

Learning Beyond the Classroom: An Agricultural Trivia Night as a Service-Learning Tool

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Introduction

Service-learning has emerged as a high-impact, experiential learning tool that intentionally connects academic learning with meaningful community engagement (Binard & Leavitt, 2000). Although service-learning is not a new concept, its use as a teaching method has continued to expand as educators seek opportunities to connect classroom learning with authentic experiences that benefit both students and the communities they serve (Roberts & Edwards, 2015). Within agricultural education, service-learning provides students opportunities to apply disciplinary knowledge while simultaneously developing leadership, communication, teamwork, and civic engagement skills (Meyers et al., 2014; Roberts & Edwards, 2015; Robinson & Torres, 2007). As institutions of higher education seek innovative approaches to engage students in authentic learning experiences, educators are increasingly exploring instructional strategies that extend learning beyond the traditional classroom setting and into the communities they serve.

Recognizing the value of experiential learning, students and faculty within the Illinois State University (ISU) Agricultural Education program developed an Agricultural Trivia Night as a service-learning project for undergraduate students. The event was designed to reinforce agricultural knowledge while creating an engaging outreach opportunity for the campus and local community. Unlike traditional educational projects, the Agricultural Trivia Night required students to apply content knowledge, collaborate with peers, plan and manage an event, and interact with community members. By combining educational outreach with service-learning principles, the initiative created a meaningful learning environment that strengthened students' understanding of agriculture while supporting a local charitable cause.

How It Works

The Agricultural Trivia Night was organized and implemented by undergraduate agricultural education students involved with the Agricultural Education Club on campus. Student teams were responsible for planning, promoting, and facilitating the event from start to finish. To ensure broad participation and accessibility, the event was designed as a low-cost, community-centered activity held in a campus classroom. Participants competed in multiple rounds of agricultural trivia covering topics such as animal science, plant and soil science, agricultural mechanics, agricultural education, agricultural business, food science, and general ISU knowledge. Other non-agriculture trivia categories were also included, such as pop culture, sports, and entertainment, to mix things up throughout the event.

Student teams developed trivia questions, coordinated event logistics, recruited participants, secured prizes, managed registration, and facilitated the competition. The event also included networking opportunities that allowed participants to interact with agricultural students and faculty while learning more about the agricultural industry. To encourage engagement and foster a sense of community, prizes were awarded to top-performing teams, while additional incentives were provided through raffles and participation activities.

Beyond simply hosting a trivia competition, members of the Agricultural Education Club were expected to reflect on the planning and implementation process and connect their experiences to concepts of leadership, communication, teamwork, event management, and civic

engagement. Through this process, students applied their classroom agricultural knowledge in an authentic setting while developing professional skills transferable to their future careers in agricultural education.

Results and Implications

The Agricultural Trivia Night exceeded initial expectations for participation and community engagement. The event attracted 78 individuals across 13 teams composed of students, faculty, and staff, demonstrating widespread interest in our agriculture-related outreach event. In addition to serving as an educational experience, the event also served as a charitable fundraiser, generating donations of canned food items that were given to a local food pantry. Almost 380 canned goods were collected and donated to a local food bank. Overall, the project successfully combined agricultural literacy promotion with a meaningful service component.

Student reflections indicated that participation in the project enhanced their confidence in leadership, communication, and organizational skills. Students reported gaining valuable experience in event planning, problem-solving, teamwork, and public interaction while applying agricultural knowledge in a real-world context. The project also reinforced valuable learning outcomes by providing students with opportunities to practice leadership and communication skills outside the classroom. Further, the event strengthened connections among the university, community members, and the broader agricultural industry, emphasizing the value of service-learning as a tool for student development and community engagement.

Future Plans and Advice to Others

Future offerings of the Agricultural Trivia Night will focus on increasing participation and expanding community outreach efforts. Organizers plan to broaden the range of agricultural topics represented in the trivia competition and encourage student participation across multiple agricultural disciplines. Additional partnerships with other agricultural registered student organizations, alumni, and industry sponsors may further enhance the event's educational and service-learning components.

Individuals interested in implementing a similar activity should focus on giving students ownership of the planning process while providing appropriate guidance and support. The event's success relied heavily on student leadership, collaboration, and creativity. By allowing students to take primary responsibility for event development and execution, educators can create meaningful experiential learning opportunities that simultaneously promote agricultural literacy, community engagement, and professional skill development.

Costs and Resources Needed

One of the primary strengths of the Agricultural Trivia Night model is its affordability. The event was intentionally designed to be low-cost and accessible, requiring only a classroom or meeting space, printed materials, promotional resources, and modest funding for prizes. Pizza and snacks were provided to participants, with the cost being covered by our Collegiate Farm Bureau. Community donations can further reduce expenses while increasing local involvement. Because of its relatively low financial investment and substantial educational benefits, the Agricultural Trivia Night serves as a practical, replicable service-learning model for collegiate agriculture programs seeking to enhance student learning through community engagement.

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