Do You Talk about Certification with Your Students?

Professors: Thank you for what you do to help educate and prepare future professionals in agronomy, crop science, and soil science. Your research helps solve problems and leads to better solutions that professionals in the field face every day working with their customers and clients. You are serving a very important function.

Students represent future professionals. Do you tell them to consider becoming certified or licensed in their chosen profession? If you do, thank you for doing so, but if you don’t, please consider telling your students about it. We have tools you can use such as brochures, posters, and web pages, but a simple two-minute comment from you, their professor, encouraging them to investigate professional certification as they prepare to enter the work world can go a long way. You are in a very influential position.

When you encourage students to become certified while being certified yourself, you have far more credibility.

Are you certified? Over the years, I have heard many in the academic community tell me, “I have a Ph.D., so I don’t need certification.” That might be true when you only look at it from the academic perspective, but when you consider how much you can influence the direction a student will go, then it is very important. Students have a better chance at employment after graduation if they are certified or at least on the path towards certification. When you encourage students to become certified while being certified yourself, you have far more credibility.

Defining and Representing the Profession

Your role directly links to what the certification programs are striving to do—define and represent the profession. Certification programs define the profession by setting standards through examination, education, experience, and ethics. They represent the profession and the professionals through advocacy, educational events, promotions, and communications. You are a critical link for the profession to continue in the future. It can’t survive without highly educated people entering it.

We are in the process of developing an ambassador program where certified professionals will come to the classroom to talk with students, describe what they do in their position, and talk about what is needed to be successful. This will be modeled after the program currently under way in Iowa (described in March–April 2013 issue of Crops & Soils magazine). It allows the student to ask questions of those who are practicing the profession. We will identify professionals in your state or province that are interested in talking with students and help you get it organized. Please contact me if you would like to learn more at lsmith@sciencesocieties.org.

We can also work with you if you would like to use the credentialing exams as an evaluation tool. We can arrange for you to offer the exam on campus, providing the student with an opportunity to start towards certification and providing you with the statistical data to use for evaluating your program against proven professional standards. It’s better than using an exam that has no direct value to the student. In this case, both students and professors benefit.

I’d like to encourage you to consider these options, and if you are interested in learning more, to contact me. Thank you for what you are doing to help craft the future of the profession. We can’t do it without your involvement.

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1 See www.certifiedcropadviser.org/promotional-materials.