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## Designing an International Experience Program for 4-H Members in Louisiana

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*In recent years, the U.S. Cooperative Extension Program (CEP) has worked to develop international exchange programs (IEPs) for 4-H members in some states. However, no such program currently exists in Louisiana. As such, the purpose of this descriptive study was to identify the IEP participation preferences held by 4-H members in Louisiana to inform future IEP development and implementation. 4-H members in this study preferred to participate in a short-term IEP during the summer of the 11th grade. Thus, it is recommended that IEP recruitment be geared toward students in the 9th and 10th grades. 4-H members preferred to participate in an IEP located in Europe or Australia/New Zealand. Future research should examine which characteristics of these locations appeal to 4-H members to broaden the appeal of IEPs in other locations. Career related courses and hands-on experience were perceived by 4-H members as important activities to include in the IEP design, whereas staying with a host family was not. Future research should assess whether this finding is specific to members in this study or representative of a national trend that warrants reexamination of the overall design of 4-H IEPs employed by the U.S. CEP.*

*Keywords:* 4-H members, international experience program (IEP), developmental evaluation

### Introduction

The forces of globalization have entwined local and global realities (Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Lechner & Boli, 2015). While globalization may not directly or exclusively determine local circumstance, Lechner and Boli (2015) argued that world societies will continue to integrate as individuals become conscious of their participation in global networks and how those networks are influenced by global forces. Regardless of whether national members are aware of the larger

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structures in place, “their everyday lives are nevertheless embedded in a global culture that transcends their village, town or country, and that becomes part of individual and collective identities” (Lechner & Boli, 2015, p. 2). Reflective of this common knowledge and collective identities across regions is the emergence of international institutions in all areas of human activity (Lechner & Boli, 2015). While education may be viewed by some as being solely a national undertaking, Baker and LeTendre (2005) maintained that this perception is largely inaccurate. In reality, globalization has altered the fabric of education and demanded the integration of a global aspect into the curricula (Baker & LeTendre, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The U.S agriculture sector is currently more globally interdependent than ever before (Lewis & Gibson, 2008). As such, agricultural and Extension education must be modeled to meet the demands of a globalized world and prepare clientele for participating as members of a global society (Akpan & Martin, 1996; Ludwig & McGirr, 2003). Regarding the role of the U.S. Cooperative Extension Program (CEP), Ludwig (2001) noted that Extension’s mission will continue to be influenced by internationalization. Additionally, Etling, Reaman, and El Sawi (1993) asserted that Extension faculty and personnel must be cognizant of the relationship between Extension’s mission and the international issues at hand. The National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) also put forth the rationale for including international awareness as an integral component of appropriate Extension outreach services and activities (NASULGC, 2004). As such, Extension educators need not only recognize the role of Extension in the international arena, but should be strongly encouraged to put forth significant efforts to incorporate an international component into programming (Bates, 2006; Ludwig, 1995).

International cooperation has been considered to be a very important facilitator of internationalization among institutions and organizations (Arnold, Davis, & Corliss, 2014; Boyd et al., 2001; Odell, Williams, Lawrence, Gartin, & Smith, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Thus, the U.S. CEP has worked to internationalize programming by way of establishing partnerships with international organizations to conduct development projects abroad, employ 4-H youth outbound exchange programs, and host international guests through special programs (Ludwig & McGirr, 2003; Major & Miller, 2012). International experience programs (IEPs), such as the International 4-H Youth Exchange Program (IFYE) and States’ 4-H International Exchange Program, have been established in some states as a means of developing a global perspective among 4-H members early on in their educational experience (Boyd et al., 2001; Ingram, Smith-Hollins, & Radhakrishna, 2009; Odell et al., 2002).

Findings in prior research lend support to the induction of IEPs as a means of facilitating efforts to internationalize Extension outreach and services. In prior studies, 4-H members who participated in an IEP (a) demonstrated a more developed global perspective and awareness of

world issues, (b) developed greater levels of self-confidence and awareness of self-purpose, (c) were more willing to immerse themselves in another culture with greater ease, (d) had a greater interest in pursuing an internationally focused career, and (e) continued to travel internationally following their initial IEP participation (Arnold et al., 2014; Boyd et al., 2001; Ingram et al., 2009; Odell et al., 2002). Additionally, as youth have been acknowledged as having the ability to evoke change within their surrounding community (Olberding & Olberding, 2010), researchers have suggested enhancing 4-H members' global perspective and awareness as a means of generating a "ripple effect" of similar outcomes among 4-H members' family and friends (Boyd et al., 2001; Major & Miller, 2012; Olberding & Olberding, 2010). In a study conducted by Boyd et al. (2001), 4-H youth who participated in an IEP perceived their family and friends were more globally aware as a result of their participation in the program. Moreover, Boyd et al. (2001) surveyed persons close to the 4-H members who participated in the IEP and found that those individuals believed the IEP had not only influenced the participant, but that they too were more globally aware from having contact with the participant. Similarly, Olberding and Olberding (2010) found that the impact of a youth exchange program extended beyond direct participants to also include host families, chaperones, and other students and faculty. As indicated by these findings, 4-H members may provide an accessible population through which global awareness can be introduced within the larger community.

Much of the literature on 4-H IEPs has focused on program outcomes, whereas little research has been conducted regarding program design. If programs are to be successful, it is necessary that they be developed to appeal to the target population (Ivy, 2008). In a study conducted to examine IEP destination choices as part of a marketing strategy, Kavakas (2013) found the IEP itself and the skills and experiences gained while participating were important marketing components. In addition, the attractiveness of a country was among the most important elements influencing students' IEP destination choice (Kavakas, 2013). As such, identifying which countries and activities are most appealing and important to Louisiana 4-H members can aid Extension personnel in developing marketable IEPs for 4-H members. Lastly, the logistical considerations associated with an IEP can influence students' participation. Logistical considerations, such as time of year to participate, duration of program, and academic level for participating, may influence 4-H members' decisions to participate in a particular IEP. Prior studies to examine these preferences have been conducted among college student populations (Bunch, Blackburn, Danjean, Stair, & Blanchard, 2015; Danjean, Bunch, & Blackburn, 2015), but not among 4-H members.

As no IEP for 4-H members currently exists in Louisiana, and considering the lack of IEP research conducted with 4-H members, developmental evaluation was deemed a necessary first step in designing and implementing such a program in Louisiana. According to Gamble (2008), developmental evaluation involves inquiry for development and is particularly suited for the early stages of an innovation. Moreover, in contrast to traditional evaluations aimed at

producing generalizable findings across populations and settings, developmental evaluation aims to produce context-specific understanding that informs future innovation processes (Gamble, 2008).

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine the perceptions and preferences held by 4-H members toward participation in an international experience program, in order to inform future practice and research regarding the design and implementation of an IEP for Louisiana 4-H members. The following objectives guided this study:

1. Describe 4-H members' perceptions of the importance of participating in an IEP.
2. Describe 4-H members' IEP logistical preferences including time of year to participate, program length, and academic level during which to participate in an IEP.
3. Describe 4-H members' preferences of location(s) as destinations for an IEP.
4. Describe 4-H members' IEP design preferences in terms of perceived importance regarding selected activities to be included in an IEP.

### **Methods**

#### **Population and Sample**

The target population for this study ( $N = 789$ ) consisted of all 4-H members who attended a three-day summer conference. Completed instruments were collected from 628 of the 789 4-H members in attendance, which yielded an 80% response rate. Most of the 4-H respondents were white ( $f = 485$ ; 77.2%) females ( $f = 389$ ; 61.9%) with a mean age of 15 ( $SD = 1.54$ ) and an academic grade level ranging from 7 to 12. Additionally, the largest group of the 4-H respondents grew up on a farm or in a rural area ( $f = 269$ ; 42.8%) and the great majority of respondents were not fluent in a language other than English ( $f = 552$ ; 87.9%).

#### **Instrumentation**

Items were modified from questionnaires by Bunch, Lamm, Israel, and Edwards (2013) and Rieger (n.d.) to develop an instrument to assess 4-H members' IEP participation preferences (Bunch, Cater, & Rampold, 2017). To ensure face and content validity, an expert panel with collective proficiencies in 4-H youth development, international program development, and instrument development reviewed the questionnaire. The panel deemed the instrument acceptable.

For the purpose of this study, five sections of the instrument were used. The first section of the instrument was designed to measure 4-H members' perceived level of importance concerning

participation in an IEP. In this section, responses were measured using a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all important*, 2 = *not very important*, 3 = *somewhat important*, and 4 = *very important*). The second section of the instrument was designed to measure 4-H youth members' logistical preferences for participating in an IEP, including (a) time of year to participate, (b) program length, and (c) academic level during which to participate (see Table 2 for response categories). The third section was used to identify 4-H youth members' preferences of select location(s) as possible destinations for an IEP. In this section, participants were asked to rate the appeal of nine locations on a four-point Likert-scale (1 = *not at all appealing*, 2 = *somewhat unappealing*, 3 = *somewhat appealing*, 4 = *very appealing*). The fourth section of the instrument was utilized to identify 4-H members' IEP design preferences. In this section, participants were asked to indicate the importance of the inclusion of select activities as part of an IEP (i.e., in-field lectures/labs, participating in field research, acquiring hands-on experience and skills, etc.). Responses were measured using a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all important*, 2 = *somewhat unimportant*, 3 = *somewhat important*, and 4 = *very important*). Lastly, demographic items were used to describe the personal and educational characteristics of the population sample.

### **Data Collection**

The 4-H youth educators who were assisting with a three-day summer conference for 4-H members in Louisiana were given a data collection packet that included (a) data collection protocol, (b) hard copy instruments, (c) participants right to refuse protocol, (d) instructions on returning instruments to the researchers, and (e) a distribution checklist. The 4-H youth educators distributed hard copy questionnaires to 4-H youth participants during the final evening of the conference and returned the completed instruments to the researchers. Parental consent for participation in this study was collected as part of the program enrollment process.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Nominal and ordinal data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages for objective two, while interval level data were computed using means and standard deviations for objectives one, three, and four.

## **Findings**

### **Objective 1: Perceived Importance of Participating in an IEP**

Objective one sought to describe 4-H members' perceived importance of participating in an IEP. More than 75% of the 4-H members perceived participating in an IEP as *somewhat important* (*f*

= 287; 45.7%) or *very important* ( $f = 230$ ; 36.6%). The remaining participants perceived participating in an IEP as *not very important* ( $f = 58$ ; 9.2%) or *not important* ( $f = 53$ ; 8.4%).

## Objective 2: IEP Logistical Preferences

Objective two sought to describe 4-H members' preferences pertaining to the logistical factors associated with participating in an IEP. Results for this objective are shown in Table 1.

Regarding their preferred academic level during which to participate in an IEP, more 4-H members identified the 11th grade ( $f = 139$ ; 22.7%) or post high school/in college ( $f = 118$ ; 19.3%), while fewer preferred to participate in the 12th grade ( $f = 77$ ; 12.6%) or 8th grade ( $f = 65$ ; 10.4%).

Regarding time of year, more 4-H members ( $f = 246$ ; 39.7%) identified summer as the preferred time of year to participate in an IEP, followed by Fall semester ( $f = 202$ ; 32.6%) and Spring semester ( $f = 171$ ; 27.6%).

Lastly, the program length preferred by most 4-H members was 1-2 weeks ( $f = 219$ ; 35.2%), followed by 3-4 weeks ( $f = 209$ ; 33.6%). The fewest 4-H members ( $f = 110$ ; 17.7%) preferred to participate in a 5-6 week long IEP, and some 4-H members ( $f = 84$ ; 13.5%) selected *none* as the ideal duration of an IEP.

**Table 1. 4-H Youth Members' Logistical Preferences for Participating in an IEP (N = 628)**

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Participation Preference: Academic Level <sup>a</sup>		
11th grade	139	22.7
Post high school/in college	118	19.3
9th grade	111	18.1
10th grade	102	16.7
12th grade	77	12.6
8th grade	65	10.6
Participation Preference: Time of Year <sup>b</sup>		
Summer	246	39.7
Fall semester	202	32.6
Spring semester	171	27.6
Participation Preference: Length of Program <sup>c</sup>		
1-2 weeks	219	35.2
3-4 weeks	209	33.6
5-6 weeks	110	17.7
None	84	13.5

<sup>a</sup> Responses missing from 16 study participants for this item

<sup>b</sup> Responses missing from 9 study participants for this item

<sup>c</sup> Responses missing from 6 study participants for this item

### Objective 3: IEP Location Preferences

Objective three was to describe 4-H members' preferred locations as destinations for participation in an IEP. Respondents' levels of preference were interpreted using by the researchers using ranges of mean scores for each level of preference. As shown in Table 2, seven of the select locations were perceived by 4-H members as *somewhat appealing*, and three were perceived as *somewhat unappealing*. The locations with the highest mean ratings were Europe ( $M = 3.32$ ;  $SD = .99$ ) and Australia or New Zealand ( $M = 3.20$ ;  $SD = 1.04$ ). The locations with the lowest means were Asia (mainland) ( $M = 2.43$ ;  $SD = 1.07$ ), Southeast Asia ( $M = 2.39$ ;  $SD = 1.09$ ), and Africa ( $M = 2.28$ ;  $SD = 1.14$ ).

**Table 2. 4-H Members' Perception of Appeal for Select IEP Locations (N = 628)**

Locations	n	M	SD	Interpretation
Europe	617	3.32	.99	Somewhat appealing
Australia or New Zealand	612	3.20	1.04	Somewhat appealing
North America	610	2.88	1.14	Somewhat appealing
South America	613	2.84	1.07	Somewhat appealing
South Pacific	618	2.79	1.07	Somewhat appealing
Central America	606	2.76	1.09	Somewhat appealing
India	596	2.60	1.12	Somewhat appealing
Asia (mainland)	612	2.43	1.07	Somewhat unappealing
Southeast Asia	614	2.39	1.09	Somewhat unappealing
Africa	618	2.28	1.14	Somewhat unappealing

*Note:* Mean ranges used in interpretations of preferences: 1.00 to 1.49 = *Not at all appealing*; 1.50 to 2.49 = *Somewhat unappealing*; 2.50 to 3.49 = *Somewhat appealing*; and 3.50 to 4.00 = *Very Appealing*.

### Objective 4: IEP Design Preferences

Objective four sought to describe 4-H members' IEP design preferences in terms of the importance of inclusion of select activities and experiences while participating in an IEP. Results for this objective are shown in Table 3.

All activities were perceived by 4-H members as being *somewhat important* components to include in an IEP. The activities with the highest means were (a) taking courses related to your career interests ( $M = 3.40$ ;  $SD = .89$ ); (b) acquiring hands-on experience and skills ( $M = 3.37$ ;  $SD = .89$ ); (c) learning about a different culture ( $M = 3.27$ ;  $SD = .91$ ); and (d) free time to do what you want ( $M = 3.27$ ;  $SD = .93$ ). The activities with the lowest means were (a) staying with a host family ( $M = 2.86$ ;  $SD = 1.00$ ); (b) in-field lectures and labs ( $M = 2.78$ ;  $SD = 1.03$ ); and (c) attending non-credit courses at foreign universities ( $M = 2.56$ ;  $SD = .95$ ).

**Table 3. 4-H Members' Perception of Importance for IEP Design Components (N = 628)**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Taking courses related to your career interests	612	3.40	.89	Somewhat important
Acquiring hands-on experience and skills	618	3.37	.89	Somewhat important
Learning about a different culture	621	3.27	.91	Somewhat important
Free time to do what you want	617	3.27	.93	Somewhat important
Traveling in a country	620	3.24	.92	Somewhat important
Sightseeing	619	3.23	.94	Somewhat important
Socializing with citizens of host country	618	3.22	.96	Somewhat important
Working one-on-one with professors and students	618	3.15	.97	Somewhat important
Speaking and learning host country language	614	3.15	.92	Somewhat important
Participating in field research	614	3.09	.94	Somewhat important
Staying with a host family	617	2.86	1.00	Somewhat important
In-field lectures and labs	620	2.78	1.03	Somewhat important
Attending non-credit courses at foreign universities	608	2.56	.95	Somewhat important

*Note:* Mean ranges used in interpretations of importance: 1.00 to 1.49 = *Not at all important*; 1.50 to 2.49 = *Somewhat unimportant*; 2.50 to 3.49 = *Somewhat important*; 3.50 to 4.00 = *Very important*.

## Conclusions

More than three-fourths of the Louisiana 4-H members who participated in this study perceive IEPs as at least somewhat important. If 4-H members were to participate in an IEP, they prefer to participate in a short-term IEP held either during the summer of the 11th grade or post high school/in college. Additionally, they prefer the IEP to be located in either Europe or Australia/New Zealand. Regarding important activities to include in the design of an IEP, 4-H members perceive all activities as at least somewhat important. The activities 4-H members perceive as most important were those that allow them to take courses related to their career interest, acquire hands-on experience and skills, learn about a different culture, and have free time to do what they want (i.e., sight-seeing and tourism). The IEP components 4-H members consider least important were staying with a host family, engaging in in-field lectures and labs, and attending non-credit courses at a foreign university.

## Discussion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, IEPs designed for 4-H members in Louisiana should be short-term programs (duration of no more than four weeks) held during the summer. This recommendation is further supported by findings in prior research conducted with other student populations. Bunch et al. (2015) and Danjean et al. (2015) examined the IEP participation preferences of College of Agriculture students and found that the majority of students preferred

to participate in a short-term IEP held during the summer. Additionally, a nation-wide study conducted by the Institute of International Education (IEE, 2015) revealed that more students participated in short-term IEPs in the 2013-2014 academic year than traditional, long-term programs. While most of the 4-H members prefer to participate in a short-term (1-4 weeks) IEP, it should be noted that some selected “none” as the ideal length of an IEP. This finding may indicate that some 4-H members in this study lack interest in participating in an IEP, regardless of the attributes of the program. As such, future research should be conducted to identify other variables that may influence 4-H members interest in participating in an IEP.

When designing IEPs for 4-H members, Extension personnel should also consider the location of the program. In a study conducted with College of Agriculture students, Van Hoof and Verbeeten (2005) found students were more motivated to participate in an IEP when they perceived the location to be appealing. Based on the findings of this study, IEPs designed for 4-H members in Louisiana should be located in either Europe or Australia/New Zealand. Prior studies conducted with other student populations have also identified these locations as the IEP destinations most appealing to students (Bunch et al., 2015; Danjean et al., 2015; IEE, 2015). However, considering the wide array of alternative IEP destinations, it could be beneficial to conduct future research to identify characteristics of Europe and Australia/New Zealand 4-H members find appealing. A study of this nature may aid Extension personnel in attracting 4-H members to IEPs in other locations that share similar characteristics.

Regarding the design of an IEP, Louisiana 4-H members perceive taking courses related to their career interests and gaining hands-on experience as the most important activities to include in the design of an IEP. This finding is consistent with prior studies conducted with other student populations, in which students reported being more motivated to participate in an IEP if they perceived the IEP as being beneficial and relevant to their future careers (Briers, Shinn, & Nguyen, 2010; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005). As such, it could be beneficial to conduct research to examine the career interests of 4-H members prior to designing an IEP. In practice, IEP information distributed to 4-H members should highlight the career benefits and opportunities for hand-on experience. As the 11th grade was identified most by Louisiana 4-H members as the preferred academic level for participating in an IEP, IEP information should be distributed to 4-H members as early as the 9th and 10th grade. Introducing 4-H members to IEPs prior to the 11th grade may increase the likelihood they will actually participate later in their high school careers. Moreover, it could be beneficial to introduce 9th and 10th grade 4-H members and their families to opportunities to host international exchange students. Arnold et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study with 4-H international participants, in which seven of ten participants reported having hosted an international exchange student prior to their own international experience. In fact, participants who hosted an international student reported that hosting an international student influenced profoundly their desire to participate in an IEP (Arnold et al., 2014). Additionally, as post high school/in college was the second most favorable

academic level for participating in an IEP, it could be beneficial for Louisiana Extension personnel to partner with local universities in their internationalization efforts.

Lastly, future research should be conducted to examine why 4-H members perceive staying with a host family as the least important activity to include in the design of an IEP. Traditionally, international 4-H programs employed by U.S. CEP have been designed to send 4-H members to live with foreign host families. In a study conducted by Arnold et al. (2014), 4-H IEP participants reported that being exposed to the culture and daily rituals of the host family was the most important component of their exchange experience. Living with a host family allowed greater immersion into the culture, which resulted in a deeper reflection among participants regarding the limitations of their own global perspective (Arnold et al., 2014). However, the findings of this study indicate that a host family design may not be best suited for 4-H members in Louisiana. Thus, future research should be conducted with 4-H members in other states to assess whether this finding is specific to the population of this study, or if this finding represents a national trend among 4-H members that warrants reexamination of the overall design of international 4-H programs employed by the U.S CEP.

### Limitations

While the census survey design employed in this study was appropriate for meeting the objectives of this study, the ability to generalize findings beyond the scope of this study is limited. However, when considered alongside the prior literature, the findings of this study provide directions for future practice and research for agricultural and Extension faculty and personnel in Louisiana. Moreover, the trends observed in this study contribute to the limited body of literature pertaining to the appropriate design of international programming for 4-H members.

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