

GALA: A New Approach to SAE

MacKenah Simmons and Gary Moore
Department of Agricultural and Human Sciences
Box 7607 North Carolina State University
Raleigh, NC 27695
919-515-2241

mssimmo2@ncsu.edu, gmoore@ncsu.edu

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

There has been a steady decline of SAE/experiential learning in agricultural education for the past 50 years. It is estimated that less than 50% of agricultural students have SAE/experiential learning programs today (Dyer & Osborne, 1995; Lewis, Rayfield & Moore, 2012; Miller, 1980; Steele, 1997; Retallick & Martin, 2008; Wilson & Moore, 2007)

There are a variety of reasons for this decline including changing federal regulations, reduction in 12 month agriculture teacher contracts, time demands on teachers, teacher shortages, changing student and teacher demographics, lack of student motivation, limited student opportunities, mandated end-of-course tests and several other reasons (Dyer & Osborne, 1996; King, Rucker, & Duncan, 2013; Osborne, 1988; Schut, 2003; Retallick, 2010, Wilson & Moore, 2007).

The profession still espouses the importance of SAE; but if the profession was honest, and drew the three circle model to represent the reality of today, there would be two large circles (Instruction and FFA) and one small circle – SAE/Experiential learning. The decline in students with SAE programs is disheartening. Research amply documents the value of experiential learning in agriculture – for both the student and for the agriculture industry. However, SAE continues to be in a decline.

A new approach to SAE has been developed at North Carolina State University The new approach is known as GALA – Guided Agricultural Learning Activity.

How it works/methodology/program phases/steps – GALA

GALA consists of a series of interactive, on-line, activity-based learning modules that focus on different careers in agriculture. Students learn what professionals in various agricultural careers do on a daily basis, the type of education required, working conditions and salary. There are video demonstrations of agricultural workers performing specific skills and interviews with them. There is also technical content with which the students engage.

After learning about the career, the students then engage in a variety of hands-on learning activities related to that career. A typical GALA has 8-10 hands-on learning activities that progressively become more challenging. These activities are performed under the guidance of a teacher, parent or agricultural professional. The student is required to demonstrate mastery of the activity/skill through the development of an electronic portfolio with written and/or visual evidences. Upon successful completion of the GALA the student's mentor checks off the completion of the GALA.

An example of how the experiential component of GALA works can be illustrated by the Apiology/Beekeeping GALA. The student is required to complete eight learning activities:

1. Create a historical timeline of beekeeping
2. Interview a beekeeper
3. Identify and describe the use of 10 beekeeping tools

4. Research the different components of a bee box and then construct a model bee box using a shoe box
5. Describe five types of protective wear and explain how it protects the beekeeper.
6. Become a beekeeper for a day and construct a schedule of activities that a beekeeper would perform
7. Compare and contrast the different methods of extracting honey
8. Shadow a beekeeper for a day

Results to date/implications

GALA modules have been developed over a variety of topics. They are Florist, Beekeeper, Stable Manager, Reptile Caretaker, Hunting Dog Trainer, Botanist, Gardener, Entomologist, Agronomist, Horticulturalist, Landscape Architect, Forester, Dog Caretaker, Veterinarian, Horsemanship, Fish and Wildlife Manager, Soil Conservationist, Fishing Guide, Farm Mechanic, Welder, and Wood Worker.

Students at Heritage High School in North Carolina have been used to test an initial prototype of the GALA modules. Student complete at least one GALA module as part of their SAE program every semester. Students enjoy the modules because they make use of technology (they are online), they get to watch videos, they work at their own pace, some have gaming components and the students learn about topics of interest to them.

Students are able to use the Agricultural Experience Tracker with the GALA modules. They enter data in the Exploratory category even though the learning and activities are much more involved than the typical exploratory SAE.

Future plans/advice to others

The current GALA modules have been developed by a number of different agriculture teachers and graduate students. While there are some common elements there is considerable variability in the design and content contained in the different modules. The idea was to give the GALA designers a freehand initially to see how they would approach this undertaking. A number of “neat” ideas have been generated. We are now in the process of critically evaluating the different GALA modules and their components and then will settle on a common look and feel and specify the essential components that should be contained in the GALA.

Agriculture teachers have been surveyed to identify the topics/careers they would like to see developed into GALAs.

Costs/resources needed

Up to this point-in-time, the development of the GALA modules has not required financial resources. Teachers have willingly volunteered to create the modules because they see the value of them. They believe this is the next major evolution of SAE. In the future we will be asking for volunteers from across the country to create additional GALA modules. The students of today are different than the students of the past and another option for SAE is needed. The GALA modules are designed to supplement the SAE portfolio of possibilities.

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