

AGRICULTURE STUDENTS' PERCEIVED COMPETENCY OF SKILLS NECESSARY TO
BE SUCCESSFUL IN COLLEGE

by

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(Under the direction of Jason Peake)

ABSTRACT

One of the reasons college students fail to successfully complete a degree is poor academic and college skill preparation (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This study attempted to identify deficiencies in skills considered necessary to be successful in college by surveying agriculture students at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC). Participating students were asked to indicate their perceived importance of and competency for each skill. Data was analyzed using Borich's model to calculate a Mean Weighted Discrepancy Score for each skill. The data indicated that "Eliminating distractions from your study environment" was the skill the students needed the most assistance with. With these skill deficiencies identified, ABAC faculty and staff can take measures to improve students' competency in these skills and potentially increase student success.

INDEX WORDS: Agriculture students, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, College success, Student skills, Transfer students

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Chapter I

Introduction

With the current economic crisis and high unemployment rate in our country, it is increasingly important for individuals to be competitive in the job market. “Many of those looking for work do not have the skills required by companies looking to hire—resulting in high unemployment even as businesses desperately seek new talent” (Bridgeland, Milano, & Rosenblum, 2011, p. 2). In the United States, a gap has emerged between the needs of the employers and the education of the American workforce (Bridgeland, Milano, & Rosenblum, 2011). “If our nation fails to bridge this gap, we will risk our ability to compete effectively on the global stage” (Bridgeland, Milano, & Rosenblum, 2011, p. 2).

In the next decade, a postsecondary certificate or degree will be required by more than half of all new jobs (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). However, “fewer than half of those who begin postsecondary training earn a certificate or degree within six years of initial enrollment” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, p. 2). In 2010, the average six-year bachelor’s degree graduation rate for Georgia’s research universities was 72%, regional universities 43.3%, state universities 37.2%, and state colleges a mere 13.9% (University System of Georgia, 2011). “While the nation appropriately focuses on ensuring that more students graduate from high school ready for college, little attention has been paid to the hidden crisis of undergraduates who leave college and other post-secondary institutions before completing their degrees” (Bridgeland, Milano, & Rosenblum, 2011, p. 2). One of the reasons students fail to successfully complete a degree is poor academic and college skill preparation (U.S. Department of Education,

2011). If steps are taken to identify students' deficiencies in these college skills, institutions can take measures to improve students' competency in them and potentially increase student success.

Statement of the Problem

Do students in an agriculture degree program at a transitioning two-year college perceive they are competent in the skills necessary to be successful in college?

Subproblems.

1. What skills do students in agriculture degree programs perceive as important to be successful in college?
2. What skills do students in agriculture degree programs perceive they are competent in?
3. What skill sets do students in agriculture degree programs need the most training in to be successful in college?

Hypotheses

- Upon completing at least one year of an agriculture degree program, students perceive they are competent in the skills necessary to be successful in college.

Null hypothesis.

- Upon completing at least one year of an agriculture degree program, students perceive they are not competent in the skills necessary to be successful in college.

Limitations of the Study

1. This study will be limited to students pursuing a degree in Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College's School of Agriculture & Natural Resources during the Summer term of 2011.
2. This study should not be generalized to states or institutions beyond those included in this study.

Definitions of Terms

Success – The success of a student is measured by their perceived competency in a set of identified skills.

ABAC Student – A student enrolled at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.

Assumptions

That Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College strives to prepare students to be successful in college.

1. That students' perception of what is important is valid.
2. That external variables are not limiting student success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if ABAC students perceived themselves to be competent in skills necessary to be successful in college. By collecting data regarding the participating students' perceived importance and competency in a set of skills, the researcher will be able to provide data to either support or repudiate the hypothesis.

Importance of the Study

Because Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College is currently in a period of transition, moving from a two-year institution to a four-year institution, research is needed to determine if the current preparation procedures provide students with the skills necessary to be successful at the four-year level. Finding this information can help faculty and staff at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College to know if their efforts to prepare students to succeed in college are adequate or if their efforts should be modified.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

This review of literature discusses the history of two year colleges in Georgia, the role of four-year universities in Georgia, the characteristics of students who transfer from two-year to four-year institutions, and the skills necessary to ensure student success.

History of Two-year Colleges in Georgia

The establishment of two-year colleges in Georgia began when Middle Georgia College, located in Cochran, was established in 1884 (Middle Georgia College History, 2006). Two other two-year colleges were established between that time and August 28, 1931, when the University System of Georgia and the Board of Regents were officially formed (Fincher, 2003). At that time, Georgia's two-year institutions were called junior colleges. It wasn't until 1988 that the colleges dropped the term "junior" (Fincher, 2003). In a 1932 Annual Report of the newly organized system, Chairman Hughes Spalding was recorded as saying, "During the last decade the spread of junior colleges has been very rapid, and there is no doubt but that this new institution will become a permanent part of our educational system in Georgia" (as cited in Fincher, 2003, p. 20).

"In 1957 a special committee of the General Assembly studied the State's need for additional junior colleges..." (Fincher, 2003, p. 49). By the end of the 1950's, there were a total of seven junior colleges in Georgia (Fincher, 2003). That number more than doubled over the next two decades, when Georgia saw an addition of eight new junior colleges between 1964 and 1972, bringing the total in the System to fifteen (Fincher, 2003). At that time, "the state's two-

year colleges had continued to educate approximately 14 percent of all students enrolled in the University System” (Fincher, 2003, p. 67).

For the future of two-year colleges in Georgia, Fincher (2003) says:

The programs of the two-year colleges are identified in terms of their relevance to other units of higher and postsecondary education. The focus should continue to be on the first two years of academic coursework for transfer credit and in preparation for advanced studies at another institution. Two-year colleges should also continue to cooperate with technical institutes in programs where general education requirements must be met. And for the foreseeable future two-year colleges were expected to be the primary provider of developmental studies for students who are inadequately prepared for higher education. (p. 107)

However, the number of institutions in Georgia holding the “two-year college” designation is on a rapid decline. Recent approvals by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia have raised all but two of the original fifteen two-year colleges in Georgia to “state college” status (University System of Georgia, 2011).

Role of Four-year Universities in Georgia

The presence of four-year universities in Georgia began when the desire of a few prominent Yale graduates for “a college or seminary of learning” in the state came to fruition with the signing of a charter for what would eventually become The University of Georgia (UGA) on January 27, 1785 (Dyer, 1985, p. 8). Since that time, the state’s universities have strived to “create a more educated Georgia” (University System of Georgia, 2010). They share the following core characteristics:

1. A statewide responsibility and commitment to excellence and academic achievements having national and international recognition;
2. A commitment to excellence in a teaching/learning environment dedicated to serve a diverse and well-prepared student body, to promote high levels of student achievement and to provide appropriate academic support services;
3. A commitment to excellence in research, scholarship and creative endeavors that are focused on organized programs to create, maintain and apply new knowledge and theories; that promote instructional quality and effectiveness; and that enhance institutionally relevant faculty qualifications;
4. A commitment to excellence in public service, economic development, and technical assistance activities designed to address the strategic needs of the state of Georgia along with a comprehensive offering of continuing education designed to meet the needs of Georgia's citizens in life-long learning and professional education;
5. A wide range of academic and professional programming at the baccalaureate, master's and doctoral levels. (University of Georgia: Role/Mission, 2005)

In addition to these core characteristics shared by all universities, The University of Georgia offers “cooperative extension, continuing education, public service, experiment stations and technology transfer...to enhance the well-being of the citizens of Georgia through their roles in economic, social, and community development” (University of Georgia: Role/Mission, 2005). UGA is also “responsive to the evolution of the state’s educational, social and economic needs” and “endeavors to prepare the...state for full participation in the global society of the twenty-first century (University of Georgia: Role/Mission, 2005).

Characteristics of Transfer Students

“In 2004, 45% of first-time freshman chose to begin the higher education experience through community colleges. Motivation to attend a community college may be influenced by several factors...geography, financial status, social climate, and academic standing” (Branson & Green, 2007, p. 5). Some students cannot fulfill academic admission requirements of large universities, so they begin their college career at a smaller two-year institution (Branson & Green, 2007).

“Significant differences exist between students beginning their collegiate career at two-year institutions and those enrolling at four-year institutions” (Johnson, Taylor, & Kohler, 1991, p. 41). Research indicates two-year college transfer students usually have lower test scores and grade point averages compared to students beginning their college career at a four-year institution (Johnson, Taylor, & Kohler, 1991). It has also been found that “two-year college agriculture students were more likely to be from rural areas or small towns and were more likely to have been 4-H or FFA members than were students at four-year institutions” (Johnson, Taylor, & Kohler, 1991).

Some studies have been conducted over the past few decades to determine if students who transfer from two-year institutions are adequately prepared for the upper-level coursework at four-year universities. Some studies have shown that transfer students “have been less prepared...than their non-transfer counterparts” while “other studies have found preparation of upper level courses of both transfer students and their non-transfer counterparts to be equivalent” (Branson & Green, 2007, p. 5) “A study at Washington State University’s College of Agriculture...indicates that transfer students 1) have some difficulty in the first semester after

transfer, 2) experience an ‘adjustment shock,’ and 3) require special counseling” (Bennett, 1974, p. 87).

Skills Necessary to Ensure Student Success

Certain skills are necessary for the majority of students to be successful in college. Handel (2007) believes “...academic preparation is the single most important determinant of student success” (p. 41). Townsend & Wilson (2006) said “...undergraduate students’ persistence is influenced not only by their own characteristics, goals, and commitments but also by their experiences academically and socially while in college,” which indicates skills necessary for students to be successful at a four-year institution can be learned in the process (p. 2).

New programs, such as learning communities and first-year seminars, are being implemented in various institutions across the country to give new students and faculty the chance to know one another more intimately than in large lecture halls. “The underlying assumption behind each of these practices is that the more students are involved in or integrated into college life, the greater the likelihood they will stay in college and attain their degree” (as cited in Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

While academic skills are a necessity for students to be successful, one must also take into account non-academic skills, which may determine success or failure for some students. “Some experts contend that helping students address these non-academic deficiencies is just as important as helping them acquire basic academic skills through remedial classes, which typically do not address issues such as study skills, goal setting, and the like” (as cited in Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagno, 2007). Karp (2011) believed there were four main mechanisms by which non-academic supports can improve student success at two-year colleges. They are: creating social relationships, clarifying aspirations and enhancing commitment,

developing college know-how, and making college life feasible (Karp, 2011). Gardener and Barefoot (2010) also attribute student success to being active on campus, as well as other student skills, such as time management, critical thinking, effective reading and writing skills, and test-taking skills.

Chapter III

Methodology

This chapter addresses the methods used to answer the previously stated research questions. It includes the population and sample, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis methods used for the study.

Population and Sample

An attempt was made to collect data from all of the approximately 100 students in an agricultural major at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College who were attending courses during the Summer term of 2011.

Instrumentation

Participants were given a questionnaire modeled after the *Minnesota Beginning Agricultural Education Teacher In-service Programming Needs Assessment* (Joerger, 2002), which included questions about demographic information, as well as a list of 114 skills deemed important for college success by Gardner and Barefoot (2010). For each skill listed, students were asked to indicate their perceived level of importance and their perceived level of competence. The Likert-type scale ranged from Not Important (1) to Very Important (5) and Not Competent (1) to Very Competent (5).

Validity.

The questionnaire was developed using subject matter from each chapter of Gardner and Barefoot's (2010) *Step by Step to College and Career Success* textbook, which is used for some of the Freshman Seminar courses taught at ABAC. Before being administered to participants, the

questionnaire was reviewed by members of the ABAC Institutional Research Board and by two faculty members in The University of Georgia's Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication department. The researcher modified the instrument based on recommendations from these two groups before distributing the questionnaire.

Data Collection and Analysis

The instrument was administered over a two-week period to 70 students in six different agricultural courses being taught during the Summer 2011 term at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. The courses ranged from 1000-level to 3000-level courses and included topics in business, forestry, mechanics, and plant science. Completed instruments were collected from all 70 participants. Due to the fact that the questionnaire for this study was given during the Summer term, only a small percentage (~7%) of all agriculture students enrolled at ABAC were present on campus to participate in the study. The researcher realizes that more accurate data could have possibly been collected if the questionnaire had been given during a Fall or Spring semester when more students are present on campus to participate.

The data was entered into and analyzed using functions of an Excel™ spreadsheet. Cronbach's α for this study was calculated to be 0.97. Formulas based on the specifications of the Borich Needs Assessment Model (Borich, 1980) were created for determining the prioritization of the skill deficiencies. Joerger (2002) described Borich's procedure: "A discrepancy score was initially calculated for each student for each competency by subtracting the competency score from the importance score. A weighted discrepancy score was then calculated by multiplying the discrepancy score by the mean importance rating for each competency. A mean weighted discrepancy score (MWDS) was calculated by taking the sum of

the weighted discrepancy scores and dividing by the number of complete participant responses for the competency” (p. 13).

Chapter IV

Results and Findings

Demographics

Of the 70 responding students, 39% (27) were pursuing a degree in Diversified Agriculture, 24% (17) in Wildlife, 21% (15) in Forestry, and the remaining 16% in other agricultural areas. The majority of respondents (73%) were male, and the median age of respondents was 22 years. The average number of years the students had been at ABAC was 2.6 (SD=1.4), with 16% (11) having attended for more than four years.

Findings Related to Subproblem 1

Subproblem 1 of this study asked, “What skills do students in agriculture degree programs perceive as important to be successful in college?” Based on the data analyzed from the questionnaire, the participating students ranked “Managing your finances” as the most important skill to be successful in college, with a 4.87 mean on a 1-5 scale. Tied for the second most important skill was “Knowing how to perform well in an interview” and “Selecting a major you feel passionate about,” with a 4.81 mean on a 1-5 scale. Table 1 represents the twenty skills with the highest rank based on students’ perceived importance. Alternately, participating students ranked “Having good friends who may have a different sexual orientation than your own” as the least important skill necessary to be successful in college, with a mean of 2.79 on a 1-5 scale. The second least important skill based on rank was “Participating in campus efforts to promote diversity,” with a 3.11 mean on a 1-5 scale. Table 2 represents the twenty skills with the lowest rank based on students’ perceived importance.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation for Highest Ranked Skills based on Perceived Importance

Skill	Mean	SD
Managing your finances	4.87	0.41
Knowing how to perform well in an interview	4.81	0.39
Selecting a major you feel passionate about	4.81	0.46
Knowing how to avoid contracting a sexually transmitted infection	4.80	0.44
Using class notes to prepare for an exam	4.79	0.45
Reading exam questions carefully	4.76	0.52
Knowing how to prepare a strong résumé	4.71	0.54
Understanding how to write an effective cover letter to accompany your résumé	4.70	0.49
Creating a workable class schedule	4.69	0.55
Understanding the consequences of abusing legal and illegal drugs	4.69	0.69
Considering which careers match your abilities	4.69	0.50
Practicing academic honesty	4.67	0.74
Knowing when to use formal vs. informal English in email communication	4.66	0.59
Editing writing assignments before submitting them	4.64	0.66
Finding the entry requirements for the major that interests you	4.64	0.59
Setting long-term goals	4.63	0.59
Being in class on time	4.63	0.54
Having a good idea of the skills you'll need to succeed in any career	4.63	0.57
Organizing information to be presented in your speech	4.61	0.60
Knowing what it takes to be a good friend	4.61	0.57

Note. 1 = Not important; 2 = Of little importance; 3 = Somewhat important; 4 = Important; 5 = Very important.

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation for Lowest Ranked Skills based on Perceived Importance

Skill	Mean	SD
Having good friends who may have a different sexual orientation than your own	2.79	1.32
Participating in campus efforts to promote diversity	3.11	1.21
Finding a mentor	3.19	0.87
Participating in service learning	3.27	1.19
Promising yourself a reward for finishing tasks	3.33	0.99
Waiting to highlight text until after you've finished [reading] the section	3.36	1.19
Having good friends from other cultures/races	3.37	1.05
Skimming a chapter before beginning to read it	3.39	1.12
Using a planner	3.40	1.16
Sitting as close to the front of the classroom as possible	3.47	1.26
Using campus resources to find out about community service opportunities	3.49	1.11
Understanding the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a Greek social organization	3.60	1.31
Using study groups	3.61	0.92
Taking advantage of the special opportunities the campus provides to interact with people different than you	3.63	1.12
Avoiding tobacco products	3.64	1.44
Seeking opportunities to learn about cultures that are different from your own	3.67	1.00
Creating a "to-do" list	3.71	1.02
Pausing at the end of each section to review what you have read	3.71	0.92
Taking notes while you read	3.77	1.08
Studying for an exam with at least one other person	3.77	1.02

Note. 1 = Not important; 2 = Of little importance; 3 = Somewhat important; 4 = Important; 5 = Very important.

Findings Related to Subproblem 2

Subproblem 2 of this study asked, “What skills do students in agriculture degree programs perceive they are competent in?” Based on the data analyzed from the questionnaire, the participating students ranked “Selecting a major you feel passionate about” as skill they were most competent in, with a 4.69 mean on a 1-5 scale. The skill students perceived themselves to be the second most competent in was “Knowing how to avoid contracting a sexually transmitted infection,” with a 4.66 mean on a 1-5 scale. Table 3 represents the twenty skills with the highest rank based on students’ perceived competency. Alternately, participating students ranked “Skimming a chapter before beginning to read it” as the skill they had the least competence in, with a mean of 2.72 on a 1-5 scale. The skill students perceived themselves to be the second least competent in was “Having good friends who may have a different sexual orientation than your own,” with a 2.73 mean on a 1-5 scale. Table 4 represents the twenty skills with the lowest rank based on students’ perceived competency.

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviation for Highest Ranked Skills based on Perceived Competency

Skill	Mean	SD
Selecting a major you feel passionate about	4.69	0.65
Knowing how to avoid contracting a sexually transmitted infection	4.66	0.70
Avoiding tobacco products, even in moderation	4.57	0.89
Practicing academic honesty	4.53	0.78
Knowing what it takes to be a good friend	4.51	0.79
Considering which careers match your abilities	4.41	0.73
Having a set of values that genuinely makes sense to you	4.40	0.86
Using class notes to prepare for an exam	4.36	0.84

Understanding how to maintain good communication with your family while in college	4.34	0.87
Reading exam questions carefully	4.33	0.86
Knowing when to use formal vs. informal English in email communication	4.31	0.81
Having a good idea of the skills you'll need to succeed in any career	4.31	0.77
Knowing the difference between responsible and irresponsible alcohol use	4.30	1.04
Being in class on time	4.29	0.84
Knowing what to do if you ever find yourself in an abusive relationship	4.27	1.19
Knowing what to do when some aspect of a friend's behavior clashes with your personal values	4.27	0.80
Knowing how to perform well in an interview	4.27	0.82
Managing your finances	4.24	0.84
Choosing effective visual aids for your speech	4.24	0.81
Creating a workable class schedule	4.21	0.90

Note. 1 = Not competent; 2 = Little competence; 3 = Somewhat competent; 4 = Competent; 5 = Very competent.

Table 4

Mean and Standard Deviation for Lowest Ranked Skills based on Perceived Competency

Skill	Mean	SD
Skimming a chapter before beginning to read it	2.72	1.17
Having good friends who may have a different sexual orientation than your own	2.73	1.52
Using a planner	2.74	1.34
Finding a mentor	2.77	1.09
Participating in campus efforts to promote diversity	2.79	1.18
Participating in service learning	2.93	1.21
Waiting to highlight text until after you've finished [reading] the section	2.94	1.19
Using campus resources to find out about community service opportunities	2.94	1.28
Having good friends who are from different cultures/races	2.96	1.27
Reciting key ideas to yourself after reading	2.97	1.19

Using study groups	3.03	1.17
Pausing at the end of each section to review what you have read	3.03	1.18
Taking notes while you read	3.13	1.30
Exploring various organizations on campus	3.14	1.25
Understanding the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a Greek social organization	3.17	1.46
Promising yourself a reward for finishing tasks	3.19	1.28
Using relaxation strategies before taking an exam	3.19	1.32
Seeking opportunities to learn about cultures that are different from your own	3.19	1.25
Sitting as close to the front of the classroom as possible	3.20	1.43
Taking advantage of the special opportunities the campus provides to interact with people different than you	3.20	1.20

Note. 1 = Not competent; 2 = Little competence; 3 = Somewhat competent; 4 = Competent; 5 = Very competent.

Findings Related to Subproblem 3

Subproblem 3 of this study asked, “What skill sets do students in agriculture degree programs need the most training in to be successful in college?” Based on Borich’s Mean Weighted Discrepancy Score (MWDS), the skill that students indicated needing the most training in was “Eliminating distractions from your study environment,” with a MWDS of 4.75. The second most needed skill according to the data was “Getting enough sleep,” with a MWDS of 4.68. Table 5 represents the twenty skills in which students perceive needing the most assistance with, based on Mean Weighted Discrepancy Scores. Alternately, the skill that students indicated needing the least training in was “Having good friends who are from other age groups,” with a MWDS of -0.23. The second least needed skill according to the data was “Having friends who may have a different sexual orientation than your own,” with a MWDS of 0.16. Table 6 represents the twenty skills in which students perceive needing the least assistance with, based on Mean Weighted Discrepancy Scores.

Table 5

Most Needed Skills Based on Mean Weighted Discrepancy Score

Skill	MWDS
Eliminating distractions from your study environment	4.75
Getting enough sleep	4.68
Dealing with stress in a healthy way	4.46
Raising your hand when you don't understand something	4.08
Concentrating while reading a text	3.99
Beginning to study for an exam at least a week in advance	3.85
Reviewing what was said in your class after the class is over	3.71
Not overextending yourself	3.54
Using relaxation techniques to combat stress	3.37
Reciting key ideas to yourself after reading	3.35
Feeling comfortable asking all types of questions	3.29
Speaking up in class	3.23
Using a dictionary to check the meaning of unfamiliar words while reading	3.15
Making your physical health a priority	3.08
Managing your finances	3.06
Precise communication: presenting your ideas convincingly to others	3.05
Exercising regularly	3.03
Taking notes on the class discussion, not just the lecture	3.03
Setting long-term goals	2.98
Knowing how to prepare a strong résumé	2.96

Table 6

Least Needed Skills Based on Mean Weighted Discrepancy Score

Skill	MWDS
Having good friends who are from other age groups	-0.23
Having friends who may have a different sexual orientation than your own	0.16
Focusing your eyes on the lecturer	0.36
Understanding the benefits of working on campus vs. off campus	0.39
Honestly grappling with the question of whether you truly need to work while attending college	0.42
Knowing what it takes to be a good friend	0.46
Promising yourself a reward for finishing tasks	0.48
Understanding the consequences of abusing legal and illegal drugs	0.54
Selecting a major you feel passionate about	0.62
Practicing academic honesty	0.67
Knowing how to avoid contracting a sexually transmitted infection	0.69
Knowing how to have fun without drinking alcohol	0.77
Avoiding tobacco products, even in moderation	0.83
Systematic thinking: organizing the possibilities, tossing out the rubbish	0.88
Sitting as close to the front of the classroom as possible	0.94
Choosing effective visual aids for your speech	0.96
Knowing the difference between responsible and irresponsible alcohol use	0.97
Understanding how to maintain good communication with your family while in college	0.98
Having a set of values that genuinely makes sense to you	0.99
Identifying your learning style	0.99

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to analyze the data from participating ABAC students' questionnaires to determine if they perceived themselves to be competent in a set of skills necessary to be successful in college. By collecting data regarding the participating students' perceived importance and competency in a set of skills, the researcher can provide data to either support or repudiate the hypothesis. It is the researcher's desire that the data collected will provide insight to the faculty and staff of ABAC for improving students' skill knowledge and success at their institution and beyond.

The specific questions of the study which the researcher strived to answer were:

1. What skills do students in agriculture degree programs perceive as important to be successful in college?
2. What skills do students in agriculture degree programs perceive they are competent in?
3. What skill sets do students in agriculture degree programs need the most training in to be successful in college?

Summary of Methodology

Participants were given a questionnaire modeled after , the *Minnesota Beginning Agricultural Education Teacher In-service Programming Needs Assessment* (Joerger, 2002), which included questions about demographic information, as well as a list of 114 skills deemed important for college success by Gardner and Barefoot (2010). For each skill listed, students

were asked to indicate their perceived level of importance and their perceived level of competence. The Likert-type scale ranged from Not Important (1) to Very Important (5) and Not Competent (1) to Very Competent (5).

The instrument was administered over a two-week period to 70 students in six different agricultural courses being taught during the Summer 2011 term at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. Completed instruments were collected from all 70 participants. Due to the fact that this study was given during the Summer term, only a small percentage (~7%) of all agriculture students enrolled at ABAC were present on campus to participate in the study.

The data was entered into and analyzed using functions of an Excel™ spreadsheet. Formulas based on the specifications of the Borich Needs Assessment Model (Borich, 1980) were created for determining the prioritization of the skill deficiencies. Joerger (2002) described Borich's procedure: "A discrepancy score was initially calculated for each student for each competency by subtracting the competency score from the importance score. A weighted discrepancy score was then calculated by multiplying the discrepancy score by the mean importance rating for each competency. A mean weighted discrepancy score (MWDS) was calculated by taking the sum of the weighted discrepancy scores and dividing by the number of complete participant responses for the competency" (p. 13).

Summary of Findings

Subproblem 1 of this study asked, "What skills do students in agriculture degree programs perceive as important to be successful in college?" Based on the data analyzed from the questionnaire, the participating students ranked "Managing your finances" as the most important skill to be successful in college, with a 4.87 mean on a 1-5 scale. Tied for the second most important skill was "Knowing how to perform well in an interview" and "Selecting a major

you feel passionate about,” with a 4.81 mean on a 1-5 scale. Alternately, participating students ranked “Having good friends who may have a different sexual orientation than your own” as the least important skill necessary to be successful in college, with a mean of 2.79 on a 1-5 scale. The second least important skill based on rank was “Participating in campus efforts to promote diversity,” with a 3.11 mean on a 1-5 scale.

Subproblem 2 of this study asked, “What skills do students in agriculture degree programs perceive they are competent in?” Based on the data analyzed from the questionnaire, the participating students ranked “Selecting a major you feel passionate about” as skill they were most competent in, with a 4.69 mean on a 1-5 scale. The skill students perceived themselves to be the second most competent in was “Knowing how to avoid contracting a sexually transmitted infection,” with a 4.66 mean on a 1-5 scale. Alternately, participating students ranked “Skimming a chapter before beginning to read it” as the skill they had the least competence in, with a mean of 2.72 on a 1-5 scale. The skill students perceived themselves to be the second least competent in was “Having good friends who may have a different sexual orientation than your own,” with a 2.73 mean on a 1-5 scale.

Subproblem 3 of this study asked, “What skill sets do students in agriculture degree programs need the most training in to be successful in college?” Based on Borich’s Mean Weighted Discrepancy Score (MWDS), the skill that students indicated needing the most training in was “Eliminating distractions from your study environment,” with a MWDS of 4.75. The second most needed skill according to the data was “Getting enough sleep,” with a MWDS of 4.68. Alternately, the skill that students indicated needing the least training in was “Having good friends who are from other age groups,” with a MWDS of -0.23. The second least needed

skill according to the data was “Having friends who may have a different sexual orientation than your own,” with a MWDS of 0.16.

Recommendations

The data implies ABAC students believe managing their finances is the most important thing they can do to ensure their college success. With the current economic status of our nation, ever-increasing cost of tuition and fees, and recent changes to the HOPE Scholarship, it is no surprise that financial management is on the top of their list. Unfortunately, many students do not come to college possessing adequate money management skills, partially because the subject is not normally taught in Georgia high schools. The subject of financial management is covered somewhat in ABAC’s Freshman Seminar courses, but not all students take the course, and it is up to the instructor as to what and how much, if any, of the subject is taught. The researcher recommends implementing a standardized “financial management” component to all ABAC Freshman Seminar courses.

The data also consistently implies that ABAC students do not consider diversity to be an important skill for college success, with “Having good friends who may have a different sexual orientation than your own” and “Participating in campus efforts to promote diversity” being ranked as the two least important. In Subproblem 2, the data also suggests lack of diversity-related skills, as “Having good friends who may have a different sexual orientation than your own” was ranked second least competent by students. The researcher suggests efforts should be made to implement a cultural diversity requirement of ABAC students, similar to existing requirements at other Georgia institutions.

“Selecting a major you feel passionate about” was ranked second in both importance and competence to the students, which indicates no additional training is necessary in this area.

Based on the weighted scores of this study, ABAC students would like the most help with eliminating distractions from their study environment. Further research could be done to determine which distractions in particular are affecting the students' study time. This information could help ABAC staff to know what can be done to assist students with this issue.

Implications for Future Research

The questionnaire for this study was given during the Summer term of 2011, which means only a small percentage (~7%) of all agriculture students enrolled at ABAC were present on campus to participate in the study. The questionnaire should be re-administered during a Fall semester in order to capture the most responses. Likewise, the study could be expanded to include students enrolled in all of the Schools at ABAC in addition to the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

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Appendix A
Original Questionnaire

COLLEGE STUDENT SKILLS ASSESSMENT

This needs assessment is comprised of two sections. Section I is designed to assess your opinions regarding the skill needs and competence of college students. This information will be used in planning future student courses. Section II will request some information about you. Responses will be kept confidential. Please record all responses on this document. Thank you.

SECTION I: Skill Needs of College Students

Directions: For each of the following topics, in the left column **darken** the number that best indicates your perceived level of **IMPORTANCE** of college student skills. In the right hand column **darken** the number that best indicates your perceived level of **COMPETENCE** regarding the topic.

EXAMPLE	
Not Important ①	Not Competent ①
Of Little Importance ②	Little Competence ② ●
Somewhat Important ③	Somewhat Competent ③
Important ④	Competent ④
Very Important ⑤ ●	Very Competent ⑤

Staying organized

This person perceived the topic “Staying organized” to be Very Important and perceived that they had little competence in this area.

Directions: For each of the following topics, in the **left** column *darken* the number that best indicates your perceived level of **IMPORTANCE** of college student skills. In the **right** hand column *darken* the number that best indicates **your** perceived level of **COMPETENCE** regarding the topic.

LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE

Not important
Of Little Importance
Somewhat Important
Important
Very Important

LEVEL OF COMPETENCE

Not Competent
Little Competence
Somewhat Competent
Competent
Very Competent

Beginning College on the Right Foot

- | | | |
|-----------|----------------------------------|-----------|
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Setting short-term goals | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Setting long-term goals | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Connecting with your instructors | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Finding a mentor | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Practicing academic honesty | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Managing your finances | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |

Managing Time

- | | | |
|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Creating a workable class schedule | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Not overextending yourself | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Using a planner | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Prioritizing goals | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Being in class on time | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |

Staying Motivated

- | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Reminding yourself of the possible consequences for not getting work done | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Creating a “to-do” list | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Breaking down big jobs into smaller steps | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Promising yourself a reward for finishing tasks ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Eliminating distractions from your study environment ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Thinking Critically

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Collaborating with others ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Evaluating the quality of information sources ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Abstract thinking: using details to discover a bigger idea ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Creative thinking: seeking connections, finding new possibilities, rejecting nothing ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Systematic thinking: organizing the possibilities, tossing out the rubbish ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Precise communication: presenting your ideas convincingly to others ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Checking the accuracy of online information ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Engaging with Learning

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Using study groups ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Establishing good relations between you and your instructors ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Getting support for a learning disability ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Making the Most of Your Learning Style

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Identifying your learning style ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Using your learning style to develop study strategies ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Writing for Success

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Brainstorming before drafting writing assignments ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Editing writing assignments before submitting them ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Knowing when to use formal vs. informal English in email communication ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Speaking for Success

- | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Identifying your objective when preparing a speech | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Analyzing the audience you will present a speech to | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Organizing information to be presented in your speech | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Choosing effective visual aids for your speech | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Preparing brief notes to use during your speech | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Practicing your presentation before giving a speech | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |

Listening in Class

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Preparing yourself to remember what will be said in your class before the class begins | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Listening critically to what your instructor says | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Reviewing what was said in your class after the class is over | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |

Note-taking in Class

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Taking notes on the class discussion, not just the lecture | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Using a note-taking system to organize your notes | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Restraining from writing down a lecture word for word | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |

Participating in Class

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Sitting as close to the front of the classroom as possible | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Focusing your eyes on the lecturer | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Listening carefully to the lecture | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Raising your hand when you don't understand something | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Speaking up in class | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Feeling comfortable asking all types of questions | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Being honest if you don't know the answer to a question ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Using related outside material to provide additional information not covered in class ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Reading for Success

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Skimming a chapter before beginning to read it ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Concentrating while reading a text ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Waiting to highlight the text until after you've finished the section ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Taking notes while you read ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Pausing at the end of each section to review what you have read ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Reciting key ideas to yourself after reading ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Using a dictionary to check the meaning of unfamiliar words while reading ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Knowing the difference between a textbook and primary source material ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Looking for connections between the text and class lectures ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Taking short breaks between each reading period ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Taking Exams

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Beginning to study for an exam at least a week in advance ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Using class notes to prepare for an exam ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Studying for an exam with at least one other person ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Knowing what to expect before going into an exam ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Predicting possible questions for an exam ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Maintaining healthy habits before exams ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Rechecking your answers if you finish an exam early ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Reading exam questions carefully ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Using relaxation strategies before taking an exam ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Understanding Relationships

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Understanding the pros and cons of getting romantically involved while in college ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Understanding the difficulties of maintaining a long-distance relationship ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Knowing what to do if you ever find yourself in an abusive relationship ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Establishing ground rules for living together with a roommate ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Understanding how to maintain good communication with your family while in college ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Knowing what it takes to be a good friend ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Knowing how electronic relationships can be both valuable and dangerous ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Understanding Diversity

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Seeking opportunities to learn about cultures that are different from your own ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Having good friends who are from other cultures/races ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Having good friends who are from other age groups ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Having good friends who may have a different sexual orientation than your own ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Understanding Values

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Having a set of values that genuinely makes sense to you ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Knowing what to do when some aspect of a friend's behavior clashes with your personal values ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Managing Stress

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Dealing with stress in a healthy way ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Using relaxation techniques to combat stress ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Achieving Wellness

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Making your physical health a priority | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Getting enough sleep | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Exercising regularly | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Educating yourself about sex and contraception | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Knowing how to avoid contracting a sexually transmitted infection | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Knowing how to have fun without drinking alcohol | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Knowing the difference between responsible and irresponsible alcohol use | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Avoiding tobacco products, even in moderation | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Understanding the consequences of abusing legal and illegal drugs | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |

Experiencing College Life to the Fullest

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Exploring various organizations on campus | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Understanding the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a Greek social organization | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Recognizing the ways that joining a club affiliated with my major can enhance my career opportunities | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Honestly grappling with the question of whether you truly need to work while attending college | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Understanding the benefits of working on campus vs. off campus | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Using campus resources to find out about community service opportunities | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Understanding the career benefits of internships | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Taking advantage of the special opportunities the campus provides to interact with people different than you | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Participating in campus efforts to promote diversity | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Participating in service learning | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |

Planning Early

- | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Finding the entry requirements for the major that interests you | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Having a good idea of the skills you'll need to succeed in any career | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Networking with others who can help you attain your career goals | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Participating in out-of-class activities that relate to your career goals | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Knowing how to prepare a strong résumé | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Understanding how to write an effective cover letter to accompany your résumé | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Knowing how to perform well in an interview | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |

Keeping an Open Mind

- | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Selecting a major you feel passionate about | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Finding the campus resources that will help you learn about careers | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |
| ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ | Considering which careers match your abilities | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ |

SECTION II: Demographic Information

Directions: Please answer the following questions as they relate to your current situation. Place a written response or circle an answer for each question.

1. Major _____

2. Class Standing: (please circle one)

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

3. Years at ABAC _____

4. Gender: (please circle one)

Male Female

5. Age _____

6. Plans after ABAC: (please circle one)

Transfer to another college/university Enter the workforce

7. Did you successfully complete ABAC 1000 – Freshman Seminar? _____

a. If yes, which textbook did you use? (Please circle one)

A Few Keys to All Success Step by Step Other /No text