

Department of Agricultural Education and Communication

Spring 2006



connecting people and agriculture

A Master's Program That Goes the Distance

By Jessica Rothering

Sitting in Archer Road traffic, prowling the over-filled parking lots for an unclaimed spot and waiting for buses that never seem to be on time are a few of the everyday campus hassles that students enrolled in the master of science degree offered by distance can avoid.

The University of Florida's Department of Agricultural Education and Communication is pioneering a master's program specifically for working agriscience teachers and Extension agents. The courses for the program are offered entirely through the Internet, and the students can watch the lectures at a convenient time in their schedule.

Assistant professor and distance master's degree program coordinator Brian Myers said UF's is one of the first master's programs offered by distance in the South.

"UF is the only game in town for an agricultural education and communication graduate degree," Myers said.

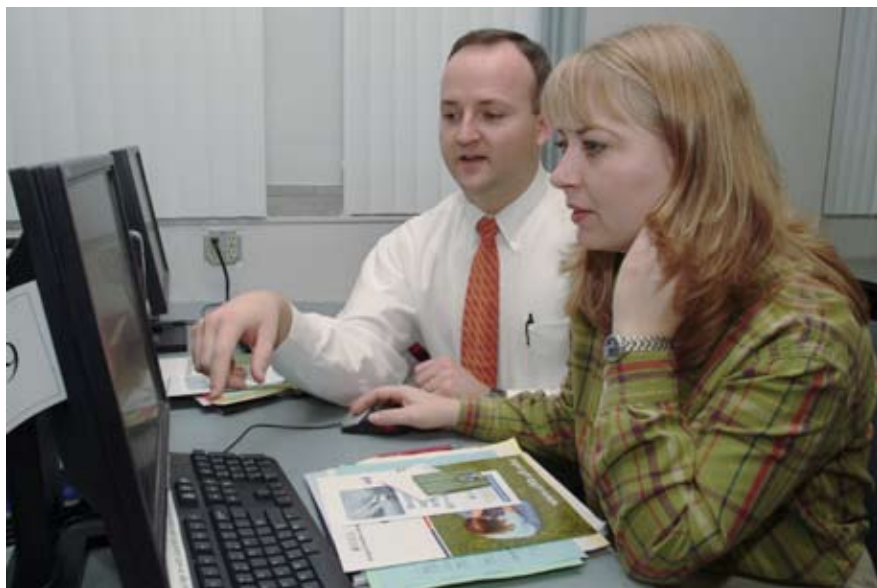
The team of distance education faculty has established a curriculum that is now being used by the University of Georgia, Oklahoma State University and Texas Tech University to offer a similar program within their school, Myers said.

The program takes 2.5 years to complete, with courses lasting eight weeks. The courses operate the same way as on-campus classes, with midterms, final exams and projects.

"When designing this program, we kept in mind that these students are full-time, working professionals," Myers said, "and we focused the programs around their needs."

The assignments given in the program are applicable to the students' work lives, and, in turn, enhance their abilities to perform in the workplace, without having to travel for hours to campus.

Currently, UF has agriscience teachers from Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas enrolled in the graduate program by distance. Students are only required to come to the campus twice during the entire program, for orientation and to present their final project.



Dr. Brian Myers assists a new student in the distance master's program.

The master's program currently has 32 students and will have its first 18 graduates in spring 2007. Only 20 new students per year are accepted into the program.

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Wedgworth Institute Builds Industry Leaders

By Katie Duley

For over 15 years, the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences has worked to keep educating Florida's agricultural industry leaders, through the Wedgworth Leadership Institute.

The Wedgworth Leadership Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources is designed to develop the leadership capabilities of people in the agricultural industry who will become increasingly involved in policy formation processes.

"The future of Florida's agriculture, natural resources and rural communities depends on leaders who are prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century," said Hannah Carter, Wedgworth Leadership Institute program director. "These men and women must be able to address these challenges with a vision of local, state, national and international dimensions."

Diversity in age, professions, gender and geographic regions are what this program focuses upon when selecting its class members, Carter said.

"We are a leadership group. We want to give experience," she said. "This group is the future leaders of



WEDGWORTH
LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Developing Leaders for Florida Agriculture & Natural Resources

the industry."

The Wedgworth Leadership Institute works to build an understanding of people, class members and their fellow citizens from all segments of the society, build an understanding of the social, economic, cultural and political systems in which people function and to use this framework to analyze and address the complex issues facing people

interested in areas related to agriculture, natural resources and rural communities.

"I became involved in the program because I wanted to learn about agriculture, but I ended up gaining confidence and learning life leadership skills that are a part of me forever," said Erin Best, founder of The Marketplace, an agricultural and advertising and marketing firm, former class V participant and member of the WLI advisory board.

Class members participate in 11 study and travel seminars nationwide and internationally. The seminars are conducted by government and private business leaders, state and federal agency personnel, and university faculty and staff.

Emerson to Lead Agricultural Awareness Effort

By Carrie Pedreiro

The tallest corn plant in a field begins with the smallest seed. Its growth is the result of a farmer's hard work and constant care. As simple as this concept may seem to some, the majority of the general public does not make the connection.

The Agriculture Awareness Initiative, a new Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences effort, is designed to help bridge this gap by educating the general public about how Florida's agriculture and natural resources industry impact their everyday life.

The man tapped to organize this initiative is Scott Emerson.

"I am excited to be in this role," Emerson said. "I am glad to be a part of the Agricultural Education and Communication family and hope to make a difference."

For Emerson, an opportunity to return to his alma mater and promote agriculture was an offer too good to pass up. Emerson, formerly editor and associate publisher for *Citrus and Vegetable Magazine*, joined the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication staff for a one-

year appointment.

The project's goal is to help Extension, media and the general public work together to improve the visibility of Florida agriculture.

Emerson said the plan involves many components for success.

Emerson said he plans to research and evaluate existing agricultural awareness efforts to determine what is working and what needs improvement. He admits current awareness efforts will be essential in the development of the new project.

Emerson said the support and involvement of agriculturalists will add to the success of the effort.

"Everyone has to be involved," Emerson said. "If you have anything to do with agriculture, get involved and be an ambassador for your industry."



Scott Emerson

Ag Ed Program to Start in Plant City

By Julia Cates

The Department of Agricultural Education and Communications is reaching out to prospective students in the Plant City area.

Beginning this fall in partnership with Hillsborough Community College, the department will offer an agricultural education undergraduate program in Plant City, as part of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences' off-campus academic programs.

Courses will be taught by faculty on-site, as well as faculty from surrounding Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences' Research and Education Centers. The research centers specialize in horticultural production, entomology and nematology, wildlife sciences, forestry sciences, plant pathology, and soil and water sciences.

Associate professor Jim Dyer will be teaching the teacher education courses needed for state certification. Dyer will be the only agricultural education faculty member at the Plant City campus.

"CALs's Department of Agricultural Education and Communication is looking to attract the non-traditional student group at the Plant City campus," said AEC department chair Ed Osborne.

Students who want and need a degree but who cannot travel to Gainesville are the primary audience for the new program. The department hopes to have 20 to 30 students enrolled in the program within the next several years.

The department also hopes to come closer to filling agriscience teaching vacancies easier by offering off-campus programs.

"There are 30 to 40 teacher vacancies every year, and we are not able to meet the demands for that," Osborne said.

Osborne also said that if anyone can make the program work, it would be Dyer.

Dyer will relocate from his Gainesville residence to start up the department's new program in Hillsborough County.



Department Establishes Endowed Scholarship

By Brittney Parrish

The Department of Agricultural Education and Communication awards thousands of dollars in scholarships to its students each year.

Agricultural Education and Communication Department chair Ed Osborne said \$13,000 per year in scholarships is awarded to students in the department based on a student's leadership, professional potential and academic performance at the University of Florida.

Some of the money comes from scholarships that are not endowed and \$10,000 comes from endowed scholarship funds, Osborne said.

"Most endowed funds were initiated by a family member who wanted to honor someone for their work or in memory of a person," he said.

To endow a scholarship, a minimum of \$20,000 must be raised. The money is then deposited into the UF Foundation and scholarships are awarded by the gained interest.

"Endowed scholarships are good because it will provide a scholarship in perpetuity, meaning forever," Osborne said.

The newest endowed scholarship is the Stephens endowment, established in honor of John and Ethel Stephens. Mr. Stephens taught agriculture at South Sumter

High School in Bushnell, Fla., and later became a school board member.

The endowment began when a group of Mr. Stephens' former students met and formed a leadership team, Osborne said. This team set a goal of raising \$40,000 and in four months time they managed to raise \$60,000 from Stephens' former students and members of the Sumter community.

"He touched a lot of lives in his 23 years of teaching agriculture," Osborne said.

The scholarship will be awarded in 2007, after a year of generating interest, Osborne said. Preference will be given to students from Sumter County.

Best To Receive CALS Award

The 2005 College of Agricultural and Life Sciences' Horizon Award will be presented to AEC alumnus Erin Best at the fall TailGator. The Horizon Award recognizes individuals for their outstanding contributions and potential as leaders in the agricultural, natural resource, life science and related industries and professions.

Students, Professors Gain Experience Overseas

By Katie Duley

Many students and professors in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication are heading overseas to learn and experience a different way of life.

AEC Department lecturer Marta Hartmann, a native of Colombia, has worked to share many international experiences with students throughout her career.

“I believe that international travel is an incredible learning experience that reaches you professionally and personally,” Hartmann said. “It can expand your outlook in terms of people, places, culture and attitudes. It provides insight into why other people are different and how others look at worldviews and practices.”

Hartmann said international travel can have many professional and personal benefits, such as gaining independence, confidence, gaining cultural awareness, language skills and intercultural competence.

Hartmann has taken many students overseas and has worked in various parts of the world, such as Cameroon. Hartmann said that in today’s world, international travel is essential.

Many students have embraced opportunities to travel abroad. For many students in the AEC Department, there are opportunities to take individual trips or select an internship appropriate to their interests. Students also have



Students from the University of Florida and the University of Guelph pose in front of Niagara Falls during the 2005 exchange program.

the opportunity to participate in a group travel trip.

Peggy Rudser, senior in AEC and president of the Agricultural Communicators and Leaders of Tomorrow, traveled with five other students and associate professor Ricky Telg to the University of Guelph in Canada.

UF students met with Canadian students, visited the university and learned about Canadian agriculture.

Place Named Professional Development Coordinator

By Jacob Raburn

A new role means new opportunities for a professor in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication.

Nick Place, associate professor and graduate coordinator, was named as the new coordinator of the Program Development and Evaluation Center in the Florida Cooperative Extension Service in January.

“Nick Place brings a set of skills and knowledge related to professional development that is outstanding,” said Larry Arrington, dean and director of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service.

The main goals of the Program Development and Evaluation Center are to provide need-based training to Extension agents throughout the state and evaluate the effectiveness of the different training programs.

Place said he wants to develop a more comprehensive professional development program.

“I want to provide quality programs that meet the needs of our clientele,” he said. “If we can do a better job of assessing needs, we can have a more comprehensive way of

focusing on professional development.”

Place, who works closely with the associate dean of Extension, said he had been looking to take on greater leadership roles within the Extension organization, and this job is giving him the opportunity to do just that.

Since Place has taken his new position, he has been presented with overcoming some difficult tasks.

“It’s been a challenge to try and create a new system that works with all levels of the Extension system, from Extension agents to state faculty to department chairs,” he said.

Arrington said Place offers new leadership and guidance to provide accountability to the state.

Arrington said the new focus on professional development for faculty has been important to the organization’s success.

“Our organization is only as good as our faculty,” he said.



Nick Place

AEC Student Selected as National FFA Officer

By Brittney Parrish

Erica Der, a 21-year-old from Plant City, Fla., began showing 4-H projects with her sister at a young age. In middle school she joined the FFA so she could continue showing her projects at the Florida Strawberry Festival. Little did she know that showing these projects would open up many doors in her future.

Der was elected the Southern Region Vice President with the National FFA Organization in October 2005 in Louisville, Ky. She joined Turkey Creek FFA in the sixth grade and has been involved with the organization ever since.

Der said that her success began at a local level, and there are many people that helped her to get where she is today.

“My parents, my agriculture teachers in middle and high school, my church family and fellow FFA members all supported me and saw my own potential even when I could not see it myself,” Der said. “I am so grateful for the people I have had surrounding me throughout my life and know that they are the reasons I have been able to go after my goals.”

As a national officer, Der will have the opportunity to travel extensively. She will be on the road about 300 days of the year, traveling approximately 100,000 miles and visiting over 40 states.

Since her duties as a national officer have begun, she has traveled all across the southern region of the United States and as far away as Japan.

On her journey to Japan, Der and her fellow team met with Future Farmers of Japan members, visited with agriculture companies, toured the country and experienced a host stay.

“It was an amazing trip that taught us so much about how our cultures are so different and yet, in many ways, the same,” Der said.

When Der travels and meets with other FFA members, she says she wants to bring about an awareness that the FFA is not for a select group, but for anyone who wants to better themselves and the agriculture industry. She says there is no mold to being an FFA member; it’s for anyone and everyone.

“We see FFA as a place where students’ lives can be changed, and we want as many young people to experience that as possible,” Der said.

After her year of service, she will resume her classes at the University of Florida where she will be a junior specializing in agricultural communication.



Erica Der

Grant Projects Help Department Improve Communities

By Melissa Brown

Two grant programs are providing the funds for the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication to benefit society through education.

The grants were given through Florida Farm Bureau, NASA and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Leadership and growing food in space were the themes for these projects.

Florida Farm Bureau

Associate professor Rick Rudd is leading a team of faculty and students to develop a training program that will teach various county Farm Bureaus’ Board of Directors important leadership skills they can take back to their communities.

“Most directors are members in other political offices in their communities, and they will be able to use these skills in their other offices,” Rudd said.

The program took three years of research to determine the skills the directors needed most. The five skills were Farm Bureau foundations, effective meetings, political

advocacy, member recruitment and retention, and organized management.

“I am excited about the program,” Rudd said. “I think it will have a big impact on rural communities in developing adult leadership.”

Space Agriculture in the Classroom

Faculty members Shannon Washburn, Jim Dyer, Glenn Israel and department chair Ed Osborne are entering the final phase of the Space Agriculture in the Classroom grant project.

Unlike many grants, this one provided recurring funding for three years from USDA and NASA. Both groups have provided the University of Florida with funds to develop a middle school agricultural awareness program about growing food in space.

The program provides middle school science and agricultural teachers with access to online lesson plans. The program also developed magazines that explain the need for growing food in space and how it is being done.

“This project has really been fun to think about the other applications of agriculture,” Washburn said.

Partying for a Good Cause

Third Annual Gator Gala Raises Money to Endow Scholarship

By Peggy Rudser

Students, faculty and families danced the night away to raise money for the Ryan Rimmer memorial scholarship at the third annual Gator Gala on Feb. 4.

Gator Gala began three years ago as a semi-formal dance and fundraiser to honor the memory of former Agricultural Education and Communication student Ryan Rimmer, who was killed in a car accident in January 2003.

Rimmer, a native of Lakeland, Fla., served the Florida FFA Association as a state vice president from 2000 to 2001. While at the University of Florida, he double-majored in agricultural leadership and political science.

A member of the UF debate team, Rimmer was also active as the student recruiter for the AEC department.

“He was a shining star within the AEC department,” said Sorrell Vickers, Gator Gala chairwoman and friend of Rimmer. “His ability to remain active in so many organizations and always carry a positive attitude are perfect examples of the students within the AEC department. He is still deeply missed.”

Held in the Reitz Union Rion Ballroom, this year’s Gala was attended by over 80 people who enjoyed desserts, door



AEC Department students relax at Gator Gala, a semi-formal dance to raise money for the Ryan Rimmer Memorial Scholarship.

prizes and dancing. The event raised over \$3,200.

A silent auction was held throughout the event and raised \$1,800 with some big ticket items, such as a night’s stay at the Ritz Carlton on Amelia Island, Disney passes, an autographed football by Ike Hilliard of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and a guided fishing trip.

Over the past three years, Gator Gala has raised \$20,000, enough to endow a scholarship in Rimmer’s name.

Department Plays Leading Role in LEAD IFAS

By Patrick Hole

A leadership and administrative development training program in the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is housed in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication.

LEAD IFAS director and AEC associate professor Rick Rudd conducts the two-year program for enhancement and development of academic administration and leadership skills. LEAD IFAS involves two workshops each year with emphasis on a specific area of leadership or administration.

“LEAD IFAS was created to help coordinate new administrators so that their departments could better work as a team,” said Ricky Telg, AEC associate professor and current LEAD IFAS participant. “There were also very few programs in place to prepare faculty for administrative roles.”

Participants for LEAD IFAS are nominated by IFAS deans.

“Currently we are on our fourth class in LEAD IFAS, with each class consisting of 20 members,” Rudd said “After this class, we will have 80 successful alumni who have completed the two-year program.”

The facilitators of LEAD IFAS have expertise in leadership, group interactions and personnel management. Faculty in agricultural education and communication are involved, as well as IFAS administrators and external experts.

The goals of LEAD IFAS are to assess current management, leadership, human relations skills and traits of selected faculty, while developing a personal action plan for each faculty participant to enhance strengths and fulfill needs in their leadership and management practices.

“IFAS administrators have been very pleased with the program and have said that it was extremely useful,” Rudd said.

AEC Students and Faculty Receive Awards at Banquet

By Peggy Rudser

While many Gator fans celebrated the victory of the men's basketball team, faculty, staff, students and their families celebrated the accomplishments of the Agricultural Education and Communication Department at the annual banquet.

The banquet fell on the same night as the university's celebration at the O'Connell Center for the national champion men's basketball team.

"This year's banquet committee came up with some new ideas," said Ed Osborne, department chairman. "This year's banquet focused on the achievements of the students."

Awards were presented for highest grade point average for undergraduate students. The freshman recipient was Melissa Hinton, Jennifer Nobles received the award for sophomore, Melissa Brown received the award for junior, and Emily Hand received the award as the senior undergraduate student with the highest grade point average.

Hand received an award for outstanding undergraduate student of the year, and Allison Lutz received the same award for master's students. The department recognized

Emily Rhoades as the outstanding doctoral student and Jodi DeGraw as outstanding staff member.

Nick Fuhrman received an award for having the highest average instructor rating for the 2005-2006 school year for graduate students. Associate professor Rick Rudd received the award for highest average instructor rating for faculty.

In addition to the awards, special recognition was given to every organization within the department as the club presidents highlighted the organizations' activities.

Associate professor Ricky Telg announced the endowment of the Ryan Rimmer Memorial Scholarship, and plans for the placement of a commemorative brick in Ryan's name at Emerson Alumni Hall.

Lisa Hightower received special recognition for her work at IFAS Communication Services on the distance education Master's of Science degree program offered by the department.

Kirby Barrick, dean of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, attended the event and was given special recognition for his support of the department.

"This year the students were the highlight of our banquet," Osborne said. "We couldn't be more proud of them."

IFAS Extension Extends Reach with Solutions for YOUR Life

By Angelina C. Toomey

To reflect recent changes in Florida Extension's overall design, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences has created a comprehensive Web site targeting everyone, from farmers to families, in the state of Florida.

The new Solutions for YOUR Life Web site will serve to link all county Extension programs and raise public awareness about the everyday role of Extension, as well as the information it provides.

IFAS Extension dean Larry Arrington originally proposed this technological makeover in January 2004 to expand and promote Extension's value on a statewide level.

"Extension needed to use communication more efficiently and use the Web better," said Tracy Irani, an associate professor in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication who functions as the project's faculty adviser and market researcher. "A lot of people were using extension services, like 4-H or the Master Gardener's program, and didn't even realize it."

To bridge this communication gap, Solutions for YOUR Life will contain information on everything from current issues facing the agricultural industry to community development.

Irani said the Web site will also contain links to each of the separate divisions of Extension.

"Extension is more than just agriculture," said IFAS Web manager Ligia Ortega. "Extension is an organization that disseminates information to help the public solve common problems."

Ortega said that Extension offers information on a variety of topics, which include the environment, parenting, home gardening and nutrition, among others.

Now, its Web site will, too.

"This site will serve as an umbrella to catch whoever misses the local county Extension Web sites," she said. "However, we have to make sure people understand that this doesn't replace county Web sites."



Ligia Ortega, IFAS Web manager, leads the Web development team for Solutions for YOUR Life.

Department Workshop Improves Teachers' Technical Skills

By Courtney Meyers

To help agricultural education teachers across the state improve their technical and teaching skills, the University of Florida and the Florida Association of Agricultural Educators teamed up to host the UF/FAAE Tech Update on the Gainesville campus Jan. 13 and 14.

The update's purpose was to allow teachers to share ideas in a social environment, while learning the latest technical information. More than 70 high school and middle school agricultural education teachers, as well as current student interns, attended the workshops.

Brian Myers, assistant professor and update coordinator, said that after several years of not offering this type of workshop for agricultural education teachers, the FAAE asked the Agricultural Education and Communication Department to develop a weekend technical update.

"Teachers had so few opportunities to learn from other teachers," Myers said. "We wanted to give them that opportunity, but also give them the technical information to keep them current."

Participants at the update attended workshops that featured a variety of topics, including new teaching methods, career development event team preparation, new lessons plans and Web site design. Thirteen UF/IFAS faculty members and graduate students, four agricultural education teachers and two others participated as workshop leaders.

FAAE President Farrah Johnson, agricultural education teacher at Deltona High School, said the officer team wanted to host a professional development event with a social aspect for younger members to get together and meet



Agricultural education teachers attend a workshop designed to help teachers prepare a meat evaluation team.

new teachers.

"I enjoyed the fact that the student interns attended," Johnson said. "I talked to several of them and got to meet them, which is something I may not have had time to do at state convention.

"The supervised agricultural experience (SAE) workshop was one of the best, from my point of view," she said. "If I end up in a non-traditional program, I need more ideas than the traditional livestock SAEs and this workshop gave me some suggestions."

Myers said he hopes the UF/FAAE Tech Update will become an annual event.

Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists Awards

Faculty and students in the department received numerous awards at the Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists conference in February. Congratulations to all recipients.

Agricultural Communication Section

Outstanding Paper Presentation: Courtney Meyers (UF) & Jeff Miller (University of Arkansas)

Graduate Paper Presentation Runner-Up: Emily Rhoades, Roslynn Brain, Ricky Telg, Tracy Irani (UF), & Owen Roberts (University of Guelph)

Rural Sociology Section

Excellence in Research: Glenn Israel

Agricultural Education Section

Outstanding Young Member of the American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE): Nick Place

Outstanding Poster: Emily Rhoades & Courtney Meyers

Outstanding Graduate Student Research Paper: Hannah Carter & Rick Rudd

Election Results

Southern Region AAAE Vice President (2006-08): Jim Dyer

AAAE Research Committee: Mark Kistler

Newsletter

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