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Assessing the Benefits and Costs of Extra- And Co-Curricular Activities for Undergraduate Students in Agricultural Economics: Implications for the FDRS Case Competition

Dixie Watts Reaves and Roger A. Hinson

Undergraduate agricultural economics students are presented with an increasing number of opportunities to participate in extra- and co-curricular activities, including quiz bowls, marketing competitions, case-study contests, and internships, among others. Just a few years ago, the Food Distribution Research Society implemented a food-marketing case-study competition. For the 2005 annual conference, the case study has been renamed the “Food Marketing Challenge.”

Despite the increasing extra-curricular opportunities for undergraduates, little research has been conducted to document the benefits and costs of participation in these activities. To determine perceived benefits from the perspective of the faculty who oversee these activities, and to determine costs (time, monetary contribution, and opportunity costs), a survey was sent to agricultural economics departments in selected U.S. colleges and universities. Results indicate that the primary reasons that faculty participate are the personal reward of

working with students and because they find it an enjoyable way to spend some of their teaching and advising time. The goals that faculty have for their student participants (professional preparation and the development of teambuilding, oral communication, and problem-solving skills) do not necessarily match the goals that faculty perceive their students to have (travel, coursework credit, and fun/socializing with their peers). Results vary by activity. Future research will ask the students themselves what they see as the benefits and costs of participation.

For schools that are considering participating in extra- and co-curricular activities for the first time, recommendations are presented: offer course credit; request monetary support from both the department and college; reward faculty members for their time through official recognition of the contribution via the annual report; and publicize participation through departmental, college, or university media outlets.

Reaves is associate professor, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg. Hinson is professor, Department of Agricultural Economics, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.