

Which Way Did They Go? Determining College Choice of Louisiana School-Based Agricultural  
Education Students

John D. Whittington  
Undergraduate Student  
jwhittington@laffa.org

Shelli E. Danjean  
Graduate Assistant  
sdanje1@lsu.edu

J. Joey Blackburn  
Assistant Professor  
jjblackburn@lsu.edu

225 Knapp Hall  
Louisiana State University  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803

## **Which Way Did They Go? Determining College Choice of Louisiana School-Based Agricultural Education Students**

### **Introduction**

College choice research has largely focused on examining how the interactions between student characteristics, goals, and achievements influence students' attitudes toward attending college, as well as their selection of a particular institution (Hossler & Gallagher, 1986). The process of college choice has been framed, historically, by three perspectives: (a) sociological, (b) psychological, and (c) economic (Bergerson, 2009; Paulson, 1990). "The sociological perspective focuses on college choice as part of the status attainment process, with emphasis on individual background factors that influence the decision of whether and where to go to college" (Bergerson, 2009, p. 3). The psychological perspective is focused on how students' perceptions of institutional climate influence their choice of college (Paulson, 1990). Economically, college choice is viewed as an investment decision (Paulson, 1990). Per this perspective, students weigh the benefits of particular institutions against the costs of attendance. Choices are, therefore, made based on the economic evaluation of benefits of postsecondary education (Paulson, 1990).

Hossler and Gallagher's (1986) model of college choice can be used as a comprehensive theoretical framework to examine these three aspects within a single model. According to Hossler and Gallagher (1986), the college choice process involves three phases, including (a) the predisposition phase, (b) the search phase, and (c) the choice phase. The predisposition phase takes into account the interaction of factors that influence students' predispositions toward college attendance. These factors may include students' background characteristics (e.g. socioeconomic status or ability), the influence of significant others (e.g. parents, friends, or high-school counselors), institutional characteristics, and educational activities (Hossler & Gallagher, 1986). As a part of the search phase, students seek information about institutions. During this stage, students likely have desire to attend college but are undecided as to which college to attend. However, students may not find adequate information during this search or may not find a college they perceive as desirable, which could result in students choosing the non-college option. The search activities of both students and institutions play a role in the outcome of this stage of the process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1986). The final phase is the choice phase, during which students evaluate their options and narrow their choice to a particular institution (Hossler & Gallagher, 1986).

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine the college and major choice of Louisiana school-based agricultural education students (SBAE). The objectives of this study were to (a) determine where college-bound SBAE students enrolled and (b) identify how many of the students chose an agriculturally related major.

### **Methodology**

Data for this study were collected as a part of the Louisiana FFA Association annual report. The online questionnaire was sent to all ( $N = 230$ ) agriculture teachers, of which 169 (73.5%) completed the report. The data of interest for this study was where the agriculture teachers reported their 2014 graduates were attending college, as well as their intended major. For the

purpose of this study, only data pertaining to students attending 4-year, in-state institutions were reported.

### Results/Findings

Table one depicts the college choice college choice of Louisiana SBAE students, as well as the whether or not their major was agriculturally related

Table 1

*College and Major Choice of Louisiana School-Based Agricultural Education Students*

College	Major Choice			
	<i>f</i>	Ag. Related	Non-Ag Related	Unknown/ Undecided
Southwest regional university	72	23	37	12
1862 land-grant	51	17	24	9
State technical university	38	16	15	7
South-central regional university	32	2	25	5
Northwest regional university	28	1	25	2
Northeastern regional university	16	3	10	3
Southern regional university	14	0	11	3
Southeastern regional university	12	0	7	5
1890 land-grant	6	1	1	4

### Conclusions/Recommendations

The largest number of students pursuing both agriculturally related and non-agriculturally related majors planned to enroll in the southwest regional university upon graduation, whereas the lowest number of students planned to enroll in the 1890 land-grant university. Additionally, teachers reported that 50 students were undecided about their academic major. Considering that the largest number of students reported plans to enroll at the southwest regional university, it could be beneficial to conduct a future study to examine the institutional factors that positively influence students' decision to enroll in this institution. Moreover, in light of the extremely low number of students planning to enroll at the 1890 land-grant institution, future research should seek to examine why students may be deterred from enrolling at this institution. As per Hossler and Gallagher (1986), students who are undecided in their college choice may be struggling with the search phase. As such, a follow-up qualitative study could be conducted with students who were undecided in their choice to examine their search progress and further assist students in gathering the information needed to make the choice. According to Hossler and Gallagher (1986), students may eliminate an institution during the search phase due to lack of accurate information about institutions or lack of awareness of the various institutions to which they could apply. As such, Louisiana universities should increase efforts to convey information to students in the state, rather than hope students will find the information on their own. Lastly, since events which shape the predisposition phase have not been well understood (Hossler & Gallagher, 1986), it could be beneficial to conduct future research to examine relationships between factors associated with the predisposition phase and college choice.

### References

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