

# University of Florida College of Agriculture Graduate Student Opinion Survey

Richard L. Kilmer<sup>1</sup>, Food and Resource Economics Department,  
Tracy S. Hoover<sup>2</sup>, Agricultural Education and Communication Department, and  
Larry J. Connor<sup>3</sup>, College of Agriculture,  
University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-0240

## Abstract

The competition is increasing among universities for graduate students. The College of Agriculture (COA) at the University of Florida surveyed current graduate students to determine their satisfaction with services, programs, and environment. The COA results are compared with colleges/universities that have used the American College Testing Student Opinion Survey. The graduate students are neutral to satisfied with the college services, programs, and environment. This parallels findings in the public and private colleges.

## Introduction

The competition among universities for graduate students is increasing as demand for advanced degrees declines, resulting in fewer students attending graduate school (Shih, et al 1996). The College of Agriculture (COA) at the University of Florida is committed to change that will keep it in the vanguard of Colleges of Agriculture in the nation. Data from the American College Testing Student Opinion Survey (American College Testing, 1994) administered at public and private colleges/universities are compared to the data from the same survey that was administered to the COA students. Although the comparison results are specific to the COA at the University of Florida, this study will identify for others a way for assessing their competitive position among other universities.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of enrolled graduate students regarding the programs, services, and environment of their institution and to obtain data on quality indicators of their graduate experience in the COA. Specific study objectives were to compare COA graduate students' satisfaction, relative to college services and programs, to that of graduate students at other public and private institutions and to compare COA graduate students' satisfaction, relative to college environment, to that of graduate students at

other public and private institutions.

## Methodology

A stratified random sample of 321 graduate students was selected from the 705 graduate students registered in the COA during the spring 1996 semester in order to have a 95 percent confidence level of obtaining a representative sample (American College Testing, 1995). The random sample, stratified by department, consisted of a percentage of students from each department that was equal statistically to the percentage of the COA's spring 1996 enrollment represented by that department.

A mailed survey instrument the "Student Opinion Survey (SOS)" prepared by American College Testing (ACT)(1994) of Iowa City, Iowa, was used for the study. It was designed to explore perceptions of enrolled students regarding the programs, services and environment of the institution. The standardized SOS reported generalizable coefficients on the following scales: Section II, Part B level of satisfaction with college services and programs, .99; Section III level of satisfaction with college environment, .98 (American College Testing, 1995).

Data were collected in February and March of 1996 following the Dillman (1978) procedure for mail questionnaire administration. A total of 236 (73.5 percent) graduate students responded to the survey. The surveys were sent to ACT for scanning and tabulation, and ACT provided an average satisfaction level for graduate students in public colleges and private colleges who had previously responded to the SOS (Tables 1, 2, and 3). The following null and alternative hypotheses were used to determine if the COA's mean statistic for each statement on the SOS was statistically different from the mean statistic of public and private colleges:

$$\begin{aligned} &H_0: \mu_{AG} = \mu_{PC} \\ &\text{and} \\ &H_a: \mu_{AG} \neq \mu_{PC} \end{aligned}$$

A t statistic was used to test the null hypothesis in equation (1). The computational method used to compute the t statistic varied depending on whether the

<sup>1</sup>Administrative Intern, Office of Academic Programs and Professor and Graduate Coordinator

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor

<sup>3</sup>Dean

The authors thank Alice Jempson, Carlos Jauregui, and Kim Box for their help in conducting the survey and preparing the manuscript.

population variances were equal or unequal. An F statistic was used to test the variances' equality or inequality, and the computational method used to compute the t statistic was altered accordingly. The TTEST procedure in SAS Proprietary Software Release 6.08 was used to compute the appropriate t statistic

## Results

### College Services and Programs

COA students are neutral to satisfied (at least 3.50) with 78 percent of the college services and programs (Table 1). This is consistent with public (74 percent) and private (78 percent) colleges. Specifically, COA students are more satisfied statistically with the following survey items than are students at public and private colleges: library facilities and services (COA: 4.30; Public: 3.96; Private: 3.68); recreational/intramural programs and services (4.15, 4.02, 3.87); and residence hall services and programs (3.80, 3.51, 3.33).

On the other hand, COA students are more satisfied statistically with student health services (3.78) than students at private colleges (3.54), but their satisfaction level is equal statistically to that of students at public colleges. COA students are less satisfied statistically with computer services (3.69) than students at public colleges (3.83), but their satisfaction level is equal statistically to that of students at private colleges. Finally, COA students are more satisfied statistically with food services (3.50) than students at private colleges (3.36), but their satisfaction level is equal statistically to that of students at public colleges.

For those college services and programs rated below 3.50, COA students are at least as dissatisfied statistically as students at public and/or private colleges. COA students are less satisfied statistically with the following survey items than are students at public and private colleges: college-sponsored tutorial services (3.33, 3.83, 3.91); job placement services (2.48, 3.33, 3.38); and parking facilities and services (2.12, 2.74, 3.00). Furthermore, COA students are less satisfied statistically with college mass transit services (3.22) than students at private colleges (3.70), but their satisfaction level is equal statistically to that of students at public colleges. On the other hand, students at public colleges are more satisfied statistically with student health insurance programs (3.23) than COA students (2.95), but COA students' satisfaction level is equal statistically to that of students at private colleges.

### College Environment

#### Academic

COA students are neutral to satisfied (at least

3.50) with 91 percent of the academic-related items in Table 2. This is consistent with public (100 percent) and private (100 percent) colleges. For the first five items in Table 2, COA students' satisfaction level is at least equal statistically to that of students at public and private colleges. COA students are more satisfied statistically with the following survey items than are students at public and private colleges: *availability of adviser* (COA: 4.33; Public: 3.92; Private: 3.92); *out-of-class availability of instructors* (4.16, 3.97, 3.99); *value of information provided by adviser* (4.16, 3.86, 3.86); and *flexibility to design a personal program of study* (3.99, 3.63, 3.62). Their satisfaction reflects high-quality out-of-class contact between student and adviser/instructor.

On the other hand, COA students are less satisfied statistically with the following survey items than are students at public and private colleges: attitude of the faculty toward students (3.85, 4.04, 4.19); instruction in major field (3.80, 4.02, 4.08); testing/grading system (3.80, 3.88, 3.94); and course content in major field (3.63, 3.94, 4.03). In contrast to COA students' satisfaction with the out-of-class performance of instructors, they do not feel that instructors are performing as well in the classroom as instructors at other institutions.

Finally, COA students' satisfaction level is equal statistically to that of students at public and private colleges for preparation received for future occupation. This suggests that, despite the needed improvement in classroom instruction, students still obtain the knowledge required for their future occupations.

#### Admissions

COA students are neutral to satisfied (at least 3.50) with 75 percent of the admissions-related items (Table 2). This is consistent with public (75 percent) and private (75 percent) colleges; however, COA students are less satisfied statistically than students at public and private colleges with college catalog/admissions publications (3.73, 3.83, 3.90) and general admissions procedures (3.53, 3.68, 3.83). On the other hand, COA students are less satisfied statistically than students at private colleges with accuracy of college information received prior to enrollment (3.54, 3.76) and availability of financial aid information prior to enrollment (3.21, 3.40), but their satisfaction level is equal statistically to that of students at public colleges.

#### Rules and Regulations

COA students are neutral to satisfied (at least 3.50) with 17 percent of the rules and regulations-related items (Table 2). This is consistent with public (17

**Table 1.** Graduate student satisfaction with college services (students who have used the services) at the University of Florida and other institutions.

Services	COA <sup>z</sup>	Public Colleges <sup>y</sup>		Private Colleges <sup>x</sup>	
	Average <sup>w</sup>	Average <sup>w</sup>	<i>t</i> statistic	Average <sup>w</sup>	<i>t</i> statistic
Library facilities and services	4.30	3.96**	-6.2351	3.68**	-11.0268
Recreational/Intramural programs and services	4.15	4.02*	-1.6994	3.87**	-3.6498
Credit-by-examination program (PEP, CLEP)	4.00	3.89	-0.3106	3.88	-0.3110
Veterans' services	4.00	4.09	0.1324	4.03	0.0388
Personal counseling services	3.97	3.84	-0.6603	3.94	-0.1492
Cultural programs	3.92	4.00	0.8795	3.83	-0.7872
Student employment services	3.91	3.78	-0.8811	3.72	-1.2398
Academic advising services	3.89	3.77	-1.0613	3.93	0.4247
Residence hall services and programs	3.80	3.51*	-1.8238	3.33**	-2.5377
Student health services	3.78	3.76	-0.2452	3.54**	-2.6488
Honors programs	3.71	3.94	0.4337	3.77	0.1596
Computer services	3.69	3.83**	1.9781	3.65	-0.4245
College-sponsored social activities	3.71	3.81	1.0931	3.63	-0.7623
College orientation program	3.64	3.76	0.9363	3.76	0.8951
Career planning services	3.57	3.53	-0.1550	3.57	-0.0118
Financial aid services	3.56	3.42	-1.2661	3.57	0.0578
Day care services	3.50	3.99	0.9819	3.58	0.1524
Food services	3.50	3.46	-0.5182	3.36*	-1.8102
College-sponsored tutorial services	3.33	3.83*	1.7405	3.91**	2.0025
College mass transit services	3.22	3.46	1.6017	3.70**	3.0182
Student health insurance program	2.95	3.23**	2.5975	2.95	-0.0054
Job placement services	2.48	3.33**	3.4401	3.38**	3.3317
Parking facilities and services	2.12	2.74**	7.2681	3.00**	10.2226

<sup>z</sup>Source: "ACT Student Opinion Survey Summary Report, University of Florida," p. 5. American College Testing, Iowa City, Iowa (April 19, 1996).

<sup>y</sup>Source: "ACT Student Opinion Survey Summary Report, Public Colleges," p. 5. American College Testing, Iowa City, Iowa (April 9, 1996).

<sup>x</sup>Source: "ACT Student Opinion Survey Summary Report, Private Colleges," p. 5. American College Testing, Iowa City, Iowa (April 9, 1996).

<sup>w</sup>5=very satisfied; 4=satisfied; 3=neutral; 2=dissatisfied; and 1=very dissatisfied.

\* Significantly different from the UF COA at the 0.10 level.

\*\* Significantly different from the UF COA at the 0.05 level.

**Table 2.** Graduate student satisfaction with college environment (academic, admissions, rules and regulations) at the University of Florida and other institutions.

College Environment	COA <sup>2</sup>		Public Colleges <sup>3</sup>		Private Colleges <sup>4</sup>	
	Average <sup>5</sup>	Average <sup>5</sup>	t statistic	Average <sup>5</sup>	t statistic	
<i>Academic</i>						
Availability of adviser	4.33	3.92**	-6.0831	3.92**	-6.4303	
Out-of-class availability of instructors	4.16	3.97**	-3.4097	3.99**	-3.0638	
Value of information provided by adviser	4.16	3.86**	-4.3920	3.86**	-4.5700	
Class size relative to course type	4.14	4.12	-0.5544	4.17	0.4929	
Flexibility to design personal program of study	3.99	3.63**	-5.0416	3.62**	-5.3909	
Attitude of faculty toward students	3.85	4.04**	3.0912	4.19**	5.1915	
Preparation received for future occupation	3.88	3.84	-0.5898	3.91	0.4323	
Instruction in major field	3.80	4.02**	3.6159	4.08**	4.8155	
Testing/Grading system	3.80	3.88*	1.6978	3.94**	3.1050	
Course content in major field	3.63	3.94**	5.0051	4.03**	6.1243	
Variety of course offerings	3.47	3.56	1.2924	3.72**	3.2710	
<i>Admissions</i>						
College catalog/admissions publications	3.73	3.83*	1.6677	3.90**	3.0280	
Accuracy of college information received prior to enrollment	3.54	3.62	1.2374	3.76**	3.3605	
General admissions procedures	3.53	3.68**	2.3742	3.83**	4.9182	
Availability of financial aid information received prior to enrollment	3.21	3.26	0.5681	3.40**	2.2593	
<i>Rules and Regulations</i>						
Personal security/safety on campus	3.55	3.56	0.2176	3.67*	1.9213	
Residence hall rules and regulations	3.48	3.23**	-2.6056	3.22**	-2.6305	
Rules governing student conduct	3.45	3.43	-0.2761	3.43	-0.2767	
Academic probation and suspension policies	3.38	3.36	-0.2605	3.39	0.1759	
Purposes for which student activity fees are used	2.96	2.95	-0.1293	3.02	0.9864	
Student voice in college policies	2.97	3.08	1.6413	3.11**	2.1191	

<sup>2</sup>Source: "ACT Student Opinion Survey Summary Report, University of Florida," p. 8. American College Testing, Iowa City, Iowa (April 19, 1996).

<sup>3</sup>Source: "ACT Student Opinion Survey Summary Report, Public Colleges," p. 8. American College Testing, Iowa City, Iowa (April 9, 1996).

<sup>4</sup>Source: "ACT Student Opinion Survey Summary Report, Private Colleges," p. 8. American College Testing, Iowa City, Iowa (April 9, 1996).

<sup>5</sup>5=very satisfied; 4=satisfied; 3=neutral; 2=dissatisfied; and 1=very dissatisfied.

\* Significantly different from the UF COA at the 0.10 level. \*\* Significantly different from the UF COA at the 0.05 level.

**Table 3.** Graduate student satisfaction with college environment (facilities, registration, general) at the University of Florida and other institutions.

College Environment	COA <sup>z</sup>		Public Colleges <sup>y</sup>		Private Colleges <sup>x</sup>	
	Average <sup>w</sup>	Average <sup>w</sup>	t statistic	Average <sup>w</sup>	t statistic	
<i>Facilities</i>						
Athletic facilities	4.06	3.52**	-9.8472	3.34**	-12.7943	
General condition of buildings and grounds	3.86	3.72**	-2.6225	3.71**	-2.8141	
Classroom facilities	3.75	3.63**	-2.1223	3.55**	-3.4577	
Laboratory facilities	3.74	3.50**	-3.6273	3.41**	-4.8019	
Campus bookstore	3.61	3.65	0.8964	3.47**	-2.3763	
Student union	3.61	3.61	-0.0373	3.30**	-5.7140	
Study areas	3.55	3.59	0.5916	3.48	-1.0897	
Availability of student housing	3.08	3.23	1.6412	3.16	0.9158	
<i>Registration</i>						
General registration procedures	3.89	3.65**	-4.0541	3.70**	-3.0662	
Academic calendar	3.81	3.82	0.2495	3.86	1.0813	
Availability of courses at convenient times	3.59	3.32**	-4.1583	3.48*	-1.6539	
Billing and fee payment procedures	3.56	3.66*	1.6529	3.59	0.5062	
<i>General</i>						
College (general)	3.91	3.90	-0.4282	3.98	1.5304	
Attitude of nonteaching staff toward students	3.65	3.57	-1.1720	3.70	0.7266	
Opportunities for personal involvement in campus activities	3.61	3.47**	-2.6179	3.45**	-2.7558	
Campus media (student newspaper, campus radio)	3.50	3.38**	-2.0262	3.31**	-3.1560	
Concern for student as an individual	3.35	3.48*	1.8180	3.70**	5.2798	
Racial harmony	3.33	3.54**	3.4352	3.72**	6.1220	
Opportunities for student employment	3.26	3.26	0.0151	3.26	0.0915	
Religious activities and programs	3.20	3.30**	2.2186	3.40**	4.3734	
Student government	2.87	3.18**	4.9513	3.23**	5.6641	

<sup>z</sup>Source: "ACT Student Opinion Survey Summary Report, University of Florida," p. 9. American College Testing, Iowa City, Iowa (April 19, 1996).

<sup>y</sup>Source: "ACT Student Opinion Survey Summary Report, Public Colleges," p. 9. American College Testing, Iowa City, Iowa (April 9, 1996).

<sup>x</sup>Source: "ACT Student Opinion Survey Summary Report, Private Colleges," p. 9. American College Testing, Iowa City, Iowa (April 9, 1996).

<sup>w</sup>5=very satisfied; 4=satisfied; 3=neutral; 2=dissatisfied; and 1=very dissatisfied.

\* Significantly different from the UF COA at the 0.10 level. \*\* Significantly different from the UF COA at the 0.05 level.

percent) and private (17 percent) colleges. COA students are less satisfied statistically (3.55) with personal security/safety on campus than are students at private colleges (3.67), but their satisfaction level is equal statistically to that of students at public colleges. On the other hand, COA students are more satisfied statistically (3.48) with residence hall rules and regulations than are students in public (3.23) and private colleges (3.22). However, COA students are less satisfied statistically (2.97) with student voice in college policies than private colleges (3.11), but their satisfaction level is equal statistically to that of students at public colleges.

#### Facilities

COA students are neutral to satisfied (at least 3.50) with 88 percent of the facilities-related items (Table 3). This is consistent with public (88 percent) but not private (25 percent) colleges. COA students are at least as well satisfied statistically as students at public and private colleges in all eight items relating to facilities. They are more satisfied statistically with the following survey items than are students at public and private colleges: athletic facilities (4.06, 3.52, 3.34); general condition of building and grounds (3.86, 3.72, 3.71); classroom facilities (3.75, 3.63, 3.55); and laboratory facilities (3.74, 3.50, 3.41). They are more satisfied statistically than students at private colleges with campus bookstore (3.61, 3.47) and student union (3.61, 3.30). Their satisfaction reflects highly on the grounds and physical plant of the COA.

#### Registration

COA students are neutral to satisfied (at least 3.50) with 100 percent of the registration-related items (Table 3). This is consistent with public (75 percent) and private (75 percent) colleges. COA students are more satisfied statistically than students at public and private colleges with general registration procedures (3.89, 3.65, 3.70) and availability of courses at convenient times (3.59, 3.32, 3.48). COA students are less satisfied statistically (3.56) than students at public colleges (3.66) with billing and fee payment procedures, but their satisfaction level is equal statistically to that of students at private colleges.

#### General

COA students are neutral to satisfied (at least 3.50) with 44 percent of the general items (Table 3). This is consistent with public (33 percent) and private (44 percent) colleges. COA students' satisfaction level is equal statistically to that of students at public and private colleges for college (overall), attitude of college non-teaching staff toward students, and opportunities for student employment. COA students are more

satisfied statistically than students at public and private colleges with opportunities for personal involvement in campus activities (3.61, 3.47, 3.45) and campus media (student newspaper, campus radio) (3.50, 3.38, 3.31); however, they are less satisfied statistically than students at public and private colleges with *concern for student as an individual* (3.35, 3.48, 3.70), *racial harmony* (3.33, 3.54, 3.72), *religious activities and programs* (3.20, 3.30, 3.40), and *student government* (2.87, 3.18, 3.23).

### Summary

University of Florida College of Agriculture graduate students are neutral to satisfied (at least 3.50) with 78 percent of the 23 college services and programs (Table 1). This is consistent with the public (74 percent) and private colleges (78 percent). Furthermore, COA students' satisfaction with the 23 college services and programs at the University of Florida is greater statistically than students in the public (private) colleges in 13 percent (22 percent) of the areas, equal statistically in 65 percent (61 percent) of the areas, and worse statistically in 22 percent (17 percent) of the areas.

For the college environment areas which include academic, admissions, rules and regulations, facilities, registration, and general, the COA students are neutral to satisfied (at least 3.5) with 69 percent of the 42 items (Tables 2 and 3). This is consistent with public colleges with 67 percent but higher than private colleges with 57 percent. Furthermore, the COA students satisfaction with the 42 college environment questions are better statistically than the public (private) colleges in 31 percent (36 percent) of the areas, equal statistically in 43 percent (29 percent) of the areas, and worse statistically in 26 percent (35 percent) of the areas.

### Conclusions

Graduate students are generally neutral to satisfied with the college services and programs and the college environment in the COA and parallels findings in the public and private colleges. Furthermore, at least 12 of the college services and programs are beyond the control of the COA and the solution rests with the University of Florida (e.g., parking facilities and services).

Academically, the faculty of the COA are (1) good advisors, (2) available to the students, (3) provide valuable advising information, and (4) flexible. They perform above their peers located at public and private colleges. However, they perform below their peers in (1) their attitude toward students, (2) instruction, (3) testing and grading, and (4) course content. These are all very correctable areas that can be addressed by the COA

faculty.

The performance of the COA and the University of Florida in admissions and rules and regulations is generally below the performance of other public and private colleges. At least 50 percent of the categories can be addressed by the COA faculty (e.g., college catalog/admissions publications) and the remaining areas will require university level assistance (personal security /safety at this campus). In facilities and registration, the COA and the University of Florida are performing better than their peers in other public and private colleges. Additional improvement can be made however. Finally, the performance of the COA in the general college environment is mixed when compared to the performance of other colleges, though the students feel good about the COA. This is shown by a 3.91 level of satisfaction registered for the category *this college in general*. This is the level experienced by other colleges.

## Literature Cited

- American College Testing. 1994. Student Opinion Survey. American College Testing: Iowa City, IA.
- American College Testing. 1995. Steps to a Successful Survey. American College Testing: Iowa City, IA.
- Dillman, D. 1978. Mail and Telephone Surveys. New York: Wiley.
- Shih, Julie, Helen N. Martin, and Murray D. Laurie. 1996. University of Florida Graduate School Annual Report 1995/1996. University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

---

## Using Peer Review to Build Project Teams: A Case Study

Cynda R. Clary<sup>1</sup>, Department of Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Business,  
New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM 88003-0003

### Abstract

Classroom group projects are an important teaching method used to prepare students for the workplace. The "fair" evaluation of these projects is often difficult due to the varying contributions of group members. Student peer review can be used as both an evaluation measure and as a positive tool for building group commitment. This study reviews concepts of group management and evaluation and compares two classroom peer review experiences. A key conclusion is that student-constructed criteria and an emphasis on observable behavior are crucial to the successful classroom use of peer review.

### Introduction

As businesses downsize and organizational structures flatten, employees are often expected to work in teams, thereby focusing more attention on communication and leadership skills (Cappelli, 1992). Studies suggest that participation in extracurricular activities and applied

classroom group projects are significant predictors of job performance, while college grades provide little insight into future performance (Cappelli, 1992; Howard, 1986). This article presents a case study of two classroom project experiences and illustrates how student peer review can be used to build stronger team relationships.

### Managing and Evaluating Group Projects

The management and evaluation of classroom group projects are a challenge. Suggestions for this process are found in both the academic and industry literatures (Hirokawa and Keyton, 1995; Ramsay and Lehto, 1994; Conway, et al., 1993; Goldfinch and Raeside, 1990; Sims, 1989). Hirokawa and Keyton (1995) examined facilitators and inhibitors of effective organizational work teams and presented a model that can be applied in the classroom setting. As stated by the authors, "effective group performance is determined by the ability and motivation of the group members, as mediated by the appropriateness of the strategy employed by the group in completing its task" (page 428). Organizational (example: instructor and university), group, and individual factors influence ability, motivation, and appropriate strategy selection. Some factors are not under the control of the instructor. For example,

---

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor

This project was partially funded through the Agricultural Experiment Station at NMSU. Thanks to L. Catlett, R. Skaggs, J. Waelti, and the reviewers for their helpful comments on this manuscript.