

**Putting the “Pro” in Program: Facilitating Preservice Teachers’
School-based Agricultural Education Program Development Competencies
in a Youth Program Development Course**

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Introduction

School-based agricultural education (SBAE) programs are designed to provide a wealth of opportunities for students through classroom and laboratory instruction, leadership development and organizational involvement (e.g., FFA), and enriching out-of-classroom experiences that build upon and apply prior knowledge (e.g., Supervised Agricultural Experience [SAE]) (Phipps, Osborne, Dyer, & Ball, 2008). As such, SBAE teachers are expected to be prepared to grant such prospects for students (Phipps et al., 2008). Teacher preparation programs are responsible for ensuring that preservice teachers are adequately prepared to enter their own SBAE programs as inservice teachers (Whittington, 2005). Agricultural and pedagogical content are provided throughout the teacher preparation process to grant preservice teachers the knowledge and skills to effectively lead their future programs, and their future students (Rice & Kitchel, 2015; Whittington, 2005).

To help provide relevant professional development for preservice teachers, university-level coursework should be sufficiently aligned to maximize learning opportunities (Wells, Perry, Anderson, Shultz, & Paulsen, 2013). Learning opportunities provided through relevant, eye-opening experiences can help to better prepare future teachers for the realities in which they will shortly reside (Baker, Culbertson, Robinson, & Ramsey, 2017; Rank & Smalley, 2017). Further, as teachers are expected to fulfill many roles both inside and outside of the traditional three components of SBAE (Phipps et al., 2008), such as working with advisory councils to improve programming (Taylor et al., 2017), attending to assigned school-related duties (Phipps et al., 2008), and so forth, it is reasonable to presume that many of a teacher’s roles cannot be learned through coursework alone, but rather must be learned by performing the tasks in real time. One such role is youth program planning and development. Perhaps a real-world-focused approach delivered through a youth program development course could help to effectively prepare preservice teachers to grow into their future roles as SBAE teachers.

How it Works

Students enrolled in the Development of Youth Programs in Agricultural Education course at Tennessee Tech were charged with creating a new Agricultural Education program. To do so, the National FFA Local Program Success (LPS) guide was utilized. The steps outlined in the LPS guide and the tasks students completed for each are described below. The project culminated in a website that outlined each step and the data collected throughout the semester.

- Clarify the why: Considering concrete learning outcomes, potential employment during and after high school, possible sources of financial support, and school district policy for adding new program, students developed a coherent argument for developing a SBAE program.
- Define opportunities available: Students developed a list of opportunities available in AFNR (e.g., careers in the local/state community) and early post-secondary opportunities (i.e., articulation agreements and dual-credit) for students enrolled in SBAE.
- Develop community support: Students partnered with the local Chamber of Commerce to compile a list of all the local business directly or indirectly related to agriculture. They randomly selected several businesses and conducted a survey to gather information on

opportunities for employment students have during high school, skills they seek in potential employees, and career experiences they prefer potential employees to possess.

- Analyze the political climate: Students sought to identify the key political players in the school district. They were tasked with identifying decision makers, community influencers, the financial situation for the school district, and potential barriers to starting a SBAE program.
- Clarify state processes: Students worked with regional and state staff to determine the steps to initiating a new SBAE program, and other relevant information for program planning and implementation (i.e., state standards).
- Develop a task list and timeline: Creating a new SBAE program can take up to two years to get implemented. The students developed a task list and timeline with the following considerations: local school district approval timeline, budgetary approvals timeline, state approval timeline, and pre-enrollment timelines for students.
- Involve key people: Students identified key individuals who could assist in the development and execution of an action plan for creating a new SBAE program.
- Develop an advisory committee: Students identified an advisory committee that was representative of the local community, created goals and sample agendas for meetings.
- Develop a community campaign: Students created a campaign to advocate for the creation of a new SBAE program with messages catered to specific audiences (e.g., students, parents, administrators, local businesses).
- Determine the curriculum: Students developed a proposed curriculum for the new SBAE program based on data gathered from local agricultural-related businesses and student interest surveys (simulated with 100 students within the college).
- Present to the school board: Students compiled all their findings and products into a website and presented to a simulated school board, which was comprised of four faculty members and the department head. The students presented all their analyzed data from the community and the need to create the SBAE program.

Implications

The project proved to be an authentic way for preservice teachers to begin assuming the identity of a SBAE teacher via practical hands-on experience that will be beneficial when entering the profession. Anecdotally, the students regarded the course and project as eye-opening and real-world.

Future Plans & Advice to Others

The course and project will be revised and implemented again in the near future across two institutions. We plan to establish a detailed handbook for this assignment in an effort to save faculty time throughout the semester. We recommend other teacher preparation programs implement similar projects across the curriculum to expose preservice teachers to real-world situations.

Costs

The project itself did not have any costs directly associated but did consume a considerable amount of time for planning and providing background to local businesses prior to the preservice teachers contacting them. As a thanks to the individuals who represented our simulated school board, refreshments were provided for less than \$25.

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