

Found in Translation: Facilitating University Interdisciplinary Research and Practice

Behari, Anita

Graduate Student, Pennsylvania State University, United States, alb506@psu.edu

As we look ahead in the fields of international agriculture and rural development we find increasingly complex and wicked problems that can no longer be met by simple one size-fits-all solutions. The need for interdisciplinary research and practice is stronger than ever. Interdisciplinary research and practice must start with interdisciplinary partnerships and understanding. The International Agriculture and Development (INTAD) dual-title graduate degree program at Pennsylvania State University allows students throughout the College of Agricultural Sciences to gain valuable skills and experience working across academic disciplines to address pressing issues in global agriculture. At the core of the INTAD dual-degree program is the capstone course INTAD 820. The class has been co-taught by an interdisciplinary team -- a Plant Pathologist and a Rural Sociologist. INTAD 820 partners social scientists with natural scientists to enlighten each other's understanding and bring about awareness of paradigms and perspectives previously unconsidered in their home disciplines. Specifically, the course emphasizes interdisciplinary communication and sharing of discipline-specific knowledge via group activities to encourage consideration and integration of multiple perspectives. Integral to the course is the opportunity to visit a developing country and examine international agriculture and rural development in practice. This past spring the INTAD 820 course visited a partner, Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE), in Costa Rica in order to apply the knowledge, skills and dispositions learned in class. CATIE provided a natural laboratory to address critical issues faced by local farmers from multiple disciplinary perspectives. By promoting rich learning opportunities and diverse, interdisciplinary partnerships we are able to better prepare the next generation to address pressing global challenges in international agriculture and development.