

**Perceived Factors that Influence the Success of Vertical Transfer Students in Agricultural Education**

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### **Introduction**

The number of students attending community colleges in 2015 accounted for approximately 41 percent of all undergraduate students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2017). Students who began at a two-year college were 21 percent less likely than students who began at the senior institution to obtain a bachelor's degree (Monaghan & Attewell, 2015) and only 25 percent of community college students later transferred to a 4-year institution (Jenkins & Fink, 2015). The specific factors that influence transfer students in Agricultural Education should be investigated. A discipline-based analysis of data found that transfer success was varied across disciplines. There is a need to evaluate the academic performance of community college transfer students by academic discipline (Cejda, 1997). Special attention should be given to community college students during the transfer to Agricultural Education programs at their respective senior institutions.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Transition Theory and Validation Theory served as the framework for this study. Transition Theory proposes how students adapt as they transfer from the community college to a four-year institution (Schlossberg, 1981) and Validation Theory identifies students who are validated in their college experiences and are more likely to persist (Rendón, 1994). The potential interaction of these theories created the conceptual model for validation within the transition phase. The process of moving from a community college to a four-year university is recognizable as a time of transition for students. While students will respond differently based on the characteristics of the transition, the environment, or the individual, validating experiences during this time are capable of supporting student adaptation to the new situation.

### **Methods**

Two research questions supported this investigation: 1) *identify the perceived factors that influence the bachelor's degree attainment of vertical transfer students in Agricultural Education* and 2) *analyze the trends which impact students' completion of a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Education*. This research study addressed the Research Priority 5, "What can agricultural leadership, education, and communication practitioners (teachers, extension agents, etc.) collaborate to deliver educational programs effectively?" (Thoron, Myers, & Barrick, 2016). An electronic mail invitation was sent to each participant with a link to the survey. Each panelist was asked to indicate their level of agreement using a five-point Likert-scale. For inclusion in the study potential participants had been employed in Agricultural Education at a post-secondary institution for at least five years, five peer reviewed articles, and involvement in a professional organization. Participants were between 29 and 58 years old, 5 and 30 years of experience in Agricultural Education at the postsecondary level, and membership in a related professional organization.

## Results

Analysis of the data was completed using SPSS.22. Of the 26 questions, participants scored 12 items with a mean score  $\geq 4.5$ . 1) *being prepared for class increases Bachelor's degree attainment*, 2) *classroom engagement promotes completion of a Bachelor's degree*, 3) *ability to make social adjustments at a four-year university is important to Bachelor's degree attainment*, 4) *meaningful relationships with faculty members are important to student attainment of a Bachelor's degree*, 5) *financial aid guidance increases Bachelor's degree attainment*, 6) *access to reliable transportation improves Bachelor's degree attainment*, 7) *real-life applications in the classroom encourages attainment of a Bachelor's degree*, 8) *prompt faculty feedback improves Bachelor's degree completion*, 9) *easy access to student support services (advising, counseling, financial aid, tutoring, etc.) encourages completion of a Bachelor's degree*, 10) *satisfaction in the overall college experience promotes Bachelor's degree attainment*, 11) *feeling of personal academic competence encourages Bachelor's degree completion*, 12) *awarding of transfer credits encourages Bachelor's degree attainment*.

## Conclusions

The conclusions of this study indicated the importance of relationships where students have access to information, financial needs, and application of their coursework. The interaction between faculty and students is demonstrated as a component of matriculation between two and four-year institutions where support is seamless and available during the transitional period. The need for in-class validation was supported by panelists and preparation for classroom engagement were identified as the most significant in the attainment of a Bachelor's degree. The panel also demonstrated support for "out-of-class" validation factors: ability to make social adjustments, financial aid guidance, access to reliable transportation, access to student support services, and awarding of transfer credits.

## Implications

The research panel supported the theory that students need in-class and out-of-class validation in order to successfully transition to a four-year institution and complete a Bachelor's degree. As two and four year universities develop programs for student success a holistic approach for student success should be considered from all avenues. Faculty and staff should engage collaboratively with advisement, recruitment, and transfer services. Agriculture education students would benefit from developing professional relationships with faculty prior to transferring to a four-year institution. The degree in which students are overwhelmed with new requirements for certification, student teaching, and navigating a new campus system may encourage improved completion rates for certified teachers. Further investigation is needed to identify the factors that increase in-class validation experiences for transfer students, and determine how to provide out-of-class validation experiences for transfer students.

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