

**An intra-curricular approach in assisting underserved populations: Engaging the community in student development**

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## **An Intra-Curricular Approach in Assisting Underserved Populations: Engaging the Community in Student Development**

### **Need for Innovation Idea**

The Appalachia region of Kentucky is recognized as the highest distressed area within the Appalachian Regional Commission (Thorne, Tickamyer & Thorne, 2004). Haaga (2004) reported Kentucky as the lowest state, of the 13-state region, in college completion (13.7%) and highest for high school dropout (37.5%). As a result, the researchers sought to develop a curriculum that could assist in this community deficiency, through agricultural education.

Durden and Ellis (2003) note student motivation improves significantly when content is delivered in a uniquely empowering way, leading to improved attendance and high academic performance. One approach to doing so is by developing positive youth and adult relationships. Hastings, Barrett, Barbuto Jr., and Bell (2010) found youth and community engagement leads to youth ownership, empowerment, and confidence. In addition, youth gained community awareness along with a change in attitudes and perceptions. Multiple studies examining the same phenomena in a variety of contexts noticed similar results (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Jarrett, Sullivan & Watkins, 2005; Bird, Martin, Tummons & Ball, 2010). An innovative agri-marketing curriculum has since been created to utilize the idea of youth and adult relationships to foster motivation, interest, and awareness of entrepreneurship opportunities for youth in resource-depleted communities of Kentucky.

### **How It Works**

The University of Kentucky implemented a school-community partnership approach to assist the poorest counties in the Appalachian region - all of which are in the poorest counties in the nation (Census Bureau, 2010). This approach entails secondary agricultural students enrolled in an agri-business course to partner with an agricultural business in their community.

From fall of 2016 to the summer of 2017, the project leadership team developed an agri-marketing curriculum with the assistance of a curriculum panel. In addition, a representative from the Kentucky Department of Education, Division of Career and Technical Education was included to ensure the curriculum aligned with current educational standards. The project team met with the Kentucky Association of Agricultural Educators (KAAE) and the Kentucky Small Business Development Center (KSBDC) to determine five secondary agriculture programs and five community agri-businesses for curriculum implementation. These participants were selected due to unemployment and poverty rates within their community. A two-day professional training in the summer of 2017 provided teachers and business leaders with the materials and methodological practices needed for the curriculum. The teachers began curriculum implementation during the 2017-2018 academic year.

The agri-marketing curriculum was created to strengthen secondary youths' relationships with adults in their community using experiential learning. To do so, students will work with their selected agricultural business to develop a thorough marketing plan by the completion of the curriculum. The students will work in groups of three to develop one marketing plan for the business. Consequently, the curriculum will explore topics essential to creating an agri-marketing plan, all within nine fundamental units. Each unit builds upon the previous with frequent overlap and reference to other subjects due to the meshing nature of a marketing plan. As students complete a unit and its corresponding summative assessment, they will have prepared a portion of the marketing plan. The end of course exam is the students' efficacy in

compiling the previously completed portions of the marketing plan into one comprehensive marketing plan which will be presented to the partnered agri-business. The curriculum is anticipated to consume 85 instructional days to fully implement.

To obtain the required information needed to develop the agri-marketing plans, students will combine their learning from classroom instruction as well as learning attained from their interactions with the community agri-business partner and KSBDC representative. Students will visit their school's partnered agri-business at least twice during the duration of the curriculum. Schools and business owners are encouraged to work together on numerous, additional occasions for students to increase their interaction with their community partners. The University of Kentucky project research team are providing on-going visits for support throughout the curriculum implementation. A teacher log survey was sent to each teacher every two weeks to document feedback as they progress with the curriculum project.

### **Results to Date**

The two-day workshop on the execution of the agri-marketing curriculum marked the completion of the curriculum writing and the beginning of implementation. There were four themes present in the teacher feedback following the workshop: the project provides for relevance to the students, a connection to the community, a variety of activities, and a future possibility of extending and continuing the project after the pilot year is over.

Instruction of the agri-marketing curriculum has begun. Four of the five selected agricultural educators are currently teaching the curriculum in their classrooms. The last educator is on a block academic schedule; therefore, this teacher will begin the curriculum in January 2018. There will be about 96 students between the five classrooms who will receive instruction. Students and the community business partners have met at least once thus far.

### **Future Plans**

It is the desire of the project leadership team to further evaluate the agri-marketing curriculum by expanding the study throughout the United States with a 5-year federal School to Work grant allocation. Upon completion of the research studies of the curriculum, an interactive and electronic textbook will be drafted that assists secondary classroom teachers with the necessary content knowledge and activities to be utilized within all agricultural classrooms. With collaborations among the KSBDC, the National FFA Organization, and the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE), it is the overall desire that professional development workshops can assist teachers across the nation in developing interactive methods to teach entrepreneurship which aids the communities in which their programs arise.

### **Cost/Resources Needed**

The budget is approximately divided as follows: personnel \$58,960 (44%), workshop supplies \$1,340 (1%), university travel \$4,020 (3%), and participant support \$30,820 (23%). Salary is included for university faculty and staff to ensure the overarching goal and objectives are achieved. Travel funding is provided to assist the leadership team with helping the teachers implement the curriculum. Stipends for teachers and business owners are provided to encourage participation and teachers are provided an allowance for teaching materials, supplies and field trip expenses to the business. Each business will receive funding to implement the designed plans as well as funding to hire one of the students, as an intern, to facilitate the actions items of the accepted agri-marketing plan.

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