

**The Razorback AgCademy: An Innovative Model for Alternatives to Dual Enrollment**

**Catherine W. Shoulders**

**Lona J. Robertson**

University of Arkansas  
205 Agriculture Building  
Fayetteville, AR 72701  
479-575-3799

[cshoulde@uark.edu](mailto:cshoulde@uark.edu)

[lrobert@uark.edu](mailto:lrobert@uark.edu)

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### **Need for Innovation**

As a result of both a large percentage of the workforce nearing retirement and steady growth within the agricultural, food, and life science (AFLS) industries, there is enormous demand for AFLS graduates. However, recruitment of students to complete degrees in AFLS programs remains a challenge (National Academy of Science, 2009). Barriers to recruitment include students' lack of awareness regarding the scope of careers within AFLS industries (Coalition for a Sustainable Agricultural Workforce, n.d.) and the cost of higher education, which is perceived by many students to be a barrier too formidable to overcome (Burdman, 2005). While dual enrollment programs have sought to reduce these barriers, many institutions maintain policies that inhibit the dual enrollment from taking hold within AFNR degree programs.

### **Methodology**

The Razorback AgCademy exposes students to agricultural careers and enables them to obtain college credit without the burden of tuition. Three online courses were developed by partnerships between University of Arkansas (UA) agricultural education faculty members, online instructional designers, and course instructors based on the content of three introductory courses, including Foundations of Agricultural Education, Introduction to Animal Science, and Foundations of Agricultural Systems Technology. Each course consists of 16 modules that corresponds to the 16 weeks in the face-to-face classes at UA. After watching an introductory video, the student moves on to a list of activities, which includes narrated PowerPoints, Prezis, videos, online games, and readings. All modules include one assignment and one quiz. Cumulative knowledge exams were developed to assess students' knowledge regarding the modules. These tests serve as gateways to university credit; once admitted and enrolled at UA, those scoring at least an 80% on an examination receive credit by exam for the corresponding university course on their university transcript. The Razorback AgCademy Director administers these exams (at a nominal fee per University policy) to students as requested.

High school sophomores, juniors and seniors from throughout Arkansas were recruited to participate in the Razorback AgCademy. The state Career and Technical Education Department created course codes for each AgCademy course. High school counselors and agriculture teachers are encouraged to work with the state to enable students to receive high school credit for AgCademy courses. Students pay a fee of \$39 per course in order to offset administrative costs. The courses employ a rolling enrollment model, and do not expire until the student graduates high school, so students are able to complete the courses at their leisure.

### **Results to Date**

The Razorback AgCademy opened for enrollment in August of 2016. To date, 47 students representing nine schools and homeschool are enrolled. Interest in offering enrollment through community colleges has been expressed by the state's college network, and has been supported by the Dale Bumpers College of AFLS Dean's Office. Four students have completed AgCademy

courses and have scheduled their examinations on campus. Numerous faculty members in the college have expressed interest in creating AgCademy courses that align with their undergraduate courses.

### **Future Plans/Advice to Others**

As students complete the credit-by-examination process, we plan to measure the impact of the Razorback AgCademy on students' university enrollment decisions and postsecondary success. Additionally, as the number of students completing the courses increases, we will measure students' perceptions of the modules in an effort to improve their learning experiences.

The Razorback AgCademy was designed to align with UA policies, and it is herein where the AgCademy displays its innovative qualities. While many methods of offering high school students college credit exist, university policies related to educational quality and tuition discounts narrowed the options through which we could reduce tuition and enrollment barriers. We share these with the intention of offering programs with similar policies an avenue through which they can offer postsecondary options to high school students. First, UA requires that all university-affiliated courses are taught by university faculty, making college courses taught by high school teachers an impossibility. The Razorback AgCademy's courses are designed by university faculty members, and are offered completely online and independent of high school instruction. University policies also explicitly prohibit any tuition discount programs. The credit-by-examination policy was already instated within the university system, as was the online not-for-credit course infrastructure. The credit-by-examination policy allows students to request an approved examination for course(s) in which they feel they have sufficient knowledge to test out of and receive credit on their transcript; a nominal fee is assessed for each exam that is administered. The university's online campus infrastructure includes a series of courses offered for consumption by the public for \$39 each. By taking advantage of these existing components of UA, the AgCademy enables students to take advantage of a tuition savings and experience the high quality educational experiences for which the university is known.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

The support of various university entities paved the way for the program's success. The university's online campus and the Dale Bumpers College of AFLS Dean's Office provided funding for a faculty member within agricultural education to develop AgCademy courses. Instructional designers and staff development personnel from the online campus assisted with course development and advertising. The Associate Dean for the college provided support and guidance to ensure the AgCademy's infrastructure aligned with UA policies. Relationships with faculty members across the college enhanced the course development process, and positive relationships with state career and technical education administrators enabled the AgCademy to integrate with the existing high school agricultural education structure. Finally, offering a current undergraduate agricultural education student the opportunity to serve as an AgCademy teaching assistant for course credit ensured all assignments were graded in a timely fashion without overburdening the AgCademy director, who maintains a full teaching and research appointment.

## References

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