
Benefits Resulting from Faculty Involvement in Planning and Coordinating Adult Leadership Programs

Wesley E. Budke

Abstract

Participating in the planning and coordination of agricultural leadership education and development programs is an important responsibility and a unique opportunity for faculty in colleges of agriculture. There are numerous opportunities for personal growth and development, increased understanding of problems and issues in agriculture, and the prospect of becoming a valuable resource for the home department. The experience can make major contributions to the faculty members' teaching and research activities.

Introduction

Have you been called upon recently to coordinate or direct an adult education or similar program? How do you value this opportunity in relation to your teaching and research interests? How does this task affect your regular faculty responsibilities? Let's examine the positive side of this experience and see how it might complement and nourish your other interests.

The two-year leadership education and development programs implemented by many states and several countries are excellent examples of adult education programming in agriculture. The Ohio Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) program is typical of these adult education programs. It is an intensive two-year program of study institutes and study tours, designed to enhance the intellectual, social, and personal competence of young men and women who hold, or are likely to hold, leadership positions in production agriculture and agribusiness.

The program provides an opportunity for the best of agriculture's emerging leaders to develop or enhance their leadership skills, broaden their understanding of agricultural problems and issues, and establish contact with proven and emerging leaders from other groups in our society (Ohio, 1984). Thus, enhancing the agricultural and nonagricultural communities through mutual understanding and seeking of equitable solutions to problems of society.

Adult leadership development programs such as this have been used in one form or another by many states and several

countries over the past 25 years to help develop rural community leadership. Miller (1976) indicated that "many advisors believe that a broad background in the humanities as well as the social sciences, and a knowledge and understanding of world economics and politics were essential for solving the special problems rural people faced in the space age."

The benefits of these agricultural leadership education and development programs to young leaders are widely known and accepted. Young leaders who participate in these programs are generally rewarded with hastened opportunities for leadership, increased self-confidence, new community roles, professional and personal networks, new perspectives and broadened horizons, improved decision making, and improved communication skills (Budke and Chen, 1993; Howell, 1982).

Less well publicized, however, are the advantages that may accrue to agriculture faculty members who are involved in planning and coordinating these programs. Colleges of agriculture often sponsor these programs and their faculty provide the leadership necessary to plan and coordinate the agricultural education activities. Also, because the programs are generally related to the social sciences, faculty and staff from agricultural extension and the agricultural economics, agricultural education, and rural sociology departments are often called upon to serve as program directors or coordinators.

Benefits to Faculty

Sometimes the assignment as program director or coordinator is viewed negatively by faculty because it reduces the time that they have available for research and classroom teaching activities. Miller (1976) found that "they often continued to fulfill various administrative and academic functions while participating in the program. Some were forced to defer other projects for two or three years. Research was delayed and program staff had limited time to contribute to academic publications, to faculty activities, or to university policy-making and government." However, based upon my experience as the Assistant Director of the Ohio Leadership Education and Development program during the past two years, there are several benefits to faculty and departments that can result from this planning and coordinating experience. This is supported by the findings of Miller (1976) who observed that "On one hand, many who participated in the program found them-

Budke is an associate professor in the Department of Agricultural Education at the Ohio State University, 212 Agricultural Administration Building, 2120 Fyffe Road, Columbus, OH 43210.

selves justifying their involvement to colleagues, defending themselves and the program for the input of time and energy. At the same time, program faculty and staff were exposed to new professional resources and ideas by generally unfamiliar groups." These experiences can significantly enrich the faculty member's teaching and research and enhance their contribution to the department. The following are several of the benefits that can be realized by the participating faculty member and his or her department.

Experience of planning adult education programs

Programmatic instruction addressing pressing local, state, national, and international agricultural problems and issues is essential. Programs designed with this objective in mind will necessarily involve the social, political, educational, and agricultural leaders in spirited dialogue. Program planning of this scope and magnitude will develop an extensive and powerful network of leaders.

Opportunity to try new instructional methodology and techniques

Faculty program planners and coordinators will have an opportunity to teach young adults and test new instructional methodologies and techniques. This extensive program provides the opportunity to implement educational activities that are compatible with adult learning characteristics. Typically, adults' quest for learning is problem driven. This an opportunity to employ several problem solving instructional techniques.

Broadened awareness and expanded thinking

Exposure to the ideas and perspectives of social, political, economic, educational, and agricultural leaders will challenge and expand the thinking of the faculty member as they examine, evaluate, and consider new points of view. They will be challenged to continually defend their position. These new ideas and points of view can be injected into teaching and research activities.

Involvement in interdisciplinary programming

Often the program planning and coordinating responsibility is shared with a faculty member from another department in the college of agriculture. This is a unique opportunity to become better acquainted with faculty members outside the home department. Exposure to the views of faculty in another department will inform and help broaden perspectives and understanding.

In-depth understanding of problems and issues

In-depth understanding of local, state, national, and international agricultural problems and issues is essential when designing the educational experience for young agricultural leaders. The faculty planner is pressed to keep abreast of these issues in order to fashion a learning experience that will expose the participants to the various aspects of the problems or issues. The faculty will gain further from the lectures, field experiences, and discussions during the study institutes and

study tours by clarifying his priorities, his self-concept, and his goals. These experiences will inject invaluable realism and excitement into the teaching and research activities.

Contact with young leaders

The contagious excitement of thirty young leaders representing all aspects of agriculture cannot help but rub off on the faculty member during the 60 days of educational programs and social activities during this two-year period. New points of view will surface, which may be predictors of future directions in agriculture, and networks will be established for future collaboration.

Contribution to the home department

The contacts, knowledge, and experiences gained while planning and coordinating the agricultural leadership education and development program can become invaluable resources for the faculty member's department. The many speakers at study institutes become key contacts as lecturers and workshop resources for the department; experience in planning national and international study tours can expand the horizons of the department; working as co-director with faculty from another department establishes a closer relationship with other areas of the college; and the relationship established with the young agricultural leaders can become a strong future student recruitment network.

Summary

The bottom line benefit of a faculty member's experience in planning and coordinating an adult agricultural leadership education and development program is its contribution to effective teaching and research. The faculty member's teaching will be enriched through a broader perspective and better understanding of local, state, national, and international agricultural problems and issues and from greater knowledge resulting from exposure to the thinking of agricultural, political, economic, social, and educational scholars and leaders. The faculty member's programmatic research should become more focused on critical agricultural problems and issues, especially in the social science areas.

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