

# An Early Outreach Initiative in Agriculture

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## Problem

Recruitment of minority students for career opportunities in agriculture and related disciplines has historically been a difficult challenge. In fact, minority enrollment in colleges of agriculture has been much less than those experienced in colleges of business, natural sciences and engineering. Most students avoid programs in agriculture because of a major misconception. These students see careers in this area as primarily farming and other production oriented jobs. They are not aware of the vast number of technical and professional opportunities that exist. This is where education and exposure can play an important role in the recruitment process. A program that provides a broad exposure to the career opportunities available in this large field has been the challenge confronting colleges of agriculture.

Prior to 1980, minority enrollment in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) at Michigan State University (MSU) had never been greater than four percent of undergraduate enrollment (In 1979, minority enrollment equaled 95 while total enrollment was 3040).

With an increasing emphasis being placed on a global economy, opportunities for professionals with college degrees in disciplines related to agriculture continue to increase. Consequently, it is important that students are aware of career opportunities in agriculture for three major reasons:

1. Excellent employment and career advancement opportunities exist in most fields.
2. Salaries that are competitive with those obtained by professionals with degrees in business, science and engineering.
3. Agricultural careers have at its very essence opportunities for business, science and engineering professionals.

For these reasons, CANR developed an outreach initiative called the Minority Apprenticeship program in 1983.

## Outreach Design

The Minority Apprenticeship Program (MAP) is a seven week summer program designed to recruit and expose talented minority students to career opportunities in agriculture and natural resources. Once students have experienced MAP, follow-up activities occur in an effort to attract these students to CANR after high school. This is the main goal of MAP, to work with students in high school and guide them through an undergraduate program in an area of agriculture or natural resources. Each summer between 40 and 50 high school sophomores and juniors are invited to participate in MAP.

MAP is organized around an administrative unit which consist of a director (.10 Full Time Equivalent) full time Gardner is director, Minority Apprenticeship Program, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University.

coordinator and a secretary (.25 Full Time Equivalent). The bulk of the daily activities are handled by the program coordinator. These activities include visiting high schools for recruitment purposes, identifying campus based summer research experiences, planning summer seminars, organizing field trips and other activities. The director has major responsibility for identifying sources of funding and working with a twelve-person program advisory board.

Participants in MAP have the opportunity to work directly with a professional in a research, business or field environment. These apprenticeship experiences are 40 hour per week assignments. In addition, participants attend field trips to agricultural and natural resources businesses and evening seminars addressing careers and leadership development topics (Seminars occur two nights per week). At the end of MAP, an awards banquet is held to honor the achievements of participants.

In addition to program activities, participants live on-campus in a residence hall and eat meals in the cafeteria for the full duration of the program. Participants also receive transportation to their apprenticeship assignments, use of campus facilities and a weekly stipend to assist with expenses.

The success of the MAP concept is highlighted by the duplication of its design by other agricultural colleges (e.g., University of Florida, Alabama A & M and Lincoln University of Missouri).

## Outreach Results

Through the Minority Apprenticeship Program many high school students have become aware of the vast professional career opportunities available in agriculture. As a result of this effort, twenty percent of former MAP participants have attended MSU, and approximately forty-six percent of former participants who enter MSU enroll in a CANR program area. When you examine historical data on enrollment trends and totals for CANR you find a positive correlation between MAP and minority enrollment totals (Chart 1).

Currently, 19 former MAP participants have graduated from MSU with degrees in program areas related to agriculture and natural resources. In addition, 17 former MAP participants have graduated from MSU with degrees in areas related to the physical and biological sciences.

MAP has also been successful in providing other agricultural colleges with students. Currently, there are 25 former participants enrolled in agricultural programs at other institutions (e.g., University of Florida, University of Illinois, University of Minnesota and Lincoln University of Missouri). While this kind of outcome was not by design it is nonetheless a pleasant surprise and positive result.

## Conclusion

The data shows a direct correlation between this outreach initiative and CANR minority undergraduate enrollment. Also, highlighted is the contribution MAP has made to minority enrollment at other agricultural colleges. Implied in these results is the notion that programs designed similar to MAP can achieve positive recruitment results and in some cases this may already be true.

As colleges of agriculture start the process of developing similar programs, they must consider establishing retention efforts to ensure that recruitment gains are not lost over time. The following is a list of suggested retention activities designed to complement any recruitment initiative:

1. Maintaining contact and communication with students throughout their high school years. Some of this contact can occur in writing, campus visitations and visits to their high schools.
2. Meeting with college students on a regular basis to facilitate long term planning and to assist in academic scheduling; monitoring academic progress; and assisting students with any professional problems or concerns they may have.
3. Developing a process designed to match upper class students (college Juniors and Seniors) with college freshmen and sophomores in a mentoring relationship.

These three retention activities play an important role in retaining students from high school to the completion of a college degree. By adding these retention activities to the programs initial design, long term recruitment success can be achieved by similar outreach initiatives.

## References

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Chart 1. CANR Minority Enrollment (Undergraduate).

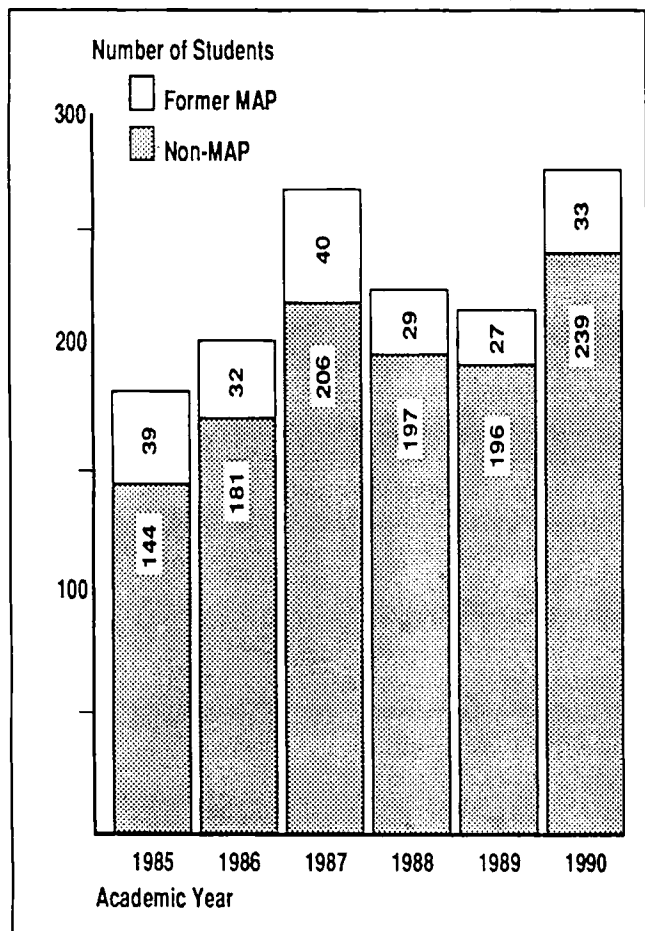


Chart 2. CANR Minority Enrollment.

