November Newsletter

ACE Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics
NEWSLETTER

From the Department Head:

The Fall semester will be winding down soon. We have an exciting group of first-year students that will be experiencing final exams for the first time. Many third and fourth year students are actively interviewing for internships and full-time job opportunities while others are applying to graduate school. Career opportunities for our students are quite promising. There were 76 companies at ACES Career Fair that were recruiting ACE students.

This is also the time of the year that we are recruiting our next cohort of undergraduate and graduate students. The Department of ACE offers exciting and challenging classroom experiences combined with exciting career and leadership opportunities. Our student ambassadors help share our success stories across the state and nation. We are thankful for their efforts.

Read below about student activities beyond the classroom, research on families and food as well as a story about a distinguished alumni. Have a great Thanksgiving.

Best,

Paul

Head, Agricultural and Consumer Economics

IBIP:

The International Business Immersion Program (IBIP), a program in its 11th year, takes students beyond the classroom to an area of the world to study in depth. Students accepted into the program are granted a unique combination of classroom education, travel, followed by a final presentation the following semester. This year, faculty directors Nick Paulson and Brenna Ellison co-directed the course that traveled to Europe in May 2015.

“This year’s IBIP class was fortunate to be exposed to some of the challenges of operating in the turbulent Greece economy as well as witness the prosperity of many Dutch

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Farm Analysis Solution Tools (http://www.farmdoc.illinois.edu/fasttools/index.asp)

Farmdoc (http://www.farmdoc.illinois.edu/index.html)

industries," says IBIP coordinator Jessa Barnard. "The students witnessed everything from a small family vineyard in the country side of Greece to

the hustle and bustle of the European Commission offices in Brussels." The group of students traveled for 14 days, visiting more than ten companies and various farm visits across Greece, the Netherlands, and Belgium. In addition to these visits, the students stayed at the American Farm School of Thessaloniki in Greece, where they learned more about the school's research units in dairy, poultry, olives, and wine. Students took a cooking class and tasted the cheese made from the campus dairy farm.

"IBIP was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity. I was able to travel, interview companies, and build lifelong connections with my peers, and professors. I would highly recommend it to anyone and everyone who is looking to go abroad to learn and to broaden their horizons intellectually and geographically," says ACE student Quinn Martin. The students researched topics ranging from dairy, wine, food waste reduction, family farms, and slow food movement. On October 8th the students presented their research project via a multimedia presentation to professionals in the agribusiness industry.

The 2016 IBIP program will visit Brazil and Argentina. Candidates are currently being interviewed for the program.

ACE Ambassadors 2015-2016

ACE Ambassadors serve as a voice to prospective new students and help new students are finding their place in the department. This year 40 students were selected.

Agribusiness Markets and Management:

- Ashley Baker
- Sierra Beery
- John Kim
- Shelby Wendling
- Hailey Weyhrich
- Katie Baker
- Richard Braden

- Farmdoc Daily (http://www.farmdocdaily.illinois.edu)
- FBFM (http://fbfm.ace.uiuc.edu/)
- Illinois Tax School (http://www.taxschool.illinois.edu/)
- International Business Immersion Program (http://ibip.illinois.edu/)
- International Policy and Development (http://ipad.ace.illinois.edu/)
- Market Maker (http://www.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/)
- Office for Futures & Options Research (http://ofor.ace.illinois.edu/)
- Plan Well Retire Well (http://www.retirewell.uiuc.edu/)
- Program for Environmental & Resource Economics (http://pere.ace.illinois.edu/)
- Rural Health (http://www.ace.illinois.edu/ruralhealth/)

Programs

- Graduate Program (/graduate)
- Undergraduate Program (/undergraduate)

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Yekai Lu
Mark Hendricks
Clare Nawrocki
Shelby Peterson

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Benjamin Noy
Rachel Richardson
Ben Sieffe
Hilary Smith

Policy, International Trade, & Development:
Jay Siegrist
Claudette Reyes
Morgan Doggett

Public Policy and Law:
Sarah Hochman
Dylan Bone
Madison Scanlan

Farm Management:
Frazier Curless
Charles Mayfield
Sarah Sellers

Financial Planning:
Julia Buccholz
Mary Carroll

2015 Financial Planning Day

On October 30, the Financial Planning Club hosted its second annual Financial Planning Day in Chicago. Students had the opportunity to hear from a leading recruitment professional for

young financial planners participated in targeted networking events to meet every firm present, and hear from panel discussions on interviewing techniques. Students were oriented through a training program sometime prior provided by graduate students from the UI Labor and Employment Relations Department. Speakers included Caleb Brown, owner of New Planner Recruiting, and Sophia Bera, owner of Gen Y Planning.

Financial Planning Day, originally created as a campus event, is designed to bring together students with firms in the Financial Planning field to learn more about options for a career in Financial Planning. More than 60 students and 23 firms took part in the 2015 event.

Financial Planning junior Lauren Scheffler, said, “Financial Planning Day was an awesome opportunity to talk with many business professionals. It was a great way to practice my "elevator speech" and hand out resumes. Talking with the different representatives really helped me gain confidence in myself. I’ve already had four phone interviews since the networking event!”

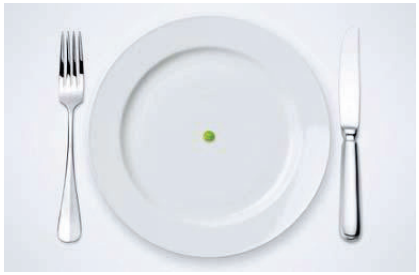
A Costly Situation

Households that have a tough time putting food on the table face another big challenge. In addition to being food insecure, they have higher health care costs, according to a study by ACE professor Craig Gundersen.

“We already know that adults in households that are food insecure have more negative health outcomes than adults in food-secure households,” said Gundersen. “However, the cost of the negative health outcomes associated with food insecurity were unknown. This study allows us to quantify these additional costs.”

Gundersen said the total health care costs were higher for food-insecure adults across numerous categories. These included inpatient hospitalization, emergency room visits, physician services, same-day surgeries, home health-care services, and prescription drugs. In total, these costs rose with increasing severity of household food insecurity.

The study analyzed data for 67,033 residents of Ontario, 18 to 64 years old, who participated in the Canadian Community Health Survey.



Although the data were from 2005 to 2010, Gundersen noted that the prevalence of household food insecurity in Ontario has not changed significantly in recent years. The survey identified level at which individuals were experiencing food insecurity. That information was linked to Ontario administrative health care data to determine individuals’ direct health-care costs during that same time period.

“After adjusting for sociodemographic variables, total costs were 23 percent higher for adults in marginally food-insecure households, 49 percent higher for those in moderately food-

insecure households, and 121 percent higher for those in severely food-insecure households, compared with adults in food-secure households," he said. "These higher costs are staggering."

Due to data limitations and differences in health-care systems, Gundersen said a similar analysis is not possible for the United States. However, although there are obvious differences between the United States and Canada, there are enough similarities that the general conclusions regarding the relationship between food insecurity and health care costs are likely present in the United States as well.

Gundersen mentioned three main implications for the United States. First, health-care providers should screen patients for food insecurity and then assist them to access additional supports, especially food assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Second, when considering the benefits associated with SNAP and other food assistance programs, their effects on health-care costs should be acknowledged. Because SNAP leads to reductions in food insecurity, it also leads to reductions in health-care costs. Third, there is an increasing concern about the stubbornly high rates of food insecurity in the United States, despite the end of the Great Recession. This concern and the urgency of the search for solutions should be heightened by the higher health-care costs associated with food insecurity.

Original article written by Debra Levey Larson

Where Are They Now: ACE Alumnus Allan Mustard -- Passport to Turkmenistan

Allan Mustard's professional goal wasn't to become a U.S. ambassador. After about a dozen career moves, Mustard is now serving in his first year as Ambassador to Turkmenistan—a country a

little larger than California that shares borders with Iran and Afghanistan. He describes his career path not as one with a calculated strategy, but more as a series of encouraging nudges and a stream of opportunities that led to an unexpected outcome.

“I really didn’t have anything in mind, except that I wanted to do something internationally,” Mustard says. “I studied Russian and German because those were the only foreign languages offered at the community college where I started out. Had they offered Haitian Creole, I might have ended up on a sandy beach in the Caribbean.”

Mustard, raised on a dairy farm near Brady, Washington, completed bachelor’s degrees at the University of Washington in Slavic languages and literature and political science. That combination opened the door to his first overseas job, as a guide and as an interpreter for the U.S. International Communications Agency at an American exhibit in the Soviet Union in the late ’70s.

The training took place on the University of Illinois campus.

“When I got to Moscow, I met Jim Brow, a USDA agricultural attaché,” Mustard says. “He said to me, ‘Gosh, you’re pretty smart, you speak good Russian, and you grew up on a farm. All you’re missing is a master’s degree in agricultural economics. If you get that, you can come work for us.’ So I did.”

Mustard completed his M.S. in Agricultural Economics at Illinois. He was encouraged to take the Foreign Service exam—a test so difficult that only about 1 in 100 people pass it. But Mustard was one of them. As a result of his test score, he accepted an invitation to Chicago for an oral assessment.

The road appeared to be a dead end when the State Department lost his paperwork, so Mustard took a job with USDA. After a month, the State Department called: they’d found the missing papers. They wanted him to take an entry-level course, beginning almost immediately. “I said I already had a job that would lead to an overseas career as an agricultural attaché. They asked, ‘Why would you want to do that?’ I explained that the only advantage of coming to State is that I’d be eligible for an ambassadorship, and that would never happen for me. So I stayed with agriculture, specifically because I didn’t think that I’d ever have a shot at an ambassadorship.”

Over the next couple of decades, Mustard held positions in Istanbul, Vienna, and Mexico City, along with being posted twice each to Washington, DC, and Moscow.

It wasn't until 2009 that Mustard entertained the ambassadorship possibility.

"Some of my State colleagues said, 'You really should apply for this,'" Mustard recalls. "'It doesn't cost anything and it only takes 45 minutes to fill out the paperwork .' So I did—and here I am."

Without hesitation, Mustard names his Illinois degree as a key career building block. "I took courses in analysis and marketing from faculty like Hal Everett and Phil Garcia. I studied development under Earl Kellogg and policy with Bob Spitze and Steve Schmidt. Foreign Agricultural Service officers tend to specialize in market development or are oriented toward food aid countries, but I did a bit of everything, and U of I gave me a full array of tools."

Using technology was one of those tools. Mustard's comfort with computer programming at Illinois led to his being "pigeonholed as the data systems geek" at the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS). "Rather than reject the title, I embraced it and split the difference; I did my analytical job, but I also did a fair amount of programming and tutoring."

Years later, when he was a senior foreign service officer in Washington, DC, computer expertise came in handy again, garnering him a position as head of FAS data systems. Each career move presented new opportunities to put into practice what he learned about agricultural economics at Illinois.

Mustard points to one opportunity following the Balkans War of the 1990s as particularly meaningful. He was agricultural counselor in the U.S. Embassy in Vienna, Austria, covering seven countries in Central Europe, including Bosnia. Bosnia's population of about 4.5 million included 2 million war refugees. Many were widows with children, receiving public assistance because their husbands were victims in the war's ethnic cleansing. Mustard was tasked with leading a food aid effort to Bosnian refugees. According to Mustard, there is a right way and a wrong way to provide food aid to a country.

"We would not just deliver the food that was needed, but we would structure it around a program that would help get at least some Bosnians out of poverty." Mustard collaborated with 10 private charities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

“My goal was to lift a certain number of villages out of poverty and restart their economies,” Mustard says. He struck a deal to divide assistance between the aid organizations’ traditional programs and credit programs for the municipalities. The intent was to inject money into the village economies at multiple points—to farmers, to consumers, and to those who sell inputs to farmers—in order to get the economies moving again.

“A year later, it was astounding that we had brought to life 50 moribund municipalities,” Mustard says. “War widows who had been living off of handouts were working again at their private businesses and supporting their families. Meeting those widows was probably the most emotional experience of my life. They were so grateful. And I had done so little—provided some policy direction for the NGOs. The organizations did the heavy lifting—but without guidance, I’m not sure the aid would have had as deep an impact.”

Mustard again mentions his study of economics and development at Illinois with Earl Kellogg. “I was reaching back to my graduate studies to come up with the constructs of how to provide relief and then figure out some way to apply them practically in order to revive the villages’ economy. It all worked.”

Today Mustard faces new challenges as Ambassador to Turkmenistan—which he describes as “one of the most closed societies in the world.” He believes the U.S. embassy can help open a window for Turkmen citizens by offering English language instruction.

“We have a library of English books at the embassy,” he says. “The classes are always full, and we have a waiting list of 300. These efforts can have an outsized impact because we’re reaching the people who want to learn English and are self-selecting to become leaders.”

So, how does one become an ambassador? To students interested in international careers, Mustard recommends starting with agriculture.

“That is the only sector of the economy that runs a trade surplus. Being an agricultural officer for the FAS is about as good as it gets.” All you need to do, he says, is look at where the growth potential for agriculture lies—and, of course, learn another language or two.

“With 96 percent of the world’s population outside the United States, that’s where the growth is—particularly in Asia,” he says.

“If I were to do this all over again, I would probably have studied Chinese rather than Russian, and Spanish instead of German. But

that said, I think you can study any foreign language and put it to good use. Think about a career with FAS, and take a shot."

What's his next career move?

"Right now I'm focused on being successful at this one," he says.

Allan Mustard (left) is sworn in as U.S. Ambassador to Turkmenistan by Assistant Secretary of State Nisha Biswal (far right), using a Bible that belonged to his great-great grandfather. Looking on are (from left) Mustard's sister, Kate Breckon; his daughter, Fiona; and his wife, Ann.

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