

Are College of Agriculture Graduates Satisfied with Their Career Choices?

J. Shane Robinson, Oklahoma State University
Bryan L. Garton, University of Missouri

Abstract

Job satisfaction plays a role in whether or not employees remain in their chosen profession. The purpose of this study was to track the career paths of graduates from the University of Missouri. Specifically, the study sought to determine the career choice, employment status, salary, and overall job satisfaction of college graduates. The findings of the study revealed graduates are entering a wide array of careers. Nearly three-fourths of the graduates were full-time employees, while 20% were attending graduate or professional school. Nearly 30% of full-time employees worked in management and sales positions. While 80% of graduates worked between 30 – 59 hours per week, those who were employed on a part-time basis were found to be most satisfied with their employment status. In all, graduates were satisfied with their current salary regardless of the financial reward. Graduates with degrees in general agriculture and food & science nutrition earned the highest salaries but were least satisfied with their chosen career. Graduates who entered industry as scientists were most satisfied with their chosen occupation, while graduates employed as support staff and research assistants were undecided about their level of job satisfaction. Overall, graduates were satisfied with their chosen career field.

Introduction/Theoretical Framework

The role of higher education has been largely influenced by industry (Morley, 2001). While there are differing views on the intent of higher education, one emergent theme appears to surface; to a degree, higher education exists to prepare students for future employment (Cole & Thompson, 2002; Evers, Rush, & Berdrow, 1998; Martin, Milne-Home, Barrett, Spalding, & Jones, 2000; McLaughlin, 1995; Peddle, 2000) and life after college (Kember & Leung, 2005; Martin et al., 2000). However, research has indicated that graduates have unrealistic expectations of the workforce and are not prepared to enter industry after graduation (Candy & Crebert, 1991). A lack of preparation could result in graduate's having low levels of job satisfaction in their respective careers.

Dawis and Lofquist (1984) stated the general expectation is for all individuals to engage in work with the ultimate goal of becoming full-time employees. Once employed, it is important for graduates to be satisfied with their career because job satisfaction plays a role in determining whether or not graduates remain in their chosen career (Robinson & Garton, 2006). Therefore, assessing graduates' job satisfaction is imperative.

It has been noted job satisfaction is the overall feeling people have about their jobs (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Martin, 2002; Rowden, 2002). Rowden (2002) stated there are two perspectives of job satisfaction. The first is the humanitarian perspective, which states “. . . that people deserve to be treated fairly and with respect” (p. 4). The second is the utilitarian perspective which “. . . can lead to behavior by employees that affects organizational functioning, as well as a reflection on organizational functioning” (p. 4). Companies realize that a more satisfied

employee leads to more effectiveness and productivity on the job (Martin, 2002). However, a dissatisfied employee can result in that person possessing negative behaviors and unwarranted actions. Such actions consist of the employee being absent from work, which can ultimately result in the employee leaving the profession or trade altogether (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Therefore, managers and supervisors should pay close attention to both humanitarian and utilitarian perspectives of job satisfaction as they relate to their employees to create a fair working environment with high morale among their workforce.

Bluestein (2001) concluded that individuals tend to seek employment that resonates with their value systems. Brown (2002) referred to these values as work values which consist of “Financial prosperity, altruism, achievement, and responsibility” (p. 49). The attitudes workers bring to their jobs and the motivation they possess while performing at their jobs leads to job satisfaction. Gilmer and Deci (1977) concluded “workers’ attitudes toward their jobs reflect the extent to which they are satisfied with their jobs and their work lives” (p. 228).

While workers often choose careers that interest them, a lack of job satisfaction can result in worker turnover, which creates multiple problems for organizations and society as a whole. Boverie and Kroth (2000) opined:

Because there will be fewer people to take the place of the current baby boomers, recruiting and keeping employees will be one of the toughest organizational tasks for at least the next two decades. The values of these new employees will emphasize less loyalty to organizations, more job hopping, a greater importance on having fun, and quality time off (p. 850).

In addition to worker turnover, the overall job tenure of employees has decreased from seven years to four years (Gregg & Wadsworth, as cited in Morley, 2001). Workers are becoming more disposable and less committed. Therefore, hiring recent college graduates has become risky (Morley, 2001).

The theoretical frameworks for this study consisted of a combination of the psychological theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) and the career success theory (Hughes, 1937). The psychological theory of work adjustment proposes:

Work is an interaction between an individual and a work environment in which each has requirements of the other. The work environment requires certain tasks to be performed and the individual brings skills to perform the tasks. The individual, in exchange, requires compensation for work performance and additional conditions of work such as a safe environment, a comfortable place to work, congenial co-workers, a competent supervisor, and an opportunity to achieve (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984, p. 56).

The theory of career success contains both objective and subjective variables (Hughes, 1937). Among the objective variables are an individual’s salary, promotion status, and overall level of job satisfaction. Heslin (2005) stated, “Career success research increasingly assesses both objective and subjective career outcomes, apparently presuming that people define their success in largely the same way (i.e., current salary, promotions and job satisfaction)” (p. 127).

Hu and Kuh (2003) noted “. . . more students than ever are participating in higher education and the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired during college are essential for the postcollege success of individuals, preparation of an informed citizenry, and continued expansion of an information-based economy” (p. 185). However, “University programs in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences typically do not prepare university graduates directly for work or for specific occupations, unlike their counterparts in professional programs” (Kwok 2004, p. 5). Martin et al. (2000) added that the variety of potential jobs graduates can enter makes it almost impossible for higher education institutions to prepare all students for every technical skill needed in their careers.

While job satisfaction is important to managers and supervisors, it also has implications for higher education institutions. Higher education institutions recognize that satisfied alumni often act as advocates on behalf of their accrediting institution, which can lead to better recruitment practices for potential students (Schmidt et al. as cited in Martin et al., 2000, p. 200). Because satisfied individuals tend to remain in their chosen field for longer periods of time creating a more stable workforce, they are more apt to respond favorably about their accrediting institution to perspective students.

Barkley, Stock, and Sylvius (1999) stated that “Given the major changes in the career expectations and experiences of agricultural alumni, up-to-date information on salaries and career experiences is a vital ingredient for sound, forward-looking college and career decisions” (p. 785). Martin et al. (2000) added “there is . . . a need for institutions to monitor graduate satisfaction, better prepare them for employment, and explore the relationship between these two dimensions” (p. 203). With these statements serving as needs for the study, certain questions arise. Within this Midwestern state’s College of Agriculture (COA), where do its graduates find employment? Are the majority of these graduates gaining full-time employment? Lastly, what attributes of graduates’ employment leads to job satisfaction?

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to track the career paths of COA graduates from the University of Missouri (MU). Specifically, the study sought to determine the career choice, employment status, salary, and overall job satisfaction of college graduates. The following research objectives guided the study:

1. Describe the employment status, career path, and salary status of COA graduates.
2. Describe COA graduates’ level of job satisfaction by employment status, career path, and salary status.
3. Describe the number of hours per week COA graduates are engaged in their work.
4. Identify COA graduates’ salary status by academic degree.
5. Assess COA graduates’ level of job satisfaction by academic degree.

Methods and Procedures

The design of the study was survey research. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data. The population for this study was MU COA graduates from January 2004 to May 2005 ($N = 711$). As part of a larger study, a random sample ($n = 272$) of the population was mailed a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of four sections, with job satisfaction and demographics comprising two of the sections. The Brayfield-Rothe (1951) job satisfaction instrument, as modified by Warner (1973) was employed for the job satisfaction section. This section consisted of 14 questions on job satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors and used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree. A panel of experts consisting of COA university faculty established content and face validity. Cano and Miller (1992) established reliability for the job satisfaction section through prior research and reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .94 for the summated scale.

To assess the objectives in the study, modes of central tendency and variability consisting of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used. Based on graduates' responses to their chosen career paths, they were collapsed into one of the following categories: sales, management, communications, government agencies, production agriculture, scientists, research assistants, teachers, support staff, financial services, food services, educational trainers (industry), graduate school, and other. The "other" category served as a "catch-all" for graduates who could not be placed in one of the existing categories. Examples of the "other" category consisted of: zookeeper, cash register operator, inventory analyst, and pharmacy technician to name a few.

The Dillman (2004) Tailored Design Method was used to collect data. Postcards announcing the forthcoming questionnaire were mailed two weeks prior to mailing the complete questionnaire package which consisted of a cover letter, questionnaire, and pre-paid return envelope. A follow-up postcard was sent to non-respondents ten days after the initial mailing of the complete package. A second complete package was mailed to non-respondents ten days after the follow-up postcard. Recipients were instructed to complete the questionnaires and return them to the researcher in the pre-paid, stamped envelope included. In all, 141 participants responded for a 52% response rate.

Non-response error was accounted for by comparing early and late respondents (Miller & Smith, 1983). In an effort to be conservative, the first 25% ($n = 35$; early respondents) were compared to the last 25% ($n = 35$; late respondents). This represented the extreme ends of the spectrum concerning early and late respondents, allowing for the greatest amount of possible discrepancy. Specifically, early and late respondents were compared with regard to their overall level of job satisfaction. No significant differences were found (Table 1).

Table 1
Comparison of Early and Late Respondents on Level of Job Satisfaction

Variable	Early Respondents		Late Respondents		p-value
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Overall Job Satisfaction	3.89	.86	3.99	.69	.60

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree; $p \leq .05$

Because this study employed an existing data set, the demographic information of the graduates had previously been collected. A greater percentage of females ($f = 75$; 53%) responded to the initial study than did males ($f = 66$; 47%). The department comprising the largest number of total graduates during the two-year period (January 2004 – May 2005) was hotel and restaurant management ($N = 36$), while the department comprising the fewest number of total graduates consisted of: agricultural economics, agricultural journalism, agricultural systems management, food and science and nutrition, general agriculture, plant science, and soil and atmospheric science ($f = 15$). The greatest number of graduates responding to the initial study consisted of animal science ($f = 15$), while the fewest number of respondents consisted of graduates in parks, recreation, and tourism, soil and atmospheric science, and general agriculture ($f = 5$). The degree programs consisting of graduates with the highest grade point average (GPA) were biochemistry and forestry, with each having a GPA of 3.47. The degree program with the lowest GPA was general agriculture ($M = 2.56$).

Findings

Objective one sought to describe the employment status, career path, and salary status of COA graduates. One hundred (71%) graduates were employed full-time (Table 2). Of the respondents, 28 (20%) were attending graduate or professional school, and five (3.5%) were employed part-time. Three (2.1%) graduates were unemployed and seeking employment. The remaining graduates were either caring for family full-time or comprised the “other” category.

Table 2
Employment Status of College of Agriculture Graduates (n = 141)

Employment Status	<i>f</i>	%
Employed full-time	100	71.0
Attending graduate or professional school	28	20.0
Employed part-time	5	3.5
Unemployed, seeking employment	3	2.1
Caring for family full-time	1	0.7
Other	4	2.8

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Table 3 depicts the various career paths graduates entered. The career paths were adopted from a study by Garton and Robinson (2006) which employed the same categories. Roughly half of the graduates were enrolled in graduate school (19.9%), or were employed in careers consisting of management (19.1%) and sales (10.6%). Teachers accounted for 6.4% of the respondents,

followed by communications and government agencies (5.7%), production agriculture and scientists (4.3%), research assistants (3.5%), and support staff (2.8%). The least populated career choices consisted of educational training in industry, financial services, and food services, consisting of 2.1% each. Eleven graduates (7.8%) fell into the “other” category.

Table 3
Career Path of College of Agriculture Graduates (n = 136)

Rank	Career Choice	<i>f</i>	%
1.	Graduate School	28	19.9
2.	Management	27	19.1
3.	Sales	15	10.6
4.	Other	11	7.8
5.	Teachers	9	6.4
6.	Communications	8	5.7
6.	Government Agencies	8	5.7
8.	Production Agriculture	6	4.3
8.	Scientists	6	4.3
10.	Research Assistants	5	3.5
11.	Support Staff	4	2.8
12.	Educational Trainers (Industry)	3	2.1
12.	Financial Services	3	2.1
12.	Food Services	3	2.1

To assess the salaries earned by graduates, Table 4 was constructed. The highest percentage of graduates earned a salary less than \$20,000 per year (31%). Over 16% of graduates earned an annual salary between \$20,000 – \$29,999. Nearly 20% of graduates earned between \$30,000 – \$34,999, while nearly 30% of graduates earned \$35,000 – \$44,999 per year. Nearly 4% of graduates earned a salary greater than \$45,000 per year.

Table 4
Salary Status of College of Agriculture Graduates (n = 129)

Salary	<i>f</i>	%
Less than \$20,000	40	31.0
\$20,000 – \$24,999	11	8.5
\$25,000 – \$29,999	10	7.8
\$30,000 – \$34,999	25	19.4
\$35,000 – \$39,999	18	13.9
\$40,000 – \$44,999	20	15.5
Greater than \$45,000	5	3.9

Objective two sought to describe the level of job satisfaction by COA graduates’ employment status, career path, and salary. Table 5 was constructed to describe graduates’ level of job satisfaction by their employment status. Graduates employed on a part-time basis were most satisfied with their job ($M = 4.27$; $SD = .38$). Graduates who were attending graduate or professional school ($M = 4.16$; $SD = .34$) had the next highest rating of job satisfaction, followed by graduates employed full-time ($M = 3.88$; $SD = .80$) and caring for family full-time ($M = 3.64$;

$SD = .00$). Graduates comprising the “other” ($M = 3.54$; $SD = .79$) category were least satisfied with their employment status.

Table 5

Job Satisfaction of College of Agriculture Graduates by Employment Status (n = 135)

Employment Status	<i>f</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Employed full-time	99	73.3	3.88	.80
Attending graduate or professional school	26	19.3	4.16	.34
Employed part-time	5	3.7	4.27	.38
Caring for family full-time	1	0.7	3.64	.00
Other	4	2.9	3.54	.79

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

The career paths graduates entered were ranked from highest to lowest in terms of mean scores (Table 6). The career paths comprising the greatest number of graduates consisted of graduate school and management ($f = 26$, 20.8%), while 15 graduates entered careers in sales (12%). The career paths least taken by graduates were: research assistants ($f = 5$, 4%), support staff ($f = 4$, 3.2%), and financial services, educational trainers in industry, and food services ($f = 3$, 2.4%).

When assessing for job satisfaction by career path, graduates who entered career paths as scientists ($M = 4.55$; $SD = .44$) were most satisfied. Graduates rounding out the top five most satisfied with their career path included those who entered into careers in financial services ($M = 4.29$; $SD = .70$), teaching ($M = 4.25$; $SD = .53$), graduate school ($M = 4.17$; $SD = .35$), and educational training ($M = 4.12$; $SD = .04$). The career path graduates were least satisfied with were those who were employed as research assistants ($M = 3.07$; $SD = 1.39$). Rounding out the bottom five career paths graduates were least satisfied with were: food services ($M = 3.71$; $SD = .56$), production agriculture ($M = 3.69$; $SD = .43$), “other” ($M = 3.68$; $SD = .86$), and support staff ($M = 3.36$; $SD = 1.20$).

Table 6
Job Satisfaction of College of Agriculture Graduates by Career Path (n = 125)

Rank	Career Choice	<i>f</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1.	Scientists	6	4.8	4.55	.44
2.	Financial Services	3	2.4	4.29	.70
3.	Teachers	9	7.2	4.25	.53
4.	Graduate School	26	20.8	4.17	.35
5.	Educational Trainers (Industry)	3	2.4	4.12	.04
6.	Sales	15	12.0	4.00	.52
7.	Management	26	20.8	3.95	.75
8.	Communications	8	6.4	3.81	.74
9.	Food Services	3	2.4	3.71	.56
10.	Production Agriculture	6	4.8	3.69	.43
11.	Other	11	8.8	3.68	.86
12.	Support Staff	4	3.2	3.36	1.20
13.	Research Assistants	5	4.0	3.07	1.39
	Total	125	100	3.96	.70

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Table 7 describes graduates' level of job satisfaction by their current salary. In terms of satisfaction, graduates earning between \$35,000 – \$39,999 were most satisfied ($M = 4.11$; $SD = .52$) with their current salary. Graduates earning less than \$20,000 were the next most satisfied ($M = 4.04$, $SD = .56$) with their salary, followed by graduates earning \$30,000 – \$34,999 ($M = 3.93$; $SD = .68$). Graduates who were least satisfied with their current salary were those earning between \$20,000 – \$24,999 ($M = 3.58$; $SD = .95$).

Table 7
Job Satisfaction of College of Agriculture Graduates by Salary Status (n = 129)

Salary	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Less than \$20,000	4.04	.56
\$20,000 – \$24,999	3.58	.95
\$25,000 – \$29,999	3.72	.99
\$30,000 – \$34,999	3.93	.68
\$35,000 – \$39,999	4.11	.52
\$40,000 – \$44,999	3.92	.78
Greater than \$45,000	3.84	.85

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Objective three sought to assess the number of hours per week COA graduates worked at their job. Nearly 7% of graduates work less than 20 hours per week, while over 70% of graduates work between 40 and 59 hours per week (Table 8). Over 15% of graduates work between 21 – 39 hours per week. Six percent work between 60 – 79 hours per week, while a little over 1% of graduates work over 80 hours per week.

Table 8

Number of Hours per Week College of Agriculture Graduates Work at their Jobs (n = 136)

Hours per Week	f	%
Less than 20 hours	9	6.6
21 – 29 hours	6	4.4
30 – 39 hours	15	11.0
40 – 49 hours	71	52.2
50 – 59 hours	25	18.4
60 – 69 hours	5	3.8
70 – 79 hours	3	2.2
More than 80 hours	2	1.4

Objective four sought to identify COA graduates' salary status by academic degree. Only five graduates earned above \$45,000 per year (Table 9). These graduates obtained their academic degrees in either agricultural journalism, food science and nutrition or general agriculture. The greatest number of graduates earning less than \$20,000 was those in animal science ($f=6$; $\% = 4.4\%$) and agricultural journalism ($f=5$; 3.8%) degree programs. The majority of agricultural economics and hotel and restaurant management graduates earned a salary between \$30,000 – \$34,999 per year.

Table 9

Annual Salary of College of Agriculture Graduates by Academic Degree

Academic Degree	Annual Salary						
	Under \$20,000	\$20,000 – 24,999	\$25,000 – 29,999	\$30,000 – 34,999	\$35,000 – 39,999	\$40,000 – 44,999	Above \$45,000
Agricultural Economics	2	1	0	4	0	0	0
Agricultural Education	4	1	1	3	4	1	0
Agricultural Journalism	5	1	0	2	0	2	1
Agribusiness Management	3	1	0	4	0	3	0
Agricultural Systems Mgt	2	1	0	3	2	3	0
Animal Science	6	2	2	3	1	0	0
Biochemistry	3	1	0	0	1	3	0
Food Science & Nutrition	1	0	0	0	2	1	3
General Agriculture	0	0	1	0	1	2	1
Hotel & Restaurant Mgt	1	1	0	4	2	2	0
Plant Science	3	0	2	1	1	2	0
Fisheries & Wildlife	2	1	2	0	2	0	0
Forestry	4	0	1	0	0	0	0
Parks, Recreation, & Tourism	1	1	0	1	2	0	0
Soil & Atmospheric Science	3	0	1	0	0	1	0

The purpose of objective five was to assess COA graduates' level of job satisfaction by academic degree. Academic degrees were ranked from highest to lowest according to their mean job satisfaction score (Table 10). Graduates from the fisheries and wildlife degree program

experienced the greatest level of job satisfaction ($M = 4.29$; $SD = 1.01$). In addition, graduates in agricultural systems management ($M = 4.21$; $SD = .33$), biochemistry ($M = 4.21$; $SD = .46$), parks, recreation, and tourism ($M = 4.09$; $SD = .71$), and plant science ($M = 4.04$; $SD = .39$) rounded out the top five academic degrees in terms of job satisfaction. Graduates with degrees in food science and nutrition ($M = 3.52$; $SD = 1.08$) were least satisfied with their jobs. Graduates with degrees in agribusiness management ($M = 3.73$; $SD = .73$), forestry ($M = 3.73$; $SD = .83$), animal science ($M = 3.61$; $SD = .76$), and general agriculture ($M = 3.57$; $SD = 1.34$) rounded out the bottom five academic degrees in which graduates were least satisfied. Overall, COA graduates tended to be satisfied with their respective careers ($M = 3.93$; $SD = .73$).

Table 10

Assessing Job Satisfaction of College of Agriculture Graduates by Academic Degree (n = 141)

Rank	Academic Degree	<i>f</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1.	Fisheries & Wildlife	7	5.0	4.29	1.01
2.	Agricultural Systems Management	13	9.2	4.21	.33
2.	Biochemistry	10	7.1	4.21	.46
4.	Parks, Recreation, & Tourism	5	3.5	4.09	.71
5.	Plant Science	10	7.1	4.04	.39
6.	Hotel & Restaurant Management	10	7.1	4.03	.53
7.	Agricultural Journalism	11	7.8	4.02	.65
8.	Soil & Atmospheric Science	5	3.5	3.99	.89
9.	Agricultural Education	14	9.9	3.98	.63
10.	Agricultural Economics	9	6.4	3.83	.81
11.	Agribusiness Management	13	9.2	3.73	.73
11.	Forestry	6	4.3	3.73	.83
13.	Animal Science	15	10.6	3.61	.76
14.	General Agriculture	5	3.5	3.57	1.34
15.	Food Science & Nutrition	8	5.8	3.52	1.08
	Overall Level of Satisfaction (all graduates)	141	100.0	3.93	.73

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Conclusions

The MU COA has a strong success rate of graduate employability. Nearly three-fourths of MU COA graduates were employed full-time, while only three percent of the graduates surveyed were unemployed. It was revealed that graduates who work on a part-time basis appeared to be most satisfied with their chosen careers.

In addition to graduates being employable, they are also entering a wide array of career opportunities. This finding is consistent with a previous study conducted by Robinson and Garton (2006) who found that agricultural education graduates were entering a variety of careers. Specifically, the largest portion of graduates is enrolled in graduate school. Outside of those attending graduate school, the next largest portion of graduates employed in the workforce were those who entered careers in management, sales, and “other.” Because the “other” category serves as a “catch-all” for all careers not detected as one of the thirteen identified categories, it

brings further credence to the fact that graduates are entering a wide variety of careers. The career path containing the fewest amount of graduates is service-oriented careers (i.e. support staff, educational training, financial services, and food services).

This study revealed that 80% of COA graduates worked between 30 – 59 hours per week and were satisfied with their chosen career. Hughes (1937) maintained, in his theory of career success, that an individual's salary was an objective variables which would indicate job satisfaction. Over 85% of the graduates earned salaries ranging from \$20,000 – \$44,999 per year. Graduates who were most satisfied with their salary earned \$35,000 – \$39,999 annually, followed by those who earned less than \$20,000 per year and whom worked part-time. Holistically, when comparing graduates across the college, those with degrees in food science and nutrition and general agriculture earned the highest salaries, while animal science and forestry majors earned the lowest salaries. The largest number of graduates surveyed earned salaries less than \$20,000 per year, followed by those who earned \$30,000 – \$34, 999 annually. In all, graduates across the college agreed to be satisfied with their current salary regardless of how much or little they earned. Because graduates were satisfied with their jobs regardless of salary, Hughes' (1937) theory of career success is not entirely supported.

Fisheries and wildlife graduates were most satisfied with their chosen career field, while food and science nutrition graduates were least satisfied with their chosen career. General agriculture and food science and nutrition graduates earned the highest salaries, yet were least satisfied with their chosen careers. Heslin (2005) stated that most people relate their career success to their salary. This study found that not all graduates who earned high salaries were satisfied with their chosen career. In all, nine academic degree programs had graduates with greater satisfaction than the overall mean level of satisfaction.

Graduates who entered industry as scientists were most satisfied with their chosen occupation. Graduates with support staff positions as well as those serving as research assistants were undecided about their level of job satisfaction. Graduates who entered careers in financial services, teaching, graduate school, educational training (industry), sales, management, communications, food services, production agriculture, and "other" all agreed to be satisfied with their career path.

Implications

An implication could be that graduates employed part-time enjoy their flexibility and freedom and are thus more satisfied with their career choice as compared to the graduates who are employed full-time. Boverie and Kroth (2000) stated that today's employees seek fun and time away from work. It could be implied that graduates who earn less than \$20,000 per year, and work part-time, focus less on salary and more on the quality of the career in which they hold.

Heslin (2005) stated that career success can be attributed to one's salary. Yet, the graduates who earned the most were the least satisfied. This finding begs the question, "Why?" Could it be higher paying jobs come with added pressure to perform? Is there a higher sense of stress associated with these careers for graduates?

It has been well established that one of the purposes of higher education is to prepare graduates for employment (Cole & Thompson, 2002; Evers, Rush, & Berdrow, 1998; Martin, Milne-Home, Barrett, Spalding, & Jones, 2000; McLaughlin, 1995; Peddle, 2000) and life after college (Kember & Leung, 2005; Martin et al., 2000). In their theory of psychological work, Dawis and Lofquist (1984) suggested that employees require “compensation for work performance and additional conditions of work such as a safe environment, a comfortable place to work, congenial co-workers, a competent supervisor, and an opportunity to achieve” (p. 56). It could be implied that these areas are being addressed with the graduates in this study.

Dawis and Lofquist (1984) further stated that “work is an interaction between an individual and a work environment in which each has requirements of the other. The work environment requires certain tasks to be performed and the individual brings skills to perform the tasks” (p. 56). Upon reviewing the findings of this study, it can be implied that this Midwestern land-grant institution’s COA is adequately preparing graduates for life after college and that its graduates have adequate skill sets and are generally satisfied with all aspects of their careers.

Recommendations

In an effort to bring awareness to service-oriented careers, faculty at this institution should encourage service learning opportunities for their students. The financial stability of jobs within a career can oftentimes be a crucial component in recruiting and retaining students. Therefore, it is recommended that faculty share this information with current students who are making decisions about accepting a job in a specific field or discipline. Further, faculty should share this information with prospective students who are considering enrolling in respective academic programs in an effort to provide a job forecast in an effort to improve students’ decision making process.

It is recommended that prospective students considering a degree in agriculture be alerted that roughly 75% of agriculture graduates at this institution attained full-time employment and were generally satisfied with their chosen career. Further, current students in the COA should be notified that their older colleagues have secured employment or are continuing their education and are generally satisfied with their chosen careers.

Additional research should seek to determine why graduates with higher salaries were less satisfied with their jobs. The findings of this research might shed light on the balance needed between having a high paying job and being satisfied with the job, especially for future graduates who will be entering the workforce.

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