

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND ATTITUDES TOWARD CULTURAL DIVERSITY AMONG SUMMER AGRICULTURE STUDENTS AT THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to measure the level of global perspective and attitude toward cultural diversity among summer agriculture students using established survey scales for these constructs. A survey instrument was completed by 145 agriculture students at The Ohio State University. Survey results indicated that, in general, students tended to have a moderate global perspective and a positive attitude toward cultural diversity. High correlation was also found between global perspectives and attitudes toward diversity. In comparison with male students, females were more likely to have a higher level of global perspective and a more positive attitude toward cultural diversity. Students who had more contact with international people also scored higher on the global perspective and cultural diversity scales. Recommendations, implications, and future study directions derived from the survey results were discussed.

Introduction

In recent years, the issues of globalization and cultural diversity have gained increasing attention in higher education. As the international community moves toward greater interdependence, globalization is driving a revolution in educational institutions. This transformation is being shaped by the demands to prepare labor for participation in the global economy and to prepare citizens to participate in the international polity (Torres, 2002). Policymakers and the general public have concluded that in order for the United States to be competitive in this era of globalization, schools and universities must produce the human capital necessary to meet the demands of the new economy (Artiles, 2003). In addition to globalization, the United States is experiencing a shift in demographic trends, including an increase in cultural diversity (Galambos, 2003). Increased diversity is evident in American higher education, where minority undergraduate enrollment is projected to rise from 29% in 1995 to 37% in 2015 (Carnevale & Fry, 2000, cited in

Pike, 2002). Faced with this fundamental demographic change, leaders in the public and private sectors have called on the higher education establishment to prepare students to function effectively in a diverse society (Pike, 2002).

Background/Theoretical Framework

Global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity among agriculture students were examined in this study. According to Hett (1993), a global perspective is an ecological world view which promotes the unity of humankind and the interdependence of humanity, universal human rights, loyalties that extend beyond national borders, and a future-oriented perspective. An attitude toward cultural diversity is defined as one's feeling, thought or disposition about the differences among people with respect to race, class, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, religious affiliation, age, language, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, and other human attributes (Grogan & Eshelman, 1998; Stanley, 1996). Historically, global perspective and diversity are two distinct

concepts with global perspectives emphasizing worldwide phenomena and diversity focusing primarily on ethnicity within the United States (Baker, 1999; Banks, 1997; Merryfield, 1993, cited in Banks, 1997). However, in recent years, many scholars and educators have made conceptual connections between these two fields of study because both are critical components of educational programs if schools are to prepare young people for effective participation in their local and global communities (Merryfield, 1996). The most important forces for cooperation between the two are the similarities of the goals and content (Baker, 1999). Baker and Merryfield indicated that both fields intended to promote equity and social justice, to improve intergroup and global understanding and relations, to improve intercultural communication, to reduce stereotyping and prejudice, and to help people comprehend human diversity and human commonalities. Based on this framework, global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity were examined in this study.

Why do we need to have a global perspective?

We are living in an interdependent world, and a citizen in any one country is compelled to learn about other countries. Akpan and Martin (1996) believe that with the rapid shrinking of our world, U.S. institutions cannot afford the consequences of failing to prepare their citizens for participation in world affairs. Welch's (2002) rationale for globalizing universities included the preparation of scholars and graduates who are internationally knowledgeable and competent, and the need to address the interdependent nature of the world (environmentally, culturally, economically, socially) through scholarship, economic priorities, and maintenance of scientific and technological competitiveness. Global perspective is a relatively new concept; therefore, the research literature on this topic is embryonic. Several researchers (Odell, Williams, Lawrence, Gartin, & Smith, 2002; Zhai & Scheer, 2002) revealed that overseas experiences tended to have a

positive influence on students' global perspectives.

Why do we need to have a positive attitude toward cultural diversity?

The U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse in ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds. To be successful in this diverse society, Americans must have cross-cultural skills, knowledge, and sensitivity. The changing ethnic texture of the U.S. population has major implications for all of the nation's institutions, including schools, colleges, universities, and the work force (Banks, 1997). These institutions must be restructured and transformed in order to meet the needs of the different kinds of people who will work in and be served by them (Banks, 1997). The inclusion of diversity into student development should not be left to any one university office or administrator (Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990). Research has confirmed that students' openness to diversity was related to the overall diversity of the student body, opportunities for positive interactions among diverse groups of students, and exposure to curricula that include knowledge about diverse groups (Pike, 2002).

Why focus on agriculture students?

The accelerating globalization and demographic changes within our society have prompted educators to rethink many aspects of their educational practices (Torres, 2002). These trends are having a profound impact on the agriculture sector and its educational institutions as well. The expansion of international trade and economic competitiveness means that the agriculture industry must operate on a global scale. Therefore, it is crucial that agriculture students become more knowledgeable about other countries, their cultures, economy, and roles in world affairs. To address diversity issues in the context of agriculture, professionals have called for more proactive behaviors and recognized the need for agricultural education to address diversity at both the secondary and post-secondary levels (Bowen, 2001; Woods & Moore, 2003). Colleges of agriculture have the responsibility to

prepare students adequately for the global and diverse environment in which they will participate throughout their careers. Assessing the maturation of agriculture students' global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity is an important step for future educational program development. Colleges of agriculture can use the results of such studies to better understand, improve and change campus environments, thereby creating settings more conducive for students' development of openness and appreciation for globalization and diversity.

Purpose and Objectives

The major objective of this study was to measure global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity among undergraduate agriculture students using established survey scales for these constructs. The following research questions were developed:

1. What are the international experiences of agriculture students? Variables include: a) sources of information used to learn about other countries, b) number of college courses taken related to global issues, c) prior overseas experience, and d) contacts with international people.
2. What is the level of global perspective for these agriculture students?
3. What is the attitude toward cultural diversity among agriculture students?
4. What are the relationships between major demographics and students' global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity?
5. Do scores of global perspective and attitude toward cultural diversity scales differ by major demographics?

Methods

The design of this study focused on survey research. The target population was all undergraduate agriculture students who were enrolled in the College of Food,

Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at the Ohio State University (OSU) during the summer of 1999 (N = 226).

The survey instrument was adapted from already developed measures to investigate students' global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity. Variables were measured by obtaining students' agreement with various 6-point Likert-type questions ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 6 (very strongly agree). Questions addressing global perspectives were adapted from Hett's (1993) Global Mindedness Scale (30 items), while attitudes toward cultural diversity were assessed by Stanley's (1996) Attitudes toward Cultural Diversity and Pluralism Scale (19 items). Several demographic questions were also included in the survey to obtain student background information.

Content and face validity of the survey instrument was established via a panel of experts and a field test. The panel of experts constituted six OSU faculty members, including three professors in international/multicultural education, one professor in research instrumentation, one senior administrator, and one professor in human and community resource development. Five college students in the target population participated in the field test to examine the wording and clarity of the questionnaire. Minor changes were made based on suggestions from panel experts and students from the field test. To assess the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test (n = 15) was performed, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated. Results yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 for the global perspective scale and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95 for the attitude toward cultural diversity scale. Therefore, the instrument was judged to be reliable.

Research subjects were 226 undergraduate agriculture students who were actively enrolled at The Ohio State University during the summer of 1999. Survey packages (including a cover letter, a survey questionnaire, and a postage paid business reply envelope) were mailed to all students in June 1999. Small incentives were also attached with the survey

questionnaire to encourage a high response

rate. About 40% (n = 91) of the students responded in the first two weeks. A postcard reminder and the second survey package were sent to non-respondents in the third and fifth weeks after the first mailing. A total of 145 students returned the survey by the end of August 1999 (64.2% response rate). Data were not available to compare the differences between respondents and non-respondents; therefore, non-response error was not investigated in this study.

Results

Sample Description

The average age of the students was 24 years. There was a slightly higher percent of females than males among the respondents (male, 48%; female, 52%). Over 92% of the respondents were white. There were virtually no international students among the respondents (one non-US citizen). About 50% of the respondents indicated that they intend to obtain a Master's degree and 29% of them wanted to obtain a Bachelor's degree. The average college GPA of the respondents was 2.92. Nearly 35% of the respondents were from a farm, another 23% came from small towns, and 17% of them came from rural areas, but not a farm. About 24% of the respondents came from a city. Nearly 48% of the students reported that their father's educational level was high school and another 30% reported their father had a Bachelor's degree; and reporting their mother's educational level, 40% had a high school diploma and 25% had a Bachelor's degree.

What are the international experiences of the responding agriculture students?

Students were asked to report their international related experiences (Table 1).

Results suggested that the students' major sources of information about other countries were newspapers/magazines (82.1%), television (81.4%), radio news (37%), and books (31%). About 35% of the respondents indicated that they took one to two college courses related to global issues and another 35% took three to four such courses. It was noted that over 63% of the students indicated that they had traveled to other countries. The mean score of student contact with international people was 2.89 (based on the scale from 0 = none to 6 = constant).

What is the level of global perspective for the responding agriculture students?

The level of global perspective was measured by student ratings on 30 Likert-type questions adapted from Hett (1993). The ratings ranged from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 6 (very strongly agree). Table 2 presents the mean score by question in rank order, as well as the overall level of global perspectives. Results showed that the students' overall mean score for the global perspective scale was 4.02, indicating a moderate global perspective. Students rated the following three statements with the highest agreement: "I often think about the kind of world we are creating for future generations (mean = 4.88)," "Americans can learn something of value from all different cultures (mean = 4.81)," and "It is very important to me to choose a career in which I can have a positive effect on quality of life for future generations (mean = 4.73)." The statements which received the lowest agreement were negatively worded items: "Generally, an individual's actions are too small to have a significant effect on the ecosystem (mean = 2.72)" and "It is not really important to me to consider myself as a member of the global community (mean = 2.93)."

Table 1
International Experiences of Responding Agriculture Students (n = 145)

Variables	Frequency	Percent*	Mean	SD
Sources of information about other countries				
Newspapers/magazines	119	82.1%		
Television	118	81.4%		
Radio news	53	36.6%		
Books	45	31.0%		
Family/relatives	27	18.6%		
Friends	29	20.0%		
Other	11	7.6%		
Number of college courses related to global issues				
None	5	3.4%		
1-2 courses	50	34.5%		
3-4 courses	51	35.2%		
5-6 courses	24	16.6%		
7-8 courses	7	4.8%		
More than 8 courses	8	5.5%		
Prior overseas experience				
Yes	92	63.4%		
No	53	36.6%		
General contact with international people**	(n = 139)		2.89	1.70

* Percent = percent of total respondents (n=145).

** Scale is based upon: 0 = none and from 1 = Occasional to 6 = Constant.

What is the attitude toward cultural diversity among the responding agriculture students?

Students' attitudes toward cultural diversity were measured by obtaining agreement ratings on a 19-item survey adapted from Stanley (1996). The ratings ranged from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 6 (very strongly agree). Mean scores for all questions in rank order are summarized in Table 3. It was found that agriculture students had a positive attitude toward cultural diversity (mean = 4.48). The highly rated questions were: "In education,

it does not matter if a student is rich or poor, everyone should have the same chance to succeed (mean = 5.21)," and "Each student should have an equal opportunity to learn and succeed in education (mean = 5.07)." Questions that received lowest agreement were the following two negatively worded items: "Students should give up their cultural beliefs and practices to fit in with other students (mean = 2.34)," and "There is really nothing that educational systems can do for students who come from lower socioeconomic groups (mean = 2.38)."

Table 2
Mean Scores for the Global Perspective Scale among Responding Agriculture Students (n = 145)

Global Perspective Statements	Mean	SD
I often think about the kind of world we are creating for future generations.	4.88	0.92
Americans can learn something of value from all different cultures.	4.81	0.93
It is very important to me to choose a career in which I can have a positive effect on quality of life for future generations.	4.73	1.03
It is important that we educate people to understand the impact that current policies might have on future generations.	4.64	0.96
The United States is enriched by the fact that it is comprised of many people from different cultures and countries.	4.64	1.01
It is important that American universities and colleges provide programs designed to promote understanding among students of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.	4.44	1.05
In the long run, America will probably benefit from the fact that the world is becoming more interconnected.	4.24	0.89
I enjoy trying to understand people's behavior in the context of their culture.	4.24	0.96
I generally find it stimulating to spend an evening talking with people from another culture.	4.19	1.05
I think of myself, not only as a citizen of my country, but also as a citizen of the world.	4.19	1.03
My opinions about national policies are based on how those policies might affect the rest of the world as well as the United States.	4.19	0.91
The needs of the United States must continue to be our highest priority over needs of other countries.*	4.08	1.25
I feel an obligation to speak out when I see our government doing something I consider wrong.	4.07	1.06
I think my behavior can impact people in other countries.	3.84	0.97
The fact that a flood can kill 50,000 people in Bangladesh is very depressing to me.	3.81	1.14
I am able to affect what happens on a global level by what I do in my own community.	3.80	0.90
I feel very concerned about the lives of people who live in politically repressive regimes.	3.77	0.95

Table 2 Continued

Global Perspective Statements	Mean	SD
When I hear that thousands of people are starving in an African country, I feel very frustrated.	3.77	1.16
When I see the conditions some people in the world live under, I feel a responsibility to do something about it.	3.61	0.99
I sometimes try to imagine how a person who is always hungry must feel.	3.61	1.08
Americans have a moral obligation to share their wealth with the less fortunate peoples of the world.	3.45	1.21
I sometimes feel irritated with people from other countries because they don't understand how we do things here.*	3.32	1.18
I feel a strong kinship with the worldwide human family.	3.30	0.93
I have very little in common with people in underdeveloped nations.*	3.26	0.95
The present distribution of the world's wealth and resources should be maintained because it promotes survival of the fittest.*	3.22	1.15
American values are probably the best.*	3.14	1.15
Americans should be permitted to pursue the standard of living they can afford if it only has a slight negative impact on the environment.*	3.10	1.14
Really, there is nothing I can do about the problems of the world.*	2.95	0.90
It is not really important to me to consider myself as a member of the global community.*	2.93	1.07
Generally, an individual's actions are too small to have a significant effect on the ecosystem.*	2.72	1.15
Overall Global Perspective	4.02	0.57

Note: Scale is based upon: 1=very strongly disagree to 6=very strongly agree.

Negatively worded items (indicated by *) were reversed when calculating the overall mean.

Table 3
Mean Scores for the Attitude toward Cultural Diversity Scale among Responding Agriculture Students (n = 145)

Attitude Toward Cultural Diversity Statements	Mean	SD
In education, it does not matter if a student is rich or poor, everyone should have the same chance to succeed.	5.21	0.89
Each student should have an equal opportunity to learn and succeed in education.	5.07	1.00
Education should help students develop respect for themselves and others.	4.98	1.07
Students should be taught to respect those who are different from themselves.	4.92	1.10
Students should feel pride in their heritage.	4.91	0.86
All students should learn about cultural differences.	4.50	1.04
Each minority culture has something positive to contribute to U.S. society.	4.41	1.02
Educational activities should be representative of a wide variety of cultures.	4.29	0.98
I enjoy being around people who are different from me.	4.19	1.07
Educators are responsible for teaching students about the ways in which various cultures have influenced this country.	4.15	0.99
Educators should plan activities that meet the diverse needs and develop the unique abilities of students from different ethnic backgrounds.	4.03	1.05
The perspectives of a wide range of ethnic groups should be included in the curriculum.	3.89	1.01
Minority individuals should adopt the values and lifestyles of the dominant culture.*	2.87	0.99
I am uncomfortable around students whose ethnic heritage is different from my own.*	2.87	1.15
Minority students are hard to work with.*	2.65	1.01
Cultural diversity is a valuable resource and should be preserved.	2.54	1.12
Cultural diversity is a negative force in the development of the U.S. society.*	2.54	1.12
There is really nothing that educational systems can do for students who come from lower socioeconomic groups.*	2.38	1.10
Students should give up their cultural beliefs and practices to fit in with other students.*	2.34	1.07
Overall Attitude Toward Cultural Diversity	4.48	0.72

Note: Scale is based upon: 1 = very strongly disagree to 6 = very strongly agree. Negatively worded items (indicated by *) were reversed when calculating the overall mean.

What are the relationships between major demographics and students' global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity?

Correlational analyses were performed to examine the relationships between the overall rating of global perspective with attitude toward cultural diversity scale, student age, parents' educational level, number of college courses related to global issues, and general contact with international people (Table 4). In interpreting the correlation coefficients and effect size, Hopkins' (2000) description was used:

Value of r	Effect size	Description
0.0-0.1	0.0-0.2	Trivial, very small, insubstantial
0.1-0.3	0.2-0.6	Low, small, minor
0.3-0.5	0.6-1.2	Moderate, medium
0.5-0.7	1.2-2.0	High, large, major
0.7-0.9	2.0-4.0	Very large, very high
0.9-1.0	4.0-infinite	Nearly perfect, distinct

For this study, only significant moderate associations, $r > 0.30$, are discussed. Results revealed that student global perspectives had a very high relationship ($r = .78$) with their attitudes toward cultural diversity. This

implies that students with a higher level of global perspectives tended to have a more positive attitude toward cultural diversity. Contact with international people also had a positive relationship with global perspectives ($r = 0.35$) and attitudes toward cultural diversity ($r = 0.34$). Other demographic or background variables either did not have a statistically significant relationship or the magnitudes of the associations were minimal.

Do scores of global perspective and attitude toward cultural diversity scale differ by major demographics?

A t-test was conducted to test the differences on the overall mean scores for the global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity scales between males and females, as well as between students with and without prior overseas experiences (Table 5). Effect size, as measured by the standardized mean difference, *Cohen's d* (Cohen, 1988), was also computed. The interpretation of the effect size was based on Hopkins' (2000) description. Results indicated that, in comparison with males, females had a significantly higher level of global perspective (moderate effect size, *Cohen's d* = 0.67) and a more positive attitude toward cultural diversity (moderate

Table 4
Correlations between Demographics Variables and Mean Scores for Global Perspective and Attitude toward Cultural Diversity Scales (n = 145)

Variables	Global Perspectives (n = 145)		Attitudes toward Cultural Diversity (n = 145)	
	coefficient	description	coefficient	description
Attitudes toward Cultural Diversity (n = 145)	0.78**	very large		
Age (n = 98)	0.07	trivial	0.00	trivial
College GPA (n = 98)	0.23*	low	0.26*	low
Contact with international people (n = 139)	0.35**	moderate	0.34**	moderate
Mother's education (n = 145)	0.21*	low	0.18*	low
Father's education (n = 144)	0.07	trivial	0.12	trivial
Number of international courses (n = 145)	0.14	low	0.21**	low

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5
T-Test and Effect Size for Global Perspective and Attitude toward Cultural Diversity Scales by Gender and Overseas Experience (n = 145)

Variables	Global Perspectives					
	Mean	SD	t	Sig.	Effect size	Description
Gender*			3.34	0.00	0.67	moderate
Female (n = 51)	4.24	0.55				
Male (n = 47)	3.86	0.59				
Overseas Experiences			1.65	0.10		
Yes (n = 92)	4.08	0.06				
No (n = 53)	3.91	0.07				
Variables	Attitudes toward Cultural Diversity					
	Mean	SD	t	Sig.	Effect size	Description
Gender*			3.12	0.00	0.63	moderate
Female (n = 51)	4.75	0.64				
Male (n = 47)	4.33	0.70				
Overseas Experiences			0.64	0.52		
Yes (n = 92)	4.51	0.08				
No (n = 53)	4.43	0.10				

* Indicates statistically significant.

effect size, *Cohen's d* = 0.63). No significant difference was found between students with prior overseas experiences and those without overseas experiences on their mean scores for global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity scales.

One-way ANOVA was also employed to test differences of level of global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity in terms of home origin and number of college courses students completed related to global issues. No significant differences were found.

Conclusions/Discussions/Limitations

Summer agriculture students obtained information about other countries from newspapers/magazines or television. More than 60% of the responding agriculture students had prior overseas experience. In general, agriculture students had a moderate global perspective and a positive attitude toward cultural diversity. It is interesting to

note that, in comparison with male students, females tended to have a higher level of global perspective and a more positive attitude toward cultural diversity. Results also revealed that students with a higher level of global perspective tended to have a more positive attitude toward diversity. This finding supported Baker (1999) and Merryfield's (1996) argument to integrate global perspective and diversity in teaching and learning programs.

Results suggested that students who had more contact with people from other countries were more likely to have a heightened level of global perspective and a more positive attitude toward cultural diversity. This conclusion coincides with Pike's (2002) conclusions, which noted that students who had more opportunities to interact with diverse group of students were more open to diversity.

Results of this research indicated that student's prior overseas experience, age, home origin, and number of college courses

they took addressing global issues were not related to their level of global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity. This conclusion showed some inconsistency with those drawn by several other researchers (Herm, 1996; Odell, et al, 2002; Zhai & Scheer, 2002). Those studies suggested that participation in overseas international programs tended to have a positive influence on students' global perspectives or attitudes toward cultural diversity; however, this investigation revealed that prior overseas experiences were not related to these two variables. However, it should be pointed out that students' prior overseas experiences in this study were self-reported and information related to the scope and types of the experience was not collected. Therefore, more research should be conducted to determine what types of overseas experiences tend to have more influence on agriculture students.

Although this study revealed some interesting findings, caution should be taken not to over generalize the results. Because this study was conducted based on 145 responding agriculture students at a single institution, it is difficult to determine whether studies at other institutions would generate similar results. Another limitation is that this research only focused on summer agriculture students, which may not be representative of the regular (non-summer) student body. Had measures of global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity been taken at different times, the results might have been different. Additionally, in order to determine the accuracy of this study, the researchers assumed that students provided honest answers to the survey questions.

Recommendations/Implications

Despite the limitations, the findings of this study have some implications for developing programs addressing globalization and diversity issues in colleges of agriculture. Specifically, this study indicated that responding agriculture students had a moderate global perspective; hence, if similar results are confirmed on other campuses, programs should be

designed to promote this asset. The strong relationship between global perspectives and attitudes toward diversity also suggested that colleges of agriculture could incorporate these two into their student development programs. Colleges of agriculture can enhance their global/multicultural educational programs through study abroad or other culture exchange/immersion programs for their students to gain both global and cross-cultural competencies.

The data revealed that the students who had more contact with people from other countries had a higher level of global perspective and a more positive attitude toward cultural diversity. This finding indicates that it is possible to create programs and campus environments that positively influence student development. For example, colleges of agriculture could use international students as valuable resources to enrich their students' educational experience. Activities and programs could be developed to facilitate interactions between U.S. students and international students, such as international clubs, conversation-partner programs, international festivals, and culture exchange seminars.

If other institutions are similar to the respondents of this study in terms of ethnicity; attention should be given to recruit more minority students at colleges of agriculture. Increasing diversity of the student body is critical to immerse students into culturally diverse learning environments and provide them opportunities for positive interactions among diverse groups of students.

Another implication of this study is the roadmap for future research. For example, the same survey might be conducted during a different semester/quarter or administer it at other universities. It would also be interesting to compare students' global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity among freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. This study concluded that females tended to have a higher level of global perspective and a more positive attitude toward cultural diversity than males. Further research could also explore the basis for the contribution to this gender difference.

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