



Sense of Belonging in Agricultural Education Research to Practice

Incorporating a mock job application into agricultural coursework

Background

Time and time again, undergraduate students enter the last months of their senior year with a sense of urgency to get a job, but without the skillset to find and successfully apply for a job. Students may gain these skills through their own research, guidance from family members and mentors, or university's internship and career center. **Students who access career services 6 months or more before graduating are 10% more likely to be employed upon graduation** (Bowen 2018). However, many students, including first generation students, face barriers, such as access, time, and imposter syndrome, that keep them from using these resources. To better prepare students for the workforce and broaden access to career resources, mock job assignments can be built into course curricula.



image: CC BY 2.0 DEED Christina, <https://www.wocintechchat.com/>

“This project meant a lot to me because I was able to strengthen my skills in creating a resume and cover letter along with looking at potential job opportunities. Now I have an idea of how to look for a job of my interest in agriculture”

What we did

Introduction to Organic Crop Production, an introductory plant sciences course, provides an overview of principles and practices of organic farming. We included a mock job application assignment in the course to help students better understand careers available within the agriculture sector and how what they were learning might be applied to future careers.

Students were asked to identify three jobs in the organic and sustainable agriculture sector, then write a resume and cover letter for one of those jobs, followed by a reflection on what they learned. Students were also asked to have staff at the UC Davis [Internship and Career Center](#) (ICC) do an initial review of their resume and cover letter before submitting their final assignment. As part of assignment development, we met with ICC staff to discuss the assignment and ensure that they had capacity to provide students with an initial review of the resumes and cover letters.

Over three quarters of students, 136, completed the assignment. Students reported that they felt more prepared to search and apply for jobs in agriculture (95%) and a similar percentage found the assignment meaningful (98%). Notably four students used their mock application materials to apply for job openings they found during the assignment.

Best practices

- **Meet with the director of your university's internship and career center** to discuss the project and ensure they have capacity to support the assignment and flag how many students and what week students are likely to meet with center staff
- **Provide a curated list of three or four job boards** for students to search through - include job boards with postings related to both the private and public sector
- **Provide resources related to resume and cover letter development** for students to reference.
- **Include a reflective exercise** to help students identify what they learned, how they learned it and how they will apply the new knowledge and skills they gained to their future.
- **Allow 3-4 weeks** for students to complete the mock application and resume assignment.
- **Provide compassionate mentoring** and state outright that applying for jobs can be scary. Acknowledge that some students may experience imposter syndrome when seeking out jobs and that if they find that they truly are not qualified for the jobs they are most interested in, to use that information to guide their next steps in their academic career.

Resources

- [Sample assignment and sample grading rubric](#)
- [UC Davis Career Resource Manual](#) (pages 19 & 38 were highlighted for students)

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This work was carried out at UC Davis on the homeland of Patwin people, we are grateful for their stewardship. Today there are three federally recognized Patwin tribes: Cachil DeHe Band of Wintun Indians of the Colusa Indian Community, Kletsel Dehe Wintun Nation, and Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation who continue to steward, protect and cherish this land as elders have instructed their young through generations.

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References

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