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ANALYSIS OF AN IRELAND STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

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## **ABSTRACT**

Throughout history, education has become more global. As a result, students are increasingly beginning to study abroad for a week, a semester, a year, or even for their entire college career. Studying abroad and gaining these experiences is thought to be more than just a resume builder; it broadens the minds of the students and opens their eyes to an entirely different world. Studies have shown the impact that studying abroad has on students and what students gain from completing these experiences. While studying abroad has become a more popular component of the college experience, only 1% of the college students in the United States take advantage of these programs and partake in a study abroad experience. The objectives of this study were to determine how international experiences impact students and in what ways the experience can be improved in order to enhance their learning.

HORT 499H, “Walking in the Footsteps of the Irish During the Potato Famine: Examinations of New World Crops in Old World Societies,” the basis of this research, was an embedded spring course that traveled to Ireland during the Maymester. A focus group was held on the last night in Ireland and students completed a short survey regarding their experiences. Additionally, throughout the study abroad experience, photographs were taken in order to capture all aspects of the entire trip. Upon returning to the United States, data from the focus group and survey was compiled and analyzed for similarities and compared against previously completed research. Five photographs were chosen to represent each of the five pre-determined themes. Based on the data obtained through this research, it is apparent that this experience had an overwhelming positive impact on the student participants. Study abroad experiences provide students with skills and opportunities that cannot be obtained elsewhere.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Study Abroad**

Education and industry are continuing to become more global as we move throughout history. Each year, college students participate in study abroad programs, whether a week, semester, year, or multiple years. Students that complete a study abroad experience broadens the minds of students and opens their eyes to an entirely different world. Studies have shown the impact that studying abroad has on students and what students gain from completing these experiences (Dwyer, 2004; Zhai & Scheer, 2002; Wilson, 1992). Studying abroad has become a more popular component of the college experience and researchers continue to study the benefits students gain from participating. However, only 1% of the college students in the United States take advantage of these programs and partake in a study abroad experience (IES NCES, 2015).

Study abroad programs impact and contribute to the students' personal growth such as acceptance of one's self and others, acceptance of responsibility, maturity, and independence (Wilson, 1992). Zhai and Scheer (2002) has shown that study abroad programs made students more interested in and aware of international and global issues. The students also were more aware and open to cultural diversity. Students that studied abroad reported that they gained new knowledge and skills including travel skills, non-verbal communication skills, coping skills, and the ability view issues from different perspectives (Zhai & Scheer, 2002). A study completed by Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) reported that students were more perceptive and open to topics

taught abroad than in country. Students that traveled abroad reported a significant out-of-classroom learning experiences. Students also indicated that study abroad topics related to personal growth and development were equally impactful; such as adaptability, flexibility, patience, responsibility, respect for others, and appreciation for arts (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). Students typically return to their home country with a greater appreciation of how the world functions and additional individual self-awareness.

### **Need for Study**

While researchers are investigating the impacts of study abroad experiences on students, more information is required. Costello (2015) states that there are five authors in particular that stress these gaps in research. Regan (2003) questions the effects of the study abroad experiences of students upon return to their home countries. Walsh (2010) states that little of the research regarding study abroad is from the students' perspectives; while McKeown (2009) notes that, while the subject of study is important, there is little research completed. The research on study abroad experiences for language programs is minimal according to Bilash and Kang (2007). Lastly, Montgomery (2010) noted that not much of the research focused on an aspect of the experience in detail and even less looked at the social and cultural context that the presence of international students created.

Zhai and Scheer (2002) states that more information is needed regarding how study abroad programs can contribute to students' educational experiences and how more students can be motivated to participate. Research findings will assist in the development of study abroad programs that will maximize students' learning and growth opportunities throughout their

college careers. According to Zhai and Scheer (2002), the research gaps are even greater with study abroad programs directed towards agricultural students as few studies have focused on that population. Students that are in colleges of agriculture should be considered the future leaders of our country's food and animal systems. Zhai and Scheer (2002) further suggested that it is of utmost importance that these students, "understand the dynamics of a changing world and how the change is going to affect the global agricultural industry."

### **Horticulture 499H: A Case Study**

The study abroad experience that is the basis for this study and analysis is HORT 499H, an embedded course at The Pennsylvania State University. Titled, "Walking in the Footsteps of the Irish During the Potato Famine: Examinations of New World Crops in Old World Societies," this course was a two-credit course during the Spring 2016 semester culminating with a one-credit ten day Maymester travel to Ireland component.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to determine how an international experience can impact student participants and suggest improvements for future study abroad experiences. Five research questions were developed to read as follows:

- 1) Why do students engage in study abroad experiences?
- 2) How are peer-to-peer relationships impacted through study abroad courses?
- 3) How do study abroad experiences impact knowledge, skills, and dispositions of students?

- 4) What benefits of study abroad experiences can be represented through photographic themes?
- 5) How can the current study abroad course (HORT 499H) be enhanced?

Student perceptions of the study abroad experience will be analyzed in order to gain a better understanding of how this experience impacted the student participants. Additionally, in order to improve the course and make recommendations for future study abroad courses, students were asked for their thoughts and opinions on what would have made the experience more impactful. At the end of the international component of the course, student participants completed a short survey and participated in a focus group. The information collected from the survey and focus group was compiled and analyzed, sorting for common themes and benefits that were recognized by the students. Additionally, throughout the experience photographs were captured. Upon returning to the United States, the photographs were analyzed and sorted into the five themes with the five most representative photos of each theme being chosen.

### **Scope and Limitations**

This study only examines and analyzes data collected from one course. Data from a variety of courses, from different programs, were not considered. Additionally, the course used as the basis of this study was an embedded course. Therefore, this research does not take into account any data from other types of study abroad programs. The results and conclusions of this study represent one study abroad program and further research should be conducted before generalizations about study abroad programs can be made.

## **Summary**

As study abroad becomes more important for college students, it is important that universities, faculty, and staff realize the importance of a well-developed program. There is little research regarding study abroad programs and are multiple “gaps” in what has been reviewed. This study is based on HORT 499H and aimed to determine how an international experience can impact student participants as well as suggest improvements for future study abroad experiences.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

Today's millennials have a different view of national boundaries compared to students of thirty years ago. The increase in the amount of travel, both national and global, along with the ability to communicate with anyone anywhere in the world with relative ease are both factors responsible for the loss of the traditional significance of national boundaries (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). As the global community becomes more interdependent, international trade and investment increases, and as society becomes more diverse, the importance of United States students graduating from secondary education with global and cross-cultural competencies and firsthand experience with different cultures is greater than ever (Zhai & Scheer, 2002; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004).

Economic interdependencies in business, finance, and trade on a global level creates a demand for a different type of educational opportunity than the traditional classroom (Smith & Mitry, 2008). This need for making a university education relevant in today's global society is major opportunity for colleges and universities worldwide (Zhai & Scheer, 2002). As a result, higher education institutions, along with governments, are investing heavily in study abroad experiences in an effort to internationalize student learning (Paige et al., 2009; Potts, 2015).

While debate continues as to which form a study abroad program should take, there is consensus that a study abroad program is an academic experience in which students “physically leave [their home countries] to engage in college study, cultural interaction, and more in the host country. It may include foreign language study, residing with a foreign host family, internships, and service” (Costello, 2015). Depending on the context, and the college or university, there are several different names for this experience. In this paper, the term study abroad will be used to encompass education abroad, international learning mobility, outbound mobility, and student exchange (Potts, 2015). While the research to date on study abroad experiences has been overly limited, universities, faculty, and, most importantly, students appear to gain many benefits from participating in these programs. The RMIT University in Australia promotes these experiences as, “exciting, life changing experiences that...can also give you the competitive edge you need in landing that dream job” (Potts, 2015; p. 442). According to Sachau, Brasher, and Fee (2010), more than 85% of colleges and universities offer some type of study abroad experience for their students. However, less than 10% of American graduates will take advantage of these opportunities and earn credit abroad before they graduate (Klebnikov, 2015).

### **Benefits of Study Abroad**

The ‘*Beyond immediate impact: Study abroad for global engagement*,’ or SAGE, research project indicated that studying abroad is one of the most important experiences that undergraduate students can participate in during their undergraduate career (Paige et al., 2009). Several studies have surveyed the benefits of studying abroad and completing college credits in



another country. Costello (2015) suggests that the benefits of study abroad can be broken into five different categories.

The first type of benefit relates to choice of venue. Students are able to choose programs based on the length of the experience (i.e. one week, six weeks, one semester, one year, etc.) and the preferred destination. Campus support networks provide students with information about the location. This allows for students contemplating participating in study abroad experiences to learn more about the country they will be visiting and determine whether or not it is a destination of interest. Upon returning, students are also able to share these experiences with friends and family members.

The second type of benefit that students gain is academic and professional. Academic commitment, the opportunity to improve language skills, professional development, return on investment, and improved career development are all documented advantages. Other than the linguistic impacts on students, academic impacts have not been extensively researched in the literature regarding the benefits of studying abroad (Hadis, 2005). Third, students gain intellectual benefits including: the ability to reflect on experiences in a critical manner, a change in the way a student lives his/her life, a decreased fear of interacting with individuals from other countries, as well as a deeper understanding of oneself.

Fourthly, are cultural growth benefits. This includes a new way of understanding international knowledge, opinions about the students' home country changing, opinions about other countries changing, a thorough and extensive exposure to other cultures, and the belief that all individuals belong in the same community. Lastly, are the increases in students' competencies; including, intercultural, cross-cultural, transcultural, internationalization, and globalization.

Others have reported additional student benefits of study abroad experiences: Personal growth, maturity, acceptance of self and others, and acceptance of responsibility are noted benefits. Independence, becoming more confident, developing the skills and attitudes necessary to function in an interdependent culture, increasing awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity, and becoming more open minded are commonly seen in students returning from study abroad experiences. Feeling more connected to the world and individuals in other countries, becoming more interested in international issues, becoming more aware of what is happening in the world, and paying more attention to the global economy are also positive changes that are seen in students. Gaining a better appreciation for their lives in the United States, learning history from a different perspective, realizing how other countries view the United States and Americans through speaking to people, and gaining more understanding, appreciation, and respect for their host country were all quoted by Zhai and Scheer (2002).

Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) cited the benefit that students learn more about geography, watching non-American TV shows, and learn foreign languages while participating in study abroad experiences to learn more about their host site and culture. Additionally, students that do not study abroad are often not as motivated to learn about other countries and cultures since it is not relevant to their immediate surroundings. According to Hadis (2005), participants in study abroad programs acquire global-mindedness and grow intellectually and tend to have a higher than average curiosity and interest in academic matters. Participants are less distracted by non-academic, age-related stimuli and study more for the sheer pleasure of learning rather than studying just for a higher grade. The global mindedness that students obtain from participating in a study abroad experience includes a concern for issues and processes that affect the world, as well as an understanding that local issues are connected to global ones. Hadis also cites that the

experience of studying abroad makes students more open to new ideas, and to take responsibility for their actions rather than relying on other adults to make decisions for themselves.

Upon returning from study abroad programs, other students practice voluntary simplicity choosing to live their life more frugally and without the extra little frills (Paige et al., 2009). Students become more aware of their product and resource use, choosing to live a simpler life, and encouraging friends and family to do the same. According to Ingraham and Peterson (2004), students gain insight about the different standards of living between the United States and the countries they visited. This experience helps students to appreciate what minorities in the United States experience. Smith and Mitry (2008) states that participation in study abroad programs provides students with the opportunity to view the world from a new and different perspective.

Study abroad experiences have a positive impact on the lives of participants, according to 83.5% of contributors (Paige et al., 2009). The experience they had during their undergraduate years influenced and shaped their subsequent lives and careers. Interest in interdisciplinary studies increased (Smith & Mitry, 2008), a career choice they had already made was confirmed, or it caused them to change fields or narrow their interest (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). A new passion and motivation was discovered for their chosen career path (Potts, 2015), they got a job overseas or one within a multinational organization (Dwyer, 2004), and skill sets that were gained during the study abroad experience, especially the soft and communication skills, were all affected by their study abroad experiences. Dwyer (2004) concludes that the impact of study abroad experiences on students may have a lasting effect for up to 50 years after graduation (as cited in Potts, 2015).

## **Barriers**

While there are extraordinary benefits, there are still only an average of 290,000 American students studying abroad each year (Klebnikov, 2015), approximately 1.4% of the students enrolled in American colleges and universities (IES NCES, 2015). There are many reasons that students may choose not to study abroad. Affordability of the program, perception of study abroad only being for the rich, time constraints, how the experience fits into the student's program of study, the fears of minority's that they will face prejudices, and advisors who would rather not discuss race, ethnicity, and culture are all barriers to students studying abroad (Smith & Mitry, 2008; Costello, 2015). Another barrier that is presented by Ingraham and Peterson (2004) is the conflict that some students feel between the desire to participate in the social opportunities yet still fulfill their academic obligations during a study abroad program.

## **College Participation in Study Abroad**

A change in national boundaries has also brought a change in study abroad programs. Previous generations typically would study abroad for a longer period of time. It has become more difficult for students today to participate in long-term study abroad experiences, whether due to money or time (Sachau, Brasler, & Fee, 2010), and there has been a movement towards short-term study abroad programs (Dwyer, 2004). Therefore, universities are now offering more short-term programs that are growing in popularity (Sachau, Brasler, & Fee, 2010). With this shift in the duration of the students' experiences, there is concern among educators that the academic, language, and intercultural benefits previously received by students may be declining (Dwyer, 2004). A study completed by Ingraham and Peterson (2004) states that the longer the

study abroad program is in duration, the stronger the effects of the experience on the students. Nevertheless, students that are participating in study abroad programs are still receiving significant benefits from the academic, language, and intercultural results of the experience (Dwyer, 2004).

According to Chieffo and Griffiths (2004), short-term study abroad programs are worthwhile educational experiences that have significant impacts on students' personal and intellectual lives and currently serve the largest number of American students participating in study abroad programs (Goldoni, 2015). Additionally, students are more likely to participate in multiple short-term study abroad programs adding to the question of how the observed benefits of participating study abroad experiences will differ from the more traditional experience. As the short-term study abroad programs are providing more students with the ability to participate in these experiences, the desire to travel abroad more increases (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). When planning their class schedules, students are also beginning to place more of an emphasis on studying abroad during their undergraduate years. Due to this finding, colleges and universities are now beginning to offer more diverse programs, in a greater variety of locations, and at varying academic levels (Dwyer, 2004).

Study abroad programs represent significant investment from the students, parents, faculty and staff members, and the colleges and universities (Paige et al., 2009). However, the impact that study abroad experiences have on academic, career, intercultural development, and personal/social growth is significant and long-lasting (Dwyer, 2004). Students that participate in study abroad programs enhance their formal education and improve their future employment opportunities (Smith & Mitry, 2008) and, therefore, it is concluded that the benefits students' gain from studying abroad outweigh the costs and drawbacks (Costello, 2015).

### **Course Development**

Developing, planning, and implementing a study abroad experience is difficult and time consuming (Koernig, 2007). There are several issues that can be addressed and worked through while planning the experience. Study abroad programs continually improve as experience is gained and professors have the opportunity to see what works and what does not work. However, thinking ahead can help to ensure that all students have a positive experience, even if it does not quite go as planned.

Meeting as a group several times before the trip helps to facilitate group interaction and reduce any anxiety that students may have. Koernig (2007) suggest the following activities to help facilitate student bonding and expose students to the culture: “student interviews of one (or two) other classmates and an oral introduction of that person to the rest of the class, two- or three-person team oral presentations on one aspect of the culture of the country, two- or three-person team oral presentations about the history [of the location to be visited], a discussion of each student’s anticipated favorite [location] and cultural event, a discussion of previous experiences traveling or living overseas” (p. 212). Pretrip class sessions allow for students not only to build rapport with each other, but also with the professors that they will be traveling with.

When organizing the study abroad program, there are several different approaches that can be taken: self, provider, or hybrid (Eckert, et. al, 2013). In the self-organized approach, the initial investigation, logistics, and contacts are carried out completely by the faculty leaders. In this approach, it is important to have academic and business contacts in the host country as cold calls do not generally work. Provider organized study abroad programs are completely organized by a third party. Providers can offer complete programs where the faculty have little work. A

hybrid system is what most faculty choose as the providers organize the logistics and the faculty plan the academic components (Eckert, et. al, 2013).

Another approach that can be taken is to partner with a university as the study abroad provider. This is a viable option when there is a strong relationship with the partner university. Local faculty can help to plan the formal and informal cultural activities and visiting students are able to meet and interact with the local students (Eckert, et. al, 2013). Encouraging students to interact with their peers from the host country can help to facilitate student understanding of the culture (Koernig, 2007).

A detailed itinerary should be developed to explain in detail what the trip will accomplish. Travel dates should be checked against the university's calendar, holidays, and weekends to ensure that the best schedule is developed for the students. One suggestion is to finish the study abroad program with the grand finale. Students will appreciate big and important areas much more if it is at the end of the trip rather than the beginning (Eckert, et. al, 2013). When developing the international component of the course, it is also important to add variety to the trip. Students will not be able to find the uniqueness in the location if it feels like doing the same thing over and over. While an itinerary cannot explain the full experience, it gives them a very good idea of what will happen on the trip (Eckert, et. al, 2013).

Koernig (2007) states that the first day of the study tour is typically the most difficult because everybody is tired, wants to change clothes, and at the same time excited. One suggestion is to plan the first day so students have two hours after arriving at the hotel to relax, get settled, and change. Napping is discouraged to help minimize the impact of jetlag. Structuring the first day so that students do not have the opportunity to sleep and keep moving until bedtime allows for a faster acclimation to the time difference (Koernig, 2007). A walking

tour of the city/town keeps students busy, helps acclimate them to their new environment, and teaches them how to use public transportation. After dinner, an early bedtime is suggested so students are ready for the next day (Koernig, 2007).

While one of the main purposes of studying abroad is to study, there needs to be a balance of academic content with cultural activities. Exams, presentations, and projects tend to fit well with the academic requirements, they are not well suited when abroad. Including these in the pretrip sessions is more appropriate as more time abroad can then be spent on cultural activities, tours, and visits (Koernig, 2007). Koernig suggests that 40% of the trip includes tours and related academic activities, 40% for structured cultural activities, and 20% for students to explore on their own.

Koernig states that tours of related groups, companies, and organizations is the most effective and fun method for students to understand the differences between the foreign country and the United States. Boardroom presentations often bore students while a walking tour and personal interaction with an employee allows students to gain a better understanding of what is happening (Koernig, 2007).

### **Semiotic Analysis**

Semiotic analysis is defined as the study of meanings that can be communicated through imagery (Kucuk, 2014). Images can be analyzed to reveal tremendous amounts of information about the entity that is pictured (Holmes-Nicholson, 2009). According to Firoj and Mamun (2014), a wide range of signs and symbols are encompassed in semiotics, including photography, film, gesture, posture, musical sounds, advertisements, and television programs. Interpretation of



the meaning of an image is different for each individual and perceptions vary among individuals (Firoj & Mamun, 2014).

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed literature related to the benefits that student participants receive from participating in study abroad programs, issues that are keeping students from participating in study abroad experiences, how more study abroad programs have shifted to short-term experiences, how study abroad courses are/should be developed, and semiotic analysis. The literature discussed in this chapter guided the study in terms of methods, considerations to explore for examining student perceptions, and items to consider for improvement in future courses.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Procedures**

#### **Introduction**

The data for this study was collected over the course of a five-month period and is based upon the HORT 499H course, “Walking in the Footsteps of the Irish During the Irish Potato Famine: Examinations of New World Crops in Old World Societies.” This course was offered in the Spring 2016 semester as a two-credit interdisciplinary course with the international study portion as a one credit 2016 Maymester class.

Enrollment in this course was initially limited to Schreyer Scholars in all majors, at any Penn State Campus, who wanted to learn about the relationship between Old and New World crops and their impact on civilization. In order to apply for the course, the student was required to choose one issue of the Irish Potato Famine that was personally compelling, write a 750-word essay that describes the issue, its impact on agriculture, citizens, communities, or culture, and email it to Dr. Dennis Decoteau by the deadline. Upon notification of acceptance into the course, students were required to enroll in the spring semester based course and the Maymester travel component of the course. In order to gain first-hand experience and be able to connect with students, professors, Ireland guides, in-country researchers, and residents, I enrolled in the HORT 499H Spring 2016 and Maymester 2016 course.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

Before leaving for the international component of this course in May, I prepared for the data collection that would take place. The purpose statement and research questions for this study were first determined. The purpose of this study was to determine how international experiences impact students and in what ways the experience can be improved in order to enhance their learning. Five research questions were developed as follows:

- 1) Why do students engage in study abroad experiences?
- 2) How are peer-to-peer relationships impacted through study abroad courses?
- 3) How do study abroad experiences impact knowledge, skills, and dispositions of students?
- 4) What benefits of study abroad experiences can be represented through photographic themes?
- 5) How can the current study abroad course (HORT 499H) be enhanced?

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) research application was submitted through the Penn State University Park Office for Research Protection's IRB Program and I completed the required training. STUDY00004952: Analysis of an Ireland Study Abroad Experience was reviewed and approved by the IRB board.

### **Description of Literature Review**

Current literature was reviewed discussing the benefits of study abroad experiences. Through the literature review, a definition of study abroad, the benefits of studying abroad, changes in study abroad programs, and research on these programs were discussed. From the papers utilized in the literature review, a list of benefits was derived. These benefits were then

compiled into general themes. These themes were identified as the most common areas that were influential in the change observed in participants. From these themes, five were determined to be the most relevant to the research purpose and questions. These five themes served as the areas where pictures from the study abroad experience could capture and represent the theme, and therefore the benefits, most accurately.

### **Instrument Development**

Focus group questions regarding the experience of student participants were also developed before departing the United States. These questions were open-ended, but directed towards the purpose and research questions of this study. In planning for a session approximately thirty minutes in length, five questions were developed. The questions were as follows:

- 1) What skills have you enhanced or gained during this trip?
- 2) How do you believe this experience can help you in your future personal endeavors?
- 3) If you are planning to do another study abroad, or if you would like to do another study abroad, what are some things that you would like to see be different?
- 4) What did we do in class beforehand, what class lectures, what class field trips or experiences that we had, really helped your experience here in Ireland?
- 5) Why do you think that people should study abroad?

In order to obtain more quantitative data, a short (fifteen question) survey was created for each student to complete at the end of the study abroad experience (see Appendix A). Similar to the focus group questions, these questions were directed towards providing answers to the purpose and research questions of this study. This survey did contain some open-ended

questions, but the students were also asked for specific numbers and to rank their agreement with several statements.

### **Course Description**

The HORT 499H course, “Walking in the Footsteps of the Irish During the Irish Potato Famine: Examinations of New World Crops in Old World Societies,” was a two credit interdisciplinary course (during the spring semester) that introduced students to new world crops (crops that were native to North and South America before 1492) such as potato, corn, bean, tomato, and chocolate. Crop discussions included areas of origin, history of uses, and current production along with how these crops “migrated” to Old World Societies (Europe, Asia, and Africa or those parts of the world known to Europeans before 1492) often coinciding with exploration to influence those societies. One to two new world crops would be discussed each week (during the two hour class period) followed by some hands-on sampling of some of the culinary uses of some of the food crops.

The second half of the Spring course included a more in-depth five-week study of the Irish potato and Ireland. This was to prepare the students for the international travel part of the course to Ireland. Pennsylvania has a long, storied history of growing and processing potatoes so contemporary production practices of potatoes in Pennsylvania were discussed along with an on-farm and processing plant class field trip. A discussion on the Irish potato famine and its sociological and political effects on Ireland and the United States concluded this section of the course.

The international study abroad portion of this embedded course was a one credit Maymester summer offering to travel to Ireland to retrace important steps of the famine and the resulting emigration and death. We coupled with researchers in Ireland to experience a ten day immersion into this subject and not only observe cultural impacts of the famine but historical sites as well. We also observed current production practices of potatoes in Ireland and compared and contrasted those with the practices currently employed in the United States. The HORT 499H Spring 2016 syllabus, HORT 499H Maymester 2016 syllabus, and the trip itinerary can be found in Appendix B.

### **Data Collection**

As an enrolled student in both the spring and summer course, I participated in all of the class activities, including lectures, field trips, and guest speakers. During these times, and especially the time spent in Ireland, I observed student interactions and behaviors both with each other, and with the locals. These observations were informal and collective.

Throughout the study abroad experience, I took photographs of the country, the landscape, the people, our activities, and the things we saw. While I had the list of potential photographic themes prior to the trip, pictures were not captured to fit into those themes. Rather, many photographs were taken in order to capture all aspects of the experience and later categorized into the themes. All photographs were captured using a Canon EOS Rebel T5 Digital SLR Camera.

On the final night in Ireland, before the last in-country group meal, I mediated a focus group for approximately thirty minutes. During this time, the professors and in-country guide

were not present with the intention of allowing the students to speak freely and answer the questions without pressure to answer a certain way. The five questions that were previously determined were asked and students took turns verbally answering each of the questions. I took notes while the students were answering the questions, but the entire focus group session was also recorded on an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder VN-7200. It should be noted that participation in the focus group was not mandatory and students were not forced to answer any questions. Upon completion of the focus group session, each student was requested to complete the student survey. Students were given approximately fifteen minutes to answer the fifteen questions. The professors and in-country guide were not present during the completion of the survey by the students.

### **Data Analysis**

Upon returning to the United States, I collected and sorted through all of the photographs that I captured while abroad. The photos were arranged into the five different themes that were previously identified. For each theme, five photos were chosen that I felt best represented the theme the most accurately. The notes from the focus group were transcribed, along with the digital voice recording of the session. The student responses were analyzed for similarities and main ideas/topics were determined. The information and responses pulled from the focus group session were compared against the research shared in the literature review and then used to answer the research questions. Similarly, the student surveys were analyzed for similarities and main ideas/topics. Each student was randomly assigned a number in order to preserve confidentiality. The mean and standard deviation were calculated for the quantitative answers.

Based on the analysis of the photographs/themes, the focus group responses, and the student survey, conclusions were drawn regarding the impact this study abroad experience had on the participating students. Along with my observations and input from the class participants, these results were then used to create recommendations for future study abroad courses. Confidentiality of all student observations and responses was maintained throughout the term of study and analysis.

### **Summary**

Before departing for Ireland, the purpose statement and five research questions were developed to guide this study and data collection. A list of benefits was pulled from the literature reviewed and were compiled into general themes from which five of the most relevant were later determined. Focus group questions and a student survey were also developed. Photographs were taken throughout the entire experience and were later compiled into the five themes that I felt were best represented. The focus group session and student survey were both completed before the last in-country meal. The student responses were analyzed and compared against the research shared in the literature review to answer the five research questions.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

#### **Introduction**

In order to answer the five research questions of this study, three different data collection procedures were utilized. Photographs capturing the entire international experience and all of the different components of the time abroad were taken. Five themes out of the list of benefits from the literature review were chosen to be represented by photos. Social Interactions, Agriculture, Cultural Diversity, History, and Student Input to the Course were the five themes that I felt were most influential to the students in this course. Second, a focus group was held before the last in-country meal in Ireland. Students were asked five open-ended questions that were directed towards the purpose and research questions. Students were encourage to answer and share their thoughts for each question, but nobody was forced to participate. The focus group session lasted approximately thirty minutes in length. After the focus group, each student was asked to complete a short, fifteen question survey. While the survey did contain some open-ended questions, the students were mainly asked for specific numbers and to rank their agreement with a number of statements.

## Photographic Themes

### Social Interactions

The following photos were chosen to fit into the first photographic theme, social interactions. These photos were thought to best represent this theme as they exhibit interactions between student participants, professors, in-country guides and researchers.



**Figure 1. Group Photo at the Trinity College Book of Kells Exhibit**



**Figure 2. Group of Students Exploring Old Castle**



**Figure 3. Taking a Break and Chatting with a Professor**





Figure 4. Interacting with the In-Country Guide



Figure 5. Interacting with Researcher at the Teagasc Research Center

## Agriculture

Figures 6 through 10 were chosen as the best representatives of the second theme, agriculture. These photos depict the aspects of Ireland's agriculture that HORT 499H students experienced and learned about.



**Figure 6. Dairy Cattle**



**Figure 7. Canola Field**





Figure 8. Potatoes from an Ireland Potato Farm



Figure 9. Teagasc Agricultural Research Center



**Figure 10. Sheep as part of Ireland's Wool Industry**

### **Cultural Diversity**

The third photographic theme, cultural diversity, depicts Ireland's culture and the life of an Irishman. Figures 11 through 15 were chosen to represent this theme.





**Figure 11. Lady Selling Flowers on the Streets of Dublin**



**Figure 12. Painted Buildings in Downtown Dublin**





Figure 13. Live Irish Music and Dancing



Figure 14. Lady Playing the Accordion with her Dog at the Cliffs of Moher



**Figure 15. A Young Group of People Enjoying the Day in Galway**

## **History**

The following photographs were chosen to fit into the fourth photographic theme, history. These photos were thought to best represent this theme as they show Ireland's history and the facts and stories that HORT 499H students learned first-hand.





Figure 16. Replica of a Viking Hut



Figure 17. Daniel O'Connell Monument



Figure 18. Sign Recognizing the Mass Emigration due to the Famine



Figure 19. Window from Which the Mayor of the Town Hung His Only Son





**Figure 20. A Body Removed from a Peat Bog on Display**

### **Student Input**

Figures 21 through 25 were chosen to represent the final photographic theme, student input into the course/planning. These pictures show the students teaching and learning about topics that they studied before leaving for Ireland.



**Figure 21. National Botanical Gardens**



**Figure 22. Croke Park**





**Figure 23. On the Hunt for Wild Orchids**



**Figure 24. Looking for Fossils in Burren National Park**





**Figure 25. Dessert from a Good Food Ireland Parlor**

### **Focus Group**

The first question asked during the focus group was: What skills have you enhanced or gained during this trip? Students 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 12 talked about the travel skills that were gained. Student 12 mentioned skills such as learning to use maps, becoming comfortable in a different city, and using a different currency. Student 8 also mentioned gaining travel skills, adding that confidence in travel was gained along with the excitement to do it on her own. Student 10 mentioned that in addition to learning how to travel well, she also learned how to travel safely, especially in a foreign country. Students also gained a greater sense of independence while traveling abroad in Ireland during this course. Students 2, 6, and 12 all said



that they gained a greater sense of independence. Two students (4 and 11) stated that this experience helped them to become more flexible and adaptable to what was going on. Student 4 said, “Sometimes things in the schedule don’t work out so it’s a good skill to be able to find something else to fill your time.” A few other students (students 4, 7, 10, and 13) mentioned that they gained greater interpersonal skills and the ability to immerse themselves in the culture more. Student 7 noted that she learned to appreciate all different cultures and people of those cultures from her experiences in this course. Several students also mentioned that they were able to connect with their professors on a different level during this study abroad experience. Students 1, 2, 5, 6, and 13 all mentioned that they were able to interact with professors on a deeper, more personal level. These students mentioned that this is something that is rare for them; students are not able to connect with and get to know their professors this well from class time or office hours. Student 6 stated, “It was definitely cool to get to know the professors on a deeper level, I never had that type of interaction with them so that was really special.” Student 4 also mentioned that she had to adapt to not being able to communicate with family and friends back home. Different forms of communication had to be utilized and, with the time difference and the course schedule, communication was often limited. Student 3 stated that this experience helped, “broaden [her] horizons in agriculture and look at things on more of a global scale than just on a national scale like we had before.”

The second question asked was: How do you believe this experience can help you in your future personal endeavors? Several students (Students 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, and 13) mentioned that being able to navigate the airport and all associated activities on their own will prove to be beneficial. Some students mentioned that they were looking at careers that require traveling, others stated that they are now interested in traveling more (in the United States and abroad) now

that they have successfully navigated the airport and have flown. Student 7 also mentioned that she is more confident in planning things on her own because of the in-country seminar that she had to plan. Students 3, 5, 7, and 12 all stated that they are now more aware of cultural differences and how to be respectful of people when visiting. Student 12 said that, “It helps you to realize that your cultural values differ a little bit. [In Ireland], they eat lunch a lot later than we do and it’s rude to be early in Ireland, but in America it is kind of expected.” Student 1 talked about overcoming a communication barrier: “It was nice to be in a country where the same language was spoken, but there were still some communication differences with different colloquial terms and the accents. This was a nice way to be able to try to deal with those communication issues and really listen to what other people are saying.” Branching out, becoming more open and outgoing was something that Student 4 mentioned as being helpful for the rest of her life, especially on the job. Student 4 stated that she didn’t have any friends in the class when she signed up, and did not know any of the students. This experience forced her to become more outgoing and meet some new friends. Unlike most of the other students in HORT 499H, Student 13 was not an agricultural major but a finance major. He mentioned that taking an agricultural class and learning about different commodities and commodity pricing was very interesting and could prove beneficial from an investing standpoint.

The third question asked during the focus group session was: If you are planning to do another study abroad, or if you would like to do another study abroad, what are some things that you would like to see be different? Going off of what you experienced with this trip. Almost all of the students that responded to this question mentioned that they would have liked to stay in Ireland longer. Students mentioned that ten days was just not long enough and they would have liked more time in Ireland. Many students also talked about the amount of travel that we did

while we were in Ireland. Students understood that this is what they signed up for, and appreciated that they got to see so many different aspects of the country, but noted that next time they would look for a program that stays in one place for an extended period of time. Student 8 comments that staying in one place allows you to get to know the people of the country and make the personal connections. This course was designed to get a lot accomplished and see many different places and attractions. Therefore, the course was very structured and close on time. Student 6 said that she was so tired she would have just wanted to take a nap and not do everything that she did. Student 13, on the other hand mentioned that he would have appreciated having a day or so that was a bit more relaxed to catch his breath, adapt to the time difference, and make it a bit easier on him for the rest of the trip. Student 11 said that she would have like to take things a bit slower and “have time to really explore the small towns instead of just getting there 8PM, eating dinner, going to bed, getting up, and leaving at 8AM.” Student 4 mentioned that she will be looking for a location that is a bit more diverse than Ireland. She said that she would pick a country that had a little more of a culture shock because she enjoys the challenge of fitting in with a language barrier. Student 3 stated that she would look for a course that had more of an immersion in the places that the native people live rather than spending so much time in the touristy locations. This way, “we could really get a feel for the way the people in the country lived.” Student 10 said, “If I were to take another course, I would probably take a course that would be more agriculture focused. Maybe visit a few more farms and do more with walking through the production itself.” Student 9 talked about how she felt some of the museums that were visited in Ireland were a repeat of what was discussed in class during the spring semester. She said, “We had already studied it so I felt like if we would have either studied specific places

and then gone to see those places or seen more of the agricultural aspects of the country it would have been interesting.”

The fourth question asked was: What did we do in class beforehand, what class lectures, what class field trips or experiences that we had, really helped to enhance your experience here in Ireland? Students 2 and 10 said that the class trip to the Pennsylvania potato farm was the most beneficial. Student 10 said that visiting this potato farm before leaving for Ireland allowed her to compare the potato farm in Ireland to the one we visited in Pennsylvania. Students 2 and 9 mentioned that at the time the lecture on the landscape architecture at the Cliffs of Moher Visitor’s Center seemed irrelevant; but upon arriving at the Cliffs personally, it was interesting to remember how they designed the visitor’s center and the different aspects that the typical tourist wouldn’t think about. Student 12 thought that the lectures comparing the old world and new world crops and tying that into the potato blight was the most interesting. In lectures, we learned about how the blight came from the new world to the old world and how it completely changed Ireland and immigration into the new world. Student 12 said that, “it was really cool to come over and see that after having learned about it.” Student 11 stated that the lectures on how the famine effected current Irish culture impacted her and made this a better experience. Student 11 said, “Just to understand where their culture comes from and all the influences that this tragic event had on even current culture. I thought that was really interesting and related really well.” Student 1 thought that the best lectures were the ones where each group made their presentation about the seminar they would be teaching while in Ireland. She said, “it really made It feel like we were each able to play a role in part of the trip. It was interesting how many different things people were interested in so we got to see a lot of different sides of Ireland.” Student 8 also agreed with this statement saying that she enjoyed being able to help plan part of the trip. Student

4 said that she was really interested in the invasive species lectures. While in Ireland, we got to see “real life examples” of these species; for example, “when we drove down the highway and all the roads, we passed the yellow bushes with the thorns that were really pretty but were very much a problem here.” Students 5 and 6 talked about how they were able to apply the things they learned in class, something that they were never able to do outside of a lab. Student 5 appreciated the more hands-on and visual experience that was offered with this course. Student 3 was unable to select one particular lecture and instead felt that the entire class was beneficial. “We were able to study a lot of different things that...[added to] a varied educational experience” said Student 3. Student 13 agreed with Student 3 saying that “I thought I genuinely gained something from each and every class and every lecture.” Student 13 also mentioned that the guest lecturer regarding the history of Ireland and the potato famine was really interesting. Student 7 commented that the more cultural based lectures helped prepare her for the time abroad and was a good pre-cursor to the information that she would obtain once in Ireland.

The final question asked during this focus group session was: Why do you think that people should study abroad? Student 10 responded to this question by saying “I think that people should do study abroad experiences just to be more aware of what is going on and just that there is something else bigger than you, bigger than your education, bigger than what you are doing with your life. The world is much bigger and [study abroad experiences help you to] be more self-aware.” Student 9 had a similar response saying that, “I think you should study abroad because gaining global perspective is important to develop both your knowledge of the world and a sense of compassion for other people. To see how your decisions affect not just those around you, immediately around you, but those on the other side of the globe.” Student 12 commented that “...you should study abroad just to gain more knowledge about the world and

expose yourself to a different set of people and a different mindset...” and that “I think you need to have a global perspective especially in the workforce now.” Student 1’s response was: “I would recommend studying abroad because it’s a much different experience than just being in class and it really tests you in a different way. Being with people 24/7 is a good experience to just know how to deal with people and deal with different personality types.” Student 8 commented that studying abroad “pushes you to learn more about yourself, learn more about other countries, learn more about your own country, and learn about the differences in the world. It opens your eyes up to a lot of different things and lots of different challenges. It just makes you think.” Student 4 said that “with every trip comes new lessons life lessons. On the personal level, it helps you in the future with business. But it also teaches your family, your surrounding friends, and it pushes you to adapt to new places and make new connections with people.” Student 5 commented that students in the course didn’t really get to know each other until they went on the trip. She says that “it shows how you can change by being with each other and you really get to know everybody. You put aside all your judgements and it’s really just a fun bonding experience that can be applied to life.” Student 6 observed that studying abroad gives you a certain confidence and makes you want to continue traveling. Student 3 pointed out that it is especially important for people in the agricultural industry to study abroad. She said that “the agricultural industry and everything in general is just becoming more globalized and so it’s a great experience to be able to develop your skills on an international scale. Student 7 thought that studying abroad is a great experience, overall. She said, “You get to meet so many people, make connections with your professors and people you never really would have met if you didn’t do this.” Student 7 believes that everybody should be given the opportunity to study abroad.

## Student Survey

The following table shows the responses from each student participant regarding the first question on the student survey, “Why did you decide to take this class?” Common responses to this question centered around four main reasons: to travel to Ireland, topic interest, to fulfill a degree requirement, and to study abroad.

**Table 1. Why Students Decided to Enroll in HORT 499H**

Student 1	“I wanted to study abroad and I knew Dr. Decoteau from another class so I thought it would be perfect. “
Student 2	“I needed this class for my minor (INTAG) and chose this specific one after the France trip was cancelled. This was my last summer for study abroad.”
Student 3	“I wanted an international experience during my time at Penn State, and this course fit my schedule and allowed me to take classes that fit my major.”
Student 4	“I thought the topic of the class was interesting, and I’ve always wanted to visit Ireland.”
Student 5	“Dr. Decoteau mentioned it to me and it seemed relevant to me and interesting!”
Student 6	“I was interested in taking a class outside of my major and the trip component made this course a special option.”
Student 7	“So I could study abroad.”
Student 8	“I knew Dr. Decoteau was awesome and I wanted to travel again and it was an inexpensive trip compared to traveling by myself.”
Student 9	“To go to Ireland! I also knew one of the professors and had enjoyed my previous class with him. Moderate interest in the subject.”
Student 10	“I was signed up for another Ireland trip and it got cancelled. The professor of that class recommended that I take this class so I did.”
Student 11	“Honestly, I didn’t have time to study abroad for a semester but I still wanted the experience and I really like history.”
Student 12	“It was sort of on a whim. I was originally planning on going to Paris but this trip was unfortunately cancelled about five days before the spring semester started. I heard about this class and decided to go for it.”
Student 13	“I wanted to have study abroad experience and understand a new culture while traveling, and I also wanted to explore a field outside of my primary course work in business.”

Additionally, students were asked if they had travel experience prior to embarking on this journey to Ireland. This question was open ended and students provided as much, or as little,

information as they felt was appropriate. When going through the responses, I categorized them into four different categories: A lot (including international), Some (including international), within the United States, and None. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Previous Travel Experience**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Student ID</b>
A lot (including international)	4	2, 6, 8, 11
Some (including international)	4	4, 7, 10, 13
Within the United States	2	9, 12
None	3	1, 3, 5

Table 3 shows the number of people that each student participant considered a friend at different periods in the overall course. The mean and standard deviation for each point in time was taken to show an average for the class. At the beginning of the spring semester, students had an average of 1.38 friends in the class. At the end of the spring semester, students had an average of 3.42 friends in the class. At the end of the international component of the experience, ten out of the thirteen students considered everybody in the class a friend with the average being 11.77.



**Table 3. Classmate Friendships over the Duration of the Course**

<b>Student</b>	<b>Beginning of Semester</b>	<b>End of Semester</b>	<b>End of International Component</b>
<b>S1</b>	1	3	13
<b>S2</b>	2	4	13
<b>S3</b>	2	5	13
<b>S4</b>	0	2	5
<b>S5</b>	1	4	13
<b>S6</b>	1	2	13
<b>S7</b>	2	2	10
<b>S8</b>	2	5	13
<b>S9</b>	0	3	8
<b>S10</b>	2	3	13
<b>S11</b>	1		13
<b>S12</b>	2	4	13
<b>S13</b>	2	4	13
<b>Mean</b>	1.38	3.42	11.77
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	0.77	1.08	2.55

As part of the student survey, participants were asked to rate their agreement to ten questions regarding their experience in this program. The scale was from one to five with one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree. The mean and standard deviation for each question's responses was calculated to show an average for the class. Overall, the average for each question was in agreement. Additionally, most of the responses were leaning towards agree and strongly agree. The top three responses were: "I am closer to the professors that I have traveled with and have a connection that we did not have before," "This experience was one that has positively impacted me and will stay with me forever," and "I would like to travel internationally again." These top three responses all focus around the idea that this experience

had an overall positive impact on the students. The bottom three responses were: “I have a greater understanding and am more conscientious of cultural diversity after completing this experience,” “I have become more open-minded during this trip,” and “I became more tolerant, patient, and understanding because of this trip.” The bottom three responses are all related to cultural skills and development that research suggest students gain. While the student responses were still positive, and the students agreed with these statements, there was less of a connection with these three compared to the other seven.

**Table 4. Survey Rating Responses**

<b>Rating</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
This experience has enhanced my global perceptions			1	5	7	4.46	0.66
I feel more confident that I could travel on my own after this trip				7	6	4.46	0.52
I have a greater understanding and am more conscientious of cultural diversity after completing this experience		1	4	8		3.54	1.41
I have gained new knowledge and skills from this experience			1	4	8	4.54	0.66
After completing this experience, I am more interested in international issues			1	4	8	4.54	0.66
I have become more open-minded during this trip			2	3	7	4.42	0.79
I am closer to the professors that I have traveled with and have a connection that we did not have before				1	12	4.92	0.28
I became more tolerant, patient, and understanding because of this trip		1	2	4	6	4.15	0.99
This experience was one that has positively impacted me and will stay with me forever				1	12	4.92	0.28
I would like to travel internationally again					13	5.00	0.00

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

### Summary

Data was collected in order to answer the five research questions of this study. Data was obtained from the photographs that were captured throughout the study abroad experience, the focus group session, and the student survey. From the photographs, five of the best represented themes were chosen and five photographs were selected as representatives for each theme.

Student responses from each question of the focus group were analyzed for common themes and responses. Responses from the student survey were also analyzed for common responses and the mean and standard deviation were calculated for the quantitative responses. All data was compared against previously completed research and analyzed for similarities and differences.

While many of the research questions were answered through a combination of the data collection procedures, photographs were used solely to answer Research Question #4.

Information obtained through the focus group, student survey, and general observations were utilized to answer Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 5.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions/Discussions/Recommendations**

#### **Introduction**

Three different data collection procedures were utilized in order to answer the five research questions. While many of the questions were answered through a combination of the procedures, photographs were used solely to answer Research Question # 4. Information obtained through the focus group, student survey, and general observations were utilized to answer Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 5.

#### **Research Question #1**

Research Question #1: Why do students engage in study abroad experiences?

#### **Conclusion**

From analyzing the first question of the student survey, it was determined that the most popular reason that student participants chose to enroll in this course was simply to study abroad. Some students needed an international experience in order to complete major/minor requirements others just wanted the experience. A handful of students mentioned that they were originally signed up for another study abroad course that ended up being cancelled and therefore joined this course. Interestingly, four of the students mentioned that they knew one of the professors, Dr. Decoteau, and that influenced their decision on enrolling in the course.

## **Discussion**

According to the obtained results, it appears as though each student had a different reason for enrolling in HORT 499H and deciding to study abroad. Some students were interested in the location of the international experience and did not have much interest in the subject material while others were more interested in the topic than the location. Two students mentioned that they were interested in taking a course outside of their major/college. With the addition of the opportunity to explore a new culture and country, this course was a way for these students to branch out into different areas.

While nobody mentioned safety as a reason for taking the course, I believe that several of the students took this embedded study abroad course rather than another one due to the comfort and safety that they felt. According to Table 2, just under half of the students have very limited travel experience; a handful had never been on a plane before and many had never traveled without their parents. In the focus group, several students mentioned that this was a good first step in traveling abroad. Students on this trip did not experience any true language barrier, as the spoken and written language were English. Additionally, most of the students knew at least one of the professors before enrolling in the course, providing some comfort in the fact that not everybody would be a stranger. For many students, this course was “safe,” not much could go wrong and they were with people who knew what they were doing.

## **Implications**

The location for the study abroad experience needs to make sense both for the students and the professors that are developing the course. It makes sense for the chosen location to be

somewhere the targeted students want to go, and can meet the learning objectives of the course. Previous experience of the students also needs to be taken into account. Students may not have much, if any, travel experience and may not feel comfortable traveling to a country that is considered risky. The topic of the study abroad course should also play a role in determining the location. If the study abroad course is offered through the Plant Science Department in the College of Agricultural Sciences, a location should be chosen where there are plenty of plant-related activities and learning opportunities. This would help in ensuring that students are gaining a clear view the industry of study in that particular country. Additionally, the interest and/or background of professors and faculty members that are involved in planning the study abroad experience should be taken into account. Experience and connections will make scheduling tours, visits, and programs much easier. Many organizations and companies receive numerous requests from study abroad programs and cold calls do not tend to receive a positive outcome (Eckert, et.al, 2013).

## **Research Question #2**

Research Question #2: How are peer-to-peer relationships impacted through study abroad courses?

## **Conclusion**

Students that participate in study abroad courses become very close to their peers while traveling. Results show that students considered more classmates a friend after spending ten days together in Ireland than after an entire semester of class with each other. Study abroad

experiences bring students closer together and form a lasting bond that will be remembered forever.

## **Discussion**

Table 3 was created based off of the student responses to survey questions three, four, and five. From this table, it is seen that most of the students started the Spring semester with one or two friends in the course. After completing the semester and interacting with other students in the class, many acquired another friend or two. I feel as though this is typical of many courses, not just embedded study abroad courses. When students go to class, they are not there to make friends but rather to learn. While some professors encourage more interaction between students through group projects, discussions, etc., many students will not get to know everybody in the class well enough to consider them a friend. When students were asked how many classmates they would consider a friend after the ten-day experience in Ireland, ten out of the thirteen students considered everybody a friend. Students 4, 7, and 9 considered 5, 10, and 8 students their friends, respectively, by the end of the trip. While these numbers are lower than the rest of the class, these individuals each gained at least three friends while abroad, more than they each gained retrospectively throughout the Spring semester.

## **Implications**

Students will naturally become closer together throughout the study abroad experience. Many of the activities will be done as an entire group, which forces the students to be together. While conflicts may arise between students, especially when they are together for long periods, it

seems as though most students realize that it is better to overcome differences and work to get along with each other.

### **Research Question #3**

Research Question #3: How do study abroad experiences impact knowledge, skills, and dispositions of students?

### **Conclusion**

From the first focus group question, it can be determined that students did in fact gain multiple different skills from this study abroad experience. Many of the skills (i.e. travel, the ability to use maps, a greater sense of independence, etc.) that students felt they gained or enhanced, were ones that were noted in previous research (Costello, 2015; Hadis, 2005; Zhai & Scheer, 2002).

### **Discussion**

Quite a few students felt as though they gained travel skills. Students mentioned that they were now more comfortable using maps, navigating a foreign city, using a different currency, and learned how to travel well and safely. Several students mentioned that they were more confident and gained a greater sense of independence while traveling abroad. Students mentioned that they gained additional skills, including: becoming more flexible and adaptable, greater interpersonal skills, the ability to communicate through a language barrier, looking at



issues on a global scale rather than a national scale, and a greater appreciation for different cultures.

From the student survey, students feel that the experience was overwhelmingly positive and that they would like to travel internationally again. Interestingly, the lowest average from the student survey ratings were all related to personal and cultural skills. While the lowest response was still positive (3.54/5), and students mentioned these items throughout the focus group, these three items were not as impactful as others. The three statements were: “I have a greater understanding and am more conscientious of cultural diversity after completing this experience,” “I have become more open-minded during this trip,” and “I became more tolerant, patient, and understanding because of this trip.” These were skills and dispositions that previous research has shown students gain from studying abroad. While this research does not show students did not gain these items, it does show that students were not impacted as much in these ways as they were in others. For instance, students felt strongly that they became closer to the professors and formed a connection that they did not have before. Students also felt as though they gained valuable travel skills along with a different perspective on issues. The low ratings in the personal and cultural skill areas may be due to the short time that students were abroad. If students were studying abroad in Ireland for a longer period and were able to have more interactions with locals, they may gain more of these skills and the impact may be more positive

### **Implications**

Students that participate in study abroad experiences gain a greater cultural understanding. However, the impact on students in regards to the cultural and personal skills

appears to be not as great when compared to the impact that these skills have on students who study abroad for a longer period. More cultural based activities and lessons may help to increase the cultural skills that students gain. Learning about the culture and gaining a greater understanding of the people may allow students to have a greater appreciation of their cultural surroundings while abroad. Spending more time in the local areas and not as much in the big tourist locations may also encourage students to be aware of the area's culture.

#### **Research Question #4**

Research Question #4: What benefits of study abroad experiences can be represented through photographic themes?

#### **Conclusion**

From all of the photographs captured throughout the experience, five themes were developed that were representative of the course and study abroad experience: Social Interactions, Agriculture, Cultural Diversity, History, and Student Input to the Course.

#### **Discussion**

The first theme was social interactions. These photographs depict the interactions among student participants and professors. While some were staged photographs, they all represent how close students and professors became over the time abroad. Through these photographs, we can

see that the students overcame their differences and had positive interactions with each other, professors, and in-country guides.

The second theme was agriculture. While this may make sense because HORT 499H is an agricultural course, I believe that students would pick up on this theme even if they were not agriculturally focused. Since this course was designed to include quite a bit of travel, there was an opportunity for students to see firsthand the open farm fields. Students on study abroad programs that stayed in one location may not have had the opportunity to see Ireland farms.

The third theme was cultural diversity. Many students noticed the accent and colloquial terms that comprise the Irish language and the customs that are different between the United States and Ireland. However, these are difficult items to capture in photographs. The photographs that were chosen as representatives of the cultural diversity theme consist of the people of Ireland, doing everyday things. While some people may consider some of the photographs, such as a group of students sitting together talking as something “normal,” it still represents the culture of Ireland’s people.

The fourth photographic theme, history, was easily captured as there are multiple statues, monuments, and replicas displayed throughout the country. Throughout Dublin, there were multiple different statues and monuments for important figures in Irish history. Museums throughout the country talked about different aspects of Irish history, especially the museums relating to the Irish Potato Famine. Without a tour guide that was knowledgeable on the importance and significance of the relics throughout the country, students may not have noticed the history or the importance of what the monuments represent. With access to the Internet and multiple other resources, students would be able to find for themselves what each figure represents, but it would take more self-motivation for the students to realize the significance.

The fifth photographic theme is one that is specific to this course. Student groups were able to plan a short seminar, and take the class to a particular location. Figures 21 through 25 captured the experiences that students participated in throughout the time in Ireland. These locations and learning topics were not initially part of the course, but were of interest to the students in the class.

### **Implications**

While many of these photos could have fit into other themes as well, they represent the interests of students and students planning part of the abroad experience. I chose which photographs I felt best represented each of the five themes. However, somebody else looking at the photograph could interpret the meaning in a different way. The perceptions of one individual are different than the perceptions of a different individual and that should be taken into account.

### **Research Question #5**

Research Question #5: How can the current study abroad course (HORT 499H) be enhanced?

### **Conclusion**

All students had an overwhelmingly positive experience and had many good things to say both about the Spring semester course and international travel experience. Each student is interested in different topics and would like to see different things while they are abroad. It is

difficult to encompass everything in one study abroad experience, especially when only abroad for a short period of time.

## **Discussion**

Some students would rather take it slow and stay in one place for an extended period. Other students enjoyed being able to see so much of the country and moving from town to town. A couple students mentioned that they would have liked the course to focus more on agriculture. While we had touched on agriculture in general, the focus of this course was not Ireland's agriculture. Everybody is going to want to get something different out of the experience and they all would like to do it a different way. While it is impossible to encompass everything each student wants to do, allowing students to plan part of the trip is a good middle ground. Not only does this give students experience communicating with people in other countries to set up a tour or visit, it also allows them to become comfortable in planning a trip of their own. Besides incorporating student input in this way, the only other thing would be to make it known exactly what the course will be like and what the focus of the experience is. This way, students will be able to have a better understanding of what to expect before signing up.

## **Implications**

Embedded courses are nice because there is class time to talk about particular areas and topics more in depth before traveling to the location. Having a good understanding of the material and what happened before departing allows for students to take more in while they are

in country. Although, it is important to ensure that it is not repetitive. Some students felt that all of the famine museums were the same and it was the same information repeatedly. While this may have been because these particular students were more interested in other aspects of Ireland and did not want to focus on the famine, students tend to pay more attention to new material.

One thing that is important to include in lecture before traveling abroad, is the culture of the country/area you are traveling to. Not only do students find this interesting, but it helps when talking to and interacting with individuals native to that country. It is important for students to recognize that they are guests in the destination country and should be respectful and form to their customs. This is another area where it is interesting to bring in a guest speaker or have somebody that is able to speak first hand on the differences. This helps students to feel included and less of an outsider when they travel to a new country.

Students also appreciated the ability to compare and contrast between their home country and the country they are visiting. For instance, in this course we visited a Pennsylvania potato farm and then an Ireland potato farm. This allowed students to see the differences and really ask pointed questions in order to better understand why this farmer does something different. Many students mentioned that they would have liked to see more of this in the course.

### **Summary**

From the first research question, it is seen that students participate in study abroad programs for a variety of reasons, but mainly to simply study abroad. Students also engaged in these programs because of the professor who was teaching the course. Research question two showed that positive peer-to-peer relationships are formed when on a study abroad experience,

more so than during a “traditional” course. From research question three it is seen that students gain travel skills, people skills, and communication skills, but not as many cultural and personal skills as previous research suggests. Photographs captured to answer research question four showed that social interactions, agriculture, cultural diversity, history, and student input to the course were all benefits that could be represented through photographs. Through research question five, students had an overwhelmingly positive experience and had many good things to say regarding HORT 499H. There are many things to consider when developing a study abroad course and course leaders should be prepared to continue to improve the course each year.

In addition to the above conclusions, it can be seen that students formed a relationship with the professors of the course that was new to them. Students and professors became close over the duration of the experience, similar to how students gained more friends throughout the course. Multiple students mentioned that they appreciated this experience and they were able to become closer to professors than they would have been through class and office hours. This topic is something that was barely mentioned in previous research, but I feel as though it is valuable. When students become closer to their professors they are more likely to open up, ask for advice, and form more of a mentor-mentee relationship. This was true for many of the students in HORT 499H and is something that they appreciated and mentioned multiple times throughout the focus group and student survey.

Further research should be conducted before generalizations about study abroad programs can be made. For instance, the differences between the length of the study abroad program, the destination country, and whether or not it is an embedded course should be explored. Additionally, research should be completed regarding area specific programs and the growth of

those students. For example, how do College of Agriculture students differ from other college students (i.e. Business, Liberal Arts, Education, etc.)?



## Appendix A

### End of Experience Student Survey

#### HORT 499H Ireland Study Abroad Survey

- 1) Why did you decide to take this class?
- 2) Prior to this trip, did you have previous travel experience? Please Explain.
- 3) At the beginning of the semester how many classmates would you consider a friend?
- 4) At the end of the semester how many classmates would you consider a friend?
- 5) At the end of the trip how many classmates would you consider a friend?

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

		1	2	3	4	5
6	This experience has enhanced my global perceptions					
7	I feel more confident that I could travel on my own after this trip					
8	I have a greater understanding and am more conscientious of cultural diversity after completing this experience					
9	I have gained new knowledge and skills from this experience					
10	After completing this experience, I am more interested in international issues					
11	I have become more open-minded during this trip					
12	I am closer to the professors that I have traveled with and have a connection that we did not have before					
13	I became more tolerant, patient, and understanding because of this trip					
14	This experience was one that has positively impacted me and will stay with me forever					
15	I would like to travel internationally again					

## Appendix B

### HORT 499H Course Syllabi and Itinerary

#### Syllabus

**Hort 499H “Walking in the Footsteps of the Irish During the Irish Potato Famine:  
Examinations of New World Crops in Old World Societies”**

**Instructors:** Dennis R. Decoteau, Tracy Hoover, and William J. Lamont **Teaching Assistant:**  
Kirsty Lloyd

**Contact Information:** Dr. Dennis R. Decoteau, Professor of Horticulture and Plant Ecosystem Health, Department of Plant Science, 18 Tyson Building, Penn State University. 865-5587, [drd10@psu.edu](mailto:drd10@psu.edu).

**Length of experience:** A 2-credit Spring course followed by a 1-credit Maymester 10 day travel to Ireland

**Credit:** 2 credit/Spring Semester, 1 credit/Maymester

**Meeting Time and Location:** Tuesday 5 – 7 pm

**Course Premise:**

Partnering with the Schreyer Global Honors Program, “Walking in the Footsteps of the Irish During the Irish Potato Famine: Examinations of New World Crops in Old World Societies” (Hort 499H) is offered during Spring 2016. This will be a 2 credit interdisciplinary Schreyer Honors course introducing the students to new world crops (crops that were native to North and South America before 1492) such as potato, corn, bean, tomato and chocolate. Crop discussion will include areas of origin, history of uses, and current production along with how these crops “migrated” to Old World Societies (Europe, Asia and Africa or those parts of the world known to Europeans before 1492) often coinciding with exploration to influence those societies. One to two new world crops per week (during a 2 hr. class period) will be discussed with the class period concluding with some hands on sampling of some of the culinary uses of the food crops that were covered during lecture. The last 5 weeks of the Spring course

will include a more in-depth study of the Irish potato and Ireland. This will prepare the students for the international travel part of the course to Ireland.

The international study portion of this Global Honors Program course will be a one credit Maymester summer offering to travel to Ireland to retrace important steps of the famine and the emigration and death that resulted. We are coupling with researchers in Ireland to provide a 10 day immersion into this subject and not only observe historical sites but current production practices of potatoes in Ireland and compare and contrast those with US practices.

### **Learning Goals:**

*Upon completing the course, the student should be able to:*

- Think critically and analytically about the role of new world crops in society
- Be able to compare and contrast crop production practices in the US with selected European countries
- Discuss biological and societal impacts of the Irish Potato Famine.
- Exhibit excellent communication skills in discussing plants and societies

**Format:** Class will meet each Tuesday from 5 – 7 pm. To reinforce the lecture material we will have a meal that utilizes some of the new world crops discussed during that lecture in an old world recipe.

**Materials:** *No text is required for the course but a reference book (The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492 by Alfred W. Crosby)* is provided to each student. All additional materials will be provided on ANGEL. Lecture notes, quizzes, and assignments will be posted by week.

**Communication:** General questions and comments about the course, including lectures and assignments, should be sent to the instructor(s) or TA through ANGEL mail utility. Only emails sent through ANGEL will receive priority.

**Grading:**

Category	Percentage of total grade (%)
Exams (2)	50
Assignments (2)	30
Quizzes (3)	15
Attendance	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

**Exams:** Two in-class exams (a midterm and a final) will be administered during the semester. Students who have a conflict with the assigned exam period must notify the instructor as soon as possible, but no later than one week before the exam. For all missed exams the student is required to bring in a legitimate written excuse.

**Assignments and Quizzes:** Selected assignments and quizzes will be administered during the semester.

**Attendance and Participation:**

Class attendance and participation is expected. Excessive absences may result in a lowering of the final grade.

**\*\*During the course of the semester, it may be necessary to update the syllabus and change the schedule of topics. Past experience has shown that the instructor may need more than the allotted time to discuss some topics.**

**Grade Scale:**

A	94-100
A-	90 – 93
B+	87 – 89
B	84 - 86
B-	80 – 83
C+	75 – 79
C	70 – 74
D	60 – 69
F	0 – 59

**Disability Statement**

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. The Office for Disability Services (ODS) Web site provides contact information for every Penn State campus: <http://equity.psu.edu/ods/dcl>. For further information, please visit the Office for Disability Services Web site: <http://equity.psu.edu/ods>.

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <http://equity.psu.edu/ods/guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

## Academic Integrity Statement

Penn State and the College of Agricultural Sciences take violations of academic integrity very seriously. Faculty, alumni, staff and fellow students expect each student to uphold the University's standards of academic integrity both in and outside of the classroom.

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. Academic integrity includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, plagiarism, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others (see [Faculty Senate Policy 49-20](#) and [G-9 Procedures](#)) <http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/conduct/codeofconduct> ).

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## **Class Lecture Schedule**

### **I. Introduction**

Jan. 12: The Columbian Exchange: Old World meets New World

### **II. The Transfer of New World Foods to the Old World**

Jan. 19: The Columbian Exchange (cont.)

The Transfer of New World Foods to the Old World - Flavorings – Cacao and  
Vanilla

*Quiz 1 - Ireland take home quiz in Angel*

Jan. 26: The “Three Sisters” – Corn, Beans and Squash

Feb. 2: Solanaceous Crops – Tomato and Peppers

**Quiz 2 (Columbian Exchange and New World Crops)**

Feb. 9: Fruit Crops – Blueberries, Cranberries, and Pawpaw

Feb. 16: Field Trip – Wegmans

*Assignment 1 – Scavenger Hunt*

### **III. Improved Cultivation of Old World Crops in the New World**

Feb. 23: Industrial Plantation Crops – Cotton and Sugar

March 1: ***Mid Term***

Food Wise discussion

March 8: Spring Break

### **IV. Indirect Consequences of the Columbian Exchange**

March 15: Coca, Quinine, and Rubber

**V. In-depth case study – Irish potatoes**

- March 22: Irish potato (Botany and History, Production and Processing)
- March 29: Ireland History (Societal impacts that confounded the famine)
- April 5: The Irish potato famine (Causes and Results, Effects on Ireland and the US)
- April 12: Quiz 3 (Ireland: Famine and Public Policy)
- Assignment 2 – Reports on Educational Seminars
- April 19: All Day Field Trip – Potato producer and processor
- April 26: No class
- May 3: ***Final Exam***



### Syllabus

**Hort 499H "Walking in the Footsteps of the Irish During the Irish Potato Famine -- Maymester – May 9-19, 2016**

**Instructors:** Dennis R. Decoteau, Tracy Hoover & William J. Lamont

**Contact Information:** Drs. Dennis Decoteau, Professor – [drd10@psu.edu](mailto:drd10@psu.edu) & Tracy Hoover, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education. [tsh102@psu.edu](mailto:tsh102@psu.edu)

**Length of experience:** May 9<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016

**Credit:** 1 credit/Maymester

**Meeting Time and Location:** Ireland

**Course Premise:**

The international study portion of this Global Honors Program course will be a one credit Maymester summer offering to travel to Ireland to retrace important steps of the famine and the impact on agriculture, communities, and culture. Students will be engaged in complimenting the existing itinerary with educational seminars.

**Objectives:**

Upon completing the course, the student will:

- Identify a cultural or educational venue, topic, or event to expand upon while in Ireland.
- Collaborate and communicate effectively with a classmate in the development and delivery of a 30 minute educational seminar offered in-country.

**In country led seminar/educational/cultural experience** – With one of your classmates you will develop and lead a seminar that features an educational/cultural component of our trip in Ireland. This seminar can complement one of our planned excursions/activities but not duplicate the content. For example, while in Dublin we may mention or cover briefly the historical significance of the Book of Kells or while traveling to Galway thorough the Burren but you( and your partner) may decide to spend a bit more time and develop a program that expands on this unique ecosystem.

Your in-country seminar should be 25-30 minutes in length, engage your classmates/chaperones, and may include a minimal admission price/cost. Your seminar objective, plan, pre-work (if applicable) and resources will be featured in class on April 12<sup>th</sup> (plan on sharing a 1-2 page document at this time). For the in-

country seminar plan to include an activity based learning opportunity and conclude with a reflection/summary session.

Initial seminar ideas and budget (if applicable) are due to Drs. Decoteau and Hoover on March 15<sup>th</sup>.

Drs. Hoover and Decoteau have multiple resources on Ireland that can be checked out to help plan and prepare for your seminar.

### **Participation:**

All class members are expected to actively participate in their classmates seminars.

<b>Assignments</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>Grading Scale</b>	<b>Points</b>
In country led seminar	50	A	94-100
Seminar resources	20	A-	90 - 93
Active learning component & reflection	15	B+	87 - 89
Participation in seminars	15	B	84 - 86
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	B-	80 - 83
		C+	75 - 79
		C	70 - 74
		D	60 - 69
		F	0 - 59

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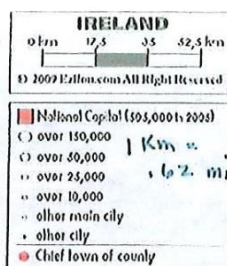
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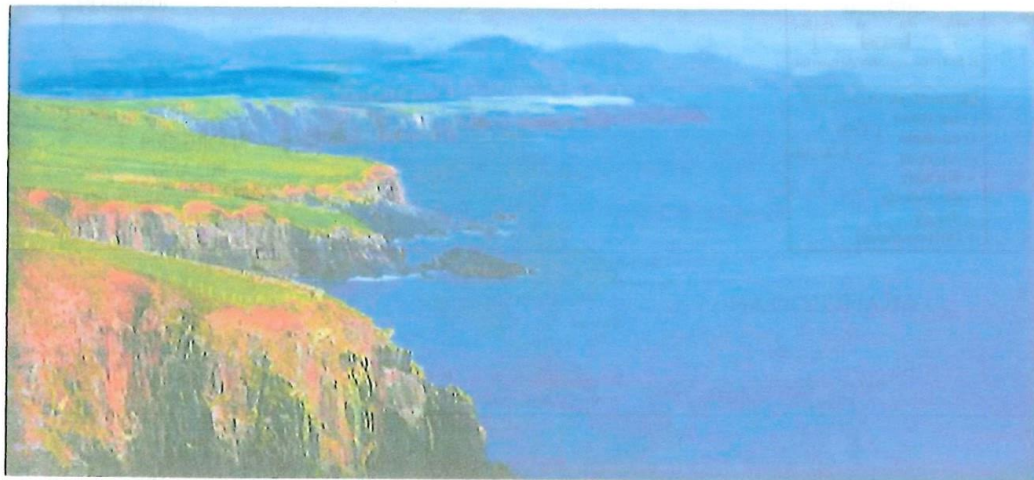
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<http://www.ezilon.com/maps/images/europe/Ireland-political-map.gif>

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**SAMPLE ITINERARY** (Subject to change as per on site needs and site visit availability)

**Tuesday, May 10<sup>th</sup> (Dublin)**

- Airport pickup
- Group lunch
- Orientation with walking tour of Dublin
- Guinness Brewery tour

**Wednesday, May 11<sup>th</sup> (Dublin)**

- Bus tour of Dublin
- Group lunch
- An evening of storytelling in a pub

**Thursday, May 12<sup>th</sup> (Dublin to Wexford with bus)**

- Teagasc
- Crop Research Centre (transportation only to be arranged by CIEE)
- Group lunch
- Local farm (transportation only to be arranged by CIEE)
- Dunbrody Famine Ship tour

**Friday, May 13<sup>th</sup> (Wexford to Killarney with bus)**

- Cobh Heritage Centre
- Titanic Experience
- Group lunch
- Blarney Stone and Castle



**Saturday, May 14<sup>th</sup> (Killarney with bus)**

- Ring of Kerry tour
- Muckross House
- Group lunch
- Old Barricks and Heritage Centre

**Sunday, May 15<sup>th</sup> (Killarney to Galway with bus)**

- Cliffs of Mohr and the Burren
- Group lunch

**Monday, May 16<sup>th</sup> (Galway with bus)**

- National University of Ireland (transportation only to be arranged by CIEE)
- UNESCO (transportation only to be arranged by CIEE)
- Group lunch
- Walking tour of Galway

**Tuesday, May 17<sup>th</sup> (Galway to Strokestown to Dublin with bus)**

- Strokestown Park: The Irish National Famine Museum
- Group lunch
- Arrive back in Dublin at night

**Wednesday, May 18<sup>th</sup> (Dublin)**

**Thursday, May 19<sup>th</sup> (Dublin)**

- Airport drop-off

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# Mikaela L. Hermstedt

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## Education

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

Expected: 2017

Dual Majors: Agricultural Sciences; Plant Sciences, Horticulture Option

Minors: Environmental Resource Mgmt; Agribusiness Mgmt; Entrepreneurship & Innovation; International Ag  
Schreyer Honors College

### Relevant Coursework

- Plant Propagation
- Plant Breeding and Genetics
- Management of Insect Pests of Ornamentals
- Plant Nutrition
- Post-Harvest Physiology
- Plant Growth Regulators

## Study Abroad

CIEE, Ireland, Penn State

Summer 2016

- Compared today's methods of potato farming in PA and Ireland
- Conducted research, including a focus group, on the benefits of studying abroad

EARTH University, Costa Rica, Penn State

Spring 2014

- Studied Waste Management, Ecotourism, and Natural Resources
- Constructed a bio-digester with fellow students for a local farmer

## Work Experience

Botany Greenhouses, **Undergrad Worker**, University Park, PA

2015-2016

- Watered and cared for a variety of greenhouse crops
- Pruned, transplanted, and root pruned greenhouse crops
- Fertilized greenhouse plants through slow-release and fertigation

Railroad Meadows, LLC, **Owner**, Lincoln, DE

2010-Present

- Conducted market research on consumer preference for handmade soaps
- Examined best care practices for alpaca and llama maintenance and fiber growth

## Internship Experience

Marshall's Riverbank Nursery, **College Intern**, Salisbury, MD

Summer 2016

- Mass propagated a variety of woody plants through cuttings
- Hand and depth pruned woody plants

Longwood Gardens, **Nursery Intern**, Kennett Square, PA

Summer 2015

- Built and maintained irrigation systems for field crops
- Trained special plants (hedges, topiaries, etc.)
- Performed pest and disease identification and control
- Operated heavy machinery including skid steer tractor, utility vehicles, and tractors

## Activities

- Collegiate FFA-Penn State 2013-Present
  - President, 14-16
  - National Judge, 14-16
- International Ag-Penn State 2014-Present
  - Treasurer, 15-16
- Delaware Farm Bureau Member 2012-Present
- Ag Student Council-Penn State 2014-Present
  - President, 16
  - Parliamentarian, 15
- Coaly Honor Society-Penn State 2014-Present
  - President, 16-17
- Gamma Sigma Delta Honor Society 2016-Present

## Honors

- Dean's List-Penn State 2013-2016
- Outstanding Junior-Penn State 2015
- Published in Penn Statements, 2015
- Farm Bureau Scholarship- 2013, 2014
- Henderson Scholarship- 2013-2016
- Dreibelbis Excellence in Agriculture- 2014
- Shinoda Memorial Scholarship- 2016
- Presidential Volunteer Service Award (Gold)
- National FFA Scholarship-2013, 2015
- Academic Excellence – 2013-2016
- Rexford Honors Scholarship- 2014
- Thevaos Honors Scholarship- 2014, 2015

## Certifications

- CPR and First Aid, ASHI
- Kayak and Canoe Safety, Red Cross
- PA Pesticide License