STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AN AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS FIELD TRIP

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Abstract: The study examined undergraduate agricultural communications students' perceptions of a day-long field trip to various employers in the communications and media industry. The participants were asked to complete two questionnaires (n=14) both before and after the field trip. A focus group was held two months after the field trip and included participants who had completed the first two instruments, or had gone on the field trip in previous semesters, but not participated in the first two data collection sessions. The first set of data was collected from the results of a four-point Likert-style questionnaire that gauged students' perceptions of field trips on five dimensions. The second questionnaire was a 10-question open-ended worksheet, and the third was the results of a focus group session. The data from the first questionnaire was analyzed using Observation Oriented Modeling, a form of statistical analysis that looks at themes and trends in a raw data set. The second questionnaire was analyzed for frequencies and coded using Initial coding methods. The focus group transcript was coded using In-Vivo coding. Results of the first questionnaire found that perceptions had increased on three out of the five dimensions. The results of the second and third instrument found that students highly value their writing and design skills, but often have trouble seeing the difference between classroom and newsroom. Results also found that students may have trouble connecting agriculture to non-food and fiber industries.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

I. INTRODUCTION 1

Statement of the Problem 2
Theoretical Framework 3
Experiential Learning 3
Significance of Study 3
Statement of Purpose 4
Research Objectives 4
Scope of the Study 4
Assumptions 5
Limitations 5
Definition of Terms 5

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE 6

Experiential Learning 6
Short-Term Experiential Learning 9
Long-Term Experiential Education 11
Experiential Learning in Teaching Communications 12
Hands-On Journalism and Communications Learning 14
Experiential Learning and Professional Development 15
Field Trips in Primary Education 16
Benefits and Drawbacks of Out of Classroom Learning 17
Summary 18

III. METHODOLOGY 19

Rationale 19
Participants 20
About the Field Trip 21
Instrumentation 22
Procedures 25
Data Analysis 26
Observation oriented modeling 27
Initial coding 27
In Vivo coding 28

Chapter Page

Validating the findings through triangulation....28
Summary....29

IV. FINDINGS....30

Participants....30
Ordinal Pattern Analysis....31
Results of the Open-ended Questionnaire....32
Importance of writing skills....38
Perceived preparedness....38
Results of the Focus Group....39
Not a cookie cutter job....41
Writing was their main thing....42
Always have to be on their toes....42
Switch-up the locations....43
Summary....44

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS ...45

Summary of the Study....45
Summary of the Findings....47
Conclusions....49
Attitude of students towards class field trips....49
Influence of a field trip on students' career expectations....51
Relevance of writing in their future careers....54
Recommendations....54
Recommendations for agricultural communications instructors....55
Recommendations for future research....56
Summary....57

REFERENCES....58

APPENDICES....64

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

1 Dimension and Respective Cronbach Score of Original Instrument 23
2 Sample Questions of Each Dimension 24
3 Ordinal Pattern Analysis Results for Each Construct of First Instrument (Orion & Hoffstien, 1991) 31
4 Where Participants Saw Themselves Working a Year and Five Years After Graduation - Pre-test 33
5 Where Participants Saw Themselves Working a Year and Five Years After Graduation - Post-test 34
6 Agricultural Communication Courses Participants Believed to be Most Useful in Their Future Careers - Pre-test 36
7 Agricultural Communication Courses Participants Believed to be Most Useful in Their Future Careers - Post-test 37
8 Statements of Each Theme of Focus Group 40

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1 Kolb's (2014) Theory of Experiential Learning 9

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Field trips have been studied as an effective method of teaching children since the early 1900s (Falk & Balling, 1980). Lucy Mitchell, a pioneer of early childhood education, wrote in the 1930s that field trips were an important part of an effective social science curriculum (Taylor, Morris, & Cordeau-Young, 1997). Because field trips were proven as an effective means of applying, retaining, and transferring knowledge (National Research Coucil, 2000), the trips provide the justification for using them for learning (Gilbert & Priest, 1997; Hofstein & Rosenfeld, 1996). In Kindergarten through 12th grade education, both the National Research Council (1996) and National Science Teachers Association (1998) have endorsed field trips as valuable learning opportunities.

Field trips are often categorized as instances of experiential learning, and, more recently, short-term experiential learning (Scarce, 1997). Experiential learning is often credited as being the combination of the works of previous education researchers (Kolb, 2014). David Kolb, a popular researcher on experiential learning, credited his work on the theory as a culmination of the works of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget.

Experiential learning is a theory for a wide range of learning activities (Kolb, 2014). The range of topics studied using experimental learning methods ranging from

month and year-long learning activities such as service learning trips in a sociological context (Jakubowski, 2003) palliative nursing care in an outpatient facility (Kaasalainen, Brazil, & Kelley, 2014) and professional development programs for doctors exploring complementary and alternative medicine (Hewson et al., 2006) to shorter learning activities such as a class project (Downey, 2012).

In contrast to long-term experiential activities, most field trip-related research has been constructed using experiential learning (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014). Previous research on field trips focused primarily on hard-science curriculum taught at the elementary and secondary levels (Falk & Balling, 1980). What little research exists at the higher education level is focused primarily on out-of-classroom lab or clinical experiences. The researcher found no literature regarding college-level field trips and student expectations regarding writing and future careers.

Statement of the Problem

Although research overwhelmingly supports the use of field trips in grade school (Falk & Balling, 1982), few studies focused on the impact of trips at the collegiate level. This is problematic if professors are ignoring or under-using an effective and tested method of instruction. Although some researchers studied the use of field trips at the undergraduate level, most of these studies focused on the hard sciences (Francis et al., 2011; Hix, 2015). Few studies consider the impact of collegiate field trips in the social sciences. This is troublesome because it insinuates field trips are only effective when teaching natural sciences, and doesn't encourage researchers and professors in the social sciences to develop field trips.

Theoretical Framework

Experiential learning

Experiential learning is a learning theory that seeks to "tap the internal interest and intrinsic motivation of learning and building on [students] prior knowledge and experience" (A. Y. Kolb & D. A. Kolb, 2005, p. 207). It relies heavily on students learning on their own, and to reflect on and make meaning from their experiences (Kolb, 2014). In a 2005 paper, Alice and David Kolb outlined the six propositions upon which the experimental learning theory is based:

> 1. Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes… 2. All learning is relearning… 3. Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between didactically opposed models of adaption to the world. Conflict, differences, and disagreement are what drive the learning process…4. Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world…5. Learning results from synergetic transitions between the person and the environment…6. Learning is the process of creating knowledge. (p. 194)

More information on experiential learning theory, including its origins, is in the following chapter.

Significance of Study

This study will help media-writing instructors determine the importance and effectiveness of out-of-the-classroom group experiences in communications-related disciplines. This study will also help educators determine how student's views of

potential careers relate back to their skills and knowledge learned in the classroom. In addition, this study will help the instructor of the class studied in regards to future field trips and their incorporation into lesson plans.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of students towards a field trip. The study is also intended to help instructors better understand how field trips in the social sciences influence students' expectations regarding potential careers and real-world workplace expectations. This study allows educators in the social sciences to determine the value of adding short-term field trip experiences to their curriculum.

Research Objectives

Three research objectives that guided the inquiry for this study were:

1. Determine the attitudes of agricultural communications students' toward class field trips.
2. Describe the influence of a field trip on agricultural communications students' career expectations.
3. Describe the influence of a field trip on agricultural communications students' attitudes toward the relevance of writing in their future careers.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study includes students at Oklahoma State University majoring in an undergraduate agricultural communications program within the Department of

Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership during the 2015-2016 school year.

Assumptions

This study included the following assumptions:

1. Students honestly and accurately answered survey and focus group questions.
2. Students who attended the focus group were honest in their participation of a field trip.

Limitations

The following limitation was identified for this study: the results of this study cannot be generalized.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined operationally for use in this study:

Field trip: A school or class trip with an educational intent, in which students interact with the setting, displays, and exhibits to gain an experiential connection to the ideas, concepts, and subject matter (Krepel & Duvall, 1981).

Short-term experiential learning: Assignments that ask students to integrate course material with a brief excursion, often less than a day, to observe or participate in a related social phenomenon (Wright, 2000).

Observation oriented modeling: A statistical analysis that uses matrix algebra rotations to detect patterns within a set of observations (Grice, 2011).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review of selected literature is relevant to this study's purpose in describing students' perceptions of a field trip and a field trips impact on career expectations and perceived importance of writing skills. The review is presented to introduce the educational theory of experiential learning, and how it can be applied to short and long-term learning experiences. This review also discusses previous research in media and communications education, particularly in the realm of experiential and hand-on learning. The review concludes with research on field trips and the potential benefits and drawbacks of using them as an educational tool. It begins with an introduction to experiential learning.

Experiential Learning

"All learning is relearning" (Kolb, 2014, p. 13).These words written by David Kolb were first published with his research on experiential learning theory (ELT) in 1984. In this research he proposed that education happens in the following four principal stages: concrete experiences (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE) (Kolb, 2014).

Many researchers have contributed work to Kolb's version of the experiential learning theory, including John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget.

John Dewey who in 1938 published his book *Experience and Education*, laid the groundwork for experiential learning. Dewey (1938) wrote that "there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education" (p. 7). Dewey believed firmly in experimental components of a lesson plan (Coffey, n.d.). However Dewey did have his reservations about the ability to use experiential learning as a blanket strategy for teaching.

> "Dewey also suggests that each student's experience will be individualized based on past experiences, and not all students will take away the same outlook of the concept. Thus, the experiential learning classroom mimics society, where all people have different views of topics and information." (Coffey, n.d.)

Dewey knew that in order for experiences to be worthwhile to students they would need to be "fruitful and creative" (Dewey, 1938, p. 13). He was a firm believer in that the quality of experience made all the difference in a progressive and quality education (Coffey, n.d).

Kurt Lewin's work on experiential learning was not only a major factor in the current definition the theory, but also had a large influence on David Kolb's 1984 model of experiential learning (Pennington, 2012). According to Kolb, two "noteworthy" aspects of learning as defined by Lewin are a focus on the here and now, and that action research and laboratory training are based on feedback (Kolb, 2014). Lewin's main

argument was that feedback was the element that kept the learning process continuous (Pennington, 2012).

Jean Piaget is the educational researcher best known for his theory on cognitive development (Kolb, 2014). Piaget used the cognitive development theory to describe the stages of the learning process, and argued that learning occurs in different ways and at different paces (Pennington, 2012). His contribution to experimental learning was his belief that experiences push students to new levels of operation. Kolb argues that during adolescence, students utilize more active orientation, and use careful thought processes to experimentally test theories (Kolb, 2014).

Kolb's version of the experiential learning theory builds on the work of Dewey, Lewin and Piaget, and emphasizes the central role of experience in the learning process (Kolb, 2014). It was Kolbs original desire to integrate all of the works of past research, and not to create an entirely new theory (Pennington, 2012). , Kolb described experiential learning theory as follows in his 2014 book "Experiential Learning in ELT":

> The aim of ELT is to create, through a synthesis of the works of the foundational scholars, a theory that helps explain how experience is transformed into learning and reliable knowledge. Truth is not manifest in experience; it must be inferred by a process of learning that questions preconceptions of direct experience, tempers the vividness and emotion of experience with critical reflection, and extracts the correct lessons from the consequences of action. (p.42)

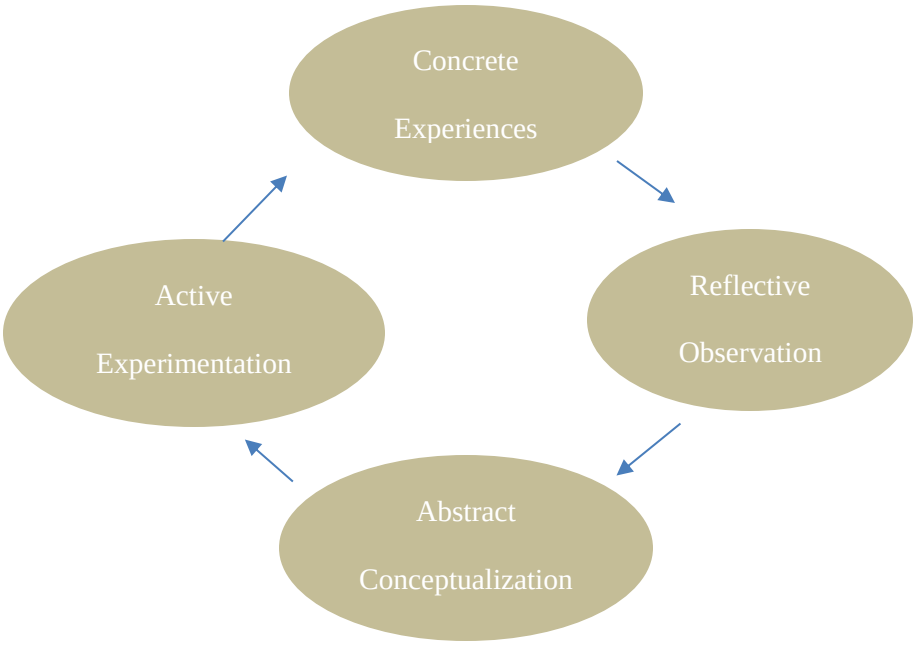

Figure 1

Kolb's (2014) Theory of Experiential Learning

Short-term experiential learning

Rick Scarce wrote that "field trips may best be seen as an example of short term experimental education" (Scarce, 1997, p. 219). Wright (2000) further defined short-term experiential learning in her research:

> "[Short-term experiential learning] refers to assignments that ask students to integrate course material with a brief excursion to observe or participate in a related social phenomenon. This contrasts with experiential learning methods such as cooperative and service learning, that often involve semester to year-long commitments from both student and instructor." (p. 116)

Wright (2002) notes that the benefit of short-term experiential learning is that the length of time it requires often allows lessons to be taught in "a brief period of time, often lasting less than a day" (p. 117). The benefits of short-term experiential learning, according to Wright (2002), is that it is easily incorporated by an instructor who has little experience with experiential learning, and simply wants to try out a different method of instruction.

Scarce (1997) also noted that students seem the most motivated to learn "when they concretely experience social phenomena though the everyday settings of field trips" (p. 220). The ability to use class field trips to observe real-world application of theories, understand research, and solidify material and lessons taught in the classroom make the trips a valuable, but often underused method of teaching, at least in higher education (Scarce, 1997). Scarce (1997) also tied class field trips to experiential education when he wrote that "field trips offer the sort of enriching experiences that Dewey recognized as so central to successful educational endeavors because they are experiences, lived social events that become ways of knowing" (p. 220).

Short-term experiential education has also been studied in the context of legal education (Higgins, Dewhurst, & Watkins, 2012). The daylong legal-themed field trip that Higgins studied proved to be successful and "acted as an empowering tool for students and assisted them in gaining ownership over future learning experiences" (p.178). Higgins et al. (2012) notes that the ability to hit many different topics within the legal system while only utilizing a day period proved to be a huge benefit to both the students and the lectures. They concluded that the research found "that structured field

trips in legal education are a valuable short-term experiential learning tool and should be strategically incorporated into the legal education curriculum." (p. 178)

In a case study of multiple instructors' sociology field trips, Wright (2002) confirmed Scarce's (1997) findings that field trips provided "short-term" experiential learning beneficial in not only reaffirming course material, but also in showing students the real-world implications of their coursework. In Wright's (2002) analysis of a field trip, he wrote that the class instructor "found the trip 'extremely effective,' noting that the value of experiential learning is that the subject is real and comes alive" (p. 121). Wright (2002) concluded that "short-term experiential learning is a flexible instructional tool, adaptable to most courses" (p.124).

Long-Term Experiential Education

In contrast to short-term experiential education, long-term experiential education is defied by Wright (2000) as "cooperative and service learning that often involves semester to year-long commitments from both student and instructor" (p. 116). Studies have found that long-term experiential education is effective in the medical field (Kaasalainen et al., 2014), in teaching social awareness and global issues (Caulfield & Woods, 2013), and in teaching sustainable agriculture methods (Francis et al., 2011). The noted benefits of long-term, or traditional experiential education, is that the students are able to spend more time learning the subject matter and having concrete experiences (Francis et al., 2011). In his experience with a semester-length experiential-learning-based Forestry class Hix (2015) concluded:

"An experiential learning approach, including a sequence of multiple field

> experiences, is one of the best ways for students to begin acquiring a foundation on which to build. They must master the techniques of field data collection and analysis, then build confidence through reflection and sharing their ideas, and ultimately apply their knowledge to other forests." (p. 485)

While most research of long-term experiential education has been focused on field experiences and out-of-classroom instruction, Downey (2012) found that a semester-long experiential role-play sales project in which external "coaches" or industry professionals, mentor the students as opposed to instructors proved to be successful. In noting its successes Downey (2012) wrote of the project: "students get a perspective of potential employers that can't be obtained at career fairs and job interviews" (p.10). Downey also found that the program had benefits even though it was given to a large lecture section of a course, and that it's benefits outweigh the large amount of structure and planning the exercise involved.

> "Experiential learning through roleplay requires a high degree of structure and observation in a large lecture classroom, but that should not preclude the use of this type of tool. As class sizes grow, instructors necessarily must find more efficient ways to create quality learning experiences for students. Leveraging industry participation provides benefits for students in terms of their exposure to real world activities and helps them make important career contacts." (p.11)

Experiential Learning in Teaching Communications

Experiential learning is also effective in teaching mass communications and journalism to students at the collegiate level (Steel, Carmichael, Holmes, Kinse, &

Sanders, 2007). Experiential learning methods that simulate a newsroom and real-world environments have shown "students seemed to grow in confidence as they dealt with the chaos of their particular newsrooms, and this growth in confidence is reflected in the student response" (Steel et al., 2007, p. 331). The most beneficial factor of experiential learning in communications and journalism instruction is the idea that students feel as if they are "doing it for real" (Steel et al., 2007, p. 330). The experiential method of submersing students head-first into the subject is seen as a powerful method of instruction as Steel (2012) described a student-run newsroom as follows:

> "From a learning and teaching perspective the election project can be seen as a success. All the students reported a positive experience in terms of how much they learned by 'doing it for real.' This learning was not only related to the technical and procedural elements of working within the media, but also how much they had learned about themselves. This reaction is all the more powerful given that the students really were plunged in at the deep end." (p. 330)

Pennington (2012) reported great success in using an experiential learning-based curriculum to teach high school agriculture students basic videography skills via a portable laboratory that the researchers called a "mobile classroom". Pennington noted the experiential aspect of the curriculum was largely to blame for it successes: "It was found that students perceived the experiential mobile classroom activity to be positive regarding their enjoyment, interest, and its practicality. Combined with the curriculum presented, this experiential activity may have elevated student perceptions" (Pennington, 2012, p. 59). Additionally, Pennington believed that a experiential learning activity

served as educational enforcement and aided in teaching students the fundamental principles of videography and photography.

Parks (2015) also boasted the success of using experiential learning methods in the journalism classroom. Parks found that students who completed an experiential collaborative writing and editing exercise wrote that the students appreciated the "real-world, professional-style experience," found "pride in adapting creatively to problems in real time," and learned firsthand the "fast-emerging divide…that mirrored professional reporter/copy desk tensions" (p. 132).

Hands-On Journalism and Communications Learning

The use of experiential methods in journalism and communications coursework is hardly new. Feldman (1995) found that "many schools offer experiential learning opportunities, such as internships and working on school papers or year-books. These opportunities have a positive relationship to early employment in the field of journalism" (Feldman, 1995, p. 23). Brandon (2002) wrote that in the early history of journalism and communication programs there was a heavy debate over whether studying writing was worthwhile, and that "many though journalism was best learned on the job" (p. 60). Because of this debate, practical training was the norm until the Columbia School of Journalism was founded, which placed focus on training students in a wide variety of aspects which then "brought liberal arts and the sciences and the beginning of Ph.D.s teaching in the classrooms" (Brandon, 2002, p. 91).

Brandon (2002) also outlined several methods in which experiential education methods and research could benefit journalism education., writing that careful integration of experiential learning methods is key to its success:

> "The experiential learning approach could open new areas of knowledge about journalism education and could help to improve the programs for students. This approach should not replace approaches now used, which have proven their worth to journalism education, but rather focus some of the discourse and debate about journalism education on the environment where the instruction is taking place." (p.65)

Experiential Learning and Professional Development

Experiential learning has also been used to assist in professional development scenarios, as opposed to strictly academic settings. Research has found that experiential learning can be successful in teaching doctors about new and alternative methods of medicine (Hewson et al., 2006) in as little time as an eight-hour seminar. Hewson et al. (2006) found that physicians were not only actively engaged in the materials, but showed willingness to learn more. Hewson et al. (2006) also noted the success of the experimental aspects of the workshop:

> "The experiential nature of the program meant that the participants first experienced a [complimentary and alternative medicine] modality (e.g., yoga), and then learned about the scientific basis and evidence for this practice." (p. 11)

In addition to medicine, experiential learning has also been proved effective in the professional development of teachers. Burke (2013) found that using experiential methods in a professional development program for foreign language teachers was extremely successful. "According to the data, teachers believed that the experiential design of EPD [professional development program] made it successful" (p. 255). Burke continued:

> "By implementing professional development in schools that is experiential in nature, teachers can integrate innovative instruction such as differentiation, constructivist theory, discovery learning, inquiry-based learning, simulations, critical thinking, problem solving, technology-based learning, and performance-based assessment through demonstration, observation, collaboration, fieldwork, and reflection." (p.260)

Field Trips in Primary Education

Field trips have long been championed as an effective and fun way to reinforce curriculum in elementary aged children. Falk and Dierking (2000) found that field trips can have lasting impacts on students, and that they create strong memories of both cognitive and sociocultural contexts. Field trips are found to be most effective when teachers utilize an agenda and purpose for taking students to an off-campus location (Falk, Moussouri, & Coulson, 1998). Students are often engaged, interested, motivated and enthused at subject matter addressed during a field trip, as opposed to in a traditional classroom (Nadelson & Jordan, 2012).

Kisiel (2005) noted multiple reasons that led teachers to take their students on a field trip, including the idea

> "that students can gain new knowledge, curriculum related or not, as a consequence of the visit… that firsthand experiences from the visit are an important contribution to student learning...that the visit can spark interest in some topic or concept, and that the student will be motivated to discover more." (p. 949)

The subject matter taught during field trips tends, more often than not, to be hard-science focused (Nadelson & Jordan, 2012; Orion & Hofstein, 1991). Museums are a popular destination for elementary and middle school field trips and often provide both science and humanities curriculum reinforcement (Kisiel, 2005).

Benefits and Drawbacks of Out of Classroom Learning

Getting children outside of the classroom has long been researched as an effective and beneficial method of enriching their education (Eshach, 2006). The National Science Education Standards (National Research Council, 1996) touted that museums and science-based education centers "can contribute greatly to the understanding of science and encourage students to further their interests outside of school" (p. 45). The simplicity and success of out-of-classroom learning and fieldtrips can be found in "the fact that it somewhat changes the routine" (Eshach, 2006, p. 197). Out of classroom learning is seen as a beneficial factor in bridging in-school learning to students' everyday lives (Eshach, 2006).

Out of classroom learning can also have drawbacks. A potential drawback of out of classroom learning is that students can be unprepared for learning if they are not aware of the goals and specific reason for the field trip (Orion & Hofstein, 1994). Research has also shown that if the teacher is unaware of their role in shaping students' experiences during the fieldtrip it can have a detrimental effect on retention of knowledge gained during the trip (Kisiel, 2005). In addition, "several researchers have noted that teachers may not have explicit goals for their visit, and are unable to connect the experience to the classroom curriculum" (Kisiel, 2005, p. 937). Behrendt and Franklin (2014) highly recommended that the teacher be prepared to "focus the students' mental and physical energy towards participation at the venue" (p. 239) in an effort to make the educational impact of the trip as successful as possible.

Summary

This chapter began with an introduction into experiential learning. Experiential learning has been recently defined as either long-term or short-term (Wright, 2000). In addition to hard sciences, social sciences can benefit greatly from the use of experiential learning exercises in the classroom, including media and communications professors. Field trips are an example of short-term experiential learning. While most literature is focused at the K-12 level, college programs have had success in using field trips as a learning tool. While field trips are beneficial there are some drawbacks; field trips must be properly planned and require clear set learning objectives and goals to be the most effective for student learning.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine students' perceptions of a field trip. The study is also intended to help instructors better understand how field trips in the social sciences influence students' expectations regarding potential careers and real-world workplace expectations. This chapter describes procedures used to conduct this research. The processes of finding and creating instrumentation, participant recruitment, and procedures in this mixed methods research are provided. An introduction to data analysis for each objective is included.

Rationale

The study utilized a mixed methods design. Mixed methods research is defined by Creswell (2012) as a "procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study" (p. 535). Mixed methods are often used when one type of research is not enough to answer the research question, or when researchers wish to follow up quantitative data with qualitative data to gain more detailed and specific information than can be gained from tests and numbers (Creswell, 2012).

Explanatory sequential design was used in this study. Explanatory sequential design consists "of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results" (Creswell, 2012, p. 542). Justification for this design method is that the quantitative data provide a general picture of the research problem and more analysis, through qualitative data collection, is "needed to refine, extend or explain the general picture" (Creswell, 2012, p. 542).

One of the benefits of explanatory design is the researcher does not have worry about integrating the different types of data (Creswell, 2012). This design also benefits from clearly labeled qualitative and quantitative parts. It defines a population using quantitative data, and then refines results through qualitative data (Creswell, 2012).

Participants

The population for this study included students majoring in agricultural communications at Oklahoma State University. This population was purposive and chosen because of the goals of the research. Respondents who participated in the first two data collection instruments were students enrolled in an agricultural communications media-writing course and who attended an optional field trip to various media-related professional workplaces. Students who attended this field trip in the same class during a previous semester were included in the focus group in order to provide more responses and adequate data.

About the Field Trip

The field trip from which the research was based was a voluntary trip offered to students in a writing course in the agricultural communications department. The course, AGCM 3113: Writing for Agricultural Publications, focuses on teaching students skills needed to work in the communications and journalism industry: interviewing, reporting, writing and editing. A total of 34 students were enrolled in the course when the researcher collected data; however, only 14 students attended the trip.

The one-day trip was held on a Friday in late November. The instructor did not require students to participate in the trip, and no incentive was offered to those who elected to participate. Each semester the trip is administered, the instructor choses various media- and communications-related organizations within the Oklahoma City metro area that either employee graduates of the agricultural communications program or have some relation to the major. The students then meet with an employee at that location who talks about their job, how their education relates to their job, and answers any questions the students may have about what they do or how to get started within the industry.

On the trip the researcher studied, four locations were visited, in which the students met with five employees. The first location was the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma. Students there met with an alumna of the program who worked at the food bank as a communications officer. Another alumna of the program, a field representative for a congressman, also talked to the students while they visited the food bank. The second location visited was The Oklahoma City Zoo. There students met with a public relations officer who was not an alumna of the program. The third location visited was

Schnake Turnbo Frank, a large public relations firm. The students met with a partner of the firm, who was an alumus of the program. The final location the students visited was *Oklahoma Today,* a state-owned tourism magazine. There the students spoke with an editor who was not an alumnus of the program.

The purpose of the trip, according to the instructor of the course, was expose students to various employment opportunities related to their major.

Instrumentation

The study included two different data collection instruments. The first was a modified version of an instrument originally developed by Orion and Hofstein (1991). The instrument was a pre- and post-test questionnaire, using a 4-point Likert scale, distributed both before and after the class field trip. The second instrument was an open-response questionnaire also distributed before and after the trip along with the first instrument. A third form of data collection, a focus group, was also administered three months after the field trip.

The first instrument was a 32-question four-point Likert questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from Orion and Hofstien's (1991) instrument that assessed students' attitudes about scientific field trips. The instrument was designed to investigate "past experience in the field, attitudes towards the subject matter, and previous attitudes towards field trips" (Orion & Hofstein, 1994, p. 1103). The instrument assessed five dimensions of students' attitudes toward the field trip. The Cronbach's α coefficient score

of each dimension of the original instrument, as well as the number of statements relating to each dimension, can be found in Table 1

Table 1

Dimension and Respective Cronbach Score of Original Instrument (*Orion & Hoffstien, 1991)*

Dimension	Number of items	Cronbach's α coefficient
The Field Trip as a Learning Tool	11	0.87
Individualized learning as learning method during a field trip	3	0.62
The social aspect of field trips	8	0.71
The adventure aspect of field trips	4	0.78
The environmental aspect of field trips	6	0.77

According to Creswell (2012), a Cronbach score is used to measure internal consistency of an instrument. Creswell (2012) defines a .7 Cronbach score or greater as acceptable, with anything less being questionable. While Orion and Hoffstien (1991) wrote that the individualized learning dimension was not as strong as the rest of the dimensions, they decided to include it in an effort to maintain the structure and consistency of the instrument (Orion and Hoffstien, 1991).

The original instrument focused on students' experiences with a geology field trip; however, the original authors recommended the instrument "be used to assess student perceptions in other scientific disciplines" (Orion & Hoffstien, 1991, p. 520). The

original instrument was modified slightly to accurately assess the topic, a communications field trip) , instead of geology field trip. The modified instrument was reviewed by a five-member panel of experts composed of academics and experienced researchers within the communications and journalism fields. The panel suggested minor changes regarding phrasing and order of the questions. Examples of selected questions from each dimension can be found in Table 2, while the modified instrument in its entirety can be found in Appendix A.

Table 2

Sample Questions of Each Dimension of the Modified Orion & Hoffstein (1991) Instrument

Dimension	Sample Questions
1. The Field Trip as a Learning Tool	1. Field trips help in understanding material learning in class 15. Field trips are important because they demonstrate and illustrate concepts learned in class
2. Individualized learning as learning method during a field trip	21. Working individually during a field trip is important for understanding the material 31. Field trips make me take an interest in, and search for, additional information
3. The social aspect of field trips	6. I would like to have more field trips since they are a lot of fun 20. The good atmosphere with my friends during a field trip is the main reason for my enjoyment of the event
4. The adventure aspect of field trips	4. What I like in a field trip is the adventure; e.g. going to multiple places, fast-paced nature etc. 8. I like field trips that involve a lot of walking
5. The environmental aspect of field trips	13. The AGCM field trip increases one's awareness of the communications industry

	22. Familiarity with different types of employers increases my connection to the AGCM industry

The second instrument was an open-response questionnaire consisting of 10 questions. Questions included some demographic questions, such as "What is your major/majors" and "How many internships have you completed for academic credit." The main purpose of the instrument, however, was to gauge students' thoughts about their careers before and after the field trip as well as to assess what skills they believe are relevant to their future careers. The second instrument was also reviewed and approved by the same panel of experts. The researcher developed the questionnaire to determine participants' perspectives regarding the professional relevance of courses in their major and skills they are learning in class. These responses were coded using initial coding.

The third data collection method consisted of a focus group. The participants were asked six questions in order to further define their thoughts on the field trip and its effectiveness. Responses were transcribed and coded using in vivo coding.

Procedures

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to data collection. The IRB letter of approval for this study, application AG1552, is included in Appendix C. The researcher, who also was a teaching assistant for the course that is the focus of this research study, informed students that he was conducting research on the planned class field trip and informed them that their participation in this research was voluntary. The researcher then explained the purpose of

his research. An Informed Consent Form was obtained to determine participation. Participants were told to create a code name that would not identify them but would allow the researcher to link their pre- and post-field trip instruments. The participants were then given the first instrument, as found in Appendix A. After participants completed the first instrument, the second was administered. The second instrument can be found in Appendix B. The researcher told the participants to use the same code name for the second instrument. After the participants completed both instruments, the researcher thanked them for their time and dismissed them.

The researcher attended the field trip with the class. At the conclusion of the field trip, the researcher asked attendees who had volunteered to complete the pre-test instruments to meet in a classroom on campus to fill out the post-test instruments. The final step in data collection was a focus group that took place approximately three months after the field trip. The focus group took place on the Oklahoma State University campus on February 18, 2015. This was the researcher's second attempt at conducting a focus group, as the first, scheduled the month before, had little turnout. The focus group lasted approximately 40 minutes. The researcher asked six questions and recorded the conversation.

Data Analysis

Results of the first questionnaire were entered into Idiogrid Version 2.4, a software program that provides Observation Oriented Modeling data analysis. Each of the five factors of the first instrument was analyzed in OOM. The other two data collection

steps were analyzed in a qualitative manner. The first, using initial coding, and the second using in vivo coding.

Observation Oriented Modeling

Observation oriented modeling (OOM), unlike most traditional statistical analysis, relies on patterns and observations within the data (Valentine & Buchanan, 2013). OOM offers an alternative to null hypothesis significance testing. According to Grice (2011), OOM allows researchers to approach their data "from the philosophical position that recognizes the primacy of the real" (p. 84). OOM frees the researcher from "making unwarranted assumptions about nature of his or her method" (Grice, 2011, p.84). Allowing the researcher to then "grant primacy to reality and tailor his or her methods and analyses to best address the natures of the persons, animals, or things under investigation via material, formal, efficient, and final causes" (Grice, 2011, p.84). The low sample size in this study is best suited for OOM because OOM does not revolve around significance and confidence intervals, and simply allows the researcher to infer causal attributions and observations about the data.

Initial Coding

Initial coding, also commonly referred to as open coding, according to Saldaña (2016), "breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examines them, and compares them for similarities and differences" (p. 115). Initial coding is "appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 115) but is noted as creating

temporary and provisional codes that can later be analyzed and built-upon to create themes (Saldaña, 2016).

The justification for the use of initial coding is that the process can range from descriptive to conceptual and theoretical. The researcher's inference of the data, through his or her experiences and knowledge, creates a supplementary analytical focus of the data (Saldaña, 2016).

In Vivo Coding

In vivo coding are codes that refer to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record, or the terms used by the participants themselves (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106). In vivo coding is appropriate for "studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 116).
According to Charmaz (2014) , in vivo codes "can provide a crucial check on whether you have grasped what is significant" (p. 135) to the participant. This allows the researcher to "condense and crystalize" the meanings of the codes (Saldaña, 2016, p. 136).

Validating the Findings through Triangulation

In order to ensure the validity of the findings and interpretation of data, the researcher used triangulation. Creswell (2011) defines triangulation as "the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research" (p. 259). Triangulation is key because it "ensures the study will be accurate because the information draws on

multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes…it encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and credible" (Creswell, 2011, p. 259).

In the case of this particular study, both the methods of data collection and the types of data were triangulated. The data collection, as described above, included quantitative data from a pre- and post-test survey instrument, qualitative data from a 10-question free response survey, and qualitative data from the results of a focus group session. The three different methods of data collection used in the study, and the three different types of data were all used to quantify and validate the themes and findings of the study through triangulation. The results of this can be found in the next chapter.

Summary

This chapter clarified the rational for using a mixed-methods approach for this study. The rationale behind mix-methods was that it provided the best method of data analysis and is able to achieve alternative perspectives that are not reduced to a single understanding (Mertens, 2009). This chapter also described the uses of the three different instruments and the justification for their selection. The chapter then concluded with an overview of the data analysis.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine students' perceptions of a field trip. The study is also intended to help instructors better understand how field trips in the social sciences influence students' expectations regarding potential careers and real-world workplace expectations. This study used surveys and focus groups as means of investigation. This chapter describes the demographic characteristics of participants in an effort to understand the participants. This chapter also includes results associated with each of the three research questions that guided the study.

Participants

The sample for this study included students majoring in agricultural communications at Oklahoma State University. Fourteen participants the completed the pre- and post-test instrument and the open-response instrument. In addition to those 14 students, a group of 12 participants attended a focus group approximately three months after the field trip. Those that attended the focus group had either attended the field trip in the semester prior and had completed the first two instruments, or had been on the field trip in the previous year.

Ordinal Pattern Analysis

Sum totals of the Likert instrument for the 14 pairs were calculated and then analyzed using Idiogrid Version 2.4, a software program that analyzes data using Observation Oriented Modeling. Ordinal Pattern Analysis looks at the trends in data, requiring the user to specify a prediction of a pattern the data will take (Grice, 2011). Because the researcher's interest in students' attitudes toward field trips, he predicted that the sum total of each construct of the first instrument would increase. That is to say, participants would rate their experiences more highly after taking the field trip, as shown through the sum totals of the pre- and post-test instrument.

In Ordinal Pattern Analysis, patterns are classified as correct or incorrect. Essentially, the classification refers to whether the researcher's prediction regarding the pattern of data is either correct or incorrect. Table 3 shows the amount of correct classifications in each of the five dimensions of the first instrument.

Table 3

Ordinal Pattern Analysis Results for Each Construct of First Instrument

Dimension number and name	Classifiable pairs of observations	Correct classifications	Percent correct classifications
1. Field trip as a learning tool	14	9	64.29%
2. Individualized learning during a field trip	14	3	21.43%
3. Social aspect of field trips	14	9	64.29%
4.Adventure aspect of field trips	14	2	14.29%
5. Environmental aspect of field trips	14	9	64.29%

For construct one, “Field trip as a learning tool,” a total of nine out of 14 classifications were correct, or about 64%. This shows that more than half of the participants found the trip to be a learning tool after the field trip than they did before. For construct two, Individualized Learning, only three of the 14 classifications were correct, about 21%. This shows that not many participants felt that the trip fostered individualized learning. For construct three, nine of the 14 classifications were correct. Over half the participants felt that the trip embraced a social component. For construct four, Adventure Aspect, only two of the 14 classifications were correct, just under 15%. Twelve participants did not find the trip to have any sort of adventure, or did not find the movement from location to location to be adventurous. The last construct, Environmental, had nine correct classifications. Participants found the trip to foster their sense of environment within the communication and journalism industry.

Results of the Open-ended Questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire were analyzed for frequencies as well as coded using initial coding protocols. Participants were asked to list as many career options as they could think of for an agricultural communications graduate. Participants listed a combined total of 94 career options before the field trip, and interestingly, also listed 94 as a combined total after the field trip. This makes for an average of 6.7 career options per participant.

Participants were then asked to list where they saw themselves working both one and five years after graduation. Results of these questions for both the pre- and post-test can be found in Table 4 and 5, respectively.

Because the responses were open-ended, the researcher coded each participant initially, and then again using these codes to group responses into a total of 12 common themes. It should be noted that participants were able to list more than one industry in their responses, and several participants listed more than one type of career path in their response.

Table 4

Where Participants Saw Themselves Working a Year and Five Years After Graduation - Pre-test

Industry Specified (One year after graduation)	Number of times specified (one year after graduation	Industry Specified (five years after graduation)	Number of times specified (five years after graduation)
Magazine	1	Magazine	4
Newspaper	1	Newspaper	1
Public Relations	7	Public Relations	6
Education	1	Marketing	1
Graduate School	1	Graduate School	1
Industry/Breed Publication	2	Industry/Breed Publication	1
Event Planning	2	Legal Field	1
Company Communications	2	Event Planning	1
Don't know/Not specified	1	Company Communications	1
		Don't know/Not specified	1

In the pre-test, “public relations” was the industry in which most participants reported seeing themselves working both one and five years after graduation, with a total of seven participants saying they would work in this industry. The second most common industry was “magazine,” with four participants reporting they would work in that industry five years after graduation.

Table 5

Where Participants See Themselves Working a Year and Five Years After Graduation - Post-test

Industry Specified (one year after graduation)	Number of times specified (one year after graduation	Industry Specified (five years after graduation)	Number of times specified (five years after graduation)
Magazine	2	Magazine	3
Newspaper	1	Public Relations	6
Public Relations	5	Education	1
Education	1	Event Planning	1
Event Planning	1	Industry/Breed Publication	1
Industry/Breed Publication	2	Marketing	3
Marketing	2	Political Field	1
Legal Field	2	Don’t know/Unspecified	2
Political Field	1		
Don’t know/ Unspecified	1		

The results of the post-test were more evenly spread out. While public relations was still among the most popular industry listed, with five participants listing it as where they saw themselves working one year after graduation and six listing it five years after graduation, other career options were also popular among the respondents. Most of the other industries were listed by more than one participant. “Marketing” and “magazine” had three mentions when asked where participants saw themselves working five years after graduation.

Participants were then asked which classes they thought would be the most useful in their future careers. The results of this question can be seen for both the pre- and post-test in Table 6 and 7, respectively.

The responses to this question were open-ended, with most participants listing more than once course in their response. The researcher coded each participant’s responses initially, and then again using these codes to group responses into the official course titles. If a participant did not specify a course or include parts of a course title into their response, that response was coded into a “General” category (e.g. “writing courses,” “publishing courses”). Participants had the option to list courses they had not yet taken or were currently in the process of taking.

Table 6

Agricultural Communications Courses Participants Believed to be Most Useful in Their Future Careers - Pre-test

Course Name	Number of Times Mentioned
AGCM 3113: Writing for Agricultural Publications	2
AGCM 3123: New Media in Agricultural Communications	1
AGCM 3213: Layout and Design for Agricultural Publications	6
AGCM 3223: Web Design for Agricultural Organizations	3
AGCM 4113: Writing and Editing for Agricultural Publications	2
AGCM 4403: Planning Campaigns for Agriculture and Natural Resources	3
AGCM 4413: Capstone for Agricultural Communications	1
Publishing Courses (No specific courses referenced)	1
Writing Courses (No specific courses referenced)	6
All Courses	1

In the pre-test, the layout and design course and writing courses (unspecified) were among the more popular responses, with six mentions each. The web design course and the campaigns course were the second most frequent responses, with three mentions each.

Table 7

Agricultural Communications Courses Participants Believed to be Most Useful in Their Future Carriers - Post-test

Course Name	Number of Times Mentioned
AGCM 3113: Writing for Agricultural Publications	1
AGCM 3123: New Media in Agricultural Communications	7
AGCM 3213: Layout and Design for Agricultural Publications	10
AGCM 3223: Web Design for Agricultural Organizations	2
AGCM 3233: Basic Photography and Photo Editing for Agriculture	1
AGCM 4113: Writing and Editing for Agricultural Publications	4
AGCM 4403: Planning Campaigns for Agriculture and Natural Resources	2
Publishing Courses (No specific courses referenced)	3
Writing Courses (No specific courses referenced)	6
All Courses	1

In the post-test, the layout and design course was the most frequently mentioned course in participants' responses with a total of 10 mentions. The new media course was second in total mentions with seven. Writing courses were the third most frequently

mentioned, with six mentions for writing courses in general (no specific course) and four mentions for the writing and editing course.

Importance of writing skills

Participants were also asked to describe the importance of writing skills in their future careers. In the pre-test, a majority of the participants (10 out of 14) used the word "important" in their response. Others used words like "crucial," or described how good writing was necessary to their perceived future. One participant explained how writing is a "good indicator of how you can communicate," while a different participant expressed that "writing will become a major part of many careers that I am interested in."

Similarly, in the post-test, more than 50%, or eight out of 14, of participants used the word "important" in their response. However, the responses in the post-test contained a much higher frequency of adverbs such as "very" and "super." One participant noted that they believed they would "write for every job you will ever have in this industry," with another arguing along the same lines by writing that "every professional career involves writing."

It is important to note that in neither the pre-test nor post-test did a participant write that writing was not important to their future career.

Perceived preparedness

Participants were also asked how prepared they believed they were for a job in the communications field outside of the agricultural industry. All participants were students enrolled in an agricultural communications program, but took courses that taught

standard communications skills that could later transfer to any communications-related job. In the pre-test, six out of 14 participants described themselves as "very" prepared for communications jobs outside of the agricultural industry. Two participants said they were "somewhat prepared" for a job. One wrote they felt "prepared outside of the industry good enough [sic]" but then noted that they are "not fully prepared until you experience it." Three participants said they were either "adequately" prepared or "getting there." One participant said they were "not very prepared," and another responded that they "need an internship to prepare my skills."

The results of the post-test showed that five participants reported they were "very" prepared. One participant was surprised at their level of perceived preparedness after the trip saying that they were "More prepared than I thought I would be." Two participants believed they were prepared due to professors' knowledge and their previous internship experiences. Two participants noted that they were "pretty prepared" while one participant just responded "prepared" with no adverb. Two participants expressed mixed preparedness, with one saying that they felt they are "half way there" and the other responding that after they graduate they will "be more prepared."

Results of the Focus Group

The third and final data collection method was a focus group conducted with 14 participants. Some of the participants attended on the field trip in the previous semester, while others attended further in the past. The conversation during the focus group was recorded and transcribed, and then coded using an in vivo method. The coding resulted in

four themes, statements from each theme can be found in Table 8, the results are also discussed in detail below.

Table 8

Statements of Each Theme of Focus Group

Theme	Statements
Not a cookie cutter job	"No place is the same, it's definitely not a cookie cutter job."
	"Whenever we went to *(a state travel magazine)* like I guess I didn't realize how much work goes into what they do and their jobs just seem very overwhelming, but it good for us to see that before we get ourselves into that situation if we weren't prepared for it."
	"I feel like some of the employers focused on on-the-job training too, you get the impression in college that everything you learn in class is going to be perfect and you're going to know it and pretty sure you only know like half the job."
Not a cookie cutter job	"Each place is different and they have their specific ways of doing things."
	"The variety of places we went to, like, they were so different."
	"[Employers visited] did [their jobs] in such different ways and that was really neat to see that even if you're just in journalism or public relations that there is variety of things to do in that which was neat."
Writing was their main thing	"Most of them [employers visited] were writers"
	"Most of the jobs we saw were writing."

	"Whenever we went to *(a state travel magazine)* like I guess I didn't realize how much work goes into what they do and their jobs just seem very overwhelming, but it good for us to see that before we get ourselves into that situation if we weren't prepared for it."
Always have to be on their toes	
	"I feel like some of the employers focused on on-the-job training too, you get the impression in college that everything you learn in class is going to be perfect and you're going to know it and pretty sure you only know like half the job."
Switch-up the locations	"Maybe switch-up the locations we go to, like maybe different locations for different students? So we get a broader, I mean we got a broad range going, but I think it would be cool to visit other places too besides the regular places every year."
	"Maybe, like, form a list [of possible locations] and then pass out during class and then have students check off which places are most interesting"
Switch-up the locations	
	"I think it would have been interesting to see more diversity in the jobs… like it would have been cool to see someone who was doing design or talk to the layout person from that magazine"

Not a cookie cutter job

Participants expressed that the field trip showed them that their degree was extremely versatile, and that the jobs they could end up working in were not the same across the board. Participants all expressed that they enjoyed the variety in the employers that they visited. When asked what they enjoyed about the field trip, Participant One said she liked "the variety of places we went to…they were so different." Participant Three

agreed saying that she "liked the fact that we got to see so many different things." Participant Four then built upon that statement by saying that the trip "showed you the different things you could do. Or the different organizations you could work for, depending on what route you go."

Participants also expressed they believed the point of the trip was to show the versatility of their degree. Participant Five answered, "to see how versatile our ag-comm degree is." Participant Three also expressed her appreciation for the field trip and the variety in employment it showed: "I don't know how I would of gotten the opportunity any other way, to, like, see those types of companies." Participant Four also expressed enjoyment in the trip's ability to show how tasks across similar jobs varied, saying: "It was really neat to see that even if you're just in journalism or P.R. that there is variety of things to do in that, which was neat."

Writing was their main thing

When asked what skill the employers they visited thought was the most important to have, five participants said writing. When asked if anyone disagreed, nobody spoke. When asked why they thought writing was the skill most valued, participants expressed that they believed it was their job. Participant Nine expressed that "most of them [employers visited] were writers"

Always have to be on their toes

Participants also expressed that the field trip opened their eyes to things about the workplace they don't think they would have learned in the classroom. One participant expressed her surprise in how much work goes on at some of the workplaces they visited:

"Whenever we went to *[state travel magazine]*, like, I guess I didn't realize how much work goes into what they do and their jobs just seem very overwhelming. But it is good for us to see that before we get ourselves into that situation if we weren't prepared for it."

Another participant expressed a similar feeling, saying that it was nice to see that not everything is as it seems in the college classroom: "I feel like some of the employers focused on on-the-job training, too, you get the impression in college that everything you learn in class is going to be perfect and you're going to know it and pretty sure you only know like half the job." Participant Three built on that comment, adding: "Each place is different and they have their specific ways of doing things. They'll teach you how they want it done."

Switch-up the locations

Although students seemed satisfied overall with the field trip, they did expresses some displeasure with a few aspects of the trip. One of the first things that participants expressed was that while there was a variety of places visited, it would have been nice to get student input when planning the trip. Participant Two also thought it might be nice to see other places, besides the same locations visited year after year: "Maybe different locations for different students? So we get a broader, I mean we got a broad range going, but I think it would be cool to visit other places too besides the regular places every year." Participant Six also mentioned perhaps using student input to plan the locations as well: "Maybe, like, form a list [of possible locations] and then pass it out during class and then have students check off which places are most interesting."

Another problem students noted about the field trip was that they felt that none of the locations dealt with agriculture. Participant Seven noted this wasn't an issue for herself, but had heard other students gripe about it: "I didn't really care, but, um, not many of them were very ag-based, it being like an ag-based major." Participant Five agreed with Seven's statement: "I don't want to do ag, so it really isn't that big of a deal, but I can see it being a point, [the major] being in ag."

Summary

This chapter presented data of a pre- and post-test instrument measuring students' perceptions of field trips before and after a trip. It then presented the results of a pre- and post- open-ended instrument. Finally, the chapter looked at the themes resulting from the focus group that was conducted a couple of months after the first two instruments were administered.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the study, conclusions based on the results, implications and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this study was to determine students' perceptions of a field trip, by using a survey and focus groups as a means of investigation.

Summary of the Study

Field trips have been studied as an effective method of teaching children since the early 1900s (Falk & Balling, 1980). Previous research on field trips primarily focused on hard science curriculum taught at the elementary and secondary levels (Falk and Balling, 1980). What little research exists at the higher education level focuses primarily on out-of-classroom lab or clinical experiences (Scarce, 1997).

Experiential learning was used as the theoretical framework for this study. David Kolb proposed that experiential learning theory is conducted in four stages: concrete experiences reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2014). Experiential learning, according to Kolb, is built upon the theories of

John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piage.

Field trips are often seen as examples of experiential learning (Wright, 2002). Rick Scarce wrote that "field trips may best be seen as an example of short term experimental education" (Scarce, 1997, p. 219). Since Scarce's (2002) publication, the term "short-term experiential education" has been used to study field trips, particularly those at the college level (Higgins et al., 2012; Wright, 2000).

Experiential education methods are also used to research communications education at the college level. Steel et al. (2007) found that experiential teaching methods in communications and journalism instruction were beneficial because of the way they could be used to replicate a "real-world scenario." In addition, Pennington (2012) also found that experiential methods were key to the success of teaching high school students basic videography skills.

The study used a mixed methods design in an effort to answer three research questions. Mixed methods research is defined by Creswell (2012) as a "procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study" (p. 535). Mixed methods are often used when one type of research is not enough to answer the research question or questions (Creswell, 2012).

This study's three instruments were used in an effort to elicit data to answer the three research questions. The first instrument was a version of Orion and Hofstein (1991) pre- and post-test administered on a 4-point Likert scale given before and after a class field trip. The second instrument was an open-response questionnaire given with the pre-

and post-test before and after the field trip. The third instrument was a focus group administered three months after the field trip.

The results of the first instrument were entered into Idiogrid Version 2.4, a software program that provides Observation Oriented Modeling data analysis and an ordinal pattern analysis of the results. The other two data collection methods were analyzed in a qualitative manner using initial and in vivo coding.

Summary of the Findings

The ordinal pattern analysis of the pre- and post-test, the researcher had correctly classified three of the five dimensions. The dimensions that were classified correctly were: 1. Field trip as a learning tool, 3. Social aspect of field trips, and 5. Environmental aspect of field trips. In each of these dimensions the researcher found that he had correctly classified nine out of 14 pairs, or in other words, 64% of participants' perceptions had increased along these dimensions.

The results of the open-ended instrument found that participants highly valued their writing skills, both before and after the field trip. It also found that students felt equally prepared for a job in the communications industry before and after the field trip. The results also showed that most participants planned to enter the public relations and magazine industries. It also found that participants listed, on average, the same amount of possible careers before and after the trip. The open-ended instrument found that students valued social media and design courses at a much higher frequency after the field trip than before. Before the field trip, AGCM 3123: New Media in Agricultural Communications was mentioned once, and AGCM 3213: Layout and Design for

Agricultural Publications was mentioned six times. However, after the field trip, when asked the same question, AGCM 3123, the new media course, was mentioned seven times, and AGCM 3213 the layout and design course was mentioned 10 times.

The results of the focus group were organized into four distinct themes. The first theme reflected participants' enjoyment the versatility and the verity of the places visited on the field trip. Another theme expressed that participants thought the purpose of the field trip was to show how limitless the agricultural communications degree was and the variety of employment they could pursue with it. Several focus group participants also noted that all of the places they visited featured writers, who heavily expressed the importance of writing skills. All participants noted that they all knew that writing was important, but it was good to hear it from people other than their instructor. Participants also noted that it was helpful to see how chaotic and haphazard a workplace environment can be. Participants specifically noted that they learned that on-the-job training is a large part of employment and that no two days in the office are the same. Participants expressed that they didn't realize how much work happened behind the scenes of an organization, and felt that the field trip offered a good learning opportunity to see what working in the industry is actually like. Finally, participants expressed that, while the variety of places visited was welcome, none of them seemed to fit into the agriculture aspect of the major. Participants noted that they would liked to have some input when choosing what places were visited during the field trip, and that visiting different places each year would keep the trip fresh and exciting.

Conclusions

The Research Objectives of this study were to "Determine the attitude of a class of agricultural communications students' towards class field trips," "Describe the influence of a class field trip on agricultural communication students' career expectations," and to "Describe the influence of a class field trip on agricultural communications students' attitudes toward the relevance of writing in their future careers." Based on the findings of this study, the first research objective can be addressed by primarily interpreting the data of the first instrument and the ordinal pattern analysis provided in Chapter IV. In addition, statements from the result of the focus group can used to help triangulate results. The second and third research objectives can be answered using the findings of the open-ended instrument in conjunction with the focus group findings.

Attitude of students toward class field trips

The ordinal pattern analysis found that the researcher had correctly classified observations for the following three out of the five dimensions of the instrument: "Field trip as a learning tool," "Social aspect of field trips," and "Environmental aspect of field trips."

It is not surprising that participants found the field trip to be an adequate learning tool, as several focus group participants expressed that the field trip had opened their eyes to the inner workings of the communications industry. Multiple participants suggested that they would not have learned about the workplace without an experience like the field trip, and noted that they appreciated how seeing it in person gave them a better

understanding of what post-graduation life might entail. This relates back to Eshach (2006) who wrote that a field trip "changes the routine" (p. 197) of everyday learning. The ability for students to get outside of the routine classroom and experience the industry was seen as something that they felt was important to their futures. The ability to see first-person what a job is like behind the scenes proved to be a powerful tool in the eyes of impressionable undergraduate students. The old mantra of "when am I ever going to use this" truly comes to life during the field trip as students see and experience what they learn in the classroom is directly related to the workplace, and is something that employers look for in candidates. These findings align with Wright (2002) who wrote that field trips allow the subject to "come to life" (p.121) for the students.

Field trips have always been social experiences. Since the days of the yellow bus and packed lunches, students have always looked forward to experiencing new things and exploring new places with their peers. The time spent traveling from location to location might have also affected the findings of this study. The long travel time that participants experienced during the trip provided ample time to chat and get to know one another better as well as build upon existing relationships.

The correct classification of the environmental aspect dimension of the first instrument is perhaps the least-surprising finding of the three. The entire field trip revolved around showing participants different work environments, and exposing them to potential employment scenarios. The results of the focus group solidify these findings as participants repeatedly told the researcher they enjoyed the myriad of places visited and the differences among the locations. The exposure to different places and environments seems to have left an impression on the participants, as it was one of the first topics

discussed during the focus group. The participants were engaged and expressed enjoyment in not visiting similar locations. By keeping the students moving to and from different locations, the instructor was able to create a sense of excitement and novelty, something that the participants thoroughly enjoyed.

The two dimensions that were not correctly classified by the researcher were the "individualized learning during a field trip," and the "adventure aspect of field trips." Participants perhaps were not as inclined to learn individually during the field trip possibly because there was no reason for them to do so. The instructor did not require them to complete any activities or post-trip assignments as the main purpose of the trip was to expose them and to get them thinking about what their future may hold. The extremely social nature of the participants may have also hampered individualized learning on the trip. Furthermore, the small number of participants who went on the trip (n=14) may have made it easier for participants to group together and gain experiences as a cohort rather than at an individual level. The failure to correctly classify the adventure aspect can be partially blamed on the instrument's adaptation from its original use for a geology field trip to one that focuses on social sciences. Because the trip didn't involve any sort of natural exploration, it comes as no surprise that participants did not find the trip to be an "adventure."

Influence of a field trip on students' career expectations

The open-ended instrument provided mixed results in regard to the second research objective. Participants listed exactly the same amount of possible careers both before and after the field trip. In addition, when asked where they saw themselves

working both one and five years after graduation, participants mainly listed the public relations, magazine and marketing industries as future employers. It is important to note that prior to the field trip participants had only mentioned the marketing industry once, but after the trip it was mentioned by five different participants. It should also be noted that the places of employment also remained constant, in that participants were not been any more specific in where they imagined being employed after the trip than they were prior to the trip.

These findings show that participants have a secure grasp on where they believe they will be employed after graduation. Even after seeing different employment locations, participants seemed headstrong on what they wish their career path to be. This can be seen as a good thing, as the dedication that students have in terms of future employment may be a strong indicator that they are willing to remain persistent in achieving their goals and dreams. It also shows that even when exposed to the inner workings of the industry, students are as determined as ever to work in those industries. While students learned how chaotic a magazine newsroom or public relations office may seem, they are passionate in their desire to work at those locations. The exposure to the 'behind the scenes' of a future workplace can be seen as motivation to work in those places, which again shows strong determination and will of the students. These findings align with Steel (2007) who noted that students noted that the "chaos" and fast pace of the newsroom helped them learn. It is important to note that while Steel's (2007) students actually participated in simulated newsroom, the participants in this study simply observed one. This finding is important because it shows that students are able to learn by observing a newsroom, as opposed to participating in a simulated one.

The findings of the relevant skills portion of the open-ended instrument also presents interesting results. Before the field trip, only six participants mentioned the layout and design course to be useful in their future careers. In addition to that class, only one student wrote that the new media course would be useful in their future career. However, after the field trip a total of 10 students mentioned the layout and design course to be useful in their future, and an astonishing seven participants listed the new media course. The number of participants mentioning the layout and design course mirrors the number of participants wishing to work in the magazine industry, it is logical that those students realize that layout and design software is detrimental to their future careers. The slight increase in those who mentioned the course could possibly be related to visiting a magazine newsroom and having the idea of working in that location fresh in the participants minds. The spike in mentions of the new media course is an interesting finding. This increase could possibly be attributed to the employers mention that social media an emerging technology is extremely important in their organizations. Participants on the field trip were told more than once by the organizations they visited that social media is something that they all have to keep in mind in their organizations. Participants also could have mentioned the class because a public relations employee with a city zoo told the field trip attendees that learning emerging and popular social media platforms are important because they are a huge part of her job. Also, the field trip might have made participants realize that these technologies are important for businesses and organizations, not just for social entertainment and communicating peer to peer. Participants might not have realized how important staying relevant and keeping up to speed with technology is for business and media organizations.

Relevance of writing in their future careers

Participants noted that writing was an extremely important skill to have both before and after the field trip. When asked the importance of writing skills on the second instrument, not a single participant wrote that writing wasn't important. Furthermore, all of the participants in the focus group agreed that writing was important to each organization they visited and each person they talked to during the trip. This show that participants held a firm grasp on the importance of writing. They realize that writing is not only important to communicate to the public, but is used heavily in internal communications as well.

In addition when asked what courses would be useful, there was no increase in the frequency of writing courses mentioned after the field trip, when compared to the pre-trip results. These results show that instructors are doing an excellent job of conveying the importance of writing to their students. Furthermore, it shows that even students who wish to work in the design and layout niches realize the importance of writing.

Recommendations

The following discussion includes recommendations for practice and further research as related to the findings of this study.

Recommendations for agricultural communications instructors

The findings above highlight the successes in agricultural communications instruction, but also show that students often feel that their communications-related education does not reflect the "agriculture" sector. During the focus group, more than one participant mentioned that while they enjoyed the trip, they believed that it didn't incorporate any sort of agricultural aspects. This may not be a reflection of the skills-based education they receive as much as their interpretation of the subjective word "agriculture." Students, especially those who plan to work in a communications-related position, should have a better understanding of agriculture outside of cows, plows and sows. For example, participants did not clearly see the link between the zoo and the agricultural industry. Furthermore they did not associate a public relations industry as having to do with agriculture, even though the person they met with was a graduate of their program and mentioned that the firm frequently dealt with agriculture-based clients. In fact, in three of the five stops during the trip, including a major metropolitan food bank, students met with an alum of their program. Yet, they don't seem to relate that to "agriculture." Instructors should note that students may have a difficult time linking agriculture to the "big picture" and how it affects more than just what is on the plate during meal times.

Instructors should also take mind to students' preferences. While it is unrealistic to plan an entire trip around students' tastes and choices, instructors should try to at least incorporate a majority of the students' goals and desires into the trip. Multiple focus group participants noted that they felt that the trip wasn't as relevant to them because they planned on going into a design field. However, it should be noted that one

agricultural communications alum the students met was heavily involved in design for her job, and even passed around examples of her design work. Instructors should perhaps poll students before a trip and ask what their goals and learning outcomes of an out of classroom activity might be, then try to incorporate some of those suggestions into the trip.

Instructors should also note that while they are doing an excellent job of teaching students what skills are critical for their future, it appears that many participants were surprised by how different the workplace can be from the classroom and seemed to describe it as "chaotic." Instructors should make note to relay the difference between workplace and classroom, and engage students in critical thinking activities that can simulate the ever-changing workplace environment so they are not surprised when thrown into the workforce. Instructors should also make note to impress upon students the importance of learning and mastering emerging technologies and social media.

Recommendations for future research

Future research should expand on the importance and rational for taking students in social-science majors on field trips, perhaps looking at what aspects of the trip are most beneficial for connecting the classroom to the real world.

Future research should focus more on the reason students have unwavering determination when discussing their future career paths. It would also be interesting to know on a more direct level what kind of impact talking to people within the industry, and visiting where they work can have on the skills and courses students' value. Future

research should also perhaps look at expanding the minds of students to increase their perception of agriculture and its impact on the country and non-traditional industries. It should also consider why students seemed to view various workplaces as “chaotic,” despite those places being seemingly calm environments to the researcher.

Summary

This chapter included a summary of the study, which included relevant literature, methodology and findings. It also included conclusions about the findings in relation to the research objectives of the study. The chapter concluded with recommendations for instructors and for future research

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Adapted from: Orion, N. and Hofstein, A. (1991). The measurement of students' attitudes toward scientific field trips. *Science Education. 75*. p. 513-523.

Directions: Please circle the number indicating how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. Field trips help in understanding material learned in class

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

2. What I like best in field trips are the jokes told by my friends

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

3. Field trips are a waste of time

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

4. What I like in a field trip is the adventure; e.g. going to multiple places, fast-pasted nature, etc.

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

5. I would like to participate in more field trips since this a a good way to learn the subject

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

6. I would like to have more field trips since they are a lot of fun

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

7. The things I observe in field trips do not help me in understanding the material taught in class

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

8. I like field trips that involve a lot of walking

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

9. It is a pity that we do not have more field trips, since this is an enjoyable way to learn

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

10. What I like most about field trips are the adventures

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

11. I like to go on field trips because it is important for me to understand the environment in which I may work

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

12. I return from field trips with a lot of real-world experiences

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

13. The AGCM field trip increases one's awareness of the communications industry

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

14. After a field trip, I do not remember the explanations given by the teacher.

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

15. Field trips are important because they demonstrate and illustrate concepts learned in class

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

16. On the field trip, taking notes interferes with my enjoyment of the event

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

17. The material learned during a field trip will remain in my memory for a long time

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

18. I would like to have more field trips, because they help me learn about agricultural communications

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

19. I do not like field trips that include a lot of walking

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

20. The good atmosphere with my friends during a field trip is the main reason for my enjoying the event

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

21. Working individually during a field trip is important for understanding the material

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

22. The field trip does not contribute to my connection with the AGCM industry

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

23. I would like to have more field trips because they help in building class spirit

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

24. Learning in the classroom is more effective than learning during a field trip

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

25. The field trip increases my enjoyment of the subject matter.

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

26. Familiarity with different types of employers increases my connection to the AGCM industry

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

27. The field trip does not increase my interest in the learning material

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

28. For me, the field trip is important because it helps in getting to know more friends

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

29. I understand employment opportunities better after observing them on a field trip

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

30. I like field trips despite the hassle of traveling

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

31. Field trips make me take an interest in, and search for, additional information

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

32. The comments and jokes made by my classmates during a field trip interfere with my ability to concentrate on learning.

4 -fully agree 3- agree 2-disagree 1-fully disagree

Appendix B

Supplemental Instrument

Please answer each question to the best of your ability. Remember that all responses will remain anonymous.

1. List as many career options as you can think of for an agricultural communications graduate.

2. Where do you see yourself working a year after graduation?

3. Where do you see yourself working 5 years after graduation?

4. Which of the agricultural communications classes do you think will be most useful in your future career?

5. Describe the importance of writing skills in your future career.

6. What type of professional atmosphere would you prefer in your future career?

7. What are your expectations for work-life balance in your future career?

8. How prepared do you think you are for a communications career outside of the agricultural industry?

9. What is your major / majors?

10. How many internships have you completed for academic credit?

Appendix C

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Tuesday, November 10, 2015
IRB Application No	AG1552
Proposal Title:	The effects of a field trip on agricultural communications students' career perceptions
Reviewed and Processed as:	Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 11/9/2018

Principal Investigator(s):

Robert Parlyka
Stillwater, OK 74078

Angel Riggs
440 Ag Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Hugh Crethar, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Robert Partyka

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: THE EFFECTS OF A FIELD TRIP ON AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS STUDENTS' CAREER PERCEPTIONS

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