

# College of Agriculture Satellite Campus Student Demographics and Alumni Level of Satisfaction

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## **Abstract**

University of Georgia - Tifton, a satellite campus of the University of Georgia UGA, began offering 4-year degree programs in fall 2003. This descriptive, quantitative study surveyed alumni using an online and email questionnaire to examine demographics, educational background, job experience, interest in pursuing a further degree and level of satisfaction of campus education. Sixty four of the 66 alumni completed the survey with major findings included the following: 42 alumni (68%) were interested in pursuing a further degree, with the majority of respondents (51%) choosing the Master of Agricultural Leadership (online degree). Ninety five percent of Alumni were gainfully employed and engaged in a career related to their major. The alumni satisfaction level of education at UGA – Tifton is: 44 respondents (69%) were very satisfied, followed by 17 (26.5%) with a rating of satisfied.

## **Introduction**

UGA is an 1862 land-grant institution serving the needs of students and industry. Within this greater institution lies the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and it consists of three campuses found in Tifton, Griffin and Athens, with Tifton and Athens serving as the satellite campuses. Known primarily as an agricultural station for the past 90 years, UGA - Tifton Campus faculty are actively involved in agricultural research. There is now a total of 7,000 acres in South Georgia owned by UGA and a partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) since 1924 has resulted in many successful research projects over the years (Esco and Watson, 2007).

Students take courses in Griffin, Tifton, or Athens as undergraduates or graduate students; in Tifton, individuals have the opportunity to obtain a Bachelor

of Science (BSA) Degree in Agriculture and they may major in either Agriscience and Environmental Systems (AES) or Agricultural Education (AgEd). Two graduate degree programs, the Master of Agricultural Leadership (MAL) and the Master of Plant Protection and Pest Management (MPPPM), are now available at UGA - Tifton, with the MAL degree established fall 2006 and the MPPPM degree spring 2008. The student body on the UGA - Tifton Campus is small and class sizes have yet to exceed 25 students as of the 2012-2013 class and the student body generally consists of no more than 60 individuals, coming from various states and backgrounds.

This study is the first formal assessment of UGA's Tifton Campus alumni since academic programs began in Tifton in fall 2003. Sixty-six students graduated from the program during a three and a half-year period from fall 2004 to spring 2008. These students moved from college to a career, with little information being available as to their respective career and its relationship to their education at UGA. Also, relatively little data existed which identified student satisfaction with current majors offered on the campus. Although the program remains in relative infancy, administrators need to identify other majors in order to increase enrollment, serve new students and serve the employment needs of the state.

## **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to describe UGA – Tifton Campus graduates and determine UGA - Tifton Campus alumni's level of satisfaction with academic programs on the UGA - Tifton campus.

1. Identify UGA - Tifton alumni demographic characteristics.

2. Describe the educational background of UGA - Tifton undergraduate alumni and determine student interest in pursuing a further degree.
3. Identify alumni's job experience and its relationship to their major at the UGA - Tifton Campus.
4. Identify alumni's level of satisfaction of education at the UGA - Tifton Campus.

### **Review of Literature for the UGA - Tifton Campus and Other Satellite Campuses**

On August 18, 1918, the Georgia General Assembly passed a bill establishing a Georgia Coastal Plain Experiment Station (Cheek, 1984). The Georgia Coastal Plain soils proved productive in row crops such as cotton, peanuts and pine trees. As a result of this, agronomy was first area of study for the newly formed Tifton Experiment Station. Many other departments' soon emerged, including animal science, horticulture and biological and agricultural engineering, plant pathology, entomology and a veterinary diagnostic lab unit (Calheiros, et al., 2004). The campus is widely known for its breeding and variety release programs in aquaculture, turf grass, Bermuda grass, blueberries, pecans, sweet onion, peanuts and cotton. Compared to research and extension, the teaching program is relatively new, having commenced in fall 2003.

Relatively few studies are available concerning alumni level of satisfaction on satellite campuses, although a number of current studies are in progress. One example is the University of North Carolina (UNC) currently studying satellite campuses in hopes of expanding its college to other areas of the state. UNC is investigating whether its satellite campus should be decentralized in terms of faculty and staff being located on the satellite campus. With the loss of many manufacturing jobs in several counties, UNC sees the perfect opportunity to capitalize on the unfortunate event (Linker, 2008). Several other land-grant universities that operate satellite campuses similar to UGA - Tifton include the Universities of Florida, Kentucky, Minnesota, Nebraska and Wisconsin.

The University of Florida system offers several College of Agricultural and Life Sciences bachelor degree programs at Research and Education Centers (RECs) including Apopka, Ft. Lauderdale, Ft. Pierce, Milton and Plant City. Students take their first two years of courses at a community college and then transfer to a REC location for the remaining two years. Class sizes are generally small and students are able to develop close working relationships with instructors while seeing first-hand research. The Ft. Pierce program location offers a bachelor degree specializing in Food and Agribusiness Marketing and Management, while the Ft. Lauderdale

REC offers four undergraduate degrees: Entomology, Environmental Horticulture, Geomatics and Turfgrass Science (University of Florida College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, 2008).

A 1992 study designed to evaluate the variables related to college attendance and employment outcomes contributing to perceived level of satisfaction for college alumni. Using a cross section of 47,408 graduates of various institutions, the study analyzed 13,481 of those who had obtained bachelor's degrees. Results pertinent to this study included graduates who had attended small, more selective institutions tended to have a higher sense of satisfaction with how their school had prepared them for employment opportunities (Schnitker, 1992). A quantitative study completed in 1994 investigated student satisfaction with the college experience at Butler County Community College in El Dorado, Kansas, comparing satisfaction between the home institution (Butler) and one of its accompanying satellite campuses. Using the College Student Satisfaction Questionnaire (1971), developed by Betz, Klingensmith and Menne, the researcher noted that students were overall satisfied with their college experience. The extent of student satisfaction varied both between and within each campus and students who attended the satellite campus were more satisfied (Stalnaker, 1994).

During the development of UGA - Tifton's bachelor program in 2000 and 2001, researchers surveyed Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC) students and high school students to determine interest in creating an agricultural bachelor degree program. ABAC is within one mile of the UGA - Tifton and the sampled high schools were spread throughout Georgia, totaling 39 in 39 counties. One hundred seven ABAC students majoring in agricultural fields returned the questionnaire, with 80% indicating they would be interested in obtaining a bachelor degree from UGA - Tifton in AES if it were offered completely in Tifton (Riley and Vellidis, 2001). The high school aspect of the questionnaire process was much larger in scope. Two thousand questionnaires (identical to ABAC questionnaire) were sent out to high school seniors from rural and urban centers. Nine hundred nine respondents returned the questionnaire, with 35% expressing interest in obtaining a degree from UGA - Tifton, under the same conditions mentioned above (Riley and Vellidis, 2001).

### **Material and Methods**

The methodology for this descriptive study consisted of quantitative data gained using a questionnaire composed by the Tifton Campus Curriculum Committee, made up of professors and administrators. Descriptive statistics were employed, means and frequencies were

reported. The instrument was online and emailed to the survey population (N=66), with subjects having the option of returning the questionnaire by fax. After the first round of responses was collected during a three-week period, non-respondents were contacted by telephone and asked to complete the questionnaire via email or fax. Sixty-four questionnaires were returned; therefore, non-response was not considered as a threat to external validity. This study was deemed exempt by the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board.

### Instrumentation

No existing appropriate questionnaire could be located so a questionnaire designed by the Tifton Campus Curriculum Committee (professors and administrators) was utilized. Five objectives were developed and the questionnaire was structured to meet each object accordingly. Beginning with objective one, the educational background of participants was described and student interest in pursuing a further degree was also recorded. Objective two identified participants' job experiences and the relationship of these experiences to their major. The motivation of each alumnus for accepting their current job position was also explored. Objective three identified each participant's perceived satisfaction of their education while at the UGA - Tifton Campus, using Likert – type – scales. For these questions, a statement was provided and endpoints corresponded to very satisfied/relevant and very dissatisfied/irrelevant. The scale consisted of an even number of points (four), the respondent was encouraged to mark a specific choice (Sclove, 2001). Objective four determined each respondent's perceptions regarding suggestions for further majors or additional changes to the campus they deemed necessary, while the final objective (five) consisted of a demographics section.

All data collection was conducted by the researcher, with the majority (n=58) of questionnaires arriving via email. One questionnaire was received via fax and five arrived through the United States Postal Service. Face validity was guaranteed by a panel of experts consisting of UGA - Tifton administrators and professors. Test reliability was established using a pilot test using graduates from a neighboring university resulting in a Cronbach's Alpha of .84. Test administrator reliability was controlled by the use of a pre-notice example and a questionnaire cover letter example (Dillman, 2000). As a result, the questionnaire was structured in a manner that allowed each respondent to address each question from their current position.

Dillman's (2000) email questionnaire format and data collection protocols were utilized for data collection. Participants also had access to a computer and email,

since all students had registered their contact information with the campus program coordinator. A pre-notice email message was sent four days prior to the actual questionnaire. This gave the respondent time to prepare for the questionnaire and it also reduced the likelihood of the respondent deleting the questionnaire upon arrival. The questionnaire was then sent to each respondent individually in order to increase confidentiality and increase response.

### Results and Discussion

Objective one was to identify UGA - Tifton alumni demographic characteristics and the following demographics are based on the survey population, corroborated by the UGA - Tifton program coordinator. Twenty-five alumni indicated their gender as female (38%), with the majority (n=41) being male (62%) and all graduates were Caucasian (Table 1). Ages ranged from 22 to 44 with 30 graduates under the age of 25 (45%), 33 graduates between 25 and 34 (50%) and three graduates over the age of 35 (5%) (Table 2).

Objective two was to describe the educational background of UGA - Tifton undergraduate alumni and determine student interest in pursuing a further degree. The survey population had all obtained their bachelor's degree in agriculture, majoring in either Agricultural Education or Agriscience and Environmental Systems. Twenty-four students (36%) achieved their bachelor degree in Agricultural Education, while 42 students (64%) received bachelor degree in Agriscience and Environmental Systems (Table 3).

For all subsequent findings and discussion, the data is based on the survey sample (n=64) who returned the questionnaire. Forty-two alumni (68%) were interested in pursuing a degree beyond the one they currently had, while 20 alumni (32%) were not interested in pursuing a further degree (62 alumni answered this question; see Table 4). For those alumni interested in pursuing a further degree, 37 (58%) provided the major they would most like to pursue. Nineteen (51%) were interested in the Master of Agricultural Leadership (MAL) and/or School Administration, four Master of Plant Protection and Pest Management (MPPPM) and environmental/agricultural sciences (11%), three (8%) Business/Agribusiness and seven (19%) responded with other majors (Table 5).

Objective three identified each participant's job experience and its relationship to their major at the UGA - Tifton Campus. Sixty-one alumni (95%) were currently employed and three alumni (5%) were unemployed (Table 6). Regarding job description, 22 (36%) identified themselves as being in education, 14 (23%) local, state, or federal research, six extension and agricultural sales and services (10%), five (8%) corporate research, three

farming and construction and maintenance (5%) and two (3%) other occupations (Table 7).

Sixty students (94%) responded when asked if they had pursued jobs related to their major. Fifty-five (92%) said they pursued jobs related to their major, while five alumni (8%) did not pursue jobs related to their major (Table 9). Sixty-one alumni (95%) responded when asked if they were contemplating a job change within the next five years. Sixteen alumni (26%) stated they were planning a job change, with 45 former students (74%) not planning a change of occupation (Table 9).

For objective four, each participant was asked to rate his or her level of satisfaction of education at the UGA - Tifton Campus. Likert – type scales were utilized; a statement was given and endpoints corresponding to very satisfied/relevant and very dissatisfied/irrelevant were provided on a scale of 1 – 4. All respondents (N=66) answered each question in this section of the instrument. One respondent (1.5%) was very dissatisfied with the education they received at the campus and two respondents (3%) were dissatisfied. Seventeen alumni (26.5%) were satisfied and 44 alumni (69%) were very

satisfied with their education at UGA - Tifton. A mean of 3.63 and standard deviation of 0.63 was calculated for objective four (Table 10). Participants were then asked to rate the relevancy of their major to their current job. Two alumni (3%) rated very irrelevant, followed by seven alumni (11%) who rated irrelevant. Twenty-six respondents (41%) rated their major as being relevant to their current job and 29 respondents (45%) rated their major as being very relevant to their job. A mean of 3.28 and standard deviation of 0.79 was calculated for objective four (Table 11).

Objective four was concluded by asking participants to rate to what extent were they satisfied with the quality of education they received at UGA - Tifton. No respondents rated very dissatisfied, while two respondents (3%) were dissatisfied with their quality of education. Twenty-four former students (38%) were satisfied with their education and 38 former students (59%) were very satisfied with the quality of education they obtained at UGA - Tifton. A mean of 3.56 and standard deviation of 0.56 was recorded for objective four (Table 12).

**Table 1 Alumni Gender Demographics (N=66)**

Gender	n	Percentage
Male	41	62
Female	25	38

**Table 4 Alumni Interest in Pursuing a Further Degree (N=66)**

Interest	n	Percentage
Yes	42	68
No	20	32

**Table 8 Similarity of Job Occupation to Major (N=66)**

Status	n	Percentage
Job related to major	55	92
Job not related to major	5	8

**Table 10 Alumni Satisfaction Level Concerning Education at UGA - Tifton (N=66)**

Satisfaction Level	n	Percentage	M	SD
Very Satisfied	44	69		
Satisfied	17	26.5		
Dissatisfied	2	3		
Very Dissatisfied	1	1.5		
			3.63	0.63

Note. Scale – (1 = very dissatisfied; 4 = very satisfied)

**Table 11 Relevancy of Majors to Alumni's Jobs (N=66)**

Relevancy rate	n	Percentage	M	SD
Very relevant	29	45		
Relevant	26	41		
Irrelevant	7	11		
Very irrelevant	2	3		
			3.28	0.79

Note. Scale – (1 = very irrelevant; 4 = very relevant)

**Table 2 Alumni Age Demographics (N=66)**

Age range	n	Percentage
Under 25	30	45
Between 25 and 34	33	50
Over 35	3	5

**Table 5 Further Degree Which Alumni Would Like to Pursue (N=66)**

Major	n	Percentage
MAL/school administration	19	51
Other	7	19
MPPPM	4	11
Environmental/Ag Sciences	4	11
Business/Agribusiness	3	8

**Table 9 Possibility of Alumni Changing Job within Next 5 Years (N=66)**

Status	n	Percentage
No	45	74
Yes	16	26

**Table 3 Alumni Educational Background (N=66)**

Education	n	Percentage
AES bachelor	42	64
AgEd bachelor	24	36

**Table 6 Alumni Job Status (N=66)**

Status	n	Percentage
Employed	61	95
Unemployed	3	5

**Table 7 Alumni Employment Descriptions (N=66)**

Description	n	Percentage
Education	2	36
Local/state/federal research	1	23
Extension	4	10
Ag sales & services	6	10
Corporate research	5	8
Farming	3	5
Construction/maintenance	3	5
Other	2	3

**Table 12 Alumni Satisfaction Level Concerning "Quality" of Education at UGA - Tifton (N=66)**

Satisfaction level	n	Percentage	M	SD
Very satisfied	38	59		
Satisfied	24	38		
Dissatisfied	2	3		
Very dissatisfied	0	0		
			3.56	0.56

Note. Scale – (1 =very dissatisfied; 4 = very satisfied)

### Summary

From 2003 to 2007 the majority of students at UGA - Tifton were male. All alumni were Caucasian, which is an issue which the campus needs to further explore in order to encourage diversification. Most alumni (95%) obtained their bachelor's degree at UGA - Tifton shortly after completing their associate's degree, with 30 graduates being under the age of 25 and 33 graduates between 25 and 34.

A majority of 42 (68%) alumni showed an interest in pursuing a further degree. As for majors of interest, the Master of Agricultural Leadership (MAL) and/or School Administration were predominant, at slightly over 50%. Currently, this degree is offered at UGA - Tifton. However, the majority of alumni who wish to pursue this degree are teachers. Since the MAL degree is distance-learning, these students must allot adequate time in their schedules before pursuing such a venture. It is recommended that UGA - Tifton contact these interested individuals and discuss methods of completing the degree. Four alumni were also interested in pursuing the Master of Plant Protection and Pest Management (MPPPM) degree, which was started in fall 2007. This degree is not distance-education, which means that students must come to campus on a regular basis. These students currently have jobs and/or family, so it remains to be seen as to whether interest in this degree continues.

Almost all participants were employed (95%), most alumni were teachers (36%), followed by alumni involved in research. The research category was broken down into local, state, or federal versus corporate research. When combined, 19 alumni (31%) were in research-related jobs. Extension and agricultural sales and services both had six alumni (10%) employed. The AES degree exposes students to a broad research and technological spectrum, which helps explain why alumni are employed in research, extension and agricultural sales and services. When participants were asked whether they had pursued jobs related to their major, the majority (92%) responded that they had pursued jobs related to their major. As for contemplation of a job change within the next five years, most alumni (74%) stated they were not planning a job change during this interval.

The majority of respondents were very satisfied (69%) with their education, while 17 alumni (26.5%) were satisfied. The relevancy of each participant's major to their current job was then raised. Twenty-nine (45%) respondents rated their major as being very relevant to their job, while 26 (41%) rated their major as relevant to their current employment. Respondents were ultimately asked to rate to what extent were they satisfied with the quality of education they received at UGA - Tifton.

The majority of alumni (59%) were very satisfied with the quality of education they received, followed by 24 (38%) rating their education received at UGA - Tifton as satisfied. Based on this data, the majority of alumni are very satisfied with the education they received at UGA - Tifton and most former students have been able to locate jobs relevant to their respective major.

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