

Understanding the Motivating Factors and Limitations of Volunteering Among  
College of Agriculture and Natural Resource Students

Jason Headrick  
Texas Tech University  
Box 42131  
Lubbock, TX 79409  
(806) 834-5749  
[Jason.headrick@ttu.edu](mailto:Jason.headrick@ttu.edu)

Shelby Shank  
Texas Tech University  
Box 42131  
Lubbock, TX 79409  
(806) 834-5749  
shshank@ttu.edu

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### **Introduction**

Volunteerism is the lifeblood of community development and nonprofit organizations around the world. The people who devote their time to a cause or an issue are the ones who keep things running. Volunteerism has positive effects for both society and the individual doing the act itself (Wilson, 2000). Some studies suggest that there is an increasing trend in implicating service-learning experiences in public schools and colleges (Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Kielsmeier, 2000). Cemalcilar (2009, p. 432) found that “individuals who self-select to partake in volunteer activities differ from their counterparts who do not in terms of some important background characteristics (e.g., parental education, ethnicity) and individual difference factors (e.g., motivation, civic involvement).” Characteristics, such as family income, political identity, gender, religious affiliation, and previous volunteering experiences contributed to students’ potential for engaging in volunteerism (Clerkin, Paynter, & Taylor, 2009). The purpose of this study is to understand the motivations of college of agriculture students to volunteer on campus and across communities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Theory of Planned Behavior has been used to study volunteerism in college students (Okun & Sloane, 2002), as it gives an understanding of the intentions and behaviors of volunteering (Tiraieyari, Ricard, & McLean, 2019). This foundational theory studies the process of how individuals decide to engage in a particular course of action (Ajzen, 1985). When placed in the context of volunteerism among agricultural students, this theory implies that a combination of factors influence students to volunteer regarding their attitude and their behavior of engaging in volunteerism. An individual’s values, beliefs, levels of personal and professional development are motivating factors that influence students in agriculture to get involved and volunteer.

### **Methodology**

This data was parceled out from a larger mixed-methods study. Survey methodology was developed in connection with a service-learning project in an undergraduate agricultural leadership course at a four-year, public institution. Many parts of the survey were developed from an integrated approach of previous studies. The motivating factor statements integrated previous studies in student affairs and volunteer management (Handy, et al, 2010; Astin, 1991; Fitch, 1987). The survey was distributed to undergraduate students using a Qualtrics form built into an on-campus distribution system. The survey was completed by 813 student participants and 51 agricultural student responses were extracted for purposes of this study. This study does not generalize all college of agriculture students but does provide an insight towards the students’ attitudes and behaviors towards volunteerism.

### **Results/Findings**

The results from the study show that 85% of college of agriculture participants have volunteered while being enrolled in college, and 98% indicated they had volunteered before entering college. Agricultural students reported a higher frequency of weekly volunteerism, as compared to monthly or semester-long volunteerism. To determine the motivating factors that led agricultural students to volunteer, participants forced a series of volunteerism motivation statements with 1 being their top priority statement and 8 being their lowest priority statement.

Participants were allowed to share their motivations if missing from the provided list and included motivations such as: being a difference maker (1), educational purposes (1), to engage in the community (1), and being selfless (1).

**Table 1**

*Motivating Factors for Volunteerism in College of Agriculture Students (N = 51)*

<b>Motivational Factors</b>	<b>Frequency Distribution</b>
I enjoy helping others.	2.17
My personal values and beliefs	3.64
Personal development purposes	3.87
Professional development purposes	4.02
Participation in Student Organizations	4.81
Meeting new people/ forming social relationships	5.36
Participation in a sorority/ fraternity	6.11
Builds my self-confidence	6.55

Open ended responses were analyzed for themes related to volunteerism among the participants. When asked what prevented them from engaging in volunteerism, participants responded that a lack of knowledge about opportunities in the local community, academic and time constraints, concerns of safety in the local community, and COVID-imposed feelings and constraints were the main themes associated with their lack of volunteerism. One student shared, "I've gotten so caught up in everything around me, that I forget doing things that I truly love like serving others."

### **Conclusions & Implications**

The results indicated that college of agriculture students have tendencies to engage in their communities through volunteerism and service, but there are limiting factors for their involvement. The results show that ag students have previous volunteer experience and continue this tradition of volunteerism and service to their collegiate careers. Students report motivating factors that focus on their personal development and growth opportunities and report being less motivated by membership in student organizations and to build self-confidence. This study reveals that agriculture students have noble motivations to engage in volunteerism.

The act of volunteerism has positive outcomes associated with its behavior (Beckman, et al, 2021). For instructors within colleges of agriculture who might require service-learning assignments, it is important to understand how to motivate students. It is also imperative to understand the factors that may prevent them from participating. Time restraints are often reported as limiting factors, but the indications of safety concerns and the aftermath of COVID emotions and related constraints offer a snapshot of this moment in time for most college students. Instructors must address safety and the emotional parallels that students may experience when we frame volunteerism and service into our courses. To increase the involvement of college students, we must understand what is motivating and preventing them to engage in community service. By meeting students where they are, colleges and universities can better promote opportunities for students to get involved with their communities. Higher education can better form a curriculum in their programs that allow students the opportunity to do community service. Instructors should encourage volunteerism to students by offering resources on how they can get involved in their community, including links to volunteer opportunities or organizations that are looking for volunteers.

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