

Spring 2024 Horticulture Advisory Committee

Meeting Date: March 5, 2024

Meeting Time: 12:30pm

External Participants:

Michael LaRusso – Grower – Hampshire Farms

Andres Piedrahita – Human Resource Generalist – Mariani Nursery

Larry Hubbard – Owner – Pepper Creek

Vicki Hubbard – Owner - Pepper Creek

Kelsey Minalga – Product Manager – Ball Horticulture Company

Joshua Pepping – Production Supervisor- Midwest Groundcovers

Amanda Weides – Account Manager – Winters Landscape

Chris Bausman – General Manager – Crimson Valley Landscaping

Aaron Bivens – General Manager – Altman Plants

Brad Buker – Arborist – Bartlett Tree Experts

Internal participants:

Chase Budziak – Dean of Instruction

Jescelynn Gibbons – Associate Dean of Instruction

Janet Gallagher – Horticulture Faculty

Sean Walters – Horticulture/Agriculture/Biology Faculty

Kimberly Rotella – Greenhouse Specialist

Catherine Macias – Administrative Specialist

- I. Program Update
 - A. Spring 2024 Enrollment
 - i. College up 7.6% since last spring
 - ii. Horticulture down 124 credit hours (-40.1%) since previous spring. Some certificates reduced required credit hours for students to accelerate completion since last year.
 - iii. The Horticulture and Agriculture departments have merged into one to streamline pathways for students and maximize networking through advisory committees, high school partners, and industry partners. Next year the advisory committees will be combined.
 - B. Discussion of Spring 2024 Courses
 - i. Bedding Plants, Botany, Advanced Floral, Cannabis Production
 - ii. Field Trips
 - iii. Work-based Learning
 - C. Program Faculty & Staffing
 - i. New Additions

1. Sean Walters, Full-Time Faculty Instructor for Agriculture, Horticulture, and Biology
 2. Jescelynn Gibbons, Associate Dean of Business and Technical Education
 3. Kayle Silva, Business and Technical Education Student Advisor
- ii. Instruction, Advising, and Faculty Horticulture Instructor, are collaborating to streamline Fall 2024 courses to meet the demands of the career field and maximize enrollment.
- D. Student News
- i. Students are placed in internships that often lead to on-going full-time employment with the employer.
 - ii. A Horticulture student received the American Institute of Floral Designers (AIFD) Symposium scholarship and will compete at the annual competition this summer with support of the College Foundation.
 - iii. A Horticulture student received Rockford Garden scholarship.
 - iv. Students will work on flowers for the University of Michigan Alumni event.
- E. Facilities, Equipment, and Supplies
- i. Advisory committee members toured the greenhouse.
 - ii. Committee members suggested LED grow lighting with infrared lighting.
- F. Upcoming Events
- i. Spring Plant Sale – May 9-May 10, 2024, with in-person and online sales.
 - ii. Kishwaukee is hosting the FFA Horticulture contest on Friday, April 12, 2024, along with the FFA public speaking contest for Section 6.
 - iii. Hosting AIRS program, Artist in Residence, a student AIFD chapter on Monday, April 1, 2024. A guest designer will visit campus, connect, and work with students.
- II. Employer Feedback & Discussion
- A. Spring 2024 Job Fair Feedback
- i. Based on advisory feedback, the department switched their annual employer event from a job interview day to an industry job fair open to all Kish students and the general public. More than 15 employers participated, and employers preferred the format of a job fair versus the interview day model. It provided employers and students with much more exposure to different jobs and organizations.
 - ii. Employers suggested hosting the event in the fall or earlier in the spring.

1. In the fall employers have more time to mentor and train students.
2. Earlier in the spring allows for employers to work with students and prepare them for their “busy” season.
3. The department is considering dates in October for the FY25 annual event.

B. Employment Opportunities

- i. Several employers shared open positions starting in spring and summer and hope to hire our students as interns and graduates as employees.
- ii. Employers shared seeing Kishwaukee College training on candidates’ resumes sets them apart from other applicants, qualifying them for management opportunities in the future.
- iii. When asked about the value of Kish’s Horticulture certificates and degrees, committee members shared that training from Kish sets graduates apart from other applicants, qualifying them for both management level positions and entrepreneurship. Kish graduates demonstrate needed passion for the industry with preparation in soft skills, management, and expertise in plants.
- iv. The owner and arborist from Bartlett Tree Experts joined the meeting to share employment avenues for Horticulture students. They also shared appreciation for the Kish course options in trees and shrubs.
- v. Employers identify there is a high demand for Spanish speaking employees in the industry.

C. Curriculum & Skills

- i. Employers suggested providing training in Microsoft Excel as it is a critical skill required by every company for most documentation and accounting. College faculty identified opportunities to utilize Excel in various assignments throughout the department’s curriculum.
- ii. Other vital skills employers are seeking in candidates include computer skills, language skills, organizational skills, and critical, real-world application. The employers were impressed with the Kish students they interacted with and identified that Kish students are better prepared in these areas than general job candidates.
- iii. The advisory committee feels the department is on the right track with the utilization of e-commerce, as the industry increasingly utilizes digital marketing and online sales with in-person pickup.
- iv. Opportunities for future curriculum or programming may include environmental control system training, drone technology,

experimenting with the use of lighting in plant production, and landscape/hardscape applications.

- v. Artificial intelligence is emerging in large-scale production environments. Exposure of this technology in curriculum or field trips would be helpful to increase student familiarity, but full-scale on-site training is not required.