In the summer of 2011, 14 students from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities ventured abroad in groups to complete field experiences, a requirement of the Master in Development Practice (MDP) degree. Each field experience was designed and implemented with an in-country host organization.

The MDP degree is a unique interdisciplinary program combining studies in Policy, Social Sciences, Education, Agriculture, Health, and Management, to train the next generation of international development professionals. The UMN program is part of an international consortium of 21 schools on 6 continents.

The field experience provided students time for rich personal reflection and learning. Many students grew more excited about development, reaffirming that they want to work in development and prefer working in the field. Others became more frustrated with international development practice. Although there were many challenges, students felt that the field experience generally enriched learning in ways not possible in a classroom.

Current literature tends to focus on undergraduate study abroad programs, and literature examining professional graduate-level international internships is scarce. This paper is a first step in filling that knowledge gap, within the limited context of the University of Minnesota MDP program.

Overall students discussed gaining confidence in a number of areas: language, cross cultural work, living abroad, and developing and completing objectives. Many were pleased with the professionalism of their experience and were happy with their end products and presentations. Feedback from host organizations suggested that they too tended to be impressed with the final products.

Academic preparation is vital:
- Theory – frame issues and respond to potential ethical dilemmas
- Practice – develop program tools

Formalize and guide group preparation:
- Identify individual strengths and weaknesses
- Discuss roles and responsibilities
- Develop team norms

Facilitate personal preparation:
- Individual research into the country and context
- Define work, group, and personal time

Strengthen processes for partner organizations:
- Well-defined scope of work before starting
- Challenging but realistic expectations of students
- Set achievable goals given limited time

Faculty support:
- Establish professional networks
- Organize in-country social events
- Ensure students have adequate technical support

Curriculum Recommendations

Findings

Cooperating with national and international organizations

Monrovia, Liberia – four students
Qualitative evaluation of two capacity building programs with the Government of Liberia

Mumbai, India – two students
Rapid assessment of maternal and neonatal health program
Qualitative assessment of community volunteers

Cairo, Egypt – four students
Cost-benefit analysis of informal solid waste collection

Cochabamba, Bolivia – three students
Baseline survey of agricultural production, family nutrition and health and economic well-being

Curriculum Recommendations

Designing and Preparing for
International Graduate-Level Professional Internships

“Networking and relationships between these organizations was enlightening to me and made me realize that was what I wanted to do.”

“‘The experience expanded my definition [of development] and deepened my understanding and appreciation of the role of wealthy people as investors and visionaries.’”

“‘To be able to bounce ideas off of other people or see something that I might not have seen just looking at it myself could have enhanced the experience.’”

“Aurelius Butler, Britt Cecconi Cruz, Peter Ehresmann, Britta Hansen, Devin Hogan, Carine NDougonna, Sheila Nezhad, Kit Martin, Blaire Molitor, Angelina Nguyen, Sadie Paschke, Kaying Vang, Serene Zhao, Alii Zomer.”