

**REASONS WHY STUDENTS DID NOT COMPLETE TWO-YEAR
POST-SECONDARY FARM MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS
IN NORTH DAKOTA**

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Introduction

Two-year post-secondary Farm Management programs exist in five institutions in North Dakota. These include Bismarck Junior College, Dickinson State College, Lake Region Junior College, North Dakota State School of Science and the University of North Dakota-Williston Branch. Each year there are students who enroll in these programs who fail to complete their prescribed course of study. A total of 128 or approximately 26 percent who enrolled in one of these programs in a recent four year period did not complete their prescribed course of study.

It was felt that perhaps some of the reasons the students did not complete their programs was due to deficiencies in the programs. These deficiencies could be common among all the programs. If so, work could be done to revise the curriculum at the respective institutions in an attempt to better meet the needs of the students.

Objectives

The primary purpose of this research was to identify the major reasons students enrolled in two-year post-secondary Farm Management programs at the five post-secondary institutions in North Dakota did not complete the prescribed course of study in which they were enrolled. The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To determine selected background characteristics of students who dropped out of North Dakota post-secondary Farm Management programs.

2. To determine reasons post-secondary Farm Management students in North Dakota did not complete the programs in which they enrolled.
3. To determine whether the weaknesses of the post-secondary Farm Management programs in North Dakota, as perceived by the students who did not complete the prescribed programs, influenced their withdrawal.

Methodology

The population of this study consisted of 128 students who dropped out of a two-year post-secondary Farm Management program during a recent four year period. A mail questionnaire was developed to collect data. A total of 48 responses was received from the original mailing, yielding a 37.5 percent return. The researcher followed up the original mailing with two additional mailings, one of which was a post card, and received a total of 75 responses for a 58.6 percent response.

The researcher randomly selected 10 of the 53 students who had not returned a questionnaire. Telephone calls were made to the 10 individuals. These individuals were asked 15 randomly selected questions to determine if their responses varied from the respondents. After comparing the responses of the non-respondents to those of the respondents, it was determined that they responded similarly. Therefore, it was assumed that the data returned by the respondents represented the total population.

Findings

The respondents were asked to provide various biographical data. Seventy-four (N=75) of the respondents were male. A majority of the students, 57.33 percent, dropped out before they reached 20 years of age. The highest attrition rate was at the end of the first year of school. Once a student started the second year of the program, the non-completion rate decreased rapidly. A total of 72 percent of the respondents lived within 150 miles of the institution they were attending. Sixty percent of the respondents did not participate in extra-curricular activities. A total of 60 percent of the respondents did not work while they attended school.

The cumulative grade point averages of the students when they exited from the Farm Management program were quite widely distributed. The highest percentage, 41.33 percent, had a grade point average of 2.51 to 3.00 on a 4.00 scale. A total of 89.33 percent of the respondents indicated it was their own

idea to drop out of school. A total of 25.33 percent of those who dropped out indicated they went on to acquire further education. Of those students who returned to school, 63.16 percent indicated they entered a two-year post-secondary program other than agriculture.

The respondents were provided a list of several factors which may have influenced their decision to drop out of their prescribed course of study. The students were asked to rate each of the selected factors as having (5) very much influence, (4) much influence, (3) some influence, (2) little influence or (1) no influence in their decision to drop out. A mean score was determined for each factor and the factors were placed in a rank order based on that mean score.

The low mean scores revealed in Table 1, all having less than "some influence," probably suggest that in most cases a combination of factors influenced their decision to drop out. Beginning with factor number two, boredom of courses, there is a very minimal mean score of 2.24. This would indicate that the remaining 29 factors have "little" or "no influence" as single factors.

Table 1 reveals the factor "Chance to go into business on my own" ranked the highest of all selected factors associated with dropping out before completion of the program, even though its mean score was only 2.77. This may indicate that many of the students were dropping out by the end of the first year of the program to go into farming full time. A number of students responding, 30.67 percent, listed this factor as being of "very much" influence. The factor "Boredom of courses" ranked second with a mean of 2.24. This would indicate that many of those who dropped out considered the courses in the program lacking stimulation. The factor "Program did not meet personal need" ranked third and might have contributed to the attitude that the classes were boring.

The factors "roommates" and "disciplinary problems" ranked lowest as having an influence on the students' decision to drop out of their post-secondary Farm Management program.

The respondents were asked to list factors they perceived to be weaknesses of Farm Management programs that influenced their decisions to drop out. They were also asked to check the level of influence each factor had on their decision. All factors listed were reported to have "very much" influence. Therefore, the weaknesses were listed in descending order according to the number of times it was reported, as shown in Table 2.

Table 1
 MEAN SCORES, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND
 RANKINGS OF SELECTED FACTORS
 (N=75)

Factor	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank*
1. Chance to go into business on my own	2.77	1.75	1
2. Boredom of courses	2.24	1.30	2
3. Program did not meet personal needs	2.19	1.52	3
4. Farm management area class content repetitive	2.07	1.03	4
5. Distance from home	2.00	1.31	5
6. Farm management area class content inadequate	1.99	1.22	6
7. Supportive area (English, science, etc.) class content repetitive	1.96	1.27	7
8. Mechanics area class content inadequate	1.85	1.25	8
9. Change in career goals	1.77	1.20	9
10. Dissatisfaction with requirements or regulations of school	1.77	1.21	10
11. Teachers	1.75	1.10	11
12. Inability to take desired courses	1.75	1.21	12
13. Mechanics area class content repetitive	1.73	1.01	13
14. Administration	1.71	1.14	14

Table 1 (Continued)

Factor	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank*
15. Lab facilities inadequate	1.71	1.15	15
16. Uncertainty of career goals	1.69	1.22	16
17. Good job offer	1.67	1.34	17
18. Supportive area (English, science, etc.) class content inadequate	1.65	1.09	18
19. Supportive area (English, science, etc.) class content too difficult	1.64	1.07	19
20. Financial difficulties	1.64	1.14	20
21. Classroom facilities inadequate	1.56	.99	21
22. Personal problems	1.53	1.04	22
23. Transferred to another educational program	1.44	1.17	23
24. Poor grades	1.37	.89	24
25. Marriage	1.36	1.06	25
26. Farm management area class content too difficult	1.29	.61	26
27. Mechanics area class content too difficult	1.24	.54	27
28. Illness or accident	1.24	.88	28
29. Roommate	1.23	.73	29
30. Disciplinary problems	1.16	.73	30

Table 2

WEAKNESSES OF THE POST-SECONDARY FARM MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS
IN NORTH DAKOTA AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS WHO DID NOT
COMPLETE THE PRESCRIBED COURSE OF STUDY
(N=75)

Factor	Number of Responses
1. Too much theory and not enough practicality	13
2. Inflexibility of class scheduling (classes not offered different quarters)	11
3. Inability of teachers to put point across	7
4. Summer program too expensive for benefit received	5
5. Inadequate facilities	5
6. Teachers inconsistent in discipline	5
7. Too many related subjects (English, science, etc.)	4
8. Too many classes from same instructor each day	4
9. Classes were not challenging enough	4
10. Mechanics not specific enough to meet farming needs	4
11. Not enough field trips	3
12. Not enough animal science	3
13. Classes not geared for students of various abilities	2
14. Too much emphasis on chemical instead of natural farming	2
15. Limited job opportunities upon graduation	2
16. Administration	2

The perceived weakness factor "Too much theory and not enough practicality" was mentioned by 13 respondents. This response may indicate two things. First, there actually was too much theory presented and not enough time spent on practical aspects a farmer would need to know. Secondly, the theory may have been necessary, but students were not mature enough to realize that the theory must be completely understood in order to explain the practical aspects.

The factor "Inflexibility of class scheduling," mentioned by 11 respondents, might indicate that students were not able to take classes at different times of the year so they could complete their education and yet remain active in farming. It may also indicate that they are limited as to when they can begin a program of instruction.

Several factors were listed by five or fewer respondents. Some of those factors include "Summer program too expensive for benefit received," "Inadequate facilities," "Teacher inconsistent in discipline," "Too many related subjects," "Too many classes from same instructor each day," "Classes were not challenging enough," and "Mechanics not specific enough to meet farming needs." The small number of respondents listing any one factor would raise questions as to whether there should be major concerns regarding these factors.

Conclusions

Based on the data from the study the following conclusions have been formulated:

1. Students enrolled in one of the five post-secondary Farm Management programs in North Dakota are most apt to drop out before the beginning of the second year of the program. A majority of the drop-outs will not have been involved in extra-curricular activities or worked while in the program. Most had a grade point average of 2.51 to 3.00; and it was their own personal decision to drop out.
2. The primary reason for dropping out of the program before completion of the prescribed course of study is to take advantage of a chance to go into business on their own. Other higher ranked factors, even though they were of little importance, were boredom of courses, program did not meet personal needs, farm management area class content repetitive, and distance from home.
3. The greatest weakness of the programs perceived by students who have dropped out is that they felt the classes were too theoretical.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the researcher's findings and knowledge gained in conducting this study.

1. Offer a one-year farm management curriculum as well as the existing program for those who need the training but have a limited time in which to acquire it.
2. Offer classes during various school terms during the year to allow individuals actively involved in farming the opportunity to complete the prescribed course of study without conflicting with the farming enterprise.
3. Increase the number of staff members at certain institutions to allow for flexibility of class scheduling and to help alleviate the problem of having numerous classes from the same instructor each day.
4. This study should be conducted at regular intervals to further determine whether program changes are necessary in the two-year post-secondary Farm Management programs in North Dakota.

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