

FFA ADVISORS' EDUCATIONAL EXPOSURE TO, USE OF, AND ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES

Robert M. Torres, Assistant Professor
Thomas J. Dormody, Professor
New Mexico State University

A basic responsibility of the agricultural education teacher is to integrate the FFA organization into their educational program. Serving as a FFA advisor, the teacher's role is to facilitate the activities and events of the FFA organization. One educational tool available for the advisor and students is the program of activities (POA). Thus, the study sought to determine the use of the program of activities by FFA chapter advisors. Descriptive survey research used to gather data found that fifty percent of the advisors were exposed to a POA as a former FFA member. The greatest influence on advisors for using a POA was state mandate. Advisors use other teachers as a source of knowledge in developing a POA with most of them adopting the National FFA Organization committee structure. Additionally, POA committee meetings tend to be convened during class, and advisors report to involve their students in planning, implementing and evaluating POA activities. Furthermore, advisors tend to have a moderately positive attitude toward the POA. Recommendations are offered based on these findings.

Like all vocational-technical education teachers, a basic responsibility of the agricultural education teacher is to integrate their vocational student organization (VSO), the FFA, into their educational program to "provide students with opportunities to apply learned skills, develop leadership abilities, and gain recognition" (Smith & Edmunds, 1995, p. 29). In doing so, agricultural education teachers agree to serve as the FFA chapter advisor. This role includes "supervising the development, publication, and implementation of a yearly plan of activities" known as a program of activities, or POA, and "supervising a yearly evaluation of the vocational student organization program" (Vaughn Vaughn, & Vaughn, 1993, p. 11). A comprehensive POA provides for yearly planning, implementing, and evaluating of the FFA program (National FFA Organization, 1995a). McCall and Bartlett (1992) mentioned that having a current POA on file in the state FFA office is a requirement in most states.

Throughout the literature, there appears to be agreement on the definition of a program of activities (POA). For example, it has been defined by the Center on Education and Training for Employment (1992, p. 7) as "a written plan listing

the activities a local VSO chapter plans to accomplish during the year." Phipps and Osborne (1988, p. 393) defined it as "an annual written plan of goals and activities to be undertaken by the membership." Vaughn, et al. (1993, p. 40) called it "a written plan, developed and published yearly, of all activities that the chapter/club wishes to accomplish during the school year." The National FFA Organization (1995b, p. 48) defined it simply as "a road map to guide your chapter to its goals each year."

A POA provides many benefits to agricultural education students and programs. For example, Dormody and Seevers (1994, p. 42) stated "participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating leadership development activities enables FFA members to do the real work of their chapters and prepare for later life." When FFA members participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating the POA, they are participating in program planning: a process they will use often in future organizational work. According to Newcomb, McCracken, and Warmbrod (1993, p. 32) "students are motivated through their involvement in setting goals and planning learning activities." Students also "learn to solve problems,

think critically, and learn from their successes and failures” (Dormody & Seevers, p. 47). Furthermore, higher-order thinking skills such as synthesis and evaluation (Miller, 1990) are emphasized in planning, implementing, and evaluating the POA.

Smith and Edmunds (1995, p. 1) highlighted “the VSO program of work can be coordinated with classroom and occupational experiences and teaches leadership and the techniques of working with others toward common goals.” Other benefits of POAs for FFA chapters (Kansas State Department of Education, 1977, p. 5 17) are:

1. They include goals that serve as a means of directing chapter activities in a positive manner.
2. They provide school administration and community with a better understanding of the local chapter.
3. They provide opportunity for members to use and develop skills taught in (sic) agricultural education.
4. They point out the vital part FFA has in a (sic) agriculture education department.
5. They are necessary for proper chapter recognition on the local, state, and national level.
6. They represent the combined thinking of a majority of the members and involve each member.

With so many apparent benefits to vocational-technical education and agricultural education students and programs for adopting the POA, it would seem likely that a high percentage of FFA chapters would be using one. In their study of FFA members in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico, Dormody and Seevers (1994) found that only 23 percent of respondents (n=5 1) had participated in POA planning and only four respondents indicated

that POA planning was one of their top three leadership development activities while in FFA. They recommended that further research be conducted to determine advisor perceptions of the level of POA adoption in FFA chapters and FFA member participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating leadership activities. A review of the literature uncovered no other references to previous research related to this topic. Therefore, the researchers in this study decided to follow-up on this recommendation.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to describe New Mexico FFA advisors’ educational exposure to, use of, and attitudes toward the program of activities (POA). Specific objectives were:

1. To describe FFA advisors by number of years of teaching, number of years advising a FFA chapter, age, and gender.
2. To describe FFA advisors’ educational exposure to a POA through membership in a VSO as a youth and the single greatest influence on them in developing the POA.
3. To describe whether or not FFA advisors have a POA; advisors’ sources of knowledge used for developing a POA; POA committees adopted; method of convening committees; and student involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating FFA activities through the committee structure.
4. To determine FFA advisors’ attitudes toward the use of a POA.

Methods/Procedures

The population for this descriptive survey study was defined as secondary agricultural education teachers grades 9-12 in New Mexico who had FFA advising responsibilities during the 1995-96 academic school year (n=70). The frame of

teachers was acquired from the state directory for agricultural education. Because the number of teachers was considered to be small, all were included.

An instrument was developed by the researchers to gather the data. The instrument contained three sections. Section one was designed to gather data from subjects pertaining to their attitude toward the use of a POA in their FFA chapter (objective 4) using a 7-point semantic differential scale. The scale was developed using three of Rogers' (1995) attributes of innovations (relative advantage, complexity, and compatibility) as a conceptual base. It contained 13 bipolar adjective pairs arranged in random fashion. For example, bipolar adjectives related to relative advantage were Important/Unimportant and Desirable/Undesirable. To reduce ambiguity of the term "program of activities", a definition was provided. Additionally, directions for tilling out the scale with an example were provided.

Section two of the instrument was designed to gather situational information related to the use of a POA (objectives 2 & 3). Questions sought to gather data on whether subjects' FFA chapter had a POA; POA committees adopted (National FFA Organization, 1984); method for convening committee meetings; single greatest influence on them for developing a POA; student involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating POA use; and advisors' sources of knowledge in developing a POA. Section three gathered demographic information from subjects (objective 1).

The instrument was submitted to a panel of experts consisting of five persons to determine face and content validity. The panel included three faculty and two graduate students in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at New Mexico State University knowledgeable in instrumentation. Suggestions and comments offered by the panel were incorporated into the final version of the instrument.

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted. The pilot test group consisted of 15 purposefully selected vocational-technical teachers in New Mexico who attended the 1995 state Vocational-Technical and Adult Education Conference. Because of the nature of the questions, subjects were given two administrations of the same instrument to calculate a test-retest reliability estimate on non-demographic items. An average of 92.5 percent test-retest agreement was attained with individual items ranging from 80.5 to 100. Using data from the first administration, a Cronbach's alpha was calculated for establishing the reliability on the semantic differential scale. The resultant reliability estimate was a Cronbach's alpha of .79.

Data were collected in Spring 1996. Subjects were sent a package containing a cover letter, questionnaire, and a postage paid, self-addressed envelope. The cover letter was structured according to Dillman (1978). The questionnaire was presented in booklet form and contained a code number for follow-up purposes.

After follow-up efforts (a reminder postcard, a second package, and a second reminder postcard), a response rate of 67 percent (n=48) was achieved. However, one returned questionnaire was not usable and eliminated from the study. To address non-response error, a sample of the non-respondents was compared to the sample of respondents (Miller & Smith, 1983). Twenty percent (n=5) of the non-respondents (n=22) were randomly selected to represent the non-respondent group. Subjects representing the non-response group were contacted by telephone to record their responses. Using independent t-test analyses, non-respondents were statistically compared to respondents on three variables (attitude toward the use of a POA, age, and number of years of teaching) at a .05 significance level.

No significant ($p > .05$) differences were found to exist between the sample of non-respondents and

the sample of respondents on the three variables. Thus, the non-respondent data (n=5) were pooled with the usable respondent data (n=47) yielding a sample size of 52 (74%) allowing generalizing to the population (Miller & Smith, 1983). Descriptive parameters were used to analyze the data.

Results

Agriculture teachers had an average of 12 years teaching experience with equal number of years serving as an FFA advisor (Table 1). The mean age of the teachers was approximately 38 years ranging from 23 to 54 years with the majority (92.3%; n=48) of the teachers being male and approximately 8 percent (n=4) being female.

When FFA advisors were asked if they had been exposed to developing a POA as a former VSO member, 50 percent (n=26) indicated YES (Figure 1). While the remaining 50 percent of the FFA advisors indicated either NO (34.6%; n=18) or that they were never a VSO member (15.4%; n=8).

FFA advisors were questioned whether or not their FFA chapter had a POA. Of the 52 FFA advisors, approximately 80 percent (n=43) indicated that their FFA chapter had a POA. Furthermore, of the FFA advisors who indicated their FFA chapter had a POA, approximately 26 percent (n=11) indicated that state mandate was the single greatest influence on them for having one (Figure 2).

Table 1. FFA Advisors' Characteristics (n=52)

Characteristic	M	SD	Range	f	%
Teaching Experience	11.8	8.43	1-30		
FFA Advisor	11.5	8.34	1-30		
Age	38.1	9.09	23-54		
Gender					
Female				4	7.7
Male				48	92.3
Total				52	100.0

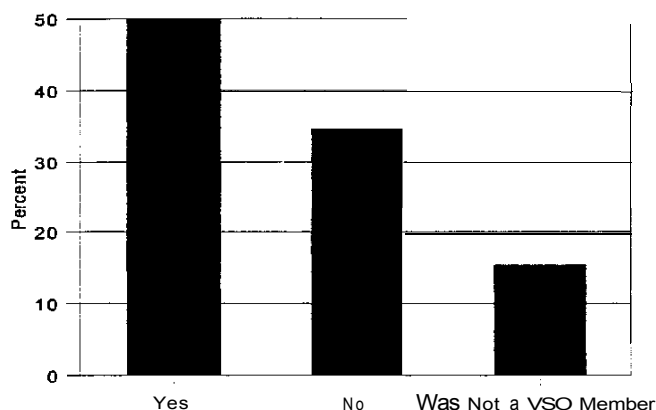


Figure 1. Exposure to developing a POA

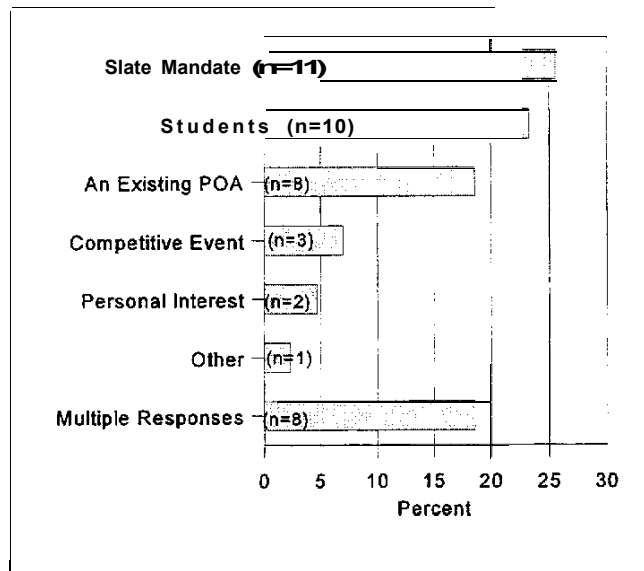


Figure 2. Influential Factors in Developing a POA

Students (23.3%; n=10), an existing POA (18.6%; n=8), a competitive event (7.0%; n=3), personal interest (4.7%; n=2), and other (2.3%; n=1) factors were identified as having the single greatest influence on advisors in developing a POA. Eight (18.6%) FFA advisors identified more than one single greatest influence for developing a POA.

Similarly, when polled as to the source(s) of knowledge for developing a POA, FFA advisors whose FFA chapter had a POA indicated other agriculture teachers (42.3%; n=22) as the most frequently cited source of knowledge (Figure 3). Pre-service education (21.2%; n=11), written material (19.2%; n=10), prior experience as a VSO member (17.3%; n=9), and in-service education (9.6%; n=5), respectively, were also frequently cited as sources of knowledge (advisors could identify more than one). Examples of sources identified in

the “other” category were the state supervisor, self-taught, and examples of a POA.

FFA advisors who indicated having a POA for their FFA chapter were asked to indicate standing committees contained in the FFA chapter POA. The most frequently cited standing committees were leadership (93%; n=40) and community service (93%; n=40) (Figure 4). In contrast, the standing committee cited least, aside from “other”, was the banquet committee (58.1%; n=25). Other standing committees frequently cited, arranged in descending order, were public relations (88.4%; n=38), recreation (88.4%; n=38), scholarship (88.4%; n=38), earnings and savings (88.4%; n=38), supervised agricultural experience (86.0%; n=37), conduct of meeting (83.7%; n=36) state and national activities (81.4%; n=35), cooperation (79.1%; n=34), and alumni relations (67.4%; n=29) (Figure 4).

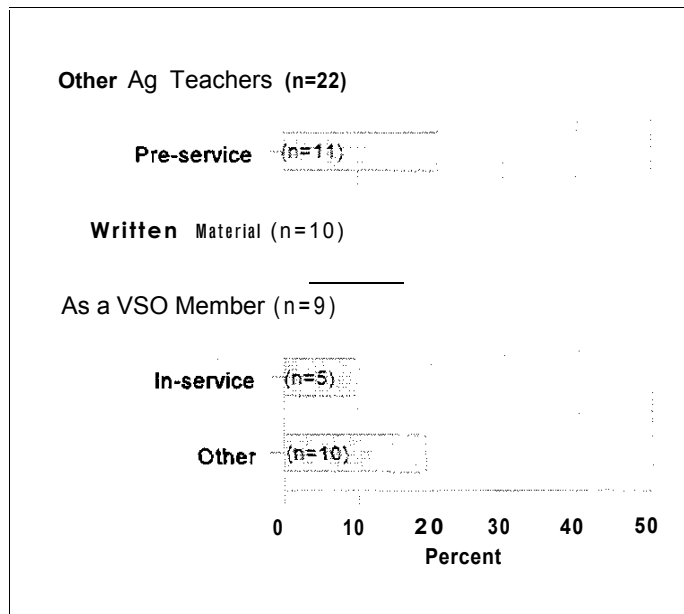


Figure 3. Sources of Knowledge for Developing a POA

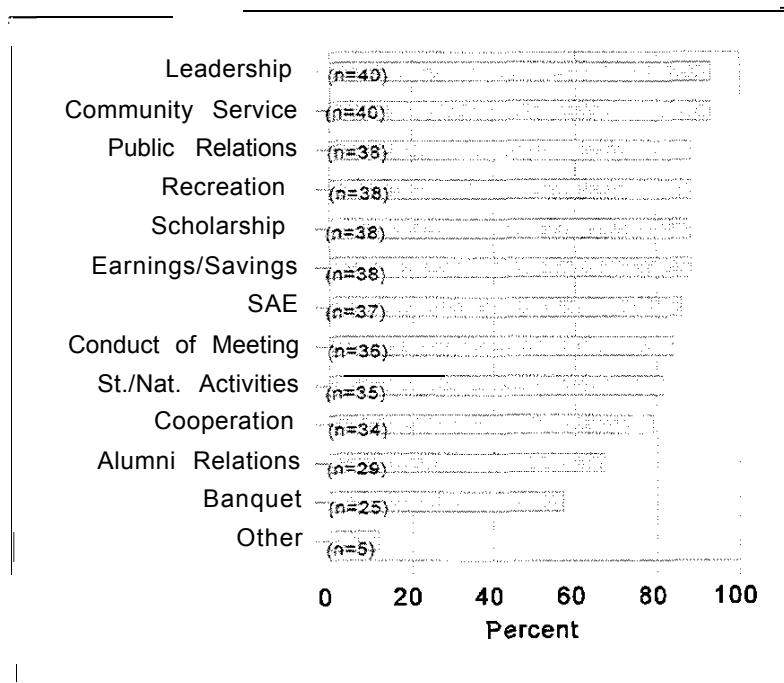


Figure 4. Use of POA Standing Committees

For FFA advisors who reported having a POA, the most frequently reported time for convening POA standing committee meetings was during class (53.5%; n=23) (Figure 5). Other times (arranged in descending order by frequency) for convening POA standing committee meetings were during lunch (27.9%; n=12), during chapter meetings (27.9%; n=12), after school (20.9%; n=9), and prior to chapter meetings (18.6%; n=8). In addition, approximately 14 percent (n=6) of the FFA advisors identified other times for convening POA standing committee meetings.

FFA advisors were asked to indicate whether or not FFA members participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating the POA activities (Figure 6). One hundred percent (n=42) of the FFA

advisors with a POA indicated that their FFA members participate in the planning and implementation of the POA activities. However, approximately 67 percent (n=28) indicated their FFA members participate in evaluating POA activities.

When determining FFA advisors' attitude toward the use of a POA, a 7-point semantic differential scale was used. The bipolar scale contained 13 adjectives and the responses summated to yield an average score. On a scale from 1=unfavorable to 7=most favorable, FFA advisors had a mean attitude score of 4.6 with a standard deviation of .90 (Table 2). Individual mean scores ranged from 2.6 to 6.4.

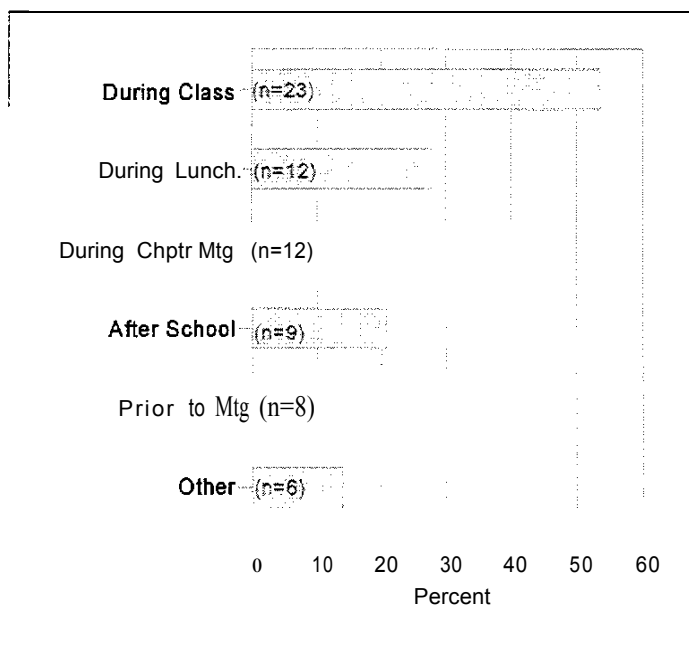


Figure 5. Methods for Convening POA Committees

Table 2. FFA Advisors' Attitude Toward the Use of a POA (n=52)

construct	M	SD	Range
Attitude	4.60	.90	2.62-6.38

Note. Scale based on: 1=unfavorable to 7=most favorable

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the data, it was concluded that FFA advisors in New Mexico have approximately 12 years of teaching and advising experience. The average age for the predominate male group was 38 years of age. In addition, the majority of the FFA advisors had been former VSO members during their secondary education.

The majority of FFA chapters had a POA. Of the 11 potential single greatest influence factors for developing a POA that were available for FFA advisors to identify, only five factors were solely identified. The five factors were state mandate, students, an existing POA, competitive event, and personal interest. Factors that were not identified as influential for developing a POA were peers/colleagues, student-teaching experience, pre-service course work, commercial POA packages, and availability of a word processor. Consequently, it is recommended that persons interested in promoting the use of a POA for FFA chapter operations consider requiring FFA advisors to develop and submit a copy of their POA to the state office for agricultural education to meet a state mandate, communicate its value to advisors from the students' perspective, and provide teachers with model POAs from their state.

It was also concluded that other agriculture teachers were the most frequently cited source of knowledge in developing a POA. Pre-service, written materials, and experience as a former VSO member were also frequently cited sources of knowledge for developing a POA. Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that persons interested in promoting the use of a POA facilitate

the networking of teachers and promote the use of other teachers as an important source of knowledge and experience for developing a POA. Furthermore, effort should be made to strengthen pre-service and include in-service course work in developing a POA. It is particularly important to make these changes now since the National FFA Organization (1995a) has adopted new guidelines for developing a POAs. Written materials should be made available through the teacher education unit and state office for agriculture education.

FFA advisors adopted the standing committees outlined by the National FFA Organization (1984). The most frequently cited standing committees were leadership and community service, whereas, the least frequently cited standing committee was banquet. FFA advisors must encourage the adoption of a committee structure that is compatible with members' interests and needs, chapter and community needs, and the size of the chapter.

The most frequently identified time for convening committee meetings was during class. This conclusion might suggest that convenience in scheduling is important in arranging for committee meetings. Meeting during class time allow for optimal member participation. Thus, it is recommended that FFA advisors utilize time during class to convene committee meetings in addressing activities related to the chapter POA. This requires structuring committees by class. In doing so, advisors should consider maturity and experience of members when assigning committees to classes. Other recommended times for convening POA committee meetings include during lunch and during chapter meetings.

FFA advisors reported that all their members are involved in planning and implementing FFA activities related to POA committees. These percentages for member participation in the POA are much higher than those reported by members (Dormody & Seevers, 1994) indicating that members may not be aware of when they are working on the POA. Advisors need to ensure that members understand their role and responsibilities for the POA. Similarly, members need to spend time on the POA throughout the school year. Committee meetings for POA update should be held regularly to ensure success.

Only 67 percent of the advisor reported that their students were involved in the evaluation of activities related to POA committees. This would suggest that some members are either not given an opportunity to evaluate committee activities or they are not taking advantage of the opportunity. It is therefore recommended that pre-service and in-service education, and state agricultural education leaders communicate the importance of involving members in evaluating POA committee activities. Through these experiences members can engage in the complete program planning process, capitalize on successes and failures, and utilize higher-order thinking skills for improving the benefits to members, chapter, and community gained through a POA.

Regarding FFA advisors' attitudes toward the use of a POA, it was concluded that they have a moderately (mean=4.6) favorable attitude. Based on a 7-point scale, where 7 is favorable, there remains a margin for growth in FFA advisors' attitudes. Thus, attitudes should be strengthened through in-service and pre-service education. Using these modes of delivery, presenters should attempt to reduce the perceived complexity and increase the relative advantage and compatibility for using a POA to guide FFA activities.

A recommendation for further research is to obtain actual written POAs from FFA advisors and analyze them for comprehensiveness, member

participation, and committee structure, among other elements.

References

Center on Education and Training for Employment. (1992). *Assisting vocational student organization members in developing and financing a yearly program of activities* (2nd ed.). Module H-4 of Category H - Vocational Student Organization Professional Teacher Education Module Series. Winterville, GA: American Association for Vocational Instructional Materials.

Dillman, D. A., (1978). Mail and telephone surveys: The total design method. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Dormody, T. J., & Seevers, B. S. (1994). Participation of FFA members in leadership development activities: A tri-state study. Journal of Agricultural Education, 35(4), 42-46.

Kansas State Department of Education. (1977). Developing the FFA program of activities. Agriculture Supplies and Services, 1,5 16-554.

McCall, T., & Bartlett, D. (1992). Is your FFA lost? The Agricultural Education Magazine, 65(2), 7-8.

Miller, C. (1990). Higher-order thinking: An integrated approach for your classroom. Vocational Education Journal, 65(6), 26-27,69.

Miller, L. E., & Smith, K. (1983). Handling nonresponse issues. Journal of Extension, 24, 45-50.

National FFA Organization (1984). Program of activities workbook. Alexandria, VA: National FFA Organization.

National FFA Organization (1995a). Chapter planning and recognition: A student handbook. Alexandria, VA: National FFA Organization.

National FFA Organization (1995b). FFA student handbook (10th ed.). Alexandria, VA: National FFA Organization.

Newcomb, L. H., McCracken, J. D., & Warmbrod, J. R. (1993). Methods of teaching agriculture (2nd ed.). Danville, IL: Interstate Publishers. Inc.

Phipps, L. J. & Osborne, E. W. (1988). Handbook on agricultural education in the public schools (5th ed.). Danville, IL: Interstate Publishers, Inc.

Rogers, E. M. (1995). Diffusions of innovations. (4th edition). New York: Free Press.

Smith, C. L., & Edmunds, N. A. (1995). The vocational instructor's survival guide. Alexandria, VA: American Vocational Association.

Vaughn, P. R., Vaughn, R. C., & Vaughn, D. L. (1993). Handbook for advisors of vocational student organizations. Winterville, GA: American Association for Vocational Instructional Materials.