

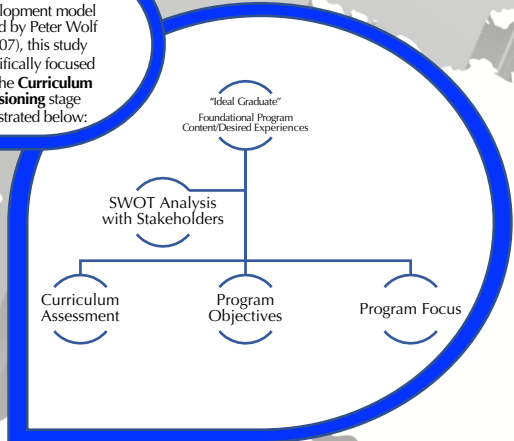
New directions: Exploring starting new agricultural communications programs internationally

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Introduction

Ag comm programs in the United States are growing and changing, increasing in numbers since 2000, suggesting an increase in popularity and demand (Miller, Large, Rucker & Buck, 2015). The demand is timely, with agricultural communicators serving a fundamental role in defending the industry (Cannon, Specht & Buck, 2016). Canada currently has no existing agricultural communications program aside from two classes at the University of Guelph (Hamel & Saindon, 2017). Understanding the methods, experiences and perspectives of those who have experience establishing national and international agricultural communications programs will inform creating these programs in Canada.

Following the curriculum development model posed by Peter Wolf (2007), this study specifically focused on the **Curriculum Visioning** stage illustrated below:



"It's such an exciting time because it's all converging...it was often said that if we don't get out there and tell people about ag, the future of ag is going to be in trouble, which is why these programs are so important."

Methods

- Three interviews conducted with current ag comm faculty members with experience in international ag comm program development
- Topics included
 - Success and challenges in program development
 - key elements, skills and concepts that should be included in ag comm programs
 - role faculty, industry and students should have in the process

Results

"How we communicate has evolved, what we communicate has evolved, and who we need to communicate to has evolved."

"We fill the gap for people who have never had that direct experience in agriculture."

"Writing and knowing the strategic purpose for that writing is crucial."

"We need to be talking with industry professionals to find out what the needs are and finding out what students and their parents want is important."

"Possibly the most important thing, new programs need to build upon the strengths of the faculty."

Conclusions

- Strong written communications are essential with foundational communications and agricultural knowledge to support it
- Extracurriculars relating to the major should be available to enhance student experiences and increase program visibility
- Feedback from stakeholders is invaluable and should not end after program establishment
- Small program size will be a challenge, but using relationships with other colleges will be beneficial and having stakeholder allies
- Relying on faculty strengths and other colleges will be a foundational element