

Service-Learning through CDEs for Preservice Teachers

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Introduction

The AGED 3201 one-hour credit course is “A service-learning course focused on the processes and procedures required to host competitive events for agricultural youth organizations with an emphasis on roles of event hosts such as planning, coordination, volunteer management, and facilitation” (Terry, 2022). Service-learning has been used as a teaching technique for many years in school-based agricultural education (Roberts & Edwards, 2015). The National FFA Organization has also implemented service-learning initiatives to provide impactful experiences through programs such as the National FFA Days of Service (Roberts & Edwards, 2015; Roberts et. al, 2016). Service-learning courses at the university level have been shown to give students opportunities to build relationships with instructors while applying their learning in a real-world setting (Eyler et. al, 2001; Roberts et. al, 2019). Preservice teachers can gain responsiveness, professional experience, and management strategies from engaging in service-learning courses in college (White, 2020).

How it Works

Faculty at Oklahoma State University and other selected persons serve as the superintendent for each of the 33 Career Development Events (CDEs) offered at the Oklahoma FFA championship event held on the campus of OSU. Each student in AGED 3201 was assigned to serve as the student superintendent for one of these CDEs. During the course, students were instructed on topics such as the role of CDEs in SBAE, CDE rules, preparing CDE teams, superintendent duties, and scoring CDEs. They also heard from a panel of CDE superintendents and a panel of SBAE teachers concerning their perspectives about CDEs role in agricultural education.

Student superintendents were required to work with their faculty superintendent to plan, prepare, and execute the contest. To start the collaborative efforts, students were responsible for initiating contact with the faculty superintendent to set up a meeting. Students were provided a check sheet of duties and tasks to be discussed with the superintendent and were advised on best practices for collaboration. After the initial meeting, students planned follow-up meetings to facilitate the planning and implementation of their assigned CDE. Student superintendents were responsible for coordinating volunteers for the day of the event, which gave students not in the course an opportunity to serve. Students were required to provide reports during each class session leading up to the state finals event. Students’ grade in the class was based on completion of course assignments and an evaluation instrument completed by their faculty superintendent.

Results to Date

For the most recent state FFA CDE finals event, students enrolled in AGED 3201 served as the student superintendent for 23 of the 33 CDEs offered. Approximately 2,300 FFA members competed in the Oklahoma FFA finals event, which took place on selected dates in April. Comments from students revealed they gained valuable experiences and developed beneficial relationships from their service as a student superintendent. The following comments were provided by student superintendents:

From taking AGED 3201 I got to network with ag teachers in Oklahoma, which was extremely beneficial to me as an out of state student. I have connected with ag teachers who I can ask to observe when I get to upper-level agricultural education courses.

I gained a better understanding of how it works to run a contest and coach a CDE team. I was also able to build stronger relationships with faculty and graduate assistants that will help me in future courses.

Being a student superintendent was work, but I learned a lot. It was great to give something back to FFA and learn about a CDE I had never heard of before.

By taking this class, I found I really enjoyed working with FFA members. It made me want to change my major to Ag Ed and become an ag teacher.

Faculty superintendents expressed appreciation for the service students provided and their contribution to the success of the event. The superintendent of the Agricultural Technology and Mechanical Systems CDE stated:

The AGED 3201 course has become an invaluable part of the Oklahoma FFA contest. The ability for pre-service Ag Ed students to work directly with contest superintendents and aid in developing and implementing the contests is one of the best service-learning activities they can do in our program.

When speaking to the class in a panel discussion, faculty superintendents shared student superintendents complete important duties such as securing volunteers, editing CDE materials, registering teams, and scoring. This assistance reduces their workload and encourages them to continue serving as a CDE superintendent.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

We intend to continue offering this class each spring semester. Feedback provided by students, faculty superintendents, and SBAE teachers whose students participate in the state finals event will be used to continuously improve course content, the experiences of our students, and the quality of the event. Successful implementation of this service-learning course requires strong connections between instructors of the class, CDE superintendents, college administrators, campus facilities coordinators, state FFA officials, and SBAE teachers. The course should not be limited to agricultural education students. Rather, it should be open to any student interested in service of this nature. However, enrollment should be limited to the maximum number of students needed to serve as student superintendents.

Several other benefits of this class have been realized. College administrators appreciate that much of the responsibility for hosting the state CDE finals event is born by the Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership Department. The service is also appreciated by state FFA officials and SBAE teachers. It has further strengthened relationships between the department and faculty from other departments in the college, the Oklahoma FFA Association, and the Oklahoma Agricultural Education Teachers Association.

Costs/Resources Needed

Costs associated with hosting and administering the CDEs are funded by the \$3 per FFA member registration fee and supplemented by the Ferguson College of Agriculture funds. Locations for CDEs must be reserved six months in advance. CDE guidelines, schedules, and results are posted on a website that must be kept up to date. Course documents, such as the syllabus, forms, and contact information are maintained on the university online course platform.

References

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