

Agriculture Advisory Meeting Notes

Date: December 4, 2023
Meeting Place: B-102 with Zoom Option

Called to order: 6:00 -7:30 p.m. **Chair(s):** Erin Krier **Note Taker:** Erin Krier

Council Members Present:

Jose Chang, Rosemary Cummings, Marc DeBernardi, Kevin Dwyer, Guillermo Guerra, Miguel Guerra, Dr. Christopher Greer, Hector Guerra, Tom Gulliver, Ron Labastida, Lacy Litten, Jerry Mahoney, Holly Nolan-Chavez, Dr. Shebaz Singh, Nic Tasca, Luis Valdez, Dr. Terry Vassey, Jill Vink, Claire Wineman, Montse Zarate

Council Members Absent:

Dr. Sean Abel, Dr. Rita Abi-Ghanem, Mitch Ardantz, Dylan Bognuda, Teri Bontrager, Emma Chow, Tom Durant, Brenda Estrada, Jim Glines, Eryn Gray, Larry Lahr, Yeni Martinez, Christine Ready, Andrew Rice, David Rice, Danilu Ramirez, Claire Wineman

Guests Present:

Annika Forester, Center for Land-Based Learning

Agenda No. 1 Student Update

Discussion:

- Erin shared two stories of current students: (1) Agricultural Plant Science major Alessandro Miguel was one of four participants in the Cal Poly Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP) working alongside Cal Poly professors and students conducting research in many agriculture topics. (2) AHC Biology Professor Dr. Jonathan Okerblom and his Robotics Club students partnered with the Wag the Ag Bulldog Bound activities at the recent event for 5th and 6th grade students where they led a demonstration in using their robot to “harvest” walnuts and move them into the appropriate “bin”. Elementary school attendees also had the opportunity to drive the robot and test their walnut harvesting skills – an enormous hit and the highlight of the day for many of the visiting students.
- Former Student Representative, Montse Zarate, who recently transferred to Cal Poly as an Agricultural Plant Science major, shared her story and explained that her time in the AHC ag program was excellent preparation. Plant Science, Soil Science, and Plant Propagation have been the most helpful as they all connect to her current Cal Poly classes. She also is working at Driscoll’s and said that all of her AHC ag classes provided her helpful foundational knowledge. Montse also recently applied for and secured a \$1,000 donation from Driscoll’s for the AHC Agriculture Advisory Committee.
- AHC ag program alum and current AHC Ag Program Outreach Assistant, Nic Tasca, gave updates on the helpful preparation received in classes at AHC, particularly plant science and plant pathology (and botany at a previous community college).
- Agricultural Commissioner Jose Chang inquired about transfer students at UC Davis, his alma mater with a fantastic agriculture program.

Action: None

Deadline: n/a

Responsibility: n/a

Agenda No. 2 Part-time Faculty and Staff Updates



- Discussion:**
- Erin shared updates regarding new part-time faculty appointments, projects of current part-time faculty, and a staff update:
 - NEW Faculty, **Dr. Terry Vassey**: agronomy, plant physiology, biochemistry, crop science – *AG 160 Plant Propagation and Production*
 - NEW Faculty, **Dr. Shebaz Singh**: food science, postharvest technology, shelf-life extension materials development – *AG 157 Ag Sales, Communication, and Leadership*
 - **Dr. Rita Abi-Ghanem** – new consulting business *Ag Consultant Services* <https://agconsultantservices.com/> and currently consulting for *Omni Nutriology* <https://omniausa.org/>
 - **Jill Vink** – *AG 125 Introduction to Soil Science* at Lompoc Federal Penitentiary and newly hired PCA for Caltrans
 - NEW Staff, **Nic Tasca** – AHC Ag Program Outreach Assistant

Action: None

Deadline: n/a

Responsibility: n/a

Agenda No. 3 High School Partnerships

- Discussion:**
- AHC will host the 3rd annual FFA Field Day on Saturday, February 17, 2024
 - Erin requested advisory committee participation as judges for the various contests, particularly vegetable crop judging and nursery/landscape
 - Erin reported that she added the Best Informed Greenhand (BIG) contest this year so contests will include: BIG, Soil & Land Evaluation, Nursery/Landscape, Vegetable Crop Judging, and Veterinary Science
 - A brief discussion arose about the details of the contest and attendees expected
 - Guillermo Guerra recommended that future contests should include Farm Power and Agronomy
 - Commissioner Chang inquired about contests that provide training for students in sustainable pest management and/or policy at the state level. Members of the committee discussed the various contests that do in fact include preparation in these areas of the industry. Commissioner Change encouraged educators to include these important topics. The complete list of FFA contests can be found by visiting <https://www.calagteachers.org/curricular-activities-code>

Action: Send detailed information and requests for volunteer judges to members of the committee.

Deadline: January 2024

Responsibility: Erin Krier

Agenda No. 4 Santa Barbara County Farm Day

- Discussion:**
- Erin shared information about this year's Santa Barbara County Farm Day, with the AHC student farm as a tour site on September 23.
 - This year the AHC student farm was the Farm Day hub, hosting VIP tours, housing the SEE AG Farm Lab booth, and offering for the first time a wine hub for visitors to enjoy AHC wine tasting along with other local winery participants.



- Additionally, the Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commissioner’s office provided exceptional educational opportunities for visitors with both Inspector Marko Marrero’s insect collection and K9 Handler/Biologist Chris Tyler’s detection dog demos with Berty and Doomis.
- The AHC site attracted approximately 500 visitors.

Action: None

Deadline: n/a **Responsibility:** n/a

Agenda No. 5 Pending Grant Proposals

- Discussion:**
- Erin shared details about two grant projects for which the college is seeking funding:
 - NSF ATE IMAGINE: Innovative Mechanized Agriculture Growing Inclusive Networks Education – this grant would include creation of a mechanized/automated ag program, revitalization of the existing Mechanized Ag course to become an Ag Mechanics course that would be offered to students, collaborating with the AHC Electronics Technology and AHC Machining & Manufacturing programs to add classes to a new certificate that already exist in those programs, to create a “calculus for ag applications” class, and to enhance internships and work-based learning.
 - The AHC ag program was asked to partner with Parkland College in Champaign, Illinois on an NSF ATE National Ag Tech Center grant proposal. This would be designed to support community college agriculture faculty in developing additional NSF ATE programs in agriculture technology. Erin was asked to be the regional coordinator, likely to include California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Nevada to provide mentorship and collaboration with other community college ag programs. Erin is also currently serving on the project’s regenerative and sustainable agriculture sector team.

Action: Erin will notify the committee of the outcomes of the grant applications.

Deadline: As award notifications are announced **Responsibility:** Erin Krier

Agenda No. 6 Center for Land-Based Learning

- Discussion:**
- Guest speaker Annika Forester from Center for Land-Based Learning (CLBL) gave a presentation about the programs the non-profit offers. She shared information about their program to connect high school students with ag education and summer internships and their program in partnership with NRCS to work on environmental restoration projects. The CLBL also has a robust beginning farmer incubator program to train new farmers and a state-registered apprenticeship program (Beginning Farm Manager).
 - Annika then shared information about a new pre-apprenticeship program for Spanish-speaking farm employees to provide upskilling to those employees who would be good candidates for management-level work if they were provided with the right training.
 - Annika shared a survey asked farmers to provide insight about what types of positions they are needing to fill and what skills their Spanish-speaking employees would need to have in order to be promoted into those roles.
 - Lacy Litten requested permission to send the link to other ag organizations, particularly California Farmworker Foundation



Action: Send the survey link in a follow-up email to the advisory committee members.

Deadline: December 2023

Responsibility: Erin Krier

Agenda No. Program and Course Updates

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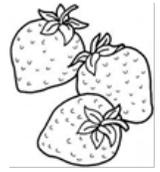
Discussion:

- Erin shared the spring course list and requested assistance promoting the classes, particularly the low-enrolled courses such as the sustainable agriculture. Marc DeBernardi inquired about how class times are determined and Erin shared that she just sent out a survey as part of the program review process to ask ag students their preferred days and times for classes. She mentioned that days and times are determined based on room availability, the need for daylight hours for labs that occur at the student farm, and in an effort to offer the classes either at the very start of the day or in the evening to accommodate work schedules.
- The Pest Control Adviser Preparation program fills a very important niche for students who are not able to or interested in transferring. There has been an issue with enrollment in the very specific courses such as Plant Pathology, Economic Entomology, and Weed Science and she requested promotional help from the members of the committee. Additionally, students in this program are in need of work experience such as crop scouting and internships. Commissioner Chang shared that there is a shortage of PCAs in the industry with many companies struggling to fill those positions because of many retirees and not enough new PCAs to fill the gap. He also discussed the plan from the Department of Pesticide Regulation to change the name of this position to Plant Care Adviser to better reflect the move towards sustainable pest management. He suggested that Erin send low-enrolled class announcements to the committee, including Grower-Shipper Association and Farm Bureau. Nic Tasca has also been working with CAPCA to promote the program and the classes therein.
- Partners are needed for a new CTE Career Academy – students will receive soft skills career preparation training from the AHC Career Center and discipline-specific training from Erin during summer programming and then will need to be placed in paid internships in Fall 2024. The Learning-Aligned Employment Program (LAEP) funding will cover up to 50% of the student’s compensation for paid internships.
- Erin informed the committee about the issue with facility space for the agriculture program and the lack of dedicated space for any agriculture classes, leading to instructional supplies being stored on carts and in Erin’s office. The only truly dedicated space for ag students is the student farm, which has no dedicated labor force and relies on Erin to supervise and manage. There is hope for some space in Building W to be designated for the agriculture program in the near future. The committee members engaged in a discussion agreeing with the disservice to the students who come from excellent facilities at the high school. The committee acknowledged how far the program has come in the past six years and is hopeful that the increase in student interest will lead to establishing dedicated space. Dr. Singh inquired about using his lab as an off-site location for certain instructional needs. The committee offered to support establishment of dedicated instructional and lab space in any way they can help.

Action: Share spring class flyer with committee, share low-enrolled classes with committee when in need of enrollment boosts, share CTE Career Academy/LAEP funding information, and inquire about the possibility of using off-site lab space for instruction

Deadline: December 2023 and ongoing

Responsibility: Erin Krier



She was encouraged when she attended the AHC Career Day student farm tour and that changed her trajectory. She appreciated the opportunities and support provided by the AHC ag program.

- Dr. Singh agreed about the challenge of families who are engaged in agriculture discouraging work in ag because it is laborious. He suggested that the new technology side of agriculture may draw stronger attention and interest in the field.
- A rich conversation ensued with committee members discussing family and counselor influence over the pathway choices of students.
- Tom Gulliver pointed out the transition that the agriculture industry is seeing where an emergence of new technologies and career pathways will open up the industry to increasing interest from a diverse student population.

Action: None

Deadline: n/a

Responsibility: n/a

Reports: **Important Dates and Follow-up**

- Next advisory committee meeting for spring semester will be Monday, May 6, 2024 at 6:00 pm