

# Enhancing Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Underrepresented Minorities for Successful Professional Careers in Agricultural Economics

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## Introduction

Agricultural economics programs across the country continue to encounter the perennial problem of student recruitment, retention and graduation rates. The 1890 land grant institutions such as The Fort Valley State University, however, have experienced far more difficulties in recruiting, retaining and successfully graduating students within four years than the national average. This project supports USDA NIFA Strategic Goal of "advancing cultural diversity of food and agricultural scientific workforce by attracting and educating more students from underrepresented groups."

The program **objectives** of the project include:

- To increase enrollment of students majoring in agricultural economics at FVSU.
- To provide career-oriented training to agricultural economics majors.
- To provide professional development workshops to enhance teaching and advising skills for faculty

## Activities

- Developed application package and brochures;
- Informed high school counselors about career opportunities available to agricultural economics majors;
- Organized two week-long summer enrichment programs (2011 and 2012) in order to create a pipeline of prospective freshmen;
- Provided scholarships to freshmen enrolled as agricultural economics majors and are past participants of the week-long summer enrichment program;
- Actively provided mentoring for students;
- Professional development activities in the form of research presentations, quiz bowls, internships and student club membership students; and
- Enabled faculty to attend workshops to enhance their teaching and advising skills

## Evaluation

- About 33.3 percent of the 2011 cohort actually knew what agricultural economics was; After the summer program ended, 83.3 percent of the students understood what Agricultural Economics is and 100 percent had a good knowledge of the jobs offered in Agricultural Economics.
- Reviewed the one week-long summer enrichment program and made some adjustments:
  - Shorter sessions & provision of refreshments,
  - Parents and university faculty/staff were invited to the students' presentations (at the closing ceremony).
- Math was found to be the biggest problem for the freshmen (program alumni).



Agricultural Economics quiz bowl participants (middle three) and advisors at the Southern Agricultural Economics Association Meeting held in Corpus Christi, TX in 2011. One of them was on the team that won second place



Agricultural Economics Faculty, staff and students attended the Association of Research Directors (ARD) Meeting that was held in Atlanta, Georgia in 2011. The students participated in the competitive papers session and one of them won Third place



FVSU Director of Career and Placement speaks on careers in Agriculture and other areas



Ms. Karla Martin, FVSU's USDA Liaison, speaks on USDA Scholarships and opportunities



Students listen attentively in the general session



Information on Public speaking and presentations

## Student presentations



Agricultural Economics 2012 Quiz Bowl team, Birmingham, AL



Families of participants, FVSU Faculty and staff at the closing ceremony

## Project Impact

- We have successfully educated 12 high school counselors about agricultural economics.
- We have successfully implemented two one-week summer enrichment programs (2011 and 2012). So far, a total of 19 High School students from the middle Georgia area have participated in the program.
- Six of the program alumni have enrolled at FVSU with five majoring in Agricultural Economics.
- Each of the five students received a scholarship of \$2000.
- A total of 13 Agricultural Economics majors participated in two Southern Agricultural Economics Associations meetings (2011 in Corpus Christi, Texas and 2012, Birmingham, Alabama) quiz bowls. One student was on the team that placed second in Corpus Christi and another student was on the team that came in third in Birmingham.
- A total of 7 students participated in the ARD student paper competition held in Atlanta, Georgia in 2011. One of the students won third place in the competition.
- Two of the former summer enrichment participants (now sophomores) have already interned with the USDA-NRCS in Florida and DB Schenker in Louisiana.
- The PI attended a workshop on POGIL (Process Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning).



Students posed with Project Director (front left) and student counselors (back row) after receiving their certificates at the close of the Program.

- Principal Investigator
- Co-Principal Investigator
- Manager

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## For further information

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