Expanding the International Focus in the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine at Mississippi State University

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Cohort #9

# Introduction

In September 2012, Mississippi State University hosted an international conference titled, *Technology Implementation at the Local Level: Food Security for the Future*. At that conference, Raj Shah, Administrator for US-AID, and Peter McPherson, President of APLU, talked about the importance of international development. They emphasized the role universities, especially land-grant universities, must play if meaningful strides are to be made in helping developing nations to better be able to feed their citizens.

In February 2013, while attending the Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists meeting in Orlando, Florida, Dr. Tim Murphy of Texas A&M University was the keynote speaker in the agricultural education section. Dr. Murphy identified five areas that departments of agricultural education need in order to ensure their viability: teacher education, extension education, agricultural communications, agricultural leadership, and international development in agriculture. We had the first three sort of covered, and I knew I wanted to figure out how to make the other two happen.

We were able to hire an agricultural leadership person in August 2013, so by the time I started FSLI in September 2013, I was focused primarily on international agricultural and extension education as a growth area.

These factors, along with APLU initiatives, general provincialism of Mississippians, and other media sources constantly proclaiming the need for international development, led me to choose this as my FSLI project: *Expanding the International Focus in the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine at Mississippi State University*. My FSLI mentor, Dr. Jerry Gilbert (our current provost), was very excited about it, as he and our president are very internationally-minded.

This report contains a summary of the progress made with this project through October, 2015.

# Goals

* Increase student interest and participation in study abroad programs. (We are under 5% at the university and under 1% in the College of Ag and Life Sciences.)
* Increase faculty participation in international development opportunities.
* Increase extension agent participation in international development opportunities.
* Improve global awareness of 4-H members.
* Improve global awareness of all Mississippians.

# Actions

1. We were able to have a position approved for a faculty member in international agricultural and extension education. I consider it really big that we were allowed to use state money to fund the position, which I understand is quite rare around the country. To increase our applicant pool, I negotiated to have the position be a partly teaching, mostly Extension position, so we could offer it as a tenure-track position, which we did.
2. I encouraged faculty to develop study abroad programs for the next year (Spring break, Summer, etc.) and encouraged students to search out study abroad opportunities. We have had one fashion design and merchandising professor, Phyllis Miller, who has taught one class just about every other summer in London since 2004. The class has generally enrolled from 4 to 8 MSU students along with students from other universities. We have only had one other offering (also in London) since 2001.
3. One fashion design and merchandising student won a scholarship to attend Regent’s University in London in Summer 2014.
4. One agricultural and extension education masters student was able to travel to Ghana to collect data for her thesis on effectiveness of extension programming to women farmers of Ghana in Summer 2014. She was a Bourlag scholar also. This student in currently an intern at ECHO and is considering a relocation to Africa in 2016.
5. Juyoung Lee, assistant professor of fashion design and merchandising, was successful in securing a grant from the Laurasian Institution and Japanese Society of America for us to hire a Japan Outreach Coordinator for two years. Chieko Iwata started in that role in August 2014. Her job is to teach Japanese culture to audiences in Mississippi.
6. We hired Susan Seal as an assistant professor of international agricultural and extension education beginning August 2014.
7. Seal taught a class on international agricultural and extension education in Fall 2014.
8. We identified partnerships with international organizations: Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP). Seal, Laura Lemons (assistant professor of agricultural leadership), and I visited Rome to meet with these potential partners in August 2014. Drs. Seal and Lemons presented scientific papers with FAO staff in May 2015 at AIAEE in Amsterdam.
9. We had 20 students from fashion design and merchandising (18% of those majors) complete a 2-week course in Italy in July 2015, along with 5 extension agents. The course was titled *Farm to Fashion* and was open to agriculture students as well, but only one participated. The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences provided scholarships to students, and we provided additional scholarships from our School of Human Sciences foundation funds to make these activities more affordable. Mississippi State University Extension provided scholarships for the extension agents.
10. At the 4-H Club Congress in June 2015, one of the tours was an international experience set up by Seal and other faculty members. Seal also coordinated a 4-H World Food Day video contest. She has conducted 4-H agent and volunteer training focused on incorporating international-related 4-H programs at the local level and presented a similar program at the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA) in Portland, OR.
11. Seal has conducted a workshop for high school agricultural teachers in the Hinds county area regarding incorporating international-related content into the classroom. She is presenting a similar program at the National Association of Agricultural Educators in New Orleans.
12. A recent graduate of our agricultural science program is currently working for AgriCorps on a development project in Ghana. She plans to pursue her masters in international agriculture upon completion of this project in 2016.
13. Lemons presented a research paper and facilitated a round table discussion at the International Leadership Association Annual Conference in Barcelona, Spain in October 2015.

# Planned Actions

1. Seal has collaborated with faculty from plant and soil sciences to offer a combined study tour for Extension agents and students to Shanghai, Shandong and Beijing, China during June 2016. For Extension agents, the study tour will also be the third step in an Extension personnel training program in international trade. The first step is a training session on the basics of international exporting for Mississippi businesses in collaboration with the Mississippi Department of Commerce and the Southern U.S. Trade Association, managed by the MDAC. The second step is a tour of the Port of Gulfport and some Mississippi river ports. An Extension publication on the basics of exporting is being submitted to Agricultural Communications.
2. Lemons and Gaea Hock (assistant professor of agricultural education) have planned a study abroad to Panama for June 2016. Students will learn about agricultural production practices and develop leadership skills on this tour.
3. We hope to double our participation in the London Study Tour for 2016.
4. Seal has written proposals for about 5 projects with faculty from the veterinary college and/or experiment station to increase international activity among faculty and students in the Division and is part of an MSU International Working Group focused on empowering women in Uganda
5. An undergraduate minor in International Agricultural Studies (IAS) in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has been submitted which includes a new agricultural education/general agriculture course in international agricultural systems as a core course.

# Future Directions and Discussion

We have not been working on this project very long, but I feel we are well on our way to achieving some of the goals we set in the beginning. We have certainly increased our offerings and awareness of international learning opportunities. As we continue to provide these opportunities, students and others will come to view international studies as expected, and we will have more citizens with a broader outlook on agriculture.