UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI EXTENSION

Developing future agriculturalists through leadership and camps in animal science

Katherine Sanders, Derek Strawn, and Marcia Shannon, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

The main goals of the University of Missouri Animal Sciences Youth Leadership Academy are to develop young leaders within the livestock industry and broaden their horizons to the far-reaching spectrum of careers offered in the animal sciences. The activities included are commodity tours, meeting with industry professionals, and leadership building activities. The participants are shown many different career paths in their four days at the academy including veterinary medicine, food processing, and even production agriculture. Students attending the academy receive the college-life experience; they stay in the residence halls at the University of Missouri where they are immersed in the culture of the university and the city of Columbia surrounding it.

HOW IT WORKS

- Twenty high school students are selected annually through an application process
- Post-camp participant survey administered face-to-face
    - Agree or disagree statements assessing career plans and perceived leadership
    - Open-ended questions seeking ideas for program improvement
    - 5-point Likert scale items assessing perceived values of trips and speakers

"I really enjoyed the leadership opportunities, meeting leaders in the livestock industry and the job outlook possibilities."

WHY IT WORKS

With a decline in young people pursuing a career in agriculture and an expected rise of earth's population, raised levels in food production are required as well as pursuance in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education. Leadership, communication, problem solving, and interpersonal skills are all necessary to be successful in the workplace; these skills can be more generally referred to as life skills (Cochran, Arnett, Ferrari, 2008). Academies and after school type programs have been very successful at promoting these life skills (Schwartz & Stolow, 2006). With this in mind, this academy learning experiences that focus on animal science while providing opportunities for building communication and interpersonal skills.

RESULTS/ IMPLICATIONS

To assess the effectiveness of this camp, we looked at student surveys which were given at the end of the academy to receive feedback on the camp experience. Overall the results were very promising; 73 of 75 participants surveyed over the past four years believed the academy helped them grow as a leader. 100 percent reported that they expanded their interest in animal science. This data suggests that the academy had a positive impact on participants, promoting life skills and career readiness. The data suggests that youth benefited from seeing new opportunities and career possibilities at MU Animal Sciences Youth Leadership Academy. Additionally, they grew their networks of similar age peers who are interested in agriculture and connected with industry leaders.

For the past four years this academy has been conducted, one of the most frequently mentioned items in the open-ended questions was meeting new people and industry leaders. Participants frequently stated that the biggest benefit of the camp was networking and connecting with industry leaders.

FUTURE PLANS & ADVICE TO OTHERS

The importance of this study is to raise awareness and presence in animal science careers while promoting life skills. With more time and resources the academy could be lengthened, adding more time for tours and time with faculty members. Continuing to adjust the agenda based on participant feedback is important for the academy is important to keep it relevant to current issues and student interest.

COSTS/ RESOURCES

The academy costs $500/per applicant making it a $10,000 program. Sponsorships from the University of Missouri and a variety of agricultural industry partners make it possible.

REFERENCES

Cochran, G., Arnett, N., Ferrari, T.M. (2008). Preparing teens for success: building 21st century skills through a 4-H work-based learning program. *Journal of Youth Development,* 3(1), article 080301FA001.

Schwarz, E., & Stolow, D. (2006). Twenty-first century learning in afterschool. New Directions for Youth Development, 110, 81-99.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is supported by [MU Extension Integrated STEM Internship program] [grant no. 2019-67032-29290] from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.