
Faculty Participation in Residential International Training Programs: Benefits, Challenges, and Implications for Teaching

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Abstract

A model for conducting residential international short-term training programs (STTs) in agriculture at The Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute has been developed. Faculty benefits and challenges resulting from STT participation are discussed. Implications of STT involvement for teaching and for traditional two-year college course and curricula development are emphasized.

Introduction

International short-term technical training programs (STTs) are a component of many international agricultural development projects sponsored by USAID, the World Bank, governments, and other organizations. International technical training differs from traditional academic programs in objectives, methodology, and emphasis on practical experience and commercial applications of knowledge (Rehwaldt and Watson, 1990). STTs are often customized, sometimes translated, vary in length from a week to a year, and vary in group size from one to several individuals. The education of participants may range from high school to post-doctoral level, and current responsibilities from small business owner to ministry official. Differences between STTs and the traditional two-year college program at The Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute (Ohio State ATI) dictate a non-traditional response from faculty.

Ohio State ATI, in Wooster, Ohio, an instructional unit of the OSU College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, offers 18 programs leading to Associate degrees. Ohio State ATI has been involved in international technical training since 1981 and has provided 82 training programs which served 188 participants from 65 countries. Ninety per cent of full-time faculty at Ohio State ATI have participated in STTs.

This paper presents a model for STTs developed at Ohio State ATI in which the faculty coordinator, international pro-

grams coordinator and international participant(s) play an essential role. Faculty issues centering around involvement in international programming and the variable aspects of international programs will be discussed.

Customized Program Design

Every STT is unique and has to be constructed to fit the needs of the participant(s) and the availability of resources. The sponsoring organization contacts the coordinator of international programs at Ohio State ATI and enters into a contract for one to several participants with specific training requirements upon approval of an appropriate plan of study at a reasonable cost (Fig. 1). A general dossier relating educational background, employment experience, and training objectives of the participant(s) is provided by the contracting agency in advance of program construction. The international coordinator contacts appropriate faculty possessing expertise in the area under consideration. One faculty member serves as coordinator of training and consults with the Ohio State ATI international coordinator concerning the development of a tentative training program for presentation to the sponsoring organization. A major consideration in program construction is to adequately match the talents, work experience and educational background of the participant with the total package of resources available for instruction.

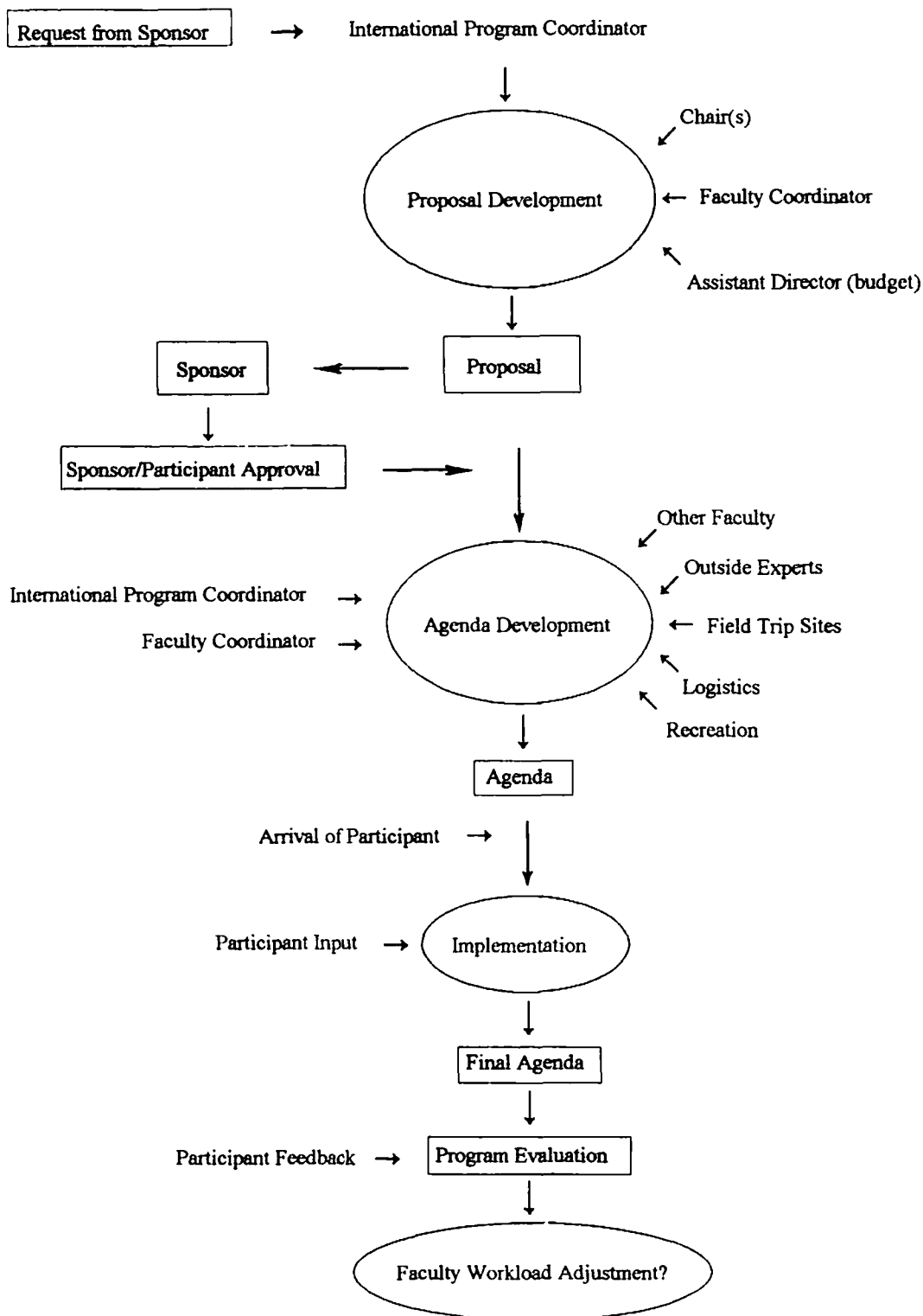
Teaching methods used in an instructional module may consist of: classroom lectures; individualized instruction; field trips to farms and other businesses throughout Ohio and neighboring states; consultations with experts in the field of study; hands-on training at the 1500-acre Ohio State ATI teaching farm; utilization of research plots and animals at the state agricultural experiment station (OARDC); and appropriate library activities involving the complete OSU library system. A balance of teaching methods should be employed in order to maintain participant interest and provide a holistic learning experience (Lee, 1987). Caution must be taken to plan field trips carefully for efficient utilization of instructional time. A frequent complaint from participants involves occasional long travel times to training sites. If the longer travel times are scheduled early in the STT, the participant may be stressed for the remainder of the training period. Free time to rest, shop and take self-guided tours is an often neglected but important aspect of an STT.

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If structured learning activities in the classroom are placed in an STT instructional module, adequate instructor preparation time should be allowed for these activities. The flexibility and small numbers of students involved in an STT may tempt a faculty member to "shoot from the hip" rather than spend time retrieving and revising appropriate teaching materials. Copies of materials presented should be supplied to participants in an effort to reduce any language barrier that may exist.

Alterations of an STT often occur after the program has been accepted by the contracting agency. A draft of the training program is presented to the participant(s) upon arrival at Ohio State ATI. Early participant feedback concerning the appropriateness of subject matter, teaching methodologies, and distribution of time devoted to each topic helps to either verify what has been established or provides rationale for altering the STT to more adequately reflect the needs of participants. Feedback from participants and the sponsoring agency is useful in program refinement (Lee, 1987). Allowing participant input into the final draft of the program agenda imparts a certain amount of ownership. The participant becomes a member of a team that is attempting to achieve specific educational goals.

Figure 1. A model for conducting residential international short-term training programs at Ohio State ATI.



Faculty Benefits

The majority of full-time faculty at Ohio State ATI have dual roles of advising students and teaching courses within

an area of specialization. Degree-seeking students normally fit into standard technology curricula requiring small amounts of faculty time in an advisory capacity. Faculty may teach a course involving a portion of their advisees in addition to students from other technologies. The teaching and advising workload involving any particular student or small group of students would be diluted over time. International participant(s) involved in a 1-4 week training program in which the faculty member has responsibilities for program coordination and several modules of instruction require an intense contribution of faculty time and other resources often coming at the expense of the more traditional two-year college program if the international assignment occurs during an on-duty academic quarter. The question could be asked, "What motivation exists for faculty to accept a short-term residential international teaching assignment?"

Yahya and Moore (1986) identified personal growth, professional improvement and achievement of program objectives contributing to the well-being of the contracting country as prime motivators for faculty to accept international overseas assignments. We have found these same factors motivate faculty to accept international residential training assignments at Ohio State ATI. In addition to the above motivators, we have identified several faculty benefits specifically related to teaching.

First, the faculty member has unlimited potential for applying creativity to teaching. The impediments of large numbers of students, limited class time and inability to travel are removed in a STT. Teaching materials generated via the flexibility and opportunities for creativity in the development of international teaching modules can often be used in the traditional college program. Faculty development spinoffs created by opportunities to travel and interface with authorities in a particular area of study while executing an international training program may apply directly to traditional college curriculum development.

The opportunity to share expertise with highly motivated students who assume a high degree of responsibility for their learning is another reason for faculty to become involved in STTs. Short-term training participants ask volumes of questions and continuously seek reference materials that can be used after returning home. Normally participating countries send people for training who have the potential to make significant contributions as a result of their short-term experience at Ohio State ATI. This positive attitude about learning can be in stark contrast to the traditional first quarter freshman student who may possess vague career plans. The gratitude and acknowledgment of a job well done displayed to faculty and staff by short-term participants can be a very rewarding experience.

There is a tendency to think provincially about agricultural technology when working exclusively with traditional students reared primarily in rural Ohio. The traditional student often views the international scene as a competitive situation with the home farm operation. Instructors have a way of promoting this provincialism especially if they have been involved in a family farming operation. The opportunity to

work with short-term international participants creates an appreciation for the global dimension of agriculture and the requirement for understanding and communicating between the world's peoples. These newly created or rekindled attitudes can be conveyed in the traditional classroom and throughout the traditional two-year program.

Finally, there are financial rewards for faculty interested in pursuing international short-term training at Ohio State ATI. If the faculty member is on a nine-month appointment and performs the training in an off-duty quarter, supplemental pay is granted. If the faculty member can demonstrate that involvement in the STT would produce an overload situation during an on-duty quarter, supplemental pay is granted. If an overload situation cannot be demonstrated, extra funds resulting from the international teaching assignment will be placed at the discretion of the faculty member for program development.

Challenges

The inherent teaching flexibility that accompanies the international program introduces certain challenges that are difficult to predict until the program and participant(s) are in place. Advanced information concerning the background of the participant is seldom adequate to construct a program that doesn't require some modification upon arrival of the participant. Often there are personal expectations for training that were not mentioned in the visitor *profile* documentation. Expectations for training could be substantially greater, or different, than available resources can provide. Human perception of an ideal training situation can be vastly different than its reality. Some participants have requested exposure to smaller scale and lower technology field trip sites. Other participants have expressed a desire for more research-based programming than a teaching institution such as Ohio State ATI can provide alone. Being in close proximity to the state agricultural experiment station (OARDC) has facilitated in making last minute basic and applied research enhancements to international programs. Just one exposure to a renowned scientist working in an area of the participant's personal interest can save the credibility of a program. A full-time international coordinator aids in quick retrieval of expertise affiliated with the University whether in teaching, research or extension. Various degrees of miss-matching of participants to the resources available can happen because few institutions have full-time coordinators dedicated to customizing training programs for short-term participants. Sponsoring organizations are often grateful for the flexibility that a full-time international program associated with an agricultural technical college can offer.

Participant personality type can offer challenges to the instructor of the STT. Some participants have strong personalities and high expectations and continue to look for more than can be provided while others are more passive and give little indication of how they are receiving the program. Most participants respond positively to an effort of providing greater exposure to topics of high personal interest. Normally, the

more proficient the participant is in speaking and understanding English the higher the educational yield of the program. The participant with a good command of English is in a position to ask effective follow-up questions that pertain to the application of the material to the home country situation.

There is a tendency to misplace STTs in the balance of faculty teaching, scholarly activity and service. Hertford (1987) states that university promotion and tenure policies must insure a fair and impartial evaluation of faculty on overseas assignments so that their accomplishments will receive equivalent consideration to faculty conducting research, teaching and service at home. This same reasoning could be applied to STT in residence. A faculty evaluation system for STT activity needs to be put in place at Ohio State ATI. Currently the STT portion of the faculty workload is documented primarily as university service which is the least important component of the faculty workload balance. Formal classroom teaching methods, with their inherent opportunities for evaluation by students and administrators are often an insignificant portion of modules presented in an STT. Objective evaluation of STT by participants while in residence is difficult to achieve because of the lack of confidentiality. Sponsoring organizations often conduct exit interviews with participants shortly after completion of an STT but normally would not share extensive feedback with Ohio State ATI faculty and administrators concerning their findings. Informal conversations with sponsoring institutions may indicate some strengths and weaknesses of an STT. Untraditional teaching methods employed in an STT dictate creativity in devising an objective faculty evaluation process. Objective evaluation by Ohio State ATI administrators of STT modular content and execution would serve to place international programs on a par with formal classroom instruction and scholarly activity for promotion and tenure purposes and for annual faculty compensation considerations.

Implications for Teaching

Experience with STTs may serve as a valuable faculty development tool. Field studies requiring travel to other areas of the country enable faculty to acquire new teaching materials and to dialogue with authorities in various subject matter disciplines. Carrying a good 35mm camera at all times allows for adequate documentation of participant activities and provides an opportunity to acquire slides to be used in the traditional classroom. STTs provide an opportunity to facilitate internationalizing the two-year college curriculum. When constructing an international module for a traditional

two-year college course, library research provides factual information but does little to convey appreciation for the world's peoples and the conditions under which they live. King and Fersh (1989) explained, "International education should not only increase one's knowledge; it should also enhance one's wisdom and affinity with humanity." Faculty can lend credibility to their efforts in internationalizing the two-year college curriculum through interaction with STT participants.

Summary

A model for conducting short-term international training (STT) at Ohio State ATI has been developed. Faculty involvement in the model can provide benefits and challenges. Major faculty benefits include:

1. Applying creativity to teaching.
2. Sharing expertise with highly motivated students who take a high degree of responsibility for their own learning.
3. Reducing provincial attitudes regarding agricultural production and marketing.
4. Developing new teaching materials that can be utilized in traditional two-year college courses.
5. Securing financial resources for personal over-load compensation or for two-year college program development.

Major faculty challenges include:

1. Limited background information on participants often requires program modification.
2. Identification of STT development and execution as a bonafide teaching function equivalent to formal classroom teaching for promotion and tenure purposes.
3. Participant personality types may affect the educational yield and expectations for a program.

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