Jamaica: Dawn of a New Beginning

B. Allen Talbert
Purdue University
615 West State Street
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2053
(765) 494-8423
btalbert@purdue.edu

Mark A. Balschweid
Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education & Communication
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
300 Ag. Hall UNL
Lincoln, NE 68583

Daniel Gottschalk
Purdue University
615 West State Street
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2053

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Introduction

Agricultural Education undergraduates must be prepared to live and work in a multicultural, global society. Talbert and Edwin (2008) recommended that these students experience gender, ethnic, socio-economic status, and rural/urban diversity in their field placements. They found that one-third of the responding agricultural education programs placed students at schools with little to no ethnic diversity. Also, according to U.S. Census Bureau (2004) data, less than five percent of U.S. college students study abroad in any particular year.

In 2004, the Agricultural Education program at Purdue University proposed a short-term study abroad for its teacher education students. The country of Jamaica was chosen as it had a secondary agricultural education system, a college of agriculture, and was substantially different in ethnicity and socioeconomic status from Indiana. In addition, the study abroad would count as two of the three "international understanding" courses required in the College of Agriculture's undergraduate core curriculum.

How it Works

An internal university grant supported the two instructors to travel summer 2004 to Jamaica to make in-country arrangements for the initial study abroad experience in summer 2005. From this exploratory trip it was decided that the Jamaican College of Agriculture, Science, and Education (CASE) would be the "home base" for the study abroad. It was also decided that the experience would be three weeks in length. This length was chosen for both pedagogical and financial reasons. It also seemed to be the length of most other summer study abroad programs at Purdue University.

At Purdue for study abroad experiences, students pay program fees instead of tuition. This allows study abroad programs to be self-funding and self-sustaining. A budget is developed based on a targeted number of participants and expected expenses.

It was decided that the experience would begin immediately after the conclusion of spring semester exams. This allowed students to complete the three week experience and still have June and July to work at internships or take on-campus summer classes. This schedule also allowed the instructors to be on-campus during the state's FFA Convention, the university's summer incoming student registration, and the state's agriculture teachers association summer conference.

Students took two teacher education courses, *Introduction to Teaching* and *Multiculturalism in Education*, worth 6 semester credit hours during the Jamaican study abroad. The schedule was: Monday/Wednesday/Friday classroom days, Tuesday/Thursday tropical agriculture tours or high school observations, and Saturday/Sunday recreational and cultural activities. Classroom days cover essentially the same content as that covered during the academic year, on-campus offerings of the courses. Course assignments are the same as the on-campus offerings with minor adjustments for technology and course length.

Results to Date/Implications

Summer 2009 was the fifth group of students to participate in the Jamaica study abroad. Group sizes have been 12, 11, 12, 13, and 11 for a total of 59 participants. This has been approximately 50% of the freshman class (the target audience) in agricultural education at Purdue University. Several Jamaica participants have taken other study abroad courses including India (another Education block) and Spain (full semester). The program has been successful in being self-funding and sustainable.

In the course evaluation, students have responded that the program provides them experiences they could not obtain in the United States. They reported they now know what it feels like to be an ethnic minority. They also reported they have a greater appreciate for the wealth in the United States and have ideas on how to use inclusive teaching for students of all backgrounds.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

The first year the experience was 22 days inclusive of the two travel days to/from Jamaica. This was too long both financially and pedagogically. Therefore, the next four trips were 17 or 18 days in length. With a more efficient itinerary, this has proven to be an appropriate number of days.

Jamaica is a country in which transportation outside of chartered services may not be safe and parts of the country, Kingston in particular, are not safe for student to explore on their own. Because of this, all trips and activities including recreational/cultural were as a group. This had the unexpected consequences of bonding the students as a group and encouraging less-adventuresome students to try new experiences.

The instructors initially believed that cost would be a prohibitive factor. We have found that as long as the experience is comparably priced to other study abroad courses at the university that students see the cost as reasonable. However, we did hear anecdotally that several students who were considering participating in summer 2009 did not because of the difficult economic times.

Costs/Resources Needed

Each university will have a slightly different structure for study abroad. At Purdue University, the Jamaica study abroad costs each student participating approximately $4,000 using a budget with 12 participants. This covered: airfare; university fees; travel insurance; in-country travel; in-country food; in-country lodging; entrance fees to cultural/recreational activities; instructor travel expenses, salaries and benefits; and CASE room and equipment rental. Because these expenses were a part of the program fee, the financial aid office treated the fee the same as tuition. Therefore, students could use grants, loans, and scholarships to pay the program fee. Additional expenses that students had to pay for out-of-pocket included: passport, travel to the U.S. airport, souvenirs, and miscellaneous expenses.

From an instructor perspective much of the planning and program arrangements took place during the preceding academic year. This required time resources and organizational skills.

References

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