

Agricultural Communications Lesson Plans for High School Agriculture Programs

A Senior Project

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Introduction

In today's workforce, individuals are expected to be able to communicate effectively through all means of communication. This includes video, graphics, emails, social media, and in person. In the agriculture industry, these means of communication have become crucial to promoting agricultural literacy throughout the world. It is important for young people to have a grasp on professionally utilizing these communication methods so that they can use them in future careers as well as advocating for the agriculture industry. The role of technology and social media is rapidly increasing in everyday life and becoming a key learning tool in secondary education. Social media has become one of the most effective ways for people to promote agricultural literacy (The Power of Social Media in Agriculture: A Guide to Social Media Success, n.d.). Lesson plans incorporating technology should "help students work at their own pace, encourage creative, original expression, improve higher order thinking skills, and expose students to authentic, real-world examples and situations" (Seamon, 1999). It is crucial for students to properly understand how to use social media websites as well as email and in person communication to increase their credibility when promoting agriculture.

Background

National FFA's Agricultural Communications Career Development Event (CDE) is structured to introduce students to the agricultural communications field by developing both written and oral communications skills in a competitive setting. Four team members develop a media plan that is then presented before of a panel of judges. In addition, individual team members are responsible for designing a web page, producing a short video, writing an article or writing an opinion piece (Agricultural Communications 2017-2021, 2016). The contest directly prepares students for careers in marketing, journalism, design or public policy. Currently, this competition is not recognized in California (Agricultural Communications 2017-2021, 2016).

With social media becoming a prominent aspect of today's culture, it is important for all individuals to be able to utilize these skills professionally. Facebook can be used in educational settings through creating groups that allow instructors and students to collaborate on a familiar platform. It can also be a nontraditional way for instructors to inform students of topics before they are presented in class (Edudemic, 2017). Instagram is a visual platform primarily used by younger generations. It can be used by teachers to highlight students and their accomplishments (Edudemic, 2017). Twitter can be used as a tool to foster discussion in an educational setting. It allows educators to pose questions using a distinct hashtag with students being able to reply through concise answers (Edudemic, 2017). All three of these platforms can be used to run successful social media campaigns, specifically those promoting agricultural literacy.

Methodology

Agricultural communications curriculum was developed after research on current industry trends and the structure of the Agricultural Communications CDE. Research on multiple social media websites as well as their uses in promoting agricultural literacy was utilized. A focus on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram ensued due to those platforms' influence in current culture. Using Cal Poly Agricultural Education and Communication Department templates, lesson plans were developed that focused on each students' communication skills to prepare them for future careers. The lesson plans were designed to encourage students to learn about current issues in the agriculture industry and how to advocate for those issues.

Conclusion

A series of lesson plans were created to develop communication skills of high school students enrolled in agriculture classes. It is important to expose students to professional high school education in preparation for college or entry into the workforce (Edudemic, 2017). By combining these skills with agriculture, the hope is students will feel comfortable promoting the agriculture industry and improving agricultural literacy.

One lesson plan, titled “So You Think You Know Social Media?” was fully developed using a template provided by Cal Poly Agriculture Education and Communication Department. Further lesson plans were summarized with intent to create full length plans in the future. The outlined lesson plans include: videography, email etiquette, and a culminating lesson surrounding professional communication plan development.

Each lesson plan is designed to utilize hands-on learning, enabling students to create their own professional social media profiles with the ability to apply the skills taught in the classroom. This project was created with the intention for more high school agriculture programs to adopt agriculture communications units, enhancing student communication and potentially compete in National FFA’s Agricultural Communications Career Development Event.

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