

Teach Ag Day: A Teacher Recruitment Effort Targeting Community College Students

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

The need for Agricultural Education teachers is well documented. Kantrovich (2007) reported that nationwide, there were 78 more teaching positions than available teachers in 2006. In response to the recognized shortage of agriculture teachers, the 10x15 – Long Range Goal for Agricultural Education established a priority initiative specific to the recruitment of agricultural educators. This initiative recommends,

As a result of an annual supply and demand study, develop and implement agricultural education teacher recruitment strategies in grades 9-14. Make agricultural educator pride and participation a key component when identifying prospective future colleagues, advising them, providing growth experiences, connecting them with universities and providing a bridge through the college experience (Team Ag Ed, 2007, Highly Qualified Educator Supply Theme, ¶ 2).

Western State is not immune to the impact of the agriculture teacher shortage. Statewide, three teaching positions were lost due to the lack of available teachers (M. Spiess, personal communication, January 2, 2008). Additional programs were unable to expand as a result of the dearth of qualified agricultural teachers.

In order to attract potential agriculture teachers, recruiting efforts must be made to recruit prospective teachers at various points throughout secondary and post-secondary education. The 109 community colleges and more than 2.5 million community college students in *Western State* provides an excellent pool of potential transfer students at universities across the state (*Western State* Community Colleges System Office, 2007). University Agricultural Education programs have benefited from close collaboration with community colleges. Teach Ag Day was implemented in an effort to provide community college students with additional information about the agricultural teaching profession and the Agricultural Education and Communication Department at *University*.

How it Works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps

The Teach Ag Day event was chaired by three students in the Agricultural Education and Communication Department with direction from one faculty coordinator and the support of other faculty members in the department. Four months prior to the event, the faculty coordinator sent email invitations to community college academic advisors with details about Teach Ag Day. Several advisors coordinated travel arrangements with interested students at their respective colleges and transported students to campus. Other students attended the event on their own.

Community college students who participated in the event had the chance to hear about the agricultural teaching profession from teachers with a variety of experience – student teachers, novice teachers, and experienced teachers. Students in the Agricultural Education and Communication Department provided their perspectives on the undergraduate and graduate programs. The program manager for *Western State* Agricultural Education and the president of the *Western State* Agricultural Teachers' Association were in attendance and shared a message about teaching opportunities in the state.

Results to Date/Implications

The first Teach Ag Day hosted 52 participants from approximately 10 community college campuses. Based on a brief survey that the participants completed at the conclusion of the event, 32 individuals expressed interest in the prospect of becoming an agriculture teacher and 36 individuals expressed interest in the possibility of transferring to *University*.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

A second Teach Ag Day event is being planned on the *University* campus in February 2008. Students who are interested in obtaining an agriculture teaching credential in *Western State* can select from five different teacher preparation programs – *University, University, University, University, and University*. Due to the regional nature of the state, location is often an important factor that students take into consideration when selecting an institution. As a result, regional recruitment efforts will be helpful in promoting teacher education programs across the state and increasing the pool of prospective agriculture teachers. Efforts will also be made to determine if community college participants have matriculated into any of the five teacher education programs across the state and have entered a teaching career in Agricultural Education.

Additionally, a continuous effort to maintain contacts with the community college participants is extremely important. The email addresses of all the participants were obtained through the event registration. Electronic communication is currently being used to send reminders of important dates, such as application deadlines and provide additional messages about the numerous job opportunities in Agricultural Education. This open communication between faculty members and community college participants generates a positive perspective of the department and promotes a promising future in the teaching profession.

Costs/Resources Needed

Teach Ag Day was accomplished with a limited budget. Transportation and lodging costs were the responsibility of community colleges or individual participants. Guest speakers generously donated their time and were willing to cover any travel costs. Participants received a free lunch and a briefcase at the conclusion of the day.

References

- Western State Community Colleges System Office*. (2007). Retrieved December 20, 2007 from <http://www.cccco.edu/SystemOffice/tabid/179/Default.aspx>
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- Team Ag Ed. (2007). Retrieved December 2, 2007 from <http://www.teamaged10x15.org/>