

SBAE Teacher Interview Assignment: An Immersive Recruitment Tool

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

With ongoing teacher shortages in School Based Agricultural Education (SBAE), emphasis has been echoed in recent literature on the priorities to recruit new teachers and retain current educators (Eck & Edwards, 2019). The agricultural education profession has been charged with considering unique avenues to increase teacher recruitment, including utilizing SBAE teachers as the frontline for educating future agriculturalists (Eck & Edwards, 2019; Haddad et al., 2020). Employing in-service SBAE teachers as a recruitment tool to foster career exploration for undergraduate students in an Introduction to Agricultural Education course at Oregon State University (OSU) aligns with current research to sustain SBAE through programmatic support and creative ways to retain and recruit. Highlighting SBAE teachers in Oregon, this ready-to-implement innovation showcases the profession for students (Haddad et al., 2020).

To engage undergraduate students at OSU in career exploration and promote agricultural education careers, students are assigned an interview project. The course exposes students to professions within agricultural literacy, SBAE, and non-formal agricultural education. The assigned interviews allow students to gain a holistic view of the career directly from the agriculture teacher or other relevant industry professional (de Janasz & Katz, 2021). The intention of career exploration within higher education courses can promote student academic success and positively contribute to students' retention by encouraging their engagement in career planning (Fouad et al., 2016).

How It Works

During a 10-week in person course, students were assigned two virtual interviews with an agricultural education professional. The first interview was encouraged to be conducted with a SBAE teacher and the second interview with a professional within non-formal agricultural education. Students were instructed to ask a set of 18 interview questions ranging from details about

their daily routine and tasks, to what inspired them to pursue this career. Due to the range of students' prior experience with or without SBAE, we utilized the state teachers' association directory or students' own networks and contacts to invite SBAE teachers to participate.

Instructions, provided through the online learning management system (i.e., Canvas), were reviewed during a class session two weeks prior to the interview assignment due date. Students were tasked with coordinating interviews with SBAE teachers, and additional guidance was available from the instructor to students who requested assistance connecting with a SBAE teacher. After the interview, students were prompted to reflect on their experience and make two connections to the course material. Each student submitted a two-page summary of the interview and reflection as the final assignment. The course instructor and two students thematic coded (Creswell & Poth, 2023) the interview summaries and then shared themes with the whole class at a later class meeting. In groups of five, students were prompted to reflect in class about the themes and highlighted quotes from the interview reflections after they were shared.

Results/Implications

Of the 16 interviews conducted, three participants were out-of-state, so we analyzed 13 SBAE teacher interviews for the state-specific project the student committee will work toward. Themes constructed from the interviews included job responsibilities and tasks, passion for agriculture, characteristics of an effective teacher, lifelong learning, and advice for students interested in the career of SBAE. Upon further analysis of the student reflections, the SBAE interview project encouraged career interest for several students enrolled, one student reflected, "Having this opportunity to hear personally all that my previous agricultural educator has done and what he hopes to do has given me so much excitement and peace about my future career." Another student wrote, "This interview didn't just confirm something I already believed in; it made me feel it on a deeper level: agriculture education isn't just a job, it's a calling." The goal of the assignment

was achieved as evidenced in this student summary statement, [the interview] “gave me a realistic view of the workload and responsibilities involved, while also showing the positive impact agricultural educators have on their students. It has encouraged me to think more deeply about the kind of educator I may become.”

Future Plans/Advise to Others

We have invited students who participated in the course and completed the assignment to serve on a committee to work with the instructor on further analysis of the reflections from the students. This committee will work through the preliminary thematic coding to pull forward a composite profile of an agriculture teacher in the Oregon Agriculture Teachers’ Association. We plan to use this in partnership with the association’s Marketing Committee. For those planning to implement a SBAE virtual interview assignment, we encourage you to use relationships within the agriculture teachers’ association in your state or area. Notifying the agriculture teachers of the assignment will benefit the students as well as aid in distributing the number of interviews per SBAE Teacher. We recommend utilizing general student interests (e.g., career goals, type and size of program, desired subject areas) to assist in pairing with programs and teachers they might align with. Additionally, it could be helpful to train students for taking field notes, recording interviews, and analyzing data.

Costs/Resources Needed

While there are no monetary costs associated with the assignment of virtual interviews, students used a variety of platforms to conduct their interviews, phone, email, Zoom, and Google Meets. There could be travel costs associated with in-person interviews but would also allow students to explore programs and communities. If available, students could use transcription software to aid in data collection and analysis.

References

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