

PERCEPTIONS OF AGRICULTURAL
COMMUNICATIONS FRESHMEN REGARDING
CURRRICULUM EXPECTATIONS AND
CAREER ASPIRATIONS

By

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Bachelor of Science

Agricultural Communications and Journalism

Utah State University

Logan, Utah

2009

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
December, 2010

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith (D&C 88:118).

“Study” and “Faith” are perfect words to describe the process of my education. From a strong desire to increase my knowledge and understanding of agricultural communications, I was led to seek more study from a good graduate program, and by faith I found an amazing place like Oklahoma State University. I will forever bleed Orange and be proud to be called a Cowboy.

To my fearless leader and committee chair, Tanner, I appreciate all the guidance you have given me through this thesis process. When I doubted my ability to finish on time, you gave me the hope that all things are possible. Your calm, mellow personality kept me grounded during the most stressful times.

Dwayne, thank you for all the academic guidance you provided. I knew if I had a question, you would have the answer. I appreciate the personal sacrifices you made to offer a summer photography class so that I might graduate on time. Somehow you always made me feel like I could accomplish anything.

Shelly, it was your friendly attitude during the 2008 Agricultural Media Summit Conference that convinced me there was no better place to attend graduate school than Stillwater, Oklahoma. I appreciate all the things you taught me about layout and design. Because of your teachings, my skills have increased by 110 percent.

To Dr. Blackwell and Dr. Kelsey, thank you for your passion for teaching. Dr. Blackwell it was your Communications Theory Course that convinced me agricultural communications was still my desired career path; and Dr. Kelsey, without your Research Methods course, writing my thesis correctly would have been impossible.

To the amazing ladies in the Student Success Center: Amy, Mary Ann, Megan, Kelsey and Katie, my experience would have been dull without your friendships. Thank you for wiping my tears, encouraging my heart and making me laugh even during the tough times. I shall miss all of you terribly.

To my adopted parents in Stillwater, Brad and Paula Barnes, thank you for all the free dinners, blessings and words of encouragement. Somehow after talking with you I always felt more motivated and inspired to continue my work in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

To my sweet roommate, Christy, I appreciate the safe environment and friendship your apartment gave me. I will forever remember the long chats at night, the hugs and the “you-can-do-its!”

Finally, to my faithful parents, Mom and Dad: thank you for continually standing by me no matter how crazy my ideas continue to be. Mostly, thank you for teaching me there is a God in Heaven that hears our prayers during easy and difficult times. Without your teachings, the completion of my thesis would have been impossible. I love you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

History has taught man and woman one of the simplest ways to raise awareness of an issue, problem or crisis: is to talk about it to communicate it. Communication is a 13-letter word used to define the “process through which messages, both intentional and unintentional, create meaning” (Baldwin, Perry & Moffitt, 2004, p. 5). More specifically, scientific communicators — employed as editors, journalists, broadcasters, public relations representatives, web designers, and photographers — have the responsibility to stand in the “critical intersection of the practice of science and the public understanding of science” (Treise & Weigold, 2002, p. 320).

Scientific communicators feel strongly their work is important (Treise & Weigold, 2002). Communication is perhaps the only way people can learn and understand the complexity of scientific developments (Treise & Weigold, 2002). “For most people, the reality of science is what they read in the press. They understand science less through direct experience or past education than through the filter of journalistic language and imagery” (Nelkin, 1995, p. 2).

Therefore, the information provided by scientific communicators has the potential to shape the formation of public opinion and influence scientific public policy decisions (Treise & Gold, 2002). A public ignorant to the scientific knowledge may impede financial contributions to scientific research (Treise & Gold, 2002).

While scientific communicators believe their work is important, Treise and Gold (2002) claimed scholars believe the process is executed poorly. The worlds of science and communications can be starkly different for a scientific communicator. Hartz and Chapell (1997) compared the scientist and journalist relationship to the childhood story of *The Tortoise and the Hare*. Scientists operate in a slow-paced environment that demands precision, exactness, and patience (Hartz & Chapell, 1997). Journalists, on the other hand, work in a world of fast-paced deadlines. Most have to tell the story before someone else gets the chance (Hartz & Chapell, 1997). Because of this time factor, scientists complained journalists do not report scientific work accurately (Treise & Weigold, 2002). Yet, journalists felt frustrated in understanding the complexity of scientific research (Treise & Weigold, 2002).

The nature of modern news also presents some issues for a scientific communicator. News values are often framed around sensationalism, hype and conflict (Treise & Weigold, 2002). In addition, many news organizations continue to cut funding and support for scientific stories (Treise & Weigold, 2002). Journalists nor scientists believed this reduction in funding was derived from a lack of public interest (Hartz & Chappell, 1997). Yet, at the same time, scientific communicators expressed difficulty in understanding their diverse audience.

Hartz and Chappell (1997) cited the following quote from Dr. Neal Lane, the head of the National Science Foundation:

With exception of a few people ... we don't know how to communicate with the public. We don't understand our audience well enough — we have not taken the time to put ourselves in the shoes of a neighbor, the brother-in-law, the person who handles our investments — to understand why it's difficult for them to hear us speak. We don't know the language, and we haven't practiced it enough (p.38).

Poor execution in scientific communications is also attributed to a lack of education, both in science and communication (Treise & Weigold, 2002). Palen (1994) argued most journalism graduates are not educated about scientific issues in their basic communications courses. In addition, Treise and Weigold (2002) reported a lack of understanding exists about the use of scientific-based media among communicators, such as a reader's motive or article interest. Mostly, the pressure placed upon scientific communicators to translate unique findings into a language and images understandable to an average person demands a special type of education (Treise & Weigold, 2002).

The unique education of scientific communicators has been important to agriculturists for more than a century. As early as 1905, agricultural journalism was taught as the university level to train writers for the agricultural press (Burnett & Tucker, 2001). By 1908, the first department of agricultural journalism was established in Madison, Wisconsin. Through time, the academic discipline evolved, introducing more strategic communications concepts such as public relations, marketing and advertising (Simon, Robertson & Doerfert, 2003). With the broader skill set, the name "agricultural communications" was chosen around 1970 to represent the academic discipline (Simon, Robertson & Doerfert, 2003). Today, the industry depends on trained agricultural communicators, from more than 25 different programs, to inform the public about

complex agricultural issues such as food safety, environmental conservation, and the scientific practices involved in agricultural production (Burnett & Tucker, 2001; Reisner, 1990). More importantly, the industry depends on talented agricultural communicators to present such scientific information to a diverse audience in interesting and entertaining ways (Buck & Barrick, 1995). Doerfert and Miller (2006) claimed individuals in the agricultural industry will look to agricultural communicators to lead them through great changes of knowledge management. Hence, a great need exists to educate and train such individuals.

Statement of the Problem

In 2007, agricultural communications curriculum evaluation was described as the No. 4 priority by the National Research Agenda of the American Association for Agricultural Education (Osborne, 2007). Researchers have claimed curriculum development and evaluation is necessary to keep up with industry trends, issues and problems (Doerfert & Miller, 2006; Morgan, 2008; Simon, Robertson & Doerfert, 2003; Sprecker & Rudd, 1998; Terry, 1996). However, the industry's needs are only one of three measurements used in curriculum development and evaluation. To be considered effective, any curriculum must balance student interest with faculty vision and industry need (Coffey, 1987).

Of the three categories, students are the major force that drives the shaping and molding of curriculum content (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999). Thus, student characteristics, skills, interests, expectations, and maturity level should receive close scrutiny when selecting content for a curriculum (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999). Therefore, any efforts to alter curriculum should be made for student benefit and not the economy (Beyer &

Liston, 1996). However, the majority of agricultural communications curriculum studies have been written from an industry-need perspective (Doerfert & Miller, 2006; Morgan, 2008; Sprecker & Rudd, 1997, 1998). Few studies have been published about the expectations or characteristics of agricultural communications students (Tucker & Paulson, 1988). Taking such a view, may have the danger to reduce a student to an abstract form of a cerebral statistic, instead of individual thinking, responsive and physical human being (Beyer & Liston, 1996). Hence, Myers (2005) urged educators to “not relinquish the power found in designing curriculum to those who do not intimately know the students” (p. 25). Students should be invited continually to share their opinion regarding what is taught in their classroom (Myers, 2005).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to describe agricultural communications freshmen perceptions of agricultural communications curriculum by describing the personal characteristics, career aspirations and curriculum expectations of agricultural communications freshmen at Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University. In addition, this study described agricultural communications freshmen’s interest and perceived importance of agricultural communications skills.

Objectives of Study

The following research objectives were addressed in this study:

- 1) Describe selected personal characteristics of agricultural communications freshmen;
- 2) Determine the curriculum expectations of agricultural communications freshmen.

- 3) Determine the career aspirations of agricultural communications freshmen.
- 4) Determine and describe agricultural communications freshmen's interest level of skills required by agricultural communications professionals.
- 5) Determine and describe agricultural communications freshmen's perceived importance of the skills required by agricultural communications professionals.

Study Assumptions

- 1) The participants responded honestly to the survey questions.
- 2) The participants had little exposure to agricultural communications courses prior to entering their first year of college.
- 3) The participants had curriculum and career expectations.
- 4) The participants were freshmen in agricultural communications.

Study Limitations

- 1) Data obtained from the participants surveyed was a convenient sample.
- 2) Responses were based on students' self-reported perceptions.
- 3) Previous knowledge of degree plans could have influenced student expectations.
- 4) Some of the first month's class lectures could have influence respondents' answers
- 5) Regional limitation: the instrument was sent to three programs with agricultural communications freshmen: Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to all agricultural communications and related programs.

Definition of Terms

Curriculum: “the sum of learning activities and experiences that a student has under the auspices or direction of the school” (Finch & Crunklin, 1999, p. 11).

Freshmen: a student with less than 24 course credits, enrolled at a university during the Fall 2010 Semester.

National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow Organization: a professional organization composed of college students interested in agricultural communications (Burnett & Tucker, 2001).

Significance of the Study

To achieve an effective curriculum, a balance of student interest, faculty vision and industry need must occur (Coffey, 1987). The material presented in this study contributes to the limited research available about agricultural communications students’ interests. The results of this study will define agricultural communications freshmen’s interests and perceived importance of agricultural communications skills. Such knowledge has the potential to aid educators and professionals in better understanding the future leaders of the industry. In addition, the knowledge acquired on students’ career and curriculum expectations can help educators, advisors and professionals better serve students during their college experiences. Finally, the demographical information identified in this study has the potential to guide agricultural communications program’ recruiters to identify target individuals as potential or future agricultural communications students.

Chapter Summary

Chapter I provided an introduction to the practice of scientific communications as a broad overview of agricultural communications. Scholars have claimed scientific communication is important, but not well executed because of poor relations between journalists and scientists, the nature of modern news, and the level of education provided for professional communicators. In response to these issues, Chapter I established a need to evaluate curriculum correctly by recognizing all important groups: students, faculty and industry. It also provided the problem statement, declaring a lack of information regarding student interest in agricultural communications curriculum. Chapter I outlined the purpose and objectives of the study as well as assumptions, limitations and significance of the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review contains five sections to address the need to analyze student influence in agricultural communications curriculum development and evaluation. The first section outlines the expectancy-value theory to provide a theoretical framework for understanding how students' expectations and values can play a role in curriculum development. The second section provides a conceptual framework of important curriculum factors and stakeholders to consider while developing or evaluating a program's curriculum. The third section provides background of agricultural communications curriculum and establishes the need for evaluation. The fourth section considers the characteristics, careers, and curriculum expectations of professional agricultural communicators. The same variables also are considered in the fifth section; however they are applied to agricultural communications students.

Theoretical framework

For the past 50 years, achievement motivation theorists have tried to explain the psychological reasoning behind achievement-oriented tasks, such as getting a good education (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). One theory, the expectancy-value theory outlined by John Atkinson (1964), claimed motivation is driven by a individual's expectancy to accomplish a goal and the level of value he/she assigns to the achievement of that goal.

Within the theory, *expectancy* is defined as the likelihood of success weighed against an individual's past experiences and *value* is viewed as the reasons behind engaging in the task (Schunk & Pajares, 2005). The usefulness of the expectancy-value theory has been well established and applied in diverse settings (Spence & Helmreich, 1983). Sullins, Hernandez, Fuller and Tashiro (1995) specifically applied the expectancy-value theory to study students' reasoning to major in science.

To understand students' choices and interests in science or agricultural communications, one must understand the expectations a student holds that directly influence his/her achievement choices (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). A student's expectancy is shaped by past experiences in cultural and self-perceived concepts. These different experiences lead the student to make some type of judgment about the probability of success in a particular behavior (Franken, 2007). For example, a student may believe if he/she engages in education, he/she may expect to receive a higher salary, status, privilege or prestige (Spence & Helmreich, 1983). Because past experience directly influences behavior, the assessment of agricultural and communications experiences of agricultural communications freshmen has the potential to reveal information that shapes their ability belief — the probability in which they can succeed in a given task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Hence, curriculum developers could be one step closer in understanding why students choose to major in agricultural communications.

However, expectancy is not considered motivational alone; rather it must be coupled with value to provide sufficient incentive to engage in the task (Franken, 2007). Wigfield and Eccles (1992) claimed research dedicated to understanding an individual's incentive value has been neglected. Eccles et al. (1983) identified three types of

incentive values: attainment value, intrinsic value and utility value. Attainment value is the importance of performing well in the desirable task. It helps to reinforce valued characteristics such as masculinity/femininity or competence. Or achieving the task may offer an environment to fulfill achievement, power or social needs. Intrinsic value is considered the level of interest one has for engaging in a task. People motivated by intrinsic value seek immediate enjoyment from task engagement (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Utility value, on the other hand, is the level of importance an individual assigns to the task. A student may choose to enroll in a course because of its utility value or importance in helping him/her achieve a goal (i.e., a job or graduation) even though a specific class holds no interest value for a student (Eccles et al., 1983). In this case, the value a student places in a specified career outweighs the negative attitude toward the subject matter.

This study applied the expectancy-value theory by describing the intrinsic value or interest level of agricultural communications freshmen and the extrinsic value or importance level students place in the skills required of professional agricultural communicators (see Objective 4 and 5). A strong level of intrinsic motivation among agricultural communications freshmen would imply students' performance is self-initiated, self-sustaining and self-rewarding (Eccles et al., 1983). However, a strong level of extrinsic motivation would imply the need for a constant reward, such as grades or money. Without these external rewards the motivation for task achievement is diminished (Eccles et al., 1983). Therefore, Eccles et al. (1983) recommended parents and teachers to advise students in the development of their natural intrinsic motivations and use external rewards with caution.

Curriculum Evaluation

The purpose of developing and evaluating a vocational education curriculum is to create usable content to aid students in reaching their full potential (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999). Developers seek to identify relevant content that is applicable both in the academic world and the employer environment (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999). The process of identifying significant content can be frustrating because curriculum developers are constantly faced with conflicting factors (see Table 1). These factors influence the process of content development and evaluation. For example, many educators encounter the dilemma between balancing general education with vocational courses. While Finch and Crunkilton (1999) claimed general education is needed to maintain curriculum integrity, it also means less time dedicated to vocational or applied education. In the process, students may “become discouraged and quit because they are forced to ‘endure’ the general subjects” before they enroll in more in-depth courses (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999, p. 172). Whatever the contributing factor, those involved in the planning and evaluation of curriculum must seek to obtain an open mind and select content that is most beneficial to students (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999).

Table 1

Factors Influencing Curriculum Development and Evaluation

Factor	Definition
Time	Days, weeks, months or years given to determine content of curriculum. The length of time directly influences the selection of a curriculum development strategy.
Money	Defines the limits of resources available for curriculum research: travel, consultants, and temporary personnel. It also defines the resources available for professor salaries, educational resources (i.e. computer labs)
Internal and external pressures	The pressures created by people inside the educational environment, i.e. administrators, faculty and students, as well as individuals on the outside like employers, professional organizations and advisory committees.
Federal, state and local requirements	Governmental regulations defining requirements for general education.
Employer need	Content and skill development requested by employers to prepare students to enter the workplace
Balance of academic and vocational education	A factor created because of the conflicting demands governmental academic requirements and vocational employer need.
Level of content	Defines the level of material taught from basic introduction to advanced studies. Generally defined by terms like secondary versus postsecondary

Note. Adapted from “Curriculum development in vocational and technical education: Planning, content and implementation,” by C.R. Finch and J.R. Crunkilton (1999), Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Usable and beneficial curriculum is found by identifying all the content relevant to students and then carefully eliminating limited content outlined by the constraints presented in Table 1. By Finch and Crunkilton (1999) guidelines, educators will find

usable curriculum “that best contributes to students’ benefit given the existing constraints” (p. 166).

Stakeholders Involved in Curriculum Evaluation

Curriculum development should happen at the institutional level versus a general level (Erven, 1987). Within the study of agricultural communications, Weckman, Witham and Telg (2000) reported the amount of content demanded by the research outweighs the time allotted to an average four-year bachelor program; therefore, curriculum should be flexible enough to permit students to specialize in specific areas of agriculture and communications. At the core of any curriculum evaluation is the need to balance industry requirements with faculty vision and student interest (Coffey, 1987).

Employers provide curriculum developers with the competitive society perspective in which a student will be expected to perform after graduation (Sprecker & Rudd, 1998). The industry defines the areas of employment offered to graduates and the expectations associated with those jobs (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999). In addition, employers define which experiences are best taught in the workplace (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999). These factors can seriously affect the types of students who enrolled specific agricultural communications programs (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999). Since agricultural communications has no current accreditation program, Tucker, Whaley and Cano (2003) stated curriculum developers rely on industry to serve in this role. The feedback given by industry gauges the success or failure of the program’s ability to prepare successful agricultural communicators (Buck & Barrick, 1995). Professional organizations in agricultural communications also help to fuel student interest (Tucker, et al., 2003).

However, employers have limitations in defining curriculum. Sprecker and Rudd (1998) reported employers do not agree on the process of how to prepare a student for the workplace. Finch and Crunkilton (1999) also argued employers do not have a progressive view compared to educators. Of the three groups, employers are most likely to fall behind in the knowledge of workplace needs (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999). For example, Carnevale, Gainer and Meltzer (1988) predicted a shift in the type of worker needed by employers. In the past, employers looked for specialized skill sets but now demand a broad range of skills from personal leadership to strategic problem-solving (Carnevale, Gainer & Meltzer, 1988). Due to the evolutionary nature of the industry, vocational curriculum developers and evaluators must consider content for the employers' current and future needs (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999).

Curriculum development and evaluation is affected by the quantity and quality of faculty members at the institution (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999). Tucker, Whaley, Whiting and Agunga (2002) reported one of the most serious issues facing agricultural communications programs is an insufficient number of qualified faculty. The number of appointed full-time agricultural communications faculty varies nationwide (Doerfert, Cepica, Jones & Fiel, 1991). In the southern states, 13 faculty members reported they taught some form of agricultural communications (Weckman, Witham & Telg, 2000). Full-time equivalent faculty numbers per program ranged from .5 to 2.6, making student-faculty ratios as small as 1:10 and as high as 1:77 (Weckman, Witham & Telg, 2000). Most agricultural communications faculty surveyed in the southern states held a doctorate degree and were an associate or assistant professor (Weckman, Witham & Telg, 2000).

Coffey (1987) reported effective curriculum incorporated a faculty's vision into its development. Jim Evans, an emeriti faculty at the University of Illinois, shared his personal thoughts concerning the role and future of academic programs in agricultural communication at the 2004 Agricultural Media Summit Conference. Evans (2004) envisioned programs that sought to diversity their efforts to include non-traditional activities involving environmentally conscious and consumer-focused communications. He also mentioned faculty's vision of forming stronger relationships with agricultural and mass communications educators to better serve students locally and nationwide; strengthening research and graduate programs; and reaching out to teach agricultural communications to local and international populations (Evans, 2004). Other faculty members envisioned helping agricultural communications programs become nationally accredited and recognized as an academic discipline (Tucker, Whaley, Whiting & Agunga, 2002). Some faculty reported an insufficient amount of scholarship, theory-based curriculum and graduate programs nationwide (Tucker et al., 2002).

While students may not participate as members of the university's curriculum development or evaluation committee, they "may vote with their curriculum change card" (Coffey, 1987, p. 1043). Therefore, if a student is not satisfied with the coursework, his/her option is to drop the class or the degree altogether. Finch and Crunkilton (1999) claimed students are the major force that drives the shaping and molding of curriculum content. Hence, any effort to change curriculum should be made for student benefit and not the economy (Beyer & Liston, 1996). Student characteristics, skills, interests, expectations and maturity level should receive close scrutiny when selecting content for a curriculum (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999). Students' social, cultural, and political contexts

also should be considered when formulating curriculum (Beyer & Liston, 1996). Analyzing such characteristics helps the developer or evaluator move from the abstract view of numerous “cerebral features” sitting in a university classroom to a better recognition of individual responsive and physical human beings (Beyer & Liston, 1996). A good curriculum is designed to respect and honor the strengths students bring to the classroom and enables students from ages 8 to 68 to engage in all forms of knowledge (Beyer & Liston, 1996).

Myers (2005) suggested curriculum evaluators should invite students to share their opinions on what and how coursework is taught within the classroom. After sharing a day with 20 students who differed in academic success, personal interests and abilities, Myers (2005) reported:

The students were surprisingly candid and well-spoken as they described what was working well and what they still needed... Besides hearing about effective methods of instruction, the teachers heard again and again that the students desperately needed to be active in their own education. These thoughts made an impression that no in-service has ever been able to match and have influenced the methods of curriculum delivery for many teachers.

Theory in Action: Agricultural Communications Curriculum

Need for agricultural communications curriculum

Finding an individual with excellent agricultural knowledge and communications skills has challenged agricultural media and business owners for years (Boone, Meisenbach & Tucker, 2000). The ability to translate unique science into a language or image understandable to an average person demands a special type of education (Treise & Weigold, 2002).

The beginning of or need for agricultural communications curriculum parallels the agricultural industry’s need to communicate effectively with the public (Boone,

Meisenbach & Tucker, 2000). Evans (2004) claimed while the food enterprise will evolve throughout the years ahead, the ability to communicate the process will determine its success. As food production presses forward into the future, agricultural communicators will be the primary individuals leading the industry through great changes, forming a bridge between the producer and the consumer (Doerfert & Miller, 2006); therefore, an effective curriculum must be in place to ensure students' knowledge, skills, and abilities are prepared to guide the industry and its public (Doerfert & Miller, 2006).

While the need for an agricultural communications curriculum originates from an industry need, Reisner (1990) reported current agricultural communications programs commenced as a result of student interest. Ten of the 26 programs surveyed in 1990 combined the agricultural communications major with the agricultural education department to meet the growing student interest.

Agricultural communications curriculum needs to be evaluated continually to ensure it is effective in preparing students to enter the career field (Sprecker & Rudd, 1998). At a minimum, this process should occur every two to five years (Morgan, 2008). More recently, the need to re-evaluate agricultural communications curriculum was named the No. 4 priority in the 2007 National Research Agenda for the American Association for Agricultural Education (Osborne, 2007).

One of the most cited reasons for curriculum evaluation is to ensure it meets industry requirements (Stewart, Moore & Flowers, 2004). An undergraduate degree in agricultural communications should prepare students with a strong foundation of agricultural knowledge as well as introduce students to basic communications skills

(Terry, 1996). Upon graduation, agricultural communications employers expect their new recruits to have a sound understanding of the current issues, trends, and problems associated with agriculture (Doerfert & Miller, 2006). Such issues are serious and always changing (Doerfert & Miller, 2006). In the past, curriculum developers and the industry have tried to keep pace with new technological advancements; however, curriculum evaluators may need to increase the pace to adequately keep up with agricultural change (Doerfert & Miller, 2006). According to Doerfert and Miller (2006), agricultural communicators are the people who will lead the industry through great changes. Therefore, “their knowledge, skills and abilities must be at a level that ensures their continued success” (Doerfert & Miller, 2006, p. 28).

Agricultural communications programs

Before 1990, few agricultural communications curriculum studies existed (Reisner, 1990). Wharton (1987) challenged all agricultural programs to revise and revitalize their curriculum (as cited in Reisner, 1990). As part of this effort, Reisner (1990) surveyed 30 institutions listed on a National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow (NACT) mailing list. Of those 30 programs, 26 offered some form of degree that combined agriculture and communications. The majority of the programs (23) were offered through the college of agriculture, although the greater part (25) also claimed dependence on other colleges within the university to aid them in teaching communications skills (Reisner, 1990). Tucker et al. (2003) explained the relationship between a university’s agricultural communications program and the mass communications program as one of the most important factors influencing the overall quality of agricultural communications curriculum, mainly because the relationship

increases the amount of course variety available to students and provides additional faculty support. However, Weckman et al. (2000) reported some traditional journalism faculty and students within southern universities projected poor attitudes toward agricultural communications. Therefore, the relationship between the different colleges can be seen as a hindrance as well as a benefit (Weckman et al., 2000).

Reisner (1990) reported student enrollment ranged from 1 to 89 students within a diverse set of degree emphases, including agricultural communications, news-editorial, broadcasting, advertising and public relations. Weckman et al. (2000) claimed student interest was growing in the southern states with reported enrollment numbers ranging from 9 to 115 undergraduates per institution. However, the mean number of students enrolled within the nine southern state programs was only slightly higher—an increased average from 30 to 32 students—than Reisner reported in 1990. Of those students, 8 to 12 graduate at each institution per year in the southern region (Weckman et al., 2000).

Curriculum requirements of the 30 programs differentiated in three categories: highly regulated, specified core or area specializations (Reisner, 1990). Highly regulated programs specified 75% of all required agricultural coursework, while area specialization programs gave students the liberty to select most of their coursework (Reisner, 1990). Specified core programs were most frequently chosen by the respondents. This curriculum style defined a foundational set of courses and allowed students to select electives to finish their degrees (Reisner, 1990). Specific coursework within the three sets of curriculum programs also varied. Agricultural economics was the only agricultural class required by all 30 programs (Reisner, 1990). However, Reisner (1990) noted about 25% of the programs required agricultural courses not specified as important by

professional agricultural communicators. All programs required core courses in communications, although the types of courses were not specified by the researcher (Reisner, 1990). Eighteen of the 30 programs required their students to take about 16% to 25% of their total coursework in communications (Reisner, 1990).

Industry Professionals Characteristics, Careers, and Curriculum Expectations

Of the three categories responsible for curriculum development — industry, faculty and students — most of the research in the past decade has focused on the industry's view of agricultural communications curriculum. Bowen and Cooper (1988) and Buck and Barrick, (1995) conducted surveys to assess professionals' demographics and job satisfaction levels. Industry specialists also serve as a pseudo-accreditation program, therefore they have been questioned by various researchers to share their opinion on agricultural communications curriculum (Tucker, Whaley, Cano, 2003).

Characteristics

Bowen and Cooper (1988) analyzed 63 Ohio State University graduates characteristics and their level of job satisfaction. Of the 63 students surveyed, 45 were female and 18 were male. The age range of 75% of the sampled graduates was 25 to 39 years old. The majority of the sample was female, totaling 71%. There was no variation in race as 100% of all respondents were Caucasian. Buck and Barrick (1995) reported different gender and age statistics among six agricultural communications professional organizations. Of the 313 people surveyed, more than half (199) were males. Age ranges were older, with the majority falling between 35 to 54 years of age (Buck & Barrick, 1995).

Most graduates (91%) listed a bachelor's degree as the highest level of their education (Bowen & Cooper, 1988). Weckman, Quinn and Withman (1992) reported an equal number of bachelor's degrees among their participants; however, they clarified 56% of the agricultural communicators listed in the USDA Directory of Land Grant Communicators also held a master's degree. Buck and Barrick (1995) later reported 93% of agricultural communicators in six different professional organizations held a bachelor's degree and about 30% held a master's degree.

Careers

The most common professional positions listed by agricultural communicators were business-marketing, public relations, and editing (Bowen & Cooper, 1988). These jobs accounted for 62% of the reported careers. Buck and Barrick (1995) found reporting, public relations and editing to be the most common titles listed by professional agricultural communicators. However, more than 171 titles were listed by respondents with only 31 positions listed by more than one person (Buck & Barrick, 1995). Bowen and Cooper (1988) claimed about one-third of the respondents worked in nonagricultural communications positions.

Diversity also was found in reported annual salaries. About 22% made less than \$15,000 and only 13% made more than \$50,000 per year (Bowen & Cooper, 1988). Buck and Barrick (1995) found only 6.4% of their respondents made less than \$20,000 per year. Although only one-fifth (49 people) answered the question, 40% of those individuals made \$30,000 to \$60,000 per year (Buck & Barrick, 1995). Despite the difference in salaries, Bowen and Cooper (1988) indicated Ohio State agricultural communications graduates were satisfied with their positions. Most of their job

satisfaction was attributed to salary and participation in the professional National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow organization (Bowen & Cooper, 1988).

Curriculum expectations

Terry and Bailey-Evans (1995), Sprecker and Rudd (1998), and Morgan (2008, 2009) all questioned a diverse set of professional agricultural communicators concerning what types of courses they believed were important to include in an agricultural communications curriculum. Buck and Barrick (1995) outlined a timeline of the industry’s perspective on agricultural communications curriculum in their literature review as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Industry Opinion Timeline of Agricultural Communications Curriculum Development

Year	Industry opinion
1956	No consensus among employers about coursework that should be offered to students (Mitchell, 1956)
1973	Communication courses recommended: writing (news and feature), editing, and photography (Kroupa and Evans, 1973)
1982	Recommended more agricultural courses than communication or journalism courses (Mitchell and Duncan, cited in Evans and Bolick 1982)
1990	Professionals suggested communication skills and coursework were more important than agricultural knowledge (Reisner, 1990).
1991	Call for graduate programs; emphasis to be placed on communication skills; although both agriculture and communication skills should be taught (Boone ,1991; Wilson, Paulson and Henderson ,1991)
1995	Agricultural communicators indicate agricultural and communications subject knowledge is equally important (Buck and Barrick, 1995).

Note. Adapted from “Characteristics, Educational Preparation, and Membership in Professional Organizations of Agricultural Communicators,” by C.A. Buck and K.R. Barrick (1995), Summary of Research Report 82: Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. Department of Agricultural Education.

For general education coursework, Terry and Bailey-Evans. (1995) reported 90% of all respondents agreed the most important subjects were English and history. Survey participants unanimously agreed grammar was the most vital concept a student could learn in general English, followed by technical writing. Creative writing was also mentioned, but ranked 6% lower than technical writing (Terry & Bailey-Evans., 1995). With regards to history, respondents believed American history and American agricultural history were important for agricultural communications students to learn (Terry & Bailey-Evans, 1995).

Within the academic major, Terry and Bailey-Evans (1995) reported a strong need for communications-based courses. Sprecker and Rudd (1998) found communications skills trumped agricultural knowledge among agricultural communications professionals in Florida. Morgan (2008) reported this attitude stems from the employers' desire to hire graduates with a holistic view of communications. Students must be able to understand the diversity of media, create and edit publications, write effectively and create good strategies for clients (Morgan, 2008). To enable students to achieve such a holistic view and prepare for the workplace, agricultural communications experts encouraged a diverse set of in-depth communications coursework be taught to students (Sprecker & Rudd, 1997, 1998). Morgan (2009) said all students must pay the price of entering the communications industry by learning how to identify and understand audiences, develop plans for desired outcomes, edit, organize thoughts, and write strategically. Therefore, agricultural communications curriculum should include courses to teach writing, public relations, public speaking, advertising, journalism and computer applications (Terry & Bailey-Evans, 1995).

Although a broad set of communications skills are important, Sprecker and Rudd (1998) claimed writing to be the most important skill acquired. Agricultural experts claimed the styles of news writing, reporting and technical writing to be slightly more important than creative writing (Terry & Bailey-Evans., 1995). Morgan (2008) identified magazine and public relations writing as more important than traditional news writing among agricultural communications professionals. Students need to have the ability to “hone-in on a story” by recognizing its value, asking the right questions, listening, and then having the ability to “tell it well” (Morgan, 2009).

More recently, Morgan (2009) identified the importance to teach students Web 2.0 and social media skills. “This goes beyond knowing how to post text and photos on Facebook and blogs, but extends to having a strong understanding of how these tools are used for marketing, public relations, and information gathering” (p. 12). Students must recognize the transition from traditional media to new media and understand how it will change the industry (Morgan, 2009). Prior to Morgan’s study, Sprecker and Rudd (1997) claimed most of the push to teach electronic media stemmed from instructors and not agricultural communications professionals.

Buck and Barrick (1995) claimed agricultural communicators professionals believed agricultural and communications subject knowledge to be equally important; however, only 2.1% claimed agricultural knowledge to be more important than communications knowledge in their jobs. Specker and Rudd (1998) indicated it was unnecessary to require core classes in every aspect of agriculture; instead, they said students need to understand basic agriculture and how to access good sources.

Basic coursework in agriculture should include agricultural economics, agricultural leadership, environmental science, agronomy and animal science (Terry & Bailey-Evans, 1995). Among professional agricultural communicators, the most important agricultural course identified was agricultural economics (Reisner, 1990; Sprecker & Rudd, 1997; Terry & Bailey-Evans., 1995). Environmental science was recommended by 80.2% of Terry and Bailey-Evans' (1995) respondents. A sound understanding of environmental movements and its activists could help solve the single largest threat to the continuation of American agriculture (Sprecker & Rudd, 1997). The least popular courses listed by communicators were food science, horticulture, agricultural education, forestry, agricultural engineering and wildlife management (Spreker & Rudd, 1998; Terry & Bailey-Evans., 1995). Most specialists said these subjects could be covered in a broad introductory class in general agriculture (Sprecker & Rudd, 1998).

Although not generally seen as a class, most professional agricultural communicators recommended students participate in an internship experience (Sprecker & Rudd, 1998; Terry & Bailey-Evans., 1995). Terry & Bailey-Evans (1995) claimed an internship experience was necessary to help students apply agricultural communications concepts, develop interpersonal skills, solve problems, and understand employee responsibilities. Sprecker and Rudd (1998) said internships were a necessary element to complete a student's training and enable career success. They recommended students complete at least one internship experience. Terry (1996) urged agricultural communications educators to make internship opportunities available to students. However, mixed messages occur within the literature about the importance of internships.

Doerfert, Cepecia, Jones and Fiel (1991) found 22 of the 30 agricultural communications programs across the nation did not require an internship experience to obtain a degree. While most specialists agreed on the importance, some alumni claimed their personal internships prior to being hired were less than the idealistic view explained by their instructors and employers (Sprecker & Rudd, 1997).

While agricultural communicators have been adamant about defining the general coursework in agricultural communications, Terry (1996) claimed the best decision is to allow the student to “generalize and specialize in specific areas of their choice based upon career goals” (p. 287). Weckman and Telg (2000) added the amount of content demanded by the research outweighs the time allotted to an average four-year bachelor program; therefore, curriculum should be flexible enough to permit students to specialize in specific areas of agriculture and communications.

Student Characteristics, Career Aspirations and Curriculum Expectations

Bisdorf-Rhoades et al. (2005) noted in their study more than 70% of agricultural communications student respondents were female. Grade point average was also listed ranging from 3.0 to 4.0, on 4.0 scale. The student characteristic listed by Tucker and Paulson (1988) was the year in school. Of the 66 surveyed, 15 were first-year students, 14 were sophomores, 17 were juniors and 20 were seniors. Year-in-school had a significant effect on interest level in agricultural and communications courses (Tucker & Paulson, 1998). In general, the demographic statistics available in the literature was limited..

More than half the students tested by Tucker and Paulson (1988) expected to work in agricultural public relations or advertising, while only 23% expressed interest in

working for mainstream communications outlets (Tucker & Paulson, 1988). Radio and television production was rated as the second most desirable job, while a career involving agricultural economics, business or cooperatives was marked as least favorable among agricultural communications students (Tucker & Paulson, 1988).

Tucker and Paulson (1988) found students expressed a stronger interest in agricultural classes and affiliated organizations than those associated with mass communications. However, first-year students were generally more likely to express a higher level of interest in non-agricultural subjects than their upperclassmen colleagues (Tucker & Paulson, 1988). In addition, the researchers found students were more likely to rate the level of agricultural and communication interest higher than their perceived knowledge (Tucker & Paulson, 1988). When students were asked to list an alternative major, 58% chose another major within agriculture, while only 32% chose something within mass communications (Tucker & Paulson, 1988).

Chapter Summary

Chapter II presented the expectancy-value theory as a theoretical framework for studying the influence agricultural communications students have on agricultural communications curriculum development and evaluation. In any given task, individuals weigh their past experiences and use them to shape future expectations (Franken, 2007). In addition, the expectancy-value theory claimed students will assign a value — intrinsic or extrinsic — to the accomplishment of a task (Eccles et al, 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Intrinsically motivated individuals receive an enjoyment simply by participating in the task, while extrinsically motivated individuals require some type of reward (Eccles

et al., 1983). Therefore, parents and teachers are encouraged to motivate students to participate in activities they naturally enjoy (Eccles et al, 1983).

This chapter also presented the process of curriculum development and evaluation. Seven curriculum factors — time, money, pressure, governmental requirements, employer need, balance and content — were presented as influential in determining what should and should not be included within a curriculum. In addition, the roles of three different curriculum stakeholders — industry, faculty and students—were discussed. Coffey (1987) claimed a good curriculum balances industry need with faculty vision and student interest.

Chapter II also provided a background of agricultural communications programs and the need to reevaluate agricultural communications curriculum. On average, about 30 programs exist nationwide with a mean of 32 students per program (Reisner, 1990). Originally, agricultural communications curriculum was developed because of student interest and an industry need for skilled communicators (Boone, Meisenbach & Tucker, 2000; Reisner, 1990). Since then, agricultural communicators have become the leaders who will lead the industry through great changes (Doerfert & Miller, 2006). Therefore, it is important for curriculum developers and evaluators to ensure the curriculum is adequately mirroring the needs of the industry and preparing students to enter the workforce (Stewart, Moore & Flowers, 2004; Terry, 1996).

This chapter outlined the characteristics, careers and curriculum expectations of professional agricultural communicators. Gender and average age ranges are not consistent throughout the literature (Bowen & Cooper, 1988; Buck & Barrick, 1995). However consistency was found in level of education held by professional agricultural

communicators. Most had obtained a bachelor degree and a few held a master degree. (Bowen & Cooper, 1988; Buck & Barrick, 1995). Job titles and salary ranges varied, although the most common positions were listed in three areas: business-marketing, public relations and editing (Bowen & Cooper, 1988). When asked about agricultural communications curriculum, most professionals preferred students take more communications courses than agricultural courses (Morgan, 2008; Sprecker & Rudd, 1997; Sprecker & Rudd, 1998; Terry & Bailey-Evans, 1995). The only specific agriculture course repeatedly mentioned by professionals was agricultural economics (Reisner, 1990; Sprecker & Rudd, 1997; Terry & Bailey-Evans, 1995). In addition, most agricultural communications professionals preferred students participate in an internship experience (Sprecker & Rudd, 1997; Sprecker & Rudd, 1998; Terry & Bailey-Evans, 1995; Terry, 1996).

Student characteristics, career aspirations and curriculum expectations were also reviewed in this chapter. The majority of students surveyed were female (70%) and expressed interest in working in public relations or advertising (Bisdorf-Rhoades et al., 2005; Tucker and Paulson, 1988). When asked about coursework, most students were more interested in agricultural courses than communication courses (Tucker & Paulson, 1988). However, first-year students were generally more likely to express a higher level of interest in non-agricultural subjects than their upperclassmen colleagues (Tucker & Paulson, 1988).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study sought to describe the role of student interest in agricultural communications curriculum development and evaluation. Chapter I outlined the background of agricultural communications as a career and curriculum as well as determined the importance for assessing student interest. Chapter II provided a theoretical framework for the study. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methods and procedures used to address the research objectives. This chapter explains the research design, population, instrumentation of the study, as well as outlines the methods used in data collection and analysis.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to describe agricultural communications freshmen perceptions of agricultural communications curriculum by describing the personal characteristics, career aspirations and curriculum expectations of agricultural communications freshmen at Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University. In addition, this study described agricultural communications freshmen's interest and perceived importance of agricultural communications skills.

Objectives of Study

The following research objectives were addressed in this study:

- 1) Describe selected personal characteristics of agricultural communications freshmen;
- 2) Determine the curriculum expectations of agricultural communications freshmen.
- 3) Determine the career aspirations of agricultural communications freshmen.
- 4) Determine and describe agricultural communications freshmen's interest level of skills required by agricultural communications professionals.
- 5) Determine and describe agricultural communications freshmen's perceived importance of the skills required by agricultural communications professionals.

Institutional Review Board

Before any research project may begin, federal regulations and Oklahoma State University require an official approval by the Institutional Review Board in order to protect the rights and welfare of human participants engaged in behavioral or biomedical research. Since the researcher was conducting research outside Oklahoma State University's jurisdiction, the proposed research had to be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Boards of Texas A&M University and Texas Tech University. After proper review, the proposed study received permission to proceed and was issued the application number AG1029 by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). Approvals from Texas Tech and Texas A&M University can also be found in Appendix A.

Research Design

The study was designed as a descriptive census survey of agricultural communications freshmen at Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University, and Texas A&M University. Creswell (2008) claimed a census was appropriate when the general population is identifiable and small. A survey instrument is suitable for the assessment of individuals' beliefs, attitudes or perceptions at one point in time and place (Creswell, 2008). A survey design also allows a researcher to compare two or more educational groups from different locations (Creswell, 2008).

For the purpose of this study, agricultural communications freshmen were defined as first-year University students registered in an entry-level agricultural communications course in a well-established agricultural communications program. To qualify as a well-established program, the program's enrollment numbers had to be greater than 100 and it had to have at least three faculty members assigned to teach agricultural communications courses. Based on this definition, three locations were chosen to administer the instrument: Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University, and Texas A&M University.

Population

The population of this study was comprised of agricultural communications freshmen enrolled at an entry-level agricultural communications course during the 2010 Fall Semester at Oklahoma State University Texas A&M University and Texas Tech University. The entire population for this study was 100 agricultural communications freshmen.

Instrumentation

A three-section questionnaire was developed by the researchers (see Appendix D) to describe the respondents' personal characteristics, career aspirations and curriculum expectations as well as their self-reported interests and importance levels of agricultural communications skill sets. Section I of the instrument was created by choosing and adapting 30 agricultural skill statements from a study conducted by Ciuffetelli (2002). The students were asked to rate each statement according to their level of interest in learning the skill. In addition, they were asked to rate each statement according to the level of importance they believed the skill had in helping them become successful in their careers. The rating was measured by a five-point scale. A rated scale "provides theoretically equal intervals among responses" (Creswell, 2008, p. 176). The following options were used in assessing interest: 0 = "Not Interested," 1 = "Somewhat Not Interested," 2 = "Unsure," 3 = "Somewhat Interested," 4 = "Interested." A similar scale was given to assess each skill's importance as perceived by the respondent. Options available were defined as: 0 = "Not Important," 1 = "Somewhat Not Important," 2 = "Unsure," 3 = "Somewhat Important," 4 = "Important." Section I of the instrument provided the data necessary to address Objectives 4 and 5.

Section II of the instrument was written to identify freshman curriculum expectations and career aspirations. After reviewing the literature, five multiple-choice questions were written to assess freshmen's class expectations and the knowledge they hoped to obtain in their coursework. Two more questions were added to the curriculum expectations listed based on past researchers' claims (Bowen & Cooper, 1988, Reisner, 1990; Sprecker & Rudd, 1997; Terry & Bailey-Evans, 1995). One question asked a

respondent's plans to join the National Agricultural Communications of Tomorrow (ACT) organization because Bowen and Cooper (1988) claimed job satisfaction was influenced by membership in the organization during the respondents' collegiate years. A second question asked respondents if they were interested in agricultural economics course. Many researchers claimed it was the most important type of course an agricultural communications student should take outside of communication courses. (Reisner, 1990; Sprecker & Rudd, 1997; Terry & Bailey-Evans, 1995). In addition, five multiple-choice questions were written to discover freshmen's career aspirations. Questions included a range of topics from salary expectation to the type of company or organization for which the respondent desired to work. The answers to section II aided the researcher in answering the questions posed by Objectives 3 and 4.

Section III was developed to identify freshmen personal characteristics. Finch and Crunkilton (1999) claimed the personal characteristics of students should receive close scrutiny when developing and evaluating curriculum. For this reason, six multiple-choice questions were written to identify respondents' age, gender, geographic region, plan of study, and student classification. Five additional questions were added to identify respondents' agricultural and communications experience as well as people or places that may have been influential in helping freshmen choose to major in agricultural communications. The answer to these questions provided data to address Objective 1.

Validity

For a study to be valid, the question of "are we measuring what we want to measure?" must be addressed (Muijs, 2004, p. 65). Creswell (2008) identified three different types of validity: content validity, criterion-related validity, and construct

validity. For the purpose of this study, content validity was chosen to ensure the questions on the instrument were a good representation of all the possible questions a researcher could ask (Creswell, 2008).

Muijs (2004) claimed the first step to establish content validity in an extensive review of the literature. A review of the literature assures the research is aware of all the possible questions that could be asked. The second part of content validity was to consult a panel of experts to ensure the instrument reads, and questions correctly (Muijs, 2004). Face validity ensures the instrument looks correct (Muijs, 2004). Three professors at Oklahoma State University and 10 agricultural communications and education graduate students reviewed the instrument. These individuals were chosen because of their familiarity of agricultural communications curriculum and student characteristics. Graduate students were included in the panel of experts to remain true to the researcher's philosophy: student input is important. After receiving feedback from 11 of the 13 invitees, the researcher edited the instrument to establish face and content validity. Grammar modifications were made in Section II. For example, question 19 was modified to eliminate gerunds (words ending with "ing"). The two demographic questions related to population were restructured to correspond better with one another. Regarding question 9, in Section II, one option "online resources," was eliminated because the panel of experts believed it was conflicting with the option "self-interests."

Reliability

Reliability demands scores from an instrument are stable and consistent over multiple administrations (Creswell, 2008). The greater the reliability an instrument has, the more likely it is to be free of measurement error (Muijs, 2004). While many types of

reliability are used in research, this study chose to test internal consistency using a coefficient alpha. This statistic determines the consistency of scores on continuous variables, such as “Not Interested” to “Interested” (Creswell, 2008).

To establish instrument reliability, a pilot test was conducted on August 5, 2010. Ten graduate students from the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership at Oklahoma State University were asked to take the survey. Following the pilot, the researcher used *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS®) version 17* to calculate a Cronbach’s Alpha, a type of coefficient alpha, used to measure scaled items. The reliability alpha of the pilot data interest scale was .832; and the pilot data importance scale had a .770 reliability alpha. Mujis (2004) reported anything above .700 was reasonably reliable.

A Cronbach’s Alpha also was calculated upon receiving respondent data to establish internal consistency reliability. The posthoc Cronbach’s Alpha was .915 for the interest scale and .933 for the importance scale.

Data Collection Procedures

Data for the study was collected using a survey instrument. This type of instrument design was a efficient way to collect data from a geographically dispersed population in a short amount of time (Creswell, 2008). Professors at Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University, and Texas A&M University were contacted and asked to administer a 54-question instrument to students enrolled in an entry-level agricultural communications orientation class. On day designated by the administrator, students in the classroom were asked to volunteer to participate in the study. Answers were recorded by the participants on two scantron sheets provided. No incentive or

reward was offered to the participants or administrators for taking part in the study. Completed surveys were mailed to the researcher in a pre-posted envelope.

The instruments were mailed to the professors at the different institutions on September 14, 2010. All surveys were returned to the research by October 8, 2010. Of the 100 surveys administered, 75 were returned. Seven surveys were eliminated from the census because the respondent did not report him/herself as a freshman.

Data Analysis Procedures

Completed response scantron sheets were taken to the Oklahoma State University Testing Center to be scanned electronically, so the information could be analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). This program was used to study, analyze, compare, and interpret the data collected at each of the institutions. Descriptive statistics like frequency and means were used to analyze the data. Chapter IV displays the results obtained from the study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methods and procedures used in this study. The design was described as a census of all the agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions. Responses were collected using a 54-question survey developed by the researcher. Face and content validity was established through the use a panel of experts composed of professors and graduate students. Reliability was tested through a pilot study. This chapter also described the procedures used to collect and analyze data

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter I provided an introduction to scientific communications and the need for an agricultural curriculum. The chapter also showed justified the need to include student interest when developing and evaluating curriculum. Chapter II provided a theoretical and conceptual framework for student input in curriculum development and evaluation, as well as provided a summary of past agricultural communications curriculum research.

Chapter III presented the methodologies used to address the research objectives. The research design, population, instrumentation, validity and reliability were all addressed in Chapter III as well as the procedures used for data collection and analysis.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings related to agricultural communications freshmen characteristics, curriculum expectations and career aspirations as well as report the respondents' interest and importance level rankings of agricultural communications skills.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to describe agricultural communications freshmen perceptions of agricultural communications curriculum by describing the personal characteristics, career aspirations and curriculum expectations of agricultural communications freshmen at Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University. In addition, this study described agricultural communications freshmen's interest and perceived importance of agricultural communications skills.

Objectives of Study

The following research objectives were addressed in this study:

- 1) Describe selected personal characteristics of agricultural communications freshmen;
- 2) Determine the curriculum expectations of agricultural communications freshmen.
- 3) Determine the career aspirations of agricultural communications freshmen.
- 4) Determine and describe agricultural communications freshmen's interest level of skills required by agricultural communications professionals.
- 5) Determine and describe agricultural communications freshmen's perceived importance of the skills required by agricultural communications professionals

Findings Related Respondents Personal Characteristics:

Research Objective 1 sought to determine the respondents' personal characteristics. Respondents were asked eight different questions to determine different demographic characteristics.

Of all the respondents, 54 were female (79.4%) and 14 were male (20.6%). Fifty-two of the respondents (76.5%) indicated to be 17 to 18 years old. When asked about the location of their university, 56 of the respondents (82.4%) reported they attend university within their state of residence and 11 respondents (16.2%) attended university outside their state of residence.

Respondents also were asked to indicate if their permanent state of residence was within the Northeastern, Midwestern, Western, Southern United States or International. Findings are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Location of Respondents' State of Residence

	No. of Respondents	%
Southern United States	45	66.2
Midwestern United States	19	27.9
Western United States	4	5.9
Northeastern United States	0	0
International	0	0

Note. Geographic distribution of states followed United States census geographic regions. <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/GARM/Ch6GARM.pdf>.

Respondents were asked if they considered the place they grew up to be a rural or urban area. Fifty respondents (73.5%) indicated they grew up in a rural area and 18 respondents (26.5%) indicated they grew up in an urban area. To further define rural and urban, the respondents were asked to indicate the population of the place they grew up (see Table 4).

Table 4

Population of Respondents' City of Permanent Residence

	No. of Respondents	%
2,500 or less citizens	31	45.6
2,500-10,000 citizens	18	26.5
30,001-50,000 citizens	4	5.9
300,001 or more citizens	4	5.9
10,001-30,000 citizens	3	4.4
50,001-100,000 citizens	3	4.4
150,001-200,000 citizens	2	2.9
100,001-150,000 citizens	1	1.5
200,001-250,000 citizens	1	1.5
250,001-300,000 citizens	1	1.5

As part of their personal characteristics, respondents were asked to indicate their degree plan as presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Type of Major Declared by Respondents

	No. of Respondents	%
Agricultural communications	31	46.3
Agricultural communications + agricultural major	14	20.9
Agricultural communications + another major	9	13.4
Other	9	13.4
Agricultural communications + communications major	4	6.0

Respondents were also asked to report the individual who helped them decide to major in agricultural communications. The results are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

Influential Individuals in Respondents' Degree Choice

	No. of Respondents	%
Self-interests	22	32.4
FFA advisor	15	22.1
College advisor	11	16.2
Parents	8	11.8
Other	7	10.3
Friends	3	4.4
Professional agricultural communicator	1	1.5
College recruitment/campus visit	1	1.5

Respondents were asked to indicate their agricultural experience (see Table 7) and communications experience (see Table 8) as part of their personal characteristics.

Table 7

Type of Respondents' Agricultural Experiences

	No. of Respondents	%
High school agricultural classes or FFA	19	27.9
Family owned livestock and/or crop production	18	26.5
All of the above	14	20.6
No agricultural experience	12	17.6
Government programs	2	2.9
Employee of livestock and/or crop production	1	1.5
Agricultural communications employee	1	1.5
Missing Data	1	1.5

Table 8

Type of Respondents' Communications Experiences

	No. of Respondents	%
High school communications courses	16	23.5
Social media user	13	19.1
Member of high school yearbook or newspaper staff	12	17.6
All of the above	8	11.8
Held a job with publication type company or organization	7	10.3
High school, community or religion organization reporter	6	8.8
No communications experience	3	4.4
High school, community or religion organization photographer	2	2.9
Missing Data	1	1.5

Findings Related to Agricultural Communications Freshmen

Curriculum Expectations

Research Objective 2 determined respondents' agricultural communications expectations. Respondents were asked five questions to determine their curriculum expectations.

Respondents were asked to indicate the amount of coursework in agriculture and communications they expected to have during the next four years. Of all the responses, 34 respondents (50.0%) expected to take an equal amount of agricultural and communications courses, 21 respondents (30.9%) expected to take more communications course than agricultural courses, and 13 respondents (19.1%) expected to take more agricultural courses than communications courses.

Respondents were asked to report the type of agricultural sciences courses they expected to enroll in during their university experience. Fifty-two respondents (76.5%) expected to take a diverse set of agricultural science courses (i.e. animal science, food science, plant science); and 16 respondents (23.5%) expected to take a specific set of agricultural science courses (i.e. animal science: genetics, reproduction).

Respondents were asked similar question about their expectations for communications coursework. Forty-eight respondents (70.6%) expected to learn a broad set of communications skills, such as public relations, writing and web design, while 19 respondents expected to learn a specific set of communications skills such as public relations or advertising.

As part of their degree program, respondents were asked how many writing courses they expected to enroll in within the next four years as presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Respondents' Writing Course Expectations

	No. of Respondents	%
Two communications-based writing courses	26	38.8
One communications-based writing course	15	22.4
Four or more communications-based writing courses	12	17.9
Three communications-based writing courses	10	14.9
No communications-based writing courses	4	6.0

Respondents were asked how many agricultural communications internships they expected to complete in the next four years. The findings are displayed in Table 10.

Table 10

Number of Expected Internships of Respondents

	No. of Respondents	%
Two agricultural communications internships	22	32.4
Three agricultural communications internships	20	29.4
One agricultural communications internship	15	22.1
Four or more agricultural communications internships	6	8.8
No agricultural communications internships	5	7.4

In another course-specific curriculum question, respondents were asked to indicate if they believed agricultural economics/business courses were important for agricultural communications professionals. Sixty-one respondents (89.7%) reported “yes”, one respondent indicated “no” and six respondents (8.8%) reported they did not

know if agricultural economic/business courses were important for an agricultural communications professional.

Respondents were asked to indicate if they expected to join the National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow Organization. Thirty-eight respondents (55.9%) indicated they planned on being a member, 23 respondents (33.8%) indicated they did not know, and 7 indicated they did not plan on becoming a member.

Findings Related to Agricultural Communications Freshmen Career Expectations

Research Objective 3 described the career aspirations of respondents at selected institutions. Respondents were asked six questions to determine their career expectations.

Respondents were asked to indicate their plans after graduation (see Table 11).

Table 11

Type of Education or Work Plans Expected by Respondents

	No. of Respondents	%
Enter the workforce as a professional agricultural communicator	20	29.4
Continue education for a master's degree in agricultural communications	12	17.6
Continue education for a master's degree in a different field	12	17.6
Enter the workforce in agriculture	11	16.2
Continue education for a doctoral degree in a different field	5	7.4
Enter the workforce in a different field	4	5.9
Continue education for a doctoral degree in agriculture	3	4.4
Missing Data	1	1.5

Respondents were also asked to indicate the type of corporation or organization in which they expected to work for after graduation (see Table 12). Another question asked respondents to report the location of their aspired workplace (see Table 13).

Table 12

Desired Type of Company and Organization for Respondents' Future Employment

	No. of Respondents	%
Work for an agricultural industry	35	52.2
Work for a non-agricultural industry	12	17.6
Work for the government	8	11.9
Work as my own boss	5	7.5
Work for not-for-profit organization	4	6.0
Work for higher education	2	3.0
Work for my family	1	1.5

Table 13

Desired Location of Respondents' Future Employment

	No. of Respondents	%
Work in my home state	30	44.1
Work within the United States	13	19.1
Work in my home region	7	10.3
Work in my home county	6	8.8
No preference	6	8.8
Work internationally	4	5.9
Work in my hometown	1	1.5
Missing data	1	1.5

Respondents were asked to indicate what type of position they expected after graduation. Results are displayed in Table 14.

Table 14

Type of Position Respondents Expected After Graduation

	No. of Respondents	%
Work in a position that allows me to work in more than one of the positions listed above	25	37.3
Work as a public relations representative	13	19.4
None of the above	10	14.9
Work as a news anchor or broadcaster	6	9.0
Work as a graphic designer	4	6.0
Work as a publication reporter	3	4.5
Work as an advertiser	2	3.0
Work as an author	2	3.0
Work as an educator	2	3.0

Respondents were asked to indicate the salary range they expected to receive after graduation. The findings are displayed in Table 15.

Table 15

Respondents' Future Salary Expectations

	No. of Respondents	%
A salary range of \$60,001-\$70,000	13	19.1
A salary range of more than \$90,000	12	17.6
A salary range of \$30,001-\$40,000	11	16.2
A salary range of \$40,001-\$50,000	8	11.8
A salary range of \$50,001-\$60,000	8	11.8
A salary range of \$20,001-\$30,000	6	8.8
A salary range of \$80,001-\$90,000	6	8.8
A salary range of \$70,001-\$80,000	4	5.9

Findings Related to Agricultural Communications Freshmen Interest Level in

Agricultural Communications Skills

Research Objective 4 was to determine and describe freshmen's interest level of the skills required of a professional agricultural communicator. Respondents were asked to rate their interest level of 30 agricultural communications skill statements using a rated scale where 0 = "Not Interested"; 1 = "Somewhat Not Interested"; 2 = "Unsure"; 3 = "Somewhat Interested"; 4 = "Interested". Table 16 shows all of the statements rated by the respondents, ranked 1 to 30.

Table 16

Skill Statements Ranked by Respondents' Level of Interest

Rank	Skill Statement	M	SD
1	Work as a member of a team	3.35	0.91
2	Describe the agricultural community to the public	3.33	1.04
3	Write with proper grammar and punctuation	3.19	1.01
4	Understand what makes a layout and design more pleasing to a viewer	3.13	1.07
5	Design a logo, advertisement, flier or brochure	3.13	1.11
6	Resolve conflict	3.10	1.11
7	Use graphics effectively to increase understanding	3.01	1.08
8	Use symbolism of color to enhance publications, websites and advertisements	3.01	1.19
9	Fix barriers of communication between an organization and its public	2.99	1.06
10	Determine ethical solutions to problems	2.97	1.07
11	Select photos for proper medium	2.96	1.21
12	Develop an effective campaign	2.94	1.24
13	Report on a topic from various points of view	2.91	1.05
14	Effectively take shots from different angles	2.91	1.26
15	Use photo editing programs	2.88	1.37
16	Talk with strangers about diverse topics	2.86	1.24
17	Evaluate the level of agricultural literacy in the United States	2.84	1.02
18	Identify bias in media stories	2.84	1.13
19	Operate camera equipment	2.84	1.37
20	Work under pressure	2.78	1.12
21	Discuss the impact of government and legislative policy upon agriculture	2.70	1.24
22	Use lighting to enhance photo elements	2.68	1.42
23	Sort through information and select the most important material for an audience	2.67	1.00
24	Discuss environmental/global issues and their relation to agriculture.	2.58	1.27
25	Understand the economical structure of agriculture	2.55	1.12
26	Apply the rules of Associated Press Style	2.43	1.22
27	Apply copyright laws	2.36	1.22
28	Edit and critique others' work	2.35	1.27
29	Understand the impact of biotechnology on world production systems	2.23	1.24
30	Analyze public perception of plant and animal food issues	2.03	1.31

Note. Classifications based on Cartmell's (2001) scale: M = 3.20 or higher = Interested; 2.40-3.19 = Somewhat Interested; 1.60-2.39 = Unsure; 0.80-1.59 = Somewhat Not Interested; 0-0.79 Not Interested.

Findings Related to Agricultural Communications Freshmen Perceived Importance of Agricultural Communications Skills

Research Objective 5 was to determine and describe freshmen's perceived importance level of the skills required of a professional agricultural communicator. Respondents were asked to rate their importance level of 30 agricultural communications skill statements by a rated scale where 0 = "Not Important"; 1 = "Somewhat Not Important"; 2 = "Unsure"; 3 = "Somewhat Important"; 4 = "Important". The skill statements are listed in order in Table 17.

Table 17

Skill Statements Ranked by Respondents' Level of Importance

Rank	Skill Statement	M	SD
1	Write with proper grammar and punctuation	3.62	0.71
2	Describe the agricultural community to the public	3.52	0.85
3	Resolve conflict	3.41	0.83
4	Work in as a member of a team	3.36	0.89
5	Fix barriers of communication between an organization and its public	3.35	1.06
6	Work under pressure	3.28	1.16
7	Understand what makes a layout and design more pleasing to a viewer's eye	3.25	0.96
8	Develop an effective campaign	3.23	0.91
9	Report on a topic from various points of view	3.22	1.07
10	Sort through information and select the most important material for an audience	3.16	1.02
11	Discuss the impact of government and legislative policy upon agriculture	3.13	1.12
12	Design a logo, advertisement, flier or brochure	3.10	1.02
13	Determine ethical solutions to problems	3.10	1.11
14	Talk with strangers about diverse topics	3.07	1.16
15	Select photos for proper medium	3.06	1.12
16	Use graphics effectively to increase understanding	3.04	1.04
17	Evaluate the level of agricultural literacy in the United States	2.99	0.98
18	Understand the economical structure of agriculture	2.99	1.02
19	Use symbolism of color to enhance publications, websites and advertisements	2.97	1.20
20	Identify bias in media stories	2.96	1.04
22	Operate camera equipment	2.94	1.04
23	Apply copyright laws	2.94	1.16
24	Edit and critique others' work	2.91	1.05
25	Use photo editing programs	2.88	1.12
26	Analyze public perception of plant and animal food issues	2.84	1.17
27	Effectively take shots from different angles	2.81	1.24
28	Apply the rules of Associated Press Style	2.77	1.15
29	Understand the impact of biotechnology on world production systems	2.62	1.14
30	Use lighting to enhance photo elements	2.54	1.20

Note. Classifications based on Cartmell's (2001) scale: M = 3.20 or higher = Important; 2.40-3.19 = Somewhat Important; 1.60-2.39 = Unsure; 0.80-1.59 = Somewhat Not Important; 0-0.79 Not Important

Chapter Summary

The majority of agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions were female (79.4%) between the ages 17 and 20, attending college within their state of residence (82.4%). The most helpful individuals aiding agricultural communications freshmen at the selected institutions in their degree selection, beyond self-interests (32.4%) are FFA advisers (22.1%), and college advisers (16.1%).

Agricultural communications freshmen from selected institutions reported most of their agricultural experience came from a family owned livestock or crop production (26.9%) or a high school agricultural classroom (28.4%). Similarly, the communications experience described by agricultural communications freshmen was linked to high school communications courses (23.9%), or serving as a member of the high school yearbook or newspaper staff (17.9%). Some respondents (19.4%) reported social media engagement as communications experience.

Half (50%) of agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions reported they expected to take an equal amount of agricultural science courses and communications courses during the next four years of their university experience. Specifically, 76.5% of all respondents expected a diverse set of agricultural science courses and 70.6% expected communications classes focused on broad skill sets. Most (94%) of agricultural communications freshmen anticipated at least one communications based-writing course; 38.8% of all respondents expected to enroll in two courses focused on communications-based writing. Respondents also believed agricultural economics and business courses were important to their career success. More than half (55.9%) of the agricultural communications freshmen at Selected institutions (N=68) expected to be

a member of National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow. Most agricultural communications freshmen expected to complete at least one internship within the next four years.

After the completion of their degree, 51.5% of the agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions expected to continue their education and 47% expect to enter the workforce. For most (52.2%) of all respondents entering the workforce meant becoming an employee of the agricultural industry. Most expected their work place to be in their home state. Within the workforce, 48% of the agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions preferred a specific position, 37% wanted a diversified position. Of the specific positions, a public relations representative (19.4%) was the most commonly marked by all respondents. News anchor or broadcaster was the next most (9%) common marked position.

Agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions were interested in working as a member of a team and describing the agricultural community to the public. Agricultural communications freshmen were “unsure” about their interest in applying copyright laws, editing and critiquing others work, understanding the impact of biotechnology on world production systems and analyzing the public’s perception of plant and animal food issues.

Within the interest category, only two statements averaged as the highest response. However, agricultural communications freshmen from Selected institutions rated the following nine agricultural communications skill statements as important:

- Write with proper grammar and punctuation
- Describe the agricultural community to the public
- Resolve conflict
- Work as a member of a team

- Fix barriers of communication between organization and its public
- Work under pressure
- Understand what makes a layout and design more pleasing to a viewer's eye
- Develop an effective campaign
- Report on a topic from various points of view

None of the 30 statements listed on the instrument were rated lower than “somewhat important” by agricultural communications freshmen.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, & IMPLICATIONS

Chapter I provided an introduction to agricultural communications and the need for an agricultural communications curriculum. The chapter also showed the need to include student input when developing and evaluating curriculum.

Chapter II provided a theoretical and conceptual framework for student input in curriculum development and evaluation, as well as provided a summary of past agricultural communications curriculum research.

Chapter III presented the methodologies used to address the research objectives. The research design, population, instrumentation, validity and reliability were all addressed in Chapter III as well as data collection and analysis.

Chapter IV presented the findings related to freshmen demographics, curriculum and career expectations and perceived level of interest and importance of agricultural communications skills.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to describe agricultural communications freshmen perceptions of agricultural communications curriculum by describing the personal characteristics, career aspirations and curriculum expectations of agricultural communications freshmen at Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University

and Texas A&M University. In addition, this study described agricultural communications freshmen's interest and perceived importance of agricultural communications skills.

Objectives of Study

The following research objectives were addressed in this study:

- 1) Describe selected personal characteristics of agricultural communications freshmen.
- 2) Determine the curriculum expectations of agricultural communications freshmen.
- 3) Determine the career aspirations of agricultural communications freshmen.
- 4) Determine and describe agricultural communications freshmen's interest level of skills required by agricultural communications professionals.
- 5) Determine and describe agricultural communications freshmen's perceived importance of the skills required by agricultural communications professionals.

Summary of Major Findings

The majority of agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions were female (79.4%) between the ages 17 and 20, attending college within their state of residence (82.4%). The most helpful individuals aiding agricultural communications freshmen at the selected institutions in their degree selection, beyond self-interests (32.4%) are FFA advisers (22.1%), and college advisers (16.1%).

Agricultural communications freshmen from selected institutions reported most of their agricultural experience came from a family owned livestock or crop production

(26.9%) or a high school agricultural classroom (28.4%). Similarly, the communications experience described by agricultural communications freshmen was linked to high school communications courses (23.9%), or serving as a member of the high school yearbook or newspaper staff (17.9%). Some respondents (19.4%) reported social media engagement as communications experience.

Half (50%) of agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions reported they expected to take an equal amount of agricultural science courses and communications courses during the next four years of their university experience. Specifically, 76.5% of all respondents expected a diverse set of agricultural science courses and 70.6% expected communications classes focused on broad skill sets. Most (94%) of agricultural communications freshmen anticipated at least one communications based-writing course; 38.8% of all respondents expected to enroll in two courses focused on communications-based writing. Respondents also believed agricultural economics and business courses were important to their career success. More than half (55.9%) of the agricultural communications freshmen at Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University (N=68) expected to be a member of National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow. Most agricultural communications freshmen expected to complete at least one internship within the next four years.

After the completion of their degree, 51.5% of the agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions expected to continue their education and 47% expect to enter the workforce. For most (52.2%) of all respondents entering the workforce meant becoming an employee of the agricultural industry. Most expected their work place to be in their home state. Within the workforce, 48% of the agricultural communications

freshmen at selected institutions preferred a specific position, 37% wanted a diversified position. Of the specific positions, a public relations representative (19.4%) was the most commonly marked by all respondents. News anchor or broadcaster was the next most (9%) common marked position.

Agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions were interested in working as a member of a team and describing the agricultural community to the public. Agricultural communications freshmen were “unsure” about their interest in applying copyright laws, editing and critiquing others work, understanding the impact of biotechnology on world production systems and analyzing the public’s perception of plant and animal food issues.

Within the interest category, only two statements averaged as the highest response. However, agricultural communications freshmen from Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University rated the following nine agricultural communications skill statements as important:

- Write with proper grammar and punctuation
- Describe the agricultural community to the public
- Resolve conflict
- Work as a member of a team
- Fix barriers of communication between organization and its public
- Work under pressure
- Understand what makes a layout and design more pleasing to a viewer’s eye
- Develop an effective campaign
- Report on a topic from various points of view

None of the 30 statements listed on the instrument were rated lower than “somewhat important” by agricultural communications freshmen.

Conclusions

Conclusions related to Objective 1

Objective 1 sought to determine the personal characteristics of agricultural communications freshmen at Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University. The vast majority of the agricultural communications freshmen at the selected institutions were female, between ages 17 and 18, attending a university within their state of residence. Most of them grew up in a rural area with a population of 10,000 or less citizens.

When choosing a major, the two most frequent reported degree plans reported by agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions were “agricultural communications” and “agricultural communications + agricultural major.” When making this choice, the most influential individuals in aiding them were: self, FFA adviser, and college adviser.

When asked about past experiences, the most common agricultural experiences of agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions were obtained in the high school classroom or on a family owned livestock and/or crop production. In relation to communications, the most reported experiences were obtained from high school communications courses, social media or from service on the high school yearbook/newspaper staff.

Conclusions related to Objective 2

Objective 2 was to determine the curriculum expectations of agricultural communications freshmen. Half of agricultural communications freshmen at the selected institutions expected to take an equal amount of agricultural and communications

courses. While participating in these courses, they expected to learn broad agricultural science concepts and be taught a diverse set of communications skills. In addition, most of the agricultural communications freshmen at the selected institutions expected to enroll in one or two communications-based writing courses, an agricultural economics course and participate in at least one internship experience. The majority of agricultural communications freshmen at the selected institutions also planned on becoming a member of the National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow Organization.

Conclusions related to Objective 3

The purpose of Objective 3 was to determine agricultural communications freshmen's career aspirations. About half of agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions planned to enter the workforce after graduation, while the other half expect to continue their education. Working for most of them meant going to work for the agricultural industry, within their home state. While in the work place, half of the agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions planned to have a specific job title, such as public relations representative, reporter, broadcaster, etc., and the other half expected to work in a diversified position allowing them to fulfill various roles. However, no consensus was found in agricultural communications freshmen's salary expectations at the selected institutions.

Conclusions related to Objective 4

Objective 4 sought to determine and describe agricultural communications freshmen's interest level of skills required by agricultural communications professionals. Agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions intrinsically valued skills like teamwork and describing the agricultural community to the public. However,

agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions were unsure about their interest in agricultural issues like biotechnology and food production. They were also unsure about editing and critiquing others work, as well as applying communications laws and styles.

Conclusions related to Objective 5

The purpose of Objective 5 was to determine and describe agricultural communications freshmen's perceived importance of the skills required by agricultural communications professionals. Agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions rated the 30 communications skills statements higher in extrinsic value, or importance level, than intrinsic value. Most of the skill statements rated the highest had some relation with the skill of public relations. However, "Write with proper grammar and punctuation" was ranked the most important communications skill.

Implications

Finch and Crunkilton (1999) claimed students are the major force that drives the shaping and molding of curriculum content. Student characteristics, skills, interests, expectations and maturity level should receive close scrutiny when selecting content for a curriculum (Finch and Crunkilton, 1999). The personal characteristics revealed in this study can help professors and professionals understand the perspective agricultural communications freshmen hold when entering the academic discipline.

The expectancy-value theory provided a good framework in helping professors and professionals understand how past student experiences shape the likelihood of future success (Schunk & Pajares, 2005). Most likely students are receiving positive experiences in a high school agricultural courses or mass communications classes, hence

leading them to believe they could succeed in an agricultural communications major. As long as these courses are giving an accurate representation of agricultural communications, professors and professionals can use high school curriculum as a catalyst for preparing future agricultural communicators.

Coffey (1987) claimed curriculum developers and evaluators should seek to formulate a curriculum to balance student interest with faculty vision and industry need. The results of this study showed some parallels between student interest and industry need. Like industry experts (Ciuffetelli, 2004; Morgan, 2009; Sprecker & Rudd, 1998; Terry & Bailey-Evans, 1995) suggested, the agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions desired to enroll in communications courses that teach a diverse set of skills. Agricultural communications freshmen from the three institutions also had an expectation to enroll in courses that provided a broad overview of agriculture. Both agricultural communications freshmen and industry believed it was important to enroll in agricultural economics courses (Ciuffetelli, 2004; Reisner, 1990; Sprecker & Rudd, 1998; Terry & Bailey-Evans, 1995). One would hope faculty of agricultural communications holds similar views, therefore bringing the curriculum to a balance.

Most of the career aspirations held by agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions were congruent with professional agricultural communicators' careers. However, it is interesting to note, most of the respondents expected to work in their home state after graduation. This trend could lead one to question the availability of agricultural communications positions available in each state, as well as the challenges a graduate could encounter in a job search if he/she is geographically bound.

The expectancy-value theory provided an excellent framework for understanding agricultural communications freshmen interest and perceived level of importance of 30 agricultural communications skills. Based on the results curriculum developers at each institution should seek to implement principles of teamwork and agricultural community description to their course assignments. Agricultural communications freshmen intrinsically value these skills, therefore making their activity engagement more enjoyable. With regards to the agricultural communications skills, no type of skills (i.e., writing, public relations, graphic design, etc) seemed to dominate another in student interest. Therefore, curriculum developers should seek to develop a curriculum that offers each type of communications skills. From those courses, students may more fully recognize and choose the skills they intrinsically value.

With regards to important agricultural communications skills, both agricultural communications freshmen and industry experts agreed writing was the most important skill. Also, the agricultural communications freshmen and professional agricultural communicators believed skills in public relations to be important. If faculty agrees with the importance of writing and public relations, the curriculum will be balanced at these levels. However, a disconnect was revealed between freshmen interest in describing agricultural community and their perceived level of importance of agricultural issues. With more research, one could discover students may develop a stronger interest in agricultural issues as they learn about them. However, programs could benefit more if the prospective student entering the program held a strong intrinsic value for studying, analyzing and communicating agricultural issue to the public.

Recommendations

Since most agricultural and communications experiences of agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions are obtained at the high school level, program administrators should review the secondary education curriculum regularly to ensure it is accurately teaching the discipline of agricultural communications. In addition, FFA advisers and college should be used as a good source to contact when looking for prospective agricultural communications students within the state.

To meet agricultural communications freshmen curriculum expectations at selected institutions, program administrators should offer an equal number of communications and agricultural courses. Diverse agricultural science courses should be taught in a broad manner to meet student and industry expectations. Curriculum developers and evaluators should also seek to develop a curriculum that offers each type of communications skills (i.e., public relations, web design, photography, writing). From those courses, students may more fully recognize and choose the skills they intrinsically value.

To ensure career success, agricultural economics should be a required course for all agricultural communications students at selected institutions. Both student and professional agricultural communicators believed this course was important to career success. Adequate internship opportunities also should be made available to meet both student and industry expectations.

As part of the entry-level courses, agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions should be introduced to realistic salary ranges and potential locations

for future employment. Such a practice has the potential to aid freshmen is obtaining a realistic perspective of their future working conditions.

Because agricultural communicators are expected to stand at the “critical intersection of the practice of science and the public understanding of science” (Treise & Weigold, 2002, p. 320), agricultural communications program administrators should seek out students who intrinsically value communicating agricultural science and its issues to the public. If other intrinsic values, such as teamwork, are discovered, faculty should use those values as natural motivators. By doing so, programs may be more successful in student retention.

Finally, the results of this study should be used in the future research seeking to build agricultural communications curriculum and obtain the balance between students, faculty and industry.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research should be done to ensure faculty’s vision of agricultural communications curriculum matches the student interest and industry need presented in this study. By doing so, the research will be following Coffey’s (1987) admonition to bring balance to student interest, faculty vision and industry need.

Research also should be conducted to understand why agricultural communications programs continue to attract more females than males. Studies conducted in the past two decades have revealed this dominant trend, but have provided no explanation. (Bisdorf-Rhoades et al. 2005, Bowen & Cooper, 1988)

In addition, more research is needed to discover if sophomore, junior and senior’s level of agricultural communications interest is similar to the freshmen interest at selected

institutions. Bowen & Cooper (1988) claimed a student's interest level and participation in mass communications decreases with each class level. Since this research is out-dated, new research is needed to assess student's interests.

In relation to the expectancy-value theory and agricultural communications curriculum development, more research is needed to understand why agricultural communications freshmen reported to be "unsure" about their interest in current agricultural issues. In addition, more information is needed to understand the intrinsic and extrinsic values driving students in their choice to major in agricultural communications. Researchers should seek to compare this study with other agricultural communications freshmen's interests at different institutions.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval Form
Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University, Texas A&M University

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, September 08, 2010
IRB Application No AG1029
Proposal Title: Perceptions, Expectations and Demographics of Agricultural Communications Freshmen

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 9/7/2011

Principal Investigator(s):

Tamra Watson 136 Ag Hall Stillwater, OK 74078	Tanner Robertson 437 Ag Hall Stillwater, OK 74078
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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.

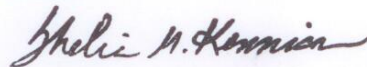
The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

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.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. 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 this 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 Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
Vice President for Research

September 8, 2010

IRB Coordinator
Ofc of Research Services
Mail Stop: 1035

Regarding: 502541 Perceptions, Expectations and Demographics of Agricultural Communications Freshmen

Dr. IRB Coordinator:

The Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee has approved your proposal referenced above. The approval is effective from September 7, 2010 to August 31, 2011. This expiration date must appear on all of your consent documents.

We will remind you of the pending expiration approximately eight weeks before August 31, 2011 and to update information about the project. If you request an extension, the proposal on file and the information you provide will be routed for continuing review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosemary Cogan".

Rosemary Cogan, Ph.D., ABPP
Protection of Human Subjects Committee

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
DIVISION OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES - OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

1186 TAMU, General Services Complex
College Station, TX 77843-1186
750 Agronomy Road, #3500

979.458.1467
FAX 979.862.3176
<http://researchcompliance.tamu.edu>

Human Subjects Protection Program

Institutional Review Board

MEMORANDUM

DATE: 06-Sep-2010

TO: NAILE, TRACI L
77843-2116

FROM: Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: Initial Review

Protocol Number: 2010-0640

Title: Perceptions, expectations and demographics of agricultural communications freshmen

Review Category: Exempt from IRB Review

It has been determined that the referenced protocol application meets the criteria for exemption and no further review is required. However, any amendment or modification to the protocol must be reported to the IRB and reviewed before being implemented to ensure the protocol still meets the criteria for exemption.

This determination was based on the following Code of Federal Regulations:
(<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.htm>)

45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior, unless: (a) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Provisions:

This electronic document provides notification of the review results by the Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX B
Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: Perceptions, expectations and demographics of agricultural communications freshmen

Investigator(s): Tamra Watson, Oklahoma State University

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to determine agricultural communications freshmen's understanding of the skills required of a professional agricultural communicator. In addition, the study will assess the curriculum and career expectations held by agricultural communication freshmen and describe their agriculture and communication experience.

Procedures: A survey that should take approximately 15 minutes to complete has been included with this letter. Please complete the survey and return it to your professor. The survey will ask you to rate a number of agricultural communications skills according to your level of interest and the level of importance. The survey also has some questions about your career and curriculum expectations.

Risks of Participation: There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits: Knowledge derived from the survey will improve faculty and agricultural communication professionals' understanding of entry-level agricultural communication students and their career and curriculum expectations. The results of this study have the potential to help industry specialists and college faculty formulate a better agricultural communication curriculum in the future.

Confidentiality: All information will be anonymous as no names or identification numbers will be recorded on the survey. The surveys will be destroyed in December 2011 after the responses have been entered into a computer. No names or identification numbers will be recorded in the data file. All results will be reported as aggregated data and no individual responses will be reported. The OSU IRB has the authority to inspect consent records and data files to assure compliance with approved procedures.

Contacts: If you have any questions about the research or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact Tamra Watson at 405-744-9357 or e-mail tamra.watson@okstate.edu or Dr. Tanner Robertson from Oklahoma State University at 405-744-8135 or e-mail tanner.robertson@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Participant Rights: Your participation in this project is appreciated and completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate at any time without any penalty or problem. Returning your completed survey to your professor indicates your willingness to participate in this study.

APPENDIX C

Instrument Administrator Script

Script to be read by Professor:

As your instructor, I have volunteered to use my classroom as part of a research study trying to help improve the quality of agricultural communications curriculum. Tamra Watson and Dr. Tanner Robertson from Oklahoma State University are interested in learning about your perceptions of the agricultural communications industry, as well as the expectations you have concerning your college coursework and future careers. To help in their research endeavors, they have requested that each one of you volunteer to fill out a questionnaire. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete and all your answers will remain anonymous. Participation in this survey will not affect your grade or your performance in this class. You may choose not to take the survey, but please remain quiet while others complete the questionnaire. If you decide to take the survey, you have the choice to withdraw from the study at anytime.

Once again, I would like to remind you that this survey is voluntary and will not impact your grade. If you choose to complete the survey, you consent to allow your anonymous answers to be used as part of the research study.



APPENDIX D
The Survey Instrument

Section I: Perceived Interest and Importance of Agricultural Communication Skills

Directions: In the first column, please rate each statement according to the level of interest you have in learning about the listed skill. Then in the second column, please rate the level of importance you believe each statement has in helping you become successful in your career.

ID NUMBER										SPECIAL CODES									
										A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9

INTEREST				
A	B	C	D	E
Not Interested	Somewhat Not Interested	Unsure	Somewhat Interested	Interested

IMPORTANCE				
A	B	C	D	E
Not Important	Somewhat Not Important	Unsure	Somewhat Important	Important

GENERAL PURPOSE DATA SHEET IV form no. 76657		INTEREST	IMPORTANCE
Agricultural Communication Skills		1 XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	1 XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Work under pressure	3	A B C D E	4 A B C D E
Discuss environmental/global issues and their relation to agriculture	5	A B C D E	6 A B C D E
Use lighting to enhance photo elements	7	A B C D E	8 A B C D E
Describe the agricultural community to the public	9	A B C D E	10 A B C D E
Sort through information and select the most important material for an audience	11	A B C D E	12 A B C D E
Resolve conflict	13	A B C D E	14 A B C D E
Analyze public perception of plant and animal food issues	15	A B C D E	16 A B C D E
Edit and critique others' work	17	A B C D E	18 A B C D E
Use symbolism of color to enhance publications, websites and advertisements	19	A B C D E	20 A B C D E
Effectively take shots from different angles	21	A B C D E	22 A B C D E
Fix barriers of communication between an organization and its public	23	A B C D E	24 A B C D E
Use photo editing programs	25	A B C D E	26 A B C D E
Develop an effective campaign	27	A B C D E	28 A B C D E
Operate photography equipment	29	A B C D E	30 A B C D E
Write with proper grammar and punctuation	31	A B C D E	32 A B C D E
Use graphics effectively to increase understanding	33	A B C D E	34 A B C D E
Discuss the impact of government and legislative policy upon agriculture	35	A B C D E	36 A B C D E
Work as a member of a team	37	A B C D E	38 A B C D E
Design a logo, advertisement, flyer or brochure	39	A B C D E	40 A B C D E
Evaluate the level of agricultural literacy in the United States	41	A B C D E	42 A B C D E
Apply copyright laws	43	A B C D E	44 A B C D E
Understand the economical structure of agriculture	45	A B C D E	46 A B C D E
Apply the rules of Associated Press Style	47	A B C D E	48 A B C D E
Understand the impact of biotechnology on world production systems	49	A B C D E	50 A B C D E
Identify bias in media stories	51	A B C D E	52 A B C D E
Understand what makes a publication layout and design more pleasing to a viewer's eye	53	A B C D E	54 A B C D E
Determine ethical solutions to problems	55	A B C D E	56 A B C D E
Talk with strangers about diverse topics	57	A B C D E	58 A B C D E
Report on a topic from various points of view	59	A B C D E	60 A B C D E
Select photos for proper medium	61	A B C D E	62 A B C D E
	63	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
	65	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
	67	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
	69	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
	71	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Section II: Curriculum and Career Expectations

Directions: Please mark the option on the scantron provided that best indicates your agricultural communication curriculum and career expectations.

1. In the next four years, I plan to:
 - a) take more agriculture courses than communication courses
 - b) take more communication courses than agriculture courses
 - c) take an equal amount of communication and agriculture courses

2. In the next four years, I plan to:
 - a) Learn a broad set of communication skills
 - i. (writing, reporting, photography, broadcasting)
 - b) Learn a specific set of communication skills
 - i. (public relations or advertising)

3. In the next four years, I plan to:
 - a) Have one agricultural communication internship experience
 - b) Have two agricultural communication internship experiences
 - c) Have three agricultural communication internship experiences
 - d) Have four or more agricultural communication internship experiences
 - e) I do not plan on an agricultural communication internship

4. In the next four years, I plan to:
 - a) Enroll in one communication-based writing course
 - b) Enroll in two communication-based writing courses
 - c) Enroll in three communication-based writing courses
 - d) Enroll in four or more communication-based writing courses
 - e) I will not enroll in communication-based writing courses

5. In the next four years, I plan to:
 - a) Enroll in a diverse set of agricultural science courses
 - i. (i.e. animal science, food science, plant science)
 - b) Enroll in a specific set of agricultural courses
 - i. (animal science: genetics, reproduction)

6. Do you plan of being a member of the National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don't know

7. I believe agricultural economic/business courses are important for agricultural communication professionals:
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don't know

8. When I graduate, I plan to:

- a) Enter the workforce as a professional agricultural communicator
- b) Enter the workforce in agriculture
- c) Enter the workforce in a different field
- d) Continue my education for a master degree in agricultural communications
- e) Continue my education for a master degree in a different field
- f) Continue my education for a doctoral degree in agriculture
- g) Continue my education for a doctoral degree in a different field

9. When I graduate, I plan to:

- a) Work for an agricultural industry
- b) Work for a non-agricultural industry
- c) Work for a not-for-profit organization
- d) Work for the government
- e) Work for higher-education
- f) Work for my family
- g) Work as my own boss

10. When I graduate, I plan to:

- a) Work as a publication reporter
- b) Work as a public relations representative
- c) Work as a news anchor or broadcaster
- d) Work as an advertiser
- e) Work as a graphic designer
- f) Work as a web designer
- g) Work as an author
- h) Work as an educator
- i) Work in a position that allows me to work in more than one of the positions listed above
- j) None of the above

11. When I graduate, I plan to:

- a) Work in my home-town
- b) Work in my home-county
- c) Work in my home-state
- d) Work in my home-region
- e) Work within the United States
- f) Work Internationally
- g) I have no preference

12. When I graduate, I plan to make:

- a) A salary range of less than \$20,000
- b) A salary range \$20,001-\$30,000
- c) A salary range \$30,001-\$40,000
- d) A salary range \$40,001-\$50,000
- e) A salary range \$50,001-\$60,000
- f) A salary range \$60,001-\$70,000
- g) A salary range \$70,001-\$80,000
- h) A salary range \$80,001-\$90,000
- i) A salary range of more than \$90,000

13. Do you believe the level of education beyond a bachelor degree influences salary in agricultural communications?

- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don't know
-

Section III: Student Demographics

Directions: Please mark the option on the scantron provided that best indicates your personal characteristics and experience.

14. What is your current student classification?

- a) Freshman (0 to 30 credits completed)
- b) Sophomore (31 to 60 credits completed)
- c) Junior (61 to 90 credits completed)
- d) Senior (91 or more credits completed)
- e) Master's Student
- f) Doctoral Student

15. Please select the option that best describes your college degree plan:

- a) Agricultural Communications
- b) Agricultural Communications + another agricultural major (i.e. Ag Com/Animal Science)
- c) Agricultural Communications + another communication major (i.e. Ag Com/Marketing)
- d) Agricultural Communications + another major (i.e. Ag Com/Business)
- e) Other

16. Who helped you decide to major in agricultural communications?

- a) Professional Agricultural Communicator
- b) Career Counselor
- c) College recruitment/campus visit
- d) College Advisor
- e) FFA Advisor
- f) Parents
- g) Friends
- h) Online resources
- i) Self interests
- j) Other

17. I attend college within my permanent state of residence:

- a) Yes
- b) No

18. My permanent state of residence is in:

- a) Northeastern
 - i. Maine, New York, Pennsylvania
- b) Midwestern United States
 - i. i.e. Oklahoma, Kansas, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Nebraska
- c) Western United States
 - i. i.e. California, Oregon, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, New Mexico
- d) Southern United States
 - i. Texas, Florida, Georgia, Virginia, Louisiana
- e) International

19. Did you grow up in an urban or rural area?

- a) Rural
- b) Urban

20. What is the population of the place you grew up?

- a) 2,500 or less people
- b) 2,501-10,000 people
- c) 10,001-30,000 people
- d) 30,001-50,000 people
- e) 50,001-100,000 people
- f) 100,001-150,000 people
- g) 150,001-200,000 people
- h) 200,001-250,000 people
- i) 250,001-300,000 people
- j) 300,001 or more people

21. Which option best describes your agriculture background experience?

- a) Family-Owned Livestock Production and/or Crop Production
- b) Employee of Livestock Production and/or Crop Production
- c) Agribusiness Employee
- d) Agricultural Communications Employee
- e) High School agriculture classes and FFA
- f) Government Programs (i.e. 4-H, Agriculture in the Classroom)
- g) All of the Above
- h) No agricultural experience

22. Which option best describes your communication experience?

- a) High school communication courses
- b) Member of high school yearbook or newspaper staff
- c) High school, community or religion organization photographer
- d) High school, community or religion organization reporter
- e) Social media user (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Blogger)
- f) Held a job with publication type company or organization
- g) All of the above
- h) No communication experience

23. What is your gender?

- a) Male
- b) Female

24. How old are you?

- a) 17-18
- b) 19-20
- c) 21-22
- d) 23-24
- e) 25-26
- f) 27-28
- g) 29-30
- h) 31 or older

VITA

Tamra Lynn Watson

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: PERCEPTIONS OF AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS FRESHMEN
REGARDING CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS AND CAREER
ASPIRATIONS

Major Field: Agricultural Communications

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Agricultural Communications at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2010.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Communications and Journalism at Utah State University, Logan, Utah in 2009.

Experience:

Research:

Student Market Research Plan Team Leader for Utah's Own, 2009;
Content Analysis Researcher for Utah State University Alumni Association, 2008.

Communications:

Career Development Graduate Assistant, 2009-2010; Utah State University Alumni Newsletter Editor, 2008-2009; Utah State University Agricultural Council Public Relations Chair, 2008-2009; Utah FFA Association Publications Representative, 2007-2009.

Agriculture:

Employee of IFA Country Stores, 2007-2009; Employee of Moroni Feed Sales Office, 2006; Employee of Watson Brothers Sheep Production, 1998-2002.

Professional Memberships:

Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow, Utah State University Chapter President 2008-2009, member 2007-2008. Phi Kappa Phi Member, 2009

Name: Tamra Watson

Date of Degree: December, 2010

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: PERCEPTIONS OF AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS
FRESHMEN REGARDING CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS AND
CAREER ASPIRATIONS

Pages in Study: 89

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: Agricultural Communications

Scope and Method of Study:

The purpose of this study was to describe agricultural communications freshmen perceptions of agricultural communications curriculum by describing selected personal characteristics, career aspirations and curriculum expectations of agricultural communications freshmen at Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University. In addition, this study also described agricultural communications freshmen's interests and perceived importance of agricultural communications skills at the selected institutions. The population for the study was 100 agricultural communications students enrolled in an entry-level agricultural communications course during the 2010 Fall Semester. To assess the perceptions of the population, a 54-question instrument was developed and sent to each University to be administered on site. Data was collected from each site using scantron sheets and was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Findings and Conclusions:

This study revealed the personal characteristics of agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions. The average agricultural communications freshman was female, between ages 17 to 18, attending a university within her state of residence. She is from a rural area, and decided to major in agricultural communications because of self-interest or encouragement from her FFA or college adviser. Most of her agricultural and communications experience was obtained in high school, on a family production farm, or by engaging in social media. This study also revealed agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions desired to enroll in an equal amount of agricultural and communications courses. According to agricultural communications freshmen's expectations the material taught in these courses to be broad and diverse. The results of this study also revealed students have a stronger extrinsic value for agricultural communications skills than an intrinsic value. Writing and describing the agricultural community to the public were the highest ranked skills by agricultural communications freshmen at selected institutions.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Tanner Robertson
