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Factors that Influence Agricultural Career Objectives Among Students Attending Historically Black Four-Year Institutions

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Perhaps no other discipline has experienced the dilemma that vocational agriculture has over the years. Seemingly, the dilemma is one of misconception which is based on the belief that vocational agriculture programs are designed to train students only for production agriculture. Also, the notions that students with limited academic abilities can succeed in an agricultural occupation, and that vocational agriculture is for someone else's child are two frequently stated misconceptions about vocational agriculture (Warmbrod, 1968; Smoker, 1974). These issues might have kept many prospective students from pursuing vocational agriculture while in high school and subsequent careers in agriculture.

The Vocational Education Act of 1963 and its amendments in 1968 and 1976 emphasize the application of science and technology, and outline objectives for vocational agriculture that reflect two decades of advancing technology in agriculture (U.S. Office of Education, 1965; Phipps 1980). It is envisaged that these emphases may rid the community of misconceptions about vocational agriculture and at the same time influence a positive attitude among many prospective students regarding vocational agriculture and the pursuit of agricultural careers.

This research was based on the assumptions: (a) That prior experiences in agriculture influence students to enroll in high school vocational agriculture as an initial pursuit of an agricultural career, (b) That experiences students gain through the vocational agricultural program influence them to enroll in a college curriculum as an intermediate pursuit of an agricultural career, and (c) That the school, the community and the family in varying degrees influence students to pursue an agricultural career.

Purpose of the Study

The study (Findlay, 1982) was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the factors that influenced students pursuing agricultural careers at the two historically black four-year institutions in Alabama to enroll in high school vocational agriculture?

2. Who influenced students at the two historically black four-year institutions in Alabama to pursue agricultural careers?

3. Who provided the most guidance services to students pursuing agricultural careers at the two historically black four-year institutions in Alabama prior to enrollment in college?

Research Procedure

The population for this study consisted of students who were enrolled in agricultural disciplines in 1982 at the two historically black four-year institutions in Alabama (Alabama A & M University and Tuskegee Institute) and who completed at least one year of vocational agriculture in an American high school. Department heads and/or coordinators of agricultural disciplines were asked to assist in the identification of the subjects for this study. This procedure was completed through communication by letter and/or telephone. The sampling procedure identified 90 students.

A two-part questionnaire was used to collect data from the subjects. The first part included 23 statements related to perceived reasons why students enroll in vocational agriculture while in high school. The assessments of each statement were made by the students using a one to nine point rating scale as described by Tuckman (1978). In the second part of the questionnaire, students were instructed to identify three individuals from a list of 22 and rank them according to the amount of influence these individuals had on their present agricultural career objective, and on each of 24 guidance services provided them while pursuing an agricultural objective.

The questionnaire was pilot tested for content validity and reliability. A reliability coefficient (Alpha) of .92 was observed for part of the questionnaire. The data gathered were coded and analyzed using the the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (Hull & Nie, 1975).

Findings

The means for factors that influenced students pursuing agricultural careers in college to enroll in high school vocational agriculture are reported in Table 1. Students in the study rated 52% of the factors above midpoint (5.0) which indicates they perceived the majority of the factors studied influenced them to enroll in high school vocational agriculture. An ambition to pursue professional careers in agriculture was observed to be the primary factor that influenced the subjects.

Students pursuing teaching as their agricultural career ranked challenging work as the factor that had most influenced their decision to enroll in high school vocational agriculture. A love for animals and an ambition to pursue professional careers in agriculture were observed to have had most influence on students pursuing agricultural sciences and agribusiness related areas respectively. Two groups a) students pursuing teaching, and b) students pursuing agribusiness rated more than one half (56%) of the variables studied above midpoint while students pursuing agricultural sciences rated slightly more than one-third (39%) of the variables above midpoint.

Table 1

Means for Factors that Influenced Students Pursuing Agricultural Careers in College to Enroll in High School Vocational Agriculture

Factors	Total Mean	Teaching $\bar{X}$	Agricultural Science $\bar{X}$	Agribusiness $\bar{X}$
Ambition to pursue professional careers in agriculture	7.70[a]	7.80	7.38	8.03
Much educational opportunities	7.41	7.80	6.70	8.03
Certainty of employment	7.12	7.26	6.64	7.62
Challenging work	7.67	8.40	5.35	7.58
Love of animals	6.71	5.66	7.79	6.00
Prior experience in agriculture	6.70	7.73	5.47	7.62
FFA activities	6.65	7.66	5.44	7.55
Much opportunity to be own boss	6.61	6.40	5.79	6.48
Agriculture teacher's advice	6.01	7.06	4.50	7.24
Love for plants	5.96	6.40	5.35	6.44
Salary earned by people in agriculture	5.19	7.00	3.20	6.58
Shop work	5.16	6.53	3.44	6.48
Peer encouragement	4.52	5.33	3.94	4.79
Mother's encouragement	4.15	4.33	3.91	4.34
Father's encouragement	4.14	4.00	3.76	4.65
Relative's advice	3.93	3.13	3.29	5.10
General subjects teachers' advice	3.87	2.80	3.44	4.93
Guidance counselor's advice	3.24	2.53	2.58	4.37
Easiness of subject	2.88	3.00	2.58	3.17
Brother's encouragement	2.88	2.46	2.58	3.44
Principal's advice	2.87	2.93	2.17	3.65
Need to satisfy requirement for graduation	2.79	2.26	2.55	3.34
Sister's encouragement	2.46	1.86	2.41	2.85

[a]Based on a scale of 1 to 9, with 9 = utmost importance.

Table 2

Percentages of Students First Choice of Clusters of Individuals Who Influenced Selected Guidance Services (N=90)

Guidance services	Community related cluster[a]	School related cluster[b]	Immediate family cluster[c]	Distant family cluster[c]
Decision-making	5.6	14.4	80.0	0.0
Developing self-confidence	4.4	12.2	81.1	1.1
Identifying occupational interest	10.0	26.7	60.0	2.2
Becoming aware of personal rewards from different jobs	11.1	26.7	60.0	1.1
Identify employment opportunities in farming	10.0	36.7	48.9	3.3
Selecting courses in high school based on occupational goals	6.7	32.2	60.0	0.0
Recognizing the need for higher education	6.7	16.7	60.0	2.2
Making an occupational choice	5.6	18.9	73.3	0.0
Developing leadership skills	6.7	27.8	62.2	2.2
Recognizing the importance of agricultural occupations	6.7	32.2	55.6	3.3
Gaining financial experience	6.7	13.3	72.2	3.3
Recognizing self-worth	6.7	7.8	82.2	2.2
Recognizing strengths and weaknesses	8.9	21.1	65.6	2.2
Selecting an occupation to pursue	8.9	22.2	65.6	2.2
Exploring occupational opportunities	6.7	27.8	62.2	2.2
Recognizing qualifications for different jobs	4.4	31.1	63.3	1.1
Accepting responsibilities	6.7	10.0	80.0	1.1
Becoming aware of experiences for different jobs	7.8	25.6	62.2	1.1
Identifying employment opportunities in off-farm agribusiness jobs	13.3	31.1	53.3	1.1

Table 2 (continued)

Guidance services	Community related cluster[a]	School related cluster[b]	Immediate family cluster[c]	Distant family cluster[d]
Formulating realistic occupational goals	4.4	13.3	79.3	2.2
Developing independence	2.2	7.8	80.9	0.0
Stimulating interest in work	8.9	13.3	72.2	2.2
Identifying clusters of occupation that require similar work traits	8.9	26.7	61.1	0.0
Recognizing physical demands of different jobs	8.9	17.8	66.7	2.2

[a]Community related included peers, 4-H leaders, college recruiter, local veterinarian, Extension agents, church pastor, and employer.

[b]School related cluster included general subject matter, teacher, principal, guidance counselor, vo-ag instructor;

[c]Immediate family cluster included self, father, mother, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather;

[d]Distant family related cluster cousin, aunt, uncle

Note, where total does not equal 100%, the difference is accounted for in non-respondents.

Students in the study were asked to identify and rank individuals who influenced their agricultural career objective. These individuals were grouped into four clusters a) community related cluster, b) school related cluster, c) immediate family cluster, and d) distant family cluster. The majority of the subjects indicated that the immediate family cluster was most influential in their agricultural career objective.

Table 2 summarizes the ranking of clusters of individuals who influenced the students on each of 24 guidance services studied. It was observed that a majority of the students ranked the immediate family cluster first as providing most assistance on all but one of the guidance services which was to identify employment opportunities in farming.

Conclusions and Implications

The research identified factors and clusters of individuals that influenced students pursuing agricultural career objectives at the two historically black four-year institutions in Alabama. Concerning the factors that influenced students to enroll in high school vocational agriculture, the subjects indicated that slightly more than half (52%) of the variables studied influenced their decision. An ambition to pursue professional careers in agriculture was rated highest among the 23 factors which indicates that the subjects perceived this variable as the primary reason they enrolled in high school vocational agriculture.

Students pursuing teaching as an agricultural career objective perceived challenging work as the primary reason for enrolling in high school vocational agriculture, while students pursuing agricultural sciences and agribusiness perceived an ambition to pursue professional careers in agribusiness and a love for animals respectively as the factors having most influence on their decisions to enroll in high school vocational agriculture. These subsamples included students pursuing teaching and students pursuing agricultural sciences. The sample agreed that, "ambition to pursue professional careers in agriculture" had much influence on their decision to enroll in high school vocational agriculture.

The subjects indicated that the immediate family cluster influenced them the most in pursuing their agricultural career objectives on all but one of the 24 guidance services studied. The guidance services provided by the immediate family cluster with the highest ratings by students were related to: (a) Student information services, (b) Students educational and occupational information services, and (c) Students counseling services. This observation indicates that the immediate family cluster is very influential in providing guidance services to students pursuing agricultural career objectives at historically black four-year institutions in Alabama. It may be concluded that the distant family, the school, and community related clusters are not very influential in guiding students to pursue agricultural career objectives at historically black four-year institutions in Alabama.

This research has implications for developing and implementing recruitment activities for teacher education programs at historically black four-year institutions and suggests that the immediate family cluster should be a priority in this effort. However, an indepth investigation is needed.

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