

Establishing a new foundation for the [University] Spring Judging Clinics

Introduction/need for innovation or idea

The 2024 [University] Spring Judging Clinics (SpJC) is an annual event that provides the opportunity for FFA students from across [State] to engage with and be exposed to different Career Development Event (CDE) contest areas. This event, post-Covid-19, has traditionally been focused on introducing the concepts of the CDE areas to students with a focus placed more squarely on content and less on practical contest instruction. Previous year's events consisted of two identical days of clinics that brought a limited number of students to [University]'s campus based on a central location for a networking and meal portion of the event. Previous FFA advisor's and clinician's feedback, along with identified research (Baker et al., 1996; Bowling & Ball, 2020; Goodwin & McKim, 2020) showed a need to adapt the clinic instruction to sift away from content and focus on contest tips/tricks/skills along with a component highlighting [University]. Based on limitations of availability, an additional adaptation identified was the length of the entire event. A change from two days to one day was deemed most appropriate; however, this would essentially reduce the number of attendees by half. A compromise of abandoning the networking and meal portion of the event was pursued. This compromise allowed the clinics to be the main focus and open the agenda for new activities and scheduling opportunities to highlight university programs.

How it works/methodology/program phases/steps

The 2024 SpJC was held as a precursor for the attending schools to begin their National FFA Week festivities with an exciting event. In preparation for the event, individuals from across [University] were asked to serve as clinicians for different [State] CDE contest areas ([State FFA Site]). Six faculty and staff members agreed to host clinics in their representative areas (Agricultural Mechanics, Aquaculture, Forestry, Horse Evaluation, Livestock Evaluation, Poultry Evaluation). The clinicians were offered to host their clinic either as a half day event, two identical half day events or a full day event. Registration for the SpJC was limited based on clinic locations rather than a hub location to maximize the number of FFA students that could attend the event. Advisors registered for a number of spots at a clinic to allow for the flexibility of a chapter to provide the opportunity to attend to as many students as possible. Additional individuals were contacted to assist in activities to be provided, at no cost, during the day of the SpJC (Campus Tours, Recruiting Expo, Keynote Speaks). These free-to-attend activities were introduced the 2024 SpJC to provide university exploration opportunities to any students not attending a clinic during that time. These activities included campus tours, an expo comprised of 11 university colleges and entities, and a Q&A with the [State] State FFA officers. A two-hour window was also implemented to encourage advisors to take their students across or near campus for lunch.

Results to date/implications

The 2024 SpJC hosted 215 registrants across eight scheduled clinics leading to 901.5 contact hours for students attending these clinics. An additional 35 students attended the SpJC only participating in the free-to-attend activities. At the end of each clinic, an evaluation

instrument was provided to the students electronically for them to provide their feedback on their experience. Of the 215 participants 92 completed the clinic evaluation, leading to a 42.79% response rate. The respondent average years of participation in FFA was between two and three years ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.43$), and their average participation in the contest area associated with the clinic, if they were competing in the CDE, was between one and two years ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.96$). Using a five-point Likert-type scale, participants responded to their agreement to three questions relating to their preparedness to compete at the state level, benefit gained beyond the scope of the CDE, and their recommendation of the clinic for future FFA members based on their experience. All three areas were highly agreed upon with the statement of recommending this event averaging the highest ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 0.64$) and having 83 participants (91.21%) agree with the statement. Eighty-two participants (89.13%) agreed with the perceived benefit beyond the scope of CDE contests statement and all responses averaged between somewhat and strongly agree ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.74$). The statement regarding the participants perceived preparation to compete at the state contest averaging the lowest ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.76$); however, 80 participants (86.96%) still agreed with the statement. When asked to identify, using a five-point Likert-type scale, the level of which the instruction was focused on contest versus content, respondents felt that the clinics were focused equally on both ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.83$). While less participants ($f = 20$, 21.74%) felt that the clinic focuses more on the contest than the content than the opposite ($f = 23$, 25.00%), there were more who felt that the clinic focused entirely on the contest which brought the average back to the middle.

Future plans/advice to others

While the attempt of the 2024 SpJC was to focus on the contest during each of the clinics and the apparent result is that there is still work to do, the event was still a success. Students and advisors raved about the clinics and activities and the clinicians were better able to understand what the vision of the event is due to the more focused approach and time commitment. For future SpJC, a continued effort to move toward contest focused clinics will be made by addressing the responses provided through the evaluations and anecdotal data provided during the event. It is our recommendation to any entity hosting CDE related events to work closely with clinicians or facilitators to focus on meeting students where they are at, while instilling the buy-in on contest focused instruction. This year's event allowed students to not only engage in contest related material, but also expose them to [University]. This experience not only provides an invaluable experience on a university campus, but it also allows students to explore the intricacies of the CDE contests they are competing in.

Costs/resources needed

The largest resource needed for this kind of event is time. Space for the clinics was secured by each of the different clinicians for their respective clinics, and the hub space was provided by a supporting college of the event. Meals were provided by university catering and sponsored, in part, by industry partners. Swag was provided, in part, by supporting colleges and university units. Additional costs of meals, swag, and administration costs were covered by the registration fees of the participants.

References

[State FFA Site]

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