

CAREER CHOICES AND FACTORS INFLUENCING  
CAREER CHANGE AMONG OKLAHOMA  
STATE UNIVERSITY AGRICULTURAL  
COMMUNICATIONS GRADUATES

By

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background and Setting

The starting point of agricultural communications in the United States can be traced to the first decade of the 1800s. Farm magazines and newspapers increased from 157 in 1880 to 400 by 1920, circulation numbers increased more rapidly, from about 1 million in 1880 to 17 million in 1920 (Boone, Meisenbach & Tucker, 2000). "Fueling the rise in circulations was the good general health of the economy, creating more subscribers and advertisers" (Boone, et al., 2000, p. 14). The years between the 1920's and 1940's were difficult for agriculture because of poor economic planning after World War I, while some sectors of the economy boomed others like agriculture suffered but the farm publishing industry survived (Boone, et al., 2000). Other technology changed during the 1920's to 1940's as the radio was introduced to the public (Boone, et al., 2000). "Herbert Hoover, then secretary of commerce, led a 1922 radio conference in Washington, D.C., that stated no use of radio, except for military purposes, should supersede use for agriculture," (Boone, et al., 2000, p. 16). Radio changed how farmers received information because before dissemination was through mailings or word of mouth, however, the farm magazine publishing continued to grow from 300 in 1940 to 390 in 1955 (Boone, et al., 2000). The next broadcasting change was in the 1940's and 1950's with the introduction of television (Boone, et al., 2000). "In some markets, farm reports were incorporated into noon news shows, whereas in others a farm show stood on their own," (Boone, et al., 2000, p. 20). To reach more specialized audiences, subject matter narrowed and from 1950 to 1970 the number of specialized farm publications

tripled (Boone, et al., 2000). "Agricultural media as a whole gained sophistication from 1950 to 1970 and required improved quality in the work of communications specialists at agricultural colleges and universities," (Boone, et al., 2000, p. 22). "The average farm in 1970 received seven farm periodicals," (Boone, et al., 2000, p. 23). "In 1986 the National Science Foundation formed NSFNET, which eventually became the internet," (Boone, et al., 2000, p. 23). In the 1980's, farmers increased their debt load significantly and the economic situation was known as a farm crisis. Farm numbers decreased and the publishing industry felt the impact tremendously because of the decrease in buying power and available income of the remaining farmers (Boone, et al., 2000).

In the early 1800s, approximately 70 percent of the United States population worked on farms, but by the 1990s less than two percent of the population of the United States worked solely on a farm. The public's lack of general agriculture knowledge affected the way agriculture had to be reported (Boone, et al., 2000). Today, agricultural media, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television all represent clear and well-defined entities (Boone, et al., 2000).

Agricultural communications programs were born out of the need by land-grant universities to disseminate information to various audiences through the media (Evans & Bolick, 1982). Professional preparation for careers in agricultural communications is commonly provided through academic programs housed in departments of agricultural education. Because of their relatively small size and reliance on other academic units to deliver curricula, agricultural communications programs might face some new challenges (Tucker, et.al., 2003).

Agricultural communicators work in various fields in the work place, and many factors influence career choices and career change among agricultural communications graduates after they receive their bachelor's degree (Tucker, et.al., 2003). Agricultural communications students want to know their career options and that their program of study is preparing them for a viable career in the agricultural communications industry (Tucker & Paulson, 1988).

### Problem

Agricultural communications faculty must maintain student satisfaction by keeping students with diverse interests informed of career opportunities. Agricultural communications graduates must be prepared to enter the workforce in a variety of career areas. With the broad scope of career opportunities available in agricultural communications, are academic programs capable of meeting students' needs when those students possess diverse interests?

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to assess an agricultural communications program's ability to prepare students for careers in diverse career areas. This study looked at career choices and factors influencing career change among agricultural communications graduates. Specifically, this study sought to assess the employability skills needed by agricultural communications graduates and evaluated the contribution of the agricultural communications curriculum in developing these skills. This study also looked at the factors influencing agricultural communications graduates to change careers or professions. Specifically, this study wanted to determine recent graduates' occupational

status and assess their perceptions of the agricultural communications program at Oklahoma State University.

### Objectives

The following research objectives were formulated to guide this study:

1. Describe the employment and occupational status of agricultural communications graduates who graduated between fall 1999 and spring 2004.
2. Assess the employability skills needed by agricultural communications graduates.
3. Evaluate the contribution of the agricultural communications curriculum to the development of employability skills.
4. Assess the agricultural communications program's ability to prepare students for diverse opportunities.
5. Identify factors that influenced graduates to change careers or occupations.

### Assumptions

The instrument used in the study solicited answers from participants, and the researcher assumed they supplied truthful answers. However, some of the questions were open-ended, and respondents answered based upon their opinions of the agricultural communications program at OSU. It is important to note that some of the data in this survey is based on the perceptions of the graduates instead of facts. The researcher also assumed the participants of this study answered all of the questions to the best of their ability.

## Limitations

This study was limited to the accuracy of e-mail addresses, which were gathered by the researcher with the help of the agricultural communications faculty at Oklahoma State University. In trying to keep the respondents identity unknown, the survey did not ask personal questions. Therefore, since the researcher does not know when respondents graduated, some of the conclusions in this study are limited.

## Significance of the Study

This study was conducted to help provide recruitment and career statistics for agricultural communications faculty at OSU. Results of this study are being used for recruitment and retention of students and for program improvements.

## Definition of Terms

Graduate: Student of the agricultural communications degree program at Oklahoma State University who received their degree between fall 1999 and spring 2004.

Alumni: Graduates of the agricultural communications degree program at Oklahoma State University from fall 1999 to spring 2004.

Agricultural Communications: academic program that involves a variety of communication specializations such as journalism, advertising, public relations, etc (Bailey-Evans, 1994).

Communications: The act of communicating; transmission (Webster's Online Dictionary, 2005).

Disseminate: to spread abroad; promulgate: *disseminate information* (Webster's Online Dictionary, 2005).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Through the review of articles pertaining to this study, it became obvious that there is a need for evaluating career choices and factors influencing career change among agricultural communications graduates. In trying to determine this need, this chapter will focus on several key topic areas, which include career patterns of graduates, distribution of employment opportunities, educational experience, career change, theories of career change, and curriculum requirements. The literature review will serve as a basis to show the need for periodic studies to keep pace with changing occupational needs and to advise students of the important curriculum and extracurricular experiences available at the university.

The development of agricultural communications programs began at the university level, and its establishment coincided with the development of the extension function in the early decades of the twentieth century (Duley, Jensen & O'Brien, 1984).

In this study, the researcher hopes to determine what skills and curricula are needed to produce agricultural communications graduates who will succeed in the global marketplace and who have desired traits needed by employers.

#### Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework builds a structure or “concept” of what has been learned in a particular area of study (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 1996). “The purpose of a concept is to simplify thinking by including a number of events under one general heading” (Ary,

et al., 1996, p. 27). Developing a conceptual framework goes beyond a simple literature review and builds a framework of research (Ary, et al., 1996).

The conceptual framework in this study was in the literature available on the theory and behavior of the career decision making process and was reviewed in an attempt to provide some insight into the factors that influenced career choices and career change of agricultural communication graduates.

Krumboltz Social Learning Framework assumed past experiences through both direct and observational stimulus can strengthen individual behavior (Seda, 1996). According to Krumboltz (1979), people are assumed to be intelligent, problem-solving individuals who strive to understand the positive and negative reinforcement that surrounds them and then attempt to control their environment to suit their own purposes and needs. In Krumboltz's (1979) framework, he considered the effect of both internal and external factors and their interactions.

Krumboltz's (1979) framework addressed the question of why individuals enter particular occupations and why they may express various preferences for different occupational activities at selected points in his or her life. In the theory, however, Krumboltz does not provide conclusive evidence of internal and external factors individuals perceive as having influenced an actual decision to enter into a specific occupation at selected points in his or her life (Brown & Brooks, 1990).

#### Patterns of Graduates

A study by Buck and Barrick (1995) at The Ohio State University stated that the results of various studies revealed that agricultural communicators are a diverse population, both in background, personal qualities, and work environment.

Buck and Barrick (1995) looked at agricultural communication graduates ages 25 to 54 years old. Buck and Barrick (1995) found that of the respondents, more than one-fourth (25.4%) had been communicators for more than 20 years. “In terms of educational background, 93 percent of the respondents had at least one college degree” (Buck & Barrick, 1995, p. 7). In addition, Buck and Barrick (1995) concluded that more than one-fifth (20.9%) of the respondents earned \$20,000 to \$29,999 per year. The most common position held was reporting (19.2%), second was public relations (16.9%), and third was editing (16.2%).

Buck and Barrick (1995) found that 55.2 percent of respondents said agricultural subject matter knowledge and communication skill knowledge were equally important in their work. “The types of backgrounds of agricultural communicators, as well as their job descriptions, indicate a continuing lack of consensus about the qualities that yield the best agricultural communicator” (Buck & Barrick, 1995, p. 10).

A study by Cooper and Bowen (1988) determined that agricultural communications graduates of The Ohio State University were very satisfied with their undergraduate courses in agriculture, journalism, and communications.

Cooper and Bowen (1988) concluded that if agricultural communications graduates of The Ohio State University could plan their curriculum again, 40 percent of the respondents would enroll in more journalism or communications classes while 18 percent would take more agriculture classes. Cooper and Bowen (1988) found that agricultural communications graduates rated their overall undergraduate experience as satisfactory (3.30 on a 4.00 scale) with internships, career exposure, and advising experiences rating most important for future agricultural communicators.



## A Career in Agricultural Communications

Agricultural journalism or agricultural communications as a career choice positions students for careers with broad responsibilities and opportunities. Probably one of the first things that needs to be recognized is that agriculture is not a field or profession isolated from the rest of society.

Agriculture must function within society for it to succeed, and therefore, someone working in agriculture must have a broad understanding of all aspects of life, not just agriculture (Boone, et al., 2000). Preparation for a career in agricultural communications should include a solid collegiate experience with courses in the arts, sciences, and agriculture (Boone, et al., 2000). Throughout the land-grant university system, agricultural communicators are found engaged in the arenas of mass media, electronic media, publishing, graphic design, and information technology to extend the research of the federal government and the university to the public (Boone, et al., 2000).

It is important to produce agricultural journalists who possess the necessary skills needed to disseminate information to the public. A goal of the agricultural communications program at the university level is to evaluate curricula to see if the program is producing graduates who possess these skills (Boone, et al., 2000).

Writing and editing are probably the most important skills for agricultural communicators, regardless of the area (Boone, et al., 2000). It is not enough to be interested in agriculture; an agricultural communicator must be able to use appropriate words and language to tell a reader about a process or procedure; describe a breed or variety; or relate other information that is important to a reader, viewer or listener (Boone, et al., 2000). Although writing is critical, the ability to edit and review another's

work is equally important. In some settings, especially in a small agency or publication, the agricultural journalist might serve as both editor and writer (Boone, et al., 2000).

### Distribution of Employment Opportunities

Agriculture has been a way of life that has had a great impact on civilization (Boone, et al., 2000). “American agriculture is a vast and diversified industry – and every day, in a variety of ways, it touches the lives of all persons young and old” (Swenson, 1987, p.75). Agriculture is a large industry that has numerous career possibilities (Swenson, 1987). Today, agriculture is not only farming but it also includes many businesses and industries also referred to as agribusiness. Some of the specialized careers in agriculture consist of agricultural communications and agricultural education, as well as conservation, forestry, and recreation (Swenson, 1987). “The agriculture industry’s main purpose is to supply man’s needs for food, fiber, and shelter” (Swenson, 1987, p.75).

Specialized fields like the agricultural communications programs are housed in larger departments like agricultural education (Tucker, et.al., 2003). A study by Cartmell and Garton (2000) noted that approximately 95 percent of the agricultural education graduates at The University of Missouri were gainfully employed, employed and continuing their education part-time, or continuing their education full-time. Cartmell and Garton (2000) stated that the remaining graduates were employed part-time or taking care of their families in the home. Cartmell and Garton (2000) added that the employment status of graduates provides evidence to the value of an agricultural education degree, whether that degree leads to employment opportunities or the pursuit of an advanced or professional degree. The agricultural communications field needs people who can

interview farmers, scientists, and industrialists; attend conventions, demonstrations, and legislative sessions; and report on new developments and legislative issues (Swenson, 1987).

### Educational Experience

Concern has grown among leaders in the American agricultural community that they will face shortages of qualified workers in the future. “If agricultural industries are to survive, the agricultural curricula must be dynamic and have the plasticity to be able to adjust to new situations and environments that help to improve on-the-job effectiveness of future graduates” (Coorts, 1987, p. 20).

Every profession has knowledge and carries out activities that separate it from other professions (Buck & Barrick, 1995). “The agricultural communications field includes professionals who combine (1) knowledge of agriculture, (2) skills in communications, (3) and interest in working with people” (Hopke, 1987, p. 77).

An agricultural communicator’s responsibility is to determine what information about agriculture is needed by society and then to develop ways to present that information (Buck & Barrick, 1995). The responsibility requires the communicator’s involvement in all stages of the communication process, and the type of skills needed varies (Buck & Barrick, 1995). Usually, agricultural communications students have degrees that require a combination of agricultural courses and journalism or communication courses (Buck & Barrick, 1995). The results of these various studies revealed that agricultural communicators are a diverse population, both in background, personal qualities, and work environment (Buck & Barrick, 1995).

A study by Major (1988) at Texas Tech University determined the occupational status of alumni from the College of Agricultural Sciences who graduated between 1971 and 1986. The study also obtained information from the graduates about their perceptions concerning their educational needs. Major's (1988) recommendations were (1) the college should be responsible for coordinating surveys of all college alumni; (2) a continuous systematic follow-up of graduates' occupational status and educational needs will help develop strong curriculum programs for the college; (3) better placement programs for graduates which will provide a quality college environment for the prospective student; and (4) efficient student advisement (as cited in Cartmell, 1998).

Cheek and McGhee (1990) reviewed studies that provided evidence regarding the career patterns of graduates, which indicated some students do not know about the diversity of career opportunities available in agriculture; therefore, it is necessary to inform students of these available opportunities.

#### Career Development Theories

In an era of a changing global marketplace, the vocational structure and diversity of curriculum are necessary to produce graduates that are prepared for the workplace (Sprecker & Rudd, 1997).

A study by Hackett, Lent, and Greenhaus (1991) looked at theoretical models of and streams of inquiry on vocational behavior during the 1970s and 1980s. "There is a clear need to expand our repertoire of methods to more adequately respond to important research questions and to profit from technical advances" (Hackett, et al., 1991, p. 27).

The study of careers is an interdisciplinary subject comprising research from multiple areas, including psychology (Betz, et al., 1989), sociology (Barley, 1989), labor economics (Brecker, 1975) and organizational behavior (Hackett, et al., 1991). There are different approaches to studying careers within these areas.

Career development theories are derived from the disciplines of organizational behavior and cognitive psychology. Super (1981) summarized the career development theories derived from psychology as follows:

Differential psychologists are concerned with occupational choice, matching and selecting theories ranging from those which focus on aptitudes and interests that make for differential choice of and success in occupations, through personality theories that view infant and child development as the key determinants, to situational or social-structural theories that tend to treat social class and the opportunity structure as the principal or even sufficient determinants of occupational choice or assignment. These approaches merge, in varying degrees, in what might be called “socialized-individual” approaches which themselves vary from treating the individual as the organizer of his experiences to viewing him as one who is socialized to become what society wants him/her to be.

Developmental psychologists, while not rejecting the differential theories, treat them as an insufficient basis for career guidance. This is because studies of the life span and life space have made it clear that occupational choice or assignment is not something that happens once in a lifetime on leaving school. These theories hold that people and situation develop, and that a career decision tends to be a series of mini-decisions of varying degrees of importance. They hold that these

mini-decisions add up to a series of occupational choices, which represent flexible maxi-decisions. Subsequently, cognitive psychologists are concerned with the processes in which the mini- and maxi-career decisions are made. Constructed first as a theory of differential determinants and then as a theory of developmental stages at which determinants must be considered, career decision making (CDM) theory has broadened to include decision processes, both descriptive and prescriptive. The CDM theories discuss the dynamic interaction of individual and environmental influences on the career decisions made through out an individual's life span. (p. 38-39)

The career decision-making process is a social process. Thus, the social context and, in particular, the people who provide the decision-maker with advice during the job search process can affect the likelihood of career change (Higgins, 2001). Higgins (2001) stated that for individuals operating in this new employment context, change in one's career can be experienced in multiple ways; it may yield a sense of renewal and personal growth or, alternatively, a sense of inconsistency and even confusion regarding one's own goals and work values. The present research does not offer a position on whether (or when) changing careers is necessarily desirable, but rather attempts to uncover some of the factors that contribute to an individual's decision to do so (Higgins, 2001).

Developmental career theories focus on human development across an entire life. Theorists in this category recognize changes that people go through as they grow up. People seek career satisfaction through work roles in which they can express themselves and can implement and develop their self-concept. A number of key structural theories will be examined briefly in chronological order in the following section: The Trait and

Factor theory (1909); Donald Super's theory (1957) modified in 1990; Tiedeman and O'Hara theory (1963); Eli Ginzberg's theory (1972); and Holland's theory (1985).

The Trait and Factor Theory began with Parsons (1909), who proposes that a choice of a vocation depends upon three factors. The first factor is to have an accurate knowledge of one's self. This includes having a clear understanding of one's aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, and limitations. The second factor is to have a thorough knowledge of job specifications. The final factor is the ability to make a proper match between the two. There are two major assumptions of trait and factor theory. The first assumption is that individuals and job traits can be matched. The second assumption is that close matches of these traits are positively correlated with job success and satisfaction.

The underlying factor of Super's (1957) theory is self-concept; people are happiest when their relations with other people are satisfying. "It includes three major needs for which satisfaction is sought in work: human relations, work, and livelihood" (Super, 1957, p. 3). Career patterns originated in the field of sociology and are considered "the study of social mobility by means of occupational mobility" (Super, 1957, p. 71).

Super (1957) stated that the life stages of the career patterns consisted of infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. These five stages were explained further by Super in (1957); the growth stage extends from conception to age fourteen; the second stage is the exploratory stage, which includes from about age fifteen to about twenty-five; the establishment stage is third and includes ages twenty-five to forty-five; the fourth stage is the maintenance stage, which includes from age forty-five to about sixty-five; and the final stage is that of decline, beginning at age sixty-five.

Super (1957) explained four career patterns reflecting the influence of self-concept and completion of appropriate exploratory tasks. These patterns are as follows: stable, choosing and entering a career both early and permanently; conventional, involving experimentation with more than one choice before selecting a permanent one; unstable, involving a series of trial career choices with no ideas of permanency; and multiple-trial, which involves moving from one stable career path to another.

Super (1990) has modified his theory through the years and added that people cycle and recycle throughout the life span as they adapt to changes in themselves, as well as to the trends in the work place. As a result of the theory modification, stages bear no invariant relationship to chronological age and the psychological changes achieved at a given stage are not necessarily permanent (Smart & Peterson, 1997).

A study by Smart and Peterson (1997) looked at Super's (1990) concept of recycling through the stages of adult career development. Smart and Peterson's (1997) study concluded that Super's concept of career recycling predicts that individuals who change careers part way through occupational life will pass through the full set of career stages for a second time, successively expressing concern that each of the developmental tasks in a single-career life cycle arise only once and take roughly a decade to work through.

“The findings that respondents who had fully completed the change into a second career were just as satisfied with their overall process of career development as stable single careerists is in keeping with Super's (1990) view that recycling into a new career is a normal developmental outcome with no adverse long-term



implications for personal happiness or vocational maturity” (Smart & Peterson, 1997, p. 372).

Tiedeman and O’Hara’s (1963) theory states that career development is a process of organizing an identification of work through the interaction of the individual’s personality with society. Like Super (1957), Tiedeman and O’Hara (1963) believe career development spans a person’s lifetime. Tiedeman and O’Hara’s (1963) theory is comprised of two main periods: anticipation and implementation. During the anticipation period, individuals progress through four stages: exploration, crystallization, choice, and specification. The first stage is exploration, and it is a time when one probes into a number of alternatives or goals and then examines himself in relation to these possible choices. Crystallization takes place when choices become clearer, understood and evaluated. After this, an individual makes a choice and begins to act on it. Tiedeman and O’Hara (1963) suggest that the higher the certainty of the choice, the greater the effect on one’s actions.

Holland’s (1985) theory developed an extensively used career development theory that focuses on a person’s personality type and the work environments that allow the person to fully express his or her personality. Holland’s (1985) theory classifies the personality types and work environments into six types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. All of these types are part of a person, but one type is usually the strongest. It is possible that a person might have up to three dominant types.

Holland’s (1985) theory organizes data about people in different jobs and the data about different working environments to suggest how people make career choices and to explain how job satisfaction and vocational achievement occur. Holland (1985) suggests

that people find job satisfaction in work environments that are compatible with their personalities and contends that people tend to choose a career that is reflective of their personality; therefore, the job environment reflects the person's personality.

Similar to Trait and Factor theory, Holland's (1985) theory places an emphasis on accurate self-knowledge and career information to make positive career decisions.

Holland (1985) explained both personality and environment are expressed in 3-letter codes. This 3-letter code is formed by selecting from Holland's six types the three types that most closely characterize the person or his or her work-school environment. The 3-letter code provides a brief summary of what a person is like by showing the degree of resemblance to three occupational groups. Individuals are assumed to be most satisfied, successful, and stable in work environments that are congruent with their personality types. Two of Holland's basic assumptions are that (a) individuals in the same vocation have similar personalities, and (b) persons tend to choose actual occupational environments (or college majors) that are consistent with their personality orientation.

Holland (1996) suggested that most persons have a personal career theory (PCT) about careers or work, which can range from weak and invalid to strong and valid.

Holland (1996) explained a PCT as the collection of beliefs, ideas, assumptions, and knowledge that guides individuals as they choose occupations or fields of study, explains why they persist in them, and is used by people as they go about making career decisions.

Holland (1996) noted that career choice problems might stem from any one or more of three components of the PCT: (1) personal characteristics, (2) occupational knowledge, or (3) translation units. From Holland's (1996) perspective, the PCT is fundamentally a matching system, probably developed informally throughout a lifetime. Holland's (1996)

theoretical formulation defines vocational identity as “the possession of a clear and stable picture of one’s goals, interests, and talents” (p. 399).

Eli Ginzberg (1972) began his work in 1951; however, it was not until 1972 that his career development theory became clearer. Ginzberg’s theory (1972) suggests three main points: first, occupational choice is a process that remains open as long as one is making decisions about his or her career; second, early decisions have an impact on shaping one’s career later in life; third, people make decisions about careers with the goal of increasing their satisfaction by identifying the best fit between their needs and desires (Ginzberg, 1972).

As careers scholars have suggested, having attractive alternatives increases the desire or intention to change careers, and hence, the probability of doing so (Neapolitan, 1980). It is expected that the diversity of one’s psychosocial advice relations will increase the probability of career change. The more confident an individual is in his or her abilities, the more psychologically ready he or she is to take on challenging work (Bandura, 1997), such as changing careers (Higgins, 2001).

Wei’s (1994) research study, involving students’ selection of graphic communications programs, supported Krumboltz’s (1979) propositions that an individual’s career decision is affected by a combination of external and internal factors. The social learning theory of career decision-making (Krumboltz, 1979) provided a comprehensive theoretical formulation to explain how people come to be employed in a variety of occupations and to suggest possible interventions that might help people make satisfactory career decisions. Wei’s (1994) findings stated the concerning factors influencing graphic communications students’ career decision making: Internal-

individual factors and situational factor were significant while psychological-emotional and social factors were not significant.

A study by Gianakos (1999) looked at patterns of career choices and career decision-making. Gianakos (1999) added people whose career choice development was stable or multiple trial patterns reported significantly greater levels of career decision-making self-efficacy than people did whose career choice development was conventional or unstable. “Persons in the stable group were significantly more likely to recommend professionals in their chosen fields as important career role models than were persons with conventional and unstable career patterns” (Gianakos, 1999, p. 244).

“Career decisions are among the most important decisions an individual must make” (Gati, 1998, p. 343). Gati (1998) explored the notion of career-related aspects as a potential framework for career decision-making and for assessing person-environment fit. Gati (1998) stated in many cases the career decision-making process can be divided into two main stages. The first stage is termed “prescreening,” which is the search for a small set of promising alternatives when individuals are expected to clarify their vocational preferences. The second stage is the “in-depth exploration” of the promising alternatives, which involves comparing them and evaluating their relative merits where individuals are expected to collect information about the promising alternatives and the probabilities of actualizing them.

Gati (1998) suggested using vocational interests to assess person-environment fit. “According to this approach, congruence is inversely related to the distance between individuals’ vocational interests and the characteristics of their work environment” (Gati,

1998, p. 344). “The aspects-based approach emerged in the context of the development of a computer-assisted guidance system” (Gati, 1998, p. 345).

Gati’s (1998) study concluded that the vocational interests are useful but only a partial view of the individual’s occupational preferences. Gati (1998) claimed that the aspects-based approach provides a general framework that may be in various types of career decisions, including the search for occupations, jobs, and even leisure activities.

### Curriculum Requirements

The growth of the nation's agricultural communication's programs and the changes in agriculture and communications technology require the exploration of new curriculum to better qualify graduates for the positions they apply for after they graduation (Bailey-Evans, 1994).

Sprecker and Rudd (1997) stated agricultural communications students at the University of Florida, in general, are prepared only to be agricultural writers, not communicators. Sprecker and Rudd (1997) showed that desktop publishing and internships are essential to a program and concluded instructors should consider these views when making agricultural communications curriculum decisions and added that curriculum should include ways for students to become acquainted with people in the industry.

A study by Buck and Paulson (1995) reviewed selected characteristics and the educational preparation of agricultural communicators. “The responsibilities of an agricultural communicator are complex, and they vary according to the type of employment, the educational preparation of the individual, and the range of his or her experiences and special interests” (Buck & Paulson, 1995, p. 2).

Buck and Paulson (1995) also concluded that more than one-half of the respondents, 55.2 percent, said both agricultural subject matter knowledge and communication skills knowledge were equally important in their work, while 42.7 percent of respondents said communication skills knowledge was most important in their work. “This study showed that there is no uniform description of an agricultural communicator. In general agricultural communicators have become more diversified” (Buck & Paulson, 1995, p. 11).

A study by Irani and Scherler (2002) conducted at the University of Florida noted that the career field in agricultural communications is rapidly expanding and changing, creating a need to determine the effectiveness of the program by measuring job satisfaction. Irani and Scherler (2002) suggested that the analysis of agricultural communications alumni will not only help current agricultural communications students, but also will suggest directions for future curriculum for the program. Irani and Scherler (2002) stated most of the agricultural communications graduates thought their educational experience had prepared them for their careers. Irani and Scherler (2002) concluded that a large percentage of agricultural communications graduates were satisfied with their jobs and that an outcome was to suggest an overall success rate of the program.

A study by Tucker, Whaley, and Cano (2003) stated that one of the ways the agricultural communications profession creates students interest in attending school is through the strong recruitment efforts of several key organizations through scholarships, internships, and mentor programs. “In the 21st century academic programs in agricultural communications continue to fulfill an important role in preparing professionals for a

variety of careers in both the private and public sectors” (Tucker, et.al., 2003, p. 24).

Tucker, Whaley, and Cano (2003) stated having educational outlook with an emphasis in the agricultural educations undergraduate department and teaching methods and probably had improved the methods of instruction for agricultural communications students.

Tucker, Whaley, and Cano (2003) concluded that for agricultural communications programs to incorporate the growth and incorporate the profession, two areas are needed: balancing academic, research, and outcome areas, as well as making sure courses are not duplicated. A study by Tucker and Paulson (1988) indicated Texas Tech University agricultural communications students have high levels of interest in both agricultural communications and mass communications subject matter.

“Based on students’ career objectives, it appears that agricultural faculty members are in a strategic position to handle placement and recruitment activities for agricultural communications graduates because of their involvement with agricultural professionals through advisory committees and service functions” (Tucker & Paulson, 1988, p. 15).

“Feedback from advisory committees, alumni groups, and other private-industry stakeholders can be a valuable source of information in strengthening curricula and competencies of graduates” (Tucker, et.al., p. 28).

#### Curriculum Overview

“Today there are approximately 30 programs in agricultural communications nationwide, offering diverse curricula including courses in journalism, broadcasting, public relations and Web-based communications” (Irani & Scherler, 2002, p. 12).

“Professional preparation for careers in agricultural communications is commonly provided through academic programs that are housed in departments of agricultural education” (Tucker, et.al., 2003, p. 22).

These academic programs have continued to evolve as both agriculture and new communication technologies have developed. Curriculum for agricultural communications programs is intended to help graduates qualify for a wide range of job opportunities (Evans & Bolick, 1982).

“Competencies needed by agricultural communicators have changed with technology and job requirements, indicating a need to examine the curriculum to make it applicable to students and their future employers” (Sprecker & Rudd, 1997, p. 1).

Erven (1987) stated that curriculum has become a crisis for higher education. “Band-Aids and patching will continue to be used by some but fail to resolve the problem” (Erven, 1987, p. 1042). Erven (1987) stated the need to develop an understanding of the issues when considering curriculum and have a framework for evaluating curricula. Erven (1987) concluded that employers, alumni, and university administrators can help faculty understand problems and needs for change, but faculty are responsible for making those changes.

In a study by Ciuffetelli (2004), agricultural writers and editors agreed agriculture was important, but the importance of technical agricultural courses in the curriculum was low or not as important as communications and journalism-type courses. Respondents stated that being able to report things correctly, meet deadlines, and gather information all proved to be important proficiencies for a future writer/editor to master (Ciuffetelli, 2004).



Efforts should be made to maintain the quality standards of advisement, which students receive in their department (Cheek & McGhee, 1990). Cheek and McGhee (1990) showed students perceive advisement to be an essential and important part of the educational process. Many colleges of agriculture are undergoing programmatic changes and are re-examining the philosophy underlying their missions (Graham, 2001).

Buck and Barrick's (1995) study revealed a need for identifying the type of education best suited for an agricultural communicator. "The responsibilities of an agricultural communicator are complex and vary according to the type of employment, the educational preparation of the individual, and the range of his or her experiences and special interests" (Buck & Barrick's, 1995, p. 2).

A significant growth within the nation's agricultural communications programs and the rapid changes in agriculture and communications technology demands the exploration of new curriculum to better qualify graduates for the positions they apply for and desire after they graduate (Bailey-Evans, 1994). The curricula in colleges and universities serve as the foundation for the development of professional proficiencies and where universities begin to develop the minds and the abilities of career-oriented students. The curriculum is designed to help graduates gain the skills and knowledge needed for them to qualify for a wide-range of job opportunities available in the agricultural communications career field (Bailey-Evans, 1994).

#### Extracurricular Activities

In a Cheek and McGhee (1990) study, graduates' perceptions of student organizations were evaluated and then used to determine if there were any benefits of being involved in extracurricular organizations. Cheek and McGhee (1990) concluded

that 36.1 percent of graduates at the University of Florida were involved in organizations as students and their participation and involvement helped them to work well with people after graduation and entering the workforce.

“Of those who were members, they generally believed that involvement helped them to understand agricultural education/vocational agriculture (77.0%), helped develop leadership skills (75.0%), helped them accept and carry out responsibilities (80.0%), helped them work with people (86.0%), helped to develop job skills (64.7%) and made them aware of career possibilities (61.0%)” (Cheek & McGhee, 1990, p. 18).

In a study by Wrye (1992), most of the graduates said students should be involved in extracurricular activities and indicated that being in an organization helped them understand agriculture, build leadership skills, learn responsibility, work as a team, and build occupational skills that helped to secure a job. Cooper & Bowen's (1988) study showed graduates of The Ohio State University were satisfied with selected academic experiences. The most satisfying experiences involved student groups and organizations such as the Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow.

#### Summary of Literature Review

Through the literature review, the researcher wanted to describe career theories that explained why people change careers. It became evident that there is a need for explaining career choices and factors influencing career change among agricultural communications graduates. The literature served as a basis for showing the need for periodic studies to keep pace with changing occupational needs and to provide students advisement of the important curriculum and extracurricular experiences available at the

university level. The conceptual framework used in this study was available in the literature on the theory and behavior of the career decision-making process. It was reviewed in an attempt to provide some insight into the factors that influenced career choices and career change of agricultural communication graduates.

Agricultural communicators are a diverse population, both in background, personal qualities, and work environment. Agricultural knowledge and communication skill knowledge were equally important in the work of agricultural communicators. Cooper and Bowen (1988) found that agricultural communications graduates rated their overall undergraduate experience as satisfactory (3.30 on a 4.00 scale) with internships, career exposure, and advising experiences rating most important for future agricultural communicators.

Agricultural communications as a career choice positions students for careers with many opportunities. Preparation for a career in agricultural communications should include college experience. Although writing is critical, the ability to edit and review another's work is equally important. In small agencies or publications, the agricultural communicators might be required to work two positions in one.

Agriculture is a large industry that has numerous career possibilities. Today, agriculture is not only farming but it also includes many businesses and industries also referred to as agribusiness. The agricultural communications field needs people who can interview farmers, scientists, and industrialists; attend conventions, demonstrations, and legislative sessions; and report on new developments and legislative issues (Swenson, 1987).

“If agricultural industries are to survive, the agricultural curricula must be dynamic and have the plasticity to be able to adjust to new situations and environments that help to improve on-the-job effectiveness of future graduates” (Coorts, 1987, p. 20). Usually, agricultural communications students have degrees that require a combination of agricultural courses and journalism or communication courses (Buck & Barrick, 1995). The results of these various studies revealed that agricultural communicators are a diverse population, both in background, personal qualities, and work environment (Buck & Barrick, 1995).

The study of careers is an interdisciplinary subject comprising research from multiple areas (Hackett, et al., 1991). There are different approaches to studying careers. Career development theories are derived from the disciplines of organizational behavior and cognitive psychology. Developmental career theories focus on human development across an entire life. Theorists in this category recognize changes that people go through as they grow up. People seek career satisfaction through work roles in which they can express themselves and can implement and develop their self-concept. As careers scholars have suggested, having attractive alternatives increases the desire or intention to change careers, and hence, the probability of doing so (Neapolitan, 1980). The more confident an individual is in his or her abilities, the more psychologically ready he or she is to take on challenging work (Bandura, 1997), such as changing careers (Higgins, 2001).

The growth of the nation's agricultural communication's programs and the changes in agriculture and communications technology require the exploration of new curriculum to better qualify graduates for the positions they apply for after they

graduation (Bailey-Evans, 1994). “In the 21st century academic programs in agricultural communications continue to fulfill an important role in preparing professionals for a variety of careers in both the private and public sectors” (Tucker, et.al., 2003, p. 24).

“Today there are approximately 30 programs in agricultural communications nationwide, offering diverse curricula including courses in journalism, broadcasting, public relations and Web-based communications” (Irani & Scherler, 2002, p. 12).

“Professional preparation for careers in agricultural communications is commonly provided through academic programs that are housed in departments of agricultural education” (Tucker, et.al., 2003, p. 22). The curricula in colleges and universities serve as the foundation for the development of professional proficiencies and where universities begin to develop the minds and the abilities of career-oriented students. The curriculum is designed to help graduates gain the skills and knowledge needed for them to qualify for a wide-range of job opportunities available in the agricultural communications career field (Bailey-Evans, 1994).

In a study by Wrye (1992), most of the graduates said students should be involved in extracurricular activities and indicated that being in an organization helped them understand agriculture, build leadership skills, learn responsibility, work as a team, and build occupational skills that helped to secure a job.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This chapter describes the methods and procedures used to conduct this study, including data collection and analysis. To address the purpose and objectives of the study, the researcher modified the survey instrument, specified the population sampling, and then proceeded with data collection and analysis.

#### Institutional Review Board

Federal regulations and OSU policy require approval of all research studies that involve human subjects before investigators can begin their research. The Oklahoma State University Office of University Research Services and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) conduct this review to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in biomedical and behavioral research. In compliance with that policy, the study received a review and was granted permission to proceed. The IRB assigned the number AG0530 to the study assessing factors influencing the college choice decisions of undergraduate students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at OSU (Appendix A).

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess an agricultural communications program's ability to prepare students for careers in diverse career areas. This study looked at career choices and factors influencing career change among agricultural communications graduates. Specifically, this study sought to assess the employability skills needed by agricultural communications graduates and evaluated the contribution of the agricultural

communications curriculum in developing these skills. This study also looked at the factors influencing agricultural communications graduates to change careers or professions. Specifically, this study wanted to determine graduates' occupational status and assess their perceptions of the agricultural communications program at OSU.

### Objectives of the Study

The following research objectives were formulated to guide this study:

1. Describe the employment and occupational status of agricultural communications graduates who graduated between fall 1999 and spring 2004.
2. Assess the employability skills needed by agricultural communications graduates.
3. Evaluate the contribution of the agricultural communications curriculum to the development of employability skills.
4. Assess the agricultural communications program's ability to prepare students for diverse opportunities.
5. Identify factors that influenced graduates to change careers or occupations.

### Population

This census study consisted of all graduates of the Oklahoma State University agricultural communications program from fall 1999 through spring 2004 (N=143). The time frame was selected to find out information about career change, as well as the graduates' first job experiences. The researcher selected the most recent graduates of the program. Graduates prior to 1999 might not be as relevant because they have been in the career field for a longer time frame and probably promoted.

## Research Design

The study used descriptive survey research to determine the career choices and factors influencing career change among OSU agricultural communications graduates from fall 1999 to spring 2004. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) asserted that descriptive research examines situations as they are and the researcher has no control over what things are, only measures what currently exists. After the survey was designed using an online Internet survey, the link to the online survey was sent via e-mail to the population for data collection. Descriptive statistics were done because a poll of the population was conducted.

## Instrument Design

The instrument for this study was modified from a survey developed by Cartmell and Garton (1999). The instrument (Appendix B) was modified to target an agricultural communications population rather than an agricultural education audience. The questions were designed to provide responses for each objective of this study. There were nine open-ended questions, six fill-in-the-blank questions, and four questions required a yes or no response. There were five rating questions where graduates' perceptions of the agricultural communications program were assessed.

The demographics portion of the instrument was developed so that background information could be collected about respondents' to compile a profile. There were no questions asked about age, race, or gender.

## Data Collection Procedures

The Dual Method for Web-Based Data Collection (Dillman, 2000) was used in an attempt to increase response rate and ease of data collection. It is dual in that there are



two parts. The first was the use of e-mail, which was used to send out an introductory e-mail and follow-up reminders. The second part to this method is the use of the Web. The Web was used to access the survey with the provided URL address and to submit the completed survey (Dillman, 2000).

The questionnaire was administered online. The invitation e-mail was sent to respondents on March 7, letting them know the instrument would be forthcoming (Appendix C). The second e-mail was sent three days later, March 10, to respondents and included a link to the survey, other information about the study, and contact information of the researchers (Appendix D). The third and fourth e-mails were reminder e-mails. (Appendix E, F). They were sent out weekly to the population starting the second week after the instrument was sent out and continued weekly until the end of the survey. Data collection ended on March 27.

Comparing early to late responses assessed non-response error. The responses to selected items from the first week of data collection were compared with responses from the final week. The researcher noted no differences in the data.

Dillman (2000) found electronic surveys to be cheaper and faster, but the response rate was not as high as that generated by mail surveys. Dillman (2000) also found more positive attitudes toward technology and higher levels of self-efficacy among the initial group of electronic respondents than among the initial mail survey respondents. In terms of costs, electronic surveys require time and some technological skill, but not postage. The cost of the online survey is relatively inexpensive at about \$10 to \$30 per month. The researcher used [www.freeonlinesurveys.com](http://www.freeonlinesurveys.com) for data collection.

## Web-based Surveys

Telephone, random sampling, and electronic surveys are the three most significant advances in survey technology in the twentieth century (Dillman, 2000). If one thinks about the impact that has been made from the telephone and random sampling, one can soon realize the potential of Web-based surveys (Dillman, 2000).

A Web-based survey is the collection of data through a self-administrated electronic set of questions on the Web. With Web-based surveys, the researcher has control of the physical appearance of the survey and can create attractive and inviting forms. Web-based surveys can include radio buttons and drop-down lists that permit the respondents to select their choice. Check boxes allow for multiple answers. Text boxes can be one line with a limited number of characters or prevent unlimited text entry (Dillman, 2000).

To successfully implement electronic surveys, professionals usually draw samples from organizational lists (e.g., company employees, university faculty, professional membership) that include e-mail addresses. Despite their limited sampling frame, survey professionals (Dillman, 2000) have argued that electronic surveys offer distinct advantages against traditional mail surveys when used with these populations and this type of survey use should continue.

## Validity

A panel of experts reviewed the instrument to establish face and content validity. The panel consisted of four OSU faculty members and two doctoral students from OSU (Appendix G). Modifications were made to specific questions based on suggestions from the advisory committee and from the panel of experts. The panel yielded a list of

corrections that needed to be done to the instrument before using it. The top three corrections are listed. First, shorten the questions to simplify them. Second, shorten four particular answers so respondents would not have to scroll up and down to fill them in, perhaps forgetting what they had previously read. Third, make some questions and answers more specific to increase simplicity. These supplied suggested modifications of the instrument made it more effective and user-friendly. Some suggestions were made to eliminate possible error with similar questions. This panel assisted in the content validity of the instrument, as they were knowledgeable about the desired content and target audience.

### Reliability

Reliability was determined by conducting a pilot test. The pilot test was conducted from February 25, 2005, to March 2, 2005. The pilot test was used to establish reliability of the instrument. Upon review of the pilot data and feedback from the respondents, the researcher made the changes in the above paragraph to the format of the survey before it was sent out for data collection.

A reliability analysis was performed pre-data collection on the frequency questions for the instrument. Because the questions were scaled, a Cronbach's Alpha was performed. Reliability coefficient on the scaled items ranged from .720 to .955.

### Data Analysis

The researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences® version 12.0 for Windows software program to analyze all data. The data was saved in a Microsoft Access database and converted for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used, such as frequencies, means, percentages, and standard deviations, to describe the influence of career choices,

institutional characteristics, influential curriculum, degree program characteristics, and opportunities for position/occupation change of agricultural communications graduates.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Problem

Agricultural communications faculty must maintain student satisfaction by keeping students with diverse interests informed of career opportunities. Agricultural communications graduates must be prepared to enter the workforce in a variety of career areas. With the broad scope of career opportunities available in agricultural communications, are academic programs capable of meeting students' needs when those students possess diverse interests?

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to assess an agricultural communications program's ability to prepare students for careers in diverse career areas. This study looked at career choices and factors influencing career change among agricultural communications graduates. Specifically, this study sought to assess the employability skills needed by agricultural communications graduates and evaluated the contribution of the agricultural communications curriculum in developing these skills. This study also looked at the factors influencing agricultural communications graduates to change careers or professions. Specifically, this study wanted to determine recent graduates' occupational status and assess their perceptions of the agricultural communications program at Oklahoma State University.

#### Objectives

The following research objectives were formulated to guide this study:

1. Describe the employment and occupational status of agricultural communications graduates who graduated between fall 1999 and spring 2004.
2. Assess the employability skills needed by agricultural communications graduates.
3. Evaluate the contribution of the agricultural communications curriculum to the development of employability skills.
4. Assess the agricultural communications program's ability to prepare students for diverse opportunities.
5. Identify factors that influenced graduates to change careers or occupations.

The population for this study consisted of all graduates of the agricultural communications program at Oklahoma State University from fall 1999 through spring 2004 (N=143). The graduates from the last five years were selected to try to compile information from the most recent graduates. The time frame also was selected to find out information about career change, as well as the graduates' first job experiences. There were 13 e-mail addresses that could not be located; therefore, the researcher had to eliminate those graduates. An additional nine were lost due to bad e-mail addresses. The researcher and the committee decided to eliminate these nine e-mail addresses from the population after failed attempts to correct the addresses or locate more recent addresses. By removing the nine invalid e-mail addresses, the accessible population was 121.

#### Response Rate

Data were collected from March 10, 2005, to March 27, 2005. Of the 121 graduates surveyed, 67 respondents completed the online instrument, resulting in a response rate of 55.4%. All responses were useable for data analysis.

## Demographics

Of the 67 respondents, the majority, 52 people, (77.6%) had earned less than five hours of graduate college credit since graduating with their bachelor of science degree majoring in agricultural communications. The second largest group of respondents, six people (9.0%) had five to 10 hours, while the third largest group, four people (6.0%), had 26 to 30 hours earned. Groups four and five in the ranking were tied with two respondents answering each: 11 to 15 hours (3.0%); 16 to 20 hours (3.0%); the sixth group was who answered 16 to 20 hours (1.5%) of graduate college credit since graduating with his or her bachelor's degree majoring in agricultural communications (see Table 1).

Table 1

*College Or University Hours Earned After Completion Of Bachelor's Degree Majoring In Agricultural Communications (n=67)*

<u>Hours Earned</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>percent of respondents</u>
Less than 5	52	77.6%
11-15	2	3.0%
16-20	2	3.0%
21-25	1	1.5%
26-30	4	6.0%
More than 30	6	9.0%

Of the respondents, 25 graduates (37.3%) would be interested in going back to school for a master's degree, while 18 graduates (26.9%) said they were not interested. Finally, 24 graduates (35.8%) said they might be interested in earning a master's degree in agricultural communications.

Of those surveyed, nine graduates (13.4%) wanted to obtain a doctoral degree, 42 graduates (62.7%) were not interested in pursuing a doctoral degree, and 16 graduates (23.9%) did not want to earn a doctoral degree at this time.

Graduates were asked questions about online courses for the master's program in agricultural communications at OSU. If online courses were offered at OSU for earning an agricultural communications graduate degree, 41 (61.2%) of the respondents would be interested in enrolling, while 26 (38.8%) would not attend. Of the respondents, 21 (31.3%) would be interested in taking graduates courses if they were offered at night, but the remaining 46 (68.7%) would not be interested even if night classes were offered.

#### Findings Related To Objective One

The first objective sought to describe the employment and occupational status of agricultural communications graduates. The majority, 57 participants (85.1%), had not pursued graduate studies beyond their bachelor's degree, while five (7.5%) of those surveyed had received some other form of continuing education. Five respondents (7.5%) did not answer this question (see Figure 1).

Respondents of this survey had the following current employment status: 51 (76.1%) were employed full-time, six (9.0%) were unemployed and seeking employment, four (6.0%) were continuing their education part-time and employed, three (4.5%) were serving in the armed forces, one graduate (1.5%) was employed part-time, one graduate (1.5%) was caring for family/home full-time, and one graduate (1.5%) was continuing education full-time (see Figure 2).



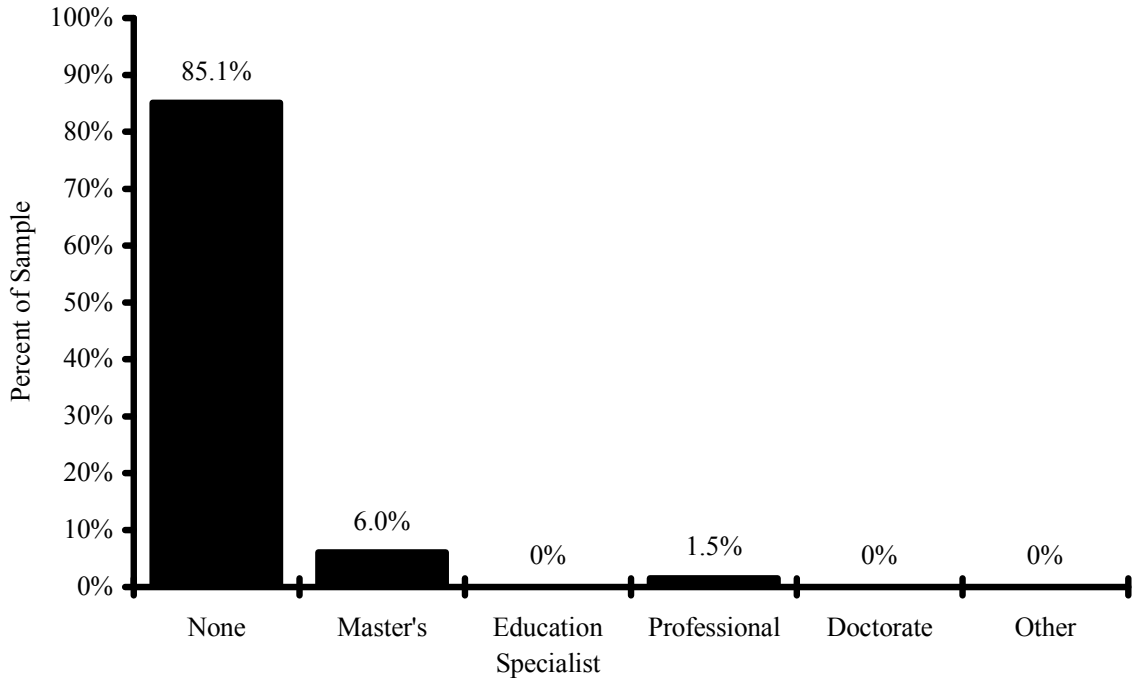


Figure 1. Respondents' degrees earned beyond a bachelor's degree majoring in agricultural communications at OSU.

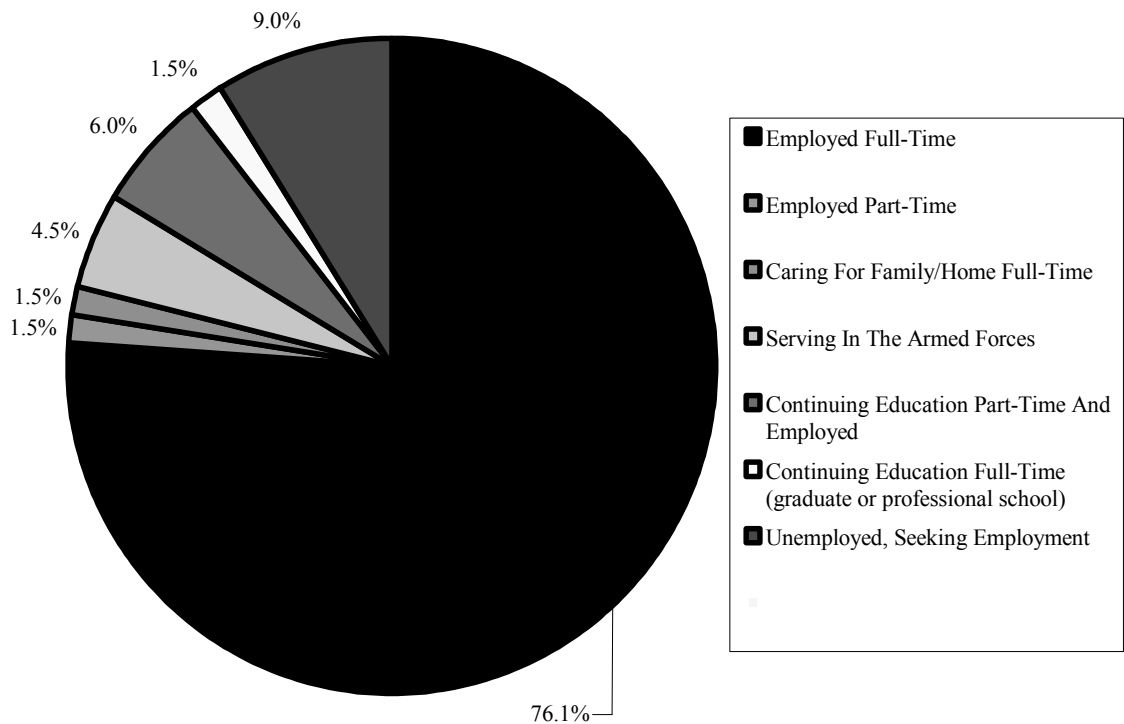
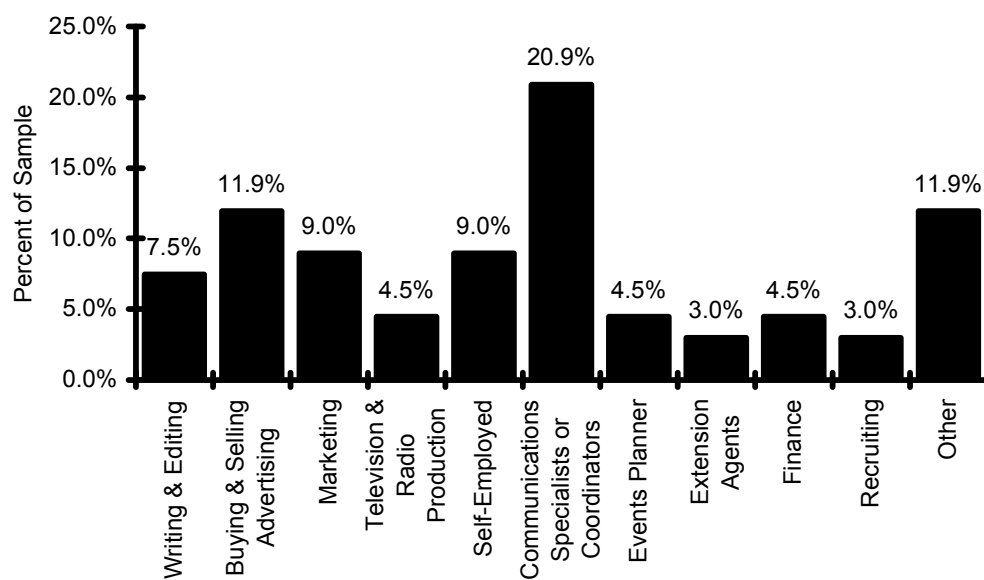


Figure 2. Current employment status of respondents with a bachelor's degree majoring in agricultural communications at OSU.

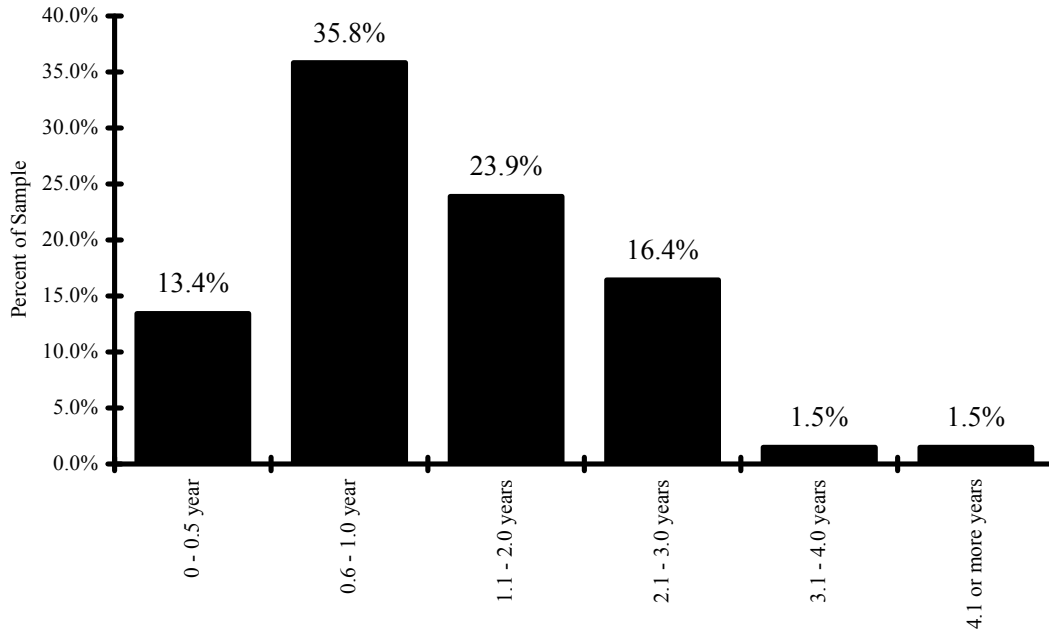
Of the various positions held by graduates, the most common occupation held was 14 respondents (20.9%) being a communications specialist or coordinator. Eight respondents (11.9%) answered advertising and sales. Eight of the respondents (11.9%) answered the "other" category. Six (9.0%) of the respondents answered marketing, six (9.0%) graduates answered being self-employed, five (7.5%) respondents answered writing and editing, three (4.5%) graduates answered television and radio, three (4.5%) respondents were event planners, three (4.5%) graduates were in finance, two (3.0%) graduates were in recruiting, and two (3.0%) graduates were extension agents. Of the respondents, seven people (10.4%) did not answer this question (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3.* Current occupational status of respondents with a bachelor degree.

Respondents' length of employment varied from one week to five years. Thirty-three (49.2%) respondents, reported being employed for less than one year. Twenty-four respondents (35.8%) were employed for six months to 12 months, 16 graduates (23.9%) were employed 13 to 24 months, 11 respondents (16.4%) had been employed 25 to 36

months, nine respondents (13.4%) had been employed less than five months, one respondent (1.5%) had been employed 37 to 48 months, one respondent (1.5%) had been employed 48 months or more, while five respondents (7.5%) did not answer this question (see Figure 4).



*Figure 4.* Years in current occupational position for respondents of this study.

Of the agricultural communications graduates, 14 respondents (20.9%) said their current salary range varied from \$30,000-\$34,999. The second largest group of respondents, 11 (16.4%), earned between \$25,000-\$29,999. The third largest group of respondents, 10 (14.9%), earned between \$35,000-\$39,999. The fourth largest group of respondents, eight (11.9%), earned between \$15,000-\$19,999. The fifth largest group of respondents, seven (10.4%), earned \$14,999 or less. The sixth largest group of respondents, six (9.0%), earned between \$20,000-\$24,999. The seventh largest group of respondents, three (4.5%), earned between \$40,000-\$44,999. The eighth group of

respondents, three (4.5%), earned between \$44,999-\$49,999. The ninth largest group of respondents, two (3.0%), earned between \$50,000-\$54,999. Lastly, of the respondents, two (3%) earned \$55,000 or more, and one (1.5%) did not answer this question (see Figure 5).

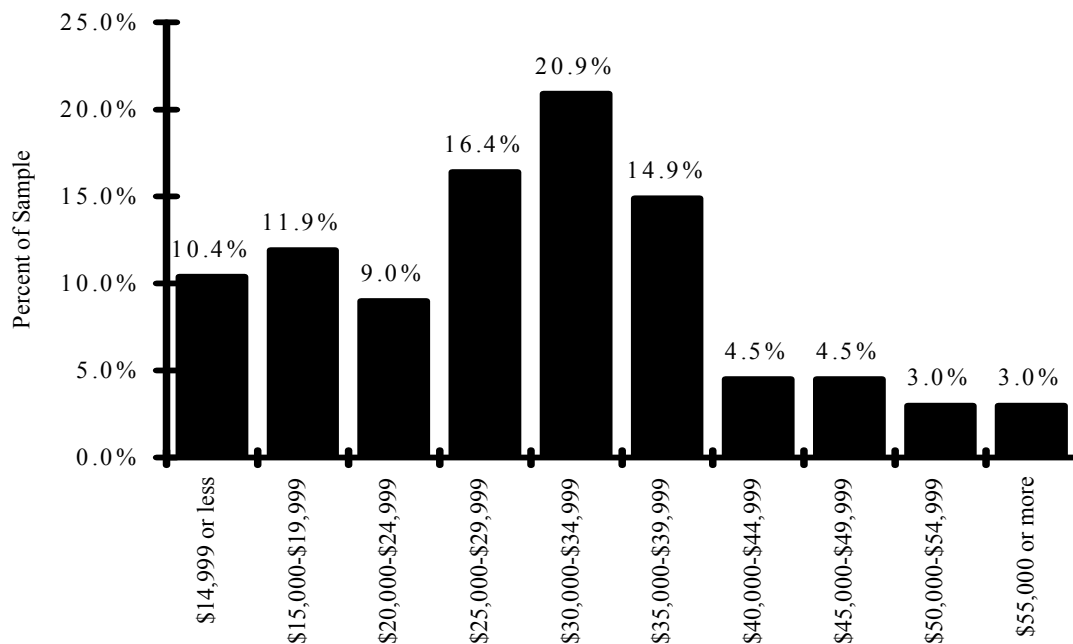
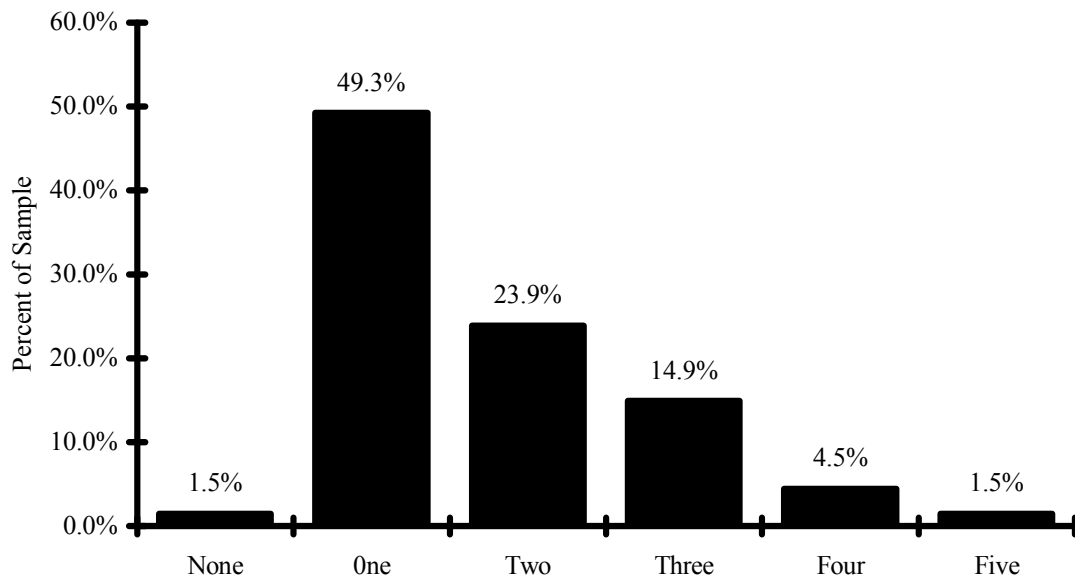


Figure 5. Current annual salary of respondents

Freelancing is one way agricultural communications graduates might make extra money. Thirty-one (46.3%) respondents did not freelance for extra income, while 17 (25.4%) indicated they freelance. It should be noted that 19 of the respondents (28.4%) did not answer this question.

Statistics from this research showed that almost half of the respondents, 33 (49.3%), had only one job since graduating from OSU. Less than a quarter, 16 (23.9%), of the graduates, had held two different jobs since graduation, 10 (14.9%) had held three different jobs, three (4.5%) had held four different jobs, one respondent (1.5%) had held

five different jobs, one respondent (1.5%) indicated not being employed, and three (4.5%) did not answer this question (see Figure 6).



*Figure 6.* Total full-time positions held by respondents since graduating from OSU.

### Findings Related To Objective Two

The second objective sought to assess the employability skills needed by agricultural communications graduates. On the survey the researcher asked graduates to rate a list of skills one might expect to develop while pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree and to indicate their opinion of the importance of the skill to be successful in today's world. The ratings were classified by respondents selecting the following choices: no importance, minor importance, moderate importance, or major importance.

Findings were assessed by the researcher ranking by mean the skills that the respondents rated. The “recognizing and using effective verbal communication skills” was rated as a major important employability skill needed by graduates with a mean of 3.91 out of 4.00 (n=66). The second major skill selected by the graduates as important for

employability was “using effective written communications skills” with a mean of 3.90 out of 4.00 (n=67). The third highest ranked skill determined by the respondents was “planning and completing projects” with a mean of 3.81 out of 4.00 (n=67). “Analyzing information to effectively make decisions” was fourth with a mean of 3.79 out of 4.00 (n=67). The fifth ranked employability skill determined by the respondents was “getting along with people” with a mean of 3.78 (n=67). The next ranked employability skills were as follows: “developing and using effective leadership skills” had a mean of 3.76 (n=67), “defining and solving problems” had a mean of 3.72 (n=67), “working with people whose attitudes and opinions are different” had a mean of 3.67 (n=67), “working cooperatively in groups; working as a team member” had a mean of 3.64 (n=67), “assessing and using a variety of information sources” had a mean of 3.51 (n=67), “analyzing and drawing conclusions from various types of data” had a mean of 3.36 (n=67), “understanding and appreciating cultural and ethnic differences” had a mean of 3.24 (n=67), “understanding international issues” had a mean of 3.13 (n=67), and “appreciating and exercising the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of a citizen” had a mean of 2.96 out of 4.00 (n=67). “Understanding the interaction of humans and the environment” had a mean of 2.93 (n=67), which ranked it as the least important employability skill needed by agricultural communications graduates (see Table 2).

### Findings Related To Objective Three

The third objective sought to evaluate the contribution of the agricultural communications curriculum to the development of employability skills. On the survey, the researcher asked graduates to rate a list of abilities one might expect to develop while pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree and indicate the degree to which the agricultural

Table 2

*Employability Skills Important To Agricultural Communications Graduates.*

Skills	Rank	n	M	SD
Recognizing and using effective verbal communication skills	1	66	3.91	0.34
Using effective written communication skills	2	67	3.90	0.31
Planning and completing projects	3	67	3.81	0.40
Analyzing information to effectively make decisions	4	67	3.79	0.45
Getting along with people	5	67	3.78	0.55
Developing and using effective leadership skills	6	67	3.76	0.46
Defining and solving problems	7	67	3.72	0.45
Working with people whose attitudes and opinions are different than mine	8	67	3.67	0.64
Working cooperatively in groups	9	67	3.64	0.60
Using a variety of information sources	10	67	3.51	0.61
Analyzing and drawing conclusions from various types of data	11	67	3.36	0.71
Understanding and appreciating cultural and ethnic differences	12	67	3.24	0.76
Understanding international issues	13	67	3.13	0.74
Appreciating and exercising the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of a citizen	14	67	2.96	0.82
Understanding the interaction of humans and the environment	15	67	2.93	0.89

*Note.* Scale: 1 = No Importance; 2 = Minor Importance; 3 = Moderate Importance; 4 = Major Importance.

communications program contributed to them attaining each skill. The ratings were classified by respondents selecting the following: no contribution, minor contribution, moderate contribution, or major contribution.

The findings were assessed by the researcher ranking the skills that the respondents rated. According to respondents, the agricultural communications program did the best job of preparing graduates for “using effective written communication skills” with a mean of 3.88 out of 4.00 (n=67). The respondents rated the second most important contribution of the curriculum as “recognizing and using effective verbal communication skills” with a mean of 3.69 out of 4.00 (n=67). The third highest contribution of the agricultural communications program in developing employability skills was “working cooperatively in groups and working as a team member” with a mean of 3.60 out of 4.00 (n=67). “Planning and completing projects” was fourth with a mean of 3.54 out of 4.00 (n=67). The fifth ranked contribution was “getting along with people” and had a mean of 3.46 out of 4.00 (n=67). Of the remaining responses, contribution of the agricultural communications curriculum to the development employability skills ranked as follows: “accessing and using a variety of information sources” had a mean of 3.45 (n=67), “developing and using effective leadership skills” had a mean of 3.43 (n=67), “working with people whose attitudes and opinions are different than mine” had a mean of 3.30 (n=66), “defining and solving problems” and “analyzing information to effectively make decisions” tied at ninth and tenth in ranked contribution with a mean of 3.18 (n=67), “analyzing and drawing conclusions from various types of data” had a mean of 3.01 (n=67), “understanding the interaction of humans and the environment” had a mean of 2.67 (n=67), “understanding and appreciating cultural and ethnic differences” with a



mean of 2.61 (n=67), and “understanding international issues” with a mean of 2.58 out of 4.00 (n=67). The last ranked contribution was “appreciating and exercising the rights, responsibilities, and the privileges of a citizen” with a mean of 2.54 (n=67) (see Table 3).

#### Findings Related To Objective Four

The fourth objective sought to identify factors assessing the agricultural communications program’s ability to prepare students for diverse opportunities. On the survey, the researcher asked graduates to rate a list of statements used to assess specific components of the agricultural communications degree program and rate each statement with the given scale. Respondents were asked to select: poor, fair, good, excellent, or not applicable. The findings were assessed by the researcher ranking skills that the respondents rated. Please note that the not applicable data was excluded in the calculation of the mean.

According to respondents, the highest rated component was “my adviser’s interest in me as a person” with a mean of 3.80 out of 4.00 (n=65, N/A=2) (see Table 4). The next highest ranked item was the “availability of my adviser” with a mean of 3.76 out of 4.00 (n=66, N/A=1). The third highest ranked item was “professional competence of the agricultural communications faculty” with a mean of 3.73 out of 4.00 (n=64, N/A=3). The fourth highest ranked component was “adviser’s help in planning my degree program” with a mean of 3.70 out of 4.00 (n=63, N/A=3, Missing=1). “Overall quality of the agricultural communications program” was fifth in rank with a mean of 3.69 out of 4.00 (n=65, N/A=2). The next ranked factors that assessed the agricultural communications program’s ability to prepare students for diverse opportunities were as follows: “quality of students in the agricultural communications program” with a mean of

Table 3

*Contribution Of Agricultural Communications Curriculum In Developing Employability Skills According To Participants*

Skills	Rank	n	M	SD
Using effective written communication skills	1	67	3.88	0.33
Recognizing and using effective verbal communication skills	2	67	3.69	0.56
Working cooperatively in groups	3	67	3.60	0.68
Planning and completing projects	4	67	3.54	0.56
Getting along with people	5	67	3.46	0.75
Using a variety of information sources	6	67	3.45	0.63
Developing and using effective leadership skills	7	67	3.43	0.66
Working with people whose attitudes and opinions are different than mine	8	66	3.30	0.74
Defining and solving problems	9	67	3.18	0.69
Analyzing information to effectively make decisions	9	67	3.18	0.63
Analyzing and drawing conclusions from various types of data	10	67	3.01	0.79
Understanding the interaction of humans and the environment	11	67	2.67	0.94
Understanding and appreciating cultural and ethnic differences	12	67	2.61	0.85
Understanding international issues	13	67	2.58	0.86
Appreciating and exercising the rights, responsibilities, and the privileges of a citizen	14	67	2.54	0.86

*Note.* Scale: 1 = No Contribution; 2 = Minor Contribution; 3 = Moderate Contribution; 4 = Major Contribution.

Table 4

*Respondents' Ranking Of Positive Program Components Of The Agricultural Communications Degree*

Components	Rank	n	M	SD
My adviser's interest in me as a person	1	67	3.80	0.51
Availability of my adviser	2	67	3.76	0.56
Professional competence of the agricultural communications faculty	3	67	3.73	0.45
Adviser's help in planning my degree Program	4	66	3.70	0.56
Overall quality of the agricultural communications program	5	67	3.69	0.47
Quality of students in the agricultural communications program	6	67	3.65	0.54
Availability of professional activities or students' organizations	7	67	3.63	0.52
Opportunities to interact with the agricultural communications faculty	8	67	3.62	0.55
Quality of instruction in the agricultural communications courses	9	67	3.61	0.52
Clarity of the degree requirements	10	67	3.59	0.63
Organization of the agricultural communications curriculum	11	67	3.56	0.53
Agricultural communications classroom facilities	12	67	3.49	0.56
Internship opportunities	12	67	3.49	0.69
Availability of required in general agriculture courses	12	67	3.49	0.56

Table 4 (continued)

Components	Rank	n	M	SD
Opportunities for formal student evaluations of teaching in agricultural communications courses	12	67	3.48	0.62
Availability of required agricultural communications courses	13	67	3.45	0.64
Quality of career advising	13	67	3.45	0.68
Appropriateness of referrals to other campus	13	67	3.45	0.63
Support provided by the agricultural communications program	14	66	3.37	0.78
Quality of agricultural communications courses in preparing me for employment	15	67	3.34	0.62
Quality of computer support	16	66	3.21	0.63
Quality of courses in preparing me for graduate/professional school	17	66	3.11	0.68
Quality and availability of job placement services	18	67	2.95	0.70
Availability of required courses in journalism and broadcasting	19	67	2.68	0.95

*Note.* Scale: 1 = Poor; 2 = Fair; 3 = Good; 4 = Excellent; 5=N/A. (N/A=Not Applicable and is not included in the calculation of the mean.)

3.65 (n=63, N/A=4), “availability of professional activities or student organizations in agricultural communications” had a mean of 3.63 (n=64, N/A =3), “opportunities to interact with the agricultural communications faculty” had a mean of 3.62 (n=65, N/A =2), “quality of instruction in the agricultural communications courses” had a mean of 3.61 (n=66, N/A =1), “clarity of the degree requirements” had a mean of 3.59 (n=66, N/A =1), “organization of the agricultural communications curriculum” had a mean of 3.56

(n=66, N/A =1), “agricultural communications classroom facilities” had a mean of 3.49 (n=65, N/A =2), “internship opportunities” had a mean of 3.49 (n=65, N/A =2), “availability of required courses in general agriculture” had a mean of 3.49 (n=65, N/A =2), “opportunities for formal student evaluations of teaching in agricultural communications courses” had a mean of 3.48 (n=65, N/A =2), “availability of required agricultural communications courses” had a mean of 3.45 (n=66, N/A =1), “quality of career advising” had a mean of 3.45 (n=67), “appropriateness of referrals to other campuses” had a mean of 3.45 (n=56, N/A =11), “support provided by the agricultural communications program” had a mean of 3.37 (n=60, N/A =6, Missing=1), “quality of agricultural communications courses in preparing me for employment” had a mean of 3.34 (n=65, N/A =2), “quality of computer support” had a mean of 3.21 (n=63, N/A =3, Missing=1), “quality of courses in preparing me for graduate/professional school” had a mean of 3.11 (n=35, N/A =31, Missing=1), and “quality and availability of job placement services” had a mean of 2.95 (n=64, N/A =3). Lastly, the component that came in last in ranking was “availability of required courses in journalism and broadcasting” with a mean of 2.68 out of 4.00 (n=65, N/A =2).

Nearly half of the respondents, 33 (49.3%), said the most important positive feature of the agricultural communications degree program at OSU was “the assistance of their professor/advisers to help them.” The second most important positive feature was the “variety of curriculum” stated by 27 respondents (40.3%). The “close-knit family of students” was the third most important positive feature according to five (7.5%) respondents. The remaining four (6.0 %) responses were classified as “other.”

Of the respondents, 11 (16.4%) considered the most negative feature of the agricultural communications degree program at OSU to be “poor class scheduling.” The second most negative feature, according to 10 (14.9%) respondents, was the desire for “more agricultural communications classes – but less journalism and broadcasting classes” offered to students. As the third most negative feature, seven respondents (10.4%) said was the “advisers are overloaded,” while seven respondents (10.4%) said “no suggestions,” and four respondents (6.0%) said “poor versatility.” The next suggestions were as follows: “poor job placement,” three respondents (4.5%); “poor relations with journalism and broadcasting department”, two respondents (3.0%); “need real-world training”, two respondents (3.0%); “need more specific skills”, three respondents (10.4%); “update technology”, three respondents (3.0%); and “poor advising” one respondent (1.5%).

There were several suggestions by the graduates that would strengthen the agricultural communications degree program at OSU. The most frequently answered improvement was to “make more in-depth specialized classes for graphic design, Web design, marketing, public relations, and broadcasting” according to 14 respondents (20.9%). The second most frequent change that graduates would suggest is “make the curriculum strictly agricultural communications instead of agricultural communications with journalism and broadcasting” according to eight respondents (11.9%). The third change graduates would implement to strengthen the agricultural communications degree program according to seven respondents (10.4%) is to “hire more faculty.” Fourth suggestion by five respondents (7.5%) was “more on the job training classes like *Cowboy Journal*.” Three respondents (4.5%) said “other” as the fifth ranked suggestion. The other

suggestions by the graduates that would strengthen the agricultural communications degree program are as follows: two respondents (3.0%) said “better communication between advisors and students,” two respondents (3.0%) selected “none,” one respondent (1.5%) said “better working environment with the journalism and broadcasting department,” one respondent (1.5%) said “alumni input to stay current with employability skills,” one respondent (1.5%) noted “keep the students the number one priority of the program,” one respondent (1.5%) said “make master’s program stand alone rather than extension of agricultural education department,” one respondent (1.5%) said “better job placement,” and one respondent (1.5%) said “more challenging curriculum.” Lastly, one respondent (1.5%) suggested “more student programs/ activities.” Please note that 19 respondents (28.4%) did not respond to this question (see Table 5).

#### Findings Related To Objective Five

The final objective sought to identify factors influencing graduates to change careers or occupations. Graduates were asked to rank specific components of the agricultural communications degree program. Almost a third of the agricultural communications graduates, 22 (32.8%) were employed immediately after graduation, while 14 (20.9%) were employed within one month. Of the respondents, 10 (14.9%) were employed within six months of graduation, six (9.0%) were hired within three months of graduating, five (7.5%) were employed within a year, and nine (13.4%) were categorized as "other." Please note that one (1.5%) respondent did not answer this question (see Figure 7).

The respondents of the study who had more than one full-time position since graduation held various positions. The most common position held by graduates was a

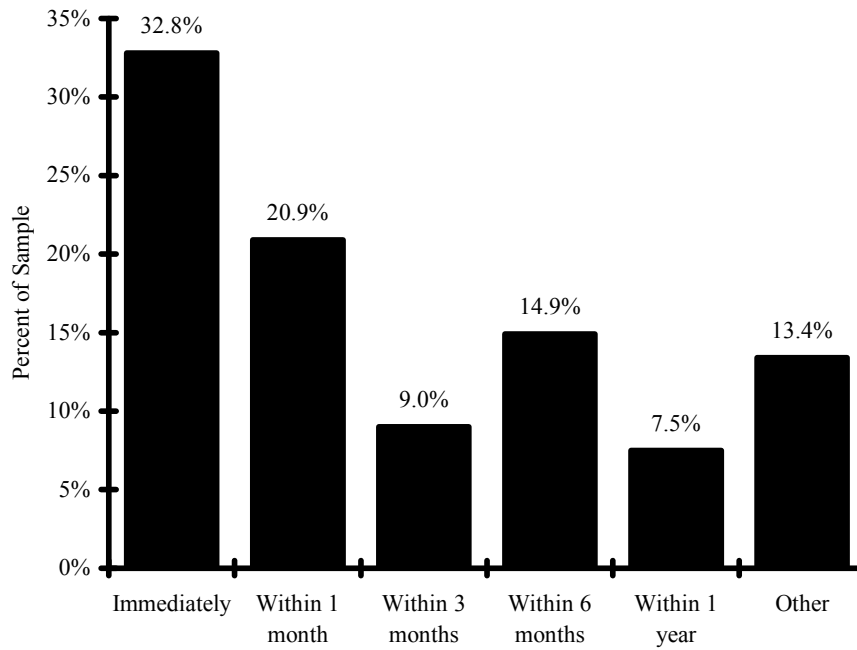
Table 5

*Respondents Suggestions To Strengthen The Agricultural Communications Program*

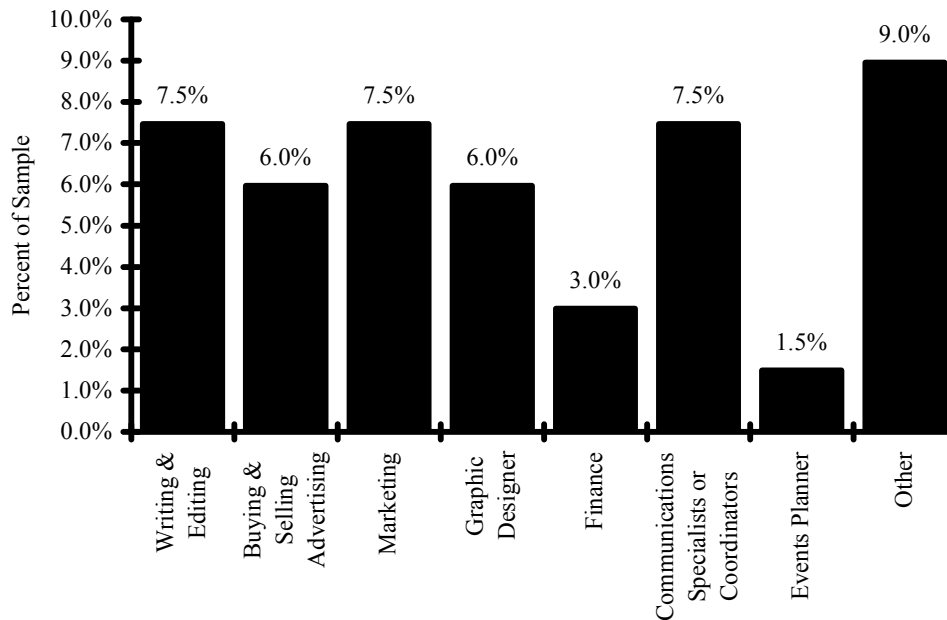
Suggestions	<i>f</i>
More specialized classes	14
Make curriculum agricultural communications not journalism and broadcasting	8
Hire more faculty	7
More on the job training classes like <i>Cowboy Journal</i>	5
Better communication between advisors and students	2
Better working environment with the journalism and broadcasting department	1
Alumni input to stay current with employability skills	1
Keep the students the number one priority of the program	1
Make master's program stand alone rather than extension of agricultural ed. dept.	1
Better job placement	1
More challenging curriculum	1
More student programs/ activities	1
None	2
Other	3

three-way-tie: marketing, five respondents (7.5%); communication specialists, five respondents (7.5%); and writing and editing, five respondents (7.5%). The next most common positions were graphic design, four respondents (6.0%), and buying and selling advertising, four respondents (6.0%). Of the respondents, six (9.0%) selected the category “other” Six respondents (6%) also selected “not applicable” to this question. Please note that 28 (41.8%) respondents did not answer this question (see Figure 8).



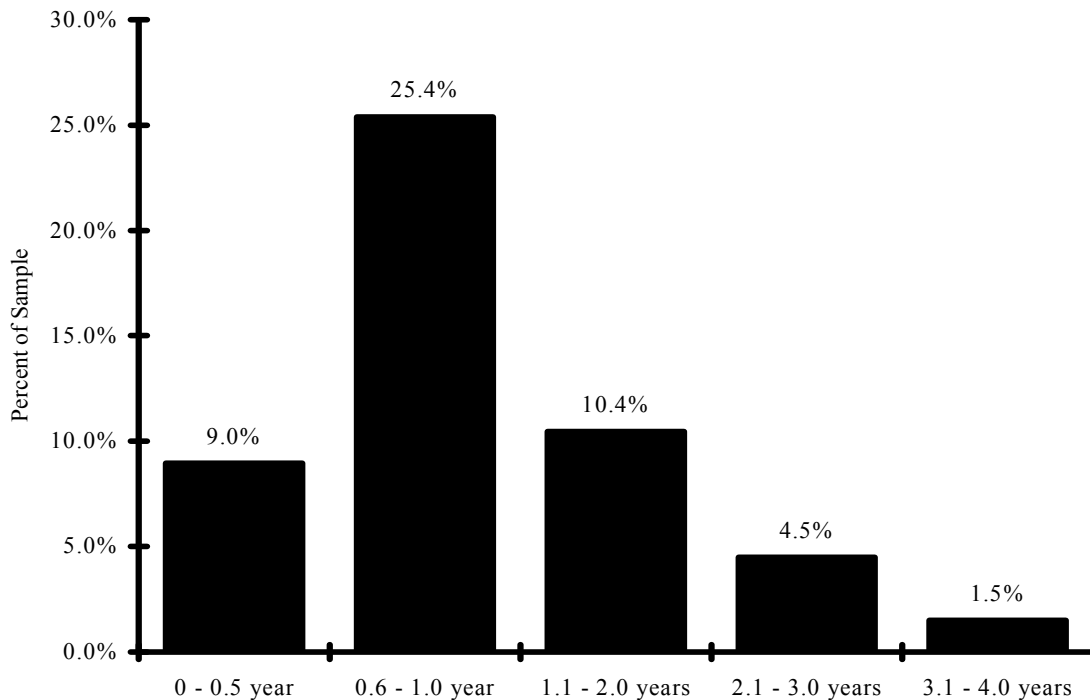


*Figure 7.* Length of time between graduation with a bachelor of science degree majoring in agricultural communications until time of first employment for respondents.



*Figure 8.* First occupation or position appointment of respondents following graduation with a Bachelor of Science degree majoring in agricultural communications.

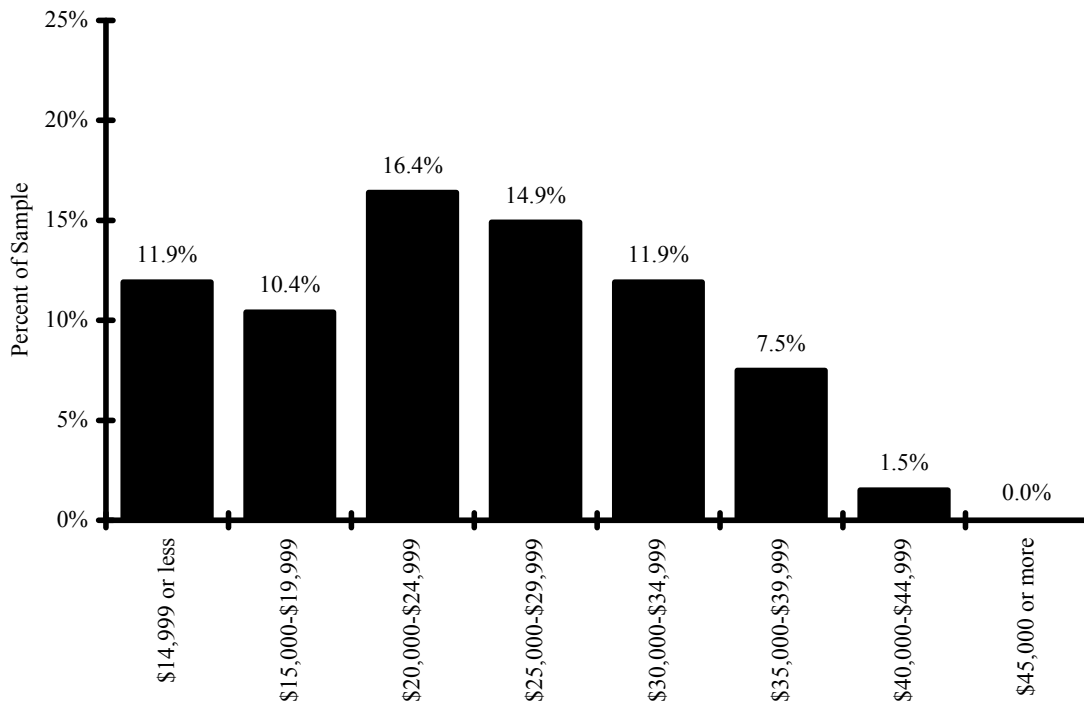
About one-fourth of the agricultural communications graduates, 17 (25.4%) were employed in their first position out of college for 7 to 12 months. The second largest time frame according to seven respondents (10.4%) to be employed in their first position out of college was 13 to 24 months. Six respondents (9.0%) were employed less than 6 months at their first place of employment. Three respondents (4.5%) were employed at their first job for 25 to 36 months, and one respondent (1.5%) was employed for 37 to 48 months. Please note that 29 (43.3%) respondents did not answer this question, and four (6.0%) respondents answered not applicable (see Figure 9).



*Figure 9.* Length of time in initial position for respondents with a Bachelor of Science degree majoring in agricultural communications.

The most frequent salary according to 11 respondents (16.4%) was \$20,000-\$24,999 for the first annual salary. The second most frequent salary earned was reported to be \$25,000-\$29,999 according to 10 respondents (14.9%). The third most frequent salary was tied between \$30,000-\$34,999 and \$14,999 or less, with eight respondents

(11.9%) each. The fifth most frequent salary marked by seven respondents (10.4%) was \$15,000-\$19,999. Sixth was \$35,000-\$39,999 according to five graduates (7.5%), while seventh was \$40,000-\$44,999 marked by one respondent (1.5%). There was no data that any graduates made more than \$45,000 for their first year after graduation. Please note that 17 respondents (25.4%) did not answer this question (see Figure 10).



*Figure 10.* Responding agricultural communications graduates’ annual starting salary.

On the survey the researcher asked graduates who had more than one position since graduation to rate a list of statements describing the affect each factor had on their decision to change positions and then rate each statement with the a one to five scale. The rankings were classified by respondents as: 1=None (no influence), 2=Little Influence, 3=Some Influence, 4=Much Influence, or 5=Considerable Influence. The findings were assessed by the researcher ranking the skills that the respondents rated.

“Little opportunity for advancement” had the highest ranking with a mean of 3.42 out of 5.00 (n=36; Missing=31). The second most frequent factor was “lack of employer/supervisor support” with a mean of 3.28 out of 5.00 (n=36; Missing=31). The agricultural communications graduates selected “salary was inadequate” to be the third most frequent factor affecting their decision to change position/occupation with a mean of 3.22 out of 5.00 (n=31; Missing=36). The fourth factor for the respondents to change positions was their “career goals/ambitions changed” with a mean of 3.06 (n=36; Missing=31). “I was burned out and needed a change” had a mean of 2.46 (n=35; Missing=32) and ranked fifth. The next factors for respondents to change positions were as follows: “benefits (healthcare retirement plan) did not meet my needs” had a mean of 2.37 (n=35; Missing=32), “the position was not what I expected” had a mean of 2.36 (n=36; Missing=31), “working hours were too long” had a mean of 2.33 (n=36; Missing=31), “location did not meet my lifestyle” had a mean of 2.28 (n=36; Missing=31), “working conditions were inadequate” with a mean of 2.09 (n=35; Missing=32), “personality conflicts with co-workers” had a mean of 2.06 (n=36; Missing=31), “spouse took a different position” had a mean of 1.49 (n=37; Missing=30), “inadequate facilities and equipment” had a mean of 1.47 (n=36; Missing=31), “I was unprepared for the position” had a mean of 1.33 out of 5.00 (n=36; Missing=31). Finally, “I was asked to resign” had the smallest group of respondents that rated it as a factor with a mean of 1.11 (n=35) (Missing=32) (see Table 6).

The respondents were asked if any other factors had moderate or major importance in their decision to change positions. The responses were categorized into five options: simply not happy with the position, 11 respondents (16.4%); location was an

Table 6

*Factors Affecting occupational Position Change Of Respondents In Ranked Order Of Importance*

Reason for Job Change	Rank	N/A	n	M	SD
Little Opportunity for Advancement	1	31	36	3.42	1.59
Lack of employer/supervisor support	2	31	36	3.28	1.70
Salary was inadequate	3	31	36	3.22	1.55
Career goals/ambitions changed	4	31	36	3.06	1.62
I was burned out and needed a change	5	32	35	2.46	1.54
Benefits (healthcare retirement plan) did not meet my needs	6	32	35	2.37	1.73
The position was not what I expected	7	31	36	2.36	1.42
Working hours were too long	8	31	36	2.33	1.43
Location did not meet my lifestyle	9	31	36	2.28	1.61
Working conditions were inadequate	10	32	35	2.09	1.52
Personality conflicts with co-workers	11	31	36	2.06	1.53
Spouse took a different position	12	30	37	1.49	1.26
Inadequate facilities and equipment	13	31	36	1.47	0.88
I was unprepared for the position	14	31	36	1.33	0.76
I was asked to resign	15	32	35	1.11	0.68

*The scale was as follows:* 1 = None (No Influence); 2 = Little Influence; 3 = Some Influence; 4 = Much Influence; 5 = Considerable Influence.

issue, five respondents (7.5%); salary was not adequate, two respondents (3.0%); no room for advancement, one respondent (1.5%); and “other,” one respondent (1.5%). Of

the remaining respondents, nine (13.4%) responded with a no or not applicable, while 38 respondents (56.7%) did not answer this question.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter I served as an introduction to this study. Agricultural communications programs were born at the university level, and their establishment coincided with the development of the extension function in the early decades of the twentieth century. Agricultural communications was developed out of need to disseminate information to the public. Agricultural communications, as a career choice, positions students for a career with a wide variety of opportunities. Agriculture must function within society for it to succeed. Therefore, someone working in agriculture must have a broad understanding of all aspects of life, not just agriculture (Boone, et al., 2000).

Chapter II focused on a review of literature. Through the review of articles pertaining to this study, it became obvious that there is a need for evaluating career choices and factors influencing career change among agricultural communications graduates. In trying to determine this need, this chapter focused on several key topic areas, which included career patterns of graduates, distribution of employment opportunities, educational experience, career change, theories of career change, and curriculum requirements. The literature review served as the basis to show the need for periodic studies to keep pace with changing occupational needs and to advise students of the important curriculum and extracurricular experiences available at the university.

Methods and procedures for this study were outlined in Chapter III. An online survey instrument was developed. After pilot testing the instrument, there were 121 potential respondents and 67 actual respondents. To address the purpose and objectives of the study, the researcher modified the survey instrument, specified the population

sampling, and then proceeded with data collection and analysis. The population consisted of OSU agricultural communications graduates from fall 1999 to spring 2004. The dual method for Web-based data collection was used in an attempt to increase the response rate (Dillman, 2000).

Chapter IV described the findings obtained in the study. The results addressed the specific objectives of the study pertaining to employment and occupational status, determining the employability skills needed, evaluating the contribution of the agricultural communications curriculum, and assessing the agricultural communications program's ability to prepare students for careers in various industries. The research also looked at career change of agricultural communications graduates.

#### Problem

Agricultural communications faculty must maintain student satisfaction by keeping students with diverse interests informed of career opportunities. Agricultural communications graduates must be prepared to enter the workforce in a variety of career areas. With the broad scope of career opportunities available in agricultural communications, are academic programs capable of meeting students' needs when those students possess diverse interests?

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to assess an agricultural communications program's ability to prepare students for careers in diverse career areas. This study looked at career choices and factors influencing career change among agricultural communications graduates. Specifically, this study sought to assess the employability skills needed by agricultural communications graduates and evaluated the contribution of the agricultural



communications curriculum in developing these skills. This study also looked at the factors influencing agricultural communications graduates to change careers or professions. Specifically, this study wanted to determine recent graduates' occupational status and assess their perceptions of the agricultural communications program at Oklahoma State University.

### Objectives

The following research objectives were formulated to guide this study:

1. Describe the employment and occupational status of agricultural communications graduates who graduated between fall 1999 and spring 2004.
2. Assess the employability skills needed by agricultural communications graduates.
3. Evaluate the contribution of the agricultural communications curriculum to the development of employability skills.
4. Assess the agricultural communications program's ability to prepare students for diverse opportunities.
5. Identify factors that influenced graduates to change careers or occupations.

### Methods and Procedures

Descriptive statistics were collected with a Web-based survey. The survey was sent to alumni who graduated in agricultural communications between fall 1999 and spring 2004. Responses were calculated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences® version 12.0 for Windows software program to analyze all data. Demographic information was collected to establish a profile of graduates of the agricultural communications program.

Conclusions Related to Objective 1: Describe the Employment  
and Occupational Status of Agricultural Communications Graduates

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher has reached the following conclusions related to Objective 1:

1. Most agricultural communications graduates are successful in finding full-time employment.
2. Graduates of the OSU agricultural communications program find employment opportunities in a variety of areas.
3. Most graduates might be interested in pursuing a master's degree if online courses were available.
4. Most graduates from agricultural communications make a good current salary in the range of \$25,000-\$39,999.
5. Agricultural communications graduates have a good starting salary ranging from \$20,000-\$39,999.
6. OSU agricultural communications graduates do not change positions often.

Conclusions Related to Objective 2: Assess the Employability  
Skills Needed by Agricultural Communications Graduates

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher offers the following conclusions related to Objective 2:

1. The most important skills necessary for employment for an agricultural communications graduate include are recognizing and using effective verbal communication skills and the use of effective written communication skills.
2. All skills on this survey were of moderate or major importance.

Conclusions Related to Objective 3: Evaluate the Contribution of the  
Agricultural Communications Curriculum to the Development of Employability Skills

The researcher evaluated the contribution of the agricultural communications curriculum to the development of employability skills and based on the findings of this study made the following conclusions related to Objective 3:

1. The agricultural communications curriculum at OSU successfully prepares students with the employability skills needed to obtain employment.

Conclusions Related to Objective 4: Assess the Agricultural Communications  
Program's Ability to Prepare Students for Careers in Various Industries

The researcher assessed the agricultural communications program's ability to prepare students for careers in various industries and based on the findings of this study provides the following conclusions related to Objective 4:

1. The agricultural communications program did an excellent job preparing students for careers in various industries.
2. Advisers are doing an excellent job of advising students.
3. There are good students in the agricultural communications program; and faculty are competent in doing their jobs.
4. The OSU agricultural communications program is excellent at teaching students to recognize and use effective verbal communications skills, use effective written communications skills, plan and complete projects, analyze information to make decisions effectively, get along with people, develop and use effective leadership skills, define and solve problems, work with people whose attitudes and opinions are different, work cooperatively in groups, analyze and draw conclusions from

various types of data, and understand and appreciate cultural and ethnic differences.

5. The most positive features of the agricultural communications program were competent faculty and variety of curriculum.

#### Conclusions Related to Objective 5: Identify Factors Influencing

##### Graduates to Change Careers or Occupations

The researcher sought to identify factors influencing graduates to change careers, and based on the findings of this study provides the following conclusions related to Objective 5:

1. The agricultural communications graduates were prepared for their career as being unprepared was not a reason they changed careers.
2. Graduate change positions for a variety of reasons including: salary was inadequate, locations was wrong, no room for advancement, etc.
3. The majority of respondents were employed within one month with nearly all being hired for their first employment opportunity within a year.
4. Respondents were employed in various fields in the agricultural communications industry.
5. The majority of graduates start with a good salary ranging from \$20,000-\$39,999 in their first year of employment.

#### Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations are derived from the conclusions of this study:

1. Offer distance-education classes for the master of science degree majoring in agricultural communications.

2. Alumni and university faculty should work together to refine curriculum so students are prepared for the job market.
3. OSU faculty should maintain a quality curriculum that continues preparing graduates with employability skills.
4. The agricultural communications program did an excellent job of preparing students for careers in various industries and faculty should use the data from this research to continue to educate students.
5. Faculty are competent in doing their jobs of teaching and advising and should continually enhance their abilities through professional development activities.
6. The agricultural communications program should continue to hire competent faculty and keep the variety of curriculum that prepares student.

#### Recommendations for Research

The following research recommendations to the department are derived from the conclusions of this study.

1. Research should be conducted to determine the need nationwide for graduate curriculum offered at a distance.
2. Determine how agricultural communications graduates' salaries compare to graduates in similar areas.
3. Determine how graduates of the OSU agricultural communications program find such diverse employment opportunities.
4. A future study of employers should be conducted to determine if the important employability skills noted by graduates is the same for employers.

5. Future research should be done to determine how graduates found their first occupational position to identify important networking and employment search avenues.
6. A follow-up study should be done in two to five years and should include more demographic questions on the survey.
7. Future studies should be conducted to determine if the curriculum needs updated to better prepare graduates for employment.
8. A study should be done to compare the salary differences of agricultural communications graduates in Oklahoma versus other areas of the United States.

#### Implications

The information gained through this study should be used in developing recruitment materials and promoting the agricultural communications degree program offered at OSU. The information should be shared with current students and faculty of the program to prepare students for various careers.

Professional preparation for careers in agricultural communications is commonly provided through academic programs housed in departments of agricultural education. Because of their relatively small size and reliance on other academic units to deliver curricula, agricultural communications programs face special challenges to further development at the university setting (Tucker, et.al., 2003).

This study and others are being done to help agricultural communications students continue to be at the highest quality level upon graduation. In the future, the data collected from this study could help faculty make necessary changes to the agricultural communications curriculum to benefit students.

Agricultural communications faculty needs to stay current on skills needed by students in their department. These skills are essential for graduates to become successful and valuable to their employers in an ever-changing global marketplace.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

## Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Thursday, February 10, 2005  
IRB Application No AG0530  
Proposal Title: Agricultural Communications Graduates' Career Choices After Graduation from Oklahoma State University

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 2/9/2006**

Principal Investigator(s)

Sara McGaha  
28274 U.S. Hwy 177  
Macomb, OK 74852

Dwayne Cartmell  
442 Ag Hall  
Stillwater, OK 74078

---

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


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

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

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
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 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, emct@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

  
Sue C. Jacobs, Chair  
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

INSTRUMENT

## Factors Influencing Career Change of OSU Agricultural Communications Graduates



The purpose of this study is to look at career choices and factors influencing career change among agricultural communications graduates of Oklahoma State University's agricultural communications program. The study will help us obtain information from students who have graduated from Oklahoma State University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Agricultural Communications. The study will only pertain to alumni that graduated from Fall 1999 to Spring 2004.

Specifically, the study will ascertain the current occupational status and assess graduates' perceptions of the agricultural communication program at Oklahoma State University. I hope you will take time and participate in this study. It should take you approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The information you provide will help our program understand the reasons why you are in your current occupation and what your perceptions were about the agricultural communications program. Furthermore, the information you provide will help us make decisions on the future of our degree program. The responses you provide will remain confidential. Only summarized data will be reported to protect the identity of each individual respondent.

Thank you for participating in the study.

Sincerely, Sara McGaha

---

1) How many graduate hours of college credit have you earned since you graduated with your Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Communications?

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- Over 30

---

2) Do you want to obtain a master's degree?

- yes
- no
- undecided

---

3) Do you want to obtain a doctoral degree?

- yes
- no
- undecided

---

4) Would you attend OSU for a graduate degree in agricultural communications if online courses were available?

Please Select

---

5) Would you attend OSU for a graduate degree in agricultural communications if courses were offered at night?

Please Select

---

6) What is the highest degree you have earned since receiving your Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Communications?

- None
- Master's
- Education Specialist
- Professional (J.D., etc.)
- Doctorate (Ph.D., etc.)
- Other (Please Specify):

---

7) Which one of the following best describes your current status?

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Caring for family/home full-time
- Serving in the military
- Continuing education part-time and employed
- Continuing education full-time (graduate or professional school)
- Unemployed, seeking employment
- Other (Please Specify):

---

8) If employed, what is your current occupational status (include position/title, employer, city/state, and responsibilities)?

---

9) How many years have you been in your current position?

---

10) For the current year, what was your annual salary/income?

- \$14,999 or less
- \$15,000-\$19,999
- \$20,000-\$24,999
- \$25,000-\$29,999
- \$30,000-\$34,999
- \$35,000-\$39,999
- \$40,000-\$44,999
- \$45,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$54,999
- \$55,000 or greater

---

11) Are you self-employed or do you freelance for extra income? If so, please describe.

---

12) How many different full-time occupations/positions have you had since graduating from OSU? (including current position)

---

13) After graduating with your Bachelor of Science, when were you first employed?

- Immediately
- Within 1 month
- Within 3 months
- Within 6 months
- Within 1 year
- Other (Please Specify):



14) If you have had more than one full-time occupation/position since graduation, what was your first position after graduation (include position/title, employer, city/state, and responsibilities)?

15) How many years were you in this position?

16) What was your annual salary/income in your first year?

- \$14,999 or less
- \$15,000-\$19,999
- \$20,000-\$24,999
- \$25,000-\$29,999
- \$30,000-\$34,999
- \$35,000-\$39,999
- \$40,000-\$44,999
- \$45,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$54,999
- \$55,000 or greater

17) If you had more than one position since graduation indicate the degree to which each of the following factors affected your decision to change positions. Please select the level of influence that best reflects your decision to change positions/occupations.

	None (No Influence) 1	Little Influence 2	Some Influence 3	Much Influence 4	Considerable Influence 5
Salary was inadequate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working hours were too long	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of employer/supervisor support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was unprepared for the position	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Location did not meet my lifestyle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personality conflicts with co-workers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working conditions were inadequate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The position was not what I expected	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Benefits (healthcare, retirement plan) did not meet my needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career goals/ambitions changed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spouse took a different position	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Little opportunity for advancement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inadequate facilities and equipment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was asked to resign	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was burned out and needed a change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18) Were there any other factors that had moderate or major importance in your decision to change positions?

19) Below is a list of abilities or skills one might expect to develop while pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree. Indicate your opinion of the importance of the skill to be successful in today's world.

	No importance	Minor importance	Moderate importance	Major importance
Planning and completing projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Analyzing information to effectively make decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Defining and solving problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appreciating and exercising the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of a citizen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accessing and using a variety of information sources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting along with people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recognizing and using effective verbal communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing and using effective leadership skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding and appreciating cultural and ethnic differences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding the interaction of humans and the environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Analyzing and drawing conclusions from various types of data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using effective written communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with people whose attitudes and opinions are different than mine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working cooperatively in groups; working as a team member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding international (global) issues (political, economic, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20) Below is a list of abilities or skills one might expect to develop while pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree. Indicate the degree to which the Agricultural Communications program contributed to your attainment of each of the following skills.

	No contribution	Minor contribution	Moderate contribution	Major contribution
Planning and completing projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Analyzing information to effectively make decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Defining and solving problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appreciating and exercising the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of a citizen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accessing and using a variety of information sources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting along with people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recognizing and using effective verbal communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing and using effective leadership skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding and appreciating cultural and ethnic differences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding the interaction of humans and the environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Analyzing and drawing conclusions from various types of data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using effective written communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with people whose attitudes and opinions are different than mine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working cooperatively in groups; working as a team member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding international (global) issues (political, economic, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21) Below are statements used to assess specific components of the Agricultural Communications degree program. Please rate each statement with the given scale.

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Not Applicable
Availability of my adviser	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My adviser's interest in me as a person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of Agricultural Communication courses in preparing me for employment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of Agricultural Communication courses in preparing me for graduate/professional school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of instruction in the Agricultural Communications courses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities to interact with the Agricultural Communications faculty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Availability of professional activities or student organizations in Agricultural Communications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appropriateness of referrals to other campus resources by my adviser	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Availability of required Agricultural Communications courses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Availability of required courses in general agriculture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Availability of required courses in journalism and broadcasting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organization of the Agricultural Communications curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organization of the Agricultural Communications curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internship opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of students in the Agricultural Communications program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Agricultural Communications classroom facilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adviser's help in planning my degree program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clarity of the degree requirements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of career advising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities for formal student evaluations of teaching in Agricultural Communications courses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional competence of the Agricultural Communications faculty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality and availability of job placement services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of computer support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall quality of the Agricultural Communications program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support provided by the Agricultural Communications program since graduation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

22) What do you consider were the positive features of the Agricultural Communications degree program at OSU?

---

23) What do you consider were the negative features of the Agricultural Communications degree program at OSU?

---

24) What suggestions would you make to strengthen the Agricultural Communications degree program at OSU?

Submit

APPENDIX C  
INVITATION E-MAIL

Dear Alumni:

Tomorrow you will receive an e-mail inviting you to participate in a survey of Oklahoma State University agricultural communications graduates. The purpose of this study is to identify the career choices and factors influencing career change among Oklahoma State University agricultural communications graduates. The information obtained from this study will help agricultural communications faculty better recruit and retain potential agricultural communications students.

Within the e-mail will be a link directing you to the URL for the survey. The survey should take you approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Thank you in advance for your participation in the survey. Without your assistance, it would be impossible to acquire this much-needed information. If you have any questions, please e-mail Sara McGaha at [saramcgaha@yahoo.com](mailto:saramcgaha@yahoo.com) or call (405) 812-5628. You may also contact my adviser, Dwayne Cartmell, with questions at [dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu](mailto:dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu) or (405) 744-0461. For additional information regarding human participation in research, contact the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board Office at (405) 744-5700.

Sincerely,  
Sara T. McGaha

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[dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu](mailto:dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu)

APPENDIX D  
INTRODUCTORY E-MAIL

Dear Alumni:

I am writing to request your participation in a Web-based survey. The purpose of this study is to identify the career choices and factors influencing career change among Oklahoma State University agricultural communications graduates. The information obtained from this study will help agricultural communications faculty better recruit and retain potential agricultural communications students.

The survey will take you approximately 15 minutes to complete. It can be accessed by going to the following Web address:

<http://FreeOnlineSurveys.com/rendersurvey.asp?id=84683>

If you have any questions, please e-mail Sara McGaha at [saramcgaha@yahoo.com](mailto:saramcgaha@yahoo.com) or call (405) 812-5628. You may also contact my adviser, Dwayne Cartmell, with questions at [dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu](mailto:dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu) or (405) 744-0461. For additional information regarding human participation in research, contact the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board Office at (405) 744-5700.

You are one of a limited number of alumni in this study, and I hope you will take time to participate and help the OSU agricultural communications program. Thank you!

Sincerely,  
Sara T. McGaha

Agricultural Communications Master's Student  
College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources  
Oklahoma State University  
136 Agricultural Hall  
Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078-6017  
Phone: 405-812-5628  
Email: [saramcgaha@yahoo.com](mailto:saramcgaha@yahoo.com)



Dwayne Cartmell, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Agricultural  
Communications  
Oklahoma State University  
(405) 744-0461  
[dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu](mailto:dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu)



APPENDIX E  
REMINDER E-MAILS

Dear Alumni:

Last Thursday you received an e-mail asking for your participation in a Web-based survey. If you have already completed the survey, thanks for your participation! If you have not completed the survey, please take approximately 15 minutes to help us out. The survey can be accessed by going to the following Web address:

<http://FreeOnlineSurveys.com/rendersurvey.asp?id=84683>

The purpose of this study is to identify the career choices and factors influencing career change among Oklahoma State University agricultural communications graduates. The information obtained from this study will help agricultural communications faculty better recruit and retain potential agricultural communications students.

If you have any questions, please e-mail Sara McGaha at [saramcgaha@yahoo.com](mailto:saramcgaha@yahoo.com) or call (405) 812-5628. You may also contact my adviser, Dwayne Cartmell, with questions at [dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu](mailto:dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu) or (405) 744-0461. For additional information regarding human participation in research, contact the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board Office at (405) 744-5700.

You are one of a limited number of alumni in this study, and I hope you will take time to participate and help the OSU agricultural communications program. Thank you!

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Dwayne Cartmell, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Agricultural  
Communications  
Oklahoma State University  
(405) 744-0461  
[dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu](mailto:dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu)

APPENDIX F  
REMINDER E-MAILS

Dear Alumni:

A week ago you received an e-mail asking for your participation in a Web-based survey.

If you have already completed the survey, thanks for your participation!

If you have not completed the survey, please take approximately 15 minutes to help us out. The survey can be accessed by going to the following Web address:

<http://FreeOnlineSurveys.com/rendersurvey.asp?id=84683>

The purpose of this study is to identify the career choices and factors influencing career change among Oklahoma State University agricultural communications graduates. The information obtained from this study will help agricultural communications faculty better recruit and retain potential agricultural communications students.

If you have any questions, please e-mail Sara McGaha at [saramcgaha@yahoo.com](mailto:saramcgaha@yahoo.com) or call (405) 812-5628. You may also contact my adviser, Dwayne Cartmell, with questions at [dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu](mailto:dwayne.cartmell@okstate.edu) or (405) 744-0461. For additional information regarding human participation in research, contact the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board Office at (405) 744-5700.

You are one of a limited number of alumni in this study, and I hope you will take time to participate and help the OSU agricultural communications program.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Sara T. McGaha

Agricultural Communications Master's Student  
College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources  
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Dwayne Cartmell, Ph.D.  
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APPENDIX G  
PANEL OF EXPERTS

## PANEL OF EXPERTS

Dr. Shelly Pepper Sitton, Assistant Professor

Dr. James Leising, Professor and Department Head

Cindy Blackwell, Assistant Professor

Julie Focht, Associate Lecturer

Danna Keleman, Graduate Associate

Marcus Ashlock, Graduate Associate

VITA

Sara Treasa McGaha

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: CAREER CHOICES AND FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER CHANGE  
AMONG OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY AGRICULTURAL  
COMMUNICATIONS GRADUATES

Major Field: Agricultural Communications

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Shawnee, Oklahoma, August 4, 1977, the daughter of  
Jesse and Barbara (Backes) McGaha.

Education: Graduated from Tecumseh High School, Tecumseh, Oklahoma, May  
of 1996; received Associates of Science from Connors State College,  
May 1998; received Bachelor of Science in Agricultural  
Communications, December, 2000; completed requirements for the  
Master of Science in Agricultural Communications at Oklahoma State  
University, July 2005.

Experience: Graphic Designer for the Countywide News and Shawnee Sun in  
Tecumseh, Oklahoma, 5/2001-2/2005.

Name: Sara McGaha

Date of Degree: July 2005

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: CAREER CHOICES AND FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER  
CHANGE AMONG OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS GRADUATES

Pages in Study: 94

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: Agricultural Communications

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to assess an agricultural communications program's ability to prepare students; assess the factors influencing career change; look at current graduates' occupational status; assessed perceptions of the program. Descriptive statistics were analyzed with a Web-based survey from alumni who graduated in agricultural communications between fall 1999 and spring 2004. Responses were calculated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences® version 12.0 for Windows. Demographic information was collected to establish a profile.

Findings and Conclusions: Graduates of the OSU agricultural communications program find employment opportunities in a variety of areas and the majority of the graduates are employed full-time. Graduates have gained employability skills during completion of their degree. There are good students in the agricultural communications program and the faculty are competent in doing their jobs. The OSU agricultural communications program has a quality program that is excellent at teaching students the skills needed to be successful.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dwayne Cartmell

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