

Initiating and Mobilizing a Pipeline in Agricultural Career Training (IMPACT)

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The IMPACT program aims to retain Food, Agriculture, Natural Resource and Human Science (FANH) students in their baccalaureate degree program while guiding them towards graduation and enrollment in a graduate degree program. The border counties between New Mexico and Texas have notoriously low college degree attainment- 15% of the populace hold a bachelor's degree, compared to state averages of 28% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Persistent poverty levels observed across the region contribute to the lack of degree completion (Good & La Prad, 2013). Students in the IMPACT program will be exposed to a broad range of careers across FANH disciplines and be provided with activities to enhance degree completion to increase the number of students graduating with FANH degrees, going into the regional workforce, and pursuing graduate education in FANH disciplines. This program aims to create an educational pipeline between a large southwestern university and a small southwestern university to enhance underrepresented students' retention and graduation rates in FANH disciplines through activities that will provide students with belonging, mentoring, and support. This pipeline program will increase college retention rates through integrated programming that taps into *belonging*, *mentoring*, and *support* issues identified by FANH students from underrepresented communities (Wimmer & Myers, 2013). The IMPACT program aims to address AAAS National Research Agenda Research priority 3: Sufficient Scientific and Professional Workforce that Addresses the Challenges of the 21st Century.

Program Steps

Belonging

One of the first steps of this program is to ensure that participants develop a sense of belonging. A large southwestern university and small southwestern university have created a cross-institutional cohort to allow undergraduate and graduate students to collaborate and participate in career exploration activities. Students within these cohorts are encouraged to join a student organization affiliated with each university.

Mentoring

The second part of the program is to provide students with mentoring. Each of the faculty advisors underwent a mentorship training program before the start of the IMPACT program. IMPACT participants complete an individualized development plan (IDP) to guide students through graduation and career development. Faculty advisors mentor IMPACT participants throughout the program in accomplishing their school/career goals.

Supporting

The final part of this program is to support students as they complete their degrees. Each semester the IMPACT cohort meets three times. At each fall meeting, students receive support modules covering financial literacy. Financial stress and concerns are primary reasons for students' non-completion of their undergraduate degrees (Joo, et al., 2009). Students will gain nutrition and budget-friendly meal preparation support geared towards college students during the spring meetings. Food insecurity among college students has become more prevalent and is

particularly acute among low-income minority students (Broton, et al., 2018). Food insecurity is associated with attrition in undergraduate students; food insecure students report lower grades, disruptions in academic progress, and more frequent depression symptoms (Payne-Sturges, et al., 2018). After the support modules, the IMPACT cohort will participate in career exploration experiences with various FANH professionals. These experiences help students understand the career and internship opportunities available within FANH disciplines in the region. After the spring semester, the large southwestern University will host IMPACT participants from both universities for a week-long leadership development program.

Results to Date

The IMPACT program was put on hold due to various COVID restrictions during its first year. In August 2021, the two universities created a cross-institutional cohort of 18 students. During the Fall semester, the cohort visited the large southwestern University twice and small southwestern University once for three IMPACT financial literacy modules and career exploration activities. In February, this same group visited for the first of three spring IMPACT nutrition modules and career exploration activities. Between August 2021 and February 2022, IMPACT participants visited and learned about career and internship opportunities at the following FANH businesses: a cheese production manufacturer, a meat processing facility, a large food bank serving 20 counties, and a State Research and Extension Center. Initial feedback from IMPACT participants has been positive, including learning about new career opportunities within FANH. Additional participant comments will be included with the final poster.

Future Plans

As the IMPACT program finishes its first year, the two universities continue to collaborate on implementing the program for a second year. After interviewing participants from the first year of implementation, changes will be made to improve the program. The following recommendations for those interested in developing a cross-institutional pipeline: 1) Make sure cohort participants understand the expectations; 2) Think outside the traditional agricultural businesses when planning career exploration activities; 3) Encourage students within the cohort to engage and collaborate, and 4) Be understanding of students' current situation as they adjust to returning to normalcy following the pandemic.

Costs/Resources Needed

The IMPACT program is a project funded by the USDA-NIFA-HSI grant. Costs associated with implementing this would vary depending on the types of workshop facilitation and travel involved. Examples of the cost of the current program were: IMPACT participant travel to hosting University \$2000; Curriculum development for the financial literacy and nutrition workshop facilitation cost \$4000, and week-long Leadership Development Workshop cost approximately \$18,000.

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