

Revitalization of the Agricultural Education Program at the University of Illinois

Issue: The College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES), University of Illinois, seeks to revitalize the Agricultural Education and Leadership program and create a program that draws upon the strengths of multiple units in the College to offer quality teacher certification programs at both the undergraduate and Masters' levels that prepare students to teach in urban, suburban and rural areas. Another central objective is to prepare students for leadership roles in business, industry, government, University extension, and society, through an option in agricultural leadership curriculum. In addition to providing training in instruction and leadership, the program will educate students about the broad range of food science, horticulture, environmental science, animal science, engineering and agricultural production areas. Science education will be a key theme undergirding the new curriculum.

What has been done: A strategic planning effort has been implemented to develop a vision and plan for the program. Consultations were conducted with a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, practicing educators, Illinois State Board of Education, and relevant organizations). A Forum on Agricultural Education was conducted in which nationally recognized scholars in agricultural education were brought to campus to assist with the visioning process. The resulting vision entails reconfiguring the program so that it no longer sits in one department (where it has languished), but becomes a college-level interdisciplinary program that draws upon, and, in turn, contributes to, the expertise from faculty based in the diverse disciplines related to agriculture represented in the College of ACES. Accomplishments to date include:

- An MOU with the College was approved to reconfigure the program
- Proposals were submitted to establish the new program as well as a new undergraduate major, resident and online master's programs
- An Interim Program Director was appointed to lead the program
- Three faculty members (two on tenure-track appointments) have been hired
- A budget has been established for the program
- The Program has been asked to coordinate a campus-wide Minor in Leadership

Impacts: A revitalized Agricultural Education program is critical to the College as it is a prime route for engaging young people in Illinois in food and environmental systems and in promoting their interest and ensuring their preparation for agriculturally-relevant careers. The teacher preparation/certification option results in the placement of agriculture teachers in high schools, who play an instrumental role in exciting young people about the science and career opportunities related to the food and environmental systems. The leadership option also holds strong implications for workforce development in Illinois.

Funding Sources, Cooperators, Partners, Mentors etc.: The College of ACES, and the Office of the Provost, have provided funds to hire additional faculty. Relationships were strengthened with the College of Education, the Council on Teacher Education, and the University's I-STEM initiative. Partnerships are being established or renewed with a variety of stakeholders, including FCAE, ILCAE, ISBE, State FFA and 4-H offices, among others, which are leading to new research and educational collaborations. Many of these partners, and faculty from peer institutions, will be invited to serve on an External Advisory Board.

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