

Mentoring high school seniors in small communities

AT A GLANCE

Rural high school seniors gain career readiness skills with guidance from University of Idaho Extension educator mentors.

The Situation

Idaho high schools require that graduating seniors complete a senior project. Every senior chooses a project idea and then finds a mentor that has expertise within the project area to guide them in design, competition and presentation. Students are not allowed to use a teacher within the school as a mentor and are encouraged to begin developing professional relationships within their community. This process helps the senior become more successful after graduation as they transition into the workforce and/or additional education. Building a mentor-student relationship takes one-on-one time during the academic year and requires multiple meetings ensuring project goals are achieved.

Our Response

In rural communities, adult mentors for senior student projects can be difficult to find simply due to scarce resources and limited businesses. It is the senior's responsibility to select a qualified mentor. Over the last nine years, the UI Extension educator in Adams County, has volunteered to mentor five senior students.



High school senior presenting her senior project to community member judges on March 3, 2021.

The rural Council School District #13 requires a minimum of 25 documented hours working on the project (for a C grade) and a minimum of 35 hours to qualify for an A grade, in addition to other factors including: the quality of senior project presentation and progress forms. Seniors must complete a presentation on their project that is judged by community members. These judges assess project completion to meet graduation requirements.

All mentees that collaborated with the UI Extension office in Adams County have completed projects that were community focused. Four mentees developed, taught and evaluated agricultural-based classes. Mentees were given guidance on planning, teaching and evaluating the lessons they chose to teach by their

mentor. It's then the mentees responsibility to carry out the plan and create the class. Topics taught by mentees included livestock first aid, horse first aid, livestock showmanship, Ranchers Feeding Youth classes in the local elementary schools and one mentee trained a certified companion animal that would visit the local school. Because of an educator's role as an instructor, and specifically agriculture and animal science focused classes, in Adams County, mentors are chosen for their work skills and/or subject matter expertise.

By being a mentor to these high school seniors, the UI Extension educator can provide a reliable professional relationship for these young adults as they make education and career choices. The seniors are also receiving practical experience through project creation that is their own from conception to completion and are learning accountability to someone other than their parents and teachers. A mentor's role is to assist when asked but to allow the student the freedom that they have rarely had in previous academic settings.

Program Outcomes

UI Extension educators were able to assist students in developing career readiness skills, including project organization, time management, decision making and personal commitment. By providing mentorship and meeting with the mentee at least five times during the senior project, educators were able to evaluate the increased skills of the mentee.

All mentees showed great improvement in planning, time management, teaching methods (both youth and adult audiences) and evaluation skills over the course of the senior project time period. As they progressed through their project, mentees reached out for more help and advice. By the end of the project, the mentor was able to sign the completion paperwork for all their projects and write a positive recommendation to be given to their high school teacher.

All mentees increased their project organization skills. Most mentees choose to complete their project the

summer prior to their senior year beginning so that they have adequate time to complete the time requirements. Mentors can expect to meet with mentees a minimum of five times over the course of their project and fill out progress reports each time. It is also strongly recommended that the mentor attend the senior project presentation judging. An evaluation form is also turned in to the teacher assigned to senior projects and is then given to the judges.

Mentees improved their time management skills and focused on their personal commitment to seeing the project completed. Upon evaluating the progress of the students' senior projects, the mentor has seen an increase in hours put into the project. Some mentees start the project just wanting to achieve the minimum for a C grade, but as the project progresses, all mentees chose to increase the hours put into their project and have received A grades. By increasing the hours, it also increases the quality of the project and were very well received by the judges that determine their final grade.

The senior projects mentored by educators not only benefited the student, but the projects were all created in a way to be of benefit to the community and/or school by offering a new class. Evaluations were given to those that attended the classes offered and all participants showed an increase in knowledge. Most showed an increase in skill level as they put the class information into practical use, and all stated they would attend a class taught by the senior again.

Mentees increased their career development skills and stated that they were better prepared for pursuing college after the senior project mentorship. Additionally, mentees have chosen to work in UI Extension office after graduation and have referred upcoming seniors to pursue a mentorship with the office. Some mentees have chosen to offer their classes that they designed after graduation to meet the needs of the community.

Finally, mentees were able to further develop their decision-making skills. In addition to the career development skills gained during their senior project, all mentees chose to attend college after high school.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Tyenne Roland, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Adams County • 208-253-4279 • tyenne@uidaho.edu

42-22-troland-mentoring-students • 11/22