

**Empowering the Next Generation of National Leaders through Experimental Leadership
Training**

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Empowering the Next Generation of National Leaders through Experiential Leadership Training

Introduction

Leadership development is an important and long-standing concern in many fields; career and technical education (CTE) is no exception (Wonacott, M. E., 2001). CTE's focus on leadership development has traditionally started in secondary programs, where leadership skills are advocated as one part of total student development (Cahill and Brady 1999). When looking at whether or not programs within CTE like agriculture education teach leadership within the classes and extra-curricular activities they offer, surveys showed that several former FFA members have since served as local, state and even national leaders (Brannon, T., Holley, C. W., & Key, J. P., 1989).

School-Based Agricultural Education programs consist of three components: classroom and laboratory, FFA, and supervised agricultural experience forming a three circle diagram (Johnson, L., 2009). Unlike other curriculum models, students benefit from a well-rounded education where they "learn by doing" (Ewing & Watson, 2008). There are few other programs in mainstream education where students learn in the classroom and then apply it in a "real world" setting (Ewing & Watson, 2008). As such, participation in student organizations has long been accepted as an important part of the program of career and technical education in the United States (Gilbertson, O.S., & Others, 1975; Allen, J., Ricketts, J. C., & Priest, K. 2007).

The fundamental goal of member leadership development in the National FFA Organization can be seen in its mission statement, motto, and code of ethics. The FFA organization has played a role in developing student leaders for over 85 years (National FFA Organization, 2014). In their mission statement the FFA states that it makes a "positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through school based agricultural education" (National FFA, 2012, para. 1).

The lack of qualified agriculture teachers in leadership training skills also impacts schools and districts desiring to open new programs or replace agriculture teachers who leave the classroom. (Smith, Lawver, & Foster, 2016). In earlier studies, researchers concluded that students who were involved in a well-rounded agricultural education program that followed the "three circle diagram model" were more likely to choose agricultural education as a college major (Cole, 1984; Miller, Williams, & Sprouse, 1984). Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests a large proportion of students who enter agricultural education preservice programs across the country were once participants in a well-rounded agricultural education program themselves. Yet, there is a shortage of literature exploring how FFA, SAE, and agricultural education might influence one's choice to teach agriculture based on a well-rounded agriculture program (Ingram, M. L., Sorenson, T. J., Warnick, B. K., & Lawver, R. G. (2018).

How It Works

In 2012, faculty at the university began hosting and facilitating the National FFA Officer Candidate Preparatory Academy. Each year national FFA officer candidates are invited to participate in a two day preparatory academy in early October to better prepare them for the final

selection process at the National FFA Convention. While at the university, the candidates go through several mock interview sessions just as they would at the national convention. Each candidate will begin with two introduction sessions, they will each have 25 one on one interviews with academy facilitators, they will go through three round robin sessions with one of those being a media session, two stand and deliver sessions, one facilitation session and a conclusion introduction session. In the media round for the round robin sessions, the candidate will be recorded just as they would be if they were being interviewed in a session that was going to be televised. For the facilitation round, the candidate is to lead a group of “students” in a workshop they have come up with, just as they would as a national officer, while traveling to the different chapters for workshops.

Many facilitators and judges for this preparatory academy are university students pursuing a degree in agricultural education. Assisting with the preparatory academy presents opportunity to these university students to see exactly how the selection process works when running for a National Officer position. Due to the vast majority of these students being agricultural education majors, there are many ways helping with this academy can benefit these university students once they become agricultural educators themselves. As an agriculture science teacher, these students will each have their own high school students they personally help train to fill chapter and district officer positions, and hopefully positions even higher than those. When the time comes for these university students to train their own high school students, they will now have a good understanding as to how each of the processes work.

Costs Associated

Each year, Interbank located here in town, donates \$5,000 to this academy to help with expenses. During the 2018 academy, \$5,538.10 was accounted for while hosting the candidates for four days. Hotel costs, vans rented to drive the candidates to and from the airport in DFW as well as around town, food and gas were accounted for in this total amount.

Results to Date

Agriculture education majors have the opportunities to learn and understand the process of National FFA candidate process while assisting in the mock interview course. In doing this, we hope that these students will take what they have learned while helping with this process, and apply it one day as an agriculture teacher as they train their own students to go through the state and national officer election process. National FFA Officer Candidates are able to see what the officer selection process is like, while getting to practice their interviewing skills to prepare them for the National FFA Convention.

Future Plans

Future plans for this innovation include recruiting as many agricultural education majors here at the university to assist in this mock interview course. Expanding evaluation participation in the agricultural education area can help better prepare the university students for their work as future educators and advisors in this preparatory area. As future [Texas] agriculture teachers, these students can learn how the national officer candidate preparation works, in hopes that they will be fully prepared to coach a student of their own through this process. Assuming that they will have chapter and district officers as well, knowing how to run through this process can even help them with training officers at the lower levels.

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