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Self-Study Report: 03 Introduction, Program Goals, Rationale

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Section 3: Introduction, Program Goals, Rationale

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication (AgLEC) was established in July 1992, merging the Departments of Agricultural Education and Agricultural Communications. In the past, Agricultural Education had focused on undergraduate preparation of secondary teachers in vocational agricultural education and on offering a graduate masters degree in the same area for teachers in the field. When the technical services of Agricultural Communications were consolidated in a new non-teaching unit (now named Communications and Information Technology), the academic component of the unit remained as the Department of Agricultural Communications. The department offered courses in technical writing and agricultural journalism, but had no graduate program.

The need to strengthen both units and to build on commonalities in mission brought the group together. Since 1992, faculty of the department have worked together to create a mission statement, action plans, committee structure, and governance guidelines to define programs and move them forward.

MISSION STATEMENT

The AgLEC faculty adopted this mission statement in February of 1996:

The mission of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication is to contribute to the human resource development vision of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR) by delivering programs of excellence in teacher education, leadership and communication, clearly defining the interrelationship between the agricultural sciences and natural resources, and the human environment.

Diverse groups of clients, from the U.S. and abroad, are served through comprehensive programs of teaching, research, and outreach. Clients include undergraduate and graduate students on campus and at distant locations. AgLEC also serves professional certificate earning and enrichment participants who need to update knowledge and skills for professional or personal reasons, either in the workplace or at home. Educational programs are offered for university credit as well as for certification (e.g., in-service needs.)

Excellence is the hallmark of all endeavors.

PROGRAM GOALS

We see great potential in our AgLEC programs for providing the educational base for developing human resources in agricultural sciences and natural resources — in educational settings, urban and rural communities, business and industry, government agencies — locally, nationally, and globally. In September 1995, we set forth our goals for the next five years in action plans (see Section 10 for full documents). The goals, which are consistent with the IANR strategic plan, the vision statement set forth in the document *Nebraska-Network 21: Communities of Learning*, and the departmental mission statement, are to:

- broaden undergraduate curriculum and programs,
- strengthen graduate education,
- expand research and other scholarly activity,
- build distance education, and
- expand and strengthen outreach service.

As we move toward the 21st century, we will plan AgLEC curricula to include course work or programs in:

- agricultural education — certification (undergraduate)*
- leadership-communication — undergraduate minor*
- leadership-communication — undergraduate option
- leadership education — graduate program of study, with specializations in:
 - ▶ teaching and learning*
 - ▶ postsecondary (college) teaching (minor)*
 - ▶ extension education*
 - ▶ international agricultural education
 - ▶ distance education
- environmental communication
- environmental education

The above programs are either currently in place and being updated (marked by *) or are in various stages of development. Later sections of this report give more detailed information regarding the stages of renewal or development for AgLEC goals and academic programs.

RATIONALE

The merger of Agricultural Communications and Agricultural Education provided an opportunity to discover ways we were meeting similar student and client needs, and allowed us to come together under a common umbrella of goals. That is, merging the two units resulted in a unique interdisciplinary approach to preparing citizens of the future. In the traditional setting of the land grant institution, our focus is on the human resources needed in the food systems of the future. Our aims are to:

- prepare future teachers, leaders, and communicators for positions in a broad range of disciplines and settings in agriculture and natural resources;
- conduct research in the dynamics of teaching and learning, leadership, and communication in the contexts of agriculture and natural resources;
- invent, implement, test, and improve modes of teaching and learning, leadership, and communication in teaching, research, and service.

Our educational role is unique with its focus on the human dimension contexts of the traditional land grant mission — service to the populace of the state. While other academic disciplines in agriculture and natural resources seek, discover, and disseminate knowledge about material things (declarative knowledge), our programs of study seek to discover the processes of how food systems professionals function — in teaching, leading, and communicating (procedural knowledge).

The kind of education we offer is essential to human development. Over and over again, employers tell us that, while job-seeking graduates from colleges of agriculture are well prepared in the knowledge and technical skills of their major fields, they lack competencies in interpersonal skills and communication. Traditional agricultural education and communication courses bring substantial resources to bear on this problem. Therefore, by updating and improving course material and broadening our programs of study on both the undergraduate and graduate levels, we can make a significant contribution in higher education into the 21st century.

CHANGES IN SUPPORT OF GOALS

AgLEC programs have experienced change since the former departments had their last reviews. Faculty have been able to redefine teaching assignments and increase course offerings. Overall, changes are occurring in what is taught, who is enrolled, and methods used. More specific changes, discussed in individual sections of this report, are listed below.

- The communication program has added an upper-division course, while instructors are making increasing use of electronic media to teach classes.
- The teacher certification program is undergoing major changes to meet new requirements.
- The “non-teaching option,” now undergoing a name change, serves those going into agriculture and natural resources with career interests in human resources.
- A minor in leadership and communication, available to students from all UNL colleges and majors, has been established.
- New minors in environmental communication and environmental education are in various stages of development.

- The graduate curriculum is being revised to include a focus on distance education, leadership, and postsecondary education.
- Several courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels are being offered via distance.
- A comprehensive process of peer review of teaching is in practice.

INTERRELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER UNITS

Because programs of study in AgLEC are interdisciplinary in nature, cooperation with other units in the university is essential. Faculty have a long history of working closely with other units in their programs. Table 3.1 below lists current inter-relationships within the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL).

Table 3.1 AgLEC's Interrelationships with Other UNL Units

Unit Name	Nature of Interrelationship
College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources	Core requirements and departmental general requirements
Teachers College	Teacher education (course work, endorsements)
College of Engineering & Technology	Technical writing requirement
College of Journalism and Mass Communications	Major in agricultural journalism
UNL Computing Resource Center	Staff technical support
Nebraska Human Resources Institute	Faculty (historical connection)
Center for Leadership Development	Faculty (historical connection)
IANR Agricultural Research Division	Appointments
Cooperative Extension Division	Appointments
IANR Communications & Information Technology	Distance education
IANR Office of Professional and Organizational Development	Staff, facilitation
Department of Vocational and Adult Education (Teachers College)	Cross listing of graduate courses; advising doctoral students
Department of Curriculum and Instruction (Teachers College)	Cross listing of graduate courses
UNL Teaching and Learning Center	Staff, programs, teaching resources
Division of Continuing Studies	Course listings

Unit Name	Nature of Interrelationship
Center for Sustainable Agriculture	Human resource consulting
College of Business Administration	Collaboration, consulting, course work
College of Arts and Sciences	Collaboration, course work
Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture	Course offerings (via distance ed)
Nebraska Foundation for Agricultural Awareness	Ag in the Classroom program

In addition to the relationships described in the list above, a traditional relationship with Nebraska's Department of Education has been strengthened by extending adjunct appointments in AgLEC to two individuals in the state office. Other partnerships are described in the *Outreach* section (section 9) of this report.

CURRENT AND FUTURE ISSUES

As discussed more fully in other sections of this report, change within a changing world is not easy. Some of the issues we face include:

- How do we manage the transformation which involves both curricular reform and faculty redirection? How do we achieve a balanced academic department with notable strength in all three mission areas — teaching, research, and outreach?
- While we recognize the increasing need to cooperate and collaborate across and beyond the university, how do we renew or forge necessary alliances, especially when competition, not cooperation, is frequently the norm?
- How do we deploy the faculty and staff for the breadth and depth needed for new initiatives — and give them the time they need to develop, test, and implement new programs of study?
- How do we handle the enormous amount of time it takes to manage curricular changes through the university system: e.g., developing a doctoral specialization; expanding and restructuring graduate courses and programs; managing policy and program issues inherent in expanding distance education; and expanding undergraduate programs in leadership and communication?
- How do we continue to address issues of student enrollment and diversity, especially in undergraduate programs? What resources can we tap to market new programs to more diverse client groups?

- How do we continue to provide high quality undergraduate programs when the size of our faculty is slowly decreasing? Do we want to be a department in which a major proportion of instruction is provided increasingly by contract/part-time instructors?
- What should a master plan for AgLEC faculty configuration in the future look like? What should be the blend of talents, pattern of assignments, and range of academic specializations?
- How do we dramatically increase the number of research proposals and projects which support increased levels of graduate assistants to build our graduate program? Should this become a major criterion for assessing faculty performance and allocating rewards?
- Should AgLEC change (and shorten) its department name? Does “agriculture” need to be in the name? Would a name such as “Leadership Studies” or “Leadership Education” be descriptive and attractive to clients of the department?

AgLEC seeks to extend the boundaries of our endeavors on behalf of our varied clients in new ways, in new venues, with colleagues in many units both on and off campus. The various sections of this self-study report which follow will show our thinking along these lines. We are confident that our thinking and planning will be greatly enhanced by the review process and the insights it generates.