internal barriers that prevent me from international research is my lack of being able to speak other languages, fear of traveling to another country, and not knowing how to relate to other cultures. --Student 007



# Recommendations

- Understanding the barriers that prevent students from participating in international agricultural programs allows for programmatic changes that increase understanding and sensitivity of other cultures, globalizing education.



# Literature Cited

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# Project Supporters



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