

Tracking the Employment Pathways of College of Agriculture Graduates

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Introduction and Theoretical Framework

College graduates possess adequate knowledge needed for obtaining careers. In 2005, the U.S. Bureau of Census (www.census.gov) stated that 81.6% of people between the ages of 25 and 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher were employed. Although people with higher education degrees are generally employed, their employment status does not sufficiently describe how satisfied they are with their chosen careers.

Little research has been conducted exploring where agricultural graduates find employment or what career experiences they have had. Barkley, Stock, and Sylvius (1999) stated that "up to date information on salaries and career experiences" of agricultural alumni is vital (p. 785). Obtaining information regarding graduates' employment status would be useful for college recruitment and retention.

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in Holland's theory of vocational behavior. "The primary concern of the theory is to explain vocational behavior and to suggest some practical ideas to help young, middle-aged, and older people select jobs, change jobs, and attain vocational satisfaction" (Holland, 1997, p. 1).

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to track the career paths of College of Agriculture (COA) graduates (January 2004 – May 2005) at a Midwestern Land-Grant institution. Specifically, the study sought to determine the career choice, employment status, salary, and overall job satisfaction of college graduates. The following research objectives guided the study:

1. Determine the career paths of COA graduates.
2. Identify the employment status of COA graduates.
3. Identify the salary of COA graduates.
4. Determine the overall job satisfaction of COA graduates.

Methodology

The research methodology employed for this study was descriptive survey. A random sample ($n = 272$) from the population ($N = 711$) was taken. The questionnaire employed measured job satisfaction and allowed graduates to expand upon their current position of employment in terms of the type of employment they possessed, their occupational title, and their annual salary. Reliability for the job satisfaction section was established through prior research resulting in a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .94 for the summated scale. Usable data was received from 141 graduates for a 52% response rate.

Findings

Objective one was to determine the career paths of COA graduates. Over half of the graduates were either enrolled in graduate school, involved in management, or in sales. The remaining graduates were involved in the following positions: teaching, science, communications, government agencies, production agriculture, research, support staff, educational training, financial services, or food services. The remaining 8% of graduates did not conveniently fall into the categories and were listed as “other”.

Objective two sought to identify the employment status of COA graduates. It was revealed that 71% were employed full-time and 4% were employed half-time. Twenty percent were attending graduate or professional school. The remaining 5% of graduates were either caring for family members, serving in the military, or unemployed.

Objective three was to identify the salary of COA graduates. Forty (29%) graduates made less than \$20,000.00. Forty-six (33%) graduates had an annual salary between \$20,000.00 - \$34,999.00. Thirty-nine (28%) graduates made between \$35,000.00 - \$44,999.00. Four (3%) graduates made more than \$45,000.00, while 12 (9%) refused to answer the question.

Objective four sought to determine the overall job satisfaction of COA graduates. A five point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree was used. It was revealed that graduates agreed to be satisfied with their current jobs ($M = 3.93$).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Graduates from this institution are entering a wide variety of career paths. Over 90% of graduates are employed full-time or are in graduate or professional school. The highest percentage of graduates make a salary of \$20,000.00 - \$34,000.00, while the least amount of graduates make over \$45,000.00. Overall, graduates at this institution are satisfied with their chosen career paths as indicated by their job satisfaction score. This finding is consistent with previous research by Robinson and Garton (2006) who found that agricultural education graduates were satisfied with their careers. These findings provide assurance that the college curriculum is allowing students the versatility to enter a wide array of career options. These findings should be shared with prospective students looking for careers in agriculture as well as current students looking for employment opportunities. Future research should track how successful graduates are at finding employment within their respective degree fields.

References

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