

International agriculture and rural development

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International agriculture and rural development experiences have become critical in the training of food and agriculture majors

Our world is changing exponentially and unleashing sets of complicated problems, challenges, and opportunities. In view of this, international agriculture and rural development experiences have become critical in the training of food and agriculture majors.

Such training must include:

- Policies and roadmaps to increase awareness of the critical roles of agriculture in global economy and rural development.
- Engaging policymakers, donors, and institutions on effective strategies to advance or strengthen agriculture and development in the global and rural economy.
- Strengthening relationships between agriculture and rural development, promote a sustainable global society, and cooperative interactions among organizations engaged in international development.
- Promoting the development of globally engaged agriculture scholars by expanding the number of international research collaborative opportunities and creating long-term mentoring programs.
- Academic institutions broadening agriculture roles in the overall under-graduate and graduate curricula.
- Agriculture faculty working with other colleagues to develop and incorporate agricultural examples and topics into courses across various colleges.

How important is international agriculture? The field of international agriculture has a massive impact not only on society but also on public policy. Today's students need to expand their understanding of various world agricultural systems through scientific research and learning to face global agricultural issues and challenges and engage with their community in meaningful ways. With a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary mix, the perfect cocktail of scientists to drive agricultural innovations can be formed.

Within the next decade, U.S. Colleges of Agriculture are likely to be challenged to transform their current roles in higher education and emerge as vital venues for scholars and stakeholders to address the evolving complex and urgent problems attributed to food, agriculture, human, natural sciences, food security or insecurity, and climate change. A concerted effort by any higher education system is needed to recalibrate its academic focus to encompass the reality of issues defining the current world's food and agriculture systems and restructure them to meet the future agriculture workforce. Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University [AAMU], a U.S. institution of higher learning like most U.S. institutions have been at the forefront of producing baccalaureate or higher

degree level minority graduates in food, agriculture, human, and natural sciences [FAHNS]. Its investments in human capital development and academic programs include global collaborations to provide students with workforce experiences outside the U.S. borders. In alignment with its mission “As a center of excellence”, the University provides a student-centered educational environment for the emergence of scholars, scientists, leaders, and critical thinkers equipped to excel through their contributions and leadership in a 21st century national and global society”.

In an increasingly interconnected world, agriculture is important to U.S. agriculture, economy, and national security. The high demands for professionals with cross-cultural intelligence [individual’s ability to adapt to new cultural contexts] and cross-cultural competencies both in the private and governmental sectors, necessitates increasing faculty and students’ overseas participations and the need for our institutions to globalize programs across cultures [Bruening and Frick, 2004].

The expansion of global markets

Expanding global markets for U.S. agricultural products is critical for U.S. food and agricultural sectors’ long- term economic health and prosperity. Numerous reports indicate a majority of academics agree that knowledge of global issues would significantly enhance the career options of students [de Wit, 2011; Jeptoo and Razia, 2012; Altbach, 2015]. The United States public officials, academic leaders, and citizens are increasingly aware of the risks to the U.S.’s national security, economic competitiveness, and global leadership if the next generation of students fail to experience and understand global societies, cultures, and languages or lack the self-confidence, independence, and leadership qualities that result from global engagements [Institute of International Education, 2020].

It is imperative and vital that the next generation of leaders understand and can operate within the geopolitical and agro-economic landscape of the 21st century and beyond. Through studying abroad, U.S. students will gain critical experiences and perspectives and establish networks that enhance their prospects in today’s globalized agricultural workforce and future potential as global agriculture problem-solvers. While the number of U.S. undergraduate students travelling overseas has grown substantially over the past several years, only about 10% of those who graduate will have study abroad experience during their college experience [Institute of International Education, 2020]. However, data on U.S. participants in study abroad programs, their destination countries, and their fields of study also indicate that there is a lack of diversity in these areas [United States Department of Education, 2012].

International scientific collaborations

The United States Department of Agriculture supports international scientific collaborations that address mutual interests within the global agricultural science community, therefore, agricultural faculties are obliged to educate students on global issues regarding agriculture and related international career opportunities [Cooperative

State Research, Education, and Extension Services, 2021; Association of Public Land-Grant Universities, 2021]. In this 21st century global economy, it is imperative that graduates are prepared to compete and aggressively take advantage of every opportunity in the global economy. Alabama A&M University recognizes the inevitability of meeting the global challenges to fulfil its missions to provide beneficial outcomes and impacts to our stakeholders. The needs can be addressed by developing international collaborative partnerships with peer institutions abroad for U.S. scholars to forge collaborations with counterparts across several agricultural disciplines.

The author Professor. Dr. Zachary Senwo and colleagues have spent nearly two decades initiating and leading overseas studies programs in such countries as Brazil, China, Honduras, Kenya, and Costa Rica and continue to mentor scholars worldwide including Malawi, China, Brazil, Senegal, Rwanda, South Africa, Cameroon, and Gabon.

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