

## **Partnering with two-year colleges: Implications for Horticulture Science Education**

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Each year, a declining number of students choose careers in agriculture. Therefore, new approaches in agricultural instruction need to be created to attract students to agriculture science. Many students initiate higher education studies at community colleges. Therefore, strong linkages among two-year community colleges and four-year universities are likely to foster the transition of more students into higher education. For that reason, two New Mexico educational institutions, Doña Ana Branch Community College-a two-year community college and New Mexico State University-a four-year university have integrated collaborative and experiential learning projects in one redesigned landscape construction course. The objective of this educational approach is to model a system that facilitates the seamless integration of compatible curricula from a community college and a university. Also, this educational approach could serve as a model for curricula that combines practical knowledge with advances in science and technology. In the midterm course evaluation, 67% of students rated the combining of a university and community college class as above average or excellent. Ninety four percent of the class rated classroom materials and laboratory activities supported learning as excellent. Students valued the experiential learning projects and would highly recommend the course to their peers. In this redesigned course, ethnic minorities now constitute 40% of the class, suggesting that this model has the potential to retain a large number of minority students in landscape horticulture. We conclude that this collaborative approach for teaching landscape horticulture is likely to enhance agricultural education and foster a seamless educational experience for students who transition from a community college to a university.