

From Application to Offer: A Career Readiness Bootcamp

Introduction/ Need for Idea

Every year, school based agricultural education (SBAE) pre-service teachers are off to the races to find jobs in the spring semester of their final year in college. In 2024, there were 206 job postings in a three-month period in the spring semester in Texas (Kelley et al., 2025). Agricultural science jobs are there and ready for the newest crop of pre-service teachers to pursue.

Kadel (2021) explained that employability skills are crucial for students to get employment. Employability is not only about a person having a job, but their ability to obtain one, maintain one and their individual characteristics to do the job (Sin & Amaral, 2017). Metacognitive skills are necessary for pre-service teachers to strengthen their reflective practices to ultimately build more confidence in pre-service teachers' professional self-esteem (Kadel, 2021; McNamara 2009). In addition, adaptability, flexibility, and a strong willingness to learn, combined with solid academic knowledge and technical skills are key qualities that enhance employability and open professional opportunities for pre-service teachers. (Kadel, 2021) With that, McNamara (2009) posed the question as to whose responsibility is to prepare students for workforce readiness including the skills needed to obtain a job.

Texas Tech University saw this as an opportunity to prepare its students for the upcoming battle of interviewing and accepting a job offer. With mentorship, practice and guidance, the goal for students to feel more prepared for this daunting task to have employability skills are what teacher preparation programs are up against. A “Get a Job Bootcamp” was created to help better prepare students for the challenge of obtaining a career in agricultural education.

How It Works

Texas State University requires a Senior Seminar course during the students, Student Teaching semester. This course is to touch base, and monitor the student’s progress through the semester. During this time, students return to campus for a mid-semester seminar. This is where the “Get a Job Bootcamp” comes to life. During this two-day seminar, a series of events take place to start the job prep process. First, the students explore what positions are open. The faculty do a full run through of what websites pre-service teachers can use to discover job openings within the high school and middle schools in agricultural science. Next, the pre-service teachers spend an afternoon working on their resumes and cover letters. The university faculty along with other former teachers support the pre-service teachers by helping to perfect these documents to be submitted in the future. The next day, the pre-service teachers participate in three to five speed interviews with current school principals. These interviews are five minutes long and focused on the administrators' favorite or most used questions within the interview process. This exposes students to many different questions and gives them an opportunity to get their first interview jitters out. The administrators have a feedback form to complete so that the

students get individualized feedback on their speed interviews. Once all students have completed the interviews, the administrators come together for a panel discussion where students are able to ask questions about the interview process and clarify any confusion.

Results to Date/Implications

This bootcamp has been completed for two semesters with a total of 35 pre-service teachers. When given a notecard for feedback on the experience on the final day, students explained that they felt less overwhelmed by the process and felt like they were ready for upcoming interviews. One student explained at the end of the semester “that really helped me understand what questions they would be asking”. Another student reported “that gave me more to go off of other than the normal tell me about yourself question”. “This seminar made me feel more confident going into interviews” explained another student. To date, out of the 35 students that participated in the bootcamp, 33 of those accepted teaching positions and are still currently in the teaching profession.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Texas Tech University will continue to provide the “Get a Job Bootcamp” for the 2026 student teaching block in March. The same schedule will be utilized however a new piece will be added. Human Resource (HR) personnel will be added to the line-up where pre-service teachers can ask questions concerning the next steps once they are offered a position and what HR will need to gain full employment. This will be an added layer for pre-service teachers to understand the full range of obtaining employment along with what the processes may look like after the job interview itself.

For programs that may wish to implement this type of experience for their students, a broad group of administrators, hiring managers and HR personnel is crucial so that students have experience with school districts of all sizes. All school districts work differently, and school districts are interested in different initiatives, so giving students a wide variety can support them in any interview they may be interested in.

Costs/Resources Needed

There is no cost connected with this bootcamp, but there are several resources needed to put on this activity. Space is one of the biggest resources needed. A classroom area is needed for the resume and panel discussions. Individual rooms are needed for individual interviews. Administrators and HR are also resources needed for this activity so that students have someone to interact with from schools. A strong working knowledge of resumes and cover letters is also needed and may need to be sourced from another entity on campus.

References

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