Use of Extracurricular Activities to Augment Agribusiness Education

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Introduction/Background

- Students in agribusiness and/or farm and ranch management options often lack direct laboratory component that is present in other agricultural disciplines.
- Agribusiness market simulators are a great tool to provide hands-on experience, but developers must balance realism and complexity. Student engagement in simulators varies due to their previous experiences with group assignments. Tangible benefits may not be readily apparent to the student aside from the course grade.
- Incorporation of extracurricular activities allows students to self-select for these opportunities that may result in a more rewarding experience for both faculty and students.
- Retention of knowledge is an ongoing challenge as students do not always see the connections between theory and reality.
- Extracurricular activities provide a dynamic environment that students enjoy due to the competitive nature of the activity and ability to travel to a regional or national conference.

Student-Centric

- Participation in extracurricular activities is focused on exposing the student to opportunities that can’t be provided within a traditional collegiate course.
- Recruitment occurs through student agribusiness organizations and existing courses. Word of mouth from students who have previously competed helps in the recruitment process.
- Use of academic enrichment funds limits the amount of fundraising required by students to participate. This allows the university to reinvest students’ own dollars back into the individual student.
- Faculty serve as mentors rather than instructors which allows students to develop their own creativity and problem-solving skills. This allows students to learn and work at their pace.
- Activities are selected by faculty with the goal of increasing knowledge retention and application of knowledge gained in traditional courses.
- Although not required to participate, students may earn elective credit in agribusiness courses.

Practical Learning

- Agribusiness students at the University of Tennessee-Martin are currently provided the opportunity to participate in a quiz bowl and marketing pitch competitions. Participation in one competition doesn’t prevent participation in other competitions during the academic year.
- Experiential and problem-based learning techniques are used which incorporate real-world problem complexity that may be absent in existing agribusiness simulators.
- Use of marketing pitch competitions more easily facilitates development of students’ soft skills. Students can also self-select to work in groups of their choosing reflecting their strengths of the content areas judged in the competition.
- Participants in the quiz bowl are exposed to questions written by faculty members from other universities which aids in problem identification. Individuals are also paired with students from other universities which further improves soft-skills.
- Connections to the real-world are stressed and reinforced as students are exposed to the reality of market research, product development, and financial projections.

Conclusion

- Students earn priceless learning and networking opportunities through extracurricular activities in the University of Tennessee-Martin Agribusiness Program which provides valuable feedback to faculty for institutional assessment purposes.
- Student engagement is increased resulting from little monetary cost for students to participate in these extracurricular activities. Curriculum is reinforced due to knowledge application and retention by students.

UT Martin Agribusiness = Student-centric + Industry Exposure + Practical Learning