



# RAM SCHOLARS: INTEGRATING TEACHER DEVELOPMENT IN INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION

KATHARINE S. ESHELMAN AND NATHAN CLARK

PROGRAM OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION, COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY



AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION  
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

## INTRODUCTION

### OVERVIEW

RAM Scholars is an inclusive higher education (IHE) program for college-aged students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) focused on providing them with a pathway to employment in the agriculture industry. Moreover, RAM Scholars offers an opportunity to integrate teacher development for preservice school-based agriculture education(SBAE) teachers through a peer mentorship experience.

### NEED FOR INTEGRATED TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Often, agricultural education teacher preparation programs do not require coursework in special education, with many teachers indicating that 0-3 courses are required (Newsome, 2023). Similarly, practicing teachers in multiple states have identified a lack of confidence when working with students with IDD (Clemons, et al., 2018; Smalley, et al., 2019). To prepare future agriculture educators to work with diverse populations in an inclusive setting, involvement in RAM Scholars provides experience with the intent to build confidence.

## HOW IT WORKS

### PARTNERSHIPS

- Department of Human Development and Family Studies- Prevention Research Center
- Department of Occupational Therapy- Center for Community Partnerships
- College of Agricultural Sciences- Agricultural Education Program

### CLASSROOM PEERS

For Agricultural Education students, the peer experience begins by taking a class alongside the RAM Scholars and developing strategies to best support Scholars in the classroom. Students can peer in the classroom for multiple semesters while gaining support and confidence from the three partnering programs.

### SUMMER INTERNSHIP

Following their classroom peer experience, Agricultural Education students can apply to a summer internship where they work alongside RAM Scholars at the university's research farm. Through the summer experience, Agricultural Education students are expected to lead the skills training and supervising of a small group of participants. During this experience, Agricultural Education students can practice effective strategies for supporting students in work-based learning programs or lab settings. Moreover, because of the increase in responsibility, Agricultural Education students can practice providing support from a team of professionals working with the students.

## RESULTS TO DATE



A RAM Scholar practicing landscaping with guidance from a peer.



RAM Scholars, peers, and faculty completing a lesson. (accessed from the RAM Scholars Webpage)

*As of, August 2024*

# 10 Inclusive Higher Education Students [RAM Scholars]

# 13 Agricultural Education Peer Mentors

## 11 Undergraduate, 2 Graduate

Throughout the experience, Agricultural Education students were asked to complete regular reflections in which increased confidence and practical management strategies were cited as areas in which they had improved. Areas of growth were often topics around how and when to scaffold or questions about how this is applied in implementing legal documents such as individualized education plans (IEP's) and 504's.



A RAM Scholar and Agricultural Education peer enjoying a break during their summer internship experience.

## FUTURE PLANS

The Agricultural Education team has identified two goals to inform our practice and strengthen the student experience. The two goals are as follows:

### EVALUATE THE PEER EXPERIENCE

- The Agricultural Education team will evaluate the impacts of our students' peer experience by evaluating their self-efficacy as it relates to integrating inclusive practices into SBAE classrooms.

### CLASSROOM READY RESOURCES

- Visual Skills Cards- Agricultural Education students will create skill cards to provide a resource and an assessment tool for their future students.
- Teaching Diverse Learners manual- As Agricultural Education students complete peer and internship experiences, they will synthesize their learning into a binder to use as a reference in their future classrooms.

## COSTS

Initial funding for RAM Scholars was provided through a Larimer County workforce development grant. Through this grant, the partner programs received funds to pay for peer internships, peer transportation to experience facilities, and supplies for RAM Scholar participant experiences. Summer internships for Agricultural Education students and course consumables were funded through Agricultural Education program funds. Other expenses such as Scholar transportation, faculty summer salary, and non-consumable materials were funded through the College of Agricultural Science. The total initial cost for the Agricultural Education program and College of Agricultural Science was \$22,100, and funding is projected to continue through state funding, grants, and gifts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the RAM Scholars team for their efforts to make this partnership possible with the CSU Program of Agricultural Education.

- Dr. Deborah Fidler- Director of the Prevention Research Center Developmental Disabilities Division and Co-Director of RAM Scholars
- Dr. James Graham- Director of Center for Community Partnerships
- Kaylyn Van Deusen- Program Coordinator for RAM Scholars

Access References here:

