

Media Relations

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K-STATE OFFERING COMPARATIVE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE SYSTEMS CLASS

MANHATTAN -- Imagine traveling around the globe to learn about seven different cultures in four months. For most students this wouldn't be possible, but the agricultural economics department at Kansas State University has developed a course that gives undergraduate students the opportunity to study abroad without leaving the classroom.

K-State's comparative food and agriculture systems course, AGEC 710, introduces students to the agricultural and cultural situations in the Mercosur, European Union, Russia and the former Soviet Union, East Asia, Oceania, South Asia and sub-Sahara Africa. It is taught by instructors in each of the regions, who spend two to three weeks each discussing the food and agricultural systems of their country and how it relates to the global market.

"I took this course because I couldn't do a study abroad program. It was a way to learn from international teachers without leaving Kansas," said Beth Yeager, a K-State doctoral student in agricultural economics, **Manhattan**. "It is a great way for those who can't afford to travel to all of the countries to learn from someone who lives and works there."

The course was originally developed as an elective for K-State's master of agribusiness distance education program, but has been restructured to offer undergraduate students the opportunity to learn about the global nature of the agriculture industry. It was first offered for undergraduate credit in the spring 2007 semester.

The course is delivered through distance technology by professors from France, Russia, Uruguay, New Zealand and Thailand. Current professors include Allen Featherstone, a K-State agricultural economics professor and director of the master of agribusiness program; Daniel Conforte, a Universidad ORT business school professor in Montevideo, Uruguay; Pavel Sorokin, a Moscow State Agro-Engineering University professor in Moscow, Russia; Nicolas Habert, an Ecole d'ingenieurs Purpan professor in Toulouse, France; Yann Duval, an economist with extensive experience with Asia-Pacific trade and investment in Bangkok, Thailand; Ravipim Chaveesuk, a Kasetsart University professor in Bangkok, Thailand; and Keith Woodford, a professor from Lincoln University in New Zealand.

To give students an even broader international experience, new sections for sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and North America are in development. New instructors include: Lisa House, associate professor and undergraduate coordinator in the food and resource economics department, University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla.; Theodora Hyuha, a senior lecturer at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda; and Rajinder Sidhu, an economics professor at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India.

The course offers an in-depth view of the global food and agribusiness industry from people who have experienced it firsthand. The goal of the course is to give U.S. students an inside view of international agriculture taught by those with a lifetime of knowledge regarding the region, according to Featherstone.

"Students learn about other regions of the world from instructors who live and work in those regions without having to leave the K-State campus,"

Featherstone said. "Through technology, we are able to provide an interactive and educational classroom setting."

Students agree having the course taught from an international perspective gives them a more realistic picture of the conditions in each region.

"I especially enjoyed the Mercosur section because we discussed in-depth how government policies have affected agriculture there," Yeager said, "but we didn't only talk about agriculture; we also learned about the culture and history of each area. I found it very interesting to learn about the East Asian culture and think students outside of agriculture would too."

Facilitated by Featherstone, each professor provides lectures, readings and an assignment for his or her module. Students are able to watch the lectures and finish the readings at their own pace within each section. Each module contains information regarding the culture, politics and history of the region; maps and photos; a complete economic portrait; and detailed information about the agricultural situation. Key crops, livestock, and imports and exports are discussed and compared with the U.S.

Live chat sessions are led by the international professors, so students can ask questions and interact directly with faculty around the globe. The opportunity to question the instructors about reading materials or current events creates an interactive and engaging learning environment as well as establishes international connections, according to Featherstone.

"The flexibility of the course was very handy. I could watch the lectures on my own time as long as I had them completed before the chat sessions," said Phil White, senior in agricultural communications and journalism, **Wellington**. "It was neat to be linked up live with professors all around the world and be able to ask questions.

"The Russian chat sessions were very interesting," he said. "They have had a lot of economic changes in the recent years and it was good to see how they compared to Kansas, which has similar agriculture."

The course is helpful to students in several majors, White said.

"I think a lot of students would enjoy and learn from the class. I would highly recommend it, especially for business and economic majors because agriculture affects the global economy," he said. "I thought the course was a good way to learn about the global economy without all of the traveling."

The three-credit hour course is open to students with junior standing and will be offered again in the spring 2008 semester. More information is available by calling 785-532-4495. Online enrollment is available at <http://www.dce.k-state.edu/courses/> and entering "AGEC 710" to be directed to the course enrollment page.

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