

The Role of Faculty In Successful Placement

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Abstract

I trust that these comments will be interpreted as an attempt to motivate faculty to motivate students. I will discuss some reasons why successful placement is important, suggest a time schedule for students to be involved in career planning and placement, and emphasize that faculty should play a key role in this process. The theme of this paper is "Faculty as a Key Ingredient in Motivating Students into Career Exploration to Enhance Successful Placement."

Successful Placement

The past decade has been a period of transition in the job market from a time when most warm and walking college graduates could obtain good jobs to the present era of a competitive job market for college graduates. To gain successful placement today, college graduates must know what they want to do and be able to communicate it convincingly to prospective employers. For the past several years, the job market for agricultural graduates has, in general, been bullish. And, if we gaze into the crystal ball for a look at supply and demand for agricultural graduates in the decade ahead, the job market promises to be as good or stronger. Placement data for 1978 agricultural graduates in the 12 states of the North Central Region reflect this positive situation. Only 6.1 percent were categorized as "not placed" — a statistic which we would like to see at zero but realistically cannot because of a myriad of individual circumstances.

There is a difference between successful placement and placement. One definition of successful placement would include 100 percent placement of graduating seniors into situations commensurate with their interests, abilities, and level of education. Placement data such as that reported above usually do not reflect this more refined or stringent definition. For example, the data do not tell us how many students took a job because (a) it was the only job the student could find, or (b) it was the first job offered to the student, or (c) it required a level of education less than a baccalaureate degree in agriculture, or (d) it was outside of the scope of the student's major. An important reason for faculty involvement in the career selection and placement process is to enhance successful placement to the highest degree possible.

Successful placement encompasses both the expectations of students and the expectations of prospective employers or graduate-professional school admissions committees. From the students' expectation sector comes the following question: Have faculty advisors helped students to confront the issue as to whether their expecta-

tions and the realities of the employing world are in harmony? From the employers' expectation sector comes this question: Are faculty advisors keeping in touch with employers so that real world expectations can be related to advisees? I will have more comment on these two points later. The expectations of parents who have helped pay for a college education which today costs a minimum of \$15,000 should also be noted.

Each instance of successful placement benefits the student, the institution, and society. That the student benefits from successful placement in the form of greater happiness in life is probably too great a promise for our institutions to make. Perhaps greater well-being is a better promise. Nonetheless, the successfully placed student is a happier customer of the institution. Conversely, the graduating student poorly placed, or not placed at all, frequently becomes a bitter, nonadvocate of agriculture and our universities and does much harm to the recruitment of future students. It is clear that the importance of each factor influencing the future recruitment of students is looming larger in face of a declining number of high school graduates. During the past five years, all of these expectations have been important reasons why state departments of education, deans, faculty, college placement officers, and counselors have placed renewed emphasis on the importance of actively assisting students with career choices.

Successful placement is built upon career planning and exploration of the world of work. During the past five years, many University and College Placement Offices have changed their names to Career Planning and

Table 1. Placement of B.S. Graduates By Fourteen Colleges of Agriculture in the North Central Region' Calendar Year 1978²

	Total	% of Total
Graduate, Professional, Additional Study	900	14.1
Education, including Extension	372	5.8
Farming, Professional Farm Management	838	13.2
Agribusiness, Industry	1906	30.0
Government, National, State, Local	620	9.7
Not Placed, Still Seeking	387	6.1
Not Seeking	99	1.6
No Information	972	15.3
Returned to Own Country	37	.6
Other	228	3.6
TOTAL	6359	100.0

1 Includes University of Illinois, Iowa State University, Kansas State University, Lincoln University, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, University of Missouri, University of Nebraska, North Dakota State University, The Ohio State University, Purdue University, South Dakota State University, Southern Illinois University and University of Wisconsin.

2 Source: "Survey of Degrees Awarded and Post Graduate Activities of Fourteen Colleges of Agriculture in the North Central Region," Calendar Year 1978. Compiled by Roger Bruene, Placement Officer, College of Agriculture, Iowa State University, April 1979.

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Placement Offices. The challenge has been to make certain that this was not a name change only. Placement involves that part of the process which we equate to soliciting interviews, the interview itself, job offers, and salary considerations. In simplistic terms, career planning involves the determination of the type of job or career the student seeks and the preparation needed for that job or career. An informed choice is essential. Students must know about their interests, abilities, aptitudes, attitudes, and potential. The career planning process is to the student as the flight plan is to the airplane pilot. A career-confident student will be a more motivated and successful student both academically and in the placement process.

A Four-Year Plan

To be most effective, career counseling must be early, it must be continuous, and it must be flexible. It must move students to the point where they discover that the future is their responsibility, their happiness, their success, and that their career choices are up to them. Career counseling must stand ready to capitalize on "the teachable moment."

To incorporate these several criteria into a program to enhance successful placement, I propose a four-year plan for faculty to implement and support. This plan is operational in practice and recognizes differing stages of development by the student. It integrates input from faculty as academic advisors and career counselors, input from the world of work, and input from placement staff.

The plan begins with incoming freshmen. If there is a stereotype for today's college freshmen, it is that they are adjusting to being away from their families, adjusting to living in a more intense social environment, adjusting to more rigorous academic programs than they experienced in high school, trying to learn how to study for the first time, looking for their own values, and trying to figure out who they are. To impose on top of this the necessity to see clearly the next stage, four to six years later, when they will have to link their academic majors to the world of work, seems to be too much to ask of typical 18-year-old college freshmen. Hence, there is the appeal to many freshmen to attend a community college and follow a "general" or "undecided" program before transferring into a specific academic major. For these reasons, it is suggested that freshmen interested in agriculture should be permitted the flexibility of choosing or not choosing a specific major during their freshman year. I believe that the freshman year should be a year of career exploration.

There are several ways to motivate freshmen in agriculture into career exploration.

1. Enrollment in introductory agricultural courses. This practice is common in Colleges of Agriculture, but it may not be a common practice for faculty to incorporate people from the outside world of work into their introductory

classes as guest speakers or to point to examples of professionals currently in agriculture who create, disseminate, and use information relating to the topic of the day.

2. Open access to faculty advisors in all departments of the College — not just the assigned faculty advisor.
3. Participation in a designated number of required visits to "open houses" sponsored by departments. The "open house" program should include both academic and career-placement information for that department.
4. Required exposure to one or more employers who address the topic, "What an employer looks for in an employee." Employers typically will cover areas such as grades, work experience, leadership activities, preferred academic subject matter, and personal traits.
5. Easy access to displays or files of career leaflets and brochures.

These experiences should be spread across the freshman year rather than primarily encountered during the first academic term. Not all students need these efforts to begin to crystallize their career plans, but the odds are in favor of it. And, in spite of following these programs, there are still some students who have not yet reached "the teachable moment."

The sophomore year is the important year for career planning. The freshman year of adjustment and career exploration has been experienced and some early indicators of academic ability registered. Most colleges at this point press the "undecided" or "undeclared" student for a decision as to major and academic program and thereby assign the student to a faculty advisor in his/her major area.

Ideally, in a one-on-one situation, the faculty advisor begins the crucial role of counselor, motivator, and friend. It is the time to lead the student into introspection and to stimulate the student to assess the current situation. For example, the faculty adviser might raise the following questions:

1. In what kinds of work situations do you work harder than you ordinarily do?
2. Do you prefer team or individual projects?
3. Does money, fear, or praise motivate you?
4. What are your strengths?
5. What are your weaknesses?

Then it is time to stimulate the student to assess the future situation:

1. What are your short-term goals, including alternatives (five years after graduation)?
2. What are your long-term goals (ten or more years after graduation)?

It is noteworthy that the prospective employer will frequently ask these same questions of the graduating senior.

Answers to these questions will change over time, but the fact that a faculty member asked the questions

frequently serves as a catalyst for introspection. For example, it is frequently at this stage that the student responds, "I want to work with people in whatever I do." Interviewers indicate that this answer is a frequent response, but it is not very helpful. "How do you want to work with people?"

I want to...	Sample Occupations
...influence the attitudes and ideas of others.	Feed Sales Representative
...gather information from people by talking with them.	Agricultural Journalist
...instruct people.	Vocational Agricultural Teacher
...supervise others in their work.	Assistant Golf Course Superintendent
...manage the work of others even though not in direct contact with them.	Food Plant Manager
...provide service to others.	Agricultural Market Reporter
...organize others.	Farm Organization Representative
...understand people and their behavior.	Consumer Marketing Specialist
...help people with their technical problems.	Extension Specialist

Once again, ideally this assessment should take place in a one-on-one situation to provide an informal, non-classroom situation. Informal settings tend to reduce misunderstandings of students by faculty because they provide a less threatening environment to students and encourage students to express their own attitudes and values. As an additional source of motivation, it is also at this time that the faculty member and student can begin the artful selection of elective courses to complement primary and/or alternative vocational objectives.

The junior year is a year of transition from career considerations to more emphasis on placement. Two structured experiences are envisioned for the junior. The first is a formally taught course with the following objectives:

1. To assist students in defining personal career objectives which will serve as a guide when seeking an initial job.
2. To develop an understanding of the qualities which employers seek when employing personnel.
3. To aid students in developing an understanding of recruitment-placement techniques and tools used to gain successful placement.
4. To provide and discuss criteria by which students can evaluate job offers.
5. To review and analyze factors which contribute to job success or failure.

In addition to bringing guest speakers to the classroom for this course, assignments, in part, include:

1. A one-page statement of the student's short and long-term vocational objectives.
2. The development of a personal resume.
3. A written cover letter - real or imagined.
4. A 20-minute videotaped practice interview and critique.

I am aware that career planning and placement courses similar to this are offered for credit to agricultural stu-

dents at the University of Illinois, University of Nebraska, Kansas State University, and The Ohio State University.

The second suggested experience during the late junior or early senior year is the internship, summer job, or earning-learning experience related to the students' intended work. Not surprisingly, Dr. William Thomas, Colorado State, recently reported in a paper on experiential education that the number of experiential education activities in Colleges of Agriculture was on the increase. It is becoming the "norm" for students to have had this experience. Thus the student without some industry related work experience is at a disadvantage in competing for a permanent job. The internship supplements both academic and career decision-making experiences of the student. It helps to affirm what they want to do and equally important what they do not want to do.

Normally, the senior year is a year of placement. Students who have progressed through the stages of career exploration, career planning, and internship will practically place themselves in opportunities commensurate with their interests, abilities, and B.S. degree. Seniors needing additional counseling at this point would include:

1. Those whose next objective was professional or graduate school and are now denied admission.
2. Those who planned to return to the home farm and now find they cannot.
3. Those for whom student teaching in vocational agriculture was not a good experience.
4. Those who must find placement in a restricted geographic area.
5. Those who have interviewed for jobs, have not been hired and are now discouraged or in a state of panic.
6. Those who, for the first time, are interested in career and placement counseling because commencement is tomorrow.

Faculty as a Key Ingredient

The degree of interest and involvement of faculty in motivating students toward successful placement ranges between two extremes. At the one end is the feeling that it is the faculty's responsibility to provide a challenging academic program and anything beyond that, including the placement of graduates, is not their responsibility. At the other extreme is the intent on the part of the faculty personally to counsel and place all graduates from the department or units within the department. In between these two extremes is a faculty involvement which combines personal advising and encouragement to their advisees to use the services of a University or College Career Counseling and Placement Office. Since many students in agriculture view their education in terms of their first job after graduation, the logic is clear for having the faculty academic advisor also assist with career counseling.

Colleges of Agriculture, of course, are primarily organized around the faculty advisor system for academic advising. Colleges within our own institutions as well as private liberal arts colleges look at our academic advising system with envy and hold it as the blueprint for their future.

But, the faculty advising system in Colleges of Agriculture is not without problems. Most new faculty recognize the need to establish a research program and improve their effectiveness as a teacher. With these two items receiving priority, advising beyond the minimum can receive little priority. Some faculty are authorities in their academic field but are not knowledgeable regarding career opportunities for their majors. Without this background information, the faculty member can harbor the concern that students will consider him incompetent if he fails to give some definite direction.

Faculty must be informed about work related to their academic area. Where do your majors go after graduation? Traditionally, almost everyone in the department knows exactly the win-loss record of the football or basketball team — an exultation or fiasco that will largely be forgotten within a year. But equally traditionally, hardly anyone knows the win-loss record of the graduates of the department or College in terms of placement. This is a win-loss record that will perpetuate itself for years for the individual student and future generations of students. Faculty need placement follow-up results to aid in advising and counseling.

On many campuses, faculty initiate programs which help keep them and students informed. These include the invitation to employers and alumni from the world of work to serve as featured speakers in the classroom, at student organization meetings, in housing unit meetings, at on-campus job fairs, or career conferences. Certainly the purpose of a college education goes far beyond the preparation for the first job after graduation. In the final analysis, however, career planning and placement does need to be geared to the labor market — how it operates, job availability, conditions of employment, the behavior of employers, and how employers operate.

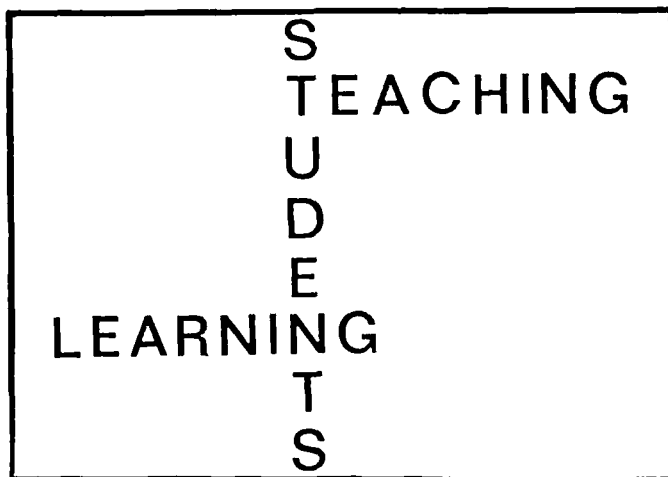
Summary

Career and placement counseling provided by faculty in Colleges of Agriculture has been very commendable. But the challenge is in front of us. As the competition for students increases in the decade ahead, a negligent attitude on the part of faculty and administrators toward successful placement can only be detrimental to enrollment. This paper has focused upon the student who matriculates through our colleges and is successfully placed. However, there is a growing awareness among college administrators and faculty that a reduction in the attrition of students currently enrolled, freshmen through seniors, deserves more attention than in the past. Perhaps some significant proportion of that attrition can be reduced with effective career counseling which is early, continuous, and flexible. And perhaps

within our academic communities we can work toward the recognition that excellence in advising should rank equally as important as excellence in teaching and research.

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Most students start a class with an enthusiastic eagerness to learn; they are interested. This interest and enthusiasm must be maintained throughout the course. Your students must be constantly stimulated. (This is easier to do in lab than lecture). Effective stimuli vary widely and their use presents an exciting challenge to you as a teacher.

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