

A Course Expanding the International Perspective Of Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

How do we prepare undergraduate students in agricultural sciences in the U.S. for productive professional careers in an increasingly interdependent world and global economy? If our students are completing their undergraduate careers without any cross cultural experiences and with little knowledge of global cultural and geographical diversity, we, as university educators, are not adequately preparing them for a career in today's world. This treatise describes an educational model in the Department of Agronomy at Purdue University which taps the remarkable international human resources within the University community and uses these resources effectively in the undergraduate classroom to introduce undergraduate students to the world.

Introduction

Wood (1991) declares that global education is central to developing graduates who can work effectively in the modern, interdependent world. He suggests that the challenge to U.S. higher education is to develop persons "who can see problems in a multidimensional framework and who can empathize with people from other cultures." He states that this empathy can be facilitated by students' "understanding of the nuances of other cultures' ways of thinking." Similarly, Schuh (1988) emphasizes the need for greater internationalization of higher education, noting that U.S. agriculture has increasingly become part of an international food and agriculture system. Eckert and Nobe (1983) agree that compelling reasons for providing an international perspective in undergraduate educational programs include; 1) enhanced American competitiveness in world markets, 2) greater national security and 3) provision of famine relief and support for other international development efforts. Some argue that an in-depth understanding of our connectedness as fellow inhabitants within the Earth system and of our cultural diversity contributes significantly to political stability and world peace. World population is expected to rise from 5.4 billion in 1991 to 8.5 billion in 2025 with approximately 94% of this growth in the less developed countries (Myers, 1991).

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Baum (1988) refers to a metaphor which effectively illustrates the concept of "global village" and adds the kind of perspective which often escapes U.S. students who lack a global view. "If this metaphorical village consists of 100 families then some 90 do not speak English and 65 cannot read. Some 80 families have no members who have flown on airplanes and 70 have no drinking water at home. About 60 families occupy 10 percent of the land while seven families own 60 percent of the land. Seven families consume 80 percent of all available energy, and only one family in the village has a university education." Others have argued that an international dimension adds significantly to the value of agricultural curricula (Brandt, 1987 and Kellogg, 1984). Brandt refers to "cultural illiteracy" as he characterizes the lack of international perspective which typifies many undergraduate students. He urges the adoption of broader international content across the curricula as well as through courses with specialized focus on international agriculture and related topics. In addition to these means of internationalizing the curricula, Kellogg (1984) reviews other commonly utilized approaches including study abroad programs and international internships with multinational industries. All agree that there is no better way to gain international perspective than to travel and to gain meaningful experiences through "immersion" in other cultures. However, most students are constrained financially or by time commitments and are unable to participate in such international programs. Brandt (1987) and Kellogg (1984) recognize that the international graduate students on each of our campuses represent a rich cultural resource which should be tapped to enhance the international perspective of undergraduates. This conceptual approach forms the backbone of a course at Purdue University entitled "Global Awareness." The objective of this paper is to share some of the details of course organization along with student comments after six semesters of developmental work with the course. The basic course design presented should extend readily to other campuses as a means of enhancing the international perspective of students in a very cost effective way.

Course Overview

"Global Awareness" has been taught six times since the Spring of 1988 as a means to broaden the international perspective of students while they are a part of our multinational campus environment. Upon completion of the course,

students are expected to have gained a heightened awareness of a) the rich diversity of the agriculture, culture, and geography of people from around the world, b) the deep and fundamental concept of global interdependence, and c) the fact that we are clearly citizen of the same "global village". The class draws students from a wide array of majors from most of the academic schools on campus. Enrollment in this elective course has grown steadily, beginning with 26 students in one section in 1988 and growing to 100 students (two sections, 50 each) for each of the last two semesters.

The course is listed for "variable credit." Students may enroll for one, two or three hours of credit for a semester. All students who enroll in the course must enroll for a minimum of one credit which requires attendance at a weekly presentation primarily made by graduate students and visiting scholars from countries other than the U.S. Approximately 45% of the class take the course for only 1 hour of credit.

As with most major colleges and universities, Purdue has a large international student enrollment. In 1992/1993 Purdue's international (non U.S.) enrollment was 2403 from 98 countries. Of this total, 1793 were graduate or professional students and 610 were undergraduate students. With a total 1992/1993 enrollment of 35,833 on the main Purdue campus, 6.7% or one out of every fifteen students in our classrooms comes from abroad (McLauchlan, 1992). These figures are likely to be representative of most major U.S. campuses and illustrate the remarkable international resource which can be tapped to enhance the global awareness of students. In 1992/1993, Purdue's international population included 184 undergraduate and graduate students in the School of Agriculture. The international perspectives of these individuals plus those of our foreign-born faculty are particularly valuable as teaching resources in classes. International guest speakers in our Global Awareness class have been asked to share personal insights about the physical (climate, geography, geology, land resources, environment) and cultural (history, economics, political system, family traditions, social structure, leisure time) features of their countries.

An informal classroom setting is maintained and the students are encouraged to enter into dialogue with the speakers when possible. Course coordination includes the scheduling of speakers to provide a balanced perspective of the cultural and geographic diversity of the globe. Speakers are pre-screened by referral from colleagues with respect to their ability to relate comfortably to an undergraduate student audience. Speakers are provided with a general outline of topic areas which they are requested to cover in whatever fashion is effective for them. Support is provided for speakers who request assistance with the preparation of slides, maps, or other resources which will enhance the effectiveness of their presentations. To promote active listening and discussion and to help to evaluate all students for one credit, every student is asked to complete a one page outline of the key points of each week's presentation. This is graded as satisfactory or unsatisfactory and returned to students.

Grades for those registered for one credit hour only are based on attendance, class participation, and a satisfactory written summary of each presentation.

Invariably the invited speakers (graduate students/visiting scientists) have welcomed the opportunity to present a more accurate picture of their nation than they feel our U.S. students have received through the mass media. The speakers have consistently provided a far more in-depth perspective on the fiber of their national cultures and economies than could possibly have been conveyed in written word or through a brief clip in a television news report. In effect our students are in position to experience each of the cultures they are exposed to as vignettes are conveyed and illustrations are colored with personalized commentary.

Presentations over the past six semesters including the Spring of 1993 have represented peoples from across the globe and have consistently gone beyond the presentation of topical information to convey a unique sense of each culture as only a native of each land can do. Fifteen class meetings per semester allow presentations on as many topics. The international guest speakers typically have been quite pleased to speak again during subsequent semesters while they remain on campus. The following is a consolidated list of the presentations made in the Global Awareness course over the past six years including 1993:

Orientation. Getting acquainted with planet Earth.

Africa: South African Dilemma; History and People of the Horn of Africa; The African Challenge; Zaire: The Heart of Africa; Niger; Tanzania - the Land of Mount Kilimanjaro; Liberia--Its Culture and Agriculture.

Asia: Mongolia; China, Land of One Billion People; India - Land of Diversity; Japan - Past, Present, and Future; Thailand; Bangladesh: The Land of Natural Challenges; Indonesia;

Europe: Iceland; The Isle of Sark - A Channel Isle; Former Yugoslavia: Deeply Rooted Conflict; Dramatic Changes Come to Ukraine; A New Hungary; Poland 500 Years After Copernicus; Bulgaria; Italy, the Boot of the Mediterranean; European Community; Turkey - Where East Meets West; Roaming Around Holland; Germany - with and without the Wall; Ireland - A Visit to the Emerald Isle; Great Britain - Culture, History, and Agriculture; European Community: Is Unity Possible? Eastern Europe, the European Community and U.S. Agriculture.

Latin America: Columbia 500 Years After Columbus; Argentina: Its Culture and Agriculture; Venezuela: Its Culture and Agriculture; Brazil: South American Colossus; Mexico - Land of Contrasts.

Middle East: Iraq and Her Neighbors.

Requirements for Two Credit Hours

To earn a second credit hour, students must identify an international topic of interest and prepare a scrapbook which contains a weekly addition of at least one current article on this topic as reported in a non-local newspaper or news magazine. Each addition must include documentation of the source (e.g. "New Trade Barriers In The European Marketplace", Joe Watson, Chicago Tribune, Monday,

December 23, 1991, p. 1). This encourages students to become involved with the reading of international news as they follow the unfolding of world history on a topic of their choice through the eyes of correspondents in other lands. In this manner students have had the opportunity to chronicle such major events in world history as the collapse of the former Soviet Union, fall of the Berlin wall, the Gulf war, military intervention to guarantee safe distribution of food relief in Somalia, and the building of conflict in the region which was Yugoslavia. Approximately 30% of the class chooses the two credit option.

Requirements for Three Credit Hours

A third credit hour may be earned through the preparation of a written treatise of an international topic, preferably related to the topic used for the student's scrapbooks. Course coordinators work with the students to define their topics and to help them identify and gather the resources they need to do a quality job of probing their topic. The primary objective is to have the students demonstrate an in-depth understanding of their selected topics. Approximately 25% of the class choose the three credit option.

Need Knowledge of Global Geography

The popular press has been replete with commentary about the woeful level of U.S. citizens' knowledge of global geography. Our surveys of undergraduate students have confirmed that their awareness of global geography is seriously deficient. As a means of focusing on this need, the students are "pop" quizzed on their knowledge of world geography at regular intervals during the semester. An example of one of these quizzes is included below:

1. Match the capital cities with the appropriate country or state by writing the appropriate letter by each country name:

Colombia (30%)	a) Khartoum	Somalia (60%)	b) London
Sudan (70%)	c) Bogota	Philippines (30%)	d) Paris
Turkey (60%)	e) Ottawa	Kenya (32%)	f) Mogadishu
Argentina (30%)	g) New Delhi	Canada (3%)	h) Manila
England (0%)	i) Buenos Aires	India (40%)	j) Ankara
	k) Nairobi		

The numbers in parentheses represent the percentages of students in Spring 1991 who did not indicate the correct response in each case. The correct answers are Bogota, Colombia; Mogadishu, Somalia; Khartoum, Sudan; Manila, Philippines; Ankara, Turkey; Nairobi, Kenya; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Ottawa, Canada; London, England; and New Delhi, India.

2. Name three OPEC countries. Of the 1991 spring semester students, 47% correctly named three; 20% named two, 15% named one, and 18% named none. Founding OPEC countries in 1960 include Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela; added in 1970s were Algeria, Ecuador, Gabon, Indonesia, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar and United Arab Emirates.

3. Name six of the twelve nation members of the European Community. Nine percent of the students correctly identified six; 21% named five; 28% named four, and 42%

named three or less. In order of entry into EC, members include Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom, Greece, Portugal, and Spain.

An example of another kind of quiz is given in Figure 1.



Figure 1. AFRICA. Most of the more than 40 nations of Africa have gained their independence since 1950. Dramatic changes--political, economic and social--continue to surge throughout the continent. Famine, refugee resettlement, racial tensions and tribal conflicts are still major problems in many countries. How many of the numbered independent nations can you identify?

The correct answers are noted below. Numbers in parentheses indicate the percent of the Spring 1991 students missing each national identity.

1. Libya (60%)	6. Niger (86%)	11. Chad (88%)
2. Algeria (83%)	7. Kenya (90%)	12. Tanzania (95%)
3. Egypt (48%)	8. Somalia (86%)	13. Angola (90%)
4. Sudan (69%)	9. Mali (88%)	14. Namibia (93%)
5. Ethiopia (64%)	10. Nigeria (95%)	15. South Africa (31%)

Course Evaluations

Students are asked to complete an evaluation of the course at the end of each semester. The following questions and student responses are sample excerpts from five semester evaluations which have been completed on this course through Spring 1992:

Question 1. What was the most interesting, helpful, beneficial aspect of the course?

"This course has made me realize how developed they are compared to U.S. development. I've always thought of some of these countries being extremely underdeveloped until seeing the slides of some of their cities and agriculture. Also the statistics on climate, location, size, etc. were very interesting and sometimes amazing."

"I learned how ethnocentric Americans are. This is the thing I will remember the most from this class."

"The aspect that has been most appealing to me about this course is the chance I have been given to visit foreign

lands, people, and cultures that I otherwise would have not seen or learned of. ...Each country was presented by an individual who lived, worked, and was raised there. Thus we got a more authentic and actual description of the countries."

"I learned a lot about the world. A class like this is fantastic for those of us who have come from small, isolated farming communities in the Midwest."

"Classroom trips!!! Planned to let the less fortunate travel."

Question 2. Have your ideas or perceptions of the world and its people changed in any way as a result of your participation in this course? If so, how?

"I have just begun to understand the world and its varied ways. Because of this course I am going to put forth an honest effort to study the world."

"The huge picture of what is going on out there has opened my eyes a little from the secluded life here in the States."

"I now think that those people who live in third world countries and survive are about the bravest people in the world."

"I love to learn about how things differ in countries other than our own. This class really sparked an inspiration in me to learn more about the world and even try to do my part in improving things in the world."

Question 3. What recommendations would you make to improve the course?

"I wish I weren't graduating. I'd love to take this course again."

"I wouldn't change any aspect of this course. It was very well organized and the speakers were informative. They were genuinely interested in sharing their culture with the class and their enthusiasm was evident in their presentations."

"My most interesting course. (My being an engineering major might explain this)."

Conclusion

Former U.N. Secretary General Javier Pérez De Cuéllar provided an eloquent summary of global interdependence in his forward to the U.N. publication "Global Outlook 2000." He noted that "The Charter of the United Nations encourages us to think in terms of common humanity and shared basic human needs. The web of ties which locks all parts of the world together, the urgency of finding solutions to social and economic problems and the increasing salience of such global issues as food security the environment, energy and international finance, to name but a few, further underline the need for a global approach." Our course is targeted at the accomplishment of a change in student perspective relative to the world in which they live. Our goal is that they share in a global perspective which includes the people of every nation in the human community. The best assessment of the success of this course in broadening the global perspective is conveyed by the students themselves through other course evaluation comments.

"Awareness of my world has given me a self-image that

I had never experienced before. It made me feel inadequate in my global education and made me realize the importance of other countries which I previously thought (out of ignorance) were insignificant. I was wrong."

"This course brought the world to Purdue. For many of us we could not 'see' the world any other way. Excellent experience."

"My perceptions of the people throughout the world have changed. I now realize that we are the same and that racism and prejudice have no room to exist."

"It has definitely widened my knowledge of the world and its countries and cultures. I have learned to enjoy global events. I now stop and read articles concerning foreign affairs in newspapers and magazines instead of just turning to the sports."

After six semesters of teaching "Global Awareness" we are encouraged by the consistently positive feedback from the students. Enrollment has grown and students have openly shared their excitement with us. Old stereotypes about people and cultures have fallen away and greater understanding of world geography and the human community has been built. Clearly the students have valued this opportunity to expand their global awareness through interaction with a part of the international campus community with which they can identify. Perhaps teaching faculty in other schools and colleges of agriculture can implement this approach to internationalization of the curriculum with success equal to that which we have enjoyed at Purdue.

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