

Developing a Career Module for the Arkansas Consortium for Teaching Agriculture (ACTA)

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Introduction

The Arkansas Consortium for Teaching Agriculture (ACTA) is a partnership of nine community colleges and three University of Arkansas System four-year institutions that offer degrees in agricultural, food and life sciences. The goal of this alliance is to accommodate a seamless transfer of credits for students at the two-year colleges who elect to pursue a baccalaureate degree at the four-year institutions. The nine community colleges have been approved by the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board to offer an Associate of Science in Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences, a proposal that was coordinated through ACTA. The 62-hour curriculum features a science-based transfer degree with enough latitude in course work to allow students to major in a variety of fields. Members of ACTA offer dual advising and shared use of libraries, instructors, and participation of the University of Arkansas Research and Extension Centers.

One of the courses that was included in the Associate of Science degree requirements is "Introduction to Agricultural Careers." To provide uniformity in the course across the community colleges, it was determined that the four-year universities, led by the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, would develop career modules representing each of their academic programs that would be used by the community colleges in teaching the course.

Methodology

To accomplish the project at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, the Associate Dean appointed a staff member in the Dean's office to coordinate the effort. The Associate Dean also committed part-time support from the Distance Education Operations Coordinator for the College, a graphic designer from Poultry Science, and a graduate assistant from the College Teaching Support Center. Each academic unit in the College was asked to appoint a faculty member to coordinate the development of the department's module and to meet periodically with other departmental coordinators and the project leaders. A format for the modules was developed and shared with the departmental coordinators. It was agreed that power point presentations would be developed, but that a supplemental video could be added. Later, once the modules began to take shape, a review team was assembled from across the College to review a draft of the modules that were developed and to make suggestions for improvement. A faculty consultant with expertise in curriculum design was also employed on a part-time basis to provide direction in finalizing the modules.

The following outline was to be followed in developing the modules: (a) Interest approach, (b) Career areas highlighted, (c) Nature of the industry for careers highlighted, (d) Employment opportunities, (e) Occupations in the industry, (f) Training and advancement,

(g) Earnings and benefits, (h) Outlook for the future, (i) General information about degree requirements, and (j) Sources of additional information.

The module for the Department of Agricultural & Extension Education was developed to highlight careers in each of the four areas of concentration in the Department and was divided into seven parts: Part 1 -Introduction; Part 2 -Careers in Agricultural Communication; Part 3- Careers in Agricultural Education (Teaching and Related Careers); Part 4- Careers in Agricultural Systems Technology Management; Part 5- Careers in Extension & Industry Education; Part 6 -Conclusion; Part 7 -Seven Minute Video Presentation (highlighting graduates who are engaged in careers in agricultural education, communication and technology).

The module was developed for a typical 50-minute class. An Instructor's Guide was developed to accompany the module: student objectives, outline of the module, student preparation needed, enrichment ideas (suggested resource persons or activities), resources to enhance the module, glossary of terms, and suggestions for student assessment.

Results to Date

The initial version of the Departmental Career Module is completed. A preview of the module, along with the modules developed by other academic units in the College, will be shown at a regular meeting of ACTA on November 29-30, 2000.

Future Plans

It is anticipated that five community colleges will use the modules in the course, "Introduction to Agricultural Careers," in the Spring Semester, 2001. Some of the community colleges will not teach the course until fall, 2001. Adjustments to the modules will be made as appropriate after the initial course is taught. An evaluation component is planned. One positive spin-off is that the departmental module can be used, with slight modification, for other departmental recruitment activities such as visits to high schools, college career days, and other events.

Costs/Resources

The development of the career module has been an expensive venture, not in terms of physical resources expended, but in terms of the investment in human capital. It has been a time consuming operation, especially on the part of the faculty member designated as the departmental coordinator. For others considering the development of similar modules, it is recommended that a multi-media person be employed to complete the project.

References

The web site for ACTA can be accessed at <http://www.uark.edu/depts/acta>