

Agricultural Business Curricula

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Because of expanded employment opportunities in agribusiness during the past few decades, many colleges/departments of agriculture now offer a major in agricultural business. Some programs, however, are weak because of myths and misunderstandings about the agricultural business curriculum. Myths are discussed and suggestions offered for developing a strong agricultural business program.

Perhaps the most misunderstood and maligned program in colleges/departments of agriculture is agricultural business. The misunderstanding of the role and content of agricultural business programs comes about both from the offering institutions and employers. There is some evidence to suggest that employers who have traditionally hired agribusiness majors out of the colleges of agriculture are beginning to hire more business school graduates. One of the reasons for the latter is that they don't believe colleges of agriculture offer the desired curriculum and training. The solution to the whole misunderstanding issue involves: 1) more emphasis by curriculum committees on the components necessary for a strong agricultural business curriculum and 2) "sell" the program to employers. In the final analysis, the success of an agricultural business curriculum will depend on its structure and quality as perceived by employers.

The purpose of this paper, however, is to address the issue of what constitutes a strong agricultural business curriculum. This will involve: 1) a review of some of the myths associated with agricultural business curricula and 2) components of a strong program.

Myths Agricultural Business Curricula

Some of the more common myths about curricula in agricultural business are:

Myth #1 - "Adding a few business courses to a general agriculture curriculum will make it an agricultural business curriculum." An agricultural business curriculum should contain a sizable component of agricultural economics courses taught by faculty with training and expertise in agricultural economics.

Myth #2 - "Business courses can replace agricultural economics courses in an agricultural business curriculum." While business courses are an important component, they do not substitute for or replace courses in agricultural economics. Even though their course titles may be identical, they differ in course emphasis (examples are marketing, finance, business law/agricultural law). Some principles in each course may be identical; however, the

trust of agricultural marketing, agricultural finance, and agricultural law is the application of those principles to agriculture and problems of agriculture. Counterpart business courses focus on processing and marketing to consumers. Agricultural business majors need both components in preparation for employment with agricultural business firms, which operate at all levels from farm to consumer. Agricultural economics courses, along with prerequisite courses in economic theory, provide an analytical framework for problem solving.

Myth #3 - "Employers are interested only in the business courses included in the curriculum." Employers expect agricultural business curricula to contain sizable components of both business and agricultural economics. The strength of the agricultural business program is the agricultural economics/business combination. In fact, the proper integration of agricultural economics courses and business courses into an agricultural business curriculum results in a stronger program than either alone, and that combination is inherent in the title of the program.

Myth #4 - "The agricultural business curriculum is a 'watered-down' program which attracts weak students." Although that may have been true at one time, such is no longer the case. In our profession, agricultural business curricula tend to be equally as rigorous as other options -- only the emphasis differs.

Components of a Strong Agricultural Business Curriculum

A strong curriculum in agricultural business will contain at least the following components:

1. General education requirements -- a common university general education core required of all graduates.
2. Production agriculture courses -- usually consisting of the agriculture college/department requirement for all agriculture majors.
3. Mathematics, computer science, and statistics -- a minimum of calculus and introductory courses in statistics and computer science.
4. Business -- perhaps the most familiar and well understood component of an agricultural business curriculum.
5. Agricultural economics courses -- as opposed to the business component, the importance of agricultural economics in the curriculum is least understood. Implied also is the importance of faculty expertise available to teach agricultural economics courses. The scope and analytical nature of agricultural economics courses make them a crucial component of any agricultural business curriculum.

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