

## **A One-Day Campus-Based Recruitment Event for Agricultural and Family and Consumer Sciences Education**

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*The iTeachU recruitment event was developed in 2011 in response to growing concerns about the nationwide shortage of teachers in agricultural education and family and consumer sciences (FCS) education. To strengthen recruitment and retention efforts at South Dakota State University in these program areas, a one-day, campus-based program was designed and implemented. Conducted annually, the event provides attendees an opportunity to explore the teaching profession, learn about agricultural education and FCS education programs, and experience the environment and climate of a college campus. Such recruitment efforts are essential to meet the demand for teachers in South Dakota, the region, and the nation. As a result of this effort, participation in this recruitment event and enrollment in each of these programs has increased. Additionally, a high percentage of enrolling students have been retained through degree completion.*

### **Introduction**

Career and technical education (CTE) programs have the potential to lead to employment in high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand occupations or professions (ACTE, 2010): Such employment is critical to the economic development of South Dakota and the region. However, in South Dakota, agricultural and family and consumer sciences (FCS) education programs at South Dakota State University (SDSU) serve as the only in-state programs that prepare future teachers in these (CTE) fields.

A review of data on teacher shortages across the nation indicates critical shortages of agricultural and FCS education teachers throughout the Midwest. Particularly, South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Iowa, and Wisconsin have reported an inadequate supply of teachers in one or both of these areas in recent years (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2015). In effort to address the inadequate supply of future teachers in South Dakota, the Critical Teaching Needs Scholarship Program was established during the 2013 South Dakota Legislative Session under Senate Bill 233 (South Dakota Board of Regents, n.d.) The purpose of the scholarship program is to encourage South Dakota's high school graduates to obtain postsecondary education in teaching, remain in the state upon college graduation, and contribute to the state and its citizens by working in a critical need teaching area (South Dakota Board of Regents, n.d.) In addition, South Dakota data suggest that a shortage of teachers exists in CTE, broadly defined (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2013). A national survey of secondary

programs in FCS education from 2010-2012 found that 26 of the 36 reporting states faced a shortage of FCS teachers (Werhan, 2013). Despite the recognized demand for teachers in agricultural and FCS education in South Dakota, SDSU has struggled, in recent years, to supply an adequate number of program graduates to fill available positions.

The gap between the supply and demand of graduates in agricultural and FCS education may exist for a number of reasons. First, similar to other areas of education, a large portion of the workforce in these two areas is comprised of “senior teachers” who are at, or nearing, retirement. Looking forward, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2009) projected that more than half of teachers teaching in the United States in 2009 could retire by 2019.

To address the deficit and ensure an adequate number of highly qualified graduates complete teacher preparation programs in both agricultural and FCS education, focused and intentional efforts must be made in recruitment and retention. Both of these content areas are often smaller programs, in terms of enrollment numbers and faculty size, and this may contribute to their limited visibility due to a reduced capacity to engage in recruitment and promotional activities. However, to meet the need for agricultural and FCS teachers, these programs must become more visible among the early childhood, elementary education, and secondary teacher preparation programs on college campuses.

## **iTeachU**

### **Program Goals**

The iTeachU program was developed as an intentional and focused recruitment activity for both agricultural and FCS education. While increasing the visibility of each program on and beyond the SDSU campus, the primary purpose of iTeachU was to recruit students to agricultural and FCS education. The purposes of the program were to:

- Identify current 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade students in South Dakota and surrounding states who have demonstrated an interest in one or both of these career areas and/or have been nominated by someone for possessing the potential to be an effective teacher of agricultural or FCS education.
- Host a one-day, campus-based program for iTeachU attendees that allows for connection with faculty, students, and the college environment.
- Develop a personalized approach to follow-up with iTeachU participants to further develop relationships with prospective students, thereby increasing the likelihood of application to the teacher preparation programs.

### **iTeachU Recruitment and Scheduling**

The inaugural iTeachU event was held in the spring of 2011, thanks to supportive funding through an institutional grant. Despite enthusiastic promotional efforts, only 12 students attended. Since the initial year, attendance at iTeachU has consistently increased to 53 students in 2015. As a result, the program which began as a means to provide prospective students with an authentic experience in the fields of agricultural and FCS education has expanded to include prospective students interested in other areas of teacher preparation as well.

From 2011-2013, the event was held during the spring semester. Initially the program was hosted during finals week, which allowed for greater access to campus facilities and more flexible schedules for college students assisting with the event. While beneficial in some ways, this timing did not allow attendees to experience a typical college day or attend class sessions.

Additionally, the end of the year timeframe created challenges for some secondary teachers wishing to attend with their students. In 2014, the event was moved to the fall semester. This move allowed for coordination with a fall meeting for cooperating teachers. Participation in iTeachU increased as a result of this move. Secondary teachers participating in the cooperating teacher seminar were encouraged to bring students for iTeachU. Some teachers indicated that it was easier to obtain administrative approval to attend because of the streamlined scheduling of the two events. This alignment allowed for shared transportation, eliminating what had been a barrier for some students prior to the change.

A letter of recommendation from a current teacher, counselor, or administrator have been submitted as a part of the application process since iTeachU began. In this process, students have identified the area of secondary education they are interested in, shared why they have an interest in education, and described their personal involvement in education, leadership, and community. Applications and recommendations have been reviewed by faculty at SDSU, and students selected were sent congratulatory letters through email by university faculty members. Up to this point, no applicants for the program have been turned away from the event.

In 2014, the scope of the recruitment event also expanded to include prospective students with an interest in any area of secondary education. As another change at that time, rather than requiring a nomination, each student simply applied to participate.

### **Activities During iTeachU**

On the day of the event, secondary students are involved in an action-packed day. From 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., students are on campus participating in the day's activities. Current undergraduate students in agricultural and FCS education serve as hosts for the prospective students and interact with them throughout the day. Through this interaction, prospective students are able to hear firsthand the opportunities available to them in these program areas, and opportunities available at SDSU, generally. This interaction has certainly been a valuable component of the recruitment event. In addition, a variety of interactive sessions are included in the day's agenda. These sessions vary from year to year, but include activities such as charades to identify qualities of effective teachers, a human scavenger hunt, team-building activities facilitated by undergraduate students, and a "field trip" to the university dairy processing facility and campus ice cream store. Each year's agenda has also included lunch at the student center and a panel of teacher candidates who share their own passion for education and answer questions.

### **Program Evaluation**

Student participants of iTeachU and secondary teachers in attendance have been asked to evaluate the program on an annual basis. A brief, paper-and-pencil evaluation has been distributed to participants of the event to gain immediate feedback. Students provided insight about what they enjoyed most about the day, and make recommendations for future events.

One student stated, "The iTeachU event was very helpful for me. I learned a lot about my future career and I loved the whole day. I really enjoyed hearing from the students. They were very helpful and I really enjoyed them." Another added, "It was a great time meeting new friends, and viewing SDSU. I had a great time actually going into a classroom and listening to the teacher give a lecture and being involved." A secondary teacher in attendance echoed the impact, sharing, "It provided my students, who are nontraditional students, to experience a college setting. Many of my students have not ever been on a college campus and this provides them an opportunity to experience what it is like first hand."

## Conclusion

Overall, the iTeachU event has been a tremendous addition to the recruitment efforts at SDSU. Each year, faculty and current students look forward to the event as an opportunity to showcase the academic programs in secondary teacher preparation and encourage others to pursue teaching careers. Secondary teachers indicate that this event allows them to identify prospective teachers, and provide a way for their students to learn more about what it takes to be a teacher. Student feedback indicates that they enjoy the day, with several students expressing interest in returning for a second year. In response to this feedback, a two-track approach to the event was implemented in 2015. Track 1 served as an introduction to education and the teaching profession, while Track 2 involved a more in-depth experience for returning students. Each Track 2 participant had the opportunity to attend a college class and engage in a facilitation workshop.

While the long term impacts of the iTeachU program have not been completely realized, several of the students who have participated in iTeachU event have enrolled in agricultural or FCS education programs at SDSU. A small number of participants from earlier years of the event are nearing completion of their undergraduate degrees in one of the two programs.

## Discussion

iTeachU, a one-day, campus-based recruitment event, can easily be replicated by other teacher education programs and institutions seeking to recruit students to agricultural and FCS education, or any teacher preparation program. For SDSU, not only did iTeachU bring prospective students to campus for a visit, it also provided for additional contact with current teachers, and encouraged collaboration between faculty in agricultural and FCS education and general secondary education faculty.

As this event continues and its impact expands, it should continue to reach more students and increase the size and scope of teacher preparation programs in agricultural and FCS education at SDSU. Further, as the availability of highly-qualified agricultural and FCS education teachers increases, awareness of the opportunities that CTE offers for hands-on learning and employment in high-skill and high-wage areas should increase among secondary-level students.

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### **Citation**

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