

Team-based Leadership Curriculum for a Student Leadership Internship Course

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Introduction/ Need for Innovation

Student internships are intended to equip students with communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills through hands-on experiences (Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton & Fielitz, 2011). These skills and experiences aid a student's preparedness to enter the workforce (Crawford et al., 2011). In the University of Idaho (UI) Agricultural and Extension Education (AEE) department, we select students, through an application and interview process, for a semester-long course paired with an internship opportunity to coordinate and orchestrate the Idaho FFA State Leadership Conference (SLC). SLC is a four-day event that includes 12 Leadership and Career Development Events, six conference sessions, industry tours, student workshops, service projects, and various other stakeholder events. In 2019, attendance at SLC was nearly 1,500 FFA members.

Over the past 10 years, the roles, responsibilities, and number of the student interns as well as the structure of the course has changed year-to-year. The majority of the course was previously dedicated to completing internship tasks and professional development. Based on feedback on the course and internship experience, we felt there was a need to reconsider how we are preparing these student interns for their roles and the leadership knowledge needed for their success. The most common issue previous interns expressed was a lack of collaboration or knowledge on how to work with other student interns. In response, we restructured internship roles to include three distinct teams with a student director for each team and designed a team-based curriculum focused on the exploration of broad topics prior to application to their SLC internship experience.

How it Works

In 2019, 22 students were interviewed and selected, hired for a specific role, trained, and given responsibility of components at SLC. Student interns are responsible for coordinating and implementing their portion of the conference, collaborating with team members, interfacing with stakeholders, and managing conflict. Students organize their portion of the conference throughout the semester and execute SLC at the culmination of the course.

The 2019 class of interns had specific roles within three delineated teams. The intern teams were created based on their purpose and function at SLC, and include the following: Public Relations comprised of delegates, workshops, service, photography, and social media manager positions; Awards and events comprised of CDEs, proficiency, and STAR award managers; and Sessions comprised of arena, backstage, AV, awards, stage materials, line-up and courtesy corps managers. This team format provides more structure for role assignments, improves the overall function of the internships, and streamlines communication between the interns, AEE faculty, and the Idaho FFA Executive Director. The three teams function on a relatively separate timeline with goals and tasks specific to different components of SLC.

The course begins the first week of the spring semester and continues until two weeks after SLC in April. This is a 3-credit course that meets for one-hour a week and requires outside of class time to complete internship role specific tasks. The curriculum topics and learning outcomes are focused on the process of leadership, building trust and navigating conflict, event planning, professional communication, commitment and accountability, crisis and conflict management, and attention to results. The team-based leadership curriculum is based on *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (Lencioni, 2002). Five class meetings were devoted to working on

internship tasks in preparation for SLC. These meetings were interspersed with the above curriculum. This format was designed to prepare students to work effectively with team members and gain the technical skills needed to be successful at SLC.

Results to Date

Anecdotally, the Idaho FFA Executive Director and internship director shared that feedback on the student interns was nearly all positive, which had historically not been the case in previous years. Additionally, in evaluations students reported really appreciating the new team structure and team-based leadership curriculum with 19 (86%) including it as one of the things they appreciated the most about the experience and no students reflected on the team experience as something to improve in the coming years. Regarding the new team structure, one student stated, "I felt that it helped give a lot more structure to real-time problem solving at SLC". Another student commented on how the curriculum benefitted them as a team member, "it made me really think about who I am as a leader and where I can best make an impact".

The student interns expressed wanting to keep the team structure and found the team-based leadership focus of the course useful. However, they wanted more time to work on internship tasks in class with their team and the direction and support of the course instructors. The students were in support of meeting two hours a week with one being devoted to curriculum and the other for internship work. Additionally, they felt it would be helpful to interact more often with Idaho FFA Executive Director for instructions and feedback.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Based on feedback from student interns, the course will be lengthened to two hours a week. The first hour will be spent on the team-based leadership curriculum for the week. The second will be solely focused on teams meeting and working on their internship specific tasks. During the second hour, the Idaho FFA Executive Director will attend via videoconferencing to answer any questions the students may have and provide feedback as needed.

A primary challenge moving forward for the AEE faculty is to find an appropriate student instructor with experience working with the SLC conference. While an undergraduate or graduate student has previously overseen the course, hiring the three team directors as teaching assistants may be a more sustainable way to run this course. We are in current discussion of the process for hiring, training, and supporting these directors. We recommend instructors of like courses and experiences take into consideration the needed knowledge to be successful in their internship experience. One important element in the SLC internship experience was feedback. This feedback helps our students take on challenging tasks and learn from triumphs and areas of improvement (Stripling & Ricketts, 2016).

Costs/ Resources Needed

The Idaho FFA Association provides hotel rooms and food for the students during the week of SLC. This cost fluctuates year to year but is approximately \$5,200. One AEE faculty member serves in a curriculum development and advising role for the course. This requires 3-5% FTE. The three new student directors will be needed to manage and direct the course November-April and will be paid a \$1,000 stipend each.

References

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