

Using Reflective Journals to Compare an International Faculty-led Study Tour and Student Internship Experience

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Abstract

The globalization of society presents the need for intercultural communications skills. International experiences impact students' global perceptions, which affect the agricultural industry's future. This study sought to determine agricultural students' values and how these values influenced their perceptions regarding their unique international experiences. Students from four universities who participated in a three-week faculty-led study tour (N = 11) were compared to University of Arkansas students who participated in a six-week internship (N = 5) in Ghent, Belgium. Students used reflective journals to record their perceptions, and a content analysis was conducted to identify emergent themes. Students from both experiences struggled most when communicating with researchers, but they gained confidence as they successfully served an international client. Host families were the most pressing concern for students, but those family stays were impactful in exposing students to Belgian culture. Students sought normalcy by comparing Europe to America and stepped up as leaders when faculty guides were not present. Regardless of whether students were led by a faculty member (study tour) or navigated the international experience predominately on their own (internship), each found value in studying internationally. Previous research recommended placing students in international settings to increase students' knowledge of global agriculture, and this concept is reinforced by this study.

Key Words

Reflective journals, international internships and study tours, agricultural communications.

Introduction

Since the last half of the 20th Century, the structure of American agriculture has changed significantly through the introduction of new technologies and growing integration of agricultural sectors into national and global markets (Dimitri, Effland, & Conklin, 2005). Globalization and consolidation have accelerated the pace of business and diversified populations, thus increasing the need for agricultural businesses to adapt (Farm Credit Council, 2006) in an effort to better connect and maintain relationships with new international consumers, competitors, and collaborators (Dimitri et al., 2005). Further, technological advancements continue to reduce communication barriers, making partnerships with distant nations much easier. The United States is involved in a "global era," and

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education is needed to train individuals for the responsibility of living in a progressively interconnected world (Nehrt, 1993).

Because those possessing global competence are becoming a necessity in this worldwide environment (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007), colleges have been advised to modify curricula to provide students with tools to not only “contribute to knowledge, but also to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate its meaning in context of an increasingly globalized world” (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2004, p. 2). In a survey of 302 employers, 67% of respondents desired a greater emphasis on training college students to recognize the “global context of situations and decisions” (Hart Research Associates, 2010, p. 1). While greater attention has been paid toward globalization and cultural diversity in higher education (Roberts, Conner, & Jones, 2013), agricultural graduates lack the global competence employers expect (Chang et al., 2013). Further complicating the issue, fewer agricultural students are participating in global experiences (Bunch, Lamm, Israel, & Edwards, 2013).

Between 2010 and 2012, the field saw a -5.7% change in the number of study-abroad agricultural students from the United States (Institute of International Education, 2014). To overcome this skill deficiency, U.S. employers spend millions of dollars on intercultural training annually (Hunter, 2004). Agricultural programs must observe and adapt curricula to ensure they provide competitive skills for graduates (Doerfert & Miller, 2006; Irlbeck & Akers, 2009).

To better meet employer needs, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in 2009 recommended broadening a student’s undergraduate experience to include student development of transferable skills, participation in research, outreach and extension, internships, and exposure to international perspectives. Research has reinforced the need to offer global experiences to agricultural students (Edgar & Edgar, 2009; Northfell, Edgar, Miller, & Cox, 2013; Place, Irani, Friedel, & Lundy, 2004; Zhai & Scheer, 2004). This call is addressed by universities when providing globally focused courses, travel courses, and study-abroad opportunities (Gouldthorpe, Harder, Stedman, & Roberts, 2012). Agriculture students who study international agriculture policy, products, peoples, and culture may increase their international competence through these unique experiential learning opportunities and be better suited for careers in the global era.

Theoretical / Conceptual / Operational Framework

In 2011, broad research needs for agricultural education, agricultural communications, leadership education, extension education, and international agriculture were outlined in the National Research Agenda (NRA): Agricultural Education and Communications 2011-2015 (Doerfert, 2011). This study responded to “Priority 4: Meaningful, Engaged Learning in All Environments,” which notes the need for areas of scientific focus to “examine the role of motivation, self-regulation, metacognition, and/or reflection in developing meaningful, engaged learning experiences across all agricultural education contexts” (Doerfert, 2011, p. 9). Meaningful experiences actively involve students in experiencing a person, surrounding, or situation (Bruening, Lopez, McCormick, & Dominguez, 2002). These meaningful learning opportunities are available to students through experiential learning opportunities. Experiential learning theory maintains learning is constructed consciously and adapted through experiences over time (Kolb, 1984). Engaging students in meaningful activities that model prospective duties and challenges (Paper, 1991) and presenting opportunities for involvement, challenges, support, structure, feedback, application, and integration (Blocher, 1978) create an ideal learning environment. Individuals must exhibit intercultural competence and sensitivity while living in increasingly diverse environments to be successful communicators (Braskamp, Braskamp, &

Merrill, 2009; Chen & Starosta, 1996). Intercultural communicative competence can be enhanced through cultural awareness or an understanding of each other's cultural conventions that affect the way people think and behave (Chen & Starosta, 1996). "Based on some of the universal commonalities of human behavior, ... an individual can begin to understand how people from diverse cultures adapt such universal behaviors to the unique expectancies of intercultural communication settings" (Chen & Starosta, 1996, p. 365). Students who participate in international experiences are introduced to new ideas and practices that shape the way they will work within the global era.

Subsequently, while the learner may fully experience a person, surrounding, or situation, one must take part in a reflection for experiences to take hold (Bruening et al., 2002). According to Thorpe (2004), reflective journals are an important tool in fostering active learning. Zhao (2003) defined reflective practice as the "ability to reflect on experiences, to employ conceptual frameworks, and to relate these to similar and dissimilar contexts to inform and improve future practice" (p. 2). Reflection allows individuals to analyze and create perceptions about experiences differently than one might have done without reflection (Brockbank & McGill, 1998). Reflective exercises not only provide insight for trip coordinators but also allow participants to identify expectations (Gouldthorpe et al., 2012). International experiences, such as this research study, have the potential to help students obtain knowledge about international agricultural policy, practices, production, and products, thereby assisting them with enhanced out-of-country opportunities.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine agricultural students' values and how these values influenced student perceptions regarding their unique international experiences. Researchers assessed students' journal entries from the same organization experience in Ghent, Belgium, which used two varying program structures, a faculty-led study tour and an international internship, during the summers of 2012 and 2013. Through this assessment, researchers sought to (a) identify supporting key values revealed by students in journal entries throughout the experience, (b) assess students' experience in Ghent, Belgium, and (c) compare student perceptions between the faculty-led and internship international experiences.

Methods

2012 Faculty-Led International Study Tour

Agricultural students ($N = 11$) from the University of Arkansas, University of Florida, New Mexico State University, and Auburn University were selected to participate in a three-week intensive summer study tour in Ghent, Belgium. The goal of the study tour was to assist the Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research (ILVO), working in cooperation with Ghent University (GU), to plan, organize, and evaluate a large community event. During the faculty-led study tour, 10 undergraduate students (three with prior international experience) and one graduate student worked directly with agricultural researchers to create consumer-friendly messages for various digital and print media. Messages and creative pieces developed by students were used by ILVO to help the Belgian public better understand the science behind where and how their food is produced, processed, and marketed at an open house event known as Open Enterprise. During the study tour, students also toured food and animal production facilities and participated in faculty-planned and guided weekend trips to Brugge, Paris, and London.

During the faculty-led study tour, advisers maintained organizational stability by creating a formal schedule for students in the workplace. Each week, students worked 37.5 hours in their groups to

complete projects for Open Enterprise. Student groups worked from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. From 8:30 a.m. to 9 a.m., all participants met as a single group to debrief and share successes and struggles from the previous workday. After this session, students met with ILVO's researchers for 30 minutes to ask questions and pose issues concerning projects. Following the second meeting, students worked in their assigned research area until 4 p.m. to complete their portion of creative pieces. Two students acted as group leaders and were responsible for overseeing and directing two of the four student groups. These student leaders had prior experience in leadership positions and acted as a safety net for those with less experience. Both leaders remained in Ghent for a total of 12 weeks to complete student work and returned to Belgium in October to assist with Open Enterprise. Students concluded each day at ILVO by reflecting using their journals for 30 minutes. This experience was highly structured with little free time for students.

2013 International Internship Methods

Agriculture students ($N = 5$) from the University of Arkansas were selected to participate in a six-week summer internship in Ghent, Belgium. Five interns (four with prior international experience) were selected based on their qualifications by the program director through an application process with one student having participated in the previous 2012 experience (R3). The program director traveled with four students at the beginning of their internships and remained in Belgium for three days. The goal of the internship experience was to assist ILVO in conducting research and creating communication pieces for the public. Student interns were assigned specific research disciplines to assist according to individual expertise: (a) animal science and fisheries; (b) plant science; and (c) food pilot. Of the five interns, three students worked directly with researchers to create short, consumer-friendly messages for print and digital media, including a video for food pilot and a brochure for plant science. Media were tailored to help the general public better understand the science behind where and how their food is produced, processed, and marketed. The remaining two interns worked with agricultural experts within fisheries and poultry disciplines to assist ILVO with data collection.

Students were responsible for creating a personal work schedule that met the needs of their ILVO adviser and generally worked 37.5 hours weekly. Student interns reported only to their assigned research supervisors periodically, and no formal meetings occurred for interns to meet as a group. During the internship, students also toured food and animal production facilities in the country planned by ILVO and participated in weekend trips planned on their own. This experience was highly unstructured with lots of free time for students.

Data and Data Analysis

Before each program, participants attended eight to 10 weekly meetings with University of Arkansas faculty and program director. These meetings provided students with skills and information needed to be successful in the international setting. Meetings included an introduction to course expectations, travel information, guest speakers, and discussions regarding ILVO, GU, and Belgian agriculture, research, and culture. Meetings were used to help students complete research projects as well as gain or improve communications skills in campaign planning, graphic design, videography, and photography. Students participated in pre- and post-trip reflection activities and were required to maintain a journal throughout the entirety of their time abroad. They were prompted to summarize pros and cons of their experience at the end of their study tour/internship. Daily journal entries were determined predominately by each student. Journals served as a portion of students' final grade along with formal evaluations of work and performance from project supervisors and program director.

Following each program, journal entries and reflective activities were transcribed and analyzed to identify emergent themes related to the students' personal and professional development values and international experience. The two coders for this study had each traveled abroad once for vacation purposes prior to analyzing data but had never taken part in an international learning opportunity with the University of Arkansas. These researchers initially read through all data to gain a general sense of the information and reflect on its meaning through note taking (Creswell, 2009). Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) constant comparative method, passages were then coded in their original context (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and entry topics were clustered and consolidated into key categories or themes (Creswell, 2009; Tesch, 1990). Themes were then listed according to occurrence and used to guide analyses on remaining journal entries (Creswell, 2009; Tesch, 1990). Adjustments were made to themes if new categories emerged from remaining data (Creswell, 2009; Tesch, 1990). These themes were validated through member checking with the project director who communicated with participants and collaborated with ILVO supervisors to assign final grades. Credibility of the findings was increased through triangulation of these sources (pre-reflection, journals, and post-reflection activities) as well as the use of students' own written journal reflections. Trustworthiness and dependability were increased through purposive sampling, the use of thick description, and the use of an audit trail supporting the key findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings and Results

Nine shared themes emerged from the 2012 faculty-led study tour ($N = 11$) and 2013 internship ($N = 5$): (a) host families; (b) food and beverage; (c) confidence; (d) seeking normalcy; (e) working with researchers (clients); (f) student relationships; (g) safety; (h) student mentoring; and (i) career decisions. These themes were addressed by participants of both experiences to varying degrees in their daily journal entries. In addition to the mentioned themes, independence emerged as a new theme from the 2013 internship. In the narrative below, students (respondents) are noted as R1-R11, 2012 and R1-R5, 2013 to indicate experience.

Host Families

Since students lived with host families for the entirety of the international experience, it was initially the most pressing concern for participants. Before departure, students were optimistic about what homestays had to offer but were nervous about fitting in with their new families. Students' nervousness stemmed from fear of rejection, being rejected by [their] host families, feeling "intrusive" (R2, 2012), sharing nothing in common with their host families, host family expectations, and living conditions. As students learned more about their host families and the experience, nerves subsided. Host families had a significant impact on exposing students to the Belgian culture and were a source of comfort.

I realized it takes a special person to take in someone they don't know and treat them like their own family ... [The host families] were all so kind, generous, and very, very supportive. Without them, spending two months in another country away from your family and friends would have been impossible. (R4, 2013)

At the end of each experience, students noted their host family as one of their favorite aspects of the experience and expected to maintain a relationship with their host families after returning home. One participant of the faculty-led tour noted during his final days in Belgium, "I have been wonder-

ing what I will miss most about Belgium, and I know that I will miss [host father's] friendship the most" (R3, 2012). R3 did maintain a relationship with his host father and even paid him a visit when participating in the 2013 internship.

Food and Beverage

Meals shared among students and host families were often noted in both experiences as a chance to bond and learn about the Belgian culture. A student of the 2013 internship reflected, "... I believe that food is a big part of traveling. Just like when you go to Chicago, you have to eat a Chicago-Style hot dog ... You have to eat the local food to experience a place" (R2, 2013). Students recorded differences in Belgian meals from typical American ones and used these opportunities to reflect on their lifestyles and relationships with those around them. "Cooking with [host father] is fun and an educational experience. I try to keep an open mind about food so I try everything he suggests, and to my surprise, most of them are good" (R3, 2012). Bonding with classmates over meals was a source of comfort and noted as a "much needed" opportunity to relax after work. "We all had some drinks, and I do believe that was the best time I have had on the entire trip. The little moments like sitting at the café are the ones I crave" (R4, 2012).

Confidence

Levels of self-confidence increased steadily for participants of both international experiences. At the beginning, students were insecure regarding their skills and role within their assigned work group at ILVO. In preparing for the 2012 study tour, one student noted:

I don't really feel like I have a good grip on what we'll be asked to do by whom and for whom — and I feel like those things are things that I, as a student, will have to just figure out when I get there. (R5, 2012)

This outlook remained true for 2013 internship participants. As students' roles were shaped, participants slowly gained confidence with highs and lows unique to each student. Experiences that contributed most to student confidence for both programs were related to realizing they could contribute to their teams and successfully serve a client in an international setting. "I had never worked with strictly researchers or anyone that was foreign. I wondered if my skills would be up to par, and when I found that they exceeded expectation that was an amazing feeling" (R1, 2013). As students recognized both their group and ILVO could benefit from their skillsets, their positivity regarding their participation in the experience increased. Students were most appreciative and satisfied after successfully completing something they had never tried before and proving their independence in an international setting.

Seeking Normalcy

In all aspects, participants of both experiences constantly sought normalcy and compared their experiences to home. Students struggled with homesickness and unfamiliar situations, so they were comforted when they found constants. These comparisons also helped students improve intercultural communication skills and deepen their appreciation for home. One student reflected on her interactions at ILVO:

I think for the American students, we came in as collaborators with a common goal to get

the projects done. We also had the mentality of solving small problems on our own and just getting things done quickly. From the researcher's point of view, I think they expected us to act like students do in Belgium. They look to the mentor for instruction, and do exactly what they say and how they say to do it. (R4, 2013)

Students also noted similarities between Belgian and American agricultural practices in their journals and identified ways in which practices could be improved on both ends.

Arriving at the [poultry] layer farm was quite a bit of a shock. I have never seen such a clean poultry farm. The grass was cut and there was cement paving. The houses were solid walls with fans on the top. The grower seemed to be well-educated about the poultry business in Belgium as well as internationally. (R3, 2012)

While students found Belgian poultry farms to be more modern and controlled than those in the United States, they also wrote other Belgian practices could be improved. "I found the Belgian Blue cattle fascinating because I come from a beef cattle background. I really like the gait measurer and found it interesting that the Belgian people were so far behind in terms of spraying with GPS" (R7, 2012).

Working with Researchers (Clients)

Working for clients was intimidating for all students and the most difficult part of both programs. This theme proved to be an even greater challenge for the 2013 student interns as they did not have a faculty guide to help soften the communications barrier. Students struggled to communicate with clients and accept feedback without involving emotions. Not only did students have to learn to communicate with nonnative English-speaking clients with differing customs, but they also had to learn how to translate complex research terminology into understandable and meaningful messages for the general public.

One student reflected, "The researchers made it clear that they wanted to present their research without dumbing it too far down ... It seems as though ego will be a big factor when dealing with researchers" (R6, 2012). This continued to be a conflict for student interns as researchers, rather than agricultural communicators, oversaw and directed student work.

Professionally, I think I have learned that in the politics of life and the workforce, working hard is sometimes not enough. It is important to understand the dynamics of certain situations, people, and environments and to act accordingly ... Sometimes you have to cater to the whims of your client, boss, or mentor to keep them happy and give them the feeling of a sense of control. (R4, 2013)

In fear of rejection and prompting further revisions, students were apprehensive of sharing their work with the researchers and struggled to accept feedback without compromising the aesthetic and communications knowledge they had gained in the classroom. Though the job was challenging, successfully serving clients proved to be very satisfying for students.

Student Relationships

Journals also revealed students of both experiences bonded and built lasting relationships with fellow

participants. In spite of the fact students of the 2012 experience attended four different universities and participants of the 2013 internship were not centrally located or from the same department, the international experience presented an opportunity for students to grow closer as colleagues and friends. “I could tell [R4] was having fun! I’m so glad we have each other. [R4] is amazing and I’d be sad without her here. We make a great team, and I know [R1] will love her too” (R5, 2013). Although students of both experiences built friendships, there were noticeable divisions among the student groups of the larger study tour in 2012. One student explained, “I see that our group has its divisions. People quickly understand who they want to hang out with ... It’s not that I don’t like the others; it’s just that these are the ones I seem to fit with best” (R4, 2012). Participants recorded the desire to continue developing friendships upon returning home.

Safety

Safety was a common concern throughout both programs. Not only were students in an unfamiliar country, but also they were sometimes left alone to navigate the cities where they visited and worked. A few participants got lost and reflected in their journals.

At one point we ended up getting on the wrong tram and had to backtrack our way home ... It was a little scary not having our bearings or knowing where we were, but I think that’s all part of the trip—to be lost and find our way home. (R1, 2012)

Students especially showed concern for their safety upon gaining unwarranted attention from strangers. A student who participated in both summer experiences reflected:

Once we were walking away that was when it all hit me, “Wow I just got pickpocketed and still have my wallet.” The guy was twice as big as me. That could have turned ugly. It was hard to sleep on Saturday because the scene kept playing over and over in my head. (R3, 2013)

Students who did not participate in the faculty-led study tour felt especially vulnerable when traveling in another country for the first time and navigating to and from work on their own. “[I was] trying to remember which way I had come before, I began arbitrarily going down streets in what I thought was the direction of home ... Finally, I made it home safe and sound” (R4). Despite being outside of their comfort zone, graduate students in both experiences stepped up to ensure the safety of others on outings and in the workplace.

Student Mentoring

Just as students were protective of each other, students with more experience became student mentors. These students willingly accepted the responsibility of teaching classmates skills, such as using Adobe® Creative Suite software, taking photos, and recording video footage, to help classmates succeed in their communications tasks. One student of the faculty-led tour surrendered her leadership position to keep the peace within work groups.

... I am stepping back and letting her take the lead, not as a coward, but because I know she has had more courses than I, and I could definitely learn things from her. I’m trying to not speak as much and just observe, process, and only if something is wrong, speak. (R8, 2012)

Students learned from each other and made adjustments to ensure all projects were completed and prepared for ILVO by the end of the experience. Because students of the 2013 experience did not have a faculty guide present for the majority of the internship, graduate students defended undergraduate students during conflicts in the workplace. “Towards the middle of the internship, there were some communication barriers. The largest issue was that I felt that [R4] wasn’t being treated fairly, and as the graduate student I needed to protect her” (R1, 2013). Graduate students freely took on the leadership role when faculty guides were not present and sought additional assistance from the program director via Skype conferences.

Career Decisions

Finally, students reflected deeply on their career path as a result of their international work. Students gained a greater understanding of their capabilities and limits, and some made decisions about the kind of work they do *not* want to do in their future careers.

Sometimes I really wonder if I will ever make it in this industry. I just don’t know if I have it in me to work at a computer or be in meetings all day long. I love to write, but not like that. (R4, 2012)

Others found they were able to survive an international setting and discovered that the experience enriched their marketability when pursuing a career in agricultural communications.

... I am much more confident in my skillset and marketability for my future career. I also think it was important and, ultimately positive, to experience work culture abroad. By comparison, it has given me a lot of perspective on work culture in the United States and, I think, has made me a more, well-rounded future employee. (R1, 2013)

Independence

Along with the nine themes identified as similar between the 2012 and 2013 international participant groups, 2013 interns uniquely recorded their anxieties about working independently. Without the aid of a faculty guide, students felt overwhelmed and unqualified for the task ahead.

This week I am feeling overwhelmed ... I’ve always had a touch of anxiety, undiagnosed of course. However, I know myself and I can feel it creeping into the edges of my brain like a soft black vignette. Sometimes it creeps in when my home is not spotless. Other times it is after a feeling of imperfection. Often it comes with separation. (R1, 2013)

On top of being overwhelmed by projects, working independently for six-weeks in a foreign environment felt isolating. After a work-related party, an intern reflected, “Well people didn’t really talk to [R1], [R4] or me, but it was still ok ... We were like the kids that no one wanted to sit by at lunch” (R3, 2013). Students relied on host families and each other for support both inside and outside the work environment.

On the other hand, students also saw their independence as an opportunity to flexibly explore Europe. “I went to Antwerp on a whim one day and only brought my train pass and pocket change because I needed to save money...” (R2, 2013). Independent travel exposed students to mishaps along the way, but improved the way they planned and managed their time and resources. Student

confidence was greatly affected by their successes and failures as they independently solved problems.

Experience Summary

Overall, students of each international experience found the opportunity to be meaningful in developing them as professionals. Beyond the challenge of working in a foreign country, many appreciated the opportunity for the skills they acquired or sharpened. “I’m glad that I am learning so much on this trip. It is like a class but accelerated and more practical” (R3, 2012). Participants of the 2013 internship shared this perspective and discovered a new source of confidence. A 2013 intern reflected, “One thing that was extremely positive for me was to be able to show my skills to an international audience. I found new success professionally when I was able to impress foreign researchers with my communication skills” (R1, 2013). Students also valued the friendships made on the trip. “I realized today that the only thing that makes this trip (if not life in general) worth anything is the people. I love spending time with these people I have grown to love” (R4, 2012). Each student clearly gained something from the experience.

While students did find educational value in the experience, they also voiced criticisms in their journals. A student from the 2012 faculty-led tour who struggled being away from home wrote, “I am proud of myself, and I am so glad I challenged myself to be a part of this. I would never do it again, but I am glad I did it” (R1, 2012). In addition, students from both international experiences were unhappy with the time it took for them to understand their role and responsibilities at ILVO. An intern who participated in the 2012 faculty-led tour reflected on his 2013 internship, “I feel that being the second year that this internship has occurred, there should be more organization ...” (R3, 2013). Another student wrote, “... I would absolutely advocate finding another opportunity within Belgium for students” (R1, 2013). These perspectives remained consistent for all 2013 internship participants.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study support conclusions and recommendations of previous research urging educators to offer international agricultural experiences to students to increase global perspective and gain cross-cultural competencies needed for a diverse and global workplace (Edgar & Edgar, 2009; Northfell et al., 2013; Place et al., 2004; Zhai & Scheer, 2004). According to student journal entries, all participants found the international experience to be meaningful. For most, this was their first internship/study-tour experience as well as their first time traveling outside of the United States. Students found the experience offered a unique opportunity to gain practical intercultural and general communications skills quickly in a real-world setting. Students played an active role in learning at ILVO as suggested by Bruening et al. (2002), creating a meaningful learning opportunity. These experiences helped students see how theory and skills learned in their college classrooms would be utilized in a work environment.

Values that emerged from student reflections indicate important considerations related to international programs. Building relationships was especially important to students and was the root of their social concerns. Though students initially had anxieties regarding their host families, most students from both programs noted their host family as their favorite aspect of the experience. Meals and weekend outings proved valuable in creating or strengthening relationships with host families and classmates. Opportunities to relax and build supportive relationships were essential in maintaining morale while working abroad. These outings helped students build lasting friendships that each hoped to continue after the study tour was completed.

Additionally, students sought to build professional relationships. Working in groups allowed stu-

dents to learn from each other's strengths and solve problems as done in the workplace. Students at times became self-appointed leaders. This created power struggles among group members, especially those who were placed in leadership positions by advisers. There is a need for international program directors to work with students prior to international leadership positions to assist them with understanding group dynamics, team roles, and peer interpersonal relationships. Though internship participants worked independently and directly with researchers at ILVO rather than as small student groups, they still experienced conflicts with co-workers. Students of both experiences learned to overcome these conflicts and focus on completing the project. Working collaboratively and with a client from another country created an opportunity to present multiple perspectives to students and enhanced their understanding as encouraged by the fourth RPA of the NRA (Doerfert, 2011). Students gained skills from each other as fellow participants assisted in educating classmates to ensure project completion.

In many instances, the experience pushed students outside of their comfort zones. Students sought normalcy in both the workplace and at home by comparing the Belgian and American cultures. To help overcome the unpredictability of visiting another country, the faculty-led study tour introduced formal schedules to create stability within the foreign environment. In hindsight, this preparation eased students' transitions personally and professionally. In addition to adding organization, having familiar faculty guides helped soften communication barriers between students and ILVO researchers including project criticism and misinterpretation of student responsibilities. In contrast, participants of the 2013 internship had to independently seek solutions to conflicts as done in the real world. While this taught students valuable professional skills, the absence of a faculty guide also exposed students to real-world stresses that distracted students from the internship's focus. In addition, the absence of faculty made it difficult for the project director to resolve conflicts at a distance as student journals and online communication only revealed the experience through their personal perspective.

Furthermore, working for clients was intimidating for all students and was the most difficult part of each program. Although working with clients was challenging, participating in international internships or work-related study-tour opportunities is recommended to provide global competencies for careers in agriculture. Students struggled to accept feedback from clients because they were not yet comfortable with their own competence in design software, videography, and photography. These internal and external conflicts tested student confidence as participants sought their purpose at ILVO and worked to live up to researcher expectations. While it is encouraged that students with existing communications skills be selected for experiences such as these, mastery of every skill in the discipline is not required. All participants gained valuable communications skills that will prove invaluable when working with agricultural communicators in their future careers. In addition, students who lacked necessary skills were motivated to adapt and pick up abilities along the way, which strengthened student confidence. It is suggested that project directors of similar experiences select a workplace with an existing communications department. ILVO does have a communications department; however, they seldom worked with the students since they had other tasks to complete. Participants struggled to work directly with researchers as they were not familiar to adapting information for the public.

Finally, using journal entries to gain insight into student perceptions proved not only valuable for the researchers but also for the students. Other studies have noted the value of using journaling to strengthen, deepen, and enhance learning (Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Gouldthorpe et al., 2012; Zhao, 2003). Journal entries provided an outlet for students to record events and realize the big

picture as discussed by Brockbank and McGill (1998). Future international study tours/internships should continue to require daily reflections to encourage meaningful and engaged learning experiences as discussed by the NRA (Doerfert, 2011). Although student journals of the faculty-led study tour focused on the social aspect, intern journals from the following summer possessed in-depth reflection regarding their work with ILVO. Because the two tours had differing reflection themes, it would be interesting to see if a faculty guide's presence impacts the time and effort students spend reflecting on the professional experience in their journals. Students may use faculty guides as an outlet for voicing concerns rather than their journals. In addition, it would be valuable for researchers to interview participants post-graduation to see how their views on the international experience have changed.

Though these findings cannot be generalized, they provide insight for future international internships/study tours about possible benefits and limitations. The findings also prove the value of experiential and international opportunities for offering meaningful learning opportunities to students as requested in the fourth RPA (Doerfert, 2011). Furthermore, this study adds insight into internal and external barriers students may face in the presence or absence of a faculty guide. It is recommended future international study tours/internships continue comparing student perceptions of these experiences to help craft an opportunity to maximize students' development of communications skills and to take risks in a safe, supportive international setting. While international internships do provide students with a sense of independence, participants risk vulnerability in a foreign work environment.

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