
Impact of Long Term Foreign Assignments on Professional Activities of Faculty

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Abstract

Faculty in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at Washington State University differ little from their peers in other colleges in terms of overseas experiences. There was a positive relationship between international content of courses taught and participation in long term overseas activities. Faculty generally reported an increased ability to both teach and conduct research as a result of long term overseas assignments. The sometimes alleged negative consequences for tenure, promotion, salary and overall professional activities were not supported by responses from faculty.

Colleges of agriculture have had a long history of major involvement in international development activities. An increasing interest in international involvement has resulted in several universities offering programs of study in international agriculture (Francis and Youngquist, 1991 and Yahya and Moore, 1986). With the passage of time and an increasing globalization of the economy and society, university and college administrators have assumed a broader perspective in terms of internationalization. It has become increasingly clear that all missions of the college; teaching, research and public service, have significant international dimensions. As a consequence, colleges of agriculture are investigating whether and how involvement of their faculty in international development and other foreign professional experiences can contribute to globalizing their programs. The emphasis has shifted from what technical expertise can U.S. universities provide to foreign countries to how can international involvement strengthen both the U.S. and foreign institutions.

Washington State University (WSU) recently undertook a study to determine the influence of overseas involvement of its faculty on their professional activities. An area of particular concern was whether and how the international content of courses changed as a result of faculty overseas experiences. A closely related issue is faculty perceptions of the impacts of long term assignments on their professional careers and personal financial well-being. Although a university wide study, this report focuses on contrasts and similarities between the

College of Agriculture and Home Economics (CAHE) and the other colleges of the university.

A random sample of WSU faculty, excluding deans and university level administrators, library faculty and county extension faculty, was surveyed during spring semester, 1992. A total of 206 (68%) useable schedules were returned. The response rate ranged from in the Division of Sciences to 85% in the CAHE. Chi-square procedures were used to test for significance of differences among groups.

Level of Involvement in International Travel

University faculty are rather broadly travelled. Ninety-one percent of WSU faculty have made one or more trips outside of the United States since attaining the age of 18 years (Table 1). Although the differences were not significant at the 10% level, the College of Agriculture and Home Economics had the lowest percentage (87%) and the Division of Sciences the highest (100%). Of the faculty with overseas travel experience, 50% of the CAHE faculty had made four or more trips outside of the United States compared to a slightly higher university average of 53 percent.

Consistent with reported destinations in earlier studies, Western Europe was the most often visited region for both the CAHE and every other college within the university. Although differences were not significant at the 10% level, CAHE faculty had the lowest rate of visitation to Western Europe (29%). CAHE rates of visitation were slightly below the university average for Canada, Mexico and Asia. The higher rates of visitation for CAHE faculty were concentrated in the Middle East, Africa and Australia.

A surprisingly high percent (22%) of WSU faculty have taken one or more trips of at least four months duration outside of the United States. The CAHE percentage was only slightly higher (25%) than the university average (Table 2). Using percent of trips, rather than percent of faculty, 16% of the trips outside the United States by WSU faculty lasted four months or longer. The CAHE faculty was slightly above the university average at 18%. As one might expect, there was a positive correlation between long duration trips and whether they were of a professional nature. The CAHE and the College of Business and Economics were the only colleges reporting 80% or more of their trips were strictly professional. Similarly, the same two colleges had the highest percent of trips for which full reimbursement was received (CAHE 53%

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Table 1 Overseas Travel Characteristics of CAHE and University Faculty

Item	Unit	
	CAHE	WSU
Percent of faculty having made one or more trips outside of the United States	87	91
Percent of faculty having made 4 or more trips outside of the United States	50	53
Percent of trips four months or longer duration	18	16
Percent of trips solely professional	80	65
Percent of professional trips for which full reimbursement was received	53	39
Source of reimbursement:		
Percent from employer	34	36
Percent from non-employer public agency	37	33
Percent from non-employer private agency	24	22
Percent from other sources	5	9

Table 2 Percent of Faculty Having Taken One or More Trips Outside of the United States of Four Months or Longer Duration.

College	Percent of Faculty
WSU	22
Agriculture and Home Economics	25
Business and Economics	38
Education	9
Engineering and Architecture	12
Nursing and Pharmacy ¹	8
Humanities and Social Sciences	18
Sciences	41
Veterinary Medicine	6

¹The Intercollegiate Center for Nursing Education and the College of Pharmacy were combined to avoid possible exposure of identity.

and Business and Economics 70%). The sources of reimbursement for CAHE faculty were virtually the same as the university.

Impacts of Long Term International Assignment on Teaching Program

Only 41 faculty with formal teaching appointments had taken an overseas assignment of four months or longer. As a consequence of the limited numbers, it was not possible to analyze the data by college. Thus, this section refers to university-wide responses.

Recent changes in the organizational structure of international programs and significant revisions in the curricular requirements of all undergraduates provides evidence of a greater acceptance of internationalization by the university

community. As a part of this study, faculty were requested to indicate the change in international content of their most internationally oriented course during the last three years. Fifty-nine percent reported no change in the international content. However, of the 40% who indicated an increase, 8% reported an increase in excess of 25 percent. Those faculty having had a long term overseas experience made a greater percentage increase in the international content of their most international course. Almost one-half (48%) increased the international content within the last three years, 9% by more than 25% (Table 3).

After reporting the rate of change in international content, faculty were asked why they did or did not make a change. The dominant response (32%) was that there was nothing uniquely international about the content of their course (Table 4). This group represented the majority of the faculty reporting that there had been no change in the international content of their course. Personal travel in a foreign country was the most important reason given for increasing the international content (15%). The subset of faculty with an overseas experience of four months or longer reported that personal travel overseas was the most important reason for increasing the international content of their course. This supports the contention in an earlier study (Henson, 1991) of the importance of conducting professional activities in a foreign setting.

Each of the 28 faculty members who reported no international travel indicated that there was nothing uniquely international about their course. The limited number of responses from some colleges led to the development of the three broad academic areas: a) sciences, b) social sciences, business and education and c) arts and humanities. Most of the CAHE faculty categorized themselves as being in the "sciences" The "sciences" faculty emphasized the non existence of anything uniquely international in the subject matter of their courses. The response category "other" dominated the responses of the other two academic areas. However, changes in text, participation in professional international association meetings and personal foreign travel were important determinants. This provides tentative support for the often heard contention that "science" is value and/or culture free. Only six percent of the faculty in the arts and humanities indicated that there was

Table 3 Percent Change in "International Content" of Most internationally Oriented Course During the Most Recent 3 Years

Percent Change in International Content	Total Faculty	Long Term Overseas Experience	
		Yes	No
Increased more than 25%	8	9	5
Increased 1% to 25%	32	39	31
No Change	59	52	63
Decreased 1% to 25%	1	0	1
Decreased more than 25%	0	0	0

Table 4 Most Important Factor Influencing the Decision to Change or Not Change "International Content" of Course

Category of Respondent	Text w/ more Int'l Content	Nothing Uniquely Int'l in Course	Directive from Chair or Admin.	Attend Prof Int'l Meeting	Personal Travel to Foreign Country	Other
All WSU	8	32	1	8	15	36
L.T. INT'L EXPERIENCE						
Yes	12	15	0	4	38	31
No	8	37	2	10	9	33
OVERSEAS TRAVEL						
Yes	9	32	2	9	16	32
No	0	27	0	0	0	73
ACADEMIC AREA						
Sciences	8	51	0	2	16	23
Soc Sci, Bus & Educ	9	16	2	16	11	45
Art & Hum	0	6	6	12	18	59

nothing uniquely international in their courses. It is interesting to note that faculty almost universally asserted directives from administrators had no influence upon their decision to change or not change the content of their course.

Faculty having one or more long term overseas assignments since joining a university faculty were requested to provide their perception of the impact of their foreign experience on their ability to teach the subject matter of their discipline. Seventy nine percent reported an increased ability to perform teaching responsibilities (Table 5). Responses did not differ significantly by rank or academic area.

Impact of Long Term Overseas Assignments on Research Programs

Over three-fourths (77%) of the faculty with long term overseas experience reported an increased ability to conduct research or other scholarly activities within their discipline (Table 6). It should be noted that five percent stated that their ability to conduct research was decreased as a result of the long term overseas assignment. This differs from the instructional area where no faculty member indicated an actual decrease in their ability to teach. Although ability to conduct research was generally thought to increase, the impact of extended overseas assignments on ability to secure grant support was not viewed as favorably with reporting a decreased capacity.

Impact of Long Term Assignments on Other Aspects of Professional Activities

There has been a perception that extended overseas assignments may adversely impact three important dimensions

of a faculty members activities: 1) the ability to secure tenure, promotion and salary increases, 2) the level of department and college assignments and 3) involvement within one's professional organization. To the degree that these issues are important, faculty are likely to alter their teaching and research activities in response. In most cases, WSU faculty with extended overseas experiences reported either no change or a more favorable development with regard to these three issues.

The majority of the faculty(81%) indicated that their extended overseas assignment did not change their ability to secure tenure and promotion (Table 7). It should be noted that none of the respondents thought that their overseas assignment decreased their ability to secure either tenure or promotion. This highly favorable perception of the influence of overseas assignments on the

receipt of tenure is not held by all faculty. Twenty eight percent of the faculty not having had an extended overseas assignment indicated that the dominant deterring factor was concern about tenure.

The impact of prior long term assignments on current salaries revealed some differences of opinion between faculty in different academic areas. Twenty percent of the faculty in the sciences reported that they thought their current salaries were lower as a result of the long term overseas experience (Table 8). Only eight percent of the faculty in the social sciences, business and education indicated that their current salaries were lower as a result of having taken an earlier long term overseas assignment.

Faculty returning from extended overseas assignments reported virtually no change in non-rewarding department

Table 5 Respondents Perception of Impact of Extended Overseas Stay on Ability to Teach the Subject Matter of Discipline

Category	Percent of Respondents Reporting Their Teaching Ability		
	Increased	No Change	Decreased
All	79	21	0
RANK			
Associate Professor	85	15	0
Professor	77	23	0
ACADEMIC AREA			
Sciences	70	30	0
Social Sci, Business & Education	93	7	0
Arts and Humanities	100	0	0

Table 6 Respondents perception of Impact of Extended Overseas Assignment on Ability to Fund and Conduct Research.

Category	Percent of Faculty Reporting		
	Increase	No Change	Decrease
CONDUCT RESEARCH			
All	77	18	5
Rank			
Associate professor	85	15	0
Professor	74	19	7
Academic area			
Sciences	83	13	4
Soc. Sci, Bus & Educ.	71	21	7
Arts & Humanities	80	20	0
SECURE GRANTS			
All	25	63	12
Rank			
Associate professor	17	67	17
Professor	29	61	10
Academic area			
Sciences	38	50	13
Soc. Sci, Bus & Educ.	15	77	8
Arts & Humanities	0	80	20

Table 7 Respondents' Perception of Impact of Their Extended Overseas Trip on Ability to Secure Tenure &/or Promotion

Category	Percent of Respondents Reporting Their Ability		
	Increased	No Change	Decreased
All respondents	19	81	0
RANK¹			
Associate Professor	33	67	0
Professor	13	87	0
ACADEMIC AREA			
Sciences	21	79	0
Soc. Sci, business & education	23	77	0
Arts & humanities	0	100	0

¹Significant @ 80% confidence level

and college assignments. Seventy-four percent reported no change in such assignments, 19% reported a decrease and only 7% an increase. Activities within one's professional associations were similarly unaffected.

Table 8 Respondents' Estimate of Influence Upon Current Annual Salary of Having Taken an Earlier Extended Overseas Assignment

Change in Annual Income	Sciences	Social Sci, Business &	Arts and
		Education	Humanities
Greater by \$10,000 or more	0	15	0
Greater by \$5,000 to \$10,000	5	15	0
Greater by \$1 to \$4,999	5	15	25
No Change	70	46	75
Less by \$1 to \$4,999	10	0	0
Less by \$5,000 to \$10,000	10	8	0
Less by \$10,000 or more	0	0	0

Summary and Conclusions

Faculty in agriculture differ little from their peers across the campus in terms of international travel, including long term overseas experiences. There is evidence that international travel, particularly long term assignments, will increase the international content of courses and that faculty with one or more long term assignments perceive that they are better able to teach their subject matter. The majority of faculty with long term overseas experience also reported an increased ability to conduct research. The influence of long term assignments on tenure, promotion and salary were generally either positive or of no consequence. Universities and colleges of agriculture seeking to further internationalize their programs should enhance the opportunities for faculty to participate in long term overseas activities.

References

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