

1992 Student Survey

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Abstract

Recruiting of new students into University agriculture programs has become increasingly difficult in the last few years. A survey was developed to identify sources of information that present first year students had used in deciding to enroll in agriculture. Attitudes towards enrollment, future employment and curriculum were also surveyed. The results of the survey are described.

The College of Agriculture at the University of Saskatchewan has two separate programs. The four year degree program is intended to produce professionals for the agriculture industry. The majority do find employment in the agriculture industry with a small portion of the students continuing into a graduate program. Some of the degree graduates return to the family farm.

The three year diploma program is administered by the School of Agriculture, a department within the College of Agriculture. This program is intended for those persons interested in managing a farm or at least participating in farming to some degree. There are some students in this program who are looking for full time employment or employment until circumstances allow them to return to the family farm.

Objectives

The objective of the survey is to examine the sources of information students used in deciding to enroll in the College or School of Agriculture. It is then possible to compare these sources of information to those which are actually provided by the College and School of Agriculture and evaluate their effectiveness.

The second objective is to try and identify other factors which would affect a potential student's decision to enroll in agriculture.

Methodology

The target group was first year students in the College and School of Agriculture. As some students taking first

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University of Wisconsin, 1989.

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White, David E., Samuel M. Brock and Sumin Ba. *Attitudes of Faculty in the College of Agriculture and Forestry, West Virginia University, Toward Internationalizing the undergraduate Curriculum*. Morgantown, WV: Division of Forestry, West Virginia University, June 1992.

year classes are transfers from other programs or are repeating the class, there were some upper year students in the sample data.

The 1992 survey had a total of 184 participants; of these 121 were first year degree students, 38 were first year diploma students, and 25 were second year degree students. A comparison of survey response and College population is given in Table 1.

The students were asked which sources of information they used in deciding to enroll in the College of Agriculture and to rank their top six choices. They were also asked about personal demographics, enrollment factors, employment possibilities, and curriculum. The entire questionnaire is available from the author.

Data Analysis

Sources of Information

Parents are still the most influential source of information when students are deciding to enroll in agriculture. Sixty-two percent of diploma students and 58% of degree students indicated parents as the source consulted most. Other choices as most influential overall were alumni or present students, and brochures and catalog published by the College of Agriculture. Twenty-two percent of the degree students listed parents as their first choice, and 17% ranked alumni/present students as their first choice. Diploma student ranked alumni/present students as their first choice (24%), and 22% used parents as their first choice. Other sources of information not identified specifically by the survey, had a significant influence on our students. Most popular among these sources was a personal desire to enroll in agriculture. A frequency table is provided in Table 2.

The sources of information were categorized into four categories in an attempt to identify specific areas which were used more extensively than others. There may be cross-correlation between these subject areas, but there is no means to quantify the extent.

Sixty percent of all participants said that they had some contact with a direct contact in the University community. These sources included alumni/present students, U. of S. Open House, High School visitation by a faculty member, University of Saskatchewan recruiter, or a non-agriculture

Table 1. Survey Participants

	Responses	Population
First year degree	121	160
First year diploma	38	44
Second year degree	25	141

Table 2. Overall Sources of Information (%).

Source	Degree	Diploma
Parents	52	62
Ag. Grad(present student)	38	41
College Brochure/catalog	34	32
Guidance counselor	27	22
Local business person	21	10
U. of S. publication	20	8
U. of S. Open House	18	8
Employer	18	19
High School Career Day	10	5
High School Visitation	10	5
Non Ag Grad of U. of S.	8	3
Television	6	3
Extension Agrologist	4	8
Trade Fair Booth	4	3
Newspaper	3	3
U. of S. Recruiter	2	5
Radio	1	3
Poster	1	5
All other sources	34	49

graduate of the University of Saskatchewan.

The survey indicated that 92% had contact with at least one direct contact outside the University community; including parents, extension agrologists, high school guidance counsellor, employer, and a local business person. As most of the new students are still very much in contact with their home and high school, this result is not surprising.

Publications and media included radio, newspaper, and television advertising as well as brochures and catalogues printed by both the College of Agriculture and the University. The survey indicated 51% had been influenced by one of these choices. If the scope is narrowed to include only catalogues and brochures produced by the College and University, all students responding indicated that only 39% made reference to one of these documents. First year degree students indicated 41% used catalogs and brochures while first year diploma students indicated that 34% used this source of information. This is a very surprising statistic as these publications, especially those which are printed by the College of Agriculture and the University should provide details of course content and enrollment criteria.

Some of the sources of information are direct recruiting and public awareness activities. These sources are high school guidance counsellor, high school career day, radio, television, newspaper, poster, University of Saskatchewan Open House, high school visitation by faculty member, brochure/catalog published by the College of Agriculture, booth at a trade fair, University of Saskatchewan recruiter, and a University of Saskatchewan publication. Of all respondents, 70% indicated contact with at least one of these sources of information. Details on particular information sources are given in Table 3.

The respondents were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of their high school in providing adequate information to make a choice of enrolling in agriculture. 67% of all respondents indicated that the high school had little or no effect in this area. This is a very important weakness in the recruiting campaign of the College. Of those students who responded to direct recruiting activities, the high school guidance counsellor was the second most important source of infor-

mation yet in terms of influence to all respondents, they are ranked fourth. The guidance counsellors are supposed to be able to recognize the abilities and talents of their students and direct them to an area of study where they can expand their knowledge in their area of interest. The College should be providing the guidance counsellors with more detailed information on the areas of instruction in agriculture so they can make more informed choices with their students.

Personal Characteristics

In order to obtain information on the background (i.e. rural vs. urban) of students, they were asked the distance to their home town and the population of these centers. Most of the students, 68%, came from a distance of greater than 160 km. Of these, 11% were from out of the province. Forty-five percent of the students indicated that their towns had a population of less than 1,000. Eighty percent of the students indicated they had direct family contact with an operating farm. This was slightly lower for the degree students and higher for diploma students.

Potential students in agriculture decide to enroll for further education at different times in their life. Degree students said that 70% had decided in or prior to grade 12 to enroll while only 37% of diploma students chose to enroll at this time. Sixty-three percent of the diploma students decided to enroll after leaving high school. This is a very significant portion of our student body. The majority of our recruiting effort is directed at the high schools where it is easy to reach those who may be interested in degree courses, but those interested in returning to the farm and improve their farm management abilities are not easily reached because they are not in a setting where recruiting efforts can be directed.

Personal Factors of Enrollment

The students were asked how various factors affected their ability to enroll in the College of Agriculture. These factors were personal economic situation, knowledge of scholarships available, reputation of the College, when they decided to enroll in agriculture, difficulty of acceptance into other colleges, and whether agriculture was their first choice of post-secondary education.

The students did not show any distinct tendencies with respect to personal financial situation. Sixty-six percent said that it had a moderate or little effect on their decision to attend university. The rest were evenly split between a large effect and no effect on their decision. Eighty percent of

Table 3. Contact with Direct Recruiting Activities (%).

Source	Response
College Brochure/Catalog	48
High School Guidance Counselor	37
U. of S. Publication	25
U. of S. Open House	23
High School Visitation	13
High School Career Day	13
Booth at a Trade Fair	5
Television	8
Newspaper	4
U. of S. Recruiter	4
Radio	2
Poster	2

students intending to enroll in agriculture indicated that the availability of scholarships and bursaries had little or no effect on their decision to enroll.

The reputation of the College of Agriculture was fairly important to the students. Sixty-one percent said that the reputation of the College of Agriculture had a large or moderate effect on attending the University of Saskatchewan rather than another institution. It is crucial that the College maintains its reputation if it is to attract students in the future. It is also important that the image be continually publicized to the public at large, the potential student body, and those who influence students.

There is always a certain portion of the student body which uses agriculture as a last resort to enter the university due to their low academic standing leaving high school. In agriculture there were 16% of degree students who had a great or moderate difficulty in being accepted into other colleges and 18% said that agriculture was not their first choice. Diploma students said 21% had a great or moderate difficulty in being accepted into other colleges and 29% did not have agriculture as their first choice.

Factors of Future Employment

Most students want their education to provide them with opportunities to find employment after graduation. The opportunities available to the students will be a factor in their decision to enroll in agriculture. Eighty-nine percent of the degree students thought that finding full time employment after graduation was a very important or important factor. Only 66% of the diploma students rated this as a high priority. Thirty-eight percent of the degree students thought an important or very important factor was the opportunity for part-time winter employment after graduation; whereas 53% of diploma students indicated this to be important. This reflects the intentions the majority of the diploma students have in returning to the farm.

Most students thought that university certification would lead to salary increases. Eighty-two percent of the degree students as well as 62% of the diploma students thought this was an important or very important factor. The correlation with those students seeking full time employment after graduation is significant. University certification can lead to full time employment as well as salary increases..

The ability to improve farm management skills was important or very important to 55% of the degree students and 90% of the diploma students. This is consistent with the findings regarding full time employment.

Perceived Effect of the Curriculum

The students were asked how the following factors affected their decision to enroll. They were: challenge of learning new ideas and concepts, quality of subject material, introduction to new scientific technology and the opportunity to learn in the new Agriculture Building.

Eighty-nine percent of all the respondents thought it was important or very important to be challenged with new ideas and concepts while 86% thought that the quality of the curriculum was important or very important. 81% of all respondents thought that it was important or very important to be introduced to new scientific technology.

The opportunity to learn in the new building does not imply directly to the quality of the education received. It does provide an opportunity to use world class facilities as a learning environment. It is surprising that 83% of all respondents indicated that the new building was unimportant or had no effect on their decision to enroll in agriculture at the University of Saskatchewan.

Comparison of Data Groups

The data could be categorized into three groups. First and second year degree students comprised two groups and first year diploma students the third. Each group had some of its own unique characteristics.

Diploma students had less interest in finding full time employment but were more interested in part time employment than the degree students. They also felt that salary increases with a diploma were not as important as a degree was to the degree students. As expected they had closer ties to the farm and were more interested in improving their farm management ability.

There was a distinct difference between first year and second year degree students. The second year students seemed to be more focused on what they wanted and how they were going to achieve these goals. Sixty-one percent of these students said this was not their first choice of post-secondary education and 44% indicated a transfer from another program. If we assume that an older student will be a more mature student then we can expect them to be more focused on full time employment and benefits from obtaining a degree than those in first year. Second year students also ranked employer, 32%, as their most influential source of information, followed by alumni/present students, 28%, and parents and University of Saskatchewan publications were ranked first by 24%.

Urban students were identified as those who came from population centers of 10,000 or more. Of these students, 54% still had some contact with a family farm. Only 68% said that agriculture was their first choice for post secondary education. They also said that they had less interest in farm management improvement and part time jobs. They also had less economic difficulties than the other students which is also not surprising under current economic conditions in agriculture.

Conclusions

The College of Agriculture has in place, a system which passes information to its potential students in a fairly efficient manner. It has a much easier time in reaching potential degree students than its diploma students. Although many of its students do have access of information they indicated that some areas could be improved.

The high school guidance counsellor is the College's major resource to the high school student. They regularly receive information concerning the College of Agriculture but the respondents to the survey indicated that this information is insufficient. What cannot be documented is the efficiency of the guidance counsellor in passing all or some of this information on to the high school student. There is a general malaise in the rural areas with residents encourag-

Notice

ing their children to study any area but agriculture. The guidance counsellors are not immune to this and cannot overcome the situation themselves. To keep high schools informed of activities on campus there must be an orderly and consistent flow of information. The development of a newsletter which highlights new developments and normal happenings within the various departments is one method of accomplishing this. At present there is an internal newsletter to inform students of important achievements and activities within the college, but it does not have a regular publishing schedule. This could serve the dual function of informing interested people both on-campus or off-campus.

An annual review of the College is published and is sent to the high schools. This publication is not a good vehicle in providing information on an ongoing basis of matters of interest which occur throughout the year. There are many activities which are sponsored by the various departments within the College which are specifically designed to inform others about what is happening in their specific areas. Many are very specific activities but others are more general in nature and such that of-campus people can benefit from attendance.

It is important for the faculty and staff to have high visibility when they are in the community. The college participates in some of the local trade fairs. Although this seems an activity that is not worthwhile due to the booth not being the most popular stopping spot in the trade fair, the visibility is still important. Similarly, speaking engagements at various functions do more than pass knowledge on, it sustains the image of the university as a place of knowledge and technology.

Agriculture students come from a fairly specific base; they have some contact with the farming community. There are many non-traditional areas, those that do not deal with production agriculture, that are part of the agriculture industry. There are many students with no contact with the agriculture community who have either no interest or no knowledge of the College of Agriculture. The first group are not difficult to address but the second presents a challenge.

There are many non-traditional segments of agriculture to emphasize to a non-traditional group of potential students. Areas of agriculture which emphasize science oriented skills and working in areas of high technology may attract non-agriculture students. Our rural population is declining so the student base must be extended into the urban population to maintain our enrollment quantity as well as quality.

There are other colleges on campus that offer a mini trade show to show off the highlights of their college; the College of Agriculture could participate by showcasing the new Agriculture Building and the accomplishments of staff who work there. This event would provide an excellent way to show the importance of the College of Agriculture.

The College of Agriculture maintains a high standard and reputation but this will only be maintained if we continue to attract talented, skilled and eager students. The challenge will be to continue to find and motivate these students.

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To all NACTA Members:

The following revised NACTA Constitution and By-Laws will be presented by your NACTA president at the annual business session for adoption by the membership during the 39th Annual NACTA Conference to be held at the College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls, ID, June 13-16, 1993. Charles Stufflebeam, NACTA Historian chaired the committee charged with updating this document. The current NACTA Constitution and By-Laws were printed in the NACTA Journal, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, March 1985, p. 95-98, with an amendment regarding "Emeritus Members" published in Vol. XXXV, No. 3, September 1991, p. 51.

This revision was requested by the NACTA Executive Committee to remove gender language and to update it to meet current needs of the association. This publication constitutes the official 30 day notice to all NACTA members required prior to the voting for approval at the annual meeting.

Constitution

ARTICLE I. Name.

The name of this organization shall be "The National Association of Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture." The letters NACTA may be used as an official acronym to designate the organization.

ARTICLE II. Purposes.

The purposes of this organization are to:

1. provide for all post-secondary teachers of agriculture a forum for discussion of questions and problems relating to the professional advancement of agricultural instruction.
2. seek improvement in the post-secondary teaching of agriculture through examination and discussion of curricula, course organization, teaching techniques, facilities, and materials.
3. encourage, promote, and reward instructional excellence in agriculture and the research supporting this instruction.

ARTICLE III. Membership.

Section 1. Active Membership. Active membership shall consist of regularly employed teachers of agricultural subjects in institutions of higher education, or other persons who are interested in higher education in agriculture, and who have paid their annual membership dues.

Section 2. Honorary Membership. Honorary membership shall consist of presidents, administrative deans, or other administrative officers of educational institutions offering courses in agriculture, and who are interested in actively supporting NACTA. Honorary members will not pay dues nor have voting privileges.

Section 3. Institutional Membership. Institutional membership shall consist of institutions of higher education offering courses in agriculture that have paid the annual membership dues. Institutions of higher education holding