

Be the Leader You Would Follow: Promoting Minority Leaders in Agriculture

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

Increasing cultural diversity in agricultural education programs is a continuous need that is supported by research and a focus of the National Research Agenda for Agricultural Education (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016; Talbert & Edwin, 2008). Current demographic data from both the NC FFA Association and the National FFA Organization shows a disparity in membership from underrepresented minority groups (National FFA Organization, 2018; NC FFA Association, 2018). When agricultural education enrollment demographics are compared to student population demographics in schools, there is a clear indication of the lack of diversity in school based agricultural education programs (Lawrence, Rayfield, Moore, & Outley, 2013).

To promote agricultural careers, develop leadership skills, and promote diversity and inclusion in school based agricultural education programs, an educational and leadership-based experience for secondary agricultural education students called “Minority Leaders in Agriculture” (MLA) was planned and implemented at North Carolina State University. The goal of this educational program was to provide an interactive educational and leadership-based experience for minority secondary agricultural education students.

How it Works/Methodology

Departmental grant funding was obtained to promote agriculture careers and leadership among minority students (African Americans, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Asians, Latinos, Hispanics, and Pacific Islanders) currently enrolled in agricultural education at the high school level. An announcement email was distributed through the North Carolina FFA listserv describing the program and seeking participation from agricultural education teachers to register their students who met the criteria. Additionally, teachers were informed that participants would receive the following: State FFA Convention registration paid (if attending), a NC State University gift bag, program t-shirt, and overnight hotel accommodations if traveling from out of town and requested by the teacher.

Registration was handled using a Google Sheet on a first come first serve basis. Due to an immediate and increased interest, the allotted 35 spots filled up within one day and led program leaders to come together to discuss adding additional spots. In order to increase the registration number, additional funding was obtained through the Dean’s office and an additional sponsorship from an academic program was secured to provide a catered lunch.

At the conclusion of the registration period, program leaders began developing a more detailed plan specific to the logistics and facilitation of the event. Undergraduate students who had served as ambassadors for organizations on campus were asked to conduct campus tours. Current undergraduate students and recent graduates were contacted to serve on a panel discussion about their experiences as a minority student in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CAL S) at NC State University. Hotel accommodations were arranged at a hotel across from campus. An evaluation form was distributed at the completion of the program to obtain feedback from the student participants and teachers.

Results to Date/Implications

The Minority Leaders in Agriculture (MLA) program was held on June 17, 2019 in Raleigh, NC on the campus of NC State University from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. After a welcome and overview of the day, participants were assigned to two different groups. Both groups had the opportunity to participate in a campus tour and a presentation entitled “How Do I Get Here?” delivered by a graduate student from the Agricultural Institute and a staff member from CALS. All participants then completed the first of their leadership-based workshops where they were given the DiSC Personality Assessment by one of the program leaders followed by lunch.

During lunch, participants were seated with faculty representatives from various departments across the college based on their responses to an interest form completed at check-in that morning. Following lunch, participants completed the second leadership component and engaged in the final presentation on the history of minority leaders in agriculture presented by a professor emeritus at NC State University. The program concluded with an ice cream social and participants and their teachers/chaperones completed the evaluation form.

Based on the evaluations, students and teachers indicated the daylong event was beneficial. Students reported they were exposed to at least one new career in agriculture. All the teachers indicated they would bring students to a follow-up event or they would recruit more students to attend if a similar program was offered in the future. Lastly, three teachers reached out to the leadership workshop leaders seeking their leadership presentations to implement with their new officer teams.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Program leaders concluded that a continuation and expansion of similar educational programs will be pivotal in contributing to the increased diversity and inclusion in agricultural education programs at the secondary and post-secondary level. It is recommended that this initial host institution, as well as additional institutions, continue to create opportunities for minority students to develop leadership skills, experience a college campus for a day, and interact with current undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty members to learn more about academic and career opportunities in agriculture.

Costs/Resources Needed

Costs incurred included cost of t-shirts provided to participants and chaperones, lunch provided by campus catering, and hotel lodging for participants. Securing funding to provide these opportunities at little to no cost is crucial to the success of the program and may be available through the Dean’s office or from recruitment funds in individual departments.

References

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