

CLASSROOM INNOVATION REPORT

Agricultural Marketing Block Program

Thomas I. Gunn

A successful innovation in classroom instruction, the Agricultural Marketing Block Program by the Department of Agricultural Economics and Education at California State University, has been in operation for several years. Designed to eliminate the sometimes artificial lines of demarcation between courses, the subject matter of three related courses is combined in a nine-credit unit block which meets three hours per day, three days per week. The block is planned as a bridge between classroom instruction and the world of agricultural business and marketing.

The block program departs to a great extent from the usual lecture format course. Some lectures are presented by the instructor, but extensive use is made of closed-circuit television, field trips, future trading games, roundtable discussions, student presentations, class demonstrations, educational films, and the participation of resource people from both inside and outside the university. Since much of the subject matter is presented by individual students or five-person teams, planning, organization, and coordination are more critical than when the instructor has complete control of subject matter delivered in the lecture format.

Need for New Teaching Program

Need for the Agricultural Marketing Block Program was suggested by discussions with agricultural businessmen in the service area of the university. They reported that agricultural business graduates had high levels of technical expertise but were often weak in areas extremely essential to work success. They said students needed to:

1. Develop the ability to stand before a group, whether in or outside the business, to make an oral presentation using good communication skills.
2. Develop the skill to write clear, concise reports.
3. Work more effectively with others in a team situation within a company in seeking solutions to various problems.
4. Better understand the importance of public relations in agriculture and how to deal with the media and general public.
5. More successfully apply classroom and textbook materials to the practical aspects of agriculture.

These suggestions lead our department to consider a block program which had been used successfully in the School of Business at the University. We believed the program, with certain modifications, would help

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students overcome the limitations in their formal academic training as reported by agricultural business contacts.

Objectives of Block Program

The block unites the purposes of the following three courses from our department: Agricultural Business Research, Commodity Marketing, Agricultural Sales and Communications.

The objects of these courses are combined to develop not only a student's technical skills, but those communicative skills which are related to agricultural marketing. These objectives are:

1. Development of both oral and written communications skills as they relate to agricultural marketing and business.
2. Determine problem areas in agricultural business and marketing and develop possible solutions to these problems through research.
3. Become acquainted with people in agricultural industry and establish a line of communication with these individuals in order to understand better how businesses operate. These acquaintances may also serve as connections for career planning or job placement.
4. Better understand the complexities of the pricing system for agricultural products. Become familiar with the operation of both cash and future markets.
5. Ascertain the differences involved in marketing various agricultural products and develop various insights into the improvement of the movement of commodities from the farm to consumers.
6. Sense the importance of the "human factor" in the operation of about any business and develop skills in working with other people.
7. Explore agricultural marketing and selling as careers and learn various techniques and principles for succeeding in these areas.

Characteristics of Block Program

Prerequisites

The program is limited to 25 upper division students. In the past, most of the applicants have been majors in agricultural business. A few students from other areas of the University have participated who have met the application requirements. All those applying must have completed the following prerequisites:

Economics 1A (Macro)
 Economics 1A (Micro)
 Ag Ec 41 (Agricultural Statistics)
 Ag Ec 161 (Marketing Agricultural Products)
 I S 50 Computer Concepts

Course Content

The subject matter included in the block is covered in various student projects during the semester. These generally are as follows:

1. Major research project (Partners or Team) (Oral and Written)
2. Minor projects (Team)
 - (a) Review of basic agricultural marketing principles (Oral)
 - (b) TV panel discussion on current topic in agricultural marketing (Oral)
 - (c) In-depth study of the marketing of an individual agricultural commodity (Oral)
3. Futures trading game (Individual or Partner)
 - (a) Mini paper on commodity futures (Written)
4. Assignment projects (Individual or Partner)
 - (a) Public relations in agriculture (Oral)
 - (b) Farm news and publications (Oral and/or Written)
 - (c) Selling agricultural products (Oral)
 - (d) Advertising and promoting agricultural products (Oral and Written)

Preparation for the above student projects requires some lectures by the instructor or by guest speakers. In addition, the teams meet periodically with the instructor outside of regular class hours. At these meetings they are provided materials and given directions for study to aid them in their presentation to the entire class.

Class Schedule

The program meets from 9:10 a.m. to 12:00 noon on MWF. Each meeting is generally divided into two parts of approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes each. A 15-20 minute break permits students to visit with the instructor, check prices in the Market News Service room or just relax. Also, an attempt is made to vary the program each day so that these two sessions are different. Variety keeps the students' attention and interest for the three hours.

Facilities Required

A classroom with movable tables permits flexibility for the varied activities that occur, such as round table discussions, demonstrations, and other activities which depart from the standard lecture type format. Good chalkboard space and adequate provisions for the use of audio-visual equipment are a necessity.

Participation of Resource People

Certain portions of the block utilize resource people from both inside and outside the University. Because the University is located in the agricultural busi-

ness center of California, many individuals are available to contribute materials or expertise to the program. During the Spring Semester 1982, twenty resource persons were utilized. Their backgrounds are as follows:

	Number Used
Agribusiness Persons	14
Public Officials (Congressman)	1
Professors (CSUF)	3
Other Campus Resource Persons	2
	20

In addition, agricultural marketing firms were visited on 3 field trips.

Each semester, three or four successful alumni of the block program are invited back to discuss their present jobs and opinions about how students might best prepare for careers in agricultural business.

Student Performance and Grading

No tests, quizzes, or written examinations are given in the block. Grading is based on oral and written projects or assignments which are presented individually as well as in teams. Regular attendance is required of the students. Peer evaluation is used extensively in various segments of the course, particularly in the oral presentation of materials for which both students and the instructor make evaluations. A final evaluation of the major research project is conducted by the instructor in an off-campus informal setting — most generally in his home.

Three grades are given for the nine units earned. These are determined from the block projects by subject matter and are assigned to the three separate courses comprising the program. When a team has done a major research project, they are asked to rate each other in terms of their total contribution to the project. One grade is given to the team, but there have been instances where one or two individuals were given a lower grade based on team evaluations and individual circumstances. In general, the grading procedures, although somewhat subjective, have proven satisfactory. The block program tends to bring out the best efforts of students. Peer pressure and deep involvement in the subject material of the program may account for above average grades.

Potential For Use In Other Areas

The block program can be adapted to other subject matter areas. The School of Business at California State University, Fresno, offers a 12-unit Basic Management Block Program each semester which includes the following courses: Administration and Organization Behaviour, Operations Management, and Principles of Marketing.

They have also conducted a real estate block which included real estate principles and practices, appraisal, finance, and investments. More recently, an advance management block program has been offered.

There are opportunities for other block programs in various areas of agricultural economics. In the Fall of 1982, CSUF conducted a block which included farm management, agricultural finance, and farm appraisal. Student evaluations of this block were mixed. Suggestions made by students showed that more time should have been given to organizing and planning the program to ensure its success. There was also evidence that a six-unit block composed of just agricultural finance and farm appraisal might be better, especially if the students enrolled had taken a basic farm management class prior to enrolling in the block.

Evaluation

The following student evaluations and comments about the program are indicative of comments from students who participated in the block program over the past few years:

1. "A pleasant variation from classes with tests, quizzes, etc. Gives you practical experience you will eventually need."

2. "I would recommend this course to others. It is the best course I've ever been in at CSUF. The strong point is that it gets the students involved."

3. "This course should be a requirement because it succeeds in developing students' communication and learning skills through peer evaluation and student control of his effort."

4. "Good to improve your relations with people."

5. "Course structure excellent. Handouts excellent."

6. "Guest speakers and supplemental materials were excellent."

A block program has certain advantages and disadvantages. There are those that might argue that it takes less time and effort on the part of the instructor. Experiences with the program indicate that this is not true. The instructor's time is largely devoted to organizing, facilitating, prompting, planning, and serving as a resource, rather than lecturing. The material presented by students, occasionally may be shallow. However, the block generally encourages a deeper involvement in the subject matter on the part of students as they begin to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The block program is restricted to a small number of students, disadvantage in institutions where large classes are often required. Another weakness of the program may be the possibility of the "free ride" by some students in team projects. This has not been experienced to any great extent in the program: peer pressure seems to control it.

The motivation generated in the program in terms of student involvement, improved student-instructor relationships, and the spillover effects of stimulating innovation in teaching within the department are sufficient to continue or even expand the block program.

NEW CONCEPT

In Technical Inservice For Agricultural Teachers

R. Kirby Barrick

For a number of years, the Department of Agricultural Education at The Ohio State University has provided inservice education courses and workshops for teachers of vocational agriculture. Topics for the inservice programs have included both professional education and technical agriculture. The Department of Agricultural Education offers courses and workshops on professional education topics. Other departments within the College of Agriculture have cooperated by teaching courses during June of each year specifically for high school teachers and by serving as resource persons for non-credit sessions.

Until recent years, non-credit workshops for vocational agriculture instructors were provided at various locations in the state. In 1980, a new concept in technical inservice education was initiated. With the Department of Agricultural Education serving as the coordinating body and with the cooperation of the Ohio Department of Education Agriculture Education Service, the first Technical Update for Teachers of Vocational Agriculture was planned by the College of Agriculture.

Tech Update

"Tech Update," the title given the workshop series, was scheduled for June 16-17, 1980, on the campus of the College of Agriculture at Ohio State in Columbus. The Dean of the College of Agriculture encouraged full cooperation of all the departments within the college in preparing for and conducting the first of what has become an annual event. Department chairpersons selected representatives from their respective departments to serve as the initial planning committee; teachers of vocational agriculture were consultants and met with the various departments in selecting topics for the workshops.

The 1980 Tech Update consisted of 66 workshops, each lasting two or four hours. Teachers had the option of enrolling for a maximum of 6 workshops with topics that were appropriate for specific teaching assignments, such as production agriculture or horticulture or natural resources. Examples of workshops included "Supply-Side Economics and the Reagan Administration," "Alternative Fuels for Use on the Farm," "Beef Cattle Heat Synchronization," "Remote Sensing," and "Animal Welfare Update."

A registration fee of \$10 was collected as teachers pre-enrolled to cover the cost of consummable

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