

SARE Sustainable Agriculture Curriculum and Continuing Education Program for Cooperative Extension Faculty and other Ag Professionals

6th Conference Call: August 19, 2004

To do:

- Dave complete draft learning outcomes for Competencies 4 and 5 and send to design team for review/edit.
- Dave send project summary prepared for Western Region PDP coordinators meeting for use in communicating with other PDP coordinators.
- Dave send draft agenda for Lied Lodge meeting by Sept. 1.
- Design team review and edit draft learning outcomes for remaining competencies. All feedback due to Dave by September 7th if possible in prep for Nebraska meeting. I have review/edits on Competencies 1-3 from almost everybody. I'll be sending out the draft of Comps 4 and 5 next week for everybody to work on.

Participants: David Chaney, Kim Kroll, Vern Grubinger, Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, Andy McGuire, Julie Sexton

Agenda

1. Course Length / Expectations for Participant's Time Commitment
2. Decide on first core competency to develop into pilot course. I'm recommending #1 as it lays the foundation for the others and probably has broadest appeal (?).
3. Lied Lodge Meeting Agenda

Course Length

Answer question about what's realistic in terms of how long the national level Web-based course should be. What length of time should we reasonably expect an extension agent to spend taking this course? A couple emails ago I had said that my general thinking has been 10-15 hours total (2-3 hours per core competency). What do you think, given the characteristics of our target audience?

Each person gave their perspective on this question. General consensus that the course in total (all core competencies) should not require more than 15 hours to complete. Each module should be approximately 2-3 hours if the student visits every page and does every activity. Key factors: 1) the course has to be of high quality—it needs to be good to attract students to spend the necessary time, and 2) we need to work on enhancing and creating incentives for participation (CE credits, in-service requirements, merit/promotion tie-in, etc...). A third factor is the length of time. We'll strive for high quality, graphical richness, and interactivity, and the right amount of depth, but there IS an upper limit on how long the course can be. Beyond a certain point, there's a negative return and students will be turned off by the length of time involved. The

group felt that 3 hours per module was probably that breaking point. Kim pointed out that a related factor is the length of time a person is willing to spend at a computer in one sitting. Research shows that 30-60 minutes per session is average. (We need to follow-up and get more specifics on that data. If that's the case, a 3 hour course would be completed in 5-6 sittings. That seems appropriate given the target audience. The course infrastructure will keep track of where the student is in the course, so that when they come back it takes them to where they left off.

The length of time question is also directly related to the overall aim of developing an integrated program with basic proficiencies and breadth of topics covered in a national on-line course, and regional/state trainings providing the necessary depth component. One of our main tasks in finalizing the framework in preparation for formal review by other stakeholders is to sift through all the topics/outcomes that we've written now and decide what realistically can be covered in a national Web-based course and what is more appropriate for the in-person regional and state trainings that will build on the Web based course. We've gone through a process of identifying what we feel are the essential proficiencies (stated as learning outcomes), and there are many, but only some of those can be effectively met in the on-line course. Others are more appropriately tied in with the in-depth training.

Given that initial distinction between the on-line course and the regional/state trainings, there are also issues with what level of depth the online course can/should provide. We do want to provide some depth on the topics covered, but not everyone may be interested in going into the same level of detail in each topic area. Dave discussed how the on-line course can be developed such that students can track at the level of depth they require or are interested in. This is a standard principle/technique in on-line education and can be built into the structure and navigation of the online course.

First Core Competency for Pilot Course

Dave is recommending #1 as it lays the foundation for the others and probably has broadest appeal. There are many non-ag production types in extension who will be taking this course and we want to start with a module that has something for them as well. Group agrees that this makes sense, but second in line should be the agroecology competency. This will be important to work on soon especially given that the Southern Region's related project is focusing on organic production and pest management topics.

Nebraska Meeting

Here's the list of topics to cover... my initial ideas plus other suggestions from our conference call:

- finalize (or give me instructions for final changes to) the curriculum framework-learning outcomes
- determine process, protocol for framework review/evaluation

- discuss specific outcomes for the curriculum framework (General outcome statement from project proposal: SARE Regions have a more clearly defined framework and guide for building in-depth professional training without having to spend time on basics.)
- work on the learning objectives, scope, of pilot course
- discuss outcome and evaluation aspects of pilot course (knowledge outcomes vs. behavior outcomes)
- plan for developing/writing course content
- review design templates for course pages and decide what we like and works best given course scope and content
- discuss ways of getting best participation we can from target audience (incentives, motivations and how to enhance those)
- other promotion/advertising ideas
- communicating about this project with colleagues, getting buy-in from regions and other state coordinators
- revisit project timeline

Dave will send draft agenda to design team by September 1.

Summarized by David Chaney