

An Evaluation of the Fall Conference for Leadership and Professional Development: A Triangular Approach

Poster Abstract

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The Fall Conference for Leadership and Professional Development, for five years, has been a successful opportunity to touch the lives of many high school freshmen that are being introduced to the FFA and its leadership development function of the agricultural education curriculum. The focus of the conference is to give students a better understanding of what it takes to be an effective leader and the many opportunities available to them through FFA and agriculture. However, the uniqueness of this leadership conference is its multi-faceted approach to reaching students, on the collegiate and high school levels. The conference is totally designed, developed, implemented and evaluated by undergraduate students in Agricultural and Extension Education 311 and 412 as a “living-lab”. High school freshmen in the agricultural sciences attend the conference for a full day of intensive preparation in life-long leadership skills. High School Agricultural Educators attending the conference participate in an intensive education inservice workshop taught by an expert in educational processes and technologies.

The theoretical framework is imbedded in the intracurricular philosophy of agricultural education. This intracurricular nature aids in the development of the whole person. One piece of that philosophy is leadership development, which manifests itself, in part, through the FFA. FFA members should therefore be exposed to leadership development at the earliest time possible. The Fall Conference for Leadership and Professional Development is offered by prospective teachers to freshmen FFA members. Therefore, is the conference meeting the goals and objectives of leadership development as philosophized by agricultural education and the FFA?

This study will evaluate student and teacher participant perception of the conference to be sure that the goals of the conference are being met. Student participants received evaluation forms in their final workshop of the conference in October 1999. Therefore, a 100% response rate was reached. Teacher participants were mailed survey questionnaires. Follow-up is needed to assess whether the Fall Conference for Leadership and Professional Development is meeting the goals of providing an atmosphere to foster leadership and professional development among rural youth in Pennsylvania. The need to provide an organized and detailed summary of participant perspectives is also necessary to keep sponsors and administrators informed of the conference progress.