

# What Factors Influence Undergraduate Agricultural Education Students' Perceptions of Their Academic Major?



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## Introduction

- Recruitment and retention of agriculture teachers is crucial to mitigating the ongoing teacher shortage (Sorenson et. al., 2016).
- Research has been conducted into methods used to recruit pre-service teachers (Hur et al., 2023) and the effects of student teaching on career perceptions (Sorenson et al., 2018).
- Changing majors is a common practice, with over one-third of education majors changing majors during the 2011-2012 academic year (Leu, 2017).
- Many factors, such as background and experience, impact decisions and therefore students' retention (Bosnjak et al., 2020).
- How do pre-service teachers perceptions of their future career shift as they gain experience?
- This study is part of an ongoing undergraduate honors thesis.

## Methods

- During the Spring 2023 semester, we began conducting one-on-one semi-structured interviews using questions regarding: (1) student demographics information, (2) student perceptions of field experiences and instructors, and (3) the struggles that students have faced within the Agricultural Education academic major thus far.
- Emma Wiseman recruited pre-service teachers to participate and conducted the interviews in order to control for any potential power dynamics.
- Emma Wiseman interviewed five pre-service teachers during the Spring 2023 and Fall 2023 semesters. She will re-interview each participant to examine patterns of change.
- Emma Wiseman recorded and transcribed each interview. She then used QDA Miner Lite to code and identify emerging themes.
- We plan to continue soliciting new participants in the future to expand our data set.

## Results

### Theme

- Family factors
- High school Agricultural Education experiences
- Career concerns
- University-specific factors
- Positive outlooks
- Academic major change

### Sub-theme

Sub-theme	<i>f</i>
College faculty / staff	18
Support from other Agricultural Education students	11
Family support of student but disapproval of major	8 and 2, respectively
Former agriculture teacher / FFA Advisor	9
Early field experiences	8
Connection with future students	8
FFA office / high school Agricultural Education courses	8

“I mean, I’ve considered changing my major, but then I go back to the classrooms and then I hang out with you [other Agricultural Education students], and I’m like, no, there’s no way I could change my major.”

## Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

- Through analysis of the interview transcripts, we identified six different themes.
- Of the six broad themes, we likewise noted several sub-themes.
- Relationships between pre-service teachers, their peers, and Agricultural Education faculty members were very important to our participants. Many participants expressed that the support of their peers was a determining factor in their retention.
- We recommend the faculty at Murray State University (MSU) prioritize relationship-building between Agricultural Education students and create opportunities for them to strengthen their professional bonds. Doing so may very well help students to continue crafting a sense of community within their academic major and their future profession.
- As we move forward in our study, we hope to identify more specific ways that we can better support our pre-service teachers at MSU.

## References

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