

## **Agriculture & Horticulture Advisory Committee**

**Meeting Date:** November 4, 2024

**Time:** 3:00pm

### **External Participants:**

Chris Bausman – General Manager, Crimson Valley Landscaping

Kelsey Minalga – Product Manager, Ball Horticulture Company

Michael LaRusso – Grower, Hampshire Farms

Matthew Fredrickson – Director of Greenhouse Operations, Hampshire Farms

Josh Pepping – Production Supervisor, Midwest Groundcovers

Larry Hubbard – Owner, Pepper Creek

Vicky Hubbard – Owner, Pepper Creek

Brad Buker – Arborist, Bartlett Tree Experts

Luke Cella – ITF Executive Director, Illinois Turfgrass Foundation

### **Internal Participants:**

Chase Budziak – Dean of Instruction

Jescelynn Gibbons – Associate Dean of Instruction

Janet Gallagher – Horticulture Faculty

Sean Walters – Horticulture/Agriculture/ Biology Faculty

Catherine Marsh – Horticulture Adjunct

Kimberly Rotella – Greenhouse Specialist

Laura Gregory – Coordinator of Employment & Job Placement Services

- I. Program Update
  - A. Fall 2024 Enrollment
    - i. College-wide enrollment increased by 7.7% over Fall 2023.
    - ii. The Horticulture program experienced a 10% increase (28 additional credit hours) compared to Fall 2023.
  - B. Follow-Up from Spring 2024 Advisory Meeting
    - i. Spanish Language Discussion
      1. This discussion is a continuation from the Spring 2024 advisory meeting to provide additional clarification and explore actionable steps.
      2. Demographics: The 2024 Kishwaukee College Datebook reports that 29.6% of the student population identifies as Hispanic/Latino.
      3. The committee identified areas for future exploration including the potential for partnering with the Illinois Department of Agriculture to assist Spanish-speaking employees in preparing

for the pesticide applicator license exam and the development of a list of essential Spanish phrases for Ag and Hort students with key industry-specific phrases to bridge language gaps.

ii. Soft Skills & Computer Skills

1. In Fall 2024 courses, students are encouraged to utilize Excel for data organization and collection.
2. Coursework now includes an increased focus on proposal writing skills.

C. Department Updates

- i. Spring 2024 Field Studies: Students visited Altman Plants, Hornbacher's Garden Center, Anderson Japanese Gardens, Sinnissippi Golf Course, and Rockford Park District Conservatory.
- ii. Fall 2024 Special Events Course: Students participated in decorating the Kishwaukee College Foundation Gala, Elwood House, and campus events.
- iii. Crop Science Class: Agriculture students engaged in hands-on visits to Syngenta and Bayer Crop Science facilities.
- iv. Prairie Management: Students toured regional prairies for practical fieldwork experiences.
- v. Greenhouse Management: Students grew mums and asters for their fall greenhouse management class and a sale was held as part of the class. Students experimented with three different growing methods. The department will move the sale date back 2 weeks to allow more time for the plants to be enjoyed.
- vi. Arborist Visit: Brad Buker from Bartlett Tree Expert surveyed the campus with faculty and students regarding tree trimming.

II. Employer Feedback & Discussion

A. Greenhouse Update

- i. The Foundation's Annual Gala on November 2, 2024, focused on the Greenhouse Campaign to raise funding for renovations of the Kish greenhouse. Next steps are to engage architects and greenhouse consultants to identify future plans.
  1. Speakers included Dean Chase Budziak, alumni Abby D'Agosta and Josh Pepping, who emphasized the role and impacts of the greenhouse.
- ii. Employer feedback
  1. The committee expressed enthusiasm and support for the College's efforts to explore a greenhouse upgrade, emphasizing its vital role in providing students with hands-on learning opportunities. They highlighted the importance of a

production-scale greenhouse for teaching and demonstrating advanced growing techniques.

2. Members suggested consulting with a greenhouse manufacturer and exploring a new, taller structure.
3. Recommendations included building separate zones with different growing techniques and styles that emphasize different types of irrigation systems, flood floors, benching, overhead sprinklers, high tunnels, light manipulation, and LED lighting.
4. Install a separate commercial-grade greenhouse control system. The industry standard is the Argus middle-base control system. Several employers at the meeting have experience with this system.
5. Dean Budziak discussed the factors that need to be considered in greenhouse plans including enrollment numbers, program completions, and cost.

iii. Spring Job Fair and Interview Day

1. The Spring 2025 Job Fair is proposed for February 4, 2025. This earlier date was recommended by employers to better align with hiring timelines, as many businesses recruit in January and February for March and April positions.

B. Industry Updates

i. Trends

1. Increased interest among younger generations in fresh flowers, gifts, and landscape design services.
2. Demand for larger outdoor living spaces continues to grow despite Northern Illinois' shorter seasons.

ii. Hiring Needs

1. Strong demand for middle management and sales personnel with Spanish-speaking skills.

iii. In-Demand Skills

1. Teaching students how to maximize profits in growing facilities, including basic inventory and cost accounting.
2. Spanish-speaking skills to better serve diverse clientele and team members.
3. Proficiency in Excel for data management and organizational tasks.
4. Horticulture knowledge and training, particularly in identifying and growing plant materials, trees, and native plants.

iv. Artificial Intelligence

1. Employers emphasized the need for students to have a basic understanding of AI, including its applications and limitations.
2. Recommendations included offering introductory training on large language models and exploring site-wide AI tools like ChatGPT.