International Agriculture and Rural Development (IARD)

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Defining Characteristics of the Major

IARD is an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental major managed and supported by the International Programs office in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (IP/CALS). Established in 2002, this flexible major enrolls 80+ students. Faculty members from many CALS departments contribute to the IARD major through teaching and academic advising. In addition to the CALS distribution requirements and a small required core of IARD courses, students choose from a large number of internationally-focused courses in the social, agricultural and environmental sciences and they pursue a required international learning experience – typically an internship or other form of field-based experiential learning. In addition, majors participate in at least one faculty-led international field trip tied to semester or year-long campus-based IARD courses. This latter experience usually involves Cornell students spending time in the field with students from overseas partner universities and subsequent team-based collaborative writing and presentations. A senior seminar course in the final semester links small teams of IARD students with faculty mentors and development practitioners around the world to work on real-world projects. Students engage in research and/or collaborative problem solving in response to practitioner defined problems, opportunities and deliverables.

From the program’s inception, an international learning experience – usually 2-4 months in length – has been required. When the major first began, student international experiences spanned a wide continuum from fairly conventional university-based study abroad and exchange programs to internships that emphasized field-based experiential and/or engaged learning. Not surprising, it was the latter that proved more popular with students and more relevant to the learning objectives of the major. As a result, many internship options have been developed. For example, with financial and networking support of the Kellogg Foundation, students can choose to intern with one of several dozen organizations in Southern Mexico. Host organizations include those working on agriculture and food systems, community-based natural resource management, rural health, education, and livelihood development, among other things. The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization offices in several countries around the world have created opportunities for Cornell IARD undergraduates to work for periods of 3 months on meaningful projects. And several faculty members have arranged for students to work with longtime overseas collaborators on field research or outreach projects in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Today most IARD majors have two or more overseas experiences during their time at Cornell, at least one of which is best characterized as an internship. While we do not require that the international experience be credit bearing, we do require that students participate in a multiple session program of pre-experience orientation to cross-cultural engaged learning and a 1 credit post-experience course emphasizing critical reflection and writing.
**Intended Student Learning Outcomes**

Given the IARD major’s interdisciplinary nature, student learning outcomes related to content knowledge include foundational concepts in economics, development sociology, several applied agricultural sciences, and natural resource management, among others. Foreign language study is strongly recommended and popular among IARD majors. As specific content-related learning outcomes exist for each course, we depend on the interdepartmental IARD curriculum committee (comprised mainly of faculty with a designation of CALS International Professor) to periodically review the mix of courses and experiences that advance those desired outcomes.

In addition, the following intended learning outcomes have been defined for the international experiences integrated into the curriculum.

**Longer-term experiences (2 months or more) - Students will:**

- acquire practical, place-based knowledge needed to address complex development problems.
- gain greater appreciation for the capacities of rural people in developing countries to define and propose solutions to their own problems, and for the factors that limit rural peoples’ agency.
- describe the purpose and approach of host development institutions’ and practitioners’ work
- research, evaluate and debate alternative rural development initiatives that claim to advance food security, alleviate poverty, improve nutrition and health, and/or enhance the sustainability of land, forests, water and other natural resources.
- reflect upon the extent to which knowledge obtained from prior coursework enables understanding of complex problems in a cross-cultural context.
- gain deeper understanding of the range of careers for agriculture and rural development professionals and identify key knowledge gaps and learning opportunities.
- gain an understanding of the importance and foundational skills needed for effective development program management.
- demonstrate greater functional proficiency for the relevant language.
- develop relationships and professional networks need for future collaboration.

**Short-term international exposure (2-3 week field study integrated into semester or year-long campus-based courses) – Students will:**

- describe basic characteristics of the geophysical/ecological environment, farming systems, communities, and rural livelihood strategies for the places visited.
- demonstrate curiosity and eagerness for further learning about the culture, history, socio-political issues, literary traditions, and development challenges for places visited.
- conceptualize, evaluate and debate potential solutions to locally identified challenges.
- share new insights into home and host country cultures and demonstrate skills in cross-cultural communication through collegial interaction with host country students.
• demonstrated willingness to critically examine and reflect upon existing beliefs, values, observations and experience.
• be able to identify and explain social, technical, and political dimensions of complex problems associated with the exploitation of natural and human resources in food systems, and individual and collective responses to these problems.
• describe the benefits of interdisciplinary solutions to global challenges;
• be able to discuss observations about the various professional cultures, values, day to day work environments, and challenges that characterize the work of development practitioners observed during the field study.
• gain greater appreciation for the value of interdisciplinary approaches to research on complex issues.

Efforts to more effectively assess these intended student learning outcomes is a work in progress!