Student-Managed Livestock Sale Provides Valuable Job Skills

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Abstract

Learning retention and enthusiasm are higher in classes where students are directly involved with application of theoretical material to practical business experiences. Forty-five Virginia Tech students were enrolled in a class entitled Livestock Merchandising during the 1995 Fall Semester. The new course was team taught by livestock industry and marketing specialists. Guest lecturers included breed association representatives, an auctioneer, livestock photographer, marketing directors, consultants, public and private sales representatives, seedstock and commercial livestock producers, and a health regulations expert. Students applied marketing principles to sale management and were responsible for developing sale catalogs, assisting the photographer, advertising, designing and preparing the facilities, managing the auction, clerking, budgeting and public relations. Students also learned sales preparation techniques for both beef cattle and horses, including grooming, nutrition, exercise and training methods. Thirty and 28 lots of beef cattle and horses, respectively, were auctioned off to the public. The sale gross exceeded $76,000 and income was used to support the Virginia Tech beef cattle and equine teaching programs. A student survey conducted at the end of the semester indicated that all 45 students rated the class as either excellent or good and would recommend this class to a friend.

Introduction

Suggestions from agricultural industry leaders for educating future employees have changed very little since 1983. Gunn (1983) surveyed agricultural businessmen who indicated that agricultural business graduates usually have a strong technical knowledge level but are poorly prepared in the areas of oral presentation and writing, team management and participation, media and general public relations, and application of knowledge to practical aspects of agriculture. Bekkum (1993) surveyed human resource managers of firms in six states that employ agricultural graduates and noted that practical learning experiences topped the list of educational and experiential needs of employers. A survey of both employers and students reported that interpersonal and communicative skills were the most important abilities needed to pursue careers in agribusiness (Radhakrishna and Bruening, 1994). Bruening and Scanlon (1995) interviewed agribusiness employers and stated that courses developing skills in commercial writing, public speaking and group processing were essential.

Research has demonstrated that successful and satisfying learning is accomplished more effectively when students are involved in realistic learning situations and the application of practical economics (Hunter, 1982; Laney, 1988; Carlson and Schodt, 1995; Henneberry and Beshear, 1995). Students favored the practice of integrating respected individuals from industry into classroom learning experiences (Henneberry, 1990). Stoll (1988) found that students were more interested in learning, had a more professional demeanor and appearance at formal activities and professional meetings, and were positively affected by exposure to industry leaders. Hoerner (1994) stated that practical work-based learning experiences ease the transition for students from an academic to business-related environment.

Methods

Course Justification and Objectives

Buying and selling decisions are among the most important factors affecting economic returns in livestock operations (Petritz et al., 1982). Furthermore, the economic success of registered seedstock operations depends upon a total merchandising program as well as breeding and nutritional programs. Planned merchandising of livestock increases the potential for greater profit by giving producers full-dollar value for the genetic pool produced. Yet the skills that result in effective advertising, merchandising, and sales are poorly understood, and only sporadically practiced, by many employed in the registered seedstock business (Evans, 1990).

This course was designed to provide practical experience in sale management as well as communicative, financial, interpersonal, and cognitive thinking skills to junior- and senior- level students who already have a good foundation in livestock production.

The educational objectives for this course were to familiarize students in identifying, evaluating, and planning for various types of merchandising programs specific to livestock enterprises. Students were also exposed to industry leaders' philosophies on livestock merchandising, and upon successful completion of the course, should be able to manage and conduct a purebred auction sale.

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Course Characteristics

Forty-five junior-and senior-level students were enrolled in APSC 3764, Livestock Merchandising. Most were Animal and Poultry Science (APSC) majors though eight students participated from other majors and two students from the two-year Agriculture Technology Program (Table 1). This two-credit course was a business elective for APSC majors and was an agricultural and/or free elective for non-majors.

Class met Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6:30 to 7:30 PM for 12 weeks during the semester. A total of 17 lectures were conducted by industry leaders and "in-house" professionals who contributed their expertise in livestock production and marketing. The instructor conducted the remaining lectures. Every lecture was followed by a question-and-answer session. Additionally, local and international resource people from the following areas were available to contribute their expertise: association representatives, auctioneers, livestock photographer and videographers, marketing directors and consultants, public and private sales representatives, seedstock and commercial livestock producers, and a health regulations expert.

Table 1. Gender, Background, and Major of Students in APSC 3764, Livestock Merchandising, at Virginia Tech.

Characteristic	Fall '95
Class Size	45
Gender:	
% Female	48.9
% Male	51.1
Student Background:	
% Urban	31.2
% Farm	44.4
% Rural Nonfarm	24.4
Academic Major:	
% Animal and Poultry Science	78.0
% Agricultural and Applied Economics	11.0
% Dairy Science	2.2
% English	2.2
% Fisheries and Wildlife	2.2
% Agriculture Technology	4.4

Results and Discussion

Class Activities, Assignments, and Evaluation

Each student was expected to complete the following two projects: 1) develop a catalog layout with pertinent footnotes for one sale lot, and 2) develop a one-page advertisement for the auction. Three of the advertisements were chosen by the Advertising Committee (which consisted of 10 students) and used for publicity purposes. Students were also required to estimate total expenses as a percentage of the sale gross, and their estimates ranged from 6.2 to 21.3% with a mean of 13.9%. The actual post-sale expense as a percentage of the sale gross was 10.79% (Table 2). The wide variation in student estimates of total expenses was used to emphasize the importance of a careful and accurate prediction of sale costs. Six students who projected the most accurate financial outcome of the sale (high selling beef and horse lots, sale gross and sale expenses as a percentage of the gross) were treated to a steak dinner at the end of the semester.

Additionally, students were required to attend and observe one of the following: a weekly auction, state-graded feeder cattle sale, dispersal, production or consignment sale. A one-page report, with the prices marked on the sale catalog or sheet, was submitted for grading within two weeks after attending the sale. A checklist of questions for the field trip report is shown in Table 3. Students were requested by the instructor to follow this guideline and pay close attention to detail. All field trips were independently scheduled by the student and were not supervised by the instructor. With an

Table 2. Total Expenditures of the 1995 Hokie Harvest Sale[z]

Expense	Cost ($)	% of Sale Gross
Advertising	400.00	0.525
Auctioneer	3,809.75	5.000
Catalog printing (1650)	1,637.00	2.148
Photographer	104.50	0.137
Postage-bulk rate	77.00	0.101
Sale sign	220.00	0.290
Registration and clerking forms	130.88	0.172
Complimentary dinner (400 @ $2.50)	1,000.00	1.312
Chair rental	95.00	0.125
Animal transfer fees	595.00	0.781
Sale and show supplies	149.37	0.196
Mulch (donated)	-----	-----
Decorations (donated)	----	-----
Total	$8218.50	10.787

[z]Sale gross = $76,195.00

Table 3. Checklist for Field Trip Report.

1. Date, type and location of sale?
   a. Duration of sale (i.e. 2 hours)?
   b. Number of consignors?
2. Type and number of livestock sold (i.e. 50 lots of beef cattle)
   a. Did all the lots sell?
   b. Any substitutions?
   c. Grouping of cattle for inspection?
3. Approximate number of people in attendance?
4. Was there a sale manager or sale consultant? If so, who?
5. Name of auctioneer and method of selling (i.e. ¢/lb, $/head, groups or pens)
6. High and low selling lots.
   a. Buyer of each?
   b. Explanation why these lots sold high and low.
7. General impression of sale?
8. Any special marketing features? (i.e. volume discounts, pre-sale social, free delivery)
9. General mood and expectations of sellers and buyers before the sale?
10. Sale gross and average?

SUBMIT THE SALE CATALOG AND SALE SHEET WITH PRICES.

ever-increasing student population with limited farm background and livestock experience, this exercise was invaluable in preparing students for the livestock production industry since many students indicated that this was their first experience attending a public auction.

Each student was required to actively participate on at least two of the following 13 committees: advertising, animal load-out, catalog design and layout, catalog mailings, sale clean-up, photography, clerking, registration, cattle display, sale-ring preparation, decorations, settling clerk, food and beverages. Committee members were instructed to be team players and needed to shoulder their share of the responsibility. According to Campbell (1977) and Kesler (1997), courses that were designed to encourage class discussions and involvement motivated students and enhanced the learning process. This course allowed students to employ teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills in order to fulfill their duties on the committee. This is in agreement with Krantz (1991) who indicated that future graduates need these skills for successful employment.

Committee reports were signed by each member and submitted for evaluation. Criteria for determining final grades in the course included class attendance (25%), class projects (25%), field trip report (25%), and thoroughness of committee reports (25%).

Preparation of Horses and Sale Facilities

Preparation of horses for sale is a specialized and time-consuming endeavor. Subsequently, horses were trained, fitted and presented by 35 students in a class entitled Equine Behavior and Training. Four students were enrolled concurrently in both the Livestock Merchandising and Equine Behavior and Training courses. At the end of the semester, these students reported that time requirements in both classes made it inadvisable to take them concurrently.

Horses required stalls and a riding arena with obstacles and jumps. Permanent and temporary stalls were used to display both beef cattle and horses. An 18' x 12' sale ring was used, and rented chairs placed in front of permanent bleachers provided a seating capacity of 400. Shrubs, pots of mums, gourds and pumpkins were donated by local businesses for use by the decorating committee. For additional decorations appropriate to the "harvest" theme, corn stalks and bales of straw were provided by the university farm.

Since 40 of the 45 students in the class were members of the Block and Bridle Club, the barbecue committee of the club was commissioned by the Livestock Merchandising class to provide a dinner which was complimentary to the buyers. Food costs were budgeted and paid from the sale gross. Attendance was projected to be 400, but final crowd estimates exceeded 500.

Summary

Integrating industry specialists in a class that emphasized communicative, financial, interpersonal and cognitive thinking skills was popular with the students. Many of the guest speakers were alumni and have since indicated that they enjoyed returning to their alma mater and contributing to the education of students. The interaction among students and speakers encouraged students to start building business relationships prior to graduation. A student survey indicated that all 45 students rated the class as either excellent or good, and they would recommend the class to other students. Seventy-eight percent of the class evaluated the course as "excellent" and 22% of the students rated their experiences in the class as "good". No responses for "fair" or "poor" were reported.

The course and sale provided a public "showcase" for University beef cattle and horses as well as the undergraduate teaching program in the Department of Animal and Poultry Sciences at Virginia Tech. The intermingling of students, faculty and buyers also served to strengthen relationships between the departmental programs and the public.

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Examining The Academic Challenges Provided By College Of Agriculture Professors

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Abstract

This paper deals with the variety and frequency of academic challenges professors require as a part of the curriculum in three-credit semester courses. Fourteen professors and faculty from a College of Agricultural Sciences allowed their course academic challenges (i.e. midterms, tests, quizzes, and assignments) to be thoroughly inventoried and categorized.

The study examined class size, course level, subject matter, and the type and quantity of academic challenges provided by professors. Midterms, written finals and written reports were the most common provided by 78%, 71%, and 57% of the professors, respectively. While there were no significant relationships found between the types of academic challenges provided and the differences in course level, class size, and subject matter, the authors describe what was noticed.

Questions are presented for additional discussion and future research. Additionally, several proactive methods to increase the effectiveness of academic challenges are explored.

Introduction

Teachers have the formidable task of educating students in preparation for problems and situations that are unknown and unpredictable. One way to accomplish this is to help students develop thinking skills that can be applied to numerous future situations. The teacher's ability to demonstrate and model critical thinking and problem solving skills during class sessions is an important factor in teaching these skills (Whittington and Newcomb, 1993). Additionally, orally modeling these behaviors has been shown to actively facilitate the development of the students' cognitive growth and academic skills (Cross and Angelo, 1988). The National Center for Postsecondary Teaching, Learning and Assessment reported that "students" classroom experiences have the most impact on creating intellectual "curiosity" (Ratcliff, 1995, p. 8.).

Course assignments and homework (academic challenges) provided by professors can be vital to the learning process if students take an active role in accepting these challenges (Doyle and Barber, 1990; Meyers, 1986). Effective use of academic challenges increases student achievement (Foyle and Baily, 1985; Ziegler 1986). Academic challenges also provide opportunities for students to "learn" the content material of their classes while challenging students to explore and use the content as a means to developing their critical thinking skills. Academic challenges can contribute both to enhancing students' progression through the thought processes and to developing their critical thinking skills (Cooper, 1989; Terenzini, et al., 1995). Because academic challenges can impact student learning, it is

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