

## What Difference Does Time Make in Alumni Responses Concerning Their Undergraduate Program?

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### Abstract

Numerous agriculture programs use an alumni follow-up as a part of their instructional evaluation system. Much debate has existed as to at what time after graduation the follow-up should be conducted. A follow-up was conducted with one group of graduates one year and four years after graduation. The study found little difference from the two responses of this group of agricultural graduates.

### Introduction

Evaluation of instructional programs for the purpose of updating and improvement is done by most educational institutions. These evaluation systems are generally based upon peer evaluation, student evaluation of instruction, and outside evaluation teams. In addition, the use of a follow-up study of graduates is often considered a valuable part of this evaluation system. Numerous university agriculture programs have conducted such studies of their graduates in order to obtain useful information for program improvement (Trinklein and Wells, 1989; Drueckhammer and Key, 1986; McCoy, 1983; Nippo, 1983; Miller, 1980; Maner, 1975). The Agriculture program at the University of Southwestern Louisiana (USL) conducts a regular follow-up of its graduates to obtain information for the improvement of instruction, student advising, job placement, and numerous other programmatic components.

A continued debate has occurred at USL as to when the follow-up study should be administered. Some feel the follow-up should be conducted within a few months of the time graduates leave the University so that the current instructional situation is being evaluated. Others feel the follow-up should be conducted a few years after graduates leave the University in order to obtain an idea of how well the instructional program is preparing people for careers. Some are of the opinion that graduates need to obtain a level of maturity before their opinions are to be used as a means of program evaluation. The concern, that graduates might move into employment less related to their degree area a few years after graduation and thus be less knowledgeable about the needs of agriculture, is often expressed. Certainly this is an important debate for all instructional programs which use a follow-up as a part of their evaluation system.

Due to the debate over when a follow-up should be

administered to give the most useful results, additional information was needed. In order to obtain this information a follow-up study was conducted with duplicate evaluation of selected graduates. The objectives of the study were:

1. Determine if the perceptions of graduates related to adequacy of training, student advising, and job placement assistance changed over a set period of time.
2. Determine if the degree of relationship of the respondents' degree and their employment changed over a set period of time.

The population of this study consisted of Bachelor of Science Degree graduates of the Department of Agricultural Sciences, Technology and Education at USL. Graduates from May and December of 1985 were used in the study.

Only graduates with a United States address were included. It was determined there were 38 graduates fitting the description of the study.

The Departments previously developed questionnaire was used for the collection of data. The questionnaire was mailed to the 38 graduates during the first week in June of 1986, with an additional mailing going to non-respondents two weeks later. This was a part of our regular graduate follow-up procedure. A response of 24 was received yielding a 63.0% response rate. Responses were received from all degree areas offered in the Department. An additional mailing of the same questionnaire was made during the first week in June of 1989 to the 24 previous respondents. An additional mailing to non-respondents was conducted two weeks later. A total of 22 responses were received.

### Findings

How closely employment was related to field of study is shown in Table 1. No significant changes were found in the 1985 and 1989 responses through the use of Chi Square (1.678). Fewer 1989 graduates were employed in positions with close, slight and little relationship to their field of college study slightly increasing members employed in their field of study or totally outside their field of study as compared with 1985.

Table 1. Relationship of Present Employment to B.S. Degree Field of Study.

Year	In Field of Study %	Closely Related %	Slightly Related %	Little Relationship %	No Relationship %
1986	38.1	19.0	14.2	14.2	23.8
1989	43.5	13.0	8.7	8.7	26.1

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**Table 2. Summary of Perceptions of Instructional Program Quality and Effectiveness.**

Year	Quality of Instructors Mean	Course Content Mean	Equipment & Facilities Mean	Benefit in Career Mean
1986	4.458	4.167	3.478	3.696
1989	4.273	4.238	3.227	3.818
F-value	.5738	.1162	.9638	.1392

No significant differences were found in the two surveys for the areas of: the quality of instructors; usefulness and quality of course information; quality of equipment and facilities used in instruction; and benefit of B. S. Degree training to their career. Questions with five forced-choice answers were used with the response categories of: poor or no benefit; fair or little benefit; average or moderate benefit; good or much benefit; and excellent or great benefit. Mean scores and F-values, calculated using a within subjects one way analysis of variance, is shown in Table 2.

Respondents' did not have significant differences (Chi Square of 4.224) in their response regarding their degree choice if they could remake their decision to pursue a degree in the College of Agriculture. Table 3 shows a summary.

**Table 3. Respondents' Choices if They Could Remake Their Decisions Regarding Study in the College of Agriculture.**

Year	Seek same degree at USL %	Seek a degree in a different area of agriculture at USL %	Seek a degree in agriculture at another institution %	Seek a degree in another area %	other %
1986	45.8	25.0	8.3	12.6	8.3
1989	56.5	30.4	0.0	13.1	0.0

The respondents' rating of job placement assistance received from the department did not show a significant difference for the two responses. Using the previous five point scale the 1986 response had a mean score of 2.929 and the 1989 response had a mean score of 3.000 yielding a nonsignificant .1495 F-value.

The respondents rating of the quality of career guidance and advisement received from the Department did not have a significant difference for the two responses. The 1986 response had a mean score of 3.526 and the 1989 response had a mean score of 3.667. The differences in the scores yielded a nonsignificant .1648 F-value.

The respondents did not significantly differ in their response to the degree of specialization they would seek if they could remake their decision regarding study in agriculture at

**Table 4. Amount of Specialization Respondents Would Seek in Their Major Fields of Study if They Could Remake Their Decision Regarding Study in Agriculture at USL**

Year	More Specialization %	Less Specialization %	Same Amount %
1986	50.0	8.3	41.7
1989	52.2	13.0	34.8

USL. The responses yielded a nonsignificant Chi Square of .4001 and are shown in Table 4.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

The graduates opinion of adequacy of training, student advising, and job placement assistance did not change during the three year period of evaluation. Graduates did not move to employment that was more and/or less related to their degree major during the three year evaluation period. Graduates did not change their opinion of the amount of specialization their degree should have contained or what they would do if they could remake their decision regarding college study.

The results of this study would indicate a follow-up of agricultural graduates can be conducted at any time during the period of one year after graduation through four years after graduation with little or no change in the findings. Additional study may be needed to determine if a follow-up study conducted less than one year after graduation would yield different results than a follow-up from the one to four year after graduation period.

## References

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