

TO: The Board of Regents Addendum IX-A-3

Academic Affairs

MEETING DATE: March 29, 2019

SUBJECT: Creation of the Rural Economic and Community Vitality Graduate Certificate in the Department of Agricultural Economics in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL)

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Approval is requested to create the Rural Economic and Community Vitality Graduate Certificate in the Department of Agricultural Economics in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at UNL

PREVIOUS ACTIONS: January 23, 2009 – President Milliken’s approval of the renaming of the Master of Agriculture to the Master of Applied Science was reported to the Board.

June 17, 2000 – The Board approved a Master of Agriculture degree at UNL.

EXPLANATION: Educational opportunities focused on rural community development are needed for citizens of these communities, especially those in leadership positions. The proposed 12 credit hour Rural Economic and Community Vitality Graduate Certificate’s curriculum is designed to provide students with the skills necessary for formulating local economic and community development policy and programs. These skills also will be highlighted in the capstone course, which is designed to integrate students’ learning into practice.

The certificate would be offered online, which will allow UNL to meet the needs of on-campus students and online learners from rural Nebraska and neighboring states.

This proposal has been approved by the Council of Academic Officers and the Executive Graduate Council. This proposal also has been reviewed and recommended for approval by the Academic Affairs Committee.

PROGRAM COST: \$2,000 for Year 1; \$5,000 for five years

SOURCE OF FUNDS: Tuition and fees

SPONSORS: Donde Plowman
Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer

Ronnie D. Green, Chancellor
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

RECOMMENDED: 
Susan M. Fritz
Executive Vice President and Provost

DATE: February 7, 2019

**UNL Proposal for New Online Graduate Certificate Program
Rural Economic and Community Vitality**

I. Basic Program Descriptive Information

Proposing Institution:	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Title of Proposed Program:	Rural Economic and Community Vitality
Degree/Credential to be Awarded:	Graduate Certificate
Other Similar Programs Offered:	Masters in Applied Sciences-Specialization in Community Development
Responsible Department or Unit:	Department of Agricultural Economics
Type of Delivery:	Online
Anticipated Date of Implementation:	Spring 2019
CIP Code Associated With the Program:	01.0000
Date Approved by Board:	

Description: Educational opportunities focused on rural community development are needed for citizens of rural communities, especially those in leadership positions. This certificate serves community leaders, practitioners and those committed to people and place. The proposed certificate conveys economic and social concepts relevant to understanding rural communities, the public decision-making process and the value of a multicultural and diverse citizenship. It provides participants with the skills and knowledge needed for dealing with quality of life and development issues in their rural communities. The elective 1-credit hours courses allow students to pursue their specific interests. The proposed online Graduate Certificate in Rural Economics and Community Vitality requires 12 credits including three 3-credit courses (core courses) and three 1-credit courses (electives) for completion. In this interdisciplinary program, students have the opportunity to conclude the certificate in one year as all courses are offered throughout the year. In the core courses, students learn the foundation of community economic development and leadership. The proposed certificate will be offered completely online, which allows us to meet the needs of citizens from Nebraska and neighboring states, the growing number of on-campus students and distant learners in University of Nebraska graduate programs across all subject areas.

Purpose: This certificate will meet the supplemental needs of professionals and non-professionals working in rural community development or related fields. Online learning benefits those who are distance disadvantaged as well as those disadvantaged due to their time schedules and commitments. The program is centered on three key concepts relevant to understanding rural communities: economic, social and leadership. These concepts will be

highlighted in the capstone course, which is designed to integrate students' learning into practice. Students will gain skills necessary for designing local economic and community development policy and programs. The goal is to assist Nebraska communities, and those beyond our state borders, in becoming more economically focused on their decisions, as well as to provide the fundamentals needed for citizens and leaders to articulate a vision for sustainable communities in a holistic and practical manner.

Relationship to Other Programs: The Masters in Community Development offered by the Masters of Applied Sciences (MAS) is designed for those willing to commit more time and money in a master's program. The new certificate in Rural Economic and Community Vitality will utilize two courses from the MAS in Community Development, which will be slightly modified to fit the goals of the certificate: CDEV814 Community and Regional Economic Analysis and CDEV894 Creative Component/Capstone Project. The elective 1-credit classes are in the development process and are unique to the new certificate program. The certificate curriculum was developed by faculty in the Department of Agricultural Economics in partnership with community development professionals from across the state.

Administration: The Office of Distance Extended Education will provide administrative support in administering the program. The Rural Economic and Community Vitality certificate program will be offered beginning in Fall 2019 through the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL).

Proposed Certificate Program: The proposed certificate requires a minimum of 12 credit hours and includes the following courses (see course descriptions, syllabi, and schedules in the appendices):

Core courses (3 credit-hrs.):

CDEV 814 – Community and Regional Economic Analysis
ALEC 833 – Dynamics of Effective Leadership in Groups and Teams
CDEV 894 - Capstone Project

Electives (1 credit-hr.)

CDEV817 - Nebraska Rural Government Finance Fundamentals
CDEV827 - Workforce Development
CDEV819 - Community Action Strategies
CDEV816 - Nebraska Rural Government Law Fundamentals
CDEV818 - Community Engagement
CDEV825 - Sustainable Economic Development
CDEV826 - Fundamentals of Business Analysis

A. Centrality to Role and Mission

The Department of Agricultural Economics is making a concerted effort to focus its energies in four major areas, one of which is Rural Innovation and Development. The Rural Economic and

Community Vitality Certificate Program assists in moving our educational program forward to fulfill our mission to “... improve decision making by public officials ...” (<http://agecon.unl.edu/>). This proposal supports the UNL (and College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) supported) goal of increasing student enrollment to between 29,000 and 32,500 students (Ronnie D. Green, Chancellor, State of the University Address, September 2017), with a greater emphasis placed on increasing graduate enrollment (Ronnie D. Green, Chancellor, State of the University Address, September 2016). The online nature of this program supports the University of Nebraska’s 2014-2016 Strategic Planning Framework (<http://www.nebraska.edu/docs/StrategicFramework.pdf>) to “Expand distance education programs and the acknowledgement that online education will need to contribute to enrollment growth (Harvey Perlman, Chancellor, State of the University Address 2013). The Rural Economic and Community Vitality Certificate is critical to solving some of the problems facing the world, including solving the growing income disparity and increasing food production (Harvey Perlman, Chancellor, State of the University Address 2015); both of which require a healthy rural sector.

As the state’s only comprehensive land-grant research university, UNL must ensure that it addresses the particular needs of the State of Nebraska. In building “spires of excellence”, the university must account for its comparative advantages, which in many instances, are dictated by its location in Nebraska. Beyond this, programs that may or may not achieve national recognition, but focus on particularly important needs for Nebraska, or specifically enhance the quality of life in Nebraska, deserve investment and support (<https://www.unl.edu/chancellor/compass/plan.shtml>). This initiative directly aligns with, and strengthens, the Rural Futures Institute mission to “support rural communities and regions in building upon their unique strengths and assets to achieve their desired futures.” It also supports their vision to be a “recognized leader for increasing community capacity as well as the confidence of rural people to address their challenges and opportunities, resulting in resilient and sustainable rural futures” (<http://ruralfutures.nebraska.edu/institute/>).

This practical and flexible online certificate program covers a broad scope of key topics for those seeking to advance their career in the area of rural economic and community development. The certificate curriculum was designed with consultation from community development professionals to provide students with the skills, knowledge, tools, and practical experience to play a proactive role in the rural community revitalization process. The proposed certificate will help increase the capacity of community development workers in Nebraska by providing a new generation of professionals and life-long learners the skills necessary for constructive participation in community affairs and in designing local policy and programming for their communities.

B. Evidence of Need and Demand

At the time of this submission, the proposed certificate will be the only one of its kind offered by a public institution in the state of Nebraska. Many rural communities across Nebraska, and neighboring states, are struggling to adapt to economic, social and demographic changes, and to

provide quality services, particularly where a low population basis exists. People living and working in rural areas do not have the ability to attend graduate schools. Research suggests that the demand for online courses is growing, including certificate programs (Allen & Seaman 2017).

Focus group discussions with community development experts disclosed an increasing demand for training that would assist those interested in community development to deal with the challenges faced by rural economies, including the ability to advocate for themselves. The proposed certificate in Rural Economic and Community Vitality provides an online curriculum that offers this training. This program blends academic excellence, a proven brand and experienced faculty; all resources that are readily available. Our curriculum is also of interest to, and has value for, students from multiple programs and disciplines throughout CASNR and other UNL colleges and programs. Students from diverse backgrounds will benefit from advanced training in community development skills that will assist them in dealing with the dynamic and unique context of rural Nebraska. Rural community challenges require citizens and leaders who understand how to identify, address and solve unique issues by assessing and utilizing local resources; while also knowing how to tap into state and federal funding opportunities.

Among the professionals who will benefit from this program are:

- Community developers
- Economic developers
- Elected and appointed civic leaders
- Nonprofit organizations
- Community planners
- Educators
- Extension educators
- Local/regional board authorities and commissions
- Citizens active in government involvement and civic affairs
- Students in related graduate programs

Interest in the proposed certificate was assessed during two focus group meetings with community development professionals and through online surveys to members of the Nebraska LEAD Program of the Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council and to members of the Nebraska Economic Developers Association (NEAD). The survey was also sent to current MAS students, to students majoring in the online Masters of Agronomy, and to current CASNR undergraduate and graduate students.

The focus group consisted of 12 community economic development leaders located throughout Nebraska. These individuals also assisted in designing a curriculum that would be relevant to rural citizens and leaders. The participants were unanimous in regards to the need and importance of an educational program focused on the unique challenges facing Nebraska's communities.

Of the 77 CASNR Junior and Senior students that responded to the survey, 39% stated they were somewhat interested to most definitely interested in an online, 12-hour credit, graduate certificate focused on community economic development. When asked if they thought the certificate would enhance their professional and career advancement, 46% felt that the certificate would likely or most definitely help their careers.

Of the 16 CASNR graduate students that responded to the student survey asking if they would be interested in enhancing their degree with an online, 12-hour credit, certificate focused on community economic development, over half (56%) indicated they may be interested to most definitely be interested in enrolling in the certificate program. When asked if they thought the certificate would enhance their professional and career advancement, 44% felt it would be somewhat likely to, and 31% felt it most definitely would enhance their career.

Of the 28 MAS students that responded to the survey, 50% indicated they are moderately interested to highly interested in enrolling in the certificate program.

Of the 164 professionals working in areas related to community development that responded to the survey asking if they would be interested in pursuing an online certificate focused on community economic development, approximately 52% indicated they might be moderately interested to highly interested in enrolling in the certificate program.

We currently have an average of 33 undergraduate students enroll annually in an undergraduate Rural Community Economics class. In a recent survey, approximately 70% of these students intend to live/work in rural areas. We also currently have more than 50 students majoring in our rural banking program. More than 90% of the graduates from this program over the past 10 years have returned to rural Nebraska. These two examples indicate an interest in students going back to rural Nebraska who would also be a target audience for the certificate degree.

The proposed certificate may also enhance the Masters of Applied Sciences specializations and other online programs offered by CASNR. In the summer of 2018, 88 active online students were enrolled in the Masters of Applied Science. There are three MAS specializations offered online: Community Development; Science for Educators; and Beef Cattle Production. Most MAS graduate programs require 36 credits for degree completion. Half of these classes have to be taken within the original academic program. The other half may be transferred from other graduate programs, conditional on approval by their advisors. The proposed certificate program provides elective coursework for students of these programs. Courses within the certificate program may also provide electives for students majoring in other graduate programs offered within CASNR; i.e., Natural Resources; Agronomy and Horticulture; Agricultural Leadership,

Education and Communications; Agricultural Economics; Food Science and Technology; Entrepreneurship; Animal Science; Entomology; Plant Pathology. In addition, there are a number of online graduate certificates (i.e., Advanced Horticulture; Floriculture & Nursery Production Management; Ornamentals, Landscape & Turf; Grassland Management; Food Safety & Defense) along with students in the online MS in Agronomy and MS in Entomology who can benefit from additional elective offerings. In the case of the online MAS with Specialization in Community Development, students can transfer all 12 credit hours gained in the Certificate to the Master's program.

C. Adequacy of Resources

1. Faculty and Staff Resources

The University of Nebraska already has the faculty and staff in place to implement the proposed certificate. Dr. Daniela Manhani Mattos, faculty member in Agricultural Economics, will be the director of the online certificate program. Instructors are faculty and Extension educators located in the Department of Agricultural Economics and the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication. Student support services will be provided by Diane Wasser of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources' Office of Distance Extended Education Office, as well as by staff in the Department of Agricultural Economics. There are no additional costs involved in the implementation of the proposed certificate, other than marketing expenses.

2. Physical Facilities/Instructional Equipment and Informational Resources

The Certificate will be offered online and no additional equipment or resources are needed. The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and the Department of Agricultural Economics are well equipped with the necessary technology to offer the certificate. Faculty involved in the certificate have their own computers with the required technology to allow them easy interaction with distant learners (email, Zoom, canvas, cameras and video-conference rooms). The Department of Agricultural Economics has two classrooms outfitted with online audio-video technologies. These classrooms have built-in video cameras and sound systems for online synchronous engagement or for producing prepackaged material by recording lectures or presentations. The College of Agriculture and Natural Resources provides access to IT assistance and instructional design specialists to help in the development and delivery of online classes and application of innovative technology solutions. The University of Nebraska Lincoln offers several courses, workshops, and training opportunities for faculty teaching online.

The commitment of the Department of Agricultural Economics and CASNR to online education is demonstrated by the alignment of facilities, support services and faculty to provide the high quality online programming expected by the communities we serve as promised in our strategic plan (<https://nebraska.edu/docs/StrategicFramework.pdf>).

The sponsoring academic unit for the online certificate in Rural Economic and Rural Vitality is the Department of Agricultural Economics within the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. This department has the capacity to provide a research-based program with faculty in the area of community and economic development.

3. Budget Projections (see Tables 1 and 2)

D. Avoidance of Unnecessary Duplication

No institutions of higher education in Nebraska offer a certificate in Rural Economic and Community Vitality. Regionally, online certificates focused on the general topic of community development are offered through Kansas State University, Colorado State University, Fort Hays University, and Arizona State University. Some of the faculty employed by these programs are scattered throughout North America and lack a true understanding and connection to Midwestern rural communities. The proposed certificate is unique and distinct as it will focus on a flexible curriculum designed to meet the needs of rural communities, develop and enhance core community capacity skills and practices, and is taught by experienced community and economic development practitioners and faculty located at the University of Nebraska.

E. Consistency with the Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education

The proposed certificate in Rural Economic and Community Vitality addresses the following goals for meeting the needs of both students and the State, in an economically efficient and inclusive manner, as stated in the Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education (revised in 2016).

Meeting the needs of students:

“Postsecondary education institutions will assess evolving needs and priorities in a timely manner and will be prepared to change and adopt new methods and technologies to address the evolving needs and priorities of the students and people of Nebraska.”

“Nebraska colleges and universities will provide their graduates with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed as capable employees and responsible citizens.”

“Nebraska’s postsecondary institutions will be student-centered and will offer life-long learning opportunities that are responsive to student’s needs.”

Meeting the needs of the state:

“Higher education in Nebraska will be responsive to the workforce development and ongoing training needs of employers and industries to sustain a knowledgeable, trained, and skilled workforce in both rural and urban areas of the State.”

“Higher education will serve the State by preparing individuals for productive, fulfilling lives and by developing and nurturing the citizens and future leaders of Nebraska.”

“Postsecondary education institutions will provide appropriate support services to help all students reach their educational goals, regardless of where or how the instruction is delivered.”

References

Allen, I.E. & Seaman, J. (2017). Digital Learning Compass: Distance education Enrollment Report 2017. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED580868.pdf>

TABLE 1: PROJECTED EXPENSES - NEW INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM
UNL Rural Economic and Community Vitality Graduate Certificate

	(FY2020) Year 1		(FY2021) Year 2		(FY2022) Year 3		(FY2023) Year 4		(FY2024) Year 5		Total Cost
	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost	
Personnel											
Faculty											\$0
Professional											
Graduate Assistants											
Support Staff											\$0
Benefits											\$0
Subtotal	0.0	\$0	0.0	\$0	0.0	\$0	0.0	\$0	0.0	\$0	\$0
Operating											
General Operating											\$0
Equipment											\$0
New or renovated space											\$0
Library/Information Resources											\$0
Other (marketing)		\$2,000		\$1,000		\$1,000		\$500		\$500	\$5,000
Subtotal		\$0		\$0		\$0		\$0		\$0	\$0
Total Expenses ¹		\$2,000		\$1,000		\$1,000		\$500		\$500	\$5,000

¹ No new faculty, staff, or additional expenses will be required.

TABLE 2: PROJECTED REVENUES - NEW INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM
UNL Rural Economic and Community Vitality Graduate Certificate

	(FY2019) Year 1		(FY2020) Year 2		(FY2021) Year 3		(FY2022) Year 4		(FY2023) Year 5		Total
	FTE	Revenue	FTE	Revenue	FTE	Revenue	FTE	Revenue	FTE	Revenue	
Reallocation of Existing Funds											\$0
Required New Public Funds											\$0
1. State Funds											\$0
2. Local Tax Funds (community colleges)											\$0
Tuition and Fees ¹		\$21,390		\$34,224		\$51,336		\$64,170		\$85,560	\$256,680
Other Funding											\$0
Total Revenue		\$21,390		\$34,224		\$51,336		\$64,170		\$85,560	\$256,680

¹ Based on conservative projected enrollments of 5, 8, 12, 15 and 20 students for years 1-5, respectively, assuming a per credit hour tuition rate of \$356.50 and 12 credit hours per program. In-state and out-state tuition rates are assumed equal.