

Using the World Wide Web to Link Students and Cooperatives

Or

“Our Collegiate Co-op Education Program”

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Background

- Formal classes in cooperatives exist
 - Political economy in academic departments is different
- Strong demand for knowledge about cooperatives
 - Looming turnover in agricultural and consumer cooperatives in the US.
 - Many of these are in rural communities
 - Need for exposure to broad education about cooperatives and why they exist
 - Big challenge for universities
 - Decentralization between distance education, community colleges, and universities
 - Need to think about a broad state or regional approach to cooperative education

Objective

- Describe our collegiate education program at the Arthur Capper Cooperative Center at Kansas State University
- Have a conversation about where education about cooperatives is going in the US
- I taught a distance course for nine years and have done other distance education activities

Outline

- Our education program is built around “co-op” experiences
 - Seminar speakers
 - Case studies
 - Study tours
 - K-State Co-op Collegiate Board (future)
 - Distance education modules with community colleges (future)
- No co-op class has existed for almost 20 years
 - Some integration of knowledge about cooperatives in the curriculum

Co-op Leader in the Classroom Series

- Work with Kansas Farmers Union, Kansas Cooperative Council, and other organizations to bring in cooperative leaders for a case study and luncheon
 - Sponsorship from CHS Foundation
 - Leader discusses issues with co-op leaders in Kansas
 - Interacts with students in the classroom

Cooperative Case Studies



FARMWAY CO-OP, INC.

"Your Farm supply cooperative in North Central Kansas"



AMERICAN CRYSTAL SUGAR COMPANY



South Dakota Soybean Processors



national grape cooperative



Minnesota Corn Processors, LLC

Garden City Coop, Inc.



Productores Unidos Cooperativa Agraria Ltda. (Uruguay)



Working with Other Universities

- Montana State
- North Dakota State
- In 2009, we are working with
 - Montana State (Mountainview)
 - North Dakota State (Bison)
 - South Dakota State (SD Wheat Growers)
 - Washington State (Treetop)

What do we do?

- Write a case study of the cooperative
 - Collaborative with both faculty members
 - Gets published in some format
- Prepare a teaching note and assignment sheet for students
 - Assign students in groups to critique each others work via the internet
 - Management intensive process
 - But it works
 - Students like the opportunity to share over email

What do we do?

- Use satellite or internet conferencing technology to have speaker in a classroom at one of the universities.
 - The other universities watches via technology
 - Instructors teach at different times over the 90 minutes
 - Co-op leader(s) interact with the students at both locations
 - Technology has improved over time
 - Very positive assignment from student's perspective
 - High impact co-op education program

Study Tours

- Argentina (twice), Australia, Brazil, Chile (twice), Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, New Zealand, Uruguay (twice)
 - Central America and South America in 2009
- High impact experiences
 - Use a semester long course called International Agribusiness followed by the study tour
 - Exit interviews of seniors rank these experiences as some of the most valuable
- Written case studies on some co-ops in the countries and visited with co-op leaders.
- Very time intensive and more than a little stressful!

2009 Co-op Study Tour

- Planning a Spring Break trip to visit California cooperatives
 - Marketing, local, and finance cooperatives
 - Joint with Montana State

K-State Cooperative Collegiate Board

- Create a “co-op board” of college students who would undertake an intensive set of cooperative experiences over the course of a year
 - Experiences with local agricultural farm supply and grain marketing cooperatives, electric and telephone, credit unions and agricultural credit, and other organizations
 - Some experiences may be done distance and others one -on-one or in groups
 - Twice a month
 - Provide a scholarship to help get commitment and avoid overcommitted students
 - Introduce students to examples of careers in cooperatives

Distance Modules with Community Colleges

- Increased desire to do state-wide education
- USDA has a grants program to do coordinated efforts with community colleges
 - Goal would be to develop a two week co-op education module that would be delivered to community colleges simultaneously
 - Module would include basic cooperative education and include a local leader at each location to help provide further information about cooperatives once the “distance portion” was done.
 - work with Kansas Association of Colleges

Conclusion

- Distance education about cooperatives can work. But one needs
 - commitment from university and leaders
 - seed money (grants and foundations)
 - lots of planning
 - lots of help from local co-op leaders
 - a variety of activities because students learn different ways
 - need to be current

Final Note

- I believe there is a revolution going on in higher education
 - Significant tuition increases have made students closely examine the value of education
 - Definitional learning is cheaper at a community college
 - We add greater value with experiences
 - Better equipped to do some of that relative to community colleges
 - Many faculty are unaware of what is going on
 - Will change the culture of an academic department
 - Stronger need for commitment to co-op education
 - Role of the existing endowments and expendables from foundations is increasingly going to be more important