

# An Analysis of Leadership Offerings in Collegiate Agricultural Education Departments



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## Abstract

A niche in collegiate leadership education exists within departments of agricultural education. From their connection to agricultural youth organizations, these departments have a tradition in training teachers and club advisors in leadership education. This study examined the current state of collegiate leadership education in departments of agricultural education with the purpose of connecting with other leadership education scholars. The results indicated leadership courses were taught by departments of agricultural education for the primary use of their own students. However, a few of the departments reported that non-college of agriculture students enrolled in their agricultural leadership courses. Faculties who taught agriculture leadership courses were schooled in traditional agricultural education that consisted of educational methods and technology. Their leadership education skills were gained through specialized study. The implications of this study suggested several collaborative efforts including instructional cross-training and research opportunities.

## Introduction

A best practice in leadership education is to provide students with a place to exercise their leadership (Townsend, 2000). Leadership educators are constantly searching for natural leadership laboratories where students can rehearse their instinctive leadership tendencies and test the

leadership processes learned in class. One group of leadership educators has been practicing in a real-time/real-place leadership laboratory for over a century. Agricultural educators have long recognized the need for student leadership preparation and they have taught leadership through two agricultural student leadership organizations the FFA and 4-H. This study presents an analysis of the current leadership education programs and courses found within collegiate departments of agricultural education.

Strong ties to leadership education are philosophically grounded in two nationally recognized youth organizations the FFA and 4-H. The FFA is devoted to “making a positive difference in the lives of young people by developing their potential for premier leadership...” (National FFA, 1996). Similarly, 4-H “enables youth to...learn new life skills, build self-confidence, learn responsibility, and set and achieve goals. 4-H builds the leaders for tomorrow” (National 4-H, 2000).

Because collegiate agricultural education departments prepare graduates to be teachers/advisors for these youth organizations, leadership education has a rich history in these departments throughout the United States. Collegiate agricultural educators began teaching leadership in the early 1900s to prepare advisors of the youth leadership organizations. FFA Advisors were trained for early chapters formed in the 1920s as clubs for farm youth enrolled in high school agriculture courses (Mississippi State, 2000). And the original 4-

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H clubs had leadership advisors dating to the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862 (National 4-H, 2000).

As agricultural leadership education programs have developed through history, so has the research surrounding such programs. For example, Boyd (1991) sought to determine if 4-H members developed leadership life skills and to ascertain if the skill development was related to their participation in 4-H. He found that 4-H members did perceive themselves as having developed a higher level of leadership life skills than non-4-H youth (Boyd, 1991). Another example of agricultural leadership education research involved high school FFA members. The researcher discovered that the more active students were in the FFA, the higher their perceptions were in the areas of making decisions, communication, understanding self, and working with groups (Dodson, 1995).

Drawing upon the historical foundation in leadership education and consequential development of leadership education research, the questions for this study were posed. What is the breadth of leadership education in collegiate agricultural education departments? What is the impact agricultural education departments make on the scholarship of leadership education?

Brown and Fritz's (1994) national study established the baseline of leadership and human resource management/development (HRM/D) offerings in collegiate departments of agricultural education. Since that study, the call for leadership and human resource management/development inclusion in informal and formal education contexts has continued to grow (Bolt, 1996; Bosshamer, 1996; Hesselbein, et al., 1999; Lewis, 1995; Swatez, 1995; Watt, 1995; Wren, 1994). With the continued impact of leadership education, this research was continued in order to disseminate updated information and build collaborative relationships among leadership education scholars.

## Methods

The intent of the study was to provide a description of leadership courses offered in departments of agricultural education. During spring 2000, email contacts were made to heads and chairs of departments listed in the 1999-2000 American Association of Agricultural Educators (AAAE) Directory (Dyer, 1999). Text introducing the purpose of the study, directions for participation and assurance of confidentiality accompanied a slightly modified version of the Brown and Fritz (1994) 22-item instrument. Respondents were

encouraged to respond electronically (or to fax the completed instrument) within two weeks. Two non-respondent e-mail follow-ups were conducted. This procedure yielded 41 respondents or 45% of the 92 departments contacted. Follow-up analysis concluded that the respondents were representative of the collegiate agricultural education community throughout the United States. Data were coded and entered into Microsoft Excel. Frequencies, means and standard deviations were calculated for the 22 items.

## Results

The study revealed that the subject of leadership is taught within departments of agricultural education. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents indicated that their department currently offered leadership and HRM/D courses. Those departments not offering leadership and HRM/D courses cited lack of resources as the primary reason for not offering courses. Other reasons for not offering leadership courses were lack of student demand, institutional impediments/resistance and discontinuation of leadership courses. Two of the departments not currently offering leadership and HRM/D courses planned to offer the courses in the future, while eight others had no plans of offering the courses in the future. For those departments offering leadership and HRM/D courses, more than half (15) required the courses of their department majors. Agricultural education departments have been offering leadership courses for an average of 17 years (range 2-50 years, mode 15 years). Course offerings were relatively evenly split between undergraduate and graduate levels. Respondents reported offering 38 undergraduate, 34 graduate and 10 dual enrollment (undergraduate/graduate) courses.

Eighty-two different courses are taught throughout the United States within departments of agricultural education. These leadership courses have differing titles (Table 1). "Leadership" appeared in the title of 61% (50) of the 82 courses of which 56% (28) were found in the titles of undergraduate courses, 34% (17) were found in the titles of graduate

Table 1. Analysis of Leadership Course Titles.

Level of Course	Leadership in Title	Agriculture in Title	Development in Title	Total <sup>2</sup>
Undergraduate	28 courses	16 courses	11 courses	38 courses
Graduate	17 courses	8 courses	6 courses	34 courses
Undergrad/Grad.	5 courses	0 course	1 course	10 courses
Total <sup>2</sup>	50 courses	24 courses	18 courses	82 courses

<sup>2</sup>Multiple responses across categories.

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courses, and 10% (5) were found in the titles of dual listed courses. "Agriculture" appeared in the title of 29% (24) of the courses, of which 67% (16) were found in the titles of undergraduate courses and 33% (8) were found in the titles of graduate courses. "Agriculture" was not found in titles of dual listed courses. "Development" appeared in the title of 22% (18) of the courses of which 61% (11) were found in the titles of undergraduate courses, 33% (6) were found in the titles of graduate courses, and 6% (1) was found in the title of dual listed courses.

Twenty-five percent of the respondents (7) said students from outside of the college of agriculture take undergraduate-level leadership and HRM/D courses—43% responded occasionally (12), while 32% responded almost never (9) (See Table 2). However, only 7% (2) respondents said students from outside of the college of agriculture take graduate-level leadership and HRM/D courses, 36% said occasionally and 60% said almost never.

**Table 2. Frequency of Non-agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources Students Enrolling in Leadership Courses.**

Level of Course	Always	Occasionally	Never	Total
Undergraduate	7 (25%)	12 (43%)	9 (32%)	28 (50%)
Graduate	2 (7%)	10 (36%)	16 (57%)	28 (50%)
Total	9 (16%)	22 (39%)	25 (45%)	56 (100%)

While on average departments generated an undergraduate enrollment of 164 students annually, the distribution of enrollment offers greater insight. Nine departments had an annual enrollment of 50 students or less. Twelve departments had an annual enrollment between 50 and 100 students, and three departments had an annual undergraduate enrollment of greater than 100 reporting 270, 962, and 1,556 students. Three respondents did not provide enrollment figures. Because of small cell sizes, it was not possible to determine if a relationship existed between enrollments and department size.

Similarly, on average, departments generated a graduate enrollment of 40 students annually, but the distribution is more relevant than the average. Twelve departments had an annual graduate enrollment of 50 students or less. Two departments had an annual graduate enrollment between 50 and 100, (80 and 90 students). One department reported annual graduate enrollment greater than 100 students at 115.

When asked what percentage of the department's student credit hour production was related to leadership and HRM/D courses, 20 departments responded that less than 24% of their undergraduate credit hours were related to leadership and HRM/D courses; one department responded 30%, and three

departments responded their undergraduate credit hour production related to leadership and HRM/D courses was 75% or greater. Eleven departments responded that their graduate student credit hour production related to leadership and HRM/D course was less than 24%; three departments production level fell between 25% and 74%; and one department responded that their graduate credit production was greater than 75%.

All administrators (100%) characterized students' attitudes toward these courses as extremely positive or positive. When comparing student attitudes toward leadership and HRM/D courses to all other courses offered at their institutions, 75% of the administrators responded students were much more positive or somewhat more positive about these courses.

Faculty currently teaching undergraduate leadership and HRM/D courses are predominately in the professorial ranks (40% assistant professors, 36% associate professors, and 2% full professors), with one department responding it employed an adjunct (part-time) faculty. Faculty currently teaching graduate leadership and HRM/D courses are in the professorial ranks as well (27% assistant professors, 41% associate professors, 32% full professors).

Respondents described the backgrounds of faculty who teach leadership and HRM/D courses as primarily agricultural education with special training or skills in the area of leadership and HRM/D (58%), while others responded that faculty had traditional agricultural education backgrounds (23%) or backgrounds in a discipline other than agricultural education with training in leadership and HRM/D (19%). Administrators characterized the appointments of faculty who teach leadership and HRM/D courses as a redirection of an existing appointment (46%) or as having been hired to teach these courses (64%).

Administrators reported faculty teaching leadership and HRM/D courses relied on a variety of teaching strategies: lecture (26), discussion (28), case study (24), simulation (25), and service learning (16). Six departments were teaching their leadership and HRM/D courses via distance, with undergraduate and graduate course offerings being fairly evenly split (6 and 5, respectively); only one respondent reported offering an other-than-for-credit module or workshop via distance. Distance delivery was reported to involve use of the web (4), video (3), satellite (2), telephone (1), and a combination of modes (1).

Nineteen respondents offer leadership and HRM/D training in settings other-than-for-credit courses, with workshops (19) being the dominate

setting, followed by individual consulting projects (11) and Cooperative Extension activities (8).

When asked to describe the approval process for their leadership and HRM/D courses at the college level, most replied the process was neither easy nor difficult (MN=3.21, SD=.07, 1-5 Likert scale, 1=extremely difficult, 3=neither easy nor difficult, 5=extremely easy). At the university level, eight of the 28 departments offering leadership and HRM/D courses reported approval was difficult or extremely difficult (MN=2.75, SD=.75). Overwhelmingly, respondents identified their dean (22) as supportive of the department offering these courses, while other support came from alumni (17), individual influential faculty outside the department (14), other departments in their college (13), advisory council members (12), members of the community (7), other colleges (5) and industry (3). Administrators described the attitudes of faculty outside of their departments toward leadership and HRM/D courses as predominately supportive (54%) and described the attitude of faculty in their departments as supportive or extremely supportive (96%).

Fourteen of the respondents are not considering adding a faculty member in the area of leadership and HRM/D, while seven plan to hire faculty to teach these courses in the next several years, four plan to hire a faculty member with a majority appointment in another area of their program with less than half of his/her teaching responsibilities in this area, and two plan to redirect appointments of faculty members to teach leadership and HRM/D courses.

## Discussion

As indicated by the results of this study, leadership education is a recognized component of collegiate agricultural education departments. The findings indicate several tendencies that may impact collegiate departments, private consultants, and public agencies. Considerations for the future are:

1. Students are very positive with their experiences in agricultural leadership courses. However, agricultural leadership courses are not offered by all agricultural education departments and, therefore, leadership courses may not be available to other agriculture science and natural resources students. Therefore, in institutions where students study the agriculture science and natural resources, opportunities for new leadership education classes and collaborative efforts among leadership educators may exist.

2. It may be difficult for leadership scholars to locate agricultural leadership educators by reviewing titles of courses reported in this study. Even though leadership courses are taught, 1/3 of the agricultural leadership courses do not contain the word leader-

ship. Apparently, the word "development" might have a leadership connotation for courses, since "development" appeared in 1/5 of the course titles.

3. The results of the study indicated that non-agriculture sciences and natural resources undergraduate students do enroll in agricultural leadership courses, but non-agriculture sciences and natural resources graduate students do not typically enroll. Knowing this trend creates a market for all leadership educators. If appropriate, agricultural leadership educators may solicit students from the non-agriculture arenas for their graduate courses. It is unlikely an undergraduate or graduate student would ever work in a situation where leadership theory and skills are not critical to their success.

4. An interesting result from this study was that the agricultural leadership faculties were primarily traditional agricultural educators with specialized training in leadership. Agricultural educators study educational methods, technological change, international development, adult education, agricultural institutional organization, and other areas. Because the agricultural leadership educators are traditionally education specialists, the opportunity for enhanced training in leadership is created. Collaboration with other scholarly entities, enhancement of professional opportunities, and strengthening of leadership concepts could be developed among all leadership educators. In addition, because agricultural leadership educators study educational methodologies in their traditional training, they have an opportunity to continue to develop the educational methodologies and strengthen the teaching of leadership.

5. The agriculture youth groups (FFA and 4-H) offer natural leadership laboratories and, therefore, a potential for research remains a strong force for all leadership education scholars. Agricultural educators can "host" the data collection in agricultural education youth organizations and/or leadership advisors preparation classes to provide additional subject sources for those interested in leadership education.

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