

## A Comparison of Youth Leadership Needs by Agriculture Students and Their Teachers

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### Introduction

The smooth transition from school to work is an obstacle that all youth face at some point in their life. If not readily prepared for this transition, an individual may face early failures that may alter their career path and set them on a road that does not allow them to reach their full potential. In a time when globalization is eminent and competition with US markets are high, it is important that youth are fully equipped to handle the responsibilities that will be placed on them when entering the labor force.

vanLinden and Fertman (1998) found that “employers are more interested in adolescents who are leaders” (p. 7). In a study conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2000), six of the top seven skills desired by employers from new graduates were leadership related. Therefore, an increase in opportunities to participate in effective leadership development activities while learning career and technical skills will allow students the chance to gain a sense of responsibility and ownership over their career and societal success.

### Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine if the leadership needs reported by agriculture students varied from those reported by their agriculture teachers. The objectives were:

- Identify selected demographic characteristics of the students and their teachers.
- Describe the students’ and teachers’ attitudes toward leadership activities.
- Compare the students’ perceived opportunities to learn and practice leadership skills in selected activities with those reported by their teachers.
- Compare the students’ level of preference for location where leadership training may occur with those reported by their teachers.
- Compare the students’ perception of importance of various factors when creating a quality leadership training experience with those reported by their teacher.

### Methodology

Agriculture teachers and students from 100 randomly selected schools were surveyed to determine their leadership development needs. The National FFA Leadership Continuum Assessment Student Questionnaire (NFLCASQ), consisting of 72 5-point Lickert type items, was designed based on information collected during focus groups conducted in two states. The instrument was deemed reliable using test/retest method. All questions were found to have 75% to 94% agreement.

Teachers were instructed to administer the questionnaire to agriculture students in their program and return the completed questionnaires to the University of Missouri-Columbia for data entry and analysis. Independent *t*-tests were conducted for purposes of this analysis.

## Results

Responses were received from 28 schools from across the country. The average student ( $n=1031$ ) respondent was involved in one or two school organizations, in their first year of membership in the FFA and involved in limited out of school activities. The average teacher ( $n=24$ ) was over the age of thirty with a bachelor's degree as the highest level of education completed and at least ten years teaching experience.

Respondents indicated that leadership was important or very important. When asked to indicate the importance of leadership skills in various areas of the students' lives, both groups indicated future career as most important. Teachers rated school and community equally as important, which was significantly different from the ratings by students.

Although both groups rated FFA and elective classes as situations where students frequently or often learned and practiced leadership, there was a significant difference in the perception of how often these two activities gave students the opportunity to practice leadership. Furthermore, students rated sports higher than elective classes in learning and practicing leadership, whereas teachers did not consider sports as a major area at all.

Both students and teachers reported agriculture classes as one of the top three situations students highly preferred or very preferred to learn leadership skills. However, students rated international experiences and national conferences as their other top two choices, which were significantly different from teachers' ratings.

Finally, student and teachers were asked about factors of a quality leadership experience. They agreed on most factors; however, teachers reported that leadership experiences should include a state officer, which was not as important to students.

## Recommendations

More leadership development interventions should be created that include factors of a quality leadership experience that are desirable to the intended audience. These interventions should be evaluated for effectiveness and redesigned when appropriate. Professional development experiences should be created that assist teachers in enhancing their students' extra-curricular experiences. For example, sports, church and work were places identified by students as opportunities for leadership development. Teachers should be taught to use these experiences as real-world application to the career and technical education curriculum. Finally, periodic assessments of agriculture teachers and students should be conducted to evaluate the current leadership development needs of each group.

## References

National Association of Colleges and Employers (2002). Job outlook 2000 – What employers want. Retrieved May 22, 2006, from <http://www.naceweb.org>.

vanLinden, J. A. & Fertman, C. I. (1998). *Youth leadership: A guide to understanding leadership development in adolescents*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.