**Study abroad is valuable to rounding out ag education**

**By MICHELE F. MIHALJEVICH**

Indiana Correspondent

AMES, Iowa — Study abroad programs offered by colleges of agriculture allow students to experience firsthand the diversity zones and gain independence and cultural awareness, according to program administrators.

Two students from Iowa State University’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) who have studied abroad agreed with the assessment. “It opens your perspective,” noted So- nia Carrola, a junior in food science from Madison, Wis. “You gain a lot in differ- ent areas – academics, personal skills, professional skills. It helps to show you want to be a global citizen. I’ve never run into anyone who regretted going on a study abroad program.”

Carrola’s study abroad was a trip to Paris, France, to look at the sustainabil- ity of the food system there. She hopes to make another trip before graduation.

Connor Bollum, a junior from Austin, Minn., studying agricultural business, has traveled to Argentina, Greece and Spain. “Before I traveled (for the pro- gram), places I’d gone were pretty much in the Midwest. I wanted to get out of my little bubble. The trips help you have memories of a lifetime. You make con- nections both personally and profes- sionally.

“Now, I’m a little more confident I can do things by myself. I can communicate past the language barrier,” he said. The trips also ground students in the school’s curriculum, said Shelley Taylor, director of the pro- gram. Each course has a syllabus, objectives, goals and evaluations.

“If the goal is to give them exposure to their area of study,” she noted. “They will have had an exposure to a culture they wouldn’t have had. They also see there’s another world out side of their sphere. That other world is something they’ll be interacting with. They will be engaging with the global marketplace.”

The college offers se- mester-long courses and shorter ones of 2-4 weeks. The majority of the pro- grams are shorter term, Taylor said.

“I have traveled to Central and South Ameri- ca, southern and eastern Africa, the United King- dom, France, Italy and Taiwan. About 22-25 per- cent of each graduating class has study abroad experience, she said. The university has scholarship money available to help defray costs and also re- ceives funding from private donors.

**Culture shock a challenge**

Participation in a study abroad pro- gram helps students gain skills such as time management, adaptability and responsibility, said Kara Hartman, inter- national academic programs specialist for Purdue University’s College of Agri- culture.

“The kids change while they’re over there,” she said. “The trips open their minds as to how big the world is, es- pecially if they come from a small town in Indiana. But travel abroad can be tough; it depends on the person and how they adjust. That culture shock is challenging for some.”

Purdue also offers semester-long pro- grams plus short- er-term courses. The longer programs are usually conducted as a university abroad, where students take classes and live in the dorms, she said. The school tries to match those courses with similar offerings at Purdue. The short- er-term programs are led by Purdue facul- ty.

Australia, China, Germany, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Nor- wegian, South America and South Korea are some of the areas Purdue students have visited. In the 2016-17 academic year, 37 percent of the college’s grad- uates participated in at least one trip, Hartman said. The university also offers scholarships to help with costs.

The University of Kentucky’s College of Agriculture, Food and Environment has seen growth in its education abroad program, especially in the last 10 years, said Amanda Saia, director of career de- velopment and academic enrichment for the college.

“This is a great opportunity for students to experience academic courses and life in general outside of a classroom,” she noted. “The experience is highly valu- able. As a land grant institution, we have faculty in every department doing work abroad.”

The college requires an academic en- Richardsonement experience, either as an intern- ship or a trip abroad, she said. “Taking a semester abroad is less popu- lar with students than the shorter-term programs.” Saia noted, “It’s actually far more affordable to travel for an entire semester but the students don’t always see it that way. If we can get a student to think about semesters, those are the best opportunities for young people to become culturally competent. They’ll learn the language and become immersed in the culture.”

The courses abroad are just like those offered on campus, she said. Students have a syllabus, learning outcomes, as- signments and attendance is taken. Last year, 175 students in the agricultural college participated in education abroad programs. Students have gone to Argen- tina, France, Italy, Japan, Korea and the United Kingdom.

**Program for freshmen**

To get students interested in a semes- ter-long program, the College of Agricul- tural, Consumer and Environmental Sci- ences (ACES) at the University of Illinois has a shorter-term session for freshmen, said Jessa Barnard, director of the study abroad program.

The college offers an eight-week Carib- bean agriculture course in the fall semes- ter. Over the following winter break, students travel for 12-15 days to coun- tries such as the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Jamaica, and to Puerto Rico.

“If students are involved as freshmen in the faculty-led, shorter programs, over winter break, we see an influx of those going abroad at the semester lev- el later on,” she said. “There are lots of perceived barriers, but not actual bar- riers, to taking a semester away from campus. Maybe they don’t want to leave campus during football season, for example.”

ACES has about 20 exchange agree- ments with universities and small col- leges overseas. The college has a data- base of all courses students have taken abroad. By using the database, students will know what courses will count to- ward their degree.

Illinois students have traveled to Brazil, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Sierra Leone and Tanzania.

“We try to match a program with a stu- dent’s interests, abilities and major,” Barnard said. “If they’re in my office, they’re probably thinking about studying agribusiness.”

“If they seem hesitant between a se- mester, or shorter program, I ask why. Being abroad for the longer term gives them a different level of independence than if they’re here.”

Generally, 37-39 percent of the col- lege’s students participate in study abroad programs in a given year, she explained.

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**Spotlight on youth ...**

Redline Equipment invests $15,850 in local FFA members

ARCHBOLD, Ohio — Redline Equipment donated $15,850 to local FFA members in the counties they serve. Money will go to fund scholarships for 54 Ohio and In- diana FFA members to attend the Wash- ington Leadership Conference, Leadership Conferences and Camp FFA. In Michigan the funds will go to support the Michigan FFA region II leadership camp from which 120 members will benefit.

“The Redliners are extremely proud to be- come a part of youth development,” said Zach Hetterick, Redline Equipment CEO, presents Marleigh Kerr, Ohio FFA state sentinel, with an $8,150 check. Redline also donated $6,150 to the Indiana FFA and $1,550 to the Michigan FFA Region II. (Photo provided)

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