

COMPARISON OF TEACHER REPORTED FOLLOW-UP
AND A MAIL FOLLOW-UP SURVEY OF
1973-74 SECONDARY AGRIBUSINESS PROGRAM COMPLETORS
IN ALABAMA

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In this era of accountability every effort is needed to obtain reliable and valid data that can be incorporated into the decision-making process. In vocational Agribusiness Education, follow-up studies constitute a valuable source of information that can be utilized for program improvement purposes and for accountability. However, the best method or methods of obtaining the highest quality data continuously needs to be examined if decision makers are to have confidence in the data they are utilizing.

A study was conducted in Alabama to compare the validity of two sources of follow-up data. The primary purpose was to compare teacher reported follow-ups of 1973-74 completors of Alabama's Secondary Agribusiness Education program with a statewide mail follow-up survey study of those same program completors. The comparison was made on the basis of the following questions.

1. Did the number of 1973-74 Secondary Agribusiness program completors reported by teachers to be employed full-time in field for which trained or related fields differ from the findings of the mail follow-up survey
2. Did the number of 1973-74 Secondary Agribusiness program completors reported by teachers to be employed in fields not related to training differ from the findings of the mail follow-up survey?
3. Did the number of 1973-74 Secondary Agribusiness program completors reported by teachers to be unemployed, seeking work differ from the findings of the mail follow-up survey?
4. Did the number of 1973-74 Secondary Agribusiness program completors reported by teachers to be unavailable for placement differ from the findings of the mail follow-up survey?

Methodology

The Occupational Research and Development Unit (ORDU) at Auburn University was contracted to conduct the mail survey of all Alabama 1973-74 Secondary Agribusiness Education program completors who had been out of school for approximately eight months (McMath, 1975). The Alabama State Supervisory staff assisted in obtaining the names and addresses of the 1973-74 Secondary Agribusiness program completors. The completors were mailed: (1) a preliminary letter to inform them they would be getting the questionnaire in about two weeks, (2) the follow-up questionnaire, and (3) if no response, a second questionnaire approximately one month later. The mail survey was sent to 4,017 program completors who had been out of school approximately eight months. The questionnaires were returned by 1,207 (30.0%) persons.

The accuracy of the job-relatedness reporting of the completors on the follow-up questionnaire was validated by obtaining the following employment information from the completors: (1) classification of employment as in field, related or non-related to training, (2) job title, (3) job description, and (4) employer's name and address. This information was obtained on the first job of the completor after leaving school. Vocational educators compared the job relevant information from each completor and concluded that the completors accurately reported the relatedness of their employment to their training.

A reliability study was conducted to ascertain whether the non-respondents in the study were different from the respondents (Drake, 1976). Data were obtained by telephone from a sample of non-respondents to allow a test for differences on each of the criteria discussed in this study. The criteria examined were: (1) number available for placement, (2) number employed in field for which trained or related field, (3) number employed in field not related to training, and (4) number unemployed and seeking work. The hypotheses of no difference between the respondents and non-respondents were not rejected. Therefore, the researchers concluded that the respondents who returned the mail survey were representative of the study population.

The second source of data was the secondary vocational agribusiness teachers who conducted a follow-up of their program completors and filed a report with the State Supervisor of Agribusiness by October 14th. The State Supervisor compiled a statewide follow-up summary which was used in the comparison study. The teachers reported 4,357 program completors, with 4,032 (92.5%) being located for inclusion in their reports.

The follow-up surveys from the ORDU study were keypunched and then tabulated by the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) computer program. A test on the difference of two proportions based on large numbers and the binomial distribution was executed manually to compare differences of the two groups (Sellers, 1977).

Findings and Conclusions

Table 1 reports the comparison of teacher reported follow-up and mailed survey follow-up on the employment status of completors of agriculture instructional programs.

Of the 4,032 program completors whose status was reported known by the teachers, 2,242 (56%) were reported to be employed full time in the field in which the individual was trained or a related field. Of the 1,027 program completors who returned the mail follow-up survey, 299 (25%) reported they were employed full time in the field for which trained or a related field. The statistical analysis of the data revealed there was a greater proportion of program completors employed full time in the field of training or related fields according to the teacher reports than was revealed by the mail follow-up survey. The difference was significant at the .05 level.

Of the 4,032 program completors whose status was reported known by teachers, 540 (13%) were reported to be employed in fields not related to their training. Of the 1,207 program completors who returned the mail follow-up survey, 264 (22%) noted they were employed full time in a field not related to their training. The statistical analysis of the data revealed there was no greater proportion of program completors employed in fields not related to their training according to teacher reports than were revealed by the mail follow-up survey.

Of the 4,032 program completors whose status was reported known by teachers, 160 (4%) were reported unemployed and seeking work. Of the 1,207 program completors who returned the mail follow-up survey, 136 (11%) indicated they were unemployed and seeking work. The statistical analysis revealed no difference in the proportion of program completors unemployed and seeking work as reported by teachers than that found by the mail follow-up survey.

Of the 4,032 program completors whose status was reported known by the teachers, 1,390 (34%) were reported to be unavailable for placement. Of the 1,207 program completors who returned the mail follow-up survey, 73 (6%) indicated they were unavailable for placement. The statistical analysis of the data revealed there was a greater proportion of program

Table 1

COMPARISON OF TEACHER REPORTED FOLLOW-UP AND MAILED SURVEY FOLLOW-UP ON THE EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF 1973-74 COMPLETORS OF AGRICULTURE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS IN ALABAMA

	Status Reported		Employed Full-Time in Field For Which Trained		Employed in Field Not Related To Training		Unemployed Seeking Work		Unavailable For Placement	
	Teacher Reported	Mailed Survey	Teacher Reported	Mailed Survey	Teacher Reported	Mailed Survey	Teacher Reported	Mailed Survey	Teacher Reported	Mailed Survey
01.0100 Ag. Production	512	156	278	46	113	28	14	22	128	12
01.0200 Ag. Supplies/ Services	106	26	73	7	13	8	11	3	27	0
28 01.0300 Ag. Mechanics	2,610	706	1,617	190	309	160	96	81	785	38
01.0400 Ag. Products	73	16	43	5	10	2	7	1	17	0
01.0500 Ornamental Horticulture	200	99	77	14	56	29	24	14	87	8
01.0600 Ag. Resources	38	14	14	2	6	5	2	1	17	0
01.0700 Forestry	109	37	51	7	10	9	2	2	53	4
01.9900 Other Agriculture	384	153	89	28	23	23	4	12	276	71
TOTAL	4,032	1,207	2,242	299	540	264	160	136	1,390	73
PERCENT BY STATUS			56%	25%	13%	22%	4%	11%	34%	6%

completers unavailable for placement according to the teacher reports than was revealed by the mail follow-up study. The difference was significant at the .05 level.

Based on the analysis of the data, significant differences were observed between the two sources of data on two of the four criteria studies. Teachers reported a higher proportion of completers employed in the field for which trained or in a related field than was reported by completers through the mail survey. Teachers also reported a higher proportion of completers unavailable for work than was reported by completers through the mail survey.

Implications and Recommendations

Data concerning the employment status of agribusiness program completers can be more accurately obtained from the completers by mail survey than from the agribusiness teachers.

Although follow-up data obtained by teachers from their former students may be valuable for program improvement, this source of data should not constitute the primary data source for accountability purposes.

It is recommended that for accountability purposes, a sample of program graduates be surveyed directly to ascertain the number of graduates employed in field or related field and the number available for placement.

It is recommended that teacher education programs train teachers to be sensitive to the need for and use of follow-up information and how to conduct accurate follow-up studies for program improvement purposes.

It is recommended that similar comparison studies be conducted periodically to assist in determining the validity and reliability of follow-up information from different data sources before firm decisions are made regarding the best and most efficient means of obtaining quality data for decision making.

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which did not cooperate in administering the test may have felt their horticulture programs were not at a desired level to be compared with other schools because of the recency of the program, inadequate instructional equipment, or perhaps other reasons.

The number of examinees on several of the norming groups was too few for an adequate level of reliability in using the norms.

The final form of the Horticulture Achievement Test is felt to be sufficiently high in reliability and validity to be used as a research and evaluation tool.

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