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Abstract

Few studies have focused upon the occupational structure of agricultural communications or the job satisfaction of agricultural communications professionals. This void in the literature prompts questions about the types of positions falling under the broad umbrella of agricultural communications. For teaching faculty, in agricultural communications, a more specific question is frequently posed: What types of positions do majors in agricultural communications pursue after graduation, and how satisfied are the graduates with their positions?

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the types of positions held by Ohio State University agricultural communications graduates. A second purpose was to assess their salaries and level of job satisfaction. A mailed questionnaire was sent to 131 agricultural communications alumni. The response rate was 57.1 %. The graduates held a variety of positions in agricultural communications and most were satisfied with their positions. Their annual salaries depended upon the type of position held, age, and gender. The best indicators of job satisfaction were ACT membership and annual salaries which the graduates earned.

Employment and Job Satisfaction Of Agricultural Communications Graduates

by **Blannie E. Bowen**
and **Barbara E. Cooper**

Few studies have focused upon the occupational structure of agricultural communications or the job satisfaction of agricultural communications professionals. This void in the literature prompts questions about the types of positions falling under the broad umbrella of agricultural communications. For teaching faculty in agricultural communications, a more specific question is frequently posed: What types of positions do majors in agricultural communications pursue after graduation, and how satisfied are the graduates with their positions?

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the types of positions held by Ohio State University agricultural communications graduates. A second purpose was to assess their salaries and level of job satisfaction. A mailed questionnaire was sent to 131 agricultural communications alumni. The response rate was 57.1%. The graduates held a variety of positions in agricultural communications and most were satisfied with their positions. Their annual salaries depended upon the type of position held, age, and gender. The best indicators of job satisfaction were ACT membership and annual salaries which the graduates earned.

Objectives

This study was designed to identify the types of positions held by agricultural communications graduates of The Ohio State University. A second purpose was to determine how satisfied the graduates are with their positions. The study had the following objectives:

1. To develop a demographic profile of agricultural communications graduates of Ohio State University.
2. To determine if graduates' annual salaries are independent of type of employment (e.g. broadcasting, writing/editing, public relations).
3. To determine if graduates' salaries are independent of age, sex and gender.
4. To identify factors related to the graduates' job satisfaction.

Blannie E. Bowen was recently appointed Rumberger Professor of Agriculture, Pennsylvania State University. **Barbara E. Cooper** is now involved in free lance editing in Lafayette, Indiana. Both were faculty members—associate and assistant professors, respectively—with the Department of Agricultural Education, The Ohio State University, at the time that this study was conducted. Both are ACE members.

Methods and Procedures

Data were collected using a mailed questionnaire. Items on the questionnaire assessed demographic traits, employment data including job satisfaction, and the graduates' satisfaction with their undergraduate preparation. The Brayfield-Rothe Job Satisfaction Index (1951), as modified by Warner (1973), was used to measure the graduates' job satisfaction (Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient = .96).

Ohio State faculty and graduate students with experiences in agricultural communications assessed the content validity of the questionnaire. Seven undergraduate agricultural communications majors completed the questionnaire to detect clarity and format problems.

The population included all Ohio State agricultural communications graduates (N = 131). The graduates were mailed a cover letter, the questionnaire, and a stamped, self-addressed envelope on November 25, 1987. A follow-up letter and questionnaire were mailed to persons not responding in two weeks. After six weeks, 68 of an accessible population of 119 graduates had responded, yielding a 57.1% response rate.

Nonresponse error was treated as suggested by Miller and Smith (1983). Graduates responding in three weeks (46) were compared to respondents of the last three weeks (22). The groups were not different ($p > .05$) in annual salary, highest degree, gender, marital status, Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow (ACT) membership, whether a member of the College of Agriculture magazine staff, and job satisfaction. Older graduates did respond faster than younger graduates ($p < .05$).

Findings

Demographic Profile

Agricultural communications became a major at Ohio State University in 1969. From its origin until 1984, the major was administered by the College of Agriculture rather than through an academic department. In 1984, the major was shifted from the College of Agriculture to the Department of Agricultural Education. Twelve students graduated in agricultural communications the first five years the major was offered compared to 22 students who graduated after the major was shifted to its new academic home.

Forty-one percent of the 68 graduates included in this study are 30-39 years old, and another third are 25-29. All respondents are white, 70% are females, and 61% are married. Ninety-one percent have a bachelor's as their highest academic degree. Almost two-thirds completed their degrees after 1978.

Twenty-two percent hold positions classified as business-marketing. Another 22% hold public relations positions, and 18% are in writing-editing positions. The remaining third of the graduates hold a variety of positions, including nonagricultural communications positions. Twenty-two percent of the graduates earn less than \$15,000 per year. An additional 17% earn between \$15,000-\$19,999, while another 17% earn \$20,000-\$24,999, and 13% earn \$50,000 or more per year.

Annual Salary and Type of Employment

Agricultural communications graduates with positions in broadcasting, public relations, and business tended to be distributed across the four salary categories listed in Table 1. Graduates holding writing-editing and education-

Bowen and Cooper: Employment and Job Satisfaction Of Agricultural Communications Gr related positions (including governmental agencies) tended to cluster into the lower annual salary categories. A Cramer's V of .34 indicates a moderate relationship between annual salary and type of employment.

Table 1
Annual salaries of agricultural communications graduates by type of employment.

Salary Range*	Type of Employment*					TOTAL
	Broadcast	Business	Education	PR	Writing/Ed.	
Under \$20,000	1	7	6	5	3	22
\$20,000–\$29,999	–	3	3	4	8	18
\$30,000–\$39,999	–	2	2	2	–	6
\$40,000–and over	2	5	–	3	–	10
TOTAL	3	17	11	14	11	56

Cramers' V-.34 (*-5 did not list salary and 9 did not list position).

Annual Salary by Age and Gender

Annual salaries of agricultural communications graduates are presented in Table 2 by age category and gender. Eighteen of the 63 graduates are males. A cross-tabulation by age and gender shows five males among the 35 graduates under age 30. There are 27 female and five male graduates under age 30 who earned less than \$30,000 per year. All three graduates under age 30 with annual salaries in excess of \$30,000 are females.

Graduates falling into the 30-and-over age category include 15 females and 13 males. A breakdown by salary and gender shows nine female and three male graduates who are over 30 with an annual salary under \$30,000. There are six female and 10 male graduates over age 30 who earn more than \$30,000 per year.

Table 2
Annual salaries of agricultural communications graduates by age and gender.

Annual Salary	Age Category				TOTAL		
	Under Age 30		30 or older		Female	Male	Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male			
Under \$30,000	27	5	9	3	36	8	44
\$30,000 or more	3	–	6	10	9	10	19
TOTAL	30	5	15	13	45	18	63

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction was computed based on 14 items rated on a 5-point scale. Ratings for the items were summed; thus, job satisfaction scores could range from 14 to 70. The graduates were very satisfied with their positions (Mean = 58.1, S.D. = 10.3, range = 16–70). The best indicators of job satisfaction were (1) whether the graduates had been ACT members and (2) their salary. These two variables explained 24% of the variance in the job satisfac-

tion scores. Other variables listed in Table 3 were not good indicators of job satisfaction once ACT membership and salary entered the regression equation (R square increased only 6%).

Table 3
Factors related to the job satisfaction of the graduates.

Intercorrelations Among Selected Variables								
Variable	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h
Job satisfaction (a)	-	.39	.30	-.01	.05	.32	-.19	.19
ACT members* (b)		-	-.02	-.27	-.38	.32	-.08	.01
Salary (c)			-	.49	.38	.20	-.22	.12
Age (d)				-	.36	-.03	-.33	.07
Gender* (e)					-	-.08	-.10	.10
Editor, Ag College Magazine* (f)						-	-.20	-.03
Marital Status* (g)							-	-.04
Satisfied with College Prep. (h)								-

* - Coding: ACT Member & Editor (0 = no, 1 = yes);
Gender (0 = female, 1 = male); Marital Status (0 = married, 1 = single).

Regression of Job Satisfaction on Selected Factors			
Variable	Multiple R*	R square change	R square total
ACT member	.39	.15	.15
Salary	.49	.09	.24
Variables d-h above	.55	.06	.30

Conclusions

Agricultural communications graduates of Ohio State tend to be satisfied with their positions. Their level of satisfaction closely parallels that of Cooperative Communicators Association members (see "Related Literature" notes). Factors other than ACT membership and annual salary are weak indicators of job satisfaction. Graduates' annual salaries appear to be dependent upon the type of employment, age, and gender. Most graduates are employed in some area of agricultural communications. Older graduates tended to be males and younger graduates, females. No minorities have graduated from Ohio State in agricultural communications.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented based on the findings of this study:

1. Agricultural communications teaching faculty and ACT advisers should use the findings of this study when advising future agricultural communicators.
2. The College of Agriculture at Ohio State should intensify its efforts to recruit minority students into agricultural communications.
3. Additional research is needed about positions, salary structures, and job satisfaction found within a particular medium.

Peterson conducts an annual study of enrollments in journalism and mass communications in U.S. universities. In a recent study, Peterson (1987) found that Autumn 1986 enrollments increased by more than 7% over Autumn 1985. He also found that 7-8% of the students were minorities. Considine (1984) also studied minority participation in journalism careers. This researcher concluded that blacks have made limited progress in terms of educational and career opportunities in journalism.

Weaver et al. (1986) compared selected characteristics of radio, television, and daily newspaper journalists. A major finding was that the type of medium did not influence job satisfaction. Size of organization was related to the job satisfaction of print journalists, but not to that of broadcast journalists. In terms of compensation, these researchers wrote, "The figures indicate that money is not the major yardstick for journalists" (p. 688). Another key finding was that print journalists had significantly more years of journalistic experience (13 years) than either radio (9 years) or television journalists (8 years).

Mann (1986) offered five ways that compensation influences the morale of magazine staff members. According to Mann, salary and compensation plans should free personnel from financial distractions, thus enhancing morale. Other purposes are to prevent envy, jealousy and frustration; make employees feel appreciated; make employees appreciate the company; and motivate employees. Mann urges caution in using salary to recruit employees. "Once a company shows it pays the going rate and gears salaries to the employee's contribution, money becomes a secondary consideration in attracting talent" (Mann, 1986, p. 12).

Krikava and Winsor (1988) developed a profile of Cooperative Communicators Association members, many of whom are graduates of agricultural communications programs. "If there's such a thing as an average CCA member, it is a 38-year-old man with a bachelor's degree in communications/journalism/English earning \$32,000" (Krikava & Winsor, 1988, p. 1). These researchers (p. 2) also found that male CCA members earn annual salaries that are 41% higher than female members. "Seeing as education is the variable most related to salary, there's cause of optimism in the future, as the Census Bureau reports that college enrollment of women is now near that of men" (p. 3).

Krikava and Winsor (1988) also studied the job satisfaction of CCA members. CCA members are moderately satisfied with their work (3.86 on a 5-point scale) and less satisfied with (1) the adequacy of their salary, (2) their salary compared to others in the company, and (3) opportunities for advancement. Krikava and Winsor note that their findings parallel those of an International Association of Business Communicators' poll.

A study commissioned by the American Agricultural Editors' Association (AAEA) provided data about another group of agricultural communications professionals (Association Research Group, 1987). Almost 77% of the respondents to the survey of AAEA members were males and 40% were in the 30-39 age category (p. 2). Slightly less than half had 10 years or less experience as an agricultural editor (p. 4). The average salary for the respondents was \$37,580, with a range of \$13,500 to \$110,000 (p. 6). When the data were analyzed by position, females tended to earn lower salaries, and members who majored in topical agriculture or agricultural journalism tended to earn above average salaries.

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