

**Dynamic Design: Learning and Adapting to Improve the Application of a Gender-Lensed  
Curriculum in Undergraduate Agricultural Extension Courses**

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## Introduction

Effective gender-responsive needs assessments and evaluation in agricultural extension programs incorporate gender and social-economic analysis to better understand the factors that impact how community members access, receive, and adopt services and innovations differently (Cook et al., 2021; Gumucio et al., 2020). This gender lens is not a “nice to have”, but a “must have” for the sustainability and inclusivity of extension programming that meets the real needs of a diverse social and agricultural landscape in the communities where we work (Diaz & Najjar, 2019). However, the current politicization of the term “gender” in popular culture, politics, and in higher education, can introduce challenges for educators and researchers attempting to bring a practical gender lens to their teaching, research, and outreach (Gumucio et al., 2020). Our innovative idea shares the lessons learned through trial, error, and adaptation of one instructor’s efforts to adopt and implement components of a gender-lens curriculum to integrate concepts of gender-responsive extension into undergraduate courses in extension program design and evaluation. We present a summary of the purpose and alignment to the course objectives, how the curriculum integration has been implemented, and reflections on lessons learned and adjustments made over the past three years of implementation.

## How it Works

The Gendered-Lens Curriculum for Development (GLCD) project aims to improve the quality and accessibility of resources available to instructors in higher education and practice to integrate concepts of gender responsiveness, women’s empowerment, and social equality into coursework, particularly for students preparing for careers in global development. The advisory board from five institutions across 12+ disciplines and support team have developed ready-to-use (or adapt) modules that are available for online, in-person, or asynchronous delivery. The content is now developed, and the team is working with several educators to pilot the content in classes.

Adapting content and activities from the twelfth of fourteen modules, the lead author of this submission, a Visiting Lecturer at Texas A&M University adapted the curriculum to integrate evidence-based content on gender responsiveness in two undergraduate agricultural extension and education courses, an asynchronous online program evaluation course (approximately 170 third and fourth-year students across five semesters) and a land grant mission and extension theory course (approximately 35 third and fourth-year students in one course) between 2022-2024. Students were asked to view a previously recorded 45-minute presentation from the curriculum and to read two to three peer reviewed publications, covering topics such as data disaggregation, gender analysis in needs assessment, and briefly exploring qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection to understand dynamics of power, access, and control in communities. In the in-person course, the instructor also facilitated open discussion with the class, encouraging students to consider how gender and other socioeconomic factors, such as age, language, economic status, family structure, and race, may impact community access to extension services and uptake of extension messaging and innovations.

### **Results to Date**

Results to date have been mixed, and the instructor continues to adapt the content and adjust delivery and assessment methods to destigmatize this somewhat controversial topic in a way that offers space for students to explore gender dynamics in extension. The instructor assessed student learning using formative, qualitative activities that prompted students to apply the key concepts of gender responsiveness to a real-world scenario (Brieron et al., 2016; Fehrman & Watson, 2021). In the online evaluation course, students were already developing a program evaluation proposal for a real program and were asked in an open-ended response format how gender and other socio-economic factors should be considered in their program evaluation design. Similarly, students in the land grant and extension course were asked to consider how to incorporate gender responsiveness and social inclusion in their community needs assessment and subsequent extension program design.

Qualitative analysis indicates mixed results. Using the cognitive domains of Bloom's Taxonomy as a framework for assessment, we find that most student responses meet the level of "applying", using the information presented in a new scenario, and many student responses meet the level of "evaluating", engaging critical thinking to apply the concepts in a new creative way and creating plans to incorporate gender-responsive best practices in their evaluations and/or program needs assessment (Bloom, 1954; Momen et al., 2021; Smith & Rayfield, 2017). However, in each course, we observed some resistance among students, roughly a quarter of students in the online course and fewer in the in-person course, to the idea that gender or other social-economic factors may impact access and outcomes in extension or other public services.

### **Future Plans**

Access to high quality, evidence-based curriculum is a great first step to equip instructors to integrate gender-responsive content into their learning and teaching. However, when integrating topics of a somewhat controversial or politicized nature, instructors must also carefully consider the delivery format and sequencing of these content areas. Each semester, the instructor has adjusted delivery of the gender-responsive evaluation curriculum to introduce new scenarios. In the future, we are exploring ways to incorporate more open space for discussion, idea sharing (including ideas that may challenge the content), and practical application of these principles.

### **Resources Needed**

This innovative idea is a low-to-no-cost approach to humanizing our agricultural extension curriculum, drawing from free online teaching materials, and integrating the content into existing courses to strengthen core course objectives.

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