Towne’s Harvest Practicum at Montana State University: The Added Value of Field-Based Learning on a Campus Farm

Alison H. Harmon PhD RD LN
harmon@montana.edu
406-994-6338

NACTA, Bozeman, MT
June 27, 2014

Co-Authors
- Bill Dyer, Professor, PSPP
- Bruce Maxwell, Professor, LRES
- Mac Burgess, Asst Professor, PSPP
- Kara Landolfi, Graduate Assistant, HHD

Pre/Post Survey 2009-2013
- Student Characteristics
- Career Goals
- Views of Field-based learning
- Mixing Academic Backgrounds
- Skills and Knowledge
- Professional Development
Student Characteristics
- 10% Non-traditional or returning students
- Caucasian
- 50% male/ 50% female
- Not typically raised on farm or ranch with some exceptions

Impact Career Goals
- About 50% want to be small scale producers prior to practicum; 30% after.
- Interested in sustainability.
- Want to support communities.
- Want to operate greenhouses.
- Generally idealist before and after.
- Learn how to make a living; business skills.
- Gain appreciation for work involved.

Views on Field-Based Learning
- High level of student interaction
- Cooperation, responsibility, accountability.
- Hands-on; tactile; enjoyable
- Part of maintaining classroom
- Real life situations; Real world; practical
- Managing a system
- Varied academic experiences
- Unstructured; scheduling difficult; weather unpredictable

Mixing Academic Backgrounds
- Like-minded; positive attitudes
- Variety of experiences
- Diversity and different ideas, viewpoints
- Collaborative learning
- Communication important
- Lack of common understanding
- More explanation needed
- Varied work ethic
Skills & Knowledge Development

PRE
- Most: Food safety, Garden Maintenance
- Least: IPM, CSA, Irrigation, Farm Planning

POST
- Most: Post-Harvest Handling, CSA, Food Safety, Garden Maintenance, Food Production, Marketing
- Least: IPM, Irrigation, Composting
- MOST IMPORTANT: Farm Planning; Running a Successful Operation

Professional Development

PRE (importance)
- Project planning, conflict resolution, project implementation, Ethical Responsibility, Systems Thinking, Problem Solving, Professionalism

POST (developed)
- Customer service, Initiative, Ethical Responsibility, Leadership, Team Work, Networking, Systems Thinking

Alison Harmon PhD RD LN
Associate Professor
Food & Nutrition; Sustainable Food Systems
MSU Health and Human Development
121 PE Complex
Bozeman MT 59717
406-994-6338
harmon@montana.edu