

# Internationalizing Agricultural Economics Curricula

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## Abstract

*The internationalization of agricultural curricula is an area of growing concern, importance and activity. A survey of Departments of Agricultural Economics indicates a very diverse situation with some international exposure for undergraduates at most universities. About one fifth of the departments have extensively internationalized their curricula with most offering some type of specialization. Another one fifth of the curricula have very little international content while the remainder offer various degrees of exposure with at least one specialized course, international content in other courses, study abroad programs and other activities.*

## Introduction

Interest in international activities by agricultural colleges of American universities has been increasing, after several years of a relatively low level of interest. This process has become increasingly important due the growing importance of global issues for the agricultural professions. Changes in international trade, development, and related issues mean that more and more of our agricultural graduates will become involved in some aspect of the international economy at some time in their careers (Henson 1990, Schuh 1989). Colleges of Agriculture (under whatever names they are now organized) are struggling with efforts to enhance the international components of our curricula. A number of conferences and publications provide general or case study information about University and College of Agriculture internationalization efforts, but do not provide the specifics that indicate the extent of such programs (North Central Curriculum Committee Project 1990; International Program Development Office 1989; White, Brack and Ba 1992). While this has resulted in a greater awareness of many of the activities in use throughout the country, it also indicated that relatively little information exists with respect to the extent and nature of internationalization programs, especially in agricultural economics.

To help fill the gaps in the knowledge base, a survey was conducted of Agricultural, Natural Resource Economics and related departments in Colleges of Agriculture at land grant and a few selected other universities. The survey utilized a one page questionnaire to elicit information on current activities and plans for future internationalization activities. It consisted of eight questions with a yes or no response; if the response was yes the respondent was requested to provide additional, descriptive information. The survey was mailed to 59 institutions in May of 1992 with a return deadline of June 15; 42 responses (72.9 percent) were

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received. A follow-up letter was mailed to non-respondents in early July and 13 additional forms were returned for a total response of 93.2 percent.

## Survey Results

The eight questions on the survey form elicited information for undergraduate curricula on (1) language requirements, (2) study abroad programs, (3) specialized international courses, (4) courses with international content as a portion of the course, (5) existence of an international specialization in the curriculum, (6) other internationalization activities in their college, (7) other internationalization activities in their university, and (8) plans for future internationalization activities. A summary of the yes/no responses is given in Table 1 with the details by respondent reported in Table 2. Results for each question are given in the following subsections.

### Language Requirements

Less than one fourth (21.8 percent) of the departments reported a general language requirement for their undergraduate students, although a few others require language training for their international specialization students. Several of those who require a language permit the substitution of high school language training for the university requirement. A fairly typical requirement of this group is two years of high school or one year of university languages.

### Study Abroad

Two thirds of the departments indicated that their undergraduate majors have some type of formal opportunity to study abroad. Generally these are through university wide programs such as a year or semester abroad at one or more foreign institutions where the university had some type of formal arrangements or exchange programs. These varied from arrangements with one or two to many places to carry out such programs. Some of the programs were handled by colleges and a few departments had some type of arrangements although these latter tended to be practicums or internships. The majority of the programs were at European universities although several were with various Latin American countries and a few in Asia, mainly Japan, the Pacific area and Africa. Some departments without formal

Table 1. Summary of Questionnaire Responses.

Question	Yes	No	% Yes
Language Requirements	12	43	21.8
Study Abroad	36	18	66.2
Specialized Courses	42	13	76.4
Partial International Courses	35	19	64.8
International Specialization	18	37	32.7
Other College Activities	32	22	59.3
Other University Activities	40	12	76.9
Plans for Future Activities	37	17	68.5

Table 2. Survey Responses by University

University	Language required?		Study Abroad?		Special Courses		Partial Courses?		Internat. Special.?		Other Int College?		Acts. Univer?		Future Plans?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
ALASKA		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
ALCORN STATE		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
ARIZONA		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
ARKANSAS		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
AUBURN		•		--		•		•		•		•		•		•
CALIFORNIA - D		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
CLEMSON		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		--
COLORADO		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
CONNECTICUT	•			•		•		•		•		•		•		•
CORNELL		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
DELAWARE		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
FLORIDA		•		•		•		•		•		•		--		•
GEORGIA		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
HAWAII	•			•		•		•		•		•		•		•
IDAHO		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
ILLINOIS	•			•		•		•		•		•		•		•
IOWA		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
KANSAS		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
KENTUCKY	•			•		•		•		•		•		•		•
LOUISIANA STATE		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
MAINE		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
MARYLAND		•		•		•		--		•		•		•		•
MASSACHUSETTS		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
MD E. Shore		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
MICHIGAN	•			•		•		•		•		•		•		•
MINNESOTA		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
MISSISSIPPI		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
MISSOURI		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
MONTANA STATE		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
NEBRASKA		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
NEVADA		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
NEW HAMPSHIRE		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
NEW MEXICO		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
NORTH CAROLINA		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
OHIO		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
OKLAHOMA		•		•		•		•		•		--		--		•
OREGON	•			•		•		•		•		•		•		•
PENN STATE		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
PUERTO RICO	•			•		•		•		•		•		•		•
PURDUE		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
RHODE ISLAND		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
RUTGERS		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
SOUTH DAKOTA		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
SOUTHERN UNIV		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
S. ILLINOIS		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
TENNESSEE	•			•		•		•		•		•		•		•
TEXAS A&M		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
TEXAS TECH		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
UTAH		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
VERMONT		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
VIRGINIA		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
WASHINGTON		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
WEST VIRGINIA		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
WISCONSIN	•			•		•		•		•		•		•		•
WYOMING		•		•		•		•		•		•		•		•
SUMS	12	43	36	18	42	13	35	19	18	37	32	22	40	12	37	17
PERCENT YES	21.8		66.7		76.4		64.8		32.7		59.3		76.9		68.5	

programs indicated that students could and were encouraged to make their own arrangements for study overseas. Purdue, Oklahoma State, Oregon State and South Dakota require students in their international specialization/minor to take a language. Ohio State requires ten hours of international experience that can include languages or cultural courses.

### Specialized International Courses

A large percentage (76.4) of the departments indicated that they offer one or more specialized undergraduate courses on international topics, i.e., those with a 100 percent international content. Thirty nine of the 55 departments offer a total of 84 courses. These are categorized as World Food and Agriculture, Trade, Development, Marketing, and Policy, plus a miscellaneous group. This latter group consisted of courses in European Agriculture and Policy, Comparative Economic Systems, International Economics, Agriculture in Planned Economies, Agricultural Project Planning and Special Topics.<sup>1</sup> Some courses cover 2 of the categories used as, for example, trade and marketing; these were classified by the name that appeared first in the title. Development courses were most common with 33 courses offered by 27 departments (Table 3). There were 17 world food and agriculture type courses, 22 trade courses, 5 marketing courses and 3 policy courses. Most departments offered 2 or 3 specialized courses while Minnesota listed 8, Illinois 5 and Cornell, Missouri, Ohio State and Vermont each listed 3.

Most of the courses were upper division, junior and senior level, but several lower division courses also were taught. Many of the upper division courses also carried graduate credit. Enrollments varied from 5 to 200; most of the courses with high enrollments were lower division and tended to be in the World Food and Agriculture category, i.e., were introductory survey courses. The average for the 70 courses for which enrollments were reported was about 35. This means, allowing for duplication and graduate enrollments, that over 2,000 undergraduates are exposed to international courses each year.

### Courses with International Components

Nearly as many departments indicated that they also taught courses that had international issues as components of courses that were basically domestic in content. These included a wide variety of courses and also large variations in the proportions of the courses devoted to the international components. The latter varied from 5 to 50 percent, with 15-20 being typical.<sup>2</sup> The two types of courses that more commonly included international components were policy (15) and marketing (11). Others with more than one response were food and fiber systems (4), introductory agricultural

1. Some of the departments combine economics and agricultural economics and thus offer courses that would be offered in the economics departments at other institutions. Since names do not always indicate precise contents no attempt was made to separate the courses with more explicit or pure economics content.

2. Several respondents did not indicate the proportions of the international components of these courses. Others indicated that some small percentage of most courses contained or that instructors were encouraged to include international aspects in all courses.

economics (5), finance (2), prices and price analysis (2), rural economic development (2). Additional courses offered included agribusiness operations; general agriculture; modernization, senior seminar; growth, man and environment; forestry management; and money and banking.

### International Agricultural Specializations

Eighteen departments indicated that some type of option for an international specialization was available for their students. Typically these were in International Agriculture as a College of Agriculture program rather than as a specialization under Agricultural Economics, although some departments do offer majors, minors or other specializations in International Agricultural Economics. Many, but not all, require a foreign language as part of the specialization. The specializations include a B.S. degree in International Agricultural Economics (Wisconsin, Wyoming), a major in International Trade and Development (Minnesota, Virginia Tech), minors (Missouri, Oregon State, Penn State, Purdue, Virginia Tech), and a Certificate in International Agriculture (Georgia). Other specializations include options (Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Oklahoma), concentrations (Vermont), area of emphasis (Iowa State) and a specialization (Penn State). Two, Utah State and Nevada, indicated that specializations were available but did not indicate the type. Specific topics of the specializations could be in International Trade and/or Development, International Agriculture, Foreign Agriculture, International Business, International Trade and Marketing, Food Policy, Trade and Development, and International Agricultural Economics.

The requirements for these specializations varied as widely as their titles, from just 3 or 4 to several courses, foreign languages, living experiences, practicums, and/or internships. The curricula varied from well designed plans with checklist forms specifying the requirements to vague descriptions specifying the number of hours of international courses. Several of the programs were run either by the College or an International Programs or International Studies unit of the College or University. Several departments have graduate specializations but not undergraduate programs.

### Other College and University Programs

Within the Colleges of Agriculture, it appears that Agricultural Economics Departments tend to have international

**Table 3. Specialized International Courses by Type and University<sup>a</sup>**

Development	CT CO DE IA IL ID IN KS MA MD MI MN MO MT NC NV NY OH OR PA S <sup>b</sup> VA VT UT WA WI WY
Trade	AL CO DE FL GA IL IN KS KY LA MN MO MS NE NJ NY OK PA TX T <sup>c</sup>
Food & Agr.	AZ CT CO IN KY MA MD MI MN MO NE NH NM OH PA VT WI WY UT VA
Marketing	NE NV NY WA WI
Policy	MN NC VT

a. State abbreviations are used for all Land Grant Universities. Thus, IN = Purdue, NY = Cornell, etc.

b. Southern University

c. Texas Tech

curricular activities more frequently than other agricultural units or the Colleges. A number of departments reported having activities but indicated that their Colleges did not have any other international curricular activities. Many Colleges, however, do have such activities and encourage other units to participate. Many of the specializations described in the preceding section are College rather than departmental programs.

Other university programs, however, are apt to exist more frequently than agricultural economics or College of Agriculture programs. This is due in part to the widespread existence of study abroad programs that have been operated for many years as university projects or as an activity of Colleges of Arts and Sciences. Colleges of Business and Economics also are frequently involved in international types of studies and programs.

### Plans for Future Activities

Over two thirds of the respondents indicated that their universities have plans for further internationalization of their curricula, at the university, college and/or departmental level - often at all three. A number indicated that they have had or currently have committees or other groups that have the function of promoting internationalization of their undergraduate curricula. Some are in the process of implementing previously developed plans; others are developing new or additional procedures and approaches to internationalization. Several indicated that instructors are being encouraged to incorporate international issues into their courses as well as to develop specialized courses on international topics. Others stated that their curricula were being revised constantly and that further internationalization was an aspect of the revisions. One institution, Minnesota, indicated that they had revised their curriculum in 1989 to give a greater emphasis to its international content, but that the revisions had not been as effective as desired. They are, therefore, planning to study and further revise the curriculum to make the international component more effective.

### Internationalization Requirements

While this topic was not covered by the survey, some respondents provided information on internationalization requirements. Except for foreign languages at some universities there are few requirements that result in all students being exposed to international issues. Some required courses, such as introductory agricultural economics, may have an international component but, in general, students who take international courses do so voluntarily by taking such courses as part of the electives or taking international courses that meet other requirements. A few schools now require an exposure to international issues or are in the process of implementing such a requirement. Typically this is a requirement for one or two courses out of the many that might be taken. These may be part of the broadening requirements that many universities have been adding to their curricula in recent years. The plans discussed in the previous section included the implementation of international by four institutions, Michigan State, Nebraska, Oregon and Purdue.

## Conclusions

The survey results contain some good news. The profession seems to be aware of the importance of international issues and problems. The extent to which these are being addressed is somewhat greater than had been anticipated and coverage is growing. It appears that a large number of our undergraduate students get some exposure to global problems, issues and approaches either in specialized courses or as portions of other courses. Opportunities for additional exposure and experience exists at the majority of the Land Grant and related universities that offer agricultural/resource economics programs.

Despite this good news, the survey results were somewhat disheartening. Relatively few universities require any language training or exposure to international issues. Many do not even provide very much of an opportunity for student exposure to international issues; a "no" response to most or all the questions on the survey was all too common. In the majority of our institutions the typical graduate with a B.S. degree probably still knows relatively little about the world in which we all must function and, thus, does not appear to be prepared to meet the global challenges that most will be facing in their professional careers. While there appears to be considerable support for internationalization, the process is apt to be slow due to the inertia of people and organizations, the slowness of institutions to adapt to changing circumstances. Furthermore, there is still some overt resistance to internationalization; one respondent, for example, stated that they had no plans for future activities because their current dean did not favor internationalization.

Fortunately the latter view is not typical and, despite the existence of institutional inertia, considerable progress is being made in providing increased opportunities for exposure to and education about the international issues facing the agricultural economics profession. And while most of us have been moving slowly, a number of institutions are providing leadership in the internationalization process. These include, but are not limited to, Michigan State, Minnesota, and Ohio State. As the data from the survey shows, however, a great many institutions are making contributions to the process although more remains to be done than has been accomplished to date.

The survey results indicate that about one fifth of the departments have very substantially internationalized their curricula, while another one fifth have no or very little international aspects in their programs. The other three fifths have some degree of internationalization, generally through course offerings and study abroad opportunities.

## References

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