

Plan to Implement the Discipline-Specific ViEWS Requirement in the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics

The Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics (AAEC) offers the Bachelor of Science degree of the same name. Within the major, there are six approved options. All students must enroll in one option in order to meet graduation requirements. Each option consists of 56 credit hours of university, college, and departmental core coursework, as well as an additional eighteen to thirty hours of in-major coursework specific to the option. Additional hours outside of the major, offered through related departments on campus, are required for selected options. Four of the options require an eighteen hour area of specialization, which may be fulfilled by completing a minor in another department. Remaining hours to reach the minimum required 120 are free elective hours. The six options are:

- Agribusiness Management
- Community Economic Development
- Environmental Economics, Management and Policy
- International Trade and Development
- Veterinary Business Management
- Financial Planning

The Financial Planning option was previously housed in the Department of Apparel, Housing and Resource Management (AHRM) in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. The discipline-specific spoken, visual and written communication plan for the option was approved when it was in the AHRM department. That plan, edited to reflect the course changes with the mover to AAEC, is found at the end of this document. The remainder of the document is the plan for the first five options.

The major employment for Agricultural Economists includes: agricultural finance, agribusiness management, agricultural product and agricultural business marketing, futures and options, real estate finance and appraisal, personal financial management, insurance, agricultural education and extension, environmental management, local government policy and planning, and domestic and international development. The spoken, visual and written requirement will be met through a communication-across-the-major approach. Students will write, speak and communicate with visual media in most classes in the major. Furthermore, the variety of assignments will ensure that students graduating in Agricultural and Applied Economics are proficient in writing and speaking to technical as well as popular audiences and in using visual media as appropriate.

Goal: Agricultural and Applied Economics students will be able to communicate clearly and effectively in writing and through the spoken word to technical audiences and a variety of nontechnical audiences (ranging from school children to adults and from farmers and industry representatives to policy makers). Students will be able to employ effective and appropriate visual communication techniques that complement their writing and speaking. Students will be able to employ a wide variety of written and oral communication techniques, as well as accompanying visual communication tools, that are appropriate to their intended audiences.

Objectives: Upon completion of the Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural and Applied Economics, the student will be able to:

1. Describe and explain applied economics, finance and business principles and results of research in a technical format, such as journal-quality manuscripts.
2. Describe and explain applied economics, finance and business principles and results of research in a variety of nontechnical formats, including reaction papers, executive briefs, newspaper articles, popular magazine articles, opinion-editorials, business financial plans, small business development plans, individual financial plans, and marketing plans.
3. Support both technical and nontechnical publications by appropriately portraying data in tabular and graphic formats.
4. Design, publish, and deliver effective presentations for both technical and nontechnical audiences in either oral (power point or similar media) or poster format.
5. Effectively utilize graphics, photographs and other visual media to support oral and poster presentations.

Implementation: Agricultural and Applied Economics, first five options

The Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics (AAEC) meets its communications goals through a number of avenues, both within and outside of the department.

Current requirements include both written and oral communications courses that are taught outside of the department: these courses will continue to be required. Basic oral and visual communication skills are developed through either Communication 2004 or Agricultural and Extension Education 3634. Basic writing skills are developed through the English 1005-1006 sequence, with advanced writing skills being obtained by taking one of the upper-level writing courses in the English Department: ENGL 3754 (Advanced Composition), ENGL 3764 (Technical Writing), or ENGL 3774 (Business Writing). Most students take Business Writing.

Discipline-specific applications of oral, written, and visual skills are obtained through the in-major courses noted in the appended table. Students are required to take a minimum of fifteen to thirty AAEC course credits, depending on the option. In addition to a set of required courses, students select additional in-major courses from among a set of options. The table identifies which courses are required for which options. In most cases, students take additional in-major courses.

Throughout this suite of courses, students will write a wide variety of business marketing and/or financial plans, non-technical articles, reviews of case studies, and analyses of economic data to support hypothesis-based results. Written feedback will be provided directly to the students for all required assignments, either directly on the submitted assignment or in an attached document. Students also will make presentations (finance, marketing, business plans) in multiple classes, employing a variety of visual media. Presentations will range from brief summaries of class projects, to reports of business investigation, to analysis of economic data and industry problems presented by individual farmers, businesses, and government representatives. Students will use increasingly sophisticated analysis and graphical displays to support their writing and speaking as they progress through the curriculum. Both team and individual presentations will be made as appropriate. Students taking real estate appraisal will complete reports meeting professional standards of the *Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice*.

Assessment: Outcomes associated with the ViEWS requirement will be assessed via several mechanisms:

1. Grading student work in each course to assess individual performance.
2. Graduating student exit interviews that will specifically refer to the communication requirement.
3. Through the assessment procedures employed by the university.
4. Through periodic surveys of employers of our graduates. The surveys will ask employers to rate the performance of graduates of our program on all items related to the objectives listed above.

Based on assessment results, the department will design and implement programmatic changes (including revisions to individual assignments, teaching strategies, and curricular structure). The standing Undergraduate Committee routinely determines course and overall curricular revision needs.

| Course | Year generally taken | Objectives targeted | Required in option ¹ |
|---|----------------------|---|--|
| AAEC 3404 (Agricultural Financial Management) | Sophomore, Junior | 3 | AGBM, VBM |
| AAEC 3414 (Farm, Cooperative and Agribusiness Management) | Sophomore, Junior | 2, 3, 4 | AGBM, CED ⁺ |
| AAEC 3424 (Food and Agribusiness Marketing Management) | Sophomore, Junior | 2, 3, 4, 5 (current writing intensive course) | AGBM, VBM |
| AAEC 3454 (Small Business Management and Entrepreneurship) | Junior | 2, 3, 4, 5 | AGBM, VBM, CED ⁺ |
| AAEC 3504 (Marketing Agricultural Products) | Junior | 1, 3, 4 | AGBM, VBM* |
| AAEC 4404 (Agricultural Management and Problem Solving) | Senior | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 | AGBM |
| AAEC 3004 (Agricultural Production and Consumption Economics) | Junior | 2, 3 | CED, EEMP, ITD, VBM* |
| AAEC 3304 (Rural and Regional Development Policy) | Sophomore, Junior | 1, 2, 3 | CED, EEMP, ITD, AGBM* |
| AAEC 4304 (Environment and Sustainable Development Economics) | Junior, Senior | 4 | EEMP, ITD, AGBM*, CED* |
| AAEC 4314 (Environmental Economics Analysis and Management) | Senior | 1, 2, 3, 5 (current writing intensive course) | EEMP, CED*, ITD ⁺ |
| AAEC 4344 (Sustainable Development Economics) | Junior, Senior | 2, 4, 5 | EEMP, ITD, CED* |
| AAEC 3204 (International Agricultural Development and Trade) | Sophomore, Junior | 2 | AGBM*, CED*, EEMP ⁺ |
| AAEC 4204 (Food and Agricultural Policy) | Junior, Senior | 1, 2, 3 | VBM, AGBM*, EEMP ⁺ , ITD ⁺ |
| AAEC 4764 (Real Estate Appraisal) | Senior | 1, 2, 3, 5 | EEMP ⁺ |
| AAEC 4804 (Econometrics) | Senior | 1, 3 | ITD ⁺ |

¹AGBM=Agribusiness Management, CED=Community Economic Development, ITD=International Trade and Development, EEMP=Environmental Economics, Management and Policy, VBM=Veterinary Business Management

*Student selects two courses from the set of courses.

⁺Student may select the course from a set of restricted electives.

NOTE: Students in any option may choose to take any AAEC course.

The Financial Planning (FNPN) Option and Communication Expectations

The financial planning option prepares well-trained professionals to help households establish and reach personal and financial goals through management of financial resources. Financial planners help households capitalize on financial opportunities, or enhanced wealth management. Comprehensive financial plans include cash flow and debt management assessments, as well as plans for effectively managing taxes, insurance, investments, retirement, and estate transfer options. The FNPN Option provides graduates with the requisite course work to pursue required industry licensure and professional designations. The primary career path for graduates is within financial planning practices; however, graduates may also be employed in the ancillary industries of banking, insurance, investments, retirement plan administration, or credit/lending. Diverse career possibilities are also available for students interested in financial counseling, a career specialization focused on debt crisis management, budgeting advice, and basic financial education. The program is one of approximately 90 undergraduate degree programs registered with the Certified Financial Planner (CFP) Board of Standards.

Financial planning positions (both entry-level and advanced) consistently identify the need for strong written, verbal, and presentation skills. Because of the client-focused nature of the profession, success is built on the ability to effectively communicate technical and non-technical information to clients, while simultaneously (1) marketing products and/or services and (2) motivating client action. Underlying the planner-client relationship is a foundation of trust and the willingness to fully disclose both qualitative (i.e., personal or family goals and aspirations) and quantitative (i.e., all financial data) information. Planners must be able to:

- elicit this information (through client interaction via conversation or written or web-based questionnaires) and document client communication to satisfy state and federal compliance requirements;
- organize, input, analyze, interpret and apply the information, using personal knowledge and intuition as well as the results of technical assessments (e.g., software, spreadsheets, etc.);
- generate options for achieving the client's goals, balancing both short- and long-term needs;
- prepare a written plan (varying in length from a short summary of key points to a 100+ page document) that includes graphical summaries and documentation of the analysis and proposed options;
- effectively present the plan to the client;
- effectively communicate and implement the plan objectives when working with other professionals, and in some cases acting as a liaison or representative, for or with the client in meetings with an estate attorney, accountant, or other professional.

The goal of the FNPN faculty is to develop the students' ability to formulate spoken, visual and written communication (SVWC) strategies that will enable them to excel in their first jobs while providing a foundation for continued skill development as they pursue career advancement. Graduates must also be adaptable to technological advances (e.g., software applications for data analysis and presentation) and to evolving communication strategies (e.g., webinars, video conferencing, and other distance-communication media) that shape the future of financial services.

Learning Objectives and Outcomes

The SVWC learning objectives and outcomes for the FNPN option include the following. Graduates of the FNPN option should:

1. Know how to target an audience, purpose, and occasion for spoken, visual and written communication within financial planning.
2. Be able to compose effective letters, memos, and other forms of business communication in a timely manner.
3. Know how to employ a variety of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that combine content, meaning and emotional involvement in order to effectively gather client data, convey options, and motivate acceptance and implementation of the financial strategies.
4. Be able to determine the effectiveness of spoken, visual and written communication within financial planning and to offer suggestions for improvement.
5. Be able to design, incorporate and explain graphic aids, such as charts, graphs, illustrations, equations, and other tabular, numerical or spreadsheet data in a financial planning document or presentation.
6. Know how to individually or collaboratively construct long financial planning documents in a timely fashion.
7. Know how to develop a set of presentation slides or presentation notes to communicate a financial plan, or components thereof, to a client.
8. Know how to individually or collaboratively make a professional presentation of a financial plan, or components thereof, to a client.

Curriculum Plan for Accomplishing the Learning Objectives and Outcomes

Like the other undergraduate options in AAEC, FNPN students complete foundational written and oral communications courses outside of the department. Basic writing skills are developed through the English 1005-1006: Freshman English sequence. Basic oral and visual communication skills are developed through either Communication 2004: Public Speaking or Agricultural and Extension Education 3634: Communicating Agriculture in Speaking. The “extensive practice in forms of persuasive and informative writing” provided in ENGL 3774: Business Writing, as described in the VT Undergraduate Catalog, will offer the students advanced writing skills and instruction that is beyond the purview of the in-option class assignments. Furthermore, this will offer students the benefits of a course taught by an instructor with formal training in English and business writing, as opposed to the discipline-specific style taught by the FNPN faculty. Finally, it is expected that completion of ENGL 3774 will specifically contribute to the FNPN SVWC Learning Objectives and Outcomes 1, 2, 4, and 6 as listed above. If enrollment in this required course is not available, acceptable alternatives are ENGL 3754: Advanced Composition or ENGL 3764: Technical Writing.

Additionally, the plan for accomplishing the SVWC learning objectives and outcomes centers around completion of four required in-option courses. The four required in-option courses that serve as the core of the SVWC plan, the related educational strategies, and the Learning Objectives and Outcomes which they support are listed below.

AAEC 3104: Financial Planning for Professionals

This course will support Learning Objectives and Outcomes 1, 2, and 5 through the following educational strategies.

- Students develop effective letters, memos, and other short client business communication to effectively illustrate and communicate client-specific analytical results, including a sound explanation of the recommended action.

FIN 3134: Finance Skills & Concepts

This course will support Learning Objectives and Outcomes 1 and 5 through the following educational strategy.

- Students develop a written explanation of, including a variety of graphic aids to effectively illustrate, Excel spreadsheet results.

AAEC 4124: Client Relationship Management

This course will support Learning Objectives and Outcomes 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 through the following educational strategies.

- Students are introduced to theories of learning styles, complete two learning style self-assessments, and develop awareness of the need to tailor the message to the audience and to consider different learning styles when crafting that message.
- Students are introduced to money/financial management personality typing, complete a money personality self-assessment, and develop awareness of the need to tailor the message in response to different money personality types.
- Students work in dyads and triads to practice and observe verbal and nonverbal cues in response to a variety of verbal communication strategies that combine content, meaning and emotional involvement.
- Each student works with a “client” (i.e. acquaintance, student from another class, family member, etc.) who presents a financial problem or issue that must be resolved.
- In meetings between the student and the client, the student must employ a variety of communication strategies to gather data from the client and to present the proposed solution or plan to the client.
- Student feedback is also provided by the client in response to the interactions with the student, the communication methods used, the resolution of the problem/issue, and the overall satisfaction with process.

AAEC 4134: Financial Planning Applications

This course will support Learning Objectives and Outcomes 1 through 8 through the following educational strategies:

- Students work in small groups to develop a comprehensive financial plan (typical length of 80-100 pages) in response to a hypothetical case household; the plan must include plan narrative and graphical illustrations, as well as supporting spreadsheet data to document the analysis and plan projections.
- Students conduct peer reviews, with feedback to the authors, to assess if the authors successfully addressed the client goals, articulated and provided supporting data to

- explain client options, and offered implementation strategies focused on the client's goals and objectives.
- Instructor feedback is provided on initial drafts of plan components, as well as the comprehensive plan.
- Students critique the narrative and graphic aids available in various professional financial planning software applications.
- Students use PowerPoint to develop slides and notes for a presentation of the financial plan to a hypothetical client.

Ongoing Outcome Assessment

Assessment of the success in accomplishing the FNPN SVWC Learning Objectives and Outcomes will be conducted with students and constituents as outlined below:

1. Graded performance on student work in each course.
2. Demonstrated competency as assessed by the internship/field study supervisor(s) of the student's spoken, visual and written communication skills.
3. Graduating student exit interviews that will specifically refer to the communication requirement.
4. Assessment procedures employed by the university.
5. On-going informal evaluations and periodic surveys of employers to assess the graduates' spoken, visual and written communication skills.

Based on assessment results, programmatic changes (including revisions to individual assignments, teaching strategies, and curricular structure) will be implemented.