

Agricultural Leadership: Oklahoma State University's New Major for Undergraduate Students



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Abstract

On June 30, 2005, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education approved the creation of what is believed to be the first officially recognized undergraduate major in Agricultural Leadership in the nation. The major is housed in Oklahoma State University's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and 4-H Youth Development. The Agricultural Leadership major provides an opportunity for students to prepare as generalists in the agricultural sciences while developing a strong understanding of leadership. Five core values guide the curriculum: commitment to agriculture, authentic leadership, open minds, critical thinking, and professionalism. Agricultural leadership faculty infuse these values throughout the coursework aligning course objectives, learning opportunities, and student experiences with the five core values. Program outcomes include approximately eighty students majoring in Agricultural Leadership, a growing number of students pursuing minors in Leadership Education, support from College administration, development of a student organization, and national recognition.

Introduction

In 2003, according to Fields, et al., ninety percent of colleges of agriculture were in the process of adding, deleting, or restructuring departments and/or majors. One of the newly established departments identified by Fields, et al. (2003) was agricultural leadership, education, and communication. Interest in leadership from an academic perspective continues to increase in colleges and universities across the nation, with classes being taught in a variety of disciplines (Vecchio, 1997). A study conducted in 2000 examined leadership offerings in departments of agricultural education and found that sixty-eight of the responding departments offered leadership coursework and cited eighty-two leadership courses. Additionally, all sixty-eight administrators reported students' attitudes toward leadership coursework as positive or extremely positive (Fritz, et al., 2003). Barrick (1992) conceptualized future departments of agricultural education as having four components or sub disciplines: Teaching and

Learning, Human Resource Development and Management, Communications, and Research Methods and Data Analysis. Barrick acknowledges that although no degree programs existed in 1992 in the area of Human Resource Development (Agricultural Leadership), the area is a fit for agricultural education because it includes coursework that has been traditionally aligned with agricultural education departments; specifically student development, volunteerism, leadership development, and youth program management.

In 2004, the American Association of Agricultural Education determined that there were eight departments of agricultural education offering an area of study focused in leadership. Each offered not only leadership coursework, but options, minors, and/or majors in leadership. Although courses and/or programs in leadership existed, many did not contain the word leadership in their title (Fritz et al., 2003). Within agricultural education a growing trend has emerged in which programs are seeking recognition for a major in Agricultural Leadership from curriculum committees and university administration. However, recognition as a major, specifically in Agricultural Leadership, has eluded many of these programs. Programs seeking recognition of coursework and programs of study in leadership found a strong political atmosphere guarding against the use of the term leadership in courses and names of majors and minors specifically within the context of agriculture. Much of the politics surrounding this issue came from various colleges across campus, including business, education, and agriculture, wanting to own the term leadership (Pennington, 2005).

Program History

Agricultural Leadership at Oklahoma State University is an undergraduate major in the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and 4-H Youth Development at Oklahoma State University. Originally created as a Professional Service option for Agricultural Education majors, the program was renamed the Leadership and Service option during 2000, again for Agricultural Education majors, and officially recognized as a major in Agricultural Leadership by the

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Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education on June 30, 2005 (Table 1).

within the Department to serve students throughout the college interested in studying leadership while pursuing other majors. The minor includes twenty hours of coursework. Six of the minor's required courses (fourteen hours) are offered through the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and 4-H Youth Development.

By 2004, students enrolled in the Leadership and Service option expressed strong interest in a program name that better represented their academic preparation. Agricultural Education's history of preparing students as agricultural teachers was very strong and students who choose the option in Leadership and Service believed they had difficulty marketing their degree in Agricultural Education without a teaching credential. The decision to modify the program by deleting the Leadership and Service option and creating a stand alone major in Agricultural Leadership proved

to be a positive step. The decision has created higher visibility for the program and we believe it provides a stronger opportunity for students to market their degree. May 2006 will mark the graduation of the first class of undergraduate students majoring in Agricultural Leadership.

The Professional Service option originally served students interested in pursuing careers in Cooperative Extension and offered a broad-based exploration of agriculture. In the mid-90s interest in the option began increasing, as did enrollment in leadership coursework. In 2000 the Professional Service option was renamed the Leadership and Service option. The Leadership and Service option continued to serve students preparing for careers in Cooperative Extension, but also began serving a broader population of students interested in a variety of agricultural career paths including politics, government agencies, non-profits, corporate agriculture, higher education, and small business.

Student enrollment in leadership courses has increased three-fold since the development of the Leadership and Service option generating close to 800 student credit hours annually in leadership coursework (Figure 1). As a result of student demand for leadership coursework, additional FTE was dedicated to the leadership program and additional leadership courses were developed. In 2002, a minor in leadership education was developed

Table 1. History of Agricultural Leadership at Oklahoma State University

TIMELINE	MILESTONE
1959	❖ The first course including leadership topics, <i>Organizing Ag Programs for Rural Groups</i> , is offered; the course focus is on adult education but includes group dynamics
1985	❖ The <i>Professional Service option</i> is created within the Agricultural Education major
1989	❖ The first faculty member with a partial appointment in agricultural leadership is hired
1992	❖ <i>Organizing Ag Programs for Rural Groups</i> is renamed <i>Leadership Skills for Agricultural Groups</i> , the course content is updated and expanded to a three credit hour course
2000	❖ The <i>Professional Service option</i> is renamed the <i>Leadership and Service option</i>
2001	❖ A second leadership course is added to the curriculum, <i>Personal Leadership Development</i> ❖ The first faculty member with 1.0 FTE devoted to agricultural leadership is hired
2002	❖ Four new leadership courses are approved by the College's curriculum committee, as well as updates to course names of existing leadership coursework ❖ A minor in leadership education offered through the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and 4-H Youth Development is approved by Oklahoma State University
2004	❖ Two new faculty positions with partial FTE devoted to agricultural leadership are filled
2005	❖ Agricultural Leadership is approved as an undergraduate major at Oklahoma State University ❖ Agricultural Leadership at Oklahoma State University is recognized at the national Association of Leadership Education meeting as the 2005 Outstanding Leadership Program ❖ USDA awards Higher Education Challenge Grant to Oklahoma State University (with University of Georgia & University of Nebraska) to develop a professional development institute for faculty in colleges of agriculture teaching leadership
2005	❖ Leadership League, a student organization serving students pursuing a major in Agricultural Leadership or a minor in Leadership Education, is officially recognized as a student organization at Oklahoma State University
2006	❖ The first undergraduate students majoring in Agricultural Leadership at Oklahoma State University graduate

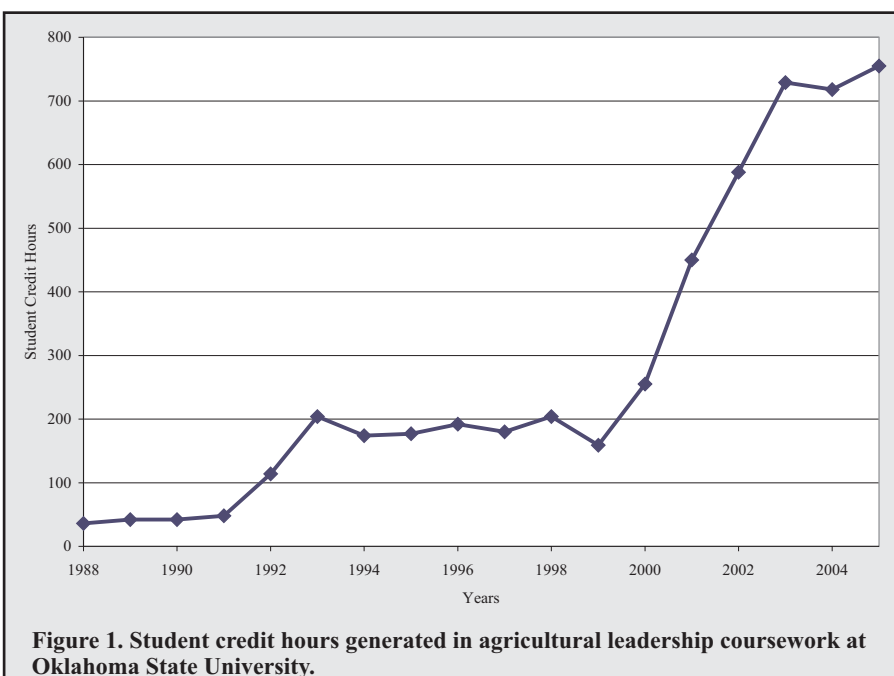


Figure 1. Student credit hours generated in agricultural leadership coursework at Oklahoma State University.

Program Curriculum

The Agricultural Leadership curriculum at Oklahoma State University is guided by five core values: commitment to agriculture, authentic leadership, open minds, critical thinking, and professionalism. The five core values were developed by the agricultural leadership faculty over a two year period. Agricultural leadership faculty infuse these values throughout the coursework aligning course objectives, learning opportunities, and student experiences with the five core values. Within the program students study leadership from an academic perspective as well as its application to the agricultural context.

Three leadership courses serve as the foundation for both the Agricultural Leadership major and the Leadership Education minor:

1. Introduction to Leadership in Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources;
2. Personal Leadership Development; and
3. Leadership: Theory and Practice.

The focus of each of the courses is behavior-based leadership, values-based leadership (Pennington & Brungardt, 2004), and theory-based leadership,

respectively. Agricultural Leadership majors and Leadership Education minors take advanced leadership courses in contemporary issues (Weeks & Pennington, 2003) and leadership program facilitation as well as a leadership education seminar in which topics rotate to represent the newest scholarship in the discipline (Table 2).

Unique to the major in Agricultural Leadership is a course in change and diffusion of innovation, and a series of courses designed specifically to provide professional development and to integrate leadership concepts with the agricultural context:

- Introduction to Agricultural Leadership;
- Professional Development in Agricultural Leadership; and
- Agricultural Leadership Internship.

Students are introduced to the major as well as the five core values underlying the curriculum in our introduction class. The professional development course (Pennington, 2004) focuses on teams, professionalism, and oral communication, as well as career opportunities for students majoring in Agricultural Leadership. Finally, the internship course serves as an experiential learning opportunity; an opportunity

for students to practice what they have learned in the classroom. The course requires students to complete a full-time, 10-week internship, guided by a mentor in the field and a faculty advisor.

In addition to leadership coursework, the curriculum provides a broad introduction to the agricultural sciences and natural resources (30 hours of coursework) and requires students to take an additional nine hours of advanced agricultural coursework: international agriculture, rural economic development, and communicating agriculture to the public. To round out the program, students select, with their advisor, eighteen additional hours tailored to their individual needs with many of the students pursuing minors such as animal science, soil science, or agricultural economics.

Program Outcomes

Approximately 80 students are currently enrolled in the Agricultural Leadership major and a growing number of students are seeking a minor in Leadership Education. Organizations hosting agricultural leadership interns have included: Archer Daniel Midlands, Tyson Foods, Murphy

Table 2. Major Requirements for Bachelor of Science Degree in Agricultural Leadership 120 Credit Hours

FOUNDATION COURSES IN AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP – 7 CREDIT HOURS	
Course Title	Course Topics
Introduction to Leadership in Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources*	Behavior-based leadership: credibility, best practices in leadership
Personal Leadership Development in Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources*	Values-based leadership: authentic leadership, personal vision, leadership vision, values, balance, leadership views, self-awareness, changing nature of organizations
Leadership: Theory and Practice*	Theory-based leadership: theoretical foundations, historical and contemporary leadership models, leadership traits, style, contingency models, transformational leadership
ADVANCED COURSES IN AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP – 17 CREDIT HOURS	
Course Title	Course Topics
Introduction to Agricultural Leadership	Core Values: commitment to agriculture, authentic leadership, critical thinking, open minds, professionalism
Contemporary Issues in Leadership*	Ethical leadership, women in leadership, charismatic leadership, emotional intelligence, hubris
Change and Diffusion of Innovation	Change leadership, innovation, adopter categories, agricultural agencies and diffusion of innovation
Seminar in Leadership Education*	Topics rotate to represent new scholarship in the discipline
Leadership Education and Facilitation*	Experiential learning, leadership education vs. leadership training, working with diverse audiences
Professional Development in Agricultural Leadership	Team leadership, group member roles and group development, oral and written communication, professionalism
Internship in Agricultural Leadership	Application of agricultural leadership curriculum
REQUIRED AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES COURSEWORK – 57 CREDIT HOURS	
Introductory Coursework (30 hours)	Orientation, Soil Science, Food Science, Entomology, Animal Science, Natural Resources, Computer Applications, Mechanized Agriculture, Agricultural Economics, Plant Science or Horticulture
Advanced Coursework (9 hours)	Written Communications in Agriculture, Rural Economic Development, International Agriculture
Electives (18 hours)	Courses to be selected from Agriculture or Leadership related coursework
GENERAL EDUCATION – 39 CREDIT HOURS	

Family Farms, John Deere, Farm Credit, USDA Office of Risk Management, Agricultural Research Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Oklahoma Water Resource Board, and Cooperative Extension Service. Locations of internships have included: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Maine, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington DC, and Chiang Mai, Thailand.

The college administration has demonstrated strong support for leadership offerings in the college which is demonstrated by the formal approval of both the minor in Leadership Education and the major in Agricultural Leadership, as well as dedicating additional FTE in the area of agricultural leadership. College administration has also demonstrated strong support for the introductory leadership course and implemented the course as a requirement for all freshmen participating in the agricultural learning/living community. Five sections of the introductory course are offered each spring semester to accommodate the college requirement. Approximately 100 students from across the college enroll in the course each spring semester.

Interest in leadership is also growing outside the classroom. Recently undergraduate students formed a new student organization Leadership League. Leadership League is a student organization dedicated to the academic study of leadership and its application within agricultural sciences and natural resources. The organization has committed to selecting a leadership issue each year to guide their organization's activities. Leadership League is currently focusing on global hunger. The group has participated in Heifer International's Global Village program and organized a service project that attracted participation from fourteen of the College's student organizations collecting more than 1000 pounds of food donations in one evening.

Agricultural Leadership at Oklahoma State University was nationally recognized by the Association of Leadership Educators and the United States Department of Agriculture. At the 2005 national meeting of the Association of Leadership Educators, Agricultural Leadership at Oklahoma State University was named the 2005 Outstanding Leadership Program. The award recognizes leadership programs that impact individuals, organizations, and/ or communities, have a sustained program excellence, and have demonstrated durability of the program. Also, in cooperation with the University of Nebraska and the University of Georgia, Oklahoma State University was awarded a USDA Higher Education Challenge Grant to provide professional development training for faculty in colleges of agriculture teaching leadership courses. The project, Leadership Education Institute for Faculty in Colleges of Agriculture, has the following objectives:

- To provide professional development to

faculty in colleges of agriculture responsible for delivering undergraduate leadership curriculum;

- To support faculty in aligning leadership instruction and curriculum with current research and best practices in leadership education;

- To develop a sustainable network of faculty in colleges of agriculture teaching leadership coursework; and,

- To disseminate contemporary models for leadership instruction and curriculum to colleges of agriculture.

During the spring 2006 semester, project collaborators selected a cohort of 10 faculty, representing 10 different universities, to participate in the two-year professional development program.

Summary

The new major at Oklahoma State University in Agricultural Leadership provides students the opportunity to study agriculture across various disciplines while learning about leadership. Integration of the programs core values throughout the curriculum provides opportunities for students to develop critical thinking skills, as well as a global perspective and an appreciation for diversity. Fields et al. (2003) identified an interdisciplinary approach to the study of agriculture, as well as fostering global perspectives and an appreciation for diversity as key issues facing education in colleges of agriculture. Additionally, both critical thinking and experiential learning were identified as important competencies and learning opportunities for undergraduate agriculture students. Furthermore, students in colleges of agriculture across the country are our future leaders. They will become both decision-makers and politicians; they will impact our economy; and they will impact our environment (Watson, 2005). The purpose of Agricultural Leadership at Oklahoma State University is to better prepare our students for their future role in society.

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