

Professional Improvement Leave Proposal

Background

This proposal for professional improvement leave during the Fall 2024 semester seeks to develop a sustainable model for providing professional development and continuing education activities for Alabama secondary agriscience education teachers to address conceptually challenging areas of FANH sciences. At the beginning of Fall 2024, I will begin my seventh year at Auburn University and my third as a tenured Associate Professor. The purpose of my professional leave consists of three focused components addressing research, outreach, and teaching: 1) development and submission of a USDA/NIFA HEC Challenge Grant (est. award \$250,000) addressing beef/dairy production and retail processing best practices for Alabama agriculture education teachers' professional improvement by modeling and observing pedagogical practices used at the American Farm School in Thessaloniki, Greece, 2) international manuscript development using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model to improving Alabama school-farm systems instruction, and 3) redesign of CTCT 4000, 5050, and 5060 to incorporate international and domestic livestock instructional methods to prepare pre-service undergraduate and graduate teaching candidates in agriculture education. I am developing a national and international reputation for recognized expertise in this research area. I have consistently published my research in the flagship journal of my field (The Journal of Agricultural Education) and presented at numerous national and international conferences addressing pedagogical course design and the psychology of teacher motivational factors within professional decision-making.

Agriculture education, leadership, and communications have embraced the abovementioned challenges. I am committed to the transformational progression of research, teaching, and outreach necessary to adopt and diffusion sustainable pedagogical best practices, education for Alabama agriculture education teachers and initiate transformative experiences for pre-service clinical residents in agriculture education.

Nature of Work to Be Undertaken:

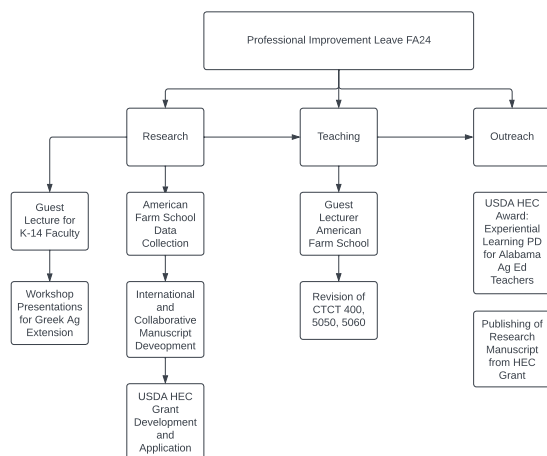
The nature of work performed during my proposed professional improvement leave is to enhance my knowledge, skills, and abilities as a researcher and teacher related to school-farm livestock operations and the inclusion of these skills to prepare better and serve current and future agriculture educators in Alabama. My work will include pedagogical practices associated with faculty-designed experiential learning methods in livestock husbandry, student engagement, and experiences in beef and dairy production facilities engaged in retail operations, invited lectures, grant and manuscript development, and continued professional development for Alabama agriculture education teachers. Three objectives frame this proposal:

1. I am enhancing my knowledge of school-based, student-led livestock production and retail facilities and their applications to agricultural education, leadership, and communication for inclusion in undergraduate and graduate courses.
2. Enhancing my competence in how faculty research, construct, deliver, and assess Kolb's experiential learning model for student development and competency in agriculture, food, and natural resource (AFNRF) contexts.
3. Enhancing my ability to develop externally funded competitive grants and contracts from the USDA (USDA, 2023) that require applicants to address state, regional, national, or international educational needs, involve a creative or non-traditional approach toward addressing needs that can serve as a model to others, and encouraging better-working relationships in the university sciences and education communities, as well as between universities.

This proposal addresses three critical challenges defined by the land-grant university system: research, teaching, and outreach to meet the objectives of the professional improvement leave (Figure 1). Through an interwoven research agenda, my projects will ensure the completion of an internationally developed research manuscript, the completion and submission of the USDA/NIFA HEC grant, and the redesign of instructional courses.

Figure 1

Inputs and Outputs Associated with Professional Improvement Leave Objectives



Time, Locations, and Work Being Done, and Outcomes

Research (September-November 2024)

My projects focus on how K-14 faculty at the American Farm School in Thessaloniki, Greece, implement experiential learner model frameworks for student engagement and learning. As discussed above, my research and application of instructional best practices have illuminated the gap between United States teacher-led school farming operations and student engagement in the production, processing, and retail-related to school-based farms, specifically in Alabama. Embedding with American Farm School faculty and students will enable me to capture the lived experiences of faculty instruction and student learning framed within experiential learning models. This data will be qualitatively organized for developing and submitting the USDA HEC grant and an internationally authored manuscript.

Teaching: (September-November 2024, Spring-Fall 2025)

Teaching will be provided in Greece and Alabama. I have been asked to serve as a guest lecturer for the American Farm School secondary and post-secondary faculty, addressing focused research studies as an Associate Professor at Auburn University. Specifics of the lectures include research presentations regarding the confluence of American agriculture and education, learning standards lesson design and evaluation, and the psychology of work and life balance experienced by agriculture education professionals. Furthermore, I have been invited to deliver professional development sessions for Greek agriculturalists engaged in what the United States would best define as formal cooperative extension networks. The opportunity to expand my knowledge of international agriculture in collaboration with United States educational practices will establish the foundation of cooperation between Auburn University and the American Farm School. Findings from these studies will be incorporated into the existing teacher preparation curriculum (CTCT 4000, 5050, and 5060). Providing appropriate and correct

teaching methods using Kolb's model will prepare future teachers with the skills to manage and engage student learning experiences more meaningfully than the struggles Alabama agriculture education teachers currently experience with school-based farm systems.

Outreach (Summer 2025-Summer 2029)

With the successful submission of the USDA HEC Grant in SP 25, programming for disseminating experiences and analyzing data will be conducted through the Sustaining Our Agriculture Resources (SOAR) program developed through external funding in 2019 from the USDA HEC Grant. The focus of the workshop deliverables will target existing agriculture education teachers in Alabama. This will ensure that Alabama's practicing agricultural education teachers receive the same instructional opportunities as undergraduate/graduate pre-service teachers at Auburn. The benefits of continuing the SOAR academy are an existing template for deliverables and grant development has been in place for four years. This outreach component will also assist in developing a second research manuscript addressing teacher needs and experiences framed in livestock production and grounded in experiential learning theory and practice.

Benefit to the College and University

The benefits to the college and university are multi-faceted. As the only university in Alabama with an agricultural education program, faculty, staff, and students have a unique obligation to prepare and support the next generation of agriculturalists, scientists, teachers, communicators, and leaders. The development of scholarly works, international collaborations, and the diffusion of new data and ideas enhance the research profile of the college and university. The described product and outcomes reinforce the agriculture education program's commitment to developing and nurturing a national reputation for recruiting graduate students and faculty. Being invited to lecture and discuss agricultural and educational issues internationally impacts the College of Education through partnerships to solve real-world problems beyond Alabama's borders.

Estimated and Proposed Budget for FA 24 PIL

I am requesting \$ 9,220.00 to support my professional development leave during the fall semester of 2024. Funds will be spent primarily on travel. The remaining funds will be obtained from professional development, sponsored research, and personal funds. These expenses are a best-faith estimate as of October 2023 based on two five-day travel excursions to the American Farm School, Thessaloniki, Greece.

September 1-7, 2024	
American Farm School, Thessaloniki, Greece	
Airfare:	\$2,600.00
Taxi	\$150.00
Lodging	\$165.00*5
days=\$825.00	
MIE	\$147.00*5
days=\$735.00	
Personal Car	\$100.00
Parking	\$150.00
September Total:	\$4510.00

November 10-16, 2024	
American Farm School, Thessaloniki, Greece	
Airfare:	\$2,600.00
Taxi	\$150.00
Lodging	\$165.00*5
days=\$825.00	
MIE	\$147.00*5
days=\$735.00	
Personal Car	\$100.00
Parking	\$150.00
November Total:	\$4510.00

Combined Total Estimated Costs: \$9,220.00