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Greenville’s agribusiness program

addresses industry applicant shortage

**BY KATIE ZELECHOWSKI**

Many Illinois agricultural businesses face a growing demand for qualified applicants to fill various positions. As this need has intensified during the last several years, colleges like Greenville University (GU) have developed programs aimed at producing graduates with strong work ethics and knowledge of the agricultural industry.

Built on strong Christian values, GU was founded in 1892 in Greenville. Since its beginning, the school has worked to instruct students in a variety of subjects while maintaining a focus on faith.

When Mark Jenner, Ph.D., became the university’s dean of Briner School of Business, his nearly 40 years of prior work within the agricultural industry prompted him to incorporate agriculture into the business school’s curriculum. His efforts culminated in an agribusiness concentration, which was first offered to students three years ago.

Whether as community college transfers or first-time college students, participants in the program are offered opportunities to apply what they learn in the classroom through hands-on experiences. The program’s capstone course, called Experience First, allows students to become instructor-guided consultants to businesses in nearby communities. The projects they complete allow students to develop innovative ideas and collaborate on solutions.

“GU agribusiness students learn to speak the industry language of agriculture, observe opportunities to improve business margins, conduct basic business analytics and communicate concisely and conference with potential opportunities to their supervisors,” said Jenner. “We don’t want our graduates to just do what they are told, we want them to do what they’re told and add value to that.”

To date, two GU students have graduated with concentrations in agribusiness. Fifteen students are currently enrolled in the program and the roster continues to grow each year.

“My goal as the director of the GU agribusiness program is to have agribusiness companies lining up to get our graduates,” said Jenner. “I believe that all agribusiness industries are hungry for students who can think critically, think analytically and communicate effectively to supervisors,” he said.

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