

**SAE Learning Experiences for Developing Teachers**

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### Introduction/Need

Although the concept of Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) projects and programs can be traced back to roots in the early 1900s, a great deal of energy and effort has been directed toward strengthening this aspect of school-based agricultural education (SBAE) in recent years. Throughout the past five years, a renewed commitment to this aspect of the agricultural education program model has been apparent. The American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE), National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE), National FFA Organization, and The National Council for Agricultural Education have each engaged in dialogue about the merits, expectations, and structure of experiential learning, SAE, and work-based learning (WBL).

National Quality Program Standards (The National Council for Agricultural Education, 2016) state that “student learning (or instruction) is enhanced through continuous experiential, project, and work-based learning through SAE”. Quality indicators suggest that SAEs are maintained by all students, aligned to agriculture, food, and natural resources pathways, are student-planned, and based upon a Career Plan of Study. Additionally, teachers are expected to meet local and state expectations for SAE supervision.

The Standards for School-Based Agricultural Education Teacher Preparation Programs (AAAE, 2017) identify an expectation that agricultural education teacher preparation program completers “integrate SAE and experiential learning into the SBAE program”. To do so, program completers must recognize the value of SAE and experiential learning, possess a depth of knowledge regarding SAE and use SAE to complement FFA and classroom instruction (AAAE, 2017).

Despite strong organizational support for experiential learning and SAEs, Retallick (2010) found school-based agriculture teachers incorporate SAEs to varying degrees. Some agriculture teachers require all students to develop an SAE and account for the work in grade calculations; others merely require record-keeping by select FFA members. For some, SAE is viewed as an optional program component, while others chose to not integrate SAE programming at all.

Certainly, a need exists for systematic and intentional instruction of school-based agriculture teachers regarding SAE implementation. AAAE’s (2013) *Philosophy of SAE Instruction* outlines specific expectations, competencies, and objectives which should be addressed in SBAE teacher preparation programs. Specifically, supervision, instruction, planning, and evaluation of SAEs must be included to ensure adequate preparation. Learning experiences must be provided that allow for the development of knowledge and skills in these areas.

### How It Works

To provide future SBAE teachers with an impactful and relevant opportunity related to SAE programming, an intensive one-day immersive learning experience was coordinated. Working with an agriculture program located in close proximity to the University of Minnesota (UM) arrangements were made to bring students enrolled in an SAE course into the field. Once there, UM students delivered instruction regarding the basics of SAE programs to an assigned class and engaged in a one-on-one conversation, or interview, with a student. These learning activities

were selected to replicate, or mimic, instructional lessons and activities that a new teacher would likely experience early in his/her career.

In groups of four or five, UM students worked collaboratively, tasked with developing an engaging 30-35-minute instructional lesson to introduce middle/secondary students to the concept of SAE. UM students were encouraged to utilize resources such as the FFA Handbook, FFA website, NAAE Communities of Practice, AET, etc. when planning. Once the whole-class instruction was finished, UM students were paired with a secondary student and given 15-20 minutes in which to conduct an interview. The purpose of the interview was to learn more about the student's skills, talents, and interests in order to help him/her to develop an appropriate SAE. Following the interview, UM students were responsible for drafting a letter to their interviewee, outlining potential SAE options and ideas.

### **Results & Implications**

Positive feedback has been received from UM students and the SBAE teacher and students. UM students gain valuable teaching experience, while the SBAE teacher and students benefit from having outside involvement and new perspectives on SAE. Many [University] students have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to engage in non-competitive aspects of SAE programs. While UM students with prior FFA experience may have judged proficiency awards or reviewed state FFA degrees, it is important that future SBAE teachers develop a mindset that SAEs do not always have to lead to a degree or award. Working with students in the early stages of SAE identification and development is particularly beneficial for all students, regardless whether they have a strong FFA background or no experience with the agricultural education program model. SBAE teachers have shared that the letters provided by UM students often highlight student interests, skills, or hobbies they were previously unaware of. This information provides new opportunities for SAE development.

### **Future Plans**

In future years, this learning activity will be continued. Ideally, new SBAE programs will be involved in the activity, providing varied environments and contexts for UM students. When possible, additional time will be allotted in class, to facilitate a run-through of each group's instructional lesson. When time has allowed, this has encouraged peer feedback and lesson revision leading to high quality lessons.

### **Advice**

1) Collaborate with an SBAE program that is still "developing" its SAE program, or specifically connect with students who are less familiar with SAEs. 2) Provide time for group work in class, if possible. 3) Develop common SAE interview questions to provide for a somewhat consistent interview experience and feedback (*5/10 interview questions were common to all*). 4) Share the interview feedback (letters) with the SBAE teacher so that continued support may be provided for developing SAE programs as suggested.

### **Resources Needed**

Aside from time, no significant cost is associated with providing this learning experience. The only expenses have been any supplies or materials needed for instruction and a university vehicle or two for convenient group transportation.

## References

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