

# Leadership Courses Required in Agricultural Teacher Education Programs

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*Leadership development has been an important component of secondary agricultural education programs since the FFA was first organized in 1928. Student leadership development continues to occur through the FFA; however, leadership has also become an element of the agricultural education instructional program. There was a need to examine how agriculture teachers are being prepared to teach about leadership. This study was conducted to describe leadership courses required in agricultural teacher education programs throughout the United States. Most agricultural teacher education programs did not require courses in leadership. Furthermore, for programs that required leadership coursework, the content topics, grading components, and required textbooks varied widely. Required leadership courses were typically taught in the same department that administered the agricultural teacher preparation program. Based on findings of this study, agricultural teacher educators need to identify a core of leadership content topics that should be taught in secondary agricultural education programs in order to ensure that agricultural teacher education candidates are adequately prepared to teach leadership. Programs that do not require leadership courses should examine their curriculum to determine if their teacher candidates are adequately prepared to teach leadership content in a secondary agricultural education program.*

Keywords: leadership courses, agricultural education, teacher education programs

## **Introduction, Theoretical Foundation, and Conceptual Framework**

Leadership is defined a number of ways. “Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Yukl, 2006, p. 8). Leadership is also defined as “the ability to preside, guide, or conduct others, activities, or events with responsibility for the final outcome” (Ricketts, 2003, p. 550). Northouse (2004) suggested that the essential elements of leadership include: leadership as a process, involves influence, occurs within a group context, and involves goal attainment. “To an extent, leadership is like beauty: it’s hard to define, but you know it when you see it” (Bennis, 1989, p. 1). Author John C. Maxwell (1993) concluded that leadership is influence.

Leadership knowledge and skills have become something that is not simply inherent but can be learned (Yukl, 2006). Leadership is not a secret code or gene, but rather observable skills and abilities which are useful to everyone (Posner, 2009). The potential for leadership exists in every student and can be developed through focused educational programs (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman–Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001). Participation in leadership programs has shown to have a positive impact on personal development, civic responsibility, multicultural awareness, understanding values, and other outcomes connected to leadership development (Cress et al., 2001).

Leadership has been an important component of secondary agricultural education programs for many years. Agricultural subjects were taught at the high school level as early as the middle 1800s to enable students to learn about the science of agriculture and to prepare them for

useful employment in agriculture. The curriculum was based in production agriculture. Boy's and girl's clubs were organized in the early 1900s to develop leadership skills among youth. These included local agricultural student clubs with a specific focus on commodities such as corn, soybeans, tomatoes, and poultry (Hillison, 1993). Clubs were designed to give youth a chance to meet peers with similar interests, learn about agriculture, and compete in judging competitions (Hillison & Bryant, 2001). These clubs gave geographically isolated farm youth the chance to improve communication, decision making, speaking, and social skills. Youth were educated in self-expression, parliamentary procedure, and teamwork. The Future Farmers of America (now known as The National FFA Organization) was officially chartered in 1928 and was modeled after agriculture clubs to enhance leadership development in rural youth.

Participation in the FFA at the local, state, and national levels has been a main source for secondary agriculture students to develop leadership knowledge and skills. However, some students have not taken full advantage of the FFA component, and thus were not exposed to potential leadership development (Morgan & Rudd, 2006). "Leadership skills are in high demand" (Dubrin, 2001, p. 21) by employers. Students of today need more opportunities than ever before in leadership and personal development for future success (Ricketts & Rudd, 2002). Previous researchers have concluded that leadership training aides students in developing leadership skills desired by employers (Carter & Spotanski, 1989) and that more training is needed (Ricketts & Rudd, 2002). Secondary agricultural education programs have implemented concepts of leadership within course content, and some have offered separate leadership courses in an attempt to educate students in the area of leadership.

The purpose of secondary agricultural education programs is to prepare students for successful careers and a lifetime of informed choices in global agriculture, food, fiber and natural resources systems (National Council for Agricultural Education, 2008). That purpose is achieved through an agricultural education program consisting of three integrated components that include formal classroom and laboratory instruction, FFA, and supervised

agricultural experience programs. Preparing teachers to effectively implement the integrated, three-component model and guide secondary students to achieve the intended purpose has been the primary focus of agricultural teacher education programs for many years.

Demand for research pertaining to the status of agricultural teacher preparation has increased as a result of reports that were critical of public education and produced a call for reformation of teacher education (McLean & Camp 2000; Swortzel, 1999). The purpose of early studies was to provide baseline data and a benchmark to describe the status of teacher preparation programs in agricultural education (Swortzel, 1999). One such study reviewed the coursework required among ten agricultural education teacher preparation programs that were considered by the profession to be of quality (McLean & Camp, 2000). The study focused on the required professional development courses and did not consider general education or technical agriculture courses. Analysis of course syllabi produced a list of 18 identifiable courses. Courses focusing on teaching methods, program planning, and student teaching were the most frequently cited. Courses taught in at least half the teacher education programs addressed student organizations, community relations, problem solving, and professionalism. McLean and Camp recommended that dialog occur among professionals to specify content that should be included in pre-service agricultural teacher education programs.

The American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE) adopted National Standards for Teacher Education in Agriculture that provided qualitative benchmarks for agricultural teacher education programs. One of the standards specified, "The design of the agricultural education teacher preparation program ensures that students complete a balanced program of general education, technical content, and pedagogical and professional studies" (American Association for Agricultural Education, 2001, p. 2). Therefore, quality agricultural teacher education programs were expected to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for teachers to be competent in the subject matter areas that they were expected to teach.

Leadership content knowledge and skill is necessary for teachers to be highly qualified and effective in teaching leadership. Adhering to a

general learning model, leadership skills can be developed through acquiring conceptual knowledge, studying examples, engaging in experiential exercises, receiving feedback, and practicing (Dubrin, 2001). Figure 1 presents a conceptual model which illustrates how content

knowledge and skills may be acquired by teacher candidates. The model depicts factors that contribute to the ability of a teacher to teach a particular content area which should potentially lead to student development in the content area.

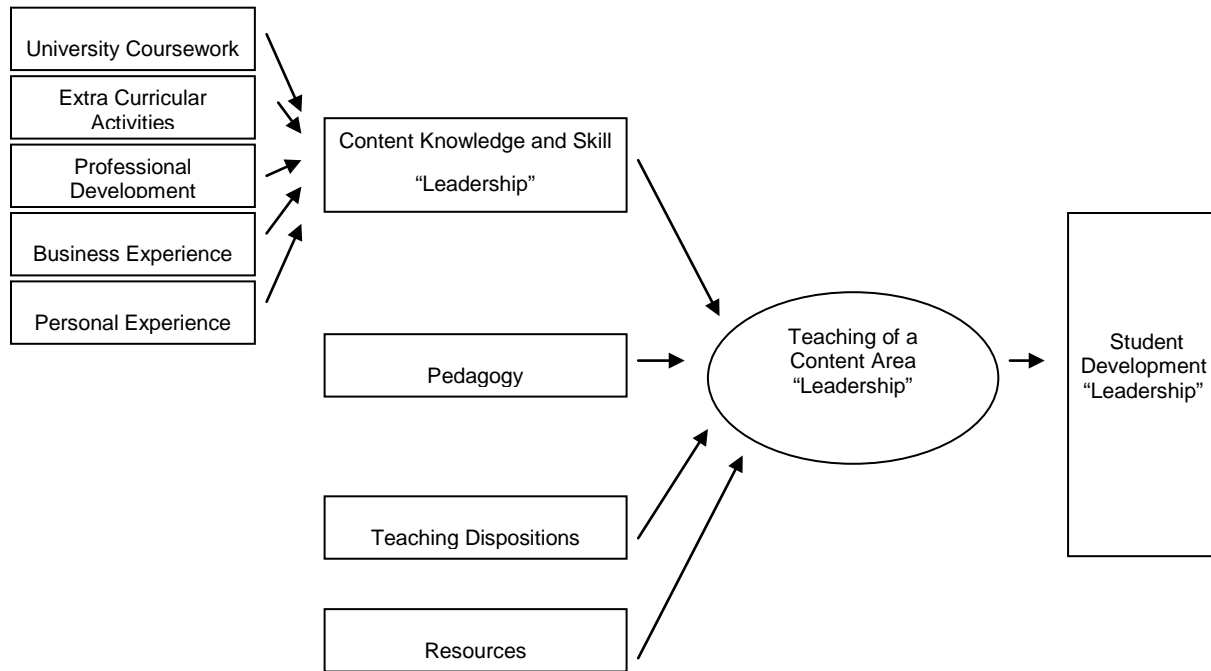


Figure 1. Conceptual model of agricultural education teacher candidate content knowledge

Leadership courses at the post-secondary level have been a part of teacher preparation to varying degrees over the years. Many agricultural leadership courses were originally developed to prepare agricultural education teacher candidates to teach about FFA. These courses included topics such as parliamentary procedure, public speaking, and officer development. Therefore, agricultural leadership courses originated from a very practical motive to address what would be taught in high school agricultural education programs. Connections to early course offerings can be traced through university catalogs to the early 1960s with the word “leadership” in the title (W. G. Weeks, personal communication, November 12, 2007). Similar courses were offered before that time but usually did not contain the word “leadership” in the title. Extension educators also recognized the benefits of leadership courses. Subsequently, courses were tailored to address 4-H youth

leader development and leadership applications in non-formal settings.

Leadership courses in agricultural education continued to evolve as the theoretical foundation of the courses has been questioned. The challenge to strengthen academic rigor in leadership courses initiated a movement to anchor courses in leadership theory in addition to skill development (S. M. Fritz, personal communication, October 22, 2007). During this process, the door was opened to additional students throughout the university campus, beyond agricultural education. Enrollment in leadership courses has grown by attracting students from other majors and departments throughout the university.

Numerous agricultural education programs throughout the United States offer leadership courses. Fritz et al. (2003) examined leadership courses offered by agricultural education programs. The research was presented as a

follow-up of two studies completed over the previous ten years. There were 92 departments contacted which resulted in a 45% response rate. The authors reported on leadership courses offered, the course titles that were used, the level at which leadership courses were offered, the number of students enrolled in the courses, and the background of the faculty who taught the leadership courses.

Fritz et al. (2003) reported that 68% of the respondents acknowledged offering leadership and human resource management/development courses. Courses had been offered for an average of 17 years with an upper limit of the range of 50 years. Titles for the leadership courses and programs differed widely among the respondent institutions. The word "leadership" appeared in 61% of leadership course titles offered in agricultural education programs. "Agriculture" was found in 29% and "development" in 22% of the course titles. More than half of the departments offering leadership coursework required the courses for their departmental majors.

In an earlier study, Fritz and Brown (1998) described the characteristics of leadership course offerings through a review of course syllabi. Eighty course syllabi were reviewed in the study and 25 syllabi contained a course objective related to leadership styles and/or characteristics. Preparation of youth leadership development professionals were stated in the course objectives on 14 of the syllabi. *The Leadership Challenge* by Kouzes and Posner (1990) was used in seven courses as a textbook and *Why Leaders Can't Lead* by Bennis (1989) was used in four courses. An experiential component was included in five percent of the courses and 16 courses required students to apply their leadership knowledge in a real world setting (Fritz & Brown, 1998).

Highly qualified teachers of agricultural education are being prepared through agricultural teacher education programs at the post-secondary level. Teacher education curriculum and field experiences are designed to prepare teacher candidates to be effective in the content areas they are expected to teach. Curriculum structure and course requirements for teacher preparation programs are established by each institution in order to produce knowledgeable, effective, and highly qualified candidates for licensure and career success

within the teaching profession. Based on the No Child Left Behind legislation, "highly qualified" teachers must meet three essential criteria: (a) attaining a bachelor's degree or better in the subject taught; (b) obtain full state teacher certification; and (c) demonstrate knowledge in the subjects taught (United States Department of Education, 2006). Teachers should possess a deep and thorough content knowledge within the subject area they are expected to teach (Grossman & Schoenfeld, 2005). Teachers must have knowledge of their subject area in order to teach effectively (Bransford, Derry, Berliner, & Hammerness, 2005). University faculty and administrators are responsible for assessing course offerings and monitoring program requirements in order to produce highly qualified and effective agriculture teachers. Therefore, agricultural teacher education programs must be designed to ensure that graduates possess knowledge and skills in the subjects that they teach, and for agricultural education teachers that includes the content area of leadership.

### Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to describe required leadership courses that were included in agricultural education teacher preparation programs. Department chairs and faculty engaged in the agricultural teacher education program were asked if their respective program required leadership courses. Faculty from programs requiring leadership courses were then asked to provide course syllabi for each required leadership course. Each course syllabus was reviewed to identify leadership content topics, components used to determine student grades in the course, and required textbooks.

The following research objectives were used to guide the study:

- RO 1: Describe the proportion of agricultural teacher education programs that require leadership courses in their teacher preparation program.
- RO 2: Identify the department that offers leadership courses required in agricultural teacher education programs.
- RO 3: Describe the content topics included in required leadership courses for agricultural teacher education programs.

RO 4: Describe the components included in determining the grades students earn in required leadership courses for agricultural teacher education programs.

### Methods and Procedures

Descriptive studies are conducted to become more familiar with the current status of a phenomena and to accurately describe the norm. The purpose of this descriptive study was to explore and describe what exists; however, this study did not investigate relationships of characteristics or attempt to produce generalizations about any relationships. Descriptive studies using content review have been widely used in education to examine textbooks, student writing, and prevailing practices such as entrance requirements and course offerings (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Using descriptive study methodology, this research involved reviews of course syllabi from required leadership courses in agricultural education teacher preparation programs.

Descriptive studies also examine what is being done during a specific time and the findings are a reflection of only one point in time for a specified population frame. These findings cannot be generalized to a different point in time or a different population. The target population for this study was all agricultural teacher education programs in the United States. The population frame was defined using the American Association for Agricultural Education Directory (American Association for Agricultural Education, 2007) to obtain a listing of the institutions that offered teacher preparation in agricultural education. The primary respondent within each institution was identified from the directory. A secondary respondent was selected from institutions if the primary respondent was not directly involved in the agricultural teacher education program at the respective institution. The final respondent list included university faculty who were knowledgeable of course and content requirements for students preparing to become licensed teachers of agriculture in their respective state.

Respondents selected from each agricultural teacher education program were initially contacted via email to explain the purpose of the

study ( $N = 82$ ). Each respondent was asked to answer four questions, which were developed by the researchers, pertaining to offering and requiring leadership coursework in preparing teachers of agriculture. A second email, with the same questions, was sent out three weeks later to the respondents who had not replied.

A third attempt was made after one month later to collect data from non-respondent institutions. Before the third email was sent, the final respondent list was re-examined, and some contacts were changed in an attempt to increase the number of respondent institutions. The third email message was sent to the respondents with a one week reply deadline in order to have information from their institution included in the study. An email reminder was sent half-way through this period to remind the respondents of the deadline. At the conclusion of the data collection process 89% ( $N = 73$ ) of the institutions had provided responses. Non-respondent follow-up procedures were not employed since the findings represent 89% of the target population, and even so, should not be generalized beyond the institutions that responded.

Respondents were initially asked to indicate if their department offered leadership coursework. Subsequently, respondents were also asked to indicate if their respective institution required leadership course(s) in the agricultural teacher preparation program. Leadership courses required in agricultural teacher preparation programs were identified by the respondent from each respective institution. Respondents were also asked to provide syllabi for their required leadership courses. Based on information included on the course syllabus, the department offering the course was determined.

Research objective three was addressed by reviewing the content topics identified on the respective course syllabi. A complete list of all leadership content topics was compiled and similar topics were combined to produce a comprehensive list of leadership content topics.

Research objective four involved a similar procedure in which the components used in determining student grades were examined and combined to produce a comprehensive list. Component weights were calculated as a percentage of each component as a proportion of the final course grade.

**Results and Findings**

Institutional representatives from 82 universities were contacted and 73 provided responses for an overall 89% response rate. Fifty-three (73%) of the respondents in this study reported that their department offered leadership coursework. Thirty-two (44%) of the respondents reported that leadership coursework was required in their agricultural teacher preparation program. Twenty-five institutions required one course in leadership, six institutions required two courses in leadership, and one institution required three leadership courses. Semester credit hours of required leadership coursework (for those institutions requiring leadership courses) ranged from one to nine with a mode of three semester credit hours (19 institutions reporting).

Research objective two was used to identify the department offering the required leadership course(s) in agricultural teacher preparation programs. Thirty-nine (97.5%) of the required leadership courses were offered by the same department as the agricultural teacher preparation program. One (2.5%) required leadership course was offered outside the host department of agricultural teacher preparation by a Department of Educational Leadership. Review of course syllabi revealed 38 different

titles for required leadership courses. *Personal Leadership Development* and *Team and Organizational Leadership* were the only duplicate course titles with each occurring twice. Thirty-four (85%) of the course titles contained the word “leadership,” 15 (38%) contained the word “agriculture” or “agricultural,” and 14 (35%) contained the word “development” or “developing.”

Research objective three was to describe the content topics included in required leadership courses for agricultural teacher education programs. Findings for question three were summarized on an institutional basis. Institutions requiring more than one leadership course were reported as a composite list of topics that teacher candidates would encounter in their teacher preparation program at the institution. Reviewing the required course syllabi yielded a comprehensive list of 78 leadership content topics reflected in 29 agricultural teacher preparation programs. The most frequent content topics included leadership styles / categories, communication skills, leadership traits / characteristics, defining leadership, teamwork / group dynamics, leadership theory, parliamentary procedure, diversity, philosophy / mission / goals, and power / influence. The 18 most frequently-listed leadership content topics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Frequency of Content Topics in Required Leadership Courses (N = 29)*

Content Topic	f
Leadership styles / categories	18
Communication skills	17
Leadership traits / characteristics	17
Defining leadership	15
Teamwork / group dynamics	15
Leadership theory	14
Parliamentary procedure	14
Diversity	13
Philosophy / mission / goals	13
Power / influence	13
Conflict resolution	12
Ethics	11
Presentations / speaking	11
Values	11
Effective meetings	10
Evaluation / critique	10
Principles / role of the FFA organization	10
Transformational leadership	10

Objective four involved describing components used to determine the grade students earn in required leadership courses for agricultural teacher education programs. The most frequently mentioned assignments on the syllabi were quizzes / tests / exams, theme papers, participation, individual presentations, and group presentations. Overall, 33 different

grading components were used in computing student course grades in required leadership courses. However, approximately half of the grading components were unique to one or two of the required leadership courses. The 15 most frequently listed components are reported in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Frequency of Course Components Used for Grading (N = 33)*

Course Component for Grading	<i>f</i>
Quiz / test / exam	29
Theme papers	23
Participation	21
Individual presentation	16
Group presentation	12
In class exercises	5
Journal	5
Philosophy	5
Portfolio	5
Service learning	5
Shadow / observation	5
Classroom resources	3
Personal assessments	3
FFA program of activities	3
School visit	3

Leadership course syllabi were reviewed to describe the relative weight (calculated as a percentage of the overall grade) of each component included in the determination of a student's grade in the course. However, the researchers were unable to determine the

weights for every component for each course. Table 3 presents the ten most common grading components, frequency, mean weight, and range of those components used in determining course grades.

Table 3  
*Relative Weighting of Leadership Course Components in Grading (N = 33)*

Grading Component	<i>f</i>	Mean Weight Percent	Range Percent
Quizzes / test / exam	27	33.9	5.2 – 80.0
Theme papers	21	21.1	5.0 – 60.0
Participation	20	12.8	5.0 – 26.5
Individual presentation	13	20.9	5.9 – 45.0
Group presentation	12	15.5	7.8 – 45.0
In-class exercises	5	22.7	8.4 – 45.0
Service learning	5	21.0	15.0 – 30.0
Journal	5	20.9	5.6 – 50.0
Shadow / observation	5	13.7	5.0 – 30.0
Philosophy	4	6.3	2.0 – 10.0

Textbooks were required in 26 of the 33 leadership courses. Fifty-three required textbooks were listed in the syllabi resulting in a list of 36 different titles. *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Northouse, P. G., 2001, 2004, 2006) was the most frequently ( $f=5$ ) required textbook.

Traditional college textbooks, written materials from the National FFA, and general audience literature were also listed as required textbooks on required leadership course syllabi. The nine most frequently required textbooks are listed in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Textbooks in Required Leadership Courses (N = 33)*

Required Textbooks	<i>f</i>
<i>Leadership: Theory and practice.</i> (Northouse, P. G., 2001, 2004, 2006)	5
<i>Effective oral communication.</i> (Cheek, J. G., Arrington, L. R., Rudd, R. D., & McGhee, M. B., 1999)	3
<i>Agriculture Teacher's Manual.</i> (National FFA Organization, 1998)	3
<i>FFA Student Handbook.</i> (National FFA Organization, 2006)	3
<i>Local program resource guide: A complete guide to enhancing the local agricultural education program.</i> (National FFA Organization, 2007)	3
<i>Official FFA student manual.</i> (National FFA Organization, 2007)	3
<i>Seven habits of highly effective people.</i> (Covey, S. R., 1989)	2
<i>Robert's rules of order newly revised.</i> (Robert, H. M., 2000)	2
<i>Leadership: Personal development and career success.</i> (Ricketts, C., 1997)	2

### Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

The proportion of departments offering leadership coursework (73%) increased slightly in comparison to the 68% previously reported by Fritz et al. (2003). This study also revealed that most agricultural teacher education programs in the United States do not require coursework in leadership as part of the teacher preparation program. Among programs requiring leadership coursework, there is wide variability in the course syllabi regarding the leadership content topics, the components that factor into the course grade, and the leadership textbooks used in the courses. There also appears to be a wide discrepancy regarding interpretation of the term leadership. Some required courses were clearly based on a theoretical foundation of leadership constructs in which the underlying course content topics, grading components, and textbooks were directly aligned with leadership theories. However, a number of other required leadership courses focused primarily on the FFA and included a range of topics associated with the student organization as a component of secondary agricultural education and extended to Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs, Career Development Events (CDE),

public speaking, parliamentary procedure, and record books. Although these may be important program topics that highly effective agricultural education teachers need to know, it does raise questions about the theoretical foundation for teacher preparation in the content area of leadership.

The leadership content addressed in required courses yielded an extensive list of topics. Although there appeared to be some overlap between topics, it was noted that among the 78 topics listed, even the most popular topic (i.e. leadership styles / categories) was only included at 18 institutions. All other leadership content topics were listed in fewer than 18 institutional syllabi, indicating a general lack of consensus among agricultural teacher educators with regard to leadership content topics needed by future secondary agriculture teachers. Although some variability is expected, it may be desirable to delineate core leadership content topics that should be addressed in required leadership coursework for secondary agricultural education teacher candidates.

Variability in the leadership content topics addressed in required leadership coursework also raises questions about the leadership content topics that are being taught in secondary agricultural education programs. Although

curriculum content is generally under the purview of the local school, agricultural educators typically decide on topics included in the program and in which courses the topics are organized. Even so, there is no clear evidence of leadership content topics that serve as a core for secondary agricultural education programs. Therefore, it is recommended that further research be conducted to develop a core list of leadership content topics that should be included in secondary agricultural education programs. Using a list of recommended leadership content topics, secondary agriculture teachers would be better able to ensure that important and appropriate leadership content topics are being addressed in their program, rather than relying on their individual judgment which appears to be the current practice with regard to leadership content taught in secondary agricultural education programs.

Specification of core leadership content topics for secondary agricultural education programs would also be helpful in guiding curriculum development efforts within agricultural teacher education programs. All but one of the required leadership courses in agricultural teacher preparation programs were offered within the same department that provided the agricultural teacher preparation program. Thus, the department that prepares teachers of agriculture also has academic purview over most of the required leadership courses. These departments therefore have the opportunity and responsibility to design and develop leadership courses to match student

needs. Courses may be designed and developed to meet a general need for a variety of students and/or specifically tailored for secondary agriculture teachers who will be teaching leadership content and skills. Agricultural teacher preparation programs have tremendous potential to influence how leadership content knowledge and skills are taught at the secondary level. Teacher educators should review the leadership content topics in required leadership courses and modify the courses to ensure alignment with the core leadership content topics identified for the secondary agricultural education programs.

From the onset, leadership has been an integral component of secondary agricultural education programs. Leadership is a content area that has evolved in agricultural education to not only include the opportunities presented through the FFA organization, but also through classroom instruction and supervised agricultural experience programs.

Preparing highly qualified teachers of agriculture has been and continues to be the primary purpose of post-secondary agricultural teacher preparation programs. Highly qualified and effective teachers of agriculture should possess content knowledge in the subject areas that they are expected to teach. Therefore, future secondary agriculture teachers should be expected to complete coursework that encompasses leadership content topics that are important and appropriate for secondary agricultural education programs.

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