

**Defining your Role: Facilitating Experiential Education**

Submitted to:  
American Association of Agricultural Educators  
2021 National Conference

Innovative Idea Poster

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## **Putting Culture back in AgriCulture: An Innovative Leadership Program**

### **Introduction**

In a virtual classroom, one Southern 1862 land-grant institution and a Southern 1890 university have created a course through the Community and Innovation Lab designed to teach concepts of emotional and cultural intelligence to students while collaborating with community partners. This collaboration between the University of Kentucky, Prairie View A&M University and respective agricultural partners, allows faculty to employ innovative engagement methods applied to both the classroom and the community.

At present, it could be argued the 21<sup>st</sup> century agricultural workforce has difficulty recruiting, engaging, and collaborating with underserved populations in urban, suburban and rural communities (Vespa, Medina & Armstrong, 2020). Much of this can be attributed to a lack of parity in a workforce that does not represent underserved populations; also, often today's employees do not have the social skills to engage in culturally diverse communities (AgCareers, 2018; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018). This innovative program could lead to recruiting and mentoring diverse undergraduate students interested in pursuing agricultural careers while assisting traditional students in becoming more culturally aware. This initiative addresses these concerns by *Putting Culture back in AgriCulture* - an innovative leadership initiative to develop diverse leaders who enter the agricultural workforce as culturally aware ambassadors who can engage with and recruit from underserved communities.

### **Methodology**

The innovative leadership program is operationalized through an online course that meets twice a week. Faculty from both institutions teach the course via Zoom, to fully engage both learning institutions. Utilizing emotional and cultural intelligence as a foundation for this experience is especially important, as it develops the individual student and helps to ensure community engagement is done correctly and is not predatory in nature. Students from both institutions participate in the course and community engagement projects. The class meets twice a week with one day dedicated to student development and the second dedicated to "community lab" or working closely with innovative agricultural and civic organizations on important projects. Ideally, this collaboration will establish a strong partnership between the 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities. Collectively, the partnership has the potential to not only enhance the social, cultural, and emotional intelligence among faculty, but also their students and organizations in both Kentucky and Texas. Furthermore, this project strengthens ties between the universities and their agricultural and community leaders providing a strong pipeline for student employment and mentorships. Lastly, this aligns with strategic initiatives from both universities.

### **Results to Date**

To date, fifteen students over two semesters have engaged in this innovative course. In addition, this course has also provided an outlet for 1862 and 1890 land grant institutions to collaborate in developing students into professional consultants who engage with innovative agricultural and civic organizations, on projects important within each community. From an individual level, the students are improving their self-awareness, cultural intelligence, and emotional intelligence. Students involved in the Community and Innovation Lab have been introduced to community partners such as AppHarvest who have promoted fresh food use and increased current knowledge of controlled environment agriculture of college students in Appalachia. Community and Innovation Lab students have also joined with Andrea James, Special Projects Director at the Mayor's Office, to work in addressing substance use disorder to the City of Lexington. Engaging with these groups has encouraged students to use people first language and be sensitive to the impact of stereotypes, thin slicing, and implicit bias as it concerns those with substance use disorder. This innovative program illustrates a unique collaborative partnership, one that is beneficial for both institutions, as well as the students involved and community engagement partners. This innovative initiative, between two land grant universities, develops diverse leaders who enter the workforce as culturally aware ambassadors who have the ability to engage underserved communities, enhancing community well-being.

### **Future Plans**

Future plans include continuing the class and integrating an alumni mentorship program to provide consistency for community partners and serve as peer mentors to current program students. The involvement of the students who have completed the class provides consistency for community partners. This consistency is crucial to have continuous support for community partners, which erases the need to start from the beginning each semester. Having a mentorship from alumni of the program also creates a legacy that is particularly important. Plans also include an annual symposium to highlight the accomplishments of the Community and Innovation Lab and its community partners. This symposium will further explain unique and innovative methods for recruiting and mentoring underrepresented students, effective approaches to enhance traditional student's cultural intelligence, and enhance potential professional networks to introduce students to agricultural professions and professional mentors.

### **Cost/Resources Needed**

Total cost and resources necessary for the program \$3000 annually for introductory face-to-face meetings to build the student cohort across both universities. This money will also be utilized for local travel to the community engagement partners for specific engagement activities. To replicate this idea using only community engagement would require significantly less resources. Those resources would include a classroom space, innovative professors willing to work with students to increase student professionalism and soft skills, collaborative initiations to increase diversity of students and faculty, and community partners for engagement.

## References

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