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## **Examining Louisiana State University College of Agriculture Students' Perceived Motivators and Barriers to Participation in International Experiences**

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### **Abstract**

In an effort to internationalize higher education and produce globally competent professionals, many universities have increased the time and financial assets put toward promoting an international experience (IE). Research supports using an IE to supplement international education efforts and help students develop the global perspective and experience needed to succeed in the workplace. The purpose of this study was to determine College of Agriculture (CoA) students' perceptions of IE participation, and identify factors that CoA students perceived as barriers and motivators to participation in an IE. CoA students were interested in an IE. Overall life experience was identified as the most agreed motivator, and financial cost was identified as the most agreed barrier. No differences were found in perceived motivators or barriers of CoA students based on academic status. University faculty should encourage students who have participated in an IE to provide presentations and workshops to other CoA students. Further, presentations should focus on overall life experiences students gained from their IE participation, and should be informal in nature to allow for peer-to-peer discussion. This study should be replicated at other peer and regional universities for comparison, and a longitudinal study could be conducted to identify trends over time. Differences in gender and major regarding barriers and motivators should also be examined.

**Keywords:** Motivations, Barriers, International Experiences, Undergraduate Education, College of Agriculture

### **Introduction**

Globalization has influenced every aspect of modern agriculture and as a result, the United States (U.S.) agriculture sector is more globally interdependent now than ever before (Lewis & Gibson, 2008). The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 reduced trade barriers, created new markets, and brought international agriculture to the doorsteps of U.S. producers and agribusinesses (Redmann, Schupp, & Richardson, 1998; Wingenbach, Boyd, & Lindner, 2003). Since then, the impact of globalization continued to grow as new market development programs were implemented to create, expand, and maintain foreign markets for U.S. agricultural products (FAS, 2010).

Today, U.S. agriculture is driven by an interconnected global economy, increased competitiveness in the market, and globalized commodities and services. As such, agriculture and extension professionals must be able to compete in a culturally integrated workplace and adequately meet the needs of diverse clientele (Navarro, 2005). According to the 2004 report by the National Association of Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) Task Force on International Education, “for students to contribute and succeed today, they must not only have a broad knowledge of the world, its people, politics, and cultures, but more importantly, have developed the skills to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate that knowledge” (p. 8). Graduating students must have an understanding of global issues and the ability to address local issues within a global context (Ludwig, 2007; Norris & Gillespie, 2009; Redmann et al., 1998).

Higher education institutions have been given much of the responsibility for developing the next-generation workforce (Punteney, 2012). U.S. land-grant universities have been called to reassess their role in the changing global environment, and increase efforts to internationalize curricula (Ludwig, 2007; Norris & Gillespie, 2009). Throughout the literature, researchers agree that internationalization is a necessary goal for universities (Briers, Shinn, & Nguyen, 2010; Childress, 2009; Norris & Gillespie, 2010; Punteney, 2012; Redman et al., 1998; Wingenbach et al., 2003). NASULGC (2004) put forth the rationale that internationalization helps students “develop the global critical thinking essential to contributing as citizens of the world and competing in the international marketplace” (p. 8). According to Briers et al. (2010), a global curriculum can result in a better-prepared student by increasing their awareness of world cultures, developing global critical thinking skills, and developing intercultural communication skills.

In an effort to internationalize higher education and produce globally competent professionals, many universities have increased the time and financial assets allocated for promoting international experiences (IEs) (Childress, 2009; Navarro, 2005; Parsons, 2010; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005). Prior research supports using IEs to supplement international education efforts and help students develop the global perspective and experience needed to succeed in the workplace (Norris & Gillespie, 2009; Ricketts & Morgan, 2009). In a study by Childress (2009), participation in an international experience (IE) affected the career

choices of nearly two-thirds of the student respondents, and half of the respondents developed careers with global aspects. Parsons (2010) found students who participated in an IE demonstrated greater foreign language skills, increased knowledge of specific regions and countries, greater cross-cultural skills, and a greater overall global perspective. Additionally, these students demonstrated attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors that were more internationally aware, open-minded, and cooperative (Parsons, 2010).

While increased institutional support has increased student participation in such experiences (Salisbury, Brian, & Pascarella, 2013), the number of U.S students who participate in an IE during their undergraduate career remains less than 10%. Only 1.3% of those students are in agriculturally related majors (Institute of International Education, 2013). To promote IEs among agriculture students, research is needed to examine the motivators and barriers that influence students' decisions to participate.

The majority of students in prior studies held positive perceptions toward participating in an IE (Briers et al., 2010; Bunch, Lamm, Israel, & Edwards, 2013; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005) and were motivated to participate if they perceived IEs were important and worth pursuing (Bunch et al., 2013; Spiering & Erickson, 2006). Stroud (2010) reported students who perceived IEs were important to improving their understanding of other countries and cultures were twice as likely to participate than students who did not share the same belief. Another motivational factor frequently reported was the possibility of future career

benefits as an IE outcome (Kim & Goldstein, 2005; Schnusenbergh, de Jong, & Goel, 2012; Stroud, 2010). Briers et al. (2010) found 70% of students were motivated to participate in an IE because they perceived participation would strengthen their resume and increase their ability to compete in the workplace. Students were motivated to participate in IEs when they had a general interest in other countries and cultures (Briers et al., 2010; Stroud, 2010) and saw IEs as a good opportunity to travel and experience other cultures (Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005). Additionally, students were motivated to participate when they liked the country in which the IE was located (Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005).

If students have positive perceptions and favorable attitudes toward IEs, they may still decline opportunities to participate if they perceive barriers to involvement. Spiering and Erickson (2006) assessed students' attitudes regarding IEs and found no significant difference in overall attitude toward IEs between students who had previously participated in an IE and students who had not. Students who chose not to participate in an IE were those who perceived the process as too complex and thought there were too many barriers involved (Spiering & Erickson, 2006). Of the barriers identified in the literature, financial cost was frequently reported (Bunch et al., 2013; Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2009). Briers et al. (2010) reported that students identified (a) paying for the program, (b) allocating affordable and proper housing, and (c) other financial constraints associated with IEs as the major barriers they considered when deciding whether or not they would participate in an IE. However, financial cost cannot solely

explain students' decision not to participate in an IE during their undergraduate career. Spiering and Erickson (2006) found the majority of students thought IEs were still worth pursuing, despite the financial costs involved. A combination of other barriers may explain students' decisions to not participate. Other identified barriers include lack of information about IE opportunities (Peterson, 2003), lack of foreign language skills (Goldstein & Kim, 2006), non-supportive opinions and expectations of family members (Presley, Damron-Martinez, & Zhang, 2010; Schnusenberget al., 2012), and concern regarding how well IEs fit into their academic plan (Spiering & Erickson, 2006).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) served as the theoretical framework for this study. According to Ajzen (1991), human behavior is influenced by the behavioral, normative, and control beliefs of an individual. Behavioral beliefs include students' positive or negative attitudes they form when evaluating their participation in IEs. Normative beliefs include students' perceptions of the subjective norm, which represents the peer pressure they perceive to be associated with participating in an IE. Control beliefs represent students' perceptions of the success or difficulty involved in participating in IEs. These three beliefs include past experiences and foreseen obstacles, and together they can predict students' intention to participate in an IE. Further, the manipulation of any of these three beliefs can modify an individual's intention to perform a specific behavior and, therefore, increase or decrease the

likelihood they will perform the targeted behavior (Ajzen 1991). Prior research has supported that a relationship exists between intent and actual behavior (Schnusenberget al., 2012). Therefore, understanding student beliefs can assist university faculty and administrators to effectively design and market IE opportunities and increase student participation in IEs.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to determine CoA students' perceptions of IE participation, and (b) to identify factors that CoA students perceived as barriers and motivators to participation in an IE. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the selected personal and educational characteristics of CoA undergraduate students?
2. What are the perceptions of CoA undergraduate students regarding interest, importance, time of year, duration, and cost concerning participation in an IE?
3. What factors do CoA undergraduate students perceive as motivators of participation in an IE?
4. What factors do CoA undergraduate students perceive as barriers to participation in an IE?
5. Are there differences in CoA undergraduate students' perceptions of motivators of participation in an IE based on their academic status?
6. Are there differences in CoA undergraduate students' perceptions of barriers to

participation in an IE based on their academic status?

### Methods

The study's population consisted of all Louisiana State University CoA students ( $N = 1,359$ ) during the 2013-2014 academic year. The frame used for the study was the CoA fall semester course schedule. A random sample of five courses from each academic status level (e.g., 1000, 2000, 3000) was selected using a stratified cluster sample (Creswell, 2012). Thus, the sample used in this study was 806 students.

Data were collected, face-to-face, via a hard copy questionnaire from students who were in attendance in the randomly selected course during the day of data collection ( $n = 444$ ). The researchers modified the original questionnaires (Bunch et al., 2013; Lamm & Harder, 2010; Reiger, n.d.) to meet the objectives of this study. Frame error was discovered during the data analysis procedures. A total of 41 students did not meet the criteria of being an undergraduate, CoA student. These 41 respondents and their responses were removed from the study. Additionally, 44 students were removed because of failure to report academic status. Completed instruments were collected from 359 of the 806 CoA students for a response rate of 45%. To control for non-response, personal and educational characteristics were compared to all students in the CoA. One significant difference was found. The freshmen included in this study were not representative of the population. It is assumed this is a result of sampling error (Creswell, 2012). No differences were found regarding all other personal and educational characteristics.

### Instrumentation

The instrument consisted of 66 total items (Bunch et al., 2013; Lamm & Harder, 2010; Reiger, n.d.). The questionnaire was divided into six sections (a) interest in participating in an IE, (b) preferred locations to participate in an IE, (c) preferred activities to participate in while involved with an IE, (d) perceived motivators to participation in an IE, (e) perceived barriers to participation in an IE, and (f) personal and educational characteristics. To establish face and content validity, a panel of experts with expertise in international development reviewed the questionnaire. The panel deemed the questionnaire to be acceptable and did not recommend changes.

For the purpose of this study, only data from four sections were used for analyses. The first section used was designed to measure CoA students' interest level in participating in an IE. Item examples from this section included: (a) are you personally interested in participating in an IE, (b) how important is an IE to your education, and (c) how much time do you prefer to spend on an IE? The second section used asked CoA students to indicate their level of importance with 10 motivation items. A four-point anchored scale (1 = *Not important*, 2 = *Not very important*, 3 = *Somewhat important*, and 4 = *Very important*) was used to determine students' level of importance regarding these items. Item examples include (a) learn another language, (b) increased employability, (c) overall life experience, and (d) important stage in my personal development.

The third section used asked CoA students to indicate their level of agreement with 15 barrier items. A four-

point anchored scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Agree*, and 4 = *Strongly agree*) was used to determine students' level of agreement regarding the barrier items. Item examples include (a) I cannot afford to participate in a study abroad opportunity, (b) I am intimidated by the thought of engaging in a study abroad opportunity, (c) my parents do not approve of study abroad opportunities, and (d) I am too busy with school. Lastly, the personal and educational characteristics section was used to describe the CoA students. This section included 10 items such as (a) gender, (b) ethnicity, (c) hometown residence, and (d) academic status.

Because this study sought to determine CoA undergraduate students' perceptions of motivations and barriers to participation in an IE, *post hoc* reliability estimates were calculated on these two constructs. Cronbach's alpha coefficient revealed exemplary (Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991) estimates of .84 for both motivations and barriers.

### Data Analysis

Data were coded for analysis using the SPSS22<sup>®</sup> software package. Data analyses for research questions one through four consisted of calculating descriptive statistics (e.g., means, percentages, frequencies, and standard deviations). Research questions five and six were analyzed by employing a one-way ANOVA. A statistical significance level of .05 was established *a priori* for all statistical tests employed. Partial eta squared ( $\eta_p^2$ ) was utilized to determine the practical effect of statistically significant findings associated with the ANOVA procedures.

### Findings

Research question one asked about the personal and educational characteristics of CoA undergraduate students at Louisiana State University. Regarding gender, 252 (70.2%) students were female and 107 (29.8%) were male. The majority ( $n = 286$ ; 79.7%) of the CoA students were White (non-Hispanic). Of the remaining students, 32 (8.9%) were African-American, 15 (4.2%) were Hispanic, 10 (2.8%) were Multi-racial, 8 (2.7%) were Asian, and 4 (1.1%) were American Indian/Native American.

In all, 17 (4.7%) of the students were freshmen, 118 (32.9%) were sophomores, 99 (27.6%) were juniors, and 123 (34.3%) indicated senior as their academic status. Regarding academic majors, the most frequent responses were Animal, Dairy, and Poultry Science ( $n = 97$ ; 27.0%), Nutrition and Food Sciences ( $n = 78$ ; 21.7%), Natural Resource Ecology and Management ( $n = 77$ ; 21.4%), Textiles, Apparel, and Merchandizing ( $n = 58$ ; 16.2%), and Agricultural Business ( $n = 28$ ; 7.8%). About half ( $n = 178$ ; 49.6%) indicated they grew up inside the city limits, and 177 (49.3%) grew up outside the city limits. The majority of respondents ( $n = 315$ ; 87.7%) indicated that they were not fluent in a language other than English and had not previously engaged in an IE ( $n = 317$ ; 88.3%).

Research question two sought to determine the perceptions of undergraduate CoA students regarding interest in participation, importance, ideal time of year, duration, and cost of participation concerning IEs. The majority ( $n = 264$ ; 73.5%) of CoA undergraduate students indicated personal interest in participating in an IE during their undergraduate education.

Additionally, most ( $n = 246$ ; 68.5%) of the students perceived IEs to be either somewhat or very important.

The most frequent sources of information utilized to inquire about IEs were friends/word of mouth ( $n = 206$ ; 57.4%), the Academic Programs Abroad website ( $n = 122$ ; 34.0%), and flyer, magazine, or newspaper ( $n = 114$ ; 31.7%). The least frequent sources of information utilized to inquire about IEs were Internet site/Other ( $n = 35$ ; 9.7%) and the student's academic advisor ( $n = 49$ ; 13.6%). The junior year ( $n = 220$ ; 61.3%) was indicated as the most suitable academic status in which to participate in an IE. Summer ( $n = 183$ ; 51.0%) was indicated as the preferred time of year for an IE and 4-6 weeks ( $n = 142$ ; 40.0%) was most often indicated as the preferred amount of time spent.

More than one-half ( $n = 199$ ; 55.4%) of the students were willing to pay between \$1,000 and \$2,999 to participate in an IE. Most ( $n = 196$ ; 54.6%) of the students required scholarships to cover between 26% and 75% of the costs associated with IE participation.

Research question three was concerned with determining factors that CoA undergraduate students perceived as motivators to IE participation (see Table 1). The overall mean of the motivator construct was 3.25 ( $SD = .50$ ). The highest rated motivator item mean was *Overall Life Experience* ( $M = 3.69$ ;  $SD = .52$ ), which was in the real limits of *Very Important*. The remaining motivator item means were within the real limits of *Somewhat Important*.

Table 1

*Perceived Motivations to IE Participation by CoA Undergraduate Students ( $n = 359$ )*

Motivations	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Overall life experience	3.69	.52	Very Important
Looks good on a résumé	3.46	.72	Somewhat Important
Opportunity to live in another country or culture	3.37	.73	Somewhat Important
Important stage in my personal development	3.32	.79	Somewhat Important
Increased employability	3.31	.75	Somewhat Important
Learn more about my academic specialization	3.17	.78	Somewhat Important
Learn another language	3.12	.87	Somewhat Important
Get a graduate degree	3.11	.88	Somewhat Important
Opportunity to work in another country after completing current degree	3.06	.86	Somewhat Important
Importance placed by academic advisor or department	2.86	.86	Somewhat Important
Motivation Construct	3.25	.50	Somewhat Important

*Note.* Real Limits: 1.00 to 1.49 = *Not Important at All*, 1.50 to 2.49 = *Not Very Important*, 2.50 to 3.49 = *Somewhat Important*, 3.50 to 4.00 = *Very Important*.

Research question four sought to identify items the CoA undergraduate students perceived as barriers to IE

participation (see Table 2). The overall mean of the barriers construct was 2.03 ( $SD = .45$ ). The highest rated barrier



item was *I cannot afford to participate in study abroad opportunities* ( $M = 2.71$ ;  $SD = .86$ ), followed by *I am too busy with school* ( $M = 2.65$ ;  $SD = .83$ ). The mean scores for these items were in the

real limits of *Agree*. The mean scores of the remaining items were within the real limits of *Disagree*.

Table 2

*Perceived Barriers to IE Participation by CoA Undergraduate Students (n = 359)*

Barriers	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
I cannot afford to participate in study abroad opportunities	2.71	.86	Agree
I am too busy with school	2.65	.82	Agree
I am too busy with work	2.48	.90	Disagree
Academic departments do not encourage me to participate in study abroad opportunities	2.25	.84	Disagree
I am not aware of study abroad opportunities	2.15	.87	Disagree
I am concerned that a study abroad opportunity will impact my personal relationships	2.02	.90	Disagree
I am intimidated by the thought of engaging in a study abroad opportunity	2.00	.81	Disagree
I do not see the need to study abroad	1.93	.85	Disagree
The culture of the university does not support me in study abroad opportunities	1.93	.72	Disagree
A study abroad opportunity will not have an impact on my future career	1.87	.80	Disagree
I am not self-motivated to participate in study abroad opportunities	1.82	.81	Disagree
Studying abroad will not help me academically	1.80	.75	Disagree
My parents do not approve of study abroad opportunities	1.72	.73	Disagree
I am not interested in learning about other cultures	1.59	.77	Disagree
I am satisfied with the world I live in and do not see a need to travel	1.54	.72	Disagree
Barrier Construct	2.03	.45	Disagree

*Note.* Real Limits: 1.00 to 1.49 = *Strongly Disagree*, 1.50 to 2.49 = *Disagree*, 2.50 to 3.49 = *Agree*, 3.50 to 4.00 = *Strongly Agree*.

Research question five asked if there were differences in motivators perceived by CoA undergraduate students by academic status (see Table 3). Sophomore students held the highest

perceived motivator score ( $M = 3.30$ ;  $SD = .50$ ). Senior students held the lowest overall motivator score ( $M = 3.17$ ;  $SD = .48$ ).

Table 3

<i>Mean Motivators Perceived by CoA Undergraduate Students by Academic Status</i>			
Academic Status	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Freshman	3.29	.50	17
Sophomore	3.30	.50	116
Junior	3.28	.51	96
Senior	3.17	.48	122
Total	3.25	.50	351

A one-way ANOVA was employed to determine if a statistically significant difference existed in perceived motivators to IE participation based on academic status (see Table 4).

Levene's test was used to ensure the assumption of equality of error variances was not violated. Levene's statistic was not significant ( $p = .61$ ). The ANOVA yielded a  $F(3, 347) = 1.44$ ,  $p = 0.231$ .

Table 4

*Analysis of Variance Summary Table of Perceived Motivators to IE Participation by Academic Status of CoA Undergraduate Students*

Source	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	1.07	3	.356	1.44	.231
Within Groups	85.78	347	.25		
Total	86.85	350			

Research question six sought to determine if statistically significant differences existed in perceived barriers to IE participation based on academic status of CoA undergraduate students (see Table 5). Freshman students ( $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = .40$ ) held the highest overall

perceptions of barriers to IE participation. Senior students ( $M = 1.97$ ;  $SD = .42$ ) held the lowest overall perceptions of barriers to IE participation.

Table 5

<i>Mean Barriers Perceived by CoA Undergraduate Students by Academic Status</i>			
Academic Status	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Freshmen	2.11	.40	17
Sophomore	2.10	.48	118
Junior	2.01	.46	99
Senior	1.97	.42	123
Total	2.03	.45	357

Prior to employing a one-way ANOVA, Levene's statistic was not statistically significant ( $p = .65$ ), therefore, equality of error variances was

assumed. The ANOVA yielded a  $F(3, 353) = 2.00, p = 0.12$ .

Table 6

<i>Analysis of Variance Summary Table of Perceived Barriers to IE Participation by Academic Status of CoA Undergraduate Students</i>					
Source	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	1.20	3	.399	2.00	.12
Within Groups	70.81	353	.20		
Total	72.00	356			

### **Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications**

The typical CoA student at Louisiana State University was a white female majoring in Animal, Dairy, and Poultry Sciences who received federal financial aid and other scholarships to assist in paying for tuition. These personal and educational characteristics are similar to students who participated in an IE during the 2011/2012 academic year nationwide (Institute of International Education, 2013). The clear majority of CoA students were interested in participating in an IE. However, one-fourth of the students reported they had

no personal interest in participating in an IE. The CoA students seeking information on IE opportunities were likely to do so through friends, word-of-mouth, or from the study abroad academic websites.

Overall life experience has been previously reported as a strong motivator for students to participate in IEs (Briers et al., 2010) and was the only motivation item CoA students perceived as very important. Students perceived all other motivation items as at least somewhat important. Regarding perceived barriers, students indicated they could not afford to participate in an IE and that they were

too busy with school to participate. This finding was not surprising, as financial cost is a common barrier reported in the literature (Briers et al., 2010; Salisbury et al., 2009; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005). Lastly, no differences were found in the perceived motivators or barriers of CoA students based on their academic status.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

An individual's perception of a behavior as a norm within his or her social group can influence the likelihood of that individual performing a specific behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In fact, Spiering and Erickson (2006) reported when considering their decision to participate in an IE, students perceived a positive benefit when discussing their experiences with other students who had participated in similar programs. Because CoA students indicated friends and word of mouth were their preferred means of inquiring information on IE participation, university faculty should encourage students who have participated in an IE previously to provide presentations and workshops to other CoA students. These presentations should focus on the overall life experiences students gained from their IE participation and should be informal in nature to allow for peer-to-peer discussion. Additionally, a global agriculture ambassador program could be initiated in Colleges of Agriculture. Advisors of this program would recruit students who were interested in international agriculture and utilize these students for international education recruitment. In addition to peer support, advisors and faculty members can contribute to students' positive perceptions concerning IE participation as a subjective norm and, therefore,

increase the likelihood they will participate (Ajzen, 1991; Schnusenberget al., 2012). Also, CoA faculty and advisors should help reduce students' perceptions of barriers by assisting students in allocating funds, as well as working with students to incorporate IE courses into their academic track (Spiering & Erickson, 2006). Informational seminars and training could be provided to CoA faculty to help them better assist students in their IE pursuits.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study should be replicated at other peer and regional universities for comparison and a longitudinal study could be conducted to identify trends over time. To better explain why one-fourth of the students were not interested in participating in an IE, future analysis is warranted to identify how their perceived barriers differed from those students who indicated personal interest in participating. Differences in gender and major regarding barriers and motivators should also be examined. Considering the influence faculty and advisors have in internationalizing the curricula and promoting IE participation, future research should seek to investigate the IE perceptions and awareness of CoA faculty. Additionally, a study of this nature could provide researchers with information regarding the current role of faculty members in promoting IEs among students. This information could help universities determine if a training program is needed for their faculty members and, if so, how to best design those training programs.

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