

# A Survey of Student and Faculty Attitudes toward Education in the College of Agriculture, University of Nebraska<sup>1</sup>

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Goldsen and her associates (3) were the first to include educational goals in a broad-gauge study of student characteristics. Richards (6) and others in the American College Testing Program have used goals as a basis for assessing changes in students during the college years. Gamson (2) and Jervis and Congdon (4) investigated differences among faculty and between faculty and students respectively.

This study focuses on the importance placed on a series of educational goals and philosophies by students and faculty in the College of Agriculture (University of Nebraska). In addition to addressing the abstract issue concerning the value a college-of-agriculture community would place on statements of educational purpose, the present results have a highly practical utility. Attainment of any educational goal is unlikely in the absence of agreement among students and faculty concerning the importance of that goal. This report presents the methods used in examining the agreements and disagreements concerning educational goals, as those elements were found in one college of agriculture.

## METHOD

### Procedure

In February, 1969, a questionnaire was administered to a random sample of twenty-five per cent of the undergraduate students in the College of Agriculture at the University of Nebraska. This proportion resulted in a sample of 296 students. Two follow-up letters resulted in a 69 per cent total return rate.

Approximately one month later questionnaires were mailed to all faculty in the College of Agriculture during that year. Ninety-three per cent of that population responded with two follow-up letters.

### Data

The form completed by both students and faculty contained twenty-six educational goal statements and eight educational philosophies. The former statements were derived from the studies done at Cornell (Goldsen, Rosenberg, Williams, and Suchman, 1960), Educational Testing Service (Peterson, 1965), and The American College Testing Program (Richards, 1966). The philosophy statements were derived from Trow's classification of student subcultures (1966). Students were asked to provide their: 1) year in school, 2) major, 3) grade point average, 4) place of residence, 5) high school quarter, 6) high school class size, and 7) home town size. Faculty were asked to supply their department, age, academic rank, percentage of time presently devoted to teaching, and percentage of time usually devoted to teaching.

### Analysis

Student and faculty responses were pooled, intercorrelated, and subjected to a cluster analysis. This analysis resulted in the identification of three clusters. The clusters were submitted next to a discriminant analysis to determine the extent to which they differentiated between students and faculty. Group membership (student or faculty) was also included in the correlational analysis referred to above. Thus, a by-product of that analysis was an identification of individual items which differentiated between the two groups.

Since it was considered desirable to examine response by membership in the several personal/demographic classifications used in the study, responses of the two groups, student and faculty, were intercorrelated and factor analyzed<sup>2</sup> separately. Factors identified in each of these two analyses were used to develop scores for each individual in each of the two groups. Analyses of variance were conducted for each of the five faculty and seven student demographic variables.

## RESULTS<sup>3</sup>

Comparison of the single statements as evaluated by students and faculty reveals very close agreement among the philosophy statements, but less so among the educational goals. Faculty and students agreed in placing most emphasis on development of effectiveness in thinking, intellectual qualities of knowledge and understanding, and breadth of experience and on applying knowledge and making a better life for oneself. Students placed much higher than faculty the aim of preparing for an occupation. Students and faculty agreed in placing highest priority on the educational philosophies involving academic work and vocational preparation. The detached, alienated philosophy was rejected by both groups. Faculty also placed the social concern/social protest philosophy at the bottom of their list.

The individual goal statements which students valued more highly than faculty included occupational preparation, establishing friendships, developing one's personality, and becoming more self-confident and mature. Faculty placed a greater weight than did students on philosophies emphasizing academic and intellectual pursuits.

When the statements were arranged in clusters, the first cluster included occupational preparation, both as a goal and as a philosophy, and the goal of earning a higher income. The second cluster consisted of scientific problem-solving, pushing back the frontiers of knowledge, questioning experience, developing moral standards, spiritual and religious understandings, serving people, and understanding oneself and others. The third cluster is composed of seeking comfort in new situations, independence, new ways of looking at the world, a satisfying philosophy, culture, active citizenship, poise, friendship, acquisition and application of knowledge, more effective thinking, personality development, self-confidence, maturity and growth.

Occupational goals for a college education were identified as a distinct subgoal by faculty but not by students. Thus the separate grouping of occupational goals found among the combined samples must be due in large part to the faculty's contribution. The last two sets of goals, the personality-social interaction and the broad personal-moral development one, are combined in the view of students into one general personal development set of goals. In this area faculty distinguished two groups of goals which were essentially the same as the clusters identified by the combined student-faculty sample.

Table 1 shows the average score on each of the three clusters for the two groups. Comparisons among these scores should be made only across groups (not across clusters) because of the difference in numbers of items weighted in the different clusters.

TABLE 1  
Mean Scores on the Three Educational Goal Clusters

Cluster	Faculty Mean	Student Mean
1	0.94	0.77
2	2.66	2.68
3	2.74	2.58

Only one difference in educational goals was found among the subclassifications of students. With the exception of the fourth quarter student, the personal-moral educational goals were valued more highly as one progressed up the scale of academic performance.

Finally, the age of the faculty member revealed something about his views concerning educational goals. The oldest and youngest faculty endorsed most heartily personal-social development as an educational goal. Faculty in their thirties rejected this goal most definitely, with those in their forties close behind.

## DISCUSSION

Perhaps the most striking finding of this study is the relatively high agreement in all comparisons made concerning educational goals and philosophies. The only clear difference occurred in the area of occupational preparation. Other goals on which students placed more emphasis than did faculty fall generally into the personal-social development area. Faculty and students seemed to agree that intellectual goals should receive most weight; moral and social appearance goals, least; with service and other-oriented goals intermediate.

Agreement concerning educational philosophies was even greater. Here academic pursuits received most emphasis (more than was given to more purely intellectual ones). The detached, alienated philosophy evidently was not attractive to this academic community, nor was questioning the purpose of one's education in the form of social action and protest attractive to faculty. As one might expect, faculty did emphasize academic and intellectual pursuits more than students did. In summary one might say that faculty and students agreed on all the non-occupational, personal-social educational goals included in this study.

Several impressions may be formed from the statements included in the educational goal clusters. The personal-moral development goal represents the breadth emphasized by the College of Agriculture in its representation of itself to students, as well as to the state at large. The College is seen as promising development in the areas of moral concern, social service, human understanding and the intellect, broadly defined, the very purposes espoused by proponents of liberal education. Thus, at a verbal level at least, the respondents in this survey seem to be recognizing the commitment of their college to a general humanistic education.

The participants distinguished the broad area just described from an area of personal development that one is tempted to depict as superficial. Several of the statements in this latter area appear to focus on the external, less basic aspects of the person: personal comfort, poise, "culture".

In this survey faculty differentiated more in the area of goals than did students. Students saw only one global educational goal.

The differences between students and faculty in the importance they attached to occupational goals call for some explanation. Faculty in large universities seem prone to decry vocationalism in their students. Perhaps faculty opposition to vocationalism is so strong and their frustration with students

oriented in this direction is so great that they feel almost overwhelmed by what must be a pervasive phenomenon. One may speculate even that at a deeper level faculty are reluctant to recognize their own vocational orientation. It has been noted that education in the liberal arts in our large public universities, as well as in many private liberal arts colleges, has become almost literally professional training. We in higher education have been told so often by those who serve as our career models that a student's dominant motive should be learning for its own sake that we are caught between this orientation and the professional one encouraged by our academic disciplines. We feel almost guilty when we are forced to recognize how much our teaching actually involves professional training. By making student vocationalism the villain the instructor may remove some of the negative feelings he might otherwise direct at himself.

The age differences among faculty with respect to personal-social educational development may be explained by the finding in other research that the older and younger members of society (particularly those with college educations) are more likely to be interested in social service. Many writers have noted the pronounced idealism of today's youth. Perhaps one who has achieved recognition and status in his field can then seek ways to serve his fellow man.

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<sup>2</sup>See Guilford, J. P. *Fundamental Statistics in Psychology and Education*, third edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956. pp. 464-467 for a description of this statistical technique presented in a way which is both technically sound and relatively readily understood.

<sup>3</sup>Tables displaying the data in more nearly complete form are available from the first author.

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# STUDYING RURAL-URBAN COMMUNICATIONS

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Preparation of college graduates who can deal with agriculturally-related issues in the public arena is the focus of attention in a new course at the University of Illinois.

A society that has viewed agriculture mainly in terms of amount, quality and price of food is broadening its perspective as complex ecological relationships become more apparent. New questions now face agriculturists. What inputs were used to produce the food and what are their effects on the ecological system? What methods were employed? What are the full and long-range effects of all parts of the agricultural enterprise? What is society's responsibility in supporting the agricultural enterprise?<sup>1</sup>

Such questions create new kinds of interaction with government agencies, legislators, consumer groups, environmental interests, public news media and others. Decisions that emerge about such questions often are made by the public. Agriculture's serious concern in this regard is mirrored in an intense discussion about its relationship with the general public.<sup>2</sup>

In short, the agriculture college graduate must be prepared to operate effectively in the public arena. He must learn how to define and communicate about public issues that affect agriculture. And he must have a frame of mind that prepares him to contribute to public decision-making that is efficient and in the general interest.

The new course, entitled "Agriculture and its Publics," uses communications analysis as a tool for dealing with interactions between agriculture and other segments of American society. It differs from general communications courses in two ways: (1) it involves issue-centered analysis of communications phenomena and (2) it is oriented to agriculturally-related issues. Also, "Agriculture and its Publics" is unique among agriculture courses in that it concentrates on communications analysis.

The course was offered in both semesters of 1971-72 under an experimental course number and more recently was approved by the College of Agriculture and the University as a regular course. Positioned as a course for juniors, seniors and graduate