



# Impact Statement

**ProjectTitle:** Developing and implementing strategic plans for selected academic programs in a college of agriculture.

**Issue:**

Strategic planning at the academic departmental and college level is designed to guide decision-making about the maintenance and development of academic programs, as well as of the allocation of resources. Development and implementation of a strategic plan provides both a roadmap for future growth and development and a set of key milestones to gauge success at attainment of those milestones.

**What has been done:**

For this project an analysis of an academic department, the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology (AECT), its three undergraduate programs – Agricultural Education, Agricultural Communications, and Agricultural Systems Technology Management – as well as its graduate program, was conducted. The project summarizes the process by which the University of Arkansas AECT department recently completed a comprehensive 10-year review of the department and its programs, including an external review by a team of peers and stakeholders. A comprehensive review provides an opportunity for both internal self-reflection and external review by peers and stakeholders. Once the review was completed, development of a strategic plan based on findings from both the self-reflection and the external review was warranted. The AECT department completes a comprehensive strategic plan every 10 years, with interim updates at 5-year intervals. This project summarized the process employed by the AECT department and results to date.

**Impacts/New Partnerships:**

During the period in which this process was taken, a campus-wide strategic planning process was initiated. Also, a parallel strategic planning processes began for both the College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences, as well as the Division of Agriculture, in which the department is administered. Thus, while the process for the AECT department is on-going and our strategic plan is as yet not finalized, several important milestones/results have been achieved as a result of the process. These include: 1) development and implementation of a new Agricultural Leadership program, including a major concentration and a minor; 2) development and implementation of the AgCademy, an on-line course-based advanced placement in agriculture program for high school students; 3) development of a PhD program for the department; and 4) an enhanced reputation of our faculty and academic unit across campus.

**Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life)**

A completed strategic plan for both the department and the college will provide better direction to assess and develop programs to meet the needs of the people of our state. For example, as college degrees often appear to contribute to the rural “brain drain” for many rural communities, there appears to be a need for training leaders to return to and assume leadership positions in order to sustain the vitality of those rural communities. That is a stated objective of our new Agricultural

Leadership program. Another example is that many talented high school youth don't pursue higher education in agriculture because they are not exposed to it as a college degree career choice early enough in their decision-making process. Creating a program to allow high school students access to advanced placement college credit in agriculture may provide incentive for them to choose college majors in agriculture. A well-articulated goal of our State, as well as the higher education community, is to increase the proportion of college-educated citizens.

**How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience?**

I have learned several key leadership lessons from this experience. Patience is required to allow the project process to “play out.” Development of a departmental strategic plan cannot be done in a vacuum and must be done within the context of the organizational structure in which it exists. Thus, allowing the University, Division of Agriculture, and College of Agriculture time to develop their plans is necessary. Individuals involved have different thought processes and different internal time tables. Some individuals need to be brought along in the strategic planning process at different speeds. Some individuals readily share their thoughts and ideas while some disagree but won't share their feelings in a group setting. Thus, patience is also important in managing group process activities. Perhaps the most important skill learned by participation in FSLI that is necessary to undertake a project such as this one is to be an effective listener at each step in the process.

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