

Implementation of an Agricultural Communications Degree Program in the United Kingdom: Perceptions of Professionals, Faculty, and Students

Abby Taylor, Alex McLeod, Jefferson Miller, Casandra Cox, & Jill Rucker

INTRODUCTION

In the United Kingdom, agricultural studies are the fastest growing discipline at the university level (Truss, 2016).

ACOM programs provide students the opportunity to study journalism, public relations, and graphic design with an emphasis on the agricultural industry (The Ohio State University, 2020).

The need exists to develop an ACOM degree program in the U.K. (Maples, 2018) .

Study Objectives:

- Further determine professional skills U.K. agricultural communications professionals, faculty, and students would expect to have after completing an agricultural communications degree.
- Determine what modules will be more useful and important to graduates entering the agricultural communications field.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative field interviews conducted with 14 U.K. industry professionals, academic faculty, and students in Edinburgh.

Interviews were conducted in person or by phone and transcribed and coded by the researcher using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

Concerning the analysis of qualitative data, an audit trail (in the form of an NVivo project file) exists to confirm the presence of themes that emerged among the qualitative responses.

Writing & Journalistic Skills

I think being able to write in an interesting way with logically presented information is an extremely valuable skill.

[CH, faculty]

Interpersonal Skills

It is important to be able to interact with a range of people and to be able to draw insights from those interactions.

[PH, faculty]

General Agricultural Modules

I think they should get a good grasp of all the basics that are driving the food and agricultural sector.

[SK, professional]

Communication Modules

In terms of communication courses, interview skills, presentation skills and all these soft skill areas would be very helpful to get credibility in that kind of industry.

[SM, faculty]

FINDINGS

Research objective one aimed to understand what skills potential employers would expect new graduates to possess after completing an ACOM degree. It also aimed to understand what students would expect to be learning as well as what faculty would expect to teach.

Writing skills and interpersonal communications skills were crucial skills for graduates to possess after graduation.

Research objective two aimed to determine the agricultural and communication modules that should be included in the degree plan.

Students would benefit most from generalized agriculture course modules.

Writing and journalistic skills were extremely important for students to learn.

Students should learn public speaking and interpersonal communication skills through their coursework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The U.K. higher education system should use the following as a starting point for an ACOM degree program.

Agricultural modules:

Animal Science | Horticulture | Crop Production | Economics | Issues in agriculture

Communications courses:

Communicating Agriculture to the Public | Agriculture Reporting & Feature Writing | Public Speaking | Crisis & Risk | Electronic