

Expanding the Reach of AEE Club: Rebranding the Departmental Student Organization as FFA Alumni and Supporters

Introduction/Need for Innovation

Student organizations have tremendous value to the teaching mission of colleges and universities (Aide et al., 1991; Hoover et al., 2004). Involvement in student organizations promotes the educational outcomes of institutions of higher education (Floerchinger, 1988, as cited by Hoover et al., 2004). As it relates to agricultural education specifically, a study from Roberts et al. (2007) found that there is value in and need for a student organization for pre-service agriculture teachers for both professional development and creation of a social network for students.

When participation in the Agricultural and Extension Education Club at [University] began to dwindle for a variety of reasons including a change of department name and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the current AEE Club officer team and advisors began to brainstorm how the mission of advancing agricultural education could be promoted to the broader student body. Thus, FFA Alumni and Supporters at [University] was born. FFA Alumni and Supporters chapters work to rally support of agricultural education and FFA chapters in local communities and support the work of FFA advisors (National FFA Organization, n.d.).

How it Works

Discussions of the potential rebrand began in the semester before the establishment of FFA Alumni & Supporters at [University]. When the idea was initially presented, students and advisors were in agreeance with the idea, but wanted to gather more information. Informal meetings were held with current AEE Club officers and faculty in the department to gather thoughts and more information about the implications of a club rebrand. A meeting was also held with [State] FFA State Staff, to inquire about the possibility of establishing such a chapter and how this chapter could support the work of [State] FFA. With largely positive response from both students and faculty, as well as FFA State Staff, the current AEE Club Officers presented a motion to the general body two weeks before the last scheduled business meeting of the semester to change the name of the organization from AEE Club at [University] to FFA Alumni and Supporters at [University]. All dues paying members were notified of the proposed bylaw amendment and notified of the meeting time and date where they could discuss and vote on the amendment.

The amendment unanimously passed, and a motion was also made and passed to defer the election of officers until the club had been announced to the greater student body. Additionally, a leadership team was formed of those present at the meeting to work to get the organization off the ground.

This leadership team met over the summer to reevaluate the bylaws, plan the Fall semester meetings, and plan for advertising the organization to the student body. This team also worked to file necessary paperwork with the Student Involvement Office at [University] to properly change the name within the university. The bylaws stayed mostly the same because the mission of the organization was still the same, just with a larger scope beyond the just the department. The [State] FFA Advisor and [State] FFA Alumni Council President were invited to

speak at the first and second meetings to share opportunities and ideas for this reformed organization. At the second meeting, officer nominations occurred and at the third meeting, officers were elected. The leadership team worked to promote FFA Alumni and Supporters by rebranding and sharing the social media handles, sending an all-campus email, promoting meetings on the [College] website, and setting up a booth at multiple campus involvement fairs.

FFA Alumni and Supporters at [University] meets on the first and third Wednesdays of every month. These are Wednesdays opposite of Collegiate Young Farmers and Ranchers organization on campus. FFA Alumni and Supporters at [University] has elected a full eight-person officer team, has hosted numerous guest speakers and team-building activities, and has plans to complete service events for the [State] association and local FFA chapters across [State]. Students recently completed an Official Dress drive, are serving as judges for a local federation's Leadership Development Events, are facilitating workshops for local FFA chapters, and are participating in the [State] FFA Alumni Annual Conference. Future plans include volunteering at State FFA Convention, helping with state leadership conferences, and creating a networking event with other FFA Alumni and Supporters corporate and school-based chapters.

Results to Date

The FFA Alumni and Supporters Chapter was established after a vote of the membership body of the former AEE Club in the Spring of 2023. The first meetings were held and officers were elected in the Fall of 2023. During that time, membership has increased from an average of ten students per meeting to fifty students per meeting, an increase of 500%. Additionally, there was enough interest in leadership positions to field a full, eight-person officer team. Plans are in place for club members to volunteer at upcoming state-level CDEs and LDEs. Additionally, more recognition and visibility has come to the agricultural education degree program at [University].

Advice to Others

For other departments that would like to replicate the transition of your departmental club to an FFA Alumni and Supporters chapter, it is recommended to have conversations with your FFA State Staff and FFA Alumni Council early. Through establishing an early partnership, our Alumni & Supporters dues were waived, and a mutually beneficial relationship began. It is also recommended to work with your university's student organization governance office to be sure all proper procedures are in-place before the official name-change vote occurs.

Cost/Resources Needed

A team of supportive students and faculty is essential to getting a newly rebranded organization off the ground. Additionally, low-cost/high-traffic advertising mechanisms such as involvement fairs, mass student emails, social media, flyers, and word of mouth are essential to spreading the word about your organization. A \$25 fee was required to change the organization on the club bank account.