

Uniquely Agriscience

Specialized Focus for New Teachers

By Joanne Littlefield

Using a time-tested formula to evaluate the needs of teachers and students is the key to success for teacher training in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs). In 2007 the Arizona State Board of Education and Department of Education awarded a five-year approval to the Department of Agricultural Education—the only one granted out of 21 teacher education programs at the University of Arizona.

According to CALs associate professor Billye Foster, a great deal of the credit for the approval rating is due to the program's continual assessment of teacher and student needs.

"We focus on the elements identified by teachers in the field," she says. "We have utilized this process for over 35 years." Following consultation with professional agricultural sciences teachers, coursework was designed to include 85 different competencies identified as elements necessary for success. For example, new teachers must be able to "identify the objectives of agricultural education at the secondary school level," "formulate observable and measurable objectives for an instructional unit," and "develop an adequate department budget based upon the instructional program with provisions for tools, consumable supplies and equipment."

"Because our program is based on research-based, field-tested competencies, the results are outstanding," Foster says. Updated about every five years, the competencies are incorporated in a logical, seamless flow across the curriculum without duplication. "Throw in to the mix a faculty that is committed to the success of their students and you have a winning hand."

Graduates from the UA's Agricultural Education teaching program at the UA find positions at high schools across Arizona, although most of the new teachers work in the highly populated Phoenix metropolitan area.

"Most teach agriscience with a heavy emphasis on biotechnology," Agricultural Education department head Jack Elliot says. "Some teach biology, technology, and even history."

The Department of Agricultural Education offers a unique program for students interested in becoming agricultural education teachers, offering Bachelor of Science degrees in Agricultural Technology Management and Education with specializations in Agricultural Education (Teaching) and Agricultural Technology Management. Rigor is emphasized through a thorough coverage of agriscience subject matter that ranges from biotechnology to agribusiness to agricultural mechanics. The department also offers programs of study leading to the degrees of Master of Science and Master of Agricultural Education.

"I believe that the agricultural education program encompasses all the learning and teaching styles that help achieve student success," says Michelle García, a graduate of the program who currently teaches at Queen Creek High School in the Phoenix area. "Being an agricultural educator allows you to have connections with your students that are irreplaceable. I joined my high school agricultural program freshman year and fell in love with all the aspects of the program. It helped me grow intellectually as well as personally." ❖

For more information

cals.arizona.edu/aed/teacher.htm



JACK ELLIOT

Arizona agriscience teachers Ginnie Bushong (left) from Hamilton High School in Chandler, and Maurice Mullins from Flowing Wells High School in Tucson update their curriculum.

"I've considered other professions, but keep coming back to this one because I feel like I have a lot that I could offer a program.

I think it would be a good experience. My passion stems from my agricultural educator, Mr. Lewis, in Chandler. He encouraged me to be a teacher."

—Jennifer Oseland, student teacher at Mesquite High School in Gilbert, Arizona