

Generating Program Enthusiasm Using University Teach Ag Pennants

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Introduction

In 2018, Purdue University revised and updated the undergraduate Agricultural Education major to reflect the changing needs of the profession in Indiana. Stakeholder feedback expressed dissatisfaction with elements of the teacher preparation program, and at the same time, changes occurred with faculty in the program. The program is now implementing the changes, and keeps Agricultural Education teachers throughout the state apprised of the changes being made. At the same time, the Purdue Agricultural Education program is seeking to increase recruitment efforts, strengthen relationships with Indiana Agriculture teachers, and build an updated brand identity. Given that many agriculture classrooms feature plaques, pennants, and banners for achievements within FFA (Roberts, Stair, & Granberry, 2020), the Purdue Ag Ed program designed Purdue Teach Ag pennants to be distributed to graduating seniors and their cooperating teachers to recognize their investment in the future of Agricultural Education.

How it Works

One Purdue faculty member generated the initial idea and design for two different pennants in Spring 2020. They worked with an agricultural communications departmental staff member who refined the design and put it into the format required by an area printing company. Two different pennant designs were created: 1) Large pennant: 12” x 30” horizontal felt pennant featuring the FFA owl, university logo, and Teach Ag logo, and 2) Small pennant: 4” x 10” vertical felt pennant featuring the university logo at the top, a blank space, and a small FFA owl on the bottom. The large pennants are distributed to graduating Agricultural Education seniors at the end of the semester in which they student teach. The large pennants are also awarded to teachers serving as cooperating teachers for Purdue Ag Education student teachers. The small pennants have a small open space between the university logo and the FFA owl. Student teachers sign their name and the semester in which they student taught in this small space. The Ag Education program then sent thank you letters along with the large and small pennants to cooperating teachers. The Purdue Ag Education program envisions teachers hanging the small owl pennants below or around the large Purdue Ag Ed pennant in their classroom or office. Instead of competition, these pennants represent their dedication to the future of the Ag Education profession. See Figure 1 for an example of the layout of the pennants in a cooperating teacher’s classroom.



Figure 1. Proposed layout of large and small Purdue Ag Ed pennants in classroom setting.

Results to Date/Implications

So far, 41 students have graduated from the Purdue Agricultural Education Program since beginning distribution of the Purdue Teach Ag Pennants with May 2020 graduates. We did not distribute cooperating teacher large pennants and student teacher small pennants until May 2021 due to complications from COVID-19 restrictions. There were 14 student teachers in the Spring 2021 semester. Some students taught under the supervision of two cooperating teachers, so each teacher received a large pennant and a small pennant.

Since on campus meetings of student teachers were permitted in 2021, Purdue faculty and staff were able to distribute the pennants face-to-face with the student teachers, unlike the 2020 cohort. Graduating students were so excited to receive their large pennants that they requested to take a group photo together with their pennants, while some even ventured around campus together to take photos with their pennants at significant sites. Still others featured their pennants in their formal graduation photos. One student seemed particularly mesmerized by their pennant, staring quietly at it after receiving it. When a faculty member asked them about it, they responded, “Oh, I just love it so much! I can’t stop looking at it!”

When Purdue faculty announced this new tradition at the statewide virtual winter workshop for the Indiana Association of Agricultural Educators, multiple Agriculture Teachers expressed excitement for the pennants. Some even asked how they might purchase one. The Purdue faculty and staff decided to limit distribution of the pennants to graduating seniors and cooperating teachers to add to the distinctive nature of the pennants. When this was announced to workshop participants, some teachers reached out to find out the requirements of becoming qualified to host a student teacher in the future. This might become an incentive to serve as a cooperating teacher.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

We intend on continuing this program into the future, and potentially feature social media posts that highlight the Purdue Ag Ed pennants in the classrooms and offices of recipients. It is important to make sure that use of your institution’s logo follows your institution’s branding requirements, and to keep the design simple and uncluttered. It is also important to keep track of who received pennants so that you can keep an accurate inventory. This is especially important for our program, as we decided that the pennants would be awarded to only graduating seniors and cooperating teachers. If a program decided to use pennants such as these as a fundraiser, then a different recordkeeping system might be warranted.

Costs/Resources Needed

We ordered 250 large pennants and 250 small pennants. The printer we worked with offered bulk discounts, and we wanted to reduce the number of times we placed an order. It cost \$875 to order 250 large pennants that featured 5 different colors, and \$377.50 to order 250 small pennants featuring 2 different colors. Our university’s Agricultural Education program has a designated gift fund that usually funds the cost of printing program newsletters that are mailed to stakeholders and alumni. Since we did not print or mail newsletters in 2020 due to COVID-19, we were able to use those funds to purchase and mail these pennants. We will need to explore other sources of funding in the future when we need to order more pennants. It was extremely helpful to have departmental staff with design expertise, and an administrative support professional who assisted in ordering and distribution of the pennants to cooperating teachers.

References

Roberts, R., Stair, K. S., & Granberry, T. (2020). Images from the trenches: A visual narrative of the concerns of agricultural education majors. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, *61*(2), 324-338. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2020.02324>