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ACTIVITIES TO DETERMINE INTEREST IN MASTER FLORAL DESIGNER CERTIFICATION PROGRAMMING

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ABSTRACT

A consumer-level floral design series was planned and implemented to find interest and generate a participant pool for an Extension floral design certificate program. Promotion through garden club and farmers' market demonstrations, and extension horticulturists, aided enrollment. Two-hour sessions involved hands-on designing of mixed vases, mound design, holiday centerpiece and others. An augmented standardized survey found that participants valued what they learned. Two-thirds of the participants felt they would create another floral arrangement in the near future and would like to complete a certificate program in floral design. These results led to a master floral designer pilot program.

Key Words

Floral design, flower arranging, master floral designer, garden club

INTRODUCTION

Floral design is a creative expression of art and its perishable medium is derived from the science of horticulture crop production. Floral arranging enthusiasts require foundational knowledge in floriculture production, flower handling, and design principles. Achieving excellence in floral design necessitates creativity, originality, and studio practice. (Anderson, 1995; Hunter, 2000; Johnson, McKinley & Benz, 2001; Pfahl, 1981, Scace & DelPrince, 2015).

Floral design workshops are occasionally delivered through Extension (e.g., Bodkins, 2015; Citrowske, 2016). Some master gardener programs involve growing and sharing flowers (DiNardo, 2007; Gao, 2001; Peronto & Murphy, 2006). However, no extensive certificate curricula similar to Master Gardener programs exist where participants can learn research-based information and best practices in floral design through Extension. A lack of floral design programming or occasional classes is in contrast to Anderson's assertion (1990) that creativity is fostered in a logically-developed floral design program with frequent contact. To address this programming gap, a consumer-level floral design series was planned to determine interest and to generate a participant pool for an Extension floral design certificate program.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT FROM SCRATCH

Short-term, hands-on floral design sessions might be the best way to build interest and a foundation for an early adopter pool. Therefore, a series of hands-on workshops, titled Floral Enthusiast, was planned at the Mississippi State University Coastal Research and Extension Center, Biloxi. We devised a schedule with the programming year slated from October 2015 to June 2016 targeting amateur floral enthusiasts.

Each workshop was two hours long and included floral care and handling information, how to use a cut flower knife, how to hydrate fresh flower foam, design techniques, selected flower varieties, and was formatted to include a demonstration followed by participants' copying the example. To prevent the possibility of over or under buying flowers and supplies, students were required to prepay registration for each workshop. Fees, which ranged from \$15 to \$30 per person, covered consumable materials expense. Workshop topics included fresh floral vase design, mound arrangement, and creation of a holiday centerpiece. Materials were procured from nearby wholesale florists. Late registrations, tardy checks, cash handling, or burdening a receptionist with the duty of phone registrations were prevented by using an existing online registration portal.

Participants reserved places in the class via credit/debit card payments to a university-owned, secured payment transaction site. The site informed participants to bring floral design tools including paring knives, scissors, wire cutters and pruning shears. If attendees could not participate, they were encouraged to send another floral enthusiast in their place. The floral studio capacity was eight students and one teacher. Attendees were encouraged to take photos of their work and post images on social media (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Attendee taking a photo of vase design. Photo by author.

Horticulture faculty and agents helped advertise the program by mentioning the new floral classes at their speaking opportunities. They also facilitated connections with garden clubs and Master Gardeners. An invitation to attend a garden club council meeting resulted in an opportunity to speak about the Floral Enthusiast series.

Appearances on a local television news program with showy floral arrangements, many made from foliage and flowers harvested from the MSU Coastal Research and Extension Center’s landscape, helped advertise that floral design classes were occurring on a regular basis. A dedicated Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/MSU-Extension-Coastal-Floral-1039532139443871/>) featured postings about upcoming and recently completed workshops along with examples of demonstrated arrangements and student work.

The garden club council meeting resulted in requests from garden club and master gardener demonstrations throughout the six-county region Mississippi Gulf Coast. Individual demonstrations were tailored to the needs of each club. Some club members brought their own containers and flowers from their yards to be used in demonstrations. Others paid fees, \$50-\$150, for containers, flowers, foliage and floral design mechanics purchased from a local wholesale florist. Vendors from a local farmers’ market supplied cut flowers and wooden garden containers for a market demonstration. A rack card listing workshop times, dates and registration information was distributed to demonstration attendees.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

A university-approved, summative evaluation instrument was used to evaluate instruction quality, content, and value. In order to understand participants’ level of floral design knowledge and ability, the instrument sought to find if the content was new to them and if they could put it into practice. A key question was to determine if the workshops were more than just an afternoon of entertainment; that participants could agree that they would create a design in the three months following the workshop based upon what they learned and practiced. The instrument also included a question for assessing interest in a certificate program. Frequencies and means were calculated from the results of the evaluation.

In all, there were 106 participants in the Floral Enthusiast workshops. Some people enrolled in multiple classes, and some repeat participants brought friends. All participants agreed their time was well spent by taking a two-hour class formatted into a demonstration followed by copying the arrangement. Everyone agreed to recommend classes to others. Attendees learned new information and gained new skills in floral design (99%). More than 90% of the participants pledged to create a floral arrangement on their own within three months of workshop completion. Seventy-seven percent of all short-term class participants agreed that they desired to achieve a certificate in floral design, of these two-thirds strongly agreed. These results provided the impetus to offer the comprehensive certificate program (Table 1).

Table 1. Floral enthusiast evaluation response frequencies illustrating participant reactions to short-term floral design workshop and interest in a certificate program

Training Goal	Mean*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Attending this workshop was worth my time	4.98				2	104
I would recommend this workshop to others	4.98				2	104
I increased my knowledge of floral design	4.92			1	6	99
I learned new skills related to floral design	4.92			1	6	99
I will use information I learned in this workshop	4.85			1	14	91
I plan to make a floral design within the next three months, based on information provided during this workshop	4.49	1	0	6	23	73
I would like to participate in workshops/programs toward a certificate in floral design	4.31	3	5	16	14	68

*1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many people are interested in designing with flowers but are not aware that Extension offers educational design workshops. These workshops provided participants an opportunity to learn select principles and build a design, but also helped students understand how a floral design studio appears and functions, the teaching and learning methods used, project outcomes, and decide if they would like to pursue more floral design training. Participants indicated they would like to create more designs in the future. This result can increase the local need for cut flowers, foliage, and floral supplies, and by pairing nearby growers with enthusiasts, creates a floral system and demonstrates horticulture extension economic impact.

It was clear from the response to these workshops that there was support for a Master Floral Designer Certificate program. Extension-certified designers could increase demand for future education, cut flowers (including locally-grown), and supplies. Their volunteer efforts could raise program awareness within the community and foster the benefits of living with flowers and plants. Candidates for the Master Floral Designer program will need to understand requirements and the commitment involved, while administrative policies must be employed to keep program management time at a minimum.

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