

CURRICULUM IMPLICATIONS

Educational Plans of Rural Ohio Secondary Students

J. David McCracken
and Kerry S. Odell

"Aspirations . . . have been shown to be among the most significant determinants of eventual educational attainment" (Marjoribanks, 1984, p. 166). The aspirations of students have been found to be a reflection of the expectations held by their parents (Lee, 1984). Although the educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of many types of students have been studied, none had previously focused on the aspirations and expectations of students in rural Ohio (Odell, 1986, p. 12). Enrollments in colleges of agriculture have traditionally drawn heavily from rural communities. Changes in the agricultural economy and other factors have resulted in fewer undergraduate students studying agriculture. What are the college attendance plans of rural students in Ohio? What influences do the parents of these students exert in the decisions students are making about their future careers? To what extent do rural students continue to choose careers in areas that are sex stereotypic?

In order to seek the answers to these and other related questions, a study was conducted in Ohio with the major purpose of discovering the aspirations of rural students relating to higher education. Specific objectives were to:

1. Investigate the extent to which parental influence is a factor in educational and career choices of students.
2. Describe the extent students expected to further their education beyond the high school.
3. Examine the relationship between gender and educational and career choices.
4. Develop implications for colleges of agriculture.

Methods

The study was descriptive and correlational in nature. The populations consisted of 10th and 12th grade students in 52 public secondary schools in Ohio which met the criteria for a rural school district. Four geographical strata were established for sampling purposes. One rural school was selected randomly from each of the four strata. Data were collected by questionnaire from the students in their school classes. The content validity of the questionnaire was established by a panel of experts, and the reliability was established using a test-retest procedure. Usable data were gathered from 491 students during the spring and autumn of 1985.

McCracken is a Professor of Agricultural Education at The Ohio State University and Odell is an assistant professor of Agricultural Education at West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia 26506-6108.

Results

Parental Expectations

Lee (1984) highlighted the importance of parental influence on the educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of students. Yang (1981) and Marjoribanks (1984) found that student perceptions of parental influence or support were positively related to educational and occupational aspirations.

Positive but low relationships were found between parental expectations and the expectations of students ($r=.24$). Most students had discussed their future educational plans with their parents (Table 1). Fewer than 25% of the students in the study reported very little or no discussion of educational plans with their parents. Approximately one-half of the students believed that their parents expected them to attend college (Table 2). Parents of 27.7% of the students were perceived as not expecting their children to attend college. Some students (22%) were unsure of their parents expectations concerning college attendance.

Contrary to the findings in the literature, the socioeconomic status of the family, as measured by Duncan's (1961) Socioeconomic Index (SEI), had little relationship with the educational and occupational aspirations of the rural students in this study. Parents and rural schools seemed to place a great deal of importance on the upward social and economic mobility offered by advanced education. The mean SEI score of 29.7 for occupations held by the fathers and the mean SEI score of 54.2 for the occupations expected by the students may have been a reflection of this attitude.

Table 1: The Extent Students Had Discussed Educational Plans With Their Parents

Extent	n	Percent
A Great Deal	151	30.8
Some	222	45.2
Very Little	78	15.9
None	36	7.3
No Response	4	0.8
Total	491	100.0

Table 2: Student's Perceptions of Parental Expectations for College Attendance

Expected to Complete or Attend	n	Percent
Yes	245	49.9
No	136	27.7
Not Sure	108	22.0
No Response	2	0.4
Total	491	100.0

Table 3: Type of Advanced Education Planned by Students

Type of Institution	n	Percent
Four Year College/Univ.	185	37.7
Technical College	114	23.2
Junior College	24	4.9
Don't Know	104	21.2
Don't Plan to Attend	64	13.0
Total	491	100.0

Table 4: When Advanced Education Would Begin for the Students

When	n	Percent
After H.S.	215	43.8
After Military	32	6.5
After Working	45	9.2
Not Definite Plans	131	26.7
Don't Plan to Attend	62	12.6
No Response	6	1.2
Total	491	100.0

Over two-thirds of the parents had no education beyond high school but over 60% of the students reported they would attend college.

Over 46% of the rural students reported that their mothers were homemakers. Less than one percent of these students expected to become homemakers as their sole occupation.

Expectations for Advanced Study

When asked what type of college they would be likely to attend, 37.7% responded they would attend a 4-year college or university. Twenty-three percent reported plans for attending a technical school and almost five percent reported plans to attend a junior college. Twenty-one percent were undecided about which type of college they would attend and 13% reported that they did not plan to attend college (Table 3).

Table 4 shows that almost 44% of the students believed that their advanced education would begin right after completing high school. However, other students planned to delay their entry into higher education. The military service or a few years of work before entering college was the choice of about 16% of the students. Over one-fourth of the students had made no definite plans about when they might attend college.

Agriculture was not the first choice as an area of advanced study for these students (Table 5). Engineering was the area chosen by 11.8%. The combined areas of education, engineering, health sciences, and business accounted for almost 40% of the areas students were planning to study. Only 4.3% of the students from these rural schools listed agriculture as their choice for future study.

Gender and Career Choice

There was a substantial relationship ($r=.61$) between gender and the area of study that students expected to pursue while in college. Males tended to expect to study agriculture, science, and engineering more frequently than females. Females more frequently expected to study the areas of art, mathematics, social science, education, health science, business, and secretarial science than males. The occupation in which students expected to eventually work was much less gender-specific ($r=.19$) than the planned area of study in college.

Females in the study reported definite plans for attending college upon graduation from high school more frequently than males. The correlation between gender and plans for advanced education was .21. Females expected occupations with higher SEI scores than males, which supported the findings of Dunne, Elliott and Carlsen (1981) and Ohlendorf and Rafferty (1982). Males expected higher first-year incomes than females, and males were more likely to enter military service than were females.

Implications

Parents generally want their children to have more opportunities than they were afforded. Parents in rural areas see formal education beyond high school as a way for their children to break away from the limited occupational and social opportunities available in most rural communities. Rural schools reflect the attitudes of the parents by placing great emphasis on preparing students for college. Most of the job opportunities in the rural areas are for semi-skilled, skilled and technical workers. Rural students attending college will typically enter occupations that are not present in large numbers in rural communities. This results in

Table 5: Area of Advanced Study Planned by Students

Area of Study	n	Percent
Agriculture	21	4.3
Art	21	4.3
Sciences	22	4.5
Humanities	8	1.6
Math	17	3.5
Social Science	24	4.9
Education	45	9.2
Engineering	58	11.8
Health Science	40	8.1
Business	48	9.8
Law	8	1.6
Secretarial Science	13	2.6
Electrical Tech.	16	3.3
Computer Science	9	1.8
Auto Mechanics	9	1.8
Accounting	9	1.8
Cosmetology	7	1.4
Other	16	3.3
Undecided	16	3.3
Don't Plan to Attend College	68	13.8
No Response	16	3.3
Total	491	100.0

young adults leaving the rural community to live in the cities and suburbs where greater job opportunities exist. This outmigration of the best young talent from the rural communities will deprive these areas of the leadership needed to develop their economic and agricultural potential in the future.

Rural students were choosing occupations for which there were few, if any, role models in the communities where they lived. Students therefore had only limited information and sometimes distorted views about their chosen occupation. This lack of understanding could result in students pursuing occupations for which they are not suited, or pursuing an education required to enter an occupation, only to find that the occupation is not what they truly envisioned it would be.

The expectations parents held for their children for education beyond high school had a profound influence upon their children's plans for advanced education, area of advanced study, and when advanced education would begin. If parents promoted occupations available in rural areas, students might be more willing to seek education and employment that would help develop rural communities.

The image of colleges of agriculture appear to be closely tied to the agricultural economy. When the agricultural economy has done well, enrollment in colleges of agriculture has been strong. When the agricultural economy has been having difficulty, enrollment in colleges of agriculture has dropped. This survey was conducted during a period of time when farmers were questioning the future of agriculture. Few rural students were selecting agriculture as an area of study to pursue in college. However, these students provide the best source of future leaders with the background to improve the future of agriculture.

The results of this study suggest that colleges of agriculture will need to work with both parents and students in recruitment efforts directed toward attracting the most outstanding talent to study and work in agriculture. Special attention should be directed towards female students, who still tend to choose sex stereotypic occupations. Role models and information about opportunities may be helpful in overcoming traditional perceptions about what occupations might be appropriate for each sex to enter.

Many of the students expressed a desire to continue to live in a rural area. Many of the careers in agriculture provide an opportunity to live and work in rural communities. Colleges of agriculture should make sure that rural students and their parents understand that educational and career decisions may have a direct influence upon where the students will live after graduation from college. Recruitment efforts should be designed to communicate a positive image of agriculture, should reach both parents and students, should attract students of both genders, and should not only emphasize the occupations for which students are being prepared but also the quality of life in the communities in which they are likely to work.

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