

Building an Agricultural Teacher Pipeline through Community College and University
Collaboration

Steven J. Rocca
Professor of Agricultural Education
California State University, Fresno
2415 E. San Ramon Avenue M/S AS75
Fresno, CA 93740
(559) 278-5088
srocca@csufresno.edu

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Introduction

The National Council for Agricultural Education (2000) developed a vision for agricultural education for the year 2020 that calls for an agriculturally literate society. To reach this vision, our nation needs an abundant supply of highly motivated, well-educated agricultural teachers. This project was proposed through the United States Department of Agriculture Hispanic Serving Institution's (USDA HSI) Educational Grant program to increase the number of underrepresented students pursuing and completing the Agricultural Education Teacher Preparation program at California State University, Fresno (Fresno State). This project sought to strengthen the academic programs at Fresno State and Modesto Junior College by filling a void in the academic programs at these institutions by providing students with information, field experience, training, and career awareness related to agricultural education. Additionally, without this project, an early field experience course would not be available to students at Modesto J.C. due to problems acquiring adequate enrollment in the course when offered independently. This project has created a pathway for students to make a smooth transition into the University's program. With a clear pathway, greater attention can be placed on attracting students toward a career in agricultural education. As an increased number of Hispanic teachers would provide the profession with much needed role models to help inspire the thousands of Hispanic students who might otherwise view higher education and a career in agriculture as an unlikely option.

How It Works

Through the three year project the following steps have been taken to accomplish the four objectives set forth by the project staff.

Objective 1: Provide an Agricultural Education Orientation (AEO) course at Modesto J.C. and Fresno State that incorporates lecture, discussion, field experience, experiential learning, and online learning activities. To accomplish this objective the project staff reviewed and modified the existing University course curriculum for delivery at Modesto J.C. The new course curriculum, now taught at both institutions, includes lecture, discussion, field experience, experiential learning, and online learning activities.

Objective 2: Assist and facilitate community college students' transition from Modesto J.C. to Fresno State by utilizing adult mentors and related field experience. The first week of the AEO course students select an agriculture teacher mentor at a high school in their local area. Students travel to that school site weekly to complete a minimum of 45 hours observing their teacher mentor. Mentor teachers work with students throughout their time in the course and are asked to follow up with students and provide continued encouragement.

Objective 3: Recruit and enroll at least 20 students each year in the AEO course, with at least 10 being enrolled in the course at Modesto J.C. In order to achieve this objective the project staff set the following goals: 1) University faculty and/or outreach staff will meet with at least 20 agriculture students each year at Modesto J.C. to answer any questions and provide transfer advising; 2) the University's Ag Ambassador team will provide a recruitment presentation in at

least five agricultural classes at Modesto J.C. annually; and 3) once students complete the AEO course and transfer to the Fresno State they will continue to be advised and mentored towards their degree by the Project Director at least twice per year.

Objective 4: Ensure the retention of Agricultural Education Orientation course completers and assist with the completion of their Bachelor's degree through continual academic planning and advising each semester and provide at least two transfer students with financial assistance each year. This financial support provides students the necessary funding to engage in program activities while still focusing on their educational goals.

Results to Date

The AEO course was successfully offered and delivered at both institutions each of the past three years. During this time 66 students enrolled in the AEO course at Modesto J.C. and 110 students at Fresno State. Of those at Modesto J.C., 33% were Hispanic/Latino students. All 176 students enrolled in the AEO course were assigned a secondary agriculture teacher mentor to assist them and provide career guidance and encouragement. At Modesto J.C., 53 of the 66 students enrolled in the course completed 45 hours of observation at their mentor teacher's school, while 92 of the 110 Fresno State students completed their observation hours. The University's Ag Ambassadors made presentations to 27 different Modesto J.C. agriculture classes, a total of 644 students attended these presentations.

An evaluation of the project found that 89% (59 out of 66) of Modesto J.C. students enrolled in the AEO course indicated they had a favorable impression of a career in agricultural education and were interested in pursuing a career in this field. To date, 12 of the community college students completing the AEO course have enrolled at Fresno State majoring in Agricultural Education. Additionally, 83 Modesto J.C. agriculture students met with a Fresno State representative to establish their academic and transfer plans. Three students have been selected and received a \$1000 scholarship from Modesto J.C. and an additional two students, who are transferring in the fall, have been selected and will receive a scholarship once they have enrolled at Fresno State.

Conclusions/Future Plans

This project has provided Fresno State and Modesto J.C. with the tools necessary to build a collaborative relationship to provide effective outreach and recruitment of Agricultural Education students attending Modesto J.C. and a smooth transition to Fresno State. The project has proven to be successful in assisting community college students to learn more about a career in agricultural education. Project participants have clearly stated the positive impact of their experience and communicated their favorable opinion of a career teaching secondary agriculture. Given the success of this project, planning has already begun to replicate this project at another community college in the state to lend even more support to the effort to increase the number of underrepresented students entering the agricultural education profession.

Cost

This project was funded by a grant from the United Department of Agriculture's Hispanic Serving Institutions Educational Grants program. The grant provided at total budget of \$240,000.

References

National Council for Agricultural Education. (2000). The national strategic plan and action agenda for agricultural education: Reinventing agricultural education for the year 2020. Retrieved from the National Council for Agricultural Education Web site: <http://teamaged.org/council/images/stories/pdf/plan2020.pdf>