

Where Are They Now: A Longitudinal Analysis of SBAE Teachers in Utah

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Introduction/Need for Research

When pre-service agriculture teachers graduate, do we know where they go? Are we sure they are becoming agriculture teachers? The purpose of this study is to describe the employment characteristics of agriculture graduates from Utah State University. Since 2000, the average number of graduates accepting school-based agricultural education positions is 58.5% (Lawver, Foster, & Smith, 2018). However, from 2014 – 2016 72.2% of eligible agricultural education graduates accepted teaching positions (Lawver et al., 2018). Lawver et al. found that 25.4% of graduates pursue other career opportunities including military, extension, production agriculture, agribusiness, graduate school and teaching other subjects. Similarly, Cartmell & Garton (2000) found that 47% of graduates gained employment in industries other than teaching. Kelsey (2006) found that 57% of women enrolled in an agricultural education program over a four-year period dropped out prior to student teaching and of those women who completed the program, 52% of them never taught. When graduates do enter the profession after student teaching, it is estimated that 40-50% of them will have left teaching by the five-year mark (Ingersoll, 2003). Teachers who do leave the classroom, tend to do so early on in their career (Grissmer & Kirby, 1997). When teachers leave the profession, there are costs associated with replacing those teachers. It is estimated these replacement costs are in excess of \$2 billion/year (Alliance, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

Teacher Attrition Theory (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987) was used to inform this research. This theory predicts that patterns of teacher attrition will occur at higher rates among early career teachers and those approaching retirement, while mid-career teachers will leave teaching at a much lower rate. There are many factors that influence early career teachers which are specific to age, gender, stage of career, life cycle events like marriage and child rearing, and career patterns like movement to a better teaching job (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987). The tenant of human capital also influences teachers' decisions when they reach mid-career timing as they have invested time and resources which result in higher salaries and benefits such as retirement, thus discouraging movement outside their current teaching assignment or district (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987).

Methodology

This longitudinal research was conducted using pre-existing data of agriculture teacher education cohorts at one institution. These data were collected by agriculture teacher educators each summer by contacting recent graduates through follow up emails and phone calls. Names of teachers were cross-referenced with current state board of education school-based agricultural education teacher data to determine those still teaching. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. The objectives for this longitudinal research were: 1) Describe the rate of SBAE teacher retention in Utah longitudinally; and 2) Describe SBAE teacher employment characteristics for Utah over the past 15 years.

Results/Findings

From 2004 - 2019 175 students graduated from the agricultural education Bachelor of Science teacher preparation program at Utah State University. Of those who graduated during this timeframe, nearly 60% were female. We found that 78% of the graduates taught at least one year beyond student teaching and 50% are currently teaching SBAE (38% in Utah and 12% in other states). Currently, 62% of the teachers in Utah are female while the majority of those teaching out of state are males (57%). Among the graduates not teaching, 7.4% are working in education outside of teaching (e.g. administration, higher education, extension), 14% are currently employed in a field outside of education, and 12% are currently not employed. Over the 15-year period, 12.4% of graduates never taught (Figure 1). The vast majority of graduates, more than 87% from 2004 to 2018 went on to teach at least one year in SBAE after student teaching with 2014-2018 having more than 93% who taught after student teaching.

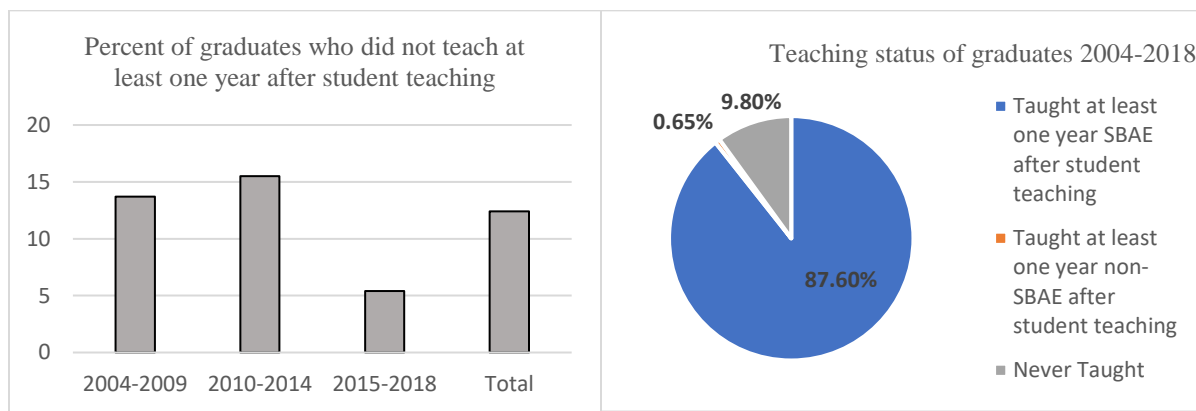


Figure 1. Fifteen year teaching status of graduates from Utah State University

Conclusions/ Implications/ Recommendations/ Impact on Profession

The purpose of this longitudinal analysis was to describe the employment characteristics of agriculture graduates from Utah State University. Although just more than half of the graduates are currently teaching, a majority of them stayed in state to teach. While 60% of the overall graduates were female, most of those who left to teach out of state were male. With 78% of graduates teaching at least one year after student teaching, we must ask ourselves why are only 38% currently teaching in Utah. Though not a remarkable amount and far less than Kelsey (2006) found, 8.6% never taught after completing the program. Why do students complete the program and student teach, then never become agriculture teachers?

Teacher attrition theory suggests that teachers who enter the profession, then leave, will often leave in their early years prior to investing time and resources into those careers. With the extremely high replacement costs associated for teachers who leave the profession, retention should be a principal concern for states and teacher preparation programs. While this research is limited to teachers in Utah, it informs teacher preparation programs as well as those who work with new in-service teachers. We recommend future research to track graduates of agriculture education programs to better understand the movement of teachers, where they go upon graduation, and why they may leave the profession.

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