

Sustainable Agriculture (SAG) Undergraduate Program Implementation Plan 2015 Annual Report

Prepared by Mark Williams, Director of Undergraduate Studies, 10/22/2015

Note: Only accepted recommendations are listed here.

Recommendation 1: Complement the Steering Committee with an Advisory Council comprised of a diverse mix of internal and external stakeholders which might include alumni, community based organizations, representatives of farm groups, etc. Such a Committee could provide for continuous improvement in program and curriculum.

Assessment method: Identification of appropriate stakeholders and community members to serve on the Advisory Council, and organization of a biannual meeting to gain feedback on existing curricular activities and recommendations for programmatic development.

Results: The SAG program has been undergoing a substantial change over the last 2 years based on student and faculty feedback. This change has resulted in a substantial restructuring of the course profile and has delayed the need for organizing an advisory committee so that students could go through the new curriculum and provide feedback that may again necessitate change.

Analysis of results and reflection: Based on student input and faculty observation, the SAG steering committee has been revamping the curriculum to create two distinct coursework tracts: Community Food Systems and Farming Systems. This approach will aid in recruiting and better position our graduates to gain successful employment. This effort has been ongoing and students are now taking classes in this new curriculum.

Ongoing improvement actions: Now that the two tracts have been finalized, SAG will develop an advisory committee to critique the portfolio of classes and modifications will be made, if necessary.

Recommendation 2: Additional faculty resources are needed for the program to continue to grow, particularly in animal and agronomic (row crop) agriculture. Consideration, as noted above, should be given to new faculty position announcements that include collaboration with programs such as SAG. Attracting additional faculty in the College and University would help overcome a perception that some may have suggesting that the SAG program is really a Horticultural Science program.

Assessment method: We have assessed the composition of the SAG steering committee and core group of faculty members involved with the SAG program, to identify opportunities to incorporate more diverse views.

Results: As the curriculum has been going through the revision process, it has become apparent that the steering committee, as well as faculty involvement in the program, could be improved by incorporating new faculty members. As such, there have been some changes in the Steering Committee membership to gain additional expertise in the areas of curricular expansion.

Analysis of results and reflection: Faculty members from programs such as Ag Biotech, Plant and Soil Science, Community Leadership Development, and Dietetics have been added to the steering committee. Discussions with faculty around the university have made it apparent that there are several new related programs and classes that will help augment the choices for our students, and increase recognition of our program across campus.

Ongoing improvement actions: The SAG program will continue to reach out to faculty across our college and university to create an inclusive environment, where faculty from diverse interests can be involved in the program. This effort is part of a growing movement in our university to increase course offerings related to sustainability. In that regard, we hope to attract additional students as the overall student pool in this area increases. The program is aware of at least one new faculty hire (PLS) where an interface with the SAG program was discussed during the hiring process. This new faculty member will be on the steering committee and has further modified one of the interdisciplinary courses used in our program (PLS404) to increase its inclusion of sustainable agriculture principles.

Recommendation 3: The Steering Committee (advisory committee, perhaps) along with the College and appropriate departmental administrators should address the quality/quantity tradeoffs and impacts of increasing student enrollment including resource needs for:
Curriculum management – The curriculum includes significant experiential learning components. Expansion may decrease the quality of the instruction and the ability to carry out such activities.

Advising

Resources (faculty and staff)

Line item operating budget

Assessment method: Tracking of student enrollment and the impact of enrollment on faculty time and resources.

Results: Over the last 2 years student numbers in the program declined due to slowed enrollment. This prompted a complete programmatic revision and new recruiting campaign.

Analysis of results and reflection: Two additional faculty members have been advising SAG students, based on appropriateness of student interest. A new

committee was formed to develop a new website and recruiting strategy. Funds were acquired from the college to help hire a website developer.

Ongoing improvement actions: The college's Dean of Academic Programs provided funding to create a new and updated website, which will be launched towards the end of this year. This website and materials associated with it (posters, flyers, etc.) will be distributed across our state and to appropriate places around the country. Additionally, there has been a new recruiter hired jointly by the HPLS and SAG programs. This person will work with the DUS and Steering Committee to make targeted recruiting efforts, with an emphasis on keeping the website up to date and optimizing its use in recruiting. The SAG funding portion for this recruiter has been provided by the Dean of the college.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen formal development efforts.

Assessment method: Evaluation of the need to proceed to formalize the program based on student enrollment and job placement.

Results: Although our students are consistently getting jobs in areas related to sustainable agriculture, enrollment in the program has decline over the last 2 years.

Analysis of results and reflection: We have tried to identify the potential reasons that enrollment has declined and our assessment is that we have poor visibility. We have made several efforts to alleviate this problem, including revamping the curriculum and modifying our recruiting efforts through website redevelopment and hiring a recruiter.

Ongoing improvement actions: With the curriculum changes and enhanced recruiting (website and recruiter), we hope to increase our total student numbers to 50-60. At that time we will move to formalize the program. One additional significant change that will be in place in January 2016 is that the DUS position will be transferred from Mark Williams to Krista Jacobsen. It is anticipated that this change will foster in a new period of enhanced growth and development by bringing in new ideas and leadership.

Recommendation 5: Develop an Organic Farm Unit incubator.

Assessment method. Evaluate incubator programs around the country and assess the potential for such a program in KY by working with local farmers.

Results: We have spent substantial time traveling to and studying existing incubator programs around the country.

Analysis of results and reflection: Although it may be possible to develop an incubator program in the future, it has become clear that the focus of

developments in this area would be better spent building a beginning farmer training program to generate students that could take advantage of the incubator. We have been applying for funding to create a beginning farmer training program, but have been unsuccessful to date. We are also pursuing donors to help fund this effort.

Ongoing improvement actions: The SAG program is attempting to create a beginning farmer training program. Once funding is obtained to develop this program, we will determine how an incubator could augment this effort.

Recommendation 6: Develop a certificate program in Organic Farming.

Assessment method. Evaluate how other programs are developing certificates to provide hands on training around the country.

Results: Our assessment of other programs and our success with our apprenticeship (SAG 397 Apprenticeship in Sustainable Agriculture) has made it clear that we have many of the pieces already in place to develop a nationally recognized beginning farmer training program.

Analysis of results and reflection: Once funding is secured, we will develop a beginning farmer training program that will serve as an organic farming certificate. This year-long program will be available to UK students and the general public.

Ongoing improvement actions: We have been applying for grants and seeking donor funding to support the development of a beginning farmer training program. Funding will primarily be used to hire an educational director for the program. Once developed, it is anticipated that the program will be funded through student fees. We will continue to pursue funding from as many appropriate sources as possible over the next period to make this program a reality.

Recommendation 7: Develop partnerships and alliances with private farm owners to develop whole farm plans to help create jobs for graduates and to serve as outreach models for other producers to consider.

Assessment method: Track and evaluate the number of students working in the farming sector during and after their undergraduate careers.

Results: Our students are gaining employment in a wide range of jobs and we are developing strategies to track these jobs.

Analysis of results and reflection: We are placing more students in a range jobs related to sustainable agriculture and the number of students developing their own farms is increasing.

Ongoing improvement actions: As part of our website development efforts, we will be documenting the job statistics for our students and presenting that information on our website, along with student testimonials of how the SAG program helped students prepare for a career.