CHARACTERISTICS OF COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE INACTIVE STUDENTS

by Vaughn P. Domeier, Counselor
Office of Resident Instruction – College of Agriculture – University of Nebraska-Lincoln

INTRODUCTION

Students leaving the College of Agriculture, University of Nebraska-Lincoln prior to graduation most often do so without discussing with the Office of Resident Instruction their reasons for leaving. Silent departure by many students creates a void as to these students' attitudes toward the college and its programs. Valuable information is lost concerning the characteristics of the college as seen from these students' points of view.

Because these students are returning to the general population, from which the college must obtain its vocal and financial support, their attitudes are of great importance.

A survey was initiated in 1972 to determine the feelings which departing students had toward the College of Agriculture. It was felt that knowledge of the attitudes of these students would be helpful in working with future students, who could be more fully served and possibly be encouraged to remain in the college. Ideally, students who leave should do so with a feeling of satisfaction with the educational experience they had undergone.

STUDY GROUP AND QUESTIONS

The office of Resident Instruction maintains, for a period of five years, records on each student who has left the college without completing a degree. Students who had left the school within a period of five years and had not returned make up the study group of this survey and will hereinafter be called "inactive students."

This survey was initiated in the spring of 1972 by contacting all of the inactive agriculture students. The questionnaire developed and used had the primary purpose of determining inactives' feelings toward the college. Additional questions were formulated to gather information about the inactives and how the University could have been of greater service to them.

The following questions were used:

1. What were your career goals when you entered the College of Agriculture?
2. Have your career goals changed since then?
3. Reason(s) for leaving the College of Agriculture. Choices of: Financial, Job Opportunity, Grades, Armed Forces, Change of School, Lack of Interest, and Other (Please state).
4. Have you continued your education since you left the College?
5. Do you plan to continue your education at any time in the next five years?
6. How would you classify the work that you have been doing since you left the College? Choices of: Student, Farming or Ranching, Agribusiness, Some Business other than Agriculture, Military Service, and Any further explanation that would describe your occupation.
7. What are your feelings toward the College of Agriculture? Choices of: Very favorable, Favorable, Neutral, Less Favorable, Strongly Against.
8. In what ways could the University have served you more fully during your stay?
9. Would you recommend the College of Agriculture to a friend or relative?
10. Any further comments which you wish to bring to our attention.

Questionnaires with return envelopes were mailed to all of the students in the inactive file. Students who did receive a questionnaire in the first mailing but did not respond received a second mailing. Three hundred and eighty-eight (43%) of the 903 students contacted completed the questionnaires.

Inactive students' responses were examined as a total survey unit and as special categories. The categories included: Origin at Matriculation, Students in Colleges of Veterinary Medicine, Students Removed from School because of Poor Academic Performance, and High School Quartile. Examination by high school quartile was only done in special cases.

Students were separated as to origin by examining matriculation material available in their permanent files. A student who, at the time of matriculation, came from a farm or ranch that was the economic support of the family was classified as being of rural origin. The matriculant from a city or town that was the source of the family income was classified as being of urban origin. A student was classified as being of mixed-influence origin if he came from a farm or ranch and the family income originated from an urban setting; or, vice versa.

The role of the urban student is of increasing importance in a college of agriculture. The number of urban-origin students has increased in recent years, to 26% in 1971.

Students in colleges of veterinary medicine were determined from Question No. 4 of the survey. These students were examined as a separate body because they are a high-performance group and cannot pursue their professional studies in this institution because of the lack of a veterinary college.

Students removed for poor academic performance were identified by letters of dismissal from the Associate Dean of Student Academic Services which appeared in the student's permanent files. These students were examined separately since they would possibly be more critical of their college experiences.

Classification of students by high school quartile was determined by examination of matriculation data. This grouping was examined only in particular cases and is reported as a special grouping.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Origin was established for 380 (98%) of the 388 inactive responses. Inactives were 66% rural, 31% urban and 13% mixed-influence origin. There was no difference between the origin groups in the percentage receiving letters of dismissal for poor academic performance.

High school quartile rankings were available on 377 of the 388 inactive responses (97%). The total group of inactives was broken into quartiles as follows: First, 26%; second, 37%; third, 25%; and fourth 12%. This can be compared with the approximate freshman class quartile separation which is: First, 50%; second, 30%; third, 15%; and fourth, 5%. As would be expected, the inactive group was made up of a disproportionate number of students from the lower quartiles.

Veterinary medicine students make up a unique group because they are generally first quartile high school students. Eighty percent of the veterinary students in this survey were in this classification. Removing the veterinary medicine students from the total inactive group changed the quartile breakdown as follows: First, 22%; second, 39%; third, 27%; and fourth, 12%.

The total credit hours attempted by each inactive student were recorded. These credit hours were separated on the University credit breakdown for classes: 0 through 26 hours – freshmen; 27 through 52 hours – sophomores; 53 through 88 hours – juniors; and 89 hours and above – seniors. Class rank at the time of separation was divided as follows: freshmen, 29%; sophomores, 38%; juniors, 25%; and seniors, 8%.

Veterinary medicine students are mainly of junior standing when they leave the college. Removing this special group from the total inactive group changes the class percentages to: freshmen, 31%; sophomores, 39%; juniors, 22%; and seniors, 7%.

Thirty-two credit hours make up one-fourth of the minimum graduation requirements in the College of Agriculture. Fifty-four percent of the inactive group (with veterinary medicine students removed) separated from the college while in the 0 to 32 credit hour grouping. The largest group to leave in this credit hour range was the high school fourth quartile group (79%). The next highest group was made up of those students removed for poor academic performance (60%).

TABLE NO. 1
Responses to the question concerning the inactives' feelings toward the College of Agriculture.

Inactive Group	No. Involved	% Replying to Question	% Response of those Replying: Very Favorable	Favorable	Neutral	Unfavorable	Strongly Against
Rural	214	98	29	52	14	4	1
Urban	117	97	26	50	17	5	2
Mixed Influence	49	100	29	47	16	8	0
Veterinary Medicine Students	25	96	38	50	8	4	0
Removed for Academic Performance	116	98	24	49	20	5	2
All Students totaled	388	98	28	50	16	5	1

A FAVORABLE ATTITUDE DOMINATES

The primary objective of the survey was fulfilled by the question on the students' relative attitudes toward the college. The two percent who failed to answer Question No. 7 generally gave the reason that they felt they had not been in the college long enough to form an opinion.

The results from Question No. 7 are given in Table No. 1. The majority of all groups studied showed a favorable attitude toward the college. The highest combined total of "favorable" and "very favorable" responses (88%) was found among the veterinary medicine students. The lowest combined total of these two responses (73%) was found among those students removed from school for academic reasons.

Question No. 9 was considered supportive to Question No. 7. This question regarding verbal support to the college received very favorable responses from those students who chose to answer the question. The inactives who did not respond often gave the reason that they could only respond to a student with a common field of interest. The lowest favorable response was found among those inactives who had been removed from school because of poor academic performance. The responses to Question No. 9 are indicated in Table No. 2.

TABLE NO. 2
Responses of inactives to the question, "Would you recommend the College of Agriculture to friends or relatives?"

Inactive Group	No. Involved	% Replying to Question	% Responses of Those Replying: Would Recommend	Would not Recommend
Rural	214	93	93	7
Urban	117	93	90	10
Mixed Influence	49	92	93	7
Veterinary Medicine Students	25	88	100	0
Removed for Academic Performance	116	91	89	11
All students totaled	388	92	92	8

OTHER QUESTIONS OF INTEREST

There was a high rate of response, by all groups examined, to the question on career goals, Question No. 2, results of which are given in Table No. 3. The urban student group exhibited the highest percentage of change in goals (61%). The totals for all students showed that 50% of the inactives had changed their goals since the time they had entered the College of Agriculture.

TABLE NO. 3
Responses of inactives to the question: "Have your career goals changed since you entered the College of Agriculture?"

Inactive Group	No. Involved	% Replying to Question	% Response of Those Replying: Goals Have Changed	Goals Have Not Changed
Rural	214	99	45	55
Urban	117	97	61	39
Mixed Influence	49	100	41	59
Veterinary Medicine Students	25	100	24	76
Removed for Academic Performance	116	100	53	47
All Students Totaled	388	98	50	50

Table 4 lists the responses to Question No. 4 regarding continuation of education since leaving college, and also lists the responses to Question No. 5 concerning the inactives' educational plans for the next five years. A large percentage of each group has continued education since leaving the College of Agriculture. The largest percentage was found in the active veterinary medicine students. Also, of a high percentage was the urban inactive group. This high percentage (75%) is due in part to the exploratory attitudes many urban students show toward agricultural subjects.

Fewer students responded to the question about plans to continue education in the next five years than to any of the other questions. A high percentage of the responding inactives in each group did indicate plans to continue their education. This high percentage is reflected by the number of College of Agriculture inactives in other schools at the time of the survey.

Of particular interest to the Office of Resident Instruction

TABLE NO. 4
Responses of inactives to the questions concerning whether they had continued their education and whether they planned to continue in the next five years.

Inactive Group	No. Involved	% Replying to Question No. 4	% Responses of Those Replying: Have Continued Education	Have Not Continued Education	% Replying to Question No. 5	% Responses of Those Replying: Plan to Continue Education	Do Not Plan to Continue Education
Rural	214	99	51	49	90	57	43
Urban	117	97	73	27	90	75	25
Mixed Influence	49	100	41	59	94	67	33
Veterinary Medicine Students	25	100	100	0	92	61	39
Removed for Academic Performance	116	97	58	42	92	64	36
All Students Totaled	388	98	59	41	90	63	37

TABLE NO. 5
Responses of inactives to the question concerning the reasons for leaving the College of Agriculture.

Inactive Group	No. Involved	% of Number in Inactive Group: Financial	Job Opportunity	Grades	Armed Forces	Change of School	Lack of Interest	Other
Rural	214	23	19	31	20	20	30	16
Urban	117	34	12	29	17	36	27	12
Mixed Influence	49	20	10	24	24	33	22	8
Veterinary Medicine Students	25	0	0	0	0	100	0	0
Removed for Academic Performance	116	33	21	54	22	13	41	9
All Students Totaled	388	26	15	30	20	27	28	13

TABLE NO. 6
Responses of inactives to the question concerning what they have been doing since leaving the College of Agriculture.

Inactive Group	No. Involved	% Response of those replying: Student	Farming or Ranching	Agri-business*	Business other than Ag	Military Service	Other
Rural	214	24	57	11	20	20	3
Urban	117	33	11	11	44	26	1
Mixed Influence	49	39	39	18	16	22	2
Veterinary Medicine Students	25	100	0	0	0	0	0
Removed for Academic Performance	116	16	50	16	30	28	3
All Students Totaled	388	28	40	12	27	22	2

*Percentages in this column based on the following numbers involved: rural, 101; urban, 54; mixed influence, 22; removed for academic performance, 64; veterinary medicine students, 9; and total students, 180.

were the reasons why students left the College of Agriculture. This material was gathered in Question No. 3 and is summarized in Table No. 5. All of the 388 completed questionnaires had responses to this question. Students listed as many as four reasons for leaving the college. Therefore, the line percentages in Table No. 5 do not total 100%. No single outstanding reason appears for leaving the school except in the case of change of school for the veterinary medicine students. Surprisingly, only 54 percent of those students removed from school for academic performance felt that grades were a reason for leaving school. Table No. 6 gives the responses to the question concerning the type of work in which the student has been engaged since leaving the College of Agriculture (Question No. 6). High percentages of rural, mixed influence, and academic removal groups entered into farming or ranching. A high percentage of the urban inactive group (44%) entered into businesses other than agriculture. The low percentages of responses in the other category shows that the five listed categories fit the majority of the students very effectively.

Responses to Question No. 8, "How could the University have more fully served the student?" covered a multitude of concerns. Grouped into major areas of interest the most frequent response (13% of the inactives) concerned the counseling and advising services they had received. Responses ranged from the complaint that advisers were not available to the accusation that incorrect information had been given them in advising. The most frequent negative response concerned the practicality of the material to be studied. Ten percent of the students complained about practicality, most often as it related to farming and ranching.

The other most common criticisms were: more personalized treatment, 7%; unnecessary prerequisites and basic courses, 5%; and overly rigid student-teacher relationships, 4%. Less frequent complaints centered on: tuition and financial help, 3%; lack of cheap housing on the agricultural campus, 3%; lack of a school of veterinary medicine, 2%; lack of a four-year forestry program, 2%; and inefficient career guidance, 2%.

DO COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS SUCCEED IN COLLEGES OF AGRICULTURE?

By Leland C. Strait, Assistant Director
Resident Instruction, College of Agriculture
Washington State University, Pullman, Washington 99163

A recent study shows that they can succeed in the College of Agriculture at Washington State University. Success was defined as, "normal progress in completion of requirements for a bachelor's degree in agriculture at Washington State University after transferring from a community college as juniors."

The study included all of the 44 students who transferred as juniors from community colleges to the College of Agriculture in September, 1970. It followed their academic progress, as measured by grades, through four semesters until June, 1972, when requirements for the bachelor's degree should have been met.

Most transfer students completed bachelor of science degrees in four semesters.

Forty-four community college transfer students with junior standing entered the College of Agriculture in September, 1970. Of these, 13 withdrew during the following two years. Only two were in academic difficulty. Of the 31 (70 percent) who remained in school 25 (57 percent) earned degrees in two years. Six were in five-year curriculums and did not complete study programs in four semesters after transfer. All of them were in excellent academic standing at completion of the study and have since graduated. Thus, 70 percent of the group earned bachelor of science degrees in four semesters. Normal progress was made by 83 percent (31 four-year graduates and 6 in five-year curriculums) upon completion of their bachelor of science degrees. (See Table 1).