Influenced Decisions: Study Abroad Effects on Students’ Decision-making Skills

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Introduction

• How do we decide?
• Can we refine our decision-making skills?
• USDA prioritizes soft skills and career competencies
  – Teamwork
  – Problem-solving
  – Professionalism
  – Decision-making
Decision-making

• Personal Factors that influence decision-making
  – Nationality
  – Religion
  – Sex
  – Age
  – Employment
  – Personality
  – Education?

• Education has an ‘allocative effect’ on decision-making, empowering learners and producers
Decision-making

• Behavioral factors influence decision-making
  – Referent groups
  – Rewards and sanctions
  – Codes of conduct
  – Ethics

• Environmental factors influence decision-making
  – Location
  – Proximity
High-impact Experiences

• High-impact experiences
  – Internship
  – Global learning
  – Capstone courses
  – Service learning
  – Undergraduate research
  – Writing-intense courses
  – Learning communities
  – First-year seminars
  – Collaborative assignments
Global Learning

• Study abroad increasing every year for the last decade
• Previous findings on study abroad and soft skills included “enhanced”
  – Global perspective
  – Professionalism
  – Cultural competencies
Statement of the Problem

• Post-secondary agricultural educators have a need to develop decision-making skills in an emerging workforce
• Universities and administrators have increasing value invested in study abroad programs
• Do study abroad experiences facilitate enhanced decision-making?
Theoretical Framework

- Personal Factors
- Behavior
- Environment

Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory
Methods

• Purpose
  – Describe TAMU self-perceived changes in decision-making skills after agricultural study abroad program

• Participants
  – Costa Rica and Namibia (2017-2018) study abroad programs
  – N=76
  – Similar assignments and coursework
  – Consistent instructors
Methods

• Pre-Post reflection questions
  – Open-ended, administered online
• Constant Comparative analysis
  – Triangulated for credibility with instructor observations, field notes
  – Frequent peer debrief
Findings

Pre Themes
- Confidence in decision-making
  - ‘Steady’ / ‘Logical’
- Behavioral factors
  - Codes of conduct
  - Rewards and sanctions

Post Themes
- ‘Broader views’
- Causes
- Effects
- Personal factors
  - Cultural differences and similarities
Conclusions

• Global agricultural experiences may contribute to changed views on decision-making processes

• Participants noted cultural considerations played a larger role in their decision process after study abroad experiences
Recommendations

• For educators
  – Plan for programmatic engagement with cultural dynamics
  – Incorporate meaningful reflection about decision-making in international and global learning settings
Recommendations

• For researchers
  – Develop quantitative measures for decision-making and other soft-skills or career competencies
  – Compare changes in DM between study abroad and campus-based HIEs
  – Compare potential differences based on study abroad location