

Graduate Student Entrepreneurship: Answering the Professional Development Needs of Secondary Agricultural Education Teachers

Introduction

Within a university, graduate students serve several important roles (Dodson et al., 2006). Some of those roles may include serving as a teaching assistant, research assistant, committee member, mentor, and advisor for undergraduate students. During the fulfillment of these roles, graduate students are often expected to participate in professional development activities in order to fulfill additional graduate degree requirements. Within Agricultural Education, professional development activities that graduate students typically participate in are research conferences. At a research conference, graduate students can be engaged in disseminating innovative teaching techniques or research in poster sessions. Furthermore, graduate students are also expected to develop research papers and disseminate those findings in the paper presentation sessions.

In order for graduate students to participate in the research conferences they must register for the conference, pay for a hotel room, and find transportation to and from the conference. For agricultural education research conferences, graduate students are given a reduced rate for conference registration. However, hotel accommodations and transportation do not have reduced rates for graduate students. According to Barrick et al. (2006) one of the responsibilities of a graduate student faculty mentor is to help graduate students find funding for their studies. Funding can come from grant opportunities and departmental resources. However, if grant funds and departmental resources are exhausted how can a graduate student pay for the expenses associated with attending a research conference? One way is to have graduate students conduct professional development workshops for secondary agricultural education teachers.

How it Works

A needs assessment was conducted in Iowa regarding agricultural mechanics competence. From this study, several areas were identified that agricultural education teachers needed professional development training. At Iowa State University, graduate students conducted series of three professional development workshops for secondary agricultural education teachers that meet one Saturday per month. During the first professional development workshop, the graduate students assist the faculty member in order to gain the experience needed to conduct a professional development workshop. The subsequent professional development workshop series was then conducted by the doctoral students under the supervision of the faculty member.

In order to generate funds for the graduate students, a registration fee of \$100 per workshop was charged to every participant or \$250 for the entire series of three workshops. The proceeds from the registration money was split evenly between the doctoral students that conducted the professional development workshops. In order to organize the funds, the department financial officer created an account for each of the graduate students. This is where the funds would be generated to pay for professional development expenses such as research conferences. At Iowa State University, these funds could be used to pay for airline fares and registration costs up front. However, other expenses such as travel, hotel, and meals had to be reimbursed after the conference. The reimbursement process typically occurred within a few days after the financial officer processed the receipts. The funds were then direct deposited back into the graduate students' bank accounts.

Results to Date

Four doctoral students have conducted various agricultural mechanics professional development events over the past three years and have collectively generated over \$12,000. One doctoral student individually has generated over \$5,000. These doctoral students have been able to pay the way to at least three regional and two national research conferences. They have also been able to pay for the printing costs associated with the research and innovative idea posters that were presented at the conferences.

Implications

The utilization of graduate students to generate their own funds to attend research conferences and other professional development activities alleviates some pressure of the graduate faculty in being the major provider of funds for graduate students. This also empowers the graduate students to have some control over the money they generate and what conferences they attend. Additionally, having graduate students conduct professional development activities for secondary agricultural education teachers gets the students connected to one of the major departmental stakeholders. This connection is one that is needed between university faculty and secondary agricultural educators in order to have a faculty that remains in touch the needs of secondary agricultural educators. Graduate students conducting professional development activities further helps prepare them for the tasks that await them as junior faculty members.

Future Plans

Faculty at Iowa State University plan to continue the use of this model to increase the interaction of graduate students and state stakeholders while fulfilling the professional development needs of both parties. Faculty members are also considering developing invitational contests that can generate additional funds while providing graduate students the experience of planning and executing a career development event.

Costs/Resources Needed

For graduate students to start generating funds, understanding the professional development needs of the secondary agricultural education teachers are needed. Graduate students and faculty must then plan and organize professional development activities. Expenses

for these events are usually covered by the registration fees. Then departmental travel accounts must be set up to organize the funds being generated.

References

Barrick, K., R.W. Clark and L. Blaschek. 2006. Current and expected roles of graduate student faculty mentors. *NACTA Journal* 50(1): 6-9.

Dodson, M.V., M.E. Ferryhough and B.B. Hiolman. 2006. Advising graduate students: Mentor or tormentor? *NACTA Journal* 50(4): 37-41.

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