

Evaluating the college experience of graduating seniors in the Texas Tech agricultural communications degree program

by

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For the past five years, Texas Tech and the agricultural communications program has been my home. With this experience coming to an end, I realize all I have learned and all I will miss through the program. This program helps teach students to not only succeed as professionals within the industry, but also as citizens overall. Writing my thesis has reminded me of the importance of support systems through family, friends, and most importantly, God. I know with these support systems on my side, I can do anything I set my eyes on.

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## ABSTRACT

The Texas Tech agricultural communications has been around for 44 years and has the goal of teaching students about skills to serve the industry as well as professional skills (Ahrens & Gibson, 2013). The assessment of the satisfaction and the success of the program is a valuable aspect to creating better programs. Understanding how a program prepares students to work in the industry post-graduation improves how the program teaches students and promotes aspects of the college experience. This qualitative study used interviews of students to develop an instrument to evaluate and asses the program as students graduate.

This study used the Astin's (1993) Inputs-Environments-Outcomes model to create the instrument evaluating the elements of student satisfaction with the program. This lead to the findings of: distinguished program, personal connection, sense of belonging, active learning, comfort in surroundings, applicability of education, and level of preparedness.

Future research will need to pilot test for reliability and validity in order to use the instrument designed from this study. Practitioners should continue to require internships experiences as well as encourage involvement in organizations, student abroad experiences and undergraduate research to help students receive the most out of their college experience.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background and Setting

Agricultural communications programs have existed for nearly 100 years in the United States (Miller, Large, Rucker, Shoulders, & Buck, 2015). Kurtzo, Hansen, Rucker, and Edgar (2016) defined agricultural communications as professionals utilizing multiple communications channels and outlets to portray a complex and vast agricultural industry to the public. Throughout the country, there are 40 programs in which agricultural communications is a major, minor, concentration, emphasis, or option. Miller et al. (2015) identified the 40 programs through institutional websites and personal communications as seen in Table 1.1.

These programs all strive to teach students a variety of skills within four categories, which are written communication skills; character skills; visual and technical skills; and oral and other communications skills (Corder & Irlbeck, 2017). They also examined the skills in which employers desired from agricultural communications graduates when hiring new employees. Figure 1.1 displays the skills within the written communication skills categories that were identified as being taught within the agricultural communications programs, skills being desired by employees, and the skills that overlap in both sections. They found that programs were teaching almost all the desired skills in which employers have of graduates with reporting and communication plan being desired but not taught.

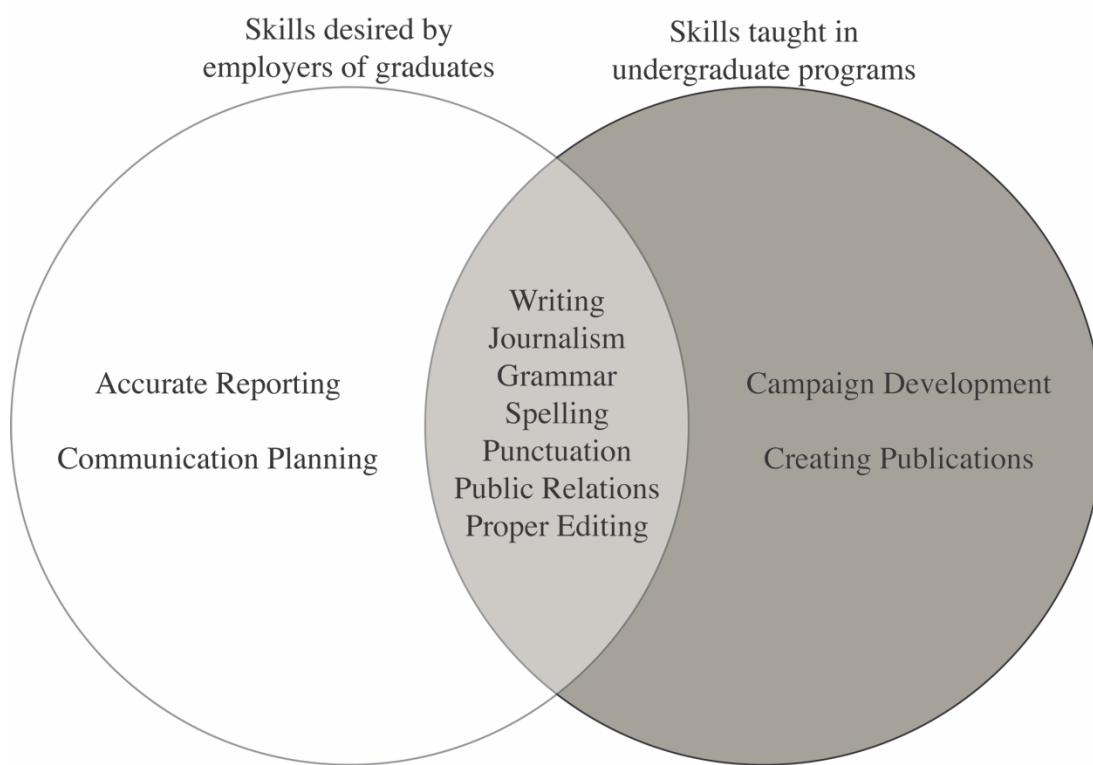
Table 1.1 *Agricultural communications programs and degree type identified by and adapted from Miller et al. (2015) (N=40)*

Institution	Major	Minor	Concentration	Degree type not available
Auburn University				X
California Polytechnic State University	X	X	X	
Clemson University			X	
Connors State College		X		
Cornell University				X
Fresno State University				X
Iowa State University				X
Kansas State University	X			
Louisiana State University				X
Michigan State University				X
Mississippi State University				X
Murray State University				X
New Mexico State University				X
North Dakota State University				X
Northwest College (Wyoming)				X
Ohio State University	X	X		
Oklahoma State University	X			
Pennsylvania State University			X	
Purdue University	X			
South Dakota State University	X			
Southern Illinois University				X
Tarleton University				X
Tennessee Tech University				X
Texas A&M University	X			
Texas Tech University	X	X		
University of Arkansas			X	X
University of Florida	X	X		
University of Georgia	X			
University of Idaho				X
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	X			
University of Kentucky				X
University of Minnesota				X
University of Missouri				X
University of Nebraska-Lincoln		X		
University of Tennessee				X

Table Continues

Table 1.1 Continued

Institution	Major	Minor	Concentration	Degree type not available
University of Wisconsin-Madison				X
University of Wisconsin-River Falls				X
University of Wyoming				X
Utah State University	X			
West Texas A&M University	X			



*Figure 1.1.* Written communications skills as desired by employees and taught by programs adapted from Corder and Irlbeck (2017)

Another category of skills being taught by programs and desired by employees was visual and technical skills, which include graphic design, photography, web design, and marketing (Corder & Irlbeck, 2017). There were a few skills that were not

being taught in which employers look for of graduates. These skills are technology advances and broadcast and video as shown in Figure 1.2.

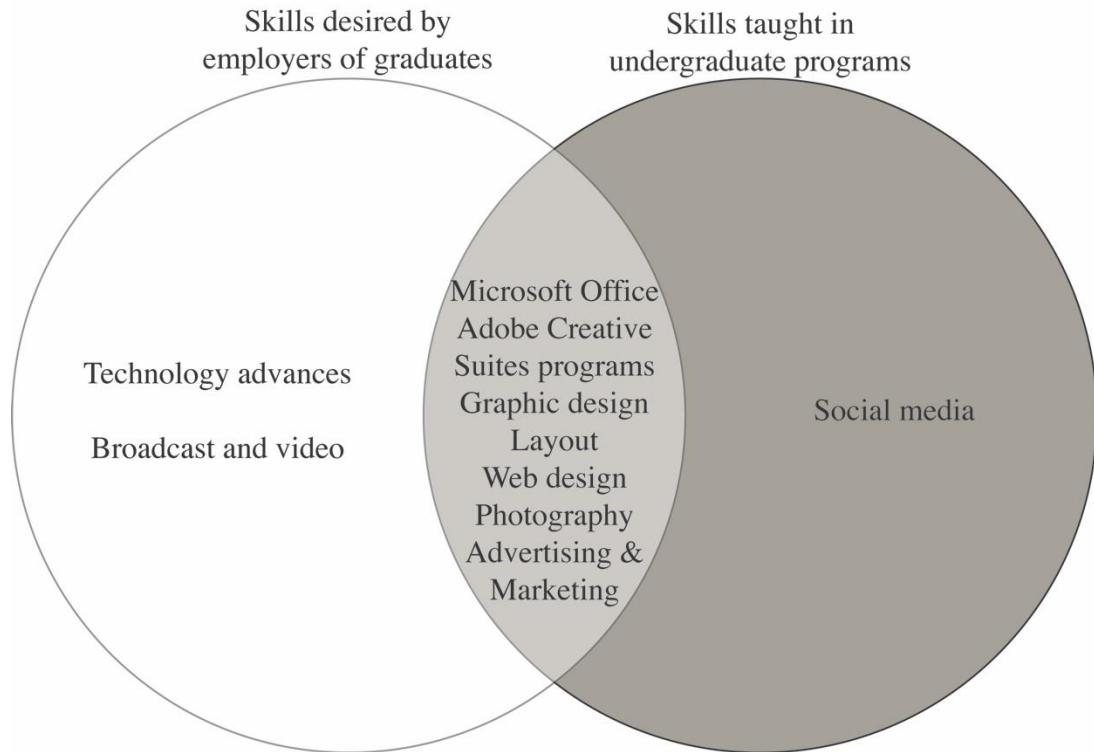
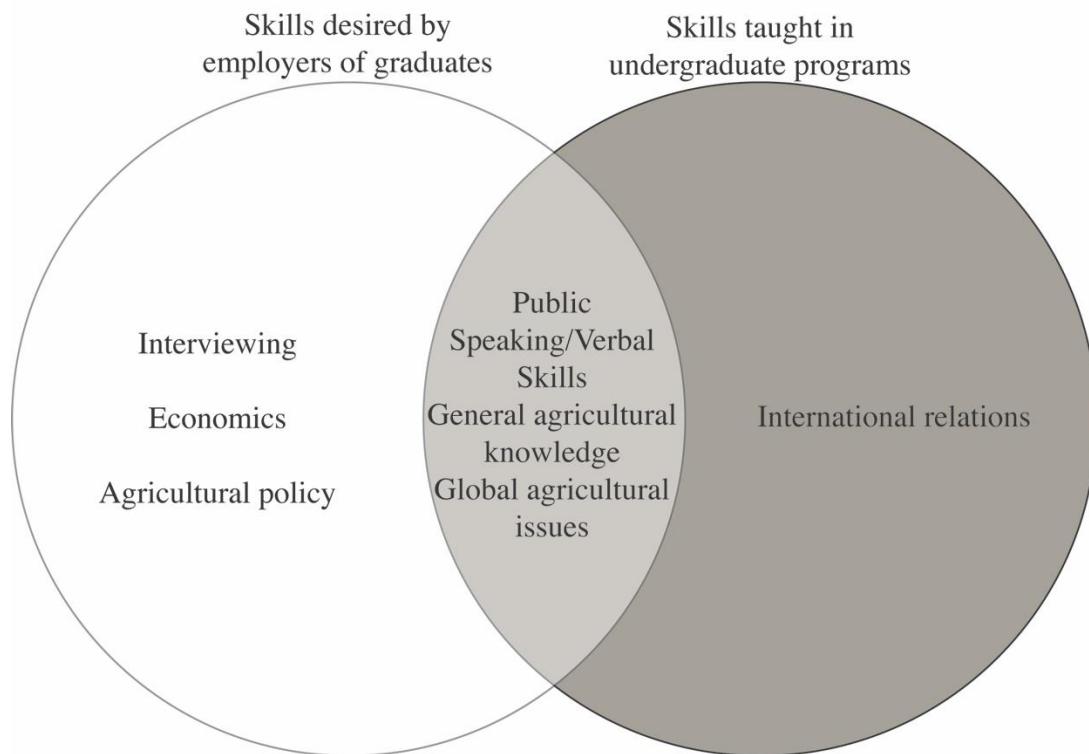


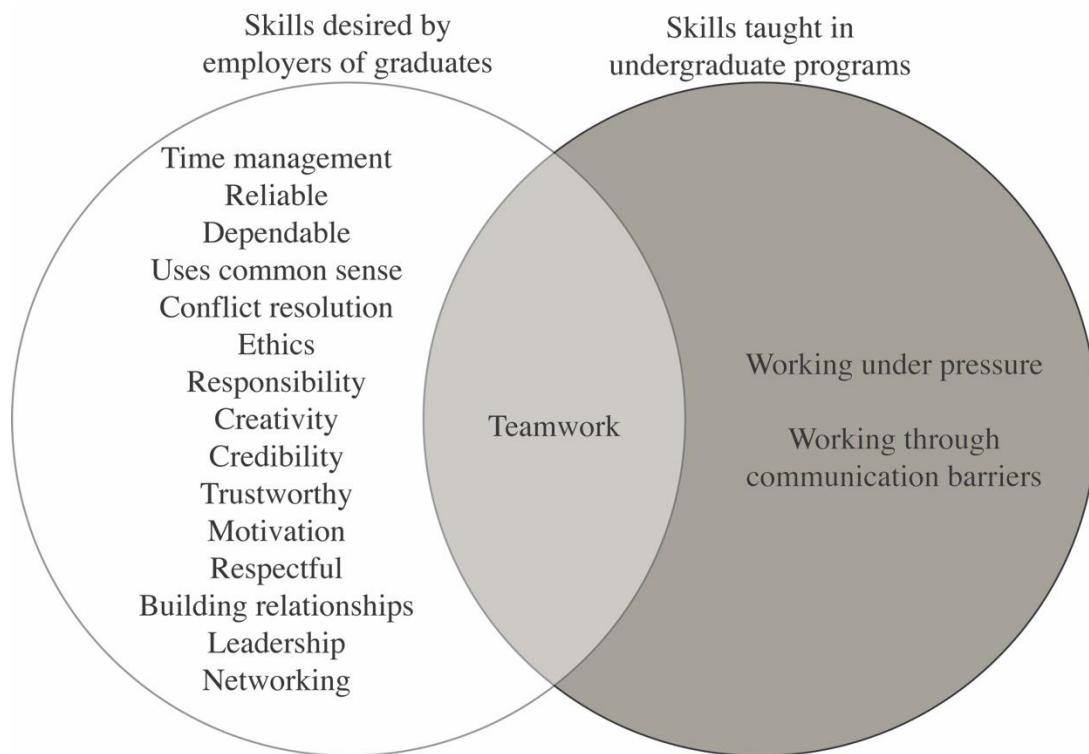
Figure 1.2. Visual and Technical skills being taught by agricultural communications programs and being desired by employees of graduates adapted from Corder and Irlbeck (2017)

Another category of skills identified were oral and other communication skills which include public speaking, general agricultural knowledge, international relations, interviewing, and agricultural policy as seen in Figure 1.3 (Corder & Irlbeck, 2017). Most skills desired by employers aligned with skills taught by programs with a few skills not being taught such as interviewing skills, economics, and agricultural policy.



*Figure 1.3.* Oral and other communication skills currently being taught by agricultural communications programs across the country and skills desired by employers adapted from Corder and Irlbeck (2017)

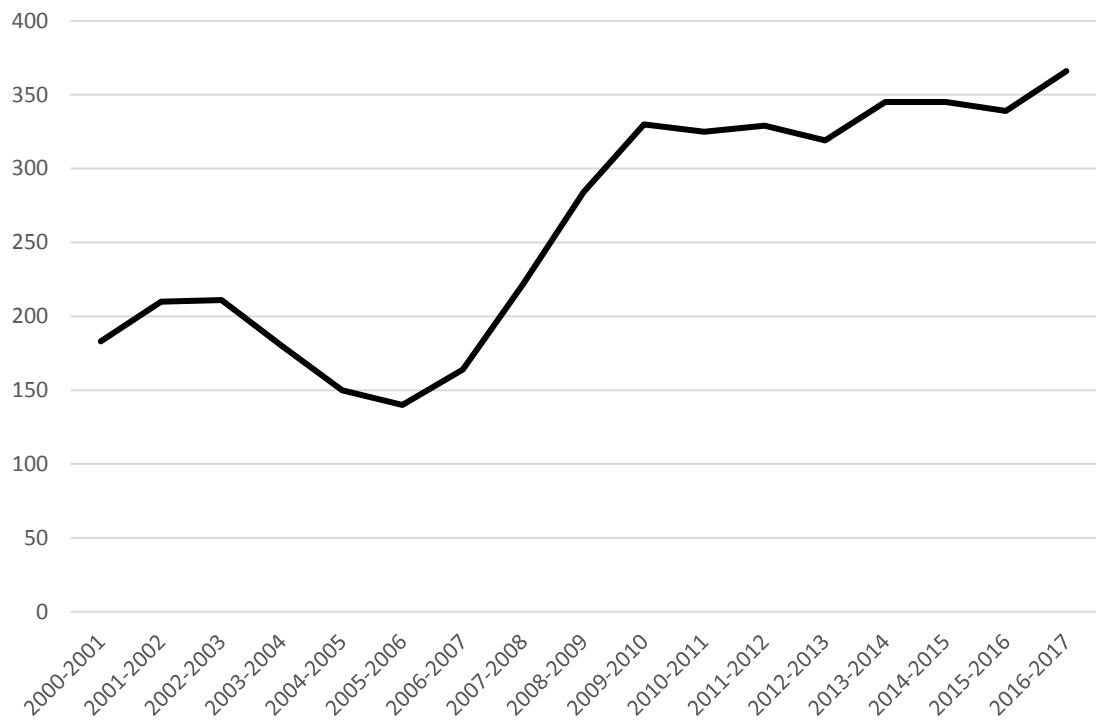
The final category of skills examined was character skills (Corder & Irlbeck, 2017). These skills included teamwork, time management, reliability, responsibility, working under pressure, motivation, and leadership as seen in Figure 1.4. Within this category, the researchers found that employers desired more skills than what was described within courses being taught in programs. Some of these skills in which employers look for are networking, ethics, using common sense, and creativity. They noted that these skills could have been taught in programs, just not described on official documentation.



*Figure 1.4.* Character skills in which were identified as being desired by employers and those being taught within agricultural communications programs adapted from Corder and Irlbeck (2017)

One of the institutions striving to teach students these skills is Texas Tech University (TTU). The TTU College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) agricultural communications program has been allowing students to seek opportunities in this field since 1973 (Ahrens & Gibson, 2013). TTU first offered an option for students to pursue agricultural communications in 1973. Nine years later, students were able to pursue a specialization, and in 1994, students could earn a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Communications. In 2007, a Master of Science in Agricultural Communications degree was offered for the first time. In October 2011, a Doctor of Philosophy in Agricultural Communications and Education was approved to be offered to students (Ahrens & Gibson, 2013).

Since 2000, the enrollment of the agricultural communications program has seen growth as seen in Figure 1.5. In the 2000-2001 academic year, the TTU agricultural communications program had 183 total students enrolled with 66 males and 117 females. In the 2016-2017 academic year, the TTU agricultural communications program had 366 total students enrolled with 59 males and 307 females (Texas Tech University, 2017).

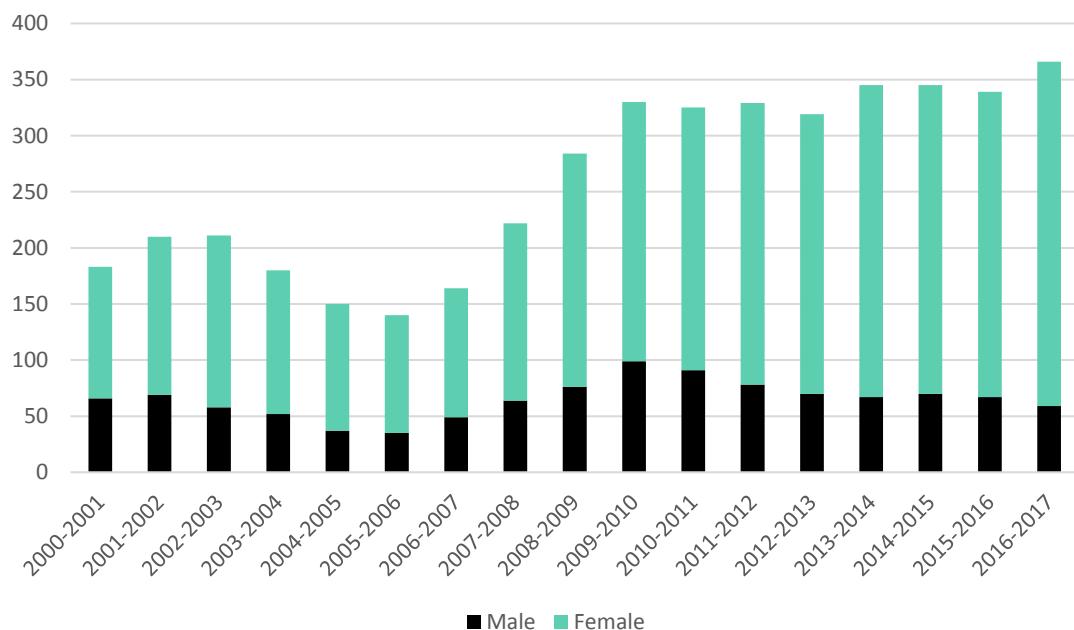


*Figure 1.5.* Texas Tech University agricultural communications enrollment from the 2000-2001 academic year to the 2016-2017 academic year (Texas Tech University, 2017)

Over the years, the student enrollment for the program has been predominately female as seen in Figure 1.6. (Texas Tech University, 2017). From the beginning of the program, females have been the predominate gender within the program (Ahrens & Gibson, 2013). However, with the growing population, there has been an increase in overall diversity within the program. In the 2000-2001

academic year, there was a lack of diverse ethnicities (Figure 1.7), but in the 2016-2017 the diversity of the ethnicities increased (Figure 1.8).

An examination of the college experiences males have when present within predominately female majors found that males feel like a minority within the classroom and in group situations as females often take over the group work and the idea of males are pushed to the back burner (Steede, Tarpley, Coppedge, & Meyers, 2017). They found that participants indicated a stigma when thinking about the agricultural communications degree as a degree for females. Within the classroom, one participant stated the fact that highlighted work was all female and not male work was highlighted. Steede et al. (2017) expressed the need for faculty to make conscious efforts to recognize, highlight, and include each and every student within a degree program regardless of minority status, whether gender, ethnicity, or age.



*Figure 1.6. Agricultural Communications enrollment by gender for each academic year since 2000-2001 (Texas Tech University, 2017)*

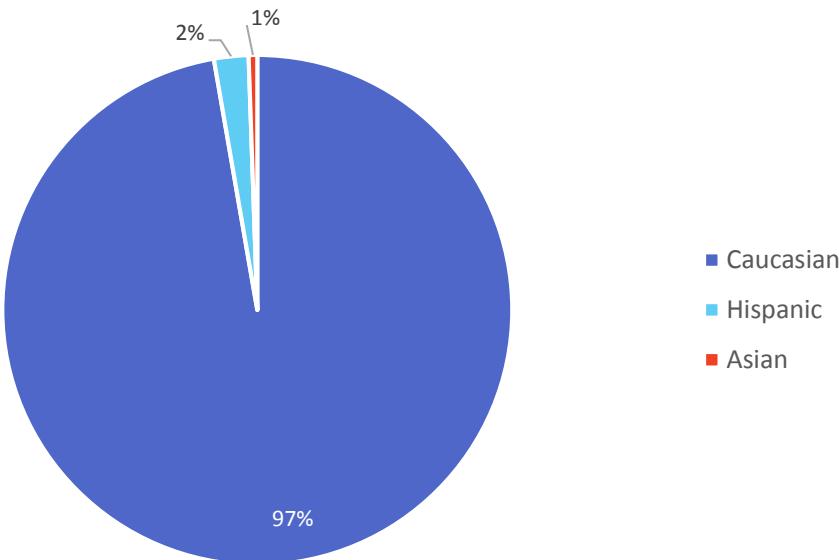


Figure 1.7. TTU agricultural communications ethnicity for 2000-2001 academic year (Texas Tech University, 2017)

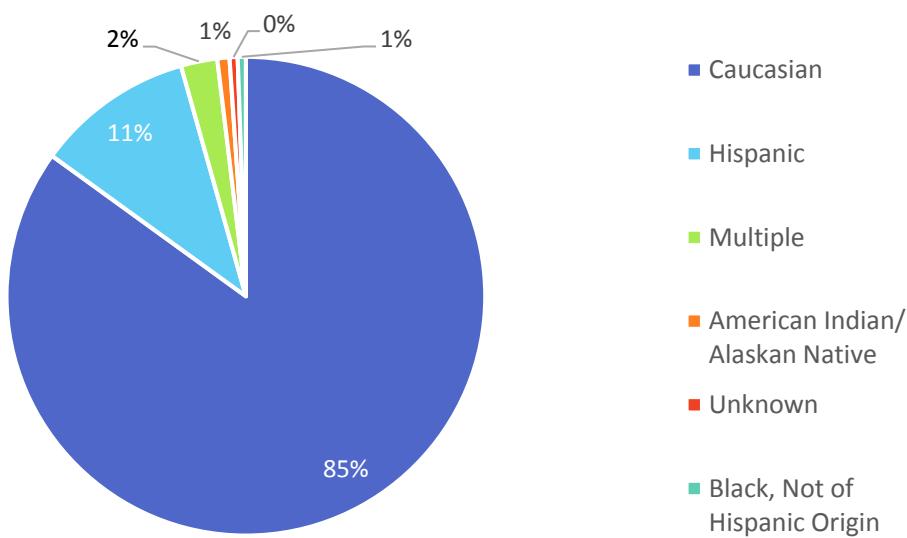


Figure 1.8. TTU agricultural communications ethnicity for 2016-2017 academic year (Texas Tech University, 2017)

Students within the program have indicated the program meets their standards and overall expectations through the courses, program, career direction, and

opportunities (McLellan, 2015). They also indicated they were motivated to work within the agricultural communications field and foresee themselves working in the agriculture industry overall. After taking courses, students showed they had a positive attitude toward the program and would probably recommend the agricultural communications degree to others (McLellan, 2015).

The TTU agricultural communications program has been researched for satisfaction (McLellan, 2015), historical analysis (Ahrens & Gibson, 2013), and curriculum taught (Corder & Irlbeck, 2017). But for the 44 years in which the TTU agricultural communications program has been in existence, there has been no significant research as to assessing the wants of the students, evaluating the satisfaction of students with their degree program, and understanding the quality of the overall student experience within the program as students leave the program and university.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Since the beginning of the TTU agricultural communications program, the program has grown and continues to grow. Like many agricultural communications programs across the nation, the TTU program faces increasing requirements to demonstrate certain outcomes by the department, college, university, and state administrators. As the Texas Tech program grows, there is a need to continue to foster personal relationships and create a valuable experience for undergraduate students. However, the TTU agricultural communications program does not have an approved assessment methodology that ensures the program is meeting faculty and staff are serving the growing population of students in the classroom and preparing them for

future career experiences. Understanding the experiences for the students have while attending a college/university and within a degree program can lead to the program fostering better environments to engage the students in more active learning.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to explore the college experience of students who are graduating from the TTU agricultural communications program to better understanding the student experience within the university and the program. The information obtained from this study is meant to help the program tailor classroom instruction, faculty interaction, and overall quality of the educational experience to better serve the students. An outcome of this study is a quantitative instrument to evaluate if the recent graduates were satisfied with the program with consistent, measurable data rather than anecdotal information. The instrument developed in this study will be used in future years to properly assess the program with quantitative data. The following research objectives were used to guide this study:

1. Identify the personal factors or inputs that influence students to discover and enroll in the TTU agricultural communications program.
2. Explore the environment in which students interact with the program and university including active learning and extracurricular involvement.
3. Understand the student satisfaction of the program to evaluate the outcomes the program produces.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model. This model is based on the idea that students develop and learn in secondary schools based on three variables identified in Astin's (1975) student development theory. The three elements are inputs (personal attributes that impact a student's decision to attend an institution or a program,) environments (the different characteristics of the school and program in which a student is involved,) and outcome (the overall experience of the institution or the program).

Astin described the need for assessing students when it comes to understanding the development and experience of a student.

Much of the book is devoted to procedures for assessing students, not only because the current assessment movement is heavily student focused but also because the usefulness of our faculty, administrator, and institutional assessments depends in part on how effectively we assess our students (Astin, 1993, p. 1).

Astin looked at discovering the best way to properly assess all aspects of the student and created the I-E-O model. Astin's (1993) purpose for creating the model was to design a structure that would produce results that yield maximum information regarding connections between practices and outcomes in education as well as minimize the chance that inferences will be wrong.

### **Significance of the Problem**

Every year, programs spend time and money developing curriculum and creating experiences for college students. These dollars are spent investigating where students are going in career fields post-graduation, how students received their jobs, what students participated in while in college, and what classes prepared students most for their careers. Research can assess the needs of the students within the department

and evaluate how the department can better improve to serve students with the greatest efficiency. This also helps develop students into more equipped professionals after graduation. Understanding how a student experiences a degree program and the overall university can help the program understand and prepare for the future needs of the students. Studies looking at the satisfaction of the students when leaving a degree program help programs explore opportunities to provide to students to meet the environmental needs of the students for better outcomes.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was presented with some limitations. One limitation was the study only considering current seniors within one degree program at one university. The students at one university could all display the same factors or contributions as opposed to other universities. Existing external variables that are not examined within this study could be an impact on the outcomes of the students' experience within the program. These external variables could be from the other aspects within the university that could influence the college experience that could not be controlled by the program. Another limitation was the instrument created by this study cannot be generalized, but can be adapted to other institutions and other degree programs as seen fit. Within the study, students were asked specific questions regarding this study that would need to be changed to reflect other institutions.

### **Basic Assumptions**

The following basic assumptions were made about this study:

- Students decided to complete an agricultural communications degree because of some influence from either past experiences, personal relations, or current faculty.
- Students felt a degree of connection within the department to continue to complete their degree. This connection could come from relations with other students, mentorships with professors and faculty, or involvement with organizations.
- Students have completed at least one internship or been involved with at least one organization while completing their degree within the program.
- Faculty members place importance in evaluating and improving the agricultural communications programs to better the program rather than rely on anecdotal information for the success of the program.
- Participants answered the instrument questions honestly.

### **Summary**

Assessing educational programs is a vital practice in order to improve the academic program and experience for students. Doerfert and Miller (2006) stated agricultural communications programs need to examine the curriculum and the overall program to keep up with the “ever-changing workplace” of the future alumni. For the past 44 years, the TTU agricultural communications program has grown and continues to grow (Texas Tech University, 2017). This study will help create a consistent and valid assessment tool for the program to use in the future with graduating seniors. Understanding the overall experiences and satisfaction of the students will allow the TTU agricultural communications program to grow more and

serve the students in a way to control the environments for students to enjoy their college experience more.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Overview**

A literature review was conducted to discover other instrument designs and the elements in which an exit instrument should assess. The literature review also examined the need of evaluating programs on a regular basis.

The purpose of this study was to explore the college experience of students who are graduating from the TTU agricultural communications program to better understanding the student experience within the university and the program. The information obtained from this study is meant to help the program tailor classroom instruction, faculty interaction, and overall quality of the educational experience to better serve the students. An outcome of this study is a quantitative instrument to evaluate if the recent graduates were satisfied with the program with consistent, measurable data rather than anecdotal information. The instrument developed in this study will be used in future years to properly assess the program with quantitative data. The following research objectives were used to guide this study:

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3. Understand the student satisfaction of the program to evaluate the outcomes the program produces.

### **Agricultural Communications and Curriculum**

Corder and Irlbeck (2017) reported four main categories of skills both employers desire from graduated students and are taught in agricultural communications programs across the country. The four categories were written communication skills, character skills, visual and technical skills, and oral and other communication skills. With the education students in agricultural communications receive from their institution, professors can prepare students for careers in journalism, public relations, marketing, broadcasting, social media management, and more (Corder & Irlbeck, 2017). There are careers in and out of the agricultural industry; with the government, a non-profit, or in higher education; within a diversified position or a specialized position such as public relations; and across the nation and world (Watson & Robertson, 2011).

DuBois (2009) also examined the skills being taught to the students in agricultural programs across the nation. The skills were: public relations, mass communications, journalism, communication, marketing, English, agricultural communication, and advertising. She also ranked the skills that are being taught. These ranking of the skills are the order in which the skills are listed above.

Cannon, Specht, and Buck (2016) sought to examine the current curricula being taught within agricultural communications programs across the country. Descriptions of the course categories and number of courses across the country were discovered as seen in Table 2.1. The researchers found that some of the courses examined could be applied into several different categories and not just to one category. This research took a vital step to describe the current programs within

agricultural communications across the country to allow faculty members and program administration to see what other programs across the country and teaching the students.

*Table 2.1 The courses being offered at current agricultural communications programs with the number of courses being offered across the nation adapted from Cannon et al. (2016)*

Category	Number of courses	Percentage
Writing	24	15.0%
Introduction	15	9.4%
Internship	14	8.8%
Writing for publication (magazine development)	11	6.9%
Graphic design	10	6.3%
Professionalism	9	5.6%
Broadcast	8	5.0%
Issues	8	5.0%
Advertising, public relations, IMC	7	4.4%
Web	7	4.4%
Capstone	6	3.8%
Presentations	6	3.8%
Photography	6	3.8%
Technology	6	3.8%
Campaigns	4	2.5%
Oral and written communication	4	2.5%
Risk/crisis communication	4	2.5%
Field experience	3	1.9%
Research	3	1.9%
Study abroad	3	1.9%
International	2	1.3%
Total courses analyzed	160	100.0%

Cannon et al. (2016) said the need for curriculum administrators to constantly assess the curriculum across the nation for agricultural communications to serve the industry and profession to the best of the ability. Administrators should

also consider what the classes are teaching and the learning objectives for each program rather than evaluating only the course descriptions.

### **College Decision Process**

Robinson, Garton, and Washburn (2007) examined first-year students within the College of Agricultural, Food and Natural Resources at the University of Missouri to discover factors influencing their college choice process. They found that campus visits, university printed publications, and letters and/or information mailed to students were the most important sources of information on deciding colleges/universities. Other factors that impact student decisions were institutional characteristics including academic reputation, post-graduation opportunities, and prominence of university athletic teams. These all impacted the overall decision process regarding what college/university students decide to attend.

Dudley (2011) sought to look at pre-college factors that impacted a student's decision to attend college. The researcher found that a student's decision of which college to attend were high school experiences, high school GPA, standardized test scores, institutional commitment, and overall career goals. When looking at a student's pre-entry attributes or inputs of a college career, Dudley (2011) specified the need to recognize that every student's experience is different. She also emphasized the need to realize that external factors, such as family background/influence, skills and abilities, and prior schooling can impact a student's college career.

Smith-Hollins, Elbert, Baggett, and Wallace (2015) identified the factors of enrollment for students within agricultural colleges across the nation, more specifically land grant institutions. Through the use of questionnaires, they found

personal influencers and school-related influencers impacted the overall enrollment of students. Personal influencers included parents, other family members, and friends. School-related influencers included high school ag teachers, high school guidance counselor, and college recruiters. These influencers aided students in selecting the college and program in which the student entered.

Suvedi, Ghimire, and Millenbah (2016) assessed graduating seniors of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Michigan State University perceptions of career preparedness by examining different demographics including agricultural background. They found differences in the students from rural or suburban backgrounds. The participants from rural areas tended to rate their career preparedness lower and had lower critical thinking, problem solving, and verbal communication skills than those who lived in suburban areas or urban areas due to the lack of exposure. They indicated that programs should consider additional advising, more encouragement to participate in extracurricular activities, and increased interactive sessions to hone students' communication skills like papers, reports, news articles, class presentations, and group discussions. If all students do not receive the proper support, satisfaction could be impacted.

### **Active Learning Experiences**

Northfell and Edgar (2014) sought to determine students' values and the influence of the student values on perceptions of study abroad experiences. The study abroad experience was to Ghent, Belgium for a three-week summer study tour in which the students assisted the Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research (ILVO), working in cooperation with Ghent University (GU), to plan, organize, and

evaluate a large community event. They found that students suggested that involvement in study abroad experiences proved valuable in the development of professional skills. Students identified the importance of relationship building with faculty and students on the trips as well as understanding the dynamics of working together as a team. There was also a great emphasis on the importance of working with others within the study abroad experience and understanding the aspects of the profession. Through the study, the students said the trip allowed them to gain a better understanding of their capabilities and limits into their future careers.

Stebner, King, and Baker (2016) explored the experiences that agricultural communications undergraduate students at Kansas State University had when completing undergraduate research. They discovered that students expect faculty to give them clear expectations when it comes to research. This also comes with the need for a clear timeline and devotion to more time with the undergraduate researcher. Students also indicated the need for recognition of their work through more than a grade or a paper turned into faculty. They indicated that by helping students have a positive experience when it comes to undergraduate research, faculty members will be able to allow students to view learning through research with great value to the overall understanding of the research process and needs.

### **Organizational Involvement**

Ashorn (2009) identified the differences between participants and non-participants of a competitive team within the TTU College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources freshmen. She found 10.7% of participants were not involved in organizations during their freshman year of college

while 24.8% of participants were involved in four or more organizations. There was an overall majority of students being involved within college in which she found students carried their involvement actions from high school to college.

Hammond and Shoemaker (2014) tested the role of socialization with graduate students at the College of Agriculture at Kansas State University. Socialization is the process in which students learn to behave through involvement in organizations and other degree opportunities had on the overall success of students. They found students who were highly involved within the opportunities provided by their academic departments, had a stronger ability to persist and succeed within the degree program. Another valuable element to increased involvement is the element of faculty interaction and support through positive feelings, encouragement, and academic advice.

Foreman and Retallick (2016) examined the impact extracurricular activities had on student perceptions of success and community involvement at Iowa State University. In this study, 96% of participants were involved in extracurricular activities including Greek life, clubs, organizations, and competitive teams. It was found that students who were involved in extracurricular activities were more apt to have a strong relationship with community involvement and successful skill development for the future.

### **Internship Experience**

Hergert (2009) sought to discover the value of internships within a college experience and found that internships are an important part of curriculum and the college experience. Internships help connect students' traditional coursework to the

workplace. He found that students place great value on the internship experience as it gives them a direct connection to their career goals. Hergert (2009) also implied that students appreciate the benefits of internship programs especially when it is designed to meet their educational and career experience needs.

Morgan (2010) found internships provide students with a myriad of skills. Those skills are the ability to meet deadlines, be a productive member of a team, be flexible in day-to-day tasks, demonstrate professional/business etiquette in the workplace, be detail oriented, have a positive attitude that is most concerned with finding answers, and think on their feet. Other skills fostered by internships are dependability, hard-working, reliability, dedication, an understanding of professional dress, real experience in problem project management skills, and interpersonal communication.

McLerran (2015) considered student involvement, specifically the role of internships, as well as the success of agricultural communications students. She found that 45% of participants at TTU in an agricultural communications program had not completed an agricultural communications internship, while 46% of participants reported completing one to six non-agriculture internships. The participants expected to complete one to two agricultural internships before graduation, with participants reporting an average of 1.53 internships had been already completed. The TTU agricultural communications program required an internship of all of its agricultural communications undergraduates. Based on these findings, she recommended the importance of an internship experience needed to be emphasized more by faculty and

program advisers to allow all students to experience internships within their college experience.

Gorham, Irlbeck, and Lange (2015) sought to determine if interns from the TTU agricultural communications program met the expectations of their supervisors. They found characteristics in which interns showed the greatest strength as creativity, willingness to learn, ability to speak well, dependability, and self-motivation. Some characteristics for improvement included attention to detail, communicating with supervisor, punctuality, improved technical and creative skills, and proof reading. They also specified that interns were currently meeting the basic needs of their supervisors, but faculty could add skills, such as time management, self-reflection activities, and peer critiques to their current curriculum to improve the internship experience overall. These could all lead to the impact of student satisfaction.

### **Student Satisfaction and Experience**

Athiyaman (1997) said attitude about an academic program pertains to an overall evaluation of that program in which one's attitude can equate to one's evaluation. Students can find their attitudes and expectations negatively disconfirmed, confirmed, or positively disconfirmed through an evaluation of their experience. If the expectations and performance match, it leads to confirmation. If the expectations are higher than the performance, negative disconfirmation occurs, and if the performance is higher than the expectations, positive disconfirmation occurs. Athiyaman (1997) noted that it is important to consider that disconfirmation can also come from for experience overall or just one attribute within the experience. Disconfirmation can

impact the overall satisfaction of the experience or class, just as negative disconfirmation can lead to overall dissatisfaction of the overall class or experience within a degree program.

When it comes to overall evaluation, perceived service quality, or attitude, is the overall evaluation of the goodness or badness of an experience. Athiyaman (1997) indicated that looking at students overall satisfaction is more difficult than looking at perceived quality of satisfaction with specific university characteristics. Those characteristics are emphasis on quality teaching, staff availability for student meetings/help, services from the library, computer labs, recreational facilities, sizes of classes, difficulty of content in classes, and workloads of the student.

McLerran (2015) sought to determine the quality of education students received from the TTU agricultural communications program in comparison to the expectations of the quality of the program students had when entering the program. She found that 89% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their expectations had been met, and 87% of the respondents reported either a high or very high probability that they would recommend the TTU agricultural communications degree to others. Positive or extremely positive feelings were held by 90% of respondents in regard to their overall feeling toward the agricultural communications program after completing courses, and 75% indicated motivation toward working in the field of agricultural communications after graduation. One of the areas of dissatisfaction within the program was seen with the quality of classrooms, technological equipment, and labs and supplies with 25% of participants rating quality much less than expected. McLerran (2015) indicated that these findings led to the idea that students

within the TTU agricultural communications program were most likely receiving positive experiences and the courses were giving an accurate representation of agricultural communications skills.

Hardre and Hackett (2015) claimed the investigation of graduate students' perceptions of themselves and their experiences throughout educational progress can help design programs and support services for the program. Because each student's experience is different, the researchers stated it is important to recognize the patterns of perceptions among students in order to better support and educate them.

Motivational perceptions and believing in oneself can lead to the ability to talk with advisors and predict their own success. They discovered that a general pattern occurred of positive perceptions with the highest level of positivity occurring at beginning of a program, a dip in the perceptions at the mid-point of the program, and an increase in perceptions toward the end of the degree program (Hardre & Hackett, 2015). Understanding the satisfaction of students can lead to successful assessment of the programs.

### **Program Assessment**

Meyers (2005) stated that, "one responsibility of a [high] school administrator is to ensure that quality curriculum is designed, adopted, and implemented" (p. 27). Yet a quality curriculum is hard to assess because it is more than just a list of subjects and topics; it is a number of factors including how students learn, teaching objectives and strategies, and support for student achievement. Meyers (2005) asked for students' input on the evaluation of curriculum where students are candid about the experiences they have had within an education curriculum. Teachers found value in having the

students as active participants in the assessment and in their own education to help assess the curriculum.

Doerfert and Miller (2006) stated that agricultural communications programs have attempted to keep pace of broader technological changes occurring within the program curriculum. However, the pace of change of technology is faster than the pace of change of curricula, which may indicate a need to increase this pace of change. They stated, “It is the responsibility of higher education and agricultural communications programs to observe and keep pace with the ever-changing workplace to ensure that they can provide the preparation and skills that produce high-quality graduates” (Doerfert and Miller, 2006, p. 21). They suggested going about this assessment by not only observing the students, processes, and methods of current agricultural communications programs, but also in talking and discussing with those who have already completed this coursework.

One small, Midwestern university integrated an assessment into its entire curriculum (Bollag, 2006). The assessment uses situations students would face after graduation to see how well the students have mastered the subject matter. Also included is a self-assessment where students evaluate their own performance on the criteria and feedback provided by the college. He makes note that developing a “homegrown” assessment take a lot of time and effort while standardized tests tend to not completely meet the needs of the program (Bollag, 2006).

Faculty members Denniston and Russell (2007) specified the future of any institution must include program assessment and change stemming from the assessment of the program. This assessment will help prepare graduates, update

curriculum, and meet the demands of ever changing environments and trends within the industry. The assessment should include multiple factors, including satisfaction.

Student satisfaction is not just one moment of favorability within a student's evaluation of an institution or program. Other areas included evaluation of specific classes and job opportunities post-graduation. Satisfaction is a continuously shaped factor based on experiences within the whole campus life (Elliot & Shin, 2002).

Assessments of programs should also include services provided by the institution.

Lipka (2010) brought up the idea of it not being the amount of data a program has as evaluation, instead it is how a program uses that data. Many universities and program administer assessment instruments, but only one third of those programs actually find them useful. This could be because many universities may use the instruments as accountability means rather than assessment tools (Lipka, 2010). Calls for colleges to use and apply their assessment are becoming more prominent. She points out that to use the data being collected would be ideal, but to conduct the assessment and to follow through with the data is a demanding task.

Each university program assesses its programs in different ways (Glenn, 2011). The variety of methods are locally developed exams, professional licensure exams, standardized content exams, alumni surveys, employer surveys, student interviews or focus groups, portfolios, and capstone courses. He reported that there were not high records in programs completing assessments. This could be because of lack of funds, lack of supporting faculty, or lack of administrative staff (Glenn, 2011).

### **Current Evaluations**

The TTU Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics developed and administers exit exams. The department has three different instruments they use to assess and evaluate the students and the program. These instruments allow the department to report the successes of the department and what the students are doing and earning post-graduation. One is an exit interview in which students meet with the department chair for 20-30 minutes. Within the interview, “The chairman fills it out and we collect data if they have jobs, or not. How much they are making and things like that, so we keep that, those records” (E. Segarra, personal communication, March 1, 2017). Another method of assessment is a set of course evaluations where students complete their opinions about every class they took within their degree program and determine if they would recommend the class and the professor. “We will ask, who was your professor in this class and what were the good parts about it and would you take it again and things like that” (E. Segarra, personal communication, March 1, 2017). The last exit instrument the department uses is a pre- post- test instrument that evaluates the knowledge of freshmen on certain topics of economics and then seniors on the same topics. This instrument allows the department to, “do statistical analysis to find out if the seniors are doing better than the freshman in this test, and, of course, the reason is what they learn in our program” (E. Segarra, personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Tobin Redwine, Ph.D. is a faculty member at Texas A&M University who used to be an academic advisor for the department in which he administered the exit instrument for the department at that time. The department used a Qualtrics survey to

gather information regarding the level of skill in which students were leaving the program. Dr. Redwine indicated there were two reasons they administered the instrument.

First one, people were asking us questions that we didn't know the answer to about our graduates. So we were trying to find a way to be able to get in front of our report. Secondly, as I am sure anybody in higher education will report, you graduate, and you fall off the earth sometimes. So we wanted a better mechanism of where our graduates were going and how to keep track of them. (T. Redwine, personal communication, February 28, 2017).

There were programmatic changes made from the results of the instrument and the faculty and staff felt more “connected” with the students after administering the instrument. Through this experience, they discovered some advice for others who want to administer exit instruments. Dr. Redwine’s set of advice is, “Senioritis is a thing, let’s keep it [the instrument] as simple as possible,” which follows closely with his second piece of advice, “It [your instrument] has to match up with your program’s goals” (T. Redwine, personal communication, February 28, 2017).

Another instrument that was administered for the TTU Department of Animal and Food Sciences was a survey that asked for contact information, employment post-graduation, demographics including agricultural background, impediments to completing a degree, scholarships needed to complete the degree, most liked components of the program, components of the program to change, and involvement in organizations (J. Brooks, personal communication, February 13, 2017). This exit instrument is sent out via email to seniors before graduation.

The Kansas State University agricultural communications and journalism program also administers an exit interview to its graduating seniors. This is a 12-

question interview with questions regarding length of time spent in the program, plans post-graduation, perceived preparedness for next job, most valuable courses, within the program, least valuable courses, and greatest lasting memory of K-State (K. Gurik, personal communication, January 10, 2017).

University of Florida issued a survey to the alumni in order to evaluate their program. Some of the questions included were current employment status, year graduated, level of preparedness received from the program, level of importance for communications skills, skills currently being used in jobs, and skills alumni wish were taught to them in the program (R. Telg, personal communication, January 4, 2017).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study utilized the Input-Environment-Outcome Model (Astin, 1993) in order to examine the attitudes of students in the Texas Tech University agricultural communications program as they look toward their future career experience. The Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model was developed by Astin (1993) to examine human behavior with the idea of three distinct areas of influence on a student: inputs, environment, and outcomes.

Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovagimian, and Miller (2007) indicated that in order for a researcher to use Astin's I-E-O model to assess a students' college experience, they must take into account the students' involvement and investment within the college. Inputs (I) are the personal qualities that initially come with the student to the learning experience. The outcomes (O) are the aptitudes the program is trying to develop within a student. The environment (E) is the experiences a student has while in the learning experience as seen in Figure 1.2 (Astin, 1993).

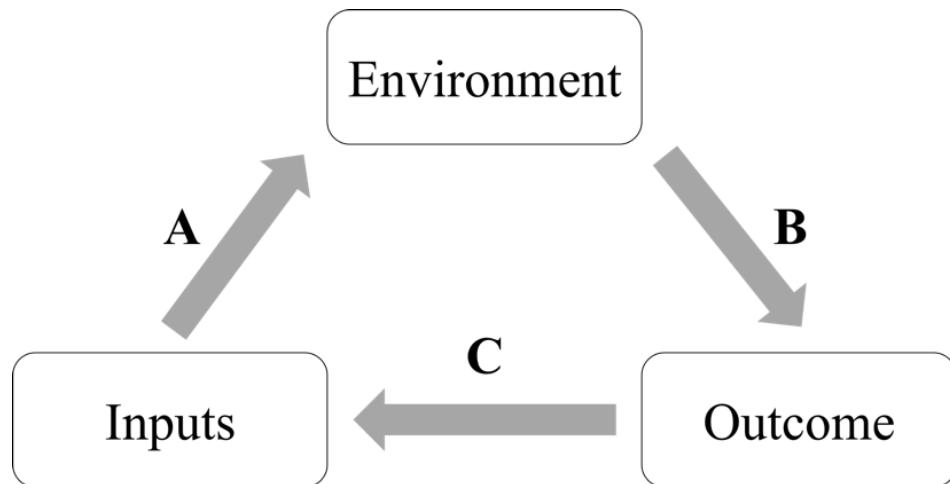


Figure 2.1. The Inputs-Environment-Outcomes model adapted from Astin (1993)

In this study, inputs (previous activities related to the field), environment (current experiences within the program), and outcomes (satisfaction with the agricultural communications program) were used to discover how recent graduates of the program evaluated the features of the program based on expectations coming into the program, including facilities, organizations, and the faculty.

Inputs are the personal attributes that bring a student to the university and the program. They include demographic characteristics, students' prior academics, reasons for selecting an institution, reasons for attending college, and reasons for selecting a specific program/major (Astin, 1993). The inputs focused on in this study were the factors that led student to enroll into Texas Tech University and, more specifically, the agricultural communications program. The attributes that were included in this study were recruiters, high school faculty and staff, parents, and community members.

Cogdell (2014) examined pre-entry attributes or inputs of incoming TTU College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources students. She gathered each student's high school GPA as an attribute before high

school graduation. The majority of students entered college with a 3.0 or higher GPA. The researcher also assessed 10 different attributes of the students before college: academic discipline, academic self-confidence, commitment to college, communication skills, general determination, goal striving, social activity, social connection, steadiness, and study skills. Social connection was an attribute majority of the students possess along with study skills. These attributes impacted the student's career and personal goals as well as the institution of selection and major at institution (Cogdell, 2014). High levels of students' academic success likelihood based on the students' inputs can impact their overall success within a college program.

Environment is everything that happens to a student during the course of an educational program that could influence a student's outcomes for the program.

Factors of the environment may include instructors, curriculum, teaching practices, program facilities, institutional and program climate, courses taken, roommates and friends, extra-curricular activities, and organizational affiliations (Astin, 1993). The environments focused on for this study were the activities the students were involved in such as student organizations, internships, living arrangements and social groups. The organizations could be within the program, department, college, institution, or community and internships within the agricultural communications field, communications field, or outside the field entirely.

Cogdell (2014) also examined some elements of environment through faculty and staff interactions and extracurricular activities in which students were interacting. Students had a favorable to strongly favorable connection with faculty and staff when it came to seeking advice and emotional distress. The relationship with

faculty and staff was extremely important to students' success. She found that involvement was a large predictor of student success and persistence within a university whether the commitment was college-level, university-level, or community-level, and at least 86% of participants were involved within student organizations (Cogdell, 2014).

Outcomes are the aspects of the student's education that the institution can influence and/or attempts to influence through programs and practices. These include skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values of the students as they leave college (Astin, 1993). The outcomes, focused on in this study was the participants' satisfaction with the agricultural communication program.

Peters (2011) used Astin's theory of student development to examine the involvement of transfer students within TTU and CASNR. Students were highly involved in intramural sports, team sports, sororities and fraternities, departmental clubs and organizations, Livestock Judging Team, and the Livestock and Meat Animal Evaluation Team. She also found that students were somewhat involved within the Lubbock community. These factors can all lead to the success of a student within a college program overall (Peters, 2011).

Smith and Zhang (2010) assessed the experience a first-generation student has when transitioning between high school and college. They were able to examine both inputs and environments through their study to describe the influence advisors, professors, parents, friends, high school teachers, and high school counselors had on students. The study found that the possession of an academic goal or regulation has more influence on transitions than other elements within the study.

### **Summary**

Many skills are being taught to students across the country, but it is the responsibility of the faculty to make sure that the program is being evaluated on a regular basis. Researchers stated, “It is the responsibility of higher education and agricultural communications programs to observe and keep pace with the ever-changing workplace to ensure that they can provide the preparation and skills that produce high-quality graduates” (Doerfert and Miller, 2006, p. 21).

Using the Inputs-Environment-Outcomes theory, this study examined the attitudes of students in the Texas Tech University agricultural communications program as they look toward their future career experience. Understanding the influences placed on a student to attend a specific university or program, the activities students are involved with during their college experience, and the overall perceptions of the students’ college experience.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Overview**

The methodology for this study followed a qualitative design to create a quantitative instrument that evaluate the influences on decision to attend, environment of the students, and the satisfaction of the student with the Texas Tech University agricultural communications program at the end of every semester. Through a series of interviews with current TTU graduating seniors, data were collected to create the instrument (see Appendix A). This chapter examines the process used to conduct this study including research design, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

The purpose of this study was to explore the college experience of students who are graduating from the TTU agricultural communications program to better understanding the student experience within the university and the program. An outcome of this study is a quantitative instrument to evaluate if the recent graduates were satisfied with the program with consistent, measurable data rather than anecdotal information. The following research objectives were used to guide this study:

1. Identify the personal factors or inputs that influence students to discover and enroll in the TTU agricultural communications program.
2. Explore the environment in which students interact with the program and university including active learning and extracurricular involvement.
3. Understand the student satisfaction of the program to evaluate the outcomes the program produces.

## Research Design

This study used qualitative study to discover the college experience of students through qualitative interviews to develop an instrument to collect quantitative data.

Qualitative research can be described with many characteristics such as the researcher is the instrument, a natural setting is needed for research, an inductive data analysis is used, the participant is the center of the meaning, and the findings are interpreted by the researcher (Creswell, 2009). Social phenomenology guided this study as it aims to help explain how we experience our everyday lives and the college experience (Schwandt, 2001). Using this method will allow the researcher to make interpretations between different meanings of the concepts being investigated (Creswell, 2013).

This research study referenced this exploratory instrument development design (Creswell, 2009) to create an instrument to assess the TTU agricultural communications program. Figure 3.1 shows the phases of the instrument development model (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). They explained the exploratory design for instrument development takes form to generalize the qualitative findings to a larger sample. This design is particularly useful when there is a need to develop and test an instrument for a phenomenon is not existent (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). This study focused on the first four phases of the model.



*Figure 3.1. Exploratory design instrument development model adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark (2010)*

The four phases used in this study were qualitative data collection, qualitative data analysis, qualitative results, and developing an instrument (Creswell &

Plano Clark, 2010). Qualitative data collection was utilized through the semi-structured interviews with the student sample. Qualitative data analysis was conducted utilizing axial and open coding through NVivo. An instrument was developed (see Appendix A) based on the results of the qualitative results.

The development of the instrument followed the following four steps of instrument development. Burton and Mazerolle (2011) described four steps of instrument development: defining constructs and determining content; generating items and judging appropriateness; design and conduct studies to test; and finalizing scale based on collection of data in step three. Defining constructs begins with an examination of the literature for instruments to help the researcher provide definitions of the constructs needed. Item generation and judgement of appropriate items requires the researcher to have a strong understanding of current literature, scales for questions within instruments, and research purpose.

### **Population and Sample**

The population studied was graduating seniors of the Texas Tech University agricultural communications program. Purposive sampling is primarily used in qualitative studies and is the practice of selecting participants based on specific characteristics toward the researcher's purpose and objectives of the study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This study used a purposive sample from the population of current seniors within the TTU agricultural communications program. There were two sampling times of the participants. The first sampling was in January of 2017 where only one participant responded via social media and personal emails. The second sampling occurred via personal emails in February 2017 where

three participants responded. An appropriate qualitative sample size depends of the questions asked within the research (Marshall, 1996). For this study, a research sample was appropriate to develop the instrument for future graduates ( $N = 4$ ). Merriam (1995) stated quite a bit can be learned from a small number within a sample of qualitative research. Through examination of the validity and reliability factors of a qualitative study, rigor with a small sample can be evaluated.

Selecting participants who exhibit the qualifications needed within this study is the goal of a purposive sample (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The researcher used personal connections with seniors in the program, fliers on social media (see Appendix B), and emails to recruit and contact the student population (see Appendix C). Participants were selected based on the criteria of the student graduating in either May, August, or December 2017. Students also needed to have completed at least one internship and had been involved with at least one organization.

The researcher contacted multiple seniors with a wide range of demographics including both genders, high and low involvement, and all GPAs, but received only responses from the four participants within this study. Data saturation was achieved early as the participants provided the same information within interviews.

### **Participants**

Four students who are seniors within the department were interviewed for this study. The students consisted of three students graduating in May 2017 and one student who will graduate in December 2017. These students have been involved in many aspects of the department on varying levels throughout their college career such

as organizations, internships, undergraduate research, and study abroad. Three students beginning their college career at TTU and one student transferred into the university later within their college career after two years at a junior college. These participants were given pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. The four participants consisted of Georgia, Zoe, Wanda, and Annabeth.

Georgia began her career at TTU as a freshman and is expected to graduate in December 2017. Georgia has been highly involved with the extracurricular activities and internships throughout her career. She has experienced study abroad through the university, but has not had the chance to conduct undergraduate research.

Zoe is a transfer student who began at TTU after two years at junior college. She grew up with her dad farming. Zoe has been involved with some organizations and has completed one internship within her college career. She has also experienced service learning courses, but has not experienced study abroad or undergraduate research.

Wanda grew up heavily involved in National FFA and remained heavily involved in organizations through her TTU career. She has been involved with organizations within the college and within the university. Wanda has completed internships, undergraduate research, and study abroad trips.

Annabeth has two TTU alumni parents and has been involved in agriculture all her life. She was involved in FFA throughout high school and has continued being involved on a university level at TTU with involvement in Chancellor's Ambassadors and President's Select. Annabeth has also completed an internship, but has not been involved in study abroad or undergraduate research.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher used a 22-question interview guide consisting of open-ended questions for the semi-structured interviews of the students within the study (see Appendix D). A panel of experts, consisting of three faculty members from the agricultural communications program, and the Institutional Review Board approved this interview guide to ensure content validity and reliability before being utilized within this study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Astin's (1993) I-E-O model guided the researcher in developing the interview guide. The researcher-created questions encompassed each element of the model: inputs, environment, and outcomes. The questions regarding inputs were "What brought you to Texas Tech University," "Did anyone influence your decisions to attend Texas Tech University," and "What made you choose agricultural communications?" Environment questions included "How were the facilities," "Did you complete an internship within your college experience," "Did you participate in undergraduate research," and "Do you feel a connection or sense of belonging with the agricultural communications program through faculty/staff and/or the students?" The questions regarding outcomes included "How have your classes prepared you for your future," "What are your plans post-graduation," and "What suggestions for improvement do you have for the program?"

These three categories of questions were selected to give the researcher a well-rounded understanding of the education provided by the TTU agricultural communications program. Other questions were developed to gain a background understanding of the participant.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher conducted four semi-structured interviews of current agricultural communications seniors at TTU to explore satisfaction the participants had toward the program and identify what questions needed to be asked in the quantitative survey. In-person and phone interviews were used for the current students. Semi-structured interviews allow more interaction with the interviewer and the participant rather than interaction amongst participants. Both methods are means for investigating complex phenomenon and should be used with interview guides (Clifford, Cope, Gillespie, & French, 2016). The researcher selected the use of interviews due to experience and the availability of the participants.

The student interviews were conducted in a small conference room in the TTU Agricultural Education and Communications Building in order to allow the participants to feel comfortable sharing their satisfaction and evaluation of the program. One student interview was conducted on the phone due to the location of the student on an internship. Carr and Worth (2001) state that phone interviews have many advantages like cost effectiveness, equitable to face-to-face interviews, and can increase response rate. Each interview included one participant and one researcher that lasted 15-30 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded and notes were taken during the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher recorded all interviews with a digital recording device then transcribed the interviews verbatim from the recordings individually. The researcher then read through the data and made notes. During analysis, the researcher coded data by open and axial coding using constant comparative method (Creswell, 2009). The

researcher examined the data for emergent themes that evolved from the interviews and document analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Upon discovery of the emergent themes, the researcher categorized the data and labeled the data by topic determining a coding method for the data (Creswell, 2009). A code is a qualitative tool to utilize symbolic words or short phrases for larger area of data with the goal to find repetitive patterns and consistencies within the data (Saldaña, 2009).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is the action of the researcher persuading an audience that the findings from research questions are worth attention and evaluation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In research, validity refers to accuracy and truthfulness while reliability refers to stability (Brink, 1993). Lincoln and Guba (1985) established four criteria when measuring trustworthiness that enforce the validity and reliability within qualitative studies: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Table 3.1 demonstrates the criteria for trustworthiness for qualitative research compared to trustworthiness measures for quantitative research (Krefting, 1991). The qualitative research criteria were used to establish the rigor and trustworthiness of this study.

Table 3.1 *Trustworthiness criteria by research approach adapted from Krefting (1991)*

Criterion	Qualitative Approach	Quantitative Approach
Truth Value	Credibility	Internal validity
Applicability	Transferability	External validity
Consistency	Dependability	Reliability
Neutrality	Confirmability	Objectivity

### **Credibility**

There is an aspect of internal validity which can be substituted by credibility in qualitative research. (Connelly, 2016). Credibility is confidence in the research methods and the findings from the data (Polit & Beck, 2014). Krefting (1991)

pointed to credibility coming from a researcher who dives into the research enabling the identification and verification of patterns. Within credibility, there are five major techniques to ensure credible findings: increasing probability of producing credible findings (triangulation), inquiry external checks, refining hypotheses and research questions as more information becomes available, checking preliminary data against archived data, and directly testing findings with human sources (member checking) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The researcher used several of these techniques throughout this study. The first is triangulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined triangulation, like radio triangulation, as the process of defining the point of origin to determine a triangle of information using two ends of a baseline. Triangulation is a powerful strategy to enhance the quality of research by cross-checking data and assessing the data against all other sources (Krefting, 1991). This study compared interview transcripts among the participants as well as using document analysis added credibility to the study. Another technique used to determine credibility was member checking. Merriam (1995) defined member checking as taking the data collected back to the participants asking if the information derived from their contribution properly represents their opinion. This study used member checking on the instrument created as an outcome of this study to ensure the instrument represented the ideas the participants shared with the researcher.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to how the qualitative study can be transferred or shifted to other settings or variables (Polit & Beck, 2014). “For transferability, qualitative

researchers focus on the informants and their story without saying this is everyone's story" (Connelly, 2016, p. 436). There are two perspectives on applicability when it comes to transferability (Krefting, 1991). The first is if the results of the study are generalizable and the second is if the results of the study are more descriptive. This study will use the latter perspective. When studies use small, purposive sampling and make the assumption that the results of the study cannot be generalizable, the transferability criterion may not be relevant (Sandelowski, 1986).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) show that naturalistic studies cannot specify an inquiry's external validity, but a researcher can provide thick descriptions of the findings and research whereas potential appliers could utilize the research in the future. The researcher has provided robust descriptions of the findings in Chapter IV.

### **Dependability**

In qualitative research, dependability is the stability of data throughout time and variables (Polit & Beck, 2014). This is similar to reliability in the understanding that the nature of the study could impact the stability of conditions (Connelly, 2016).

(Guba, 1981) stated arguments regarding the usefulness of dependability. The first of the arguments is that there is no validity without reliability, or there is not credibility without dependability. The second argument is that using overlapping methods can help with the overall validity and reliability. The third argument is the using replication to assist with reliability. The fourth argument is completing an audit trail to evaluate the process and findings of the research.

Based on Guba's (1981) fourth argument of an auditor, Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated an audit trail can be used to determine dependability. This

research used an audit trail of interview transcripts, NVivo coding files, and printouts of the documents. The data for the audit trail were stored on the researcher's computer and organized within distinct files so that it could be accessed and referenced easily by the researcher if needed.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the element of objectivity within qualitative research (Polit & Beck, 2014). It is the “neutrality or the degree findings are consistent and could be repeated” (Connelly, 2016, p. 435). The main technique for establishing confirmability in studies is through an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail in this study included interview transcripts, NVivo coding files, and printouts of the documents.

### **Researcher Bias**

Poggenpeol and Myburgh (2003) identified possible threats to the qualitative research process: a) a possible threat to the truth value of information and data obtained from the researcher's discomfort mentally or in other areas, b) lack of preparedness for field study by the researcher, c) inappropriately conducted interviews by the researcher, d) lack of fact checking for members on findings, e) lack of demographic data within the results, f) lack of in-depth analysis of interviews, g) superficial description of the methodology ad research in general. The researcher considered these threats to the research and conducted interviews in an appropriate manner and analyzed the depth of research within the study. Some of the threats have been addressed below. Creswell and Miller (2000) indicated that another form of qualitative research validity is the disclosure of a researcher's biases, assumptions and

beliefs. We are aware that personal bias and individual opinions can affect the course of a study and has addressed this concern by composing a research subjectivity statement:

I had vast and personal experience and knowledge within the TTU agricultural communications program throughout her undergraduate and graduate career. My views of the program are influenced by my experience and allow me to make decisions regarding the state of the program and the reflections of the overall success of the program. In this research, my own opinion and viewpoints are not important so I remained open-minded as I conducted interviews and analyzed the documents vital to the study. Therefore, my reactions to the participant's opinions and viewpoints of the program did not influence the results of this study. The knowledge of the program helped me create the interview guides and conduct interviews to understand what was being stated and the context of the program. This knowledge hindered me from asking more probing questions because of my understanding of the context.

Throughout my experience within the agricultural communications program at TTU, I have experienced all the experiences in which we were asking within the interview guide. I have conducted undergraduate research, experience a study abroad trip, participated in internships, taken a service learning course, and engaged in many organizations. I also have lived on campus within the Learning Community. Therefore, I have a positive bias regarding involvement within college and the program overall. This allowed me the opportunity to help build this consistent evaluation method.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Overview**

This chapter will present the findings of the qualitative study regarding the examination of students' college experience. The purpose of this study was to explore the college experience of students who are graduating from the TTU agricultural communications program to better understanding the student experience within the university and the program. An outcome of this study is a quantitative instrument to evaluate if the recent graduates were satisfied with the program with consistent, measurable data rather than anecdotal information. The following research objectives were used to guide this study:

1. Identify the personal factors or inputs that influence students to discover and enroll in the TTU agricultural communications program.
2. Explore the environment in which students interact with the program and university including active learning and extracurricular involvement.
3. Understand the student satisfaction of the program to evaluate the outcomes the program produces.

The themes identified through NVivo coding were distinguished program, personal connection, sense of belonging, active learning, comfort in surroundings, applicability of education, and level of preparedness.

#### **Research Objective One**

Research objective one sought to identify the personal factors or inputs that influence students to discover and enroll in the TTU agricultural

communications program. Two themes emerged within this objective: distinguished program and personal connection.

### **Distinguished Program**

Three the participants in the study indicated the ranking of the program was an influence when choosing and promoting the program. Wanda said, “When I was looking for a program, I definitely wanted agriculture, and then when I found out that Texas Tech was number one in the nation in ag comm, I mean, that was just the cherry on top” (Interview 3, p. 1). Two participants showed interest in the fact that the program was ranked number one in the nation with happy demeanor. Georgia noted, “Also, the ag comm department was ranked number one, so that motivated me to come here or to Tech, so that I can be in a really good ag comm department (Interview 1, p. 1).

### **Personal Connection**

When it came to who influenced the participants to attend Texas Tech University and the agricultural communications program, two participants were influenced by either current students or current faculty members. Wanda said a friend from the National FFA Organization talked to her about the program and eventually convinced her to attend TTU. Georgia said she was unsure of her major until she visited with a faculty member. She said:

When I first got here, [faculty member] sat down with me and she talked to me. So, she kind of helped me before I came to Texas Tech to kind of set in stone that I was going to be attending college there and what I would be majoring in. So, I guess she was kind of a mentor before I got here. (Interview 1, p. 1).

Another influence on students attending the TTU agricultural communications program was family members or friends. Most of the participants alluded to an influence from siblings, alumni parents, or cousins that influenced them to attend this university and the program. Annabeth said, “Well, growing up in Lubbock and having two alumni parents, it was just the obvious choice, and I like safety and I knew it was a safe option, and also I just loved it” (Interview 4, p. 1). Georgia said the fact that because of her siblings, she fell in love with Texas Tech, “Well, my sister and brother both are graduates of Texas Tech, so they came to Texas Tech. And after I visited, going to football games, I just fell in love with it” (Interview 1, p.1).

### **Research Objective Two**

Research objective two explored the environment in which students interact with the program and university including active learning and extracurricular involvement. Two major themes emerged from this objective: sense of belonging, active learning, and comfort in surroundings.

#### **Sense of Belonging**

When asked, “Did you live on campus,” majority of the participants did, although not all in the same residence hall or all within the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources Learning Community (CASNR LC) in the Stangel/Murdough residence hall. Georgia said “I was like on the committee or something for the learning committee where we met and came up with new ideas,” (Interview 1, p. 4).

Multiple times throughout the data collection, the participants discussed a “sense of home,” “feels like a family,” and “small town feeling” within the program and the overall university. Annabeth described this feeling when she said:

I mean I think Tech has the quality of being, you know. Obviously, it is a huge university, over 35,000 students, but it still feels homey and there's something about it that feels almost small town and that's even more characteristic of our department, college, and department really. I do feel like a sense of home, and it's just kind of a special thing and it makes me sad because I don't think everyone gets that experience. Even at Tech, I think other majors don't experience what we have (Interview 4, p. 4-5).

Georgia also described that sense of family when she said, “I've really enjoyed it so I would say Texas Tech ag comm is doing an excellent job of making sure everyone feels like a family when they come” (Interview 1, p. 1). She also described the feeling of the department and its social connections when she noted, “I feel connected to ag comm and I feel like that is the only major really in the ag department cause that's all of the people I hang out with” (Interview 1, p. 4).

This was also defined by Annabeth through the description of the smaller class sizes and a smaller program overall. She also stated the idea of going through a degree with the same people. She said:

I mean I think the fact that it's a smaller, there're smaller class sizes. I think that helps because you kind of get to know everyone who's in your, I guess, “class,” and you kind of stick with them because you're all kind of doing the same program and so you're going through all these classes and you typically going to be in most of your ag comm classes with the same people. So that develops and the faculty they just, you know they, I think, really try hard to learn your name and learn about what you have going on (Interview 4, p. 5).

All of the participants were involved in organizations during their college careers. Some participants got involved within organizations due to prior experiences, “I [Zoe] was looking to be more involved because I was very involved in high school” (Interview 2, p. 2). Half of the participants were involved more in university or system level activities through Chancellor’s Ambassadors and/or President’s Select. Annabeth indicated her involvement with a sorority led to mentorship and involvement within the university:

I am so thankful for that experience and the older girls in the sorority. When I was a freshman really took me under their wing, and you know, kind of showed me what I should be involved in. They said, “You know, try for President’s Select, try for Chancellor’s Ambassador’s, [and] all this kind of stuff,” so they’re the ones that kind of got me coordinated. And I was involved with student government, I was ag senator, so that kind of was my ag involvement I guess my in my earlier years, um that wasn’t as much my cup of tea as I would have thought that would have been and I was wanting to be more focused in my sorority and other areas. (Interview 4, p. 4)

The other two participants were more involved with agricultural organizations like Ambassadors for Agriculture, Sigma Alpha, Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow (ACT), Agri-Techsans, Collegiate 4-H, and/or Block and Bridle. Zoe said she joined ACT because “I was a new Texas Tech student, so I was kind of trying to make friends and see what the program was about” (Interview 2, p. 2). Wanda said her experience in Agri-Techsans opened her eyes to new opportunities, “I did join Agri-Techsans for a year, and I really enjoyed that...It helped me in a few ways by showing me that I needed to branch out just a little bit, because I had been in agriculture since I was 14” (Interview 3, p. 3).

Two participants said they were involved in leadership roles within their organizations. Georgia was an officer for one organization, “Ag Ambassadors, I was the Vice President or I am the Vice President now. So, that really helps me kind of serve as a leadership role” (Interview 1, p. 2). Annabeth was the president of her sorority and had been elected at the Student Government Association CASNR Senator.

### **Comfort in Surroundings**

When asked to evaluate the facilities, a majority of the participants said some need for improvements within the building and classrooms. Zoe said a need for a “little facelift” and the idea that the facilities are “not so glamourous” (Interview 2, p.1). Zoe did provide an example of ways to give the facilities a “facelift” by saying, “Like when you walk into like mass comm and they have all these awesome graphics and stuff, so I think if they lean a little more towards that, it will be just a more interesting learning environment” (Interview 2, p. 1). Annabeth also eluded to the idea of the facilities falling behind the expectations of the overall program. Annabeth said:

I think it’s sad that we have one of the number one programs in the nation, [and] we don’t, I don’t think we have the facilities that match that. And, you know, it’s not our fault, I just don’t think we’ve maybe received funding to go toward the building. A lot of our focus is on our program and the academics, which is obviously the most important, but I think that we deserve some upgrades (Interview 4, p. 2).

Wanda had comments on both the fact that the facilities are serving their purpose as well as needing improvements.

We’re kind of prime in the middle of campus. I mean obviously, some of us would want better Wi-Fi, but that’s a problem all over campus. I mean hot water would be nice. AC down in the

computer lab would be nice. Other than that, I can't say too many bad things about it. (Interview 3, p. 3)

One participant, Georgia, was really appreciative of the facilities and equipment provided by the program. She said the facilities were great with cameras that students can check out and classrooms that promote learning. (Interview 1, p. 2).

### **Active Learning**

All of the participants had completed at least one internship throughout their college experience within the agricultural industry. Zoe completed an internship with a farmer cooperative organization using many of the skills learned within classes, such as promotional videos, graphic designs, and informational posts. Wanda completed more unique internships with one in the aviation industry, one teaching, one in information technology, and one selling agricultural insurance. Annabeth's internship was completed at a floral shop designing flowers and promotional items. Georgia completed "a handful [seven] of them [internships]" within different disciplines of the agricultural industry.

Most participants indicated they had heard about the internship from the program emails sent out by an agricultural communications faculty member. Annabeth said the internship she completed "exposed me to the fact I don't want to do fun, non-professional events for a career. So that was really good because I wasn't sure" (Interview 4, p. 4).

Only one participant had experience with undergraduate research. Wanda had helped with coding for a master's thesis and conducted research while on study abroad. Wanda described her experience with coding, "We looked at different non-profit organizations, and I was able to go to the Western Region Conference and

present with [another student] on that. That was very neat" (Interview 3, p. 6). The other participants indicated no experience conducting undergraduate research, but did indicate participation within thesis interviews and surveys as well as conducting some class assigned research during their curriculum.

Two participants had participated in study abroad trips while in college. Georgia attended a TTU sponsored, faculty led two-week trip to Germany and France and Wanda went on a non-TTU sponsored trip to Rome for a summer. Georgia said she had reservations before attending the trip but received valuable advice about the trip from a faculty mentor within the program. Georgia said,

Well, I honestly was scared to study abroad because I didn't know what that meant. Until I sat down with [professor name], and she talked to me about, 'Hey, I think you should go on this two week study abroad trip with us,' and I got to thinking. I was like, 'It would be really neat to go to Europe.'(Interview 1, p. 3-4)

Wanda described her trip as "interesting," "eye-opening," and something to step "outside your comfort zone." Wanda explained the value of the experience:

Coming back gave me much more empathy, even regarding political events that I'm looking at, because I know people that are in those shoes that are suffering through that. So, it's hard for me to....anyway that's political. It opened my eyes coming back. I think it changed a lot of things for me; validated a lot of thoughts and feelings I've had for a long time. It was very valuable to me in my learning experience outside of the classroom in college.  
(Interview 3, p. 5)

### **Research Objective Three**

Research objective three sought to understand the student satisfaction of the program to evaluate the outcomes the program produces. During the process of analysis, two themes emerged. These themes were level of preparedness and applicability of education.

### **Level of Preparedness**

When asked to “rate your satisfaction with the following items where 1 = strongly dissatisfied to 5 = strongly satisfied,” on different skills, all participants rated overall satisfaction with degree program as five or strongly satisfied. The next highest rated was communication skills followed by employment or higher education opportunities, then agricultural knowledge, and last technical skills. Annabeth said the program prepared her with written communication skills, “Being a better writer is something that is so important because you’re gonna write all the time. Whether it is, you know, emails to a potential employer or, you know, notes to your kid’s teachers one day or something” (Interview 4, p. 6).

Zoe said everything she has learned in classes, she has used on her internships, “It’s not like I have been wasting my time with busy work. I have made videos, graphics, and written stories for magazines. All of those skills I have used” (interview 2, p. 4). Georgia said, “I feel like going into a job whenever I graduate I will be able to hold up against some of the best and to keep growing” (Interview 1, p. 5). Wanda describe the preparedness with not only skills, but an open-mindset:

Multiple times in my undergraduate career, they said "you're not going to learn until you step into the first day of your job. You think you know, but you don't." Knowing that mindset, I can step into any of my positions, I can step in saying "I'm not going to know everything coming into it." (Interview 3, p. 7).

When the participants were asked, “If you had to do this over again, would you select TTU ACOM again? Why?” all participants positively responded indicating they would “100%” do the program over again. Wanda expressed interest in the idea of recommending the program to the FFA students she mentors. She also said, “The

benefits that we reap going through this program are exclusive to our program and abundant in spilling out into even the people that we come into contact [with]” (Interview 3, p. 7).

Georgia alluded to the benefits of recommending not only the program, but also the university as a whole. She said:

It’s a great atmosphere. During the fall, you’ve got the football games, you’ve got everything, so on the Texas Tech side, it’s a great atmosphere. Then on the ag comm side, everyone’s a family, everyone’s so nice. I’ve met so many friends and had so much, so many experiences that I honestly don’t know if I could have got that if I went to [another university] or anything like that. So, just the experiences altogether. The places I’ve been, I don’t think anybody else could have offered it like Texas Tech did and the ag comm department (Interview 1, p. 5).

Annabeth also commented on the benefits of the department and the idea that she would absolutely return to the program because of these benefits. Annabeth noted,

I would 100% go back and do it because it was just all, all of the things we’re talking about the benefits of it, the community, and just the wonderful faculty and the skill sets that I talked about having earned. I just wouldn’t have traded that for anything.  
(Interview 4, p. 5)

Two of the participants said they would improve elements of the new block scheduling system. Annabeth said she would change it because “I really enjoyed how my um my degree went but I don’t know any different” (Interview 4, p. 7.) Zoe had concerns for the block and wanted more “clarification on stuff and that could go to other courses too” (Interview 2, p. 4).

Wanda said the department could improve with more technical skills, “We could stand to dabble in a few more computer skills... I think we could stand to do an

Excel, Word Type course that goes a little deeper of what is possible with Excel, how to make a good Power Point presentation" (Interview 3, p. 8).

### **Applicability of Education**

All of the participants said positive things for the education they received from the agricultural communications program, specifically that the education and skills students receive are applicable to the out-of-classroom experiences they received through internships, organizations, and study abroad. The participants said the skills they learned are directly applicable to the internships and professions in agricultural communications. Zoe described this application through service learning coursework: "It helped me learn a little bit about professionalism and like, seeing that the work I am doing now will eventually amount to something. It is not just school work" (Interview 2, p. 2). Annabeth echoed those sentiments of the applicability of the service learning classes. She indicated:

I mean, I think it was really good because it was for somebody else. I mean, it was for a grade, but it's also for someone else to use. So I think it kind of makes it more realistic and you're really applying what you're learning in all of your classes, and obviously that why it's a capstone class in this degree program because [it] makes all of your course material applicable (Interview 4, p. 3).

Wanda and Georgia discussed the applicability of the skills and lessons from the coursework within their internships and other positions throughout their college experiences. Georgia noted:

That's just because she [a professor] really taught us the foundation of writing a news release. I mean, um, communications is all about how you present yourself and how you write and things like that. So, she [a professor] really laid the background to what I am doing right now at [internship]. (Interview 1, p. 1-2)

This aligned with the comment from Wanda discussing the applicability of skills in future careers. Wanda noted, “I think some of the skills that we learned are obviously adaptable to any of the opportunity that we get into. More importantly than that, they’ve prepared our mindset walking into the job” (Interview 3, p. 7).

All of the participants complimented the program and the idea that the professors educate the students with a diverse skill set to be applicable to many different niches and jobs. Annabeth said,

I just think that I am not worried about graduating even though I don’t have a job lined up because I know I got a diverse skill set from this degree. It just gave me a lot of skills and I’m not scared because I can do really any job that I want. (Interview 3, p. 1)

She also alluded to the idea of a broad skills when she said:

I’m trying to think, ‘cause, you know, in communication with some like PR students or advertising [students], I feel like some of them right now. I hear them talk about campaigns, well we did that. I feel like sometimes, and I don’t know, I don’t know all of the classes they take. I feel like sometimes, I may have taken more things than some of the mass comm students, and I feel like I have a little more of a diverse skill set, but I don’t know that for sure and I don’t want to sound rude (Interview 4, p. 5).

Wanda also pointed to this idea of growth with a diverse skill set by saying the program is “an excellent environment for growth.” She also noted,

Ag comm is also cool in the fact that regardless that we’re all going through the same program, we’re all coming out with different skills because we can put our focus towards those skills, but still be a well-rounded communications professional walking out into the career world. (Interview 3, p. 7)

Georgia also reflected these sentiments when she said, “I feel like going into a job whenever I graduate I will be able to hold up against some of the best and to keep

growing. I just feel like Texas Tech prepared me to go out and be ready for the real world" (Interview 1, p. 5).

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Overview**

Chapter I provided an introduction to the need for assessing the Texas Tech University agricultural communications program and explained the need for looking at student input when assessing programs. Chapter II provided a framework for assessing the whole student within a college program and provided a summary of past research regarding agricultural communications, curriculum assessment, and student satisfaction. Chapter III explained the research design, population, instrumentation, validity and reliability as well as the procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter IV provided the findings from the interviews and document analysis. Chapter V will discuss the conclusions of major findings, implications of these findings, and future research needed within this field and applications for practitioners.

The implications of this research are presented with the major findings and comparing those conclusions with the information discovered within the literature review. Recommendations for future application and exploration for practitioners are presented to explore the ever-evolving curriculum and technological changes as well as the diverse needs of the students.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to explore the satisfaction of students who are graduating from the TTU agricultural communications program to better understanding the student experience within the university and the program. An outcome of this study is a quantitative instrument to evaluate if the recent graduates

were satisfied with the program with consistent, measurable data rather than anecdotal information. The following research objectives were used to guide this study:

1. Identify the personal factors or inputs that influence students to discover and enroll in the TTU agricultural communications program.
2. Explore the environment in which students interact with the program and university including active learning and extracurricular involvement.
3. Understand the student satisfaction of the program to evaluate the outcomes the program produces.

## **Key Findings and Conclusions**

### **Research Objective One**

The first research objective sought to identify the personal factors or inputs that influence students to discover and enroll in the TTU agricultural communications program. Astin (1993) explained inputs to be involvement in high school, reasons for selecting a program and university as a whole, as well as demographic information.

The majority of the sample was influenced to attend Texas Tech based on the suggestions from friends and family and the overall prestige of the department on a national level. Other factors included within the findings but not of high emphasis were influences from social media and scholarship availability. Smith-Hollins et al. (2015) found there are personal influencers that can impact the student's overall enrollment and college decision. The personal influencers include parent, other family members, and friends. Many of the participants said a personal influence was a key influencer when choosing TTU. Zoe said her cousins had an influence on her

attending TTU, “I guess you can say my older cousins did [had an influence]. All of them attended Tech, and they always talked about how great it was, and how everybody’s really friendly, and it doesn’t feel that big even though it is a very large university” (Interview 2, p. 1). Other participants had similar influences.

Robinson et al. (2007) described academic reputation, post-graduation opportunities, and prominence of university athletic teams had an influence on students choosing the school in which to attend college. The TTU agricultural communications program having a distinguished ranking of number one in the nation could lead to a high academic reputation and post-graduation opportunities (Miller et al., 2015). Many participants indicated this being an influencer to attend TTU. Wanda indicated that discovering TTU agricultural communications was the number one program in the nation was the “cherry on top” for her decision to attend TTU. This is an interesting aspect because it was not until Miller et al. (2015) in which the program received the distinguished award of the number one ranking. This would have been after these participants selected the university they would attend and would have spent at least one year in college.

The instrument questions (see Appendix A) that were developed from this objective are:

- Who influenced you to attend Texas Tech University?
- What influenced you to attend the Texas Tech agricultural communications program?
- Did you enter Texas Tech as a freshman?
- Which of the following best describes where you grew up?

- Please select all that apply to you.
  - I was a member of FFA
  - I was a member of 4-H
  - My parents make a living from farming and/or ranching
  - I grew up on a production farm and/or ranch
  - My grandparents make a living from farming and/or ranching
  - I have no prior involvement with the agricultural industry
  - I am currently engaged in farming and/or ranching
  - I took a course in agricultural and/or natural resources in high school
  - I have taken a course in agriculture and/or natural resources while in college

### **Research Objective Two**

The second research objective sought to explore the environment in which students interact with the program and university including active learning and extracurricular involvement. An examination of Astin's (1993) I-E-O model, specifically the environment element, allowed the researchers to discover the involvement of students on campus. Environment was defined as a myriad of factors that plays a role in the overall success of the student including extracurricular activities, internships, and study abroad. Astin (1993) also explained the role of environments, facilities, and feeling within the program, to be an impact on the overall satisfaction of a student.

The findings indicated all participants were involved in organizations and internships. The findings also suggest that study abroad trips are not as heavily

emphasized and undergraduate research is not a high priority for students. Campus housing was not a big factor when considering the success of the overall degree program. Most likely students were involved in organizations in high school and continued that trend within college. It is also likely that students hear more talk and see more opportunities for internships because they are required, rather than study abroad experiences and undergraduate research experiences which are optional.

In a study of agricultural communications courses, Cannon et al. (2016) found the international category had the smallest number of courses. The researchers indicated this might be for lack of funding or the international courses are more abundant at the college or university level when compared to the department. There is currently only one study abroad course specific to agricultural communications offered at Texas Tech. If students study abroad, they usually find other courses within CASNR or the university. This could explain the lack of study abroad participants. Zoe was a transfer student said her schedule was full when she entered Texas Tech and she could not fit study abroad into her schedule. Timing, finances, and lack of courses are potential reasons for low study abroad participation amongst the participants.

Foreman and Retallick (2016) found that high involvement in organizations can lead to stronger relationships with the community and academic success. They found students who are involved in organizations could lead to students understanding the desired learning outcomes from professors. Understanding the involvement in organizations will help achieve some of the desired skills employers look for within the categories of written communication skills, character skills, visual

and technical skills, and oral and other communication skills (Corder & Irlbeck, 2017). With the participants of this study being involved with organizations, it can most likely lead to high involvement across the program, which can lead to well-prepared professionals post-graduation from the program.

When it comes to internships, Morgan (2010) identified that a variety of skills are learned and can be applied to the classroom and post-graduation plans. The skills displayed within internships align with the skills employers want (Morgan, 2010; Corder & Irlbeck, 2017; Gorham, Irlbeck, & Lange, 2015).

In McLellan's (2015) findings, although students were required to complete an internship by the end of their college career, 45% of the students that participated in the study had not yet completed one. The researcher emphasized the need for faculty to promote internships.

The only participant that participated in research in her undergraduate career indicated receiving the ideas for research through a professor. Wanda said, “[A professor] and I had talked about it before I left. I was looking into a master's degree, and I wanted to see if research was something I was even interested in” (Interview 3, p. 6). Stebner, King, and Baker (2016) looked at the aspects of undergraduate research and found that students want clear expectations, a positive research environment, recognition for their hard work, a longer timeline, and close and constant supervision. This could lead to the need for faculty to encourage students to participate as well as be willing to devote time to guide the student through undergraduate research.

Overall, the students were satisfied with the program and would recommend it to others. Certain elements impact the student's satisfaction, such as sense of belonging. Students are satisfied with the smaller community and family feeling within the department but think the facilities do not always match the needs of the students. Students see an outdated building have trouble keeping up with the ever-changing technology and society around them.

Annabeth acknowledged the community within the program. She said, "I do feel like a sense of home, and it's just kind of a special thing and it makes me sad because I don't think everyone gets that experience. Even at Tech, I think other majors don't experience what we have" (Interview 4, p. 4-5). Athiyaman (1997) described that students' look at overall satisfaction with the quality of specific characteristics to build their perceptions. This could mean that the feeling students receive within the community of program can be a larger aspect created by the faculty and the students within the program.

Athiyaman (1997) also said satisfaction can come from small class sizes, facilities, level of difficulty of content in classes, and workloads of the student. McLerran (2015) also found satisfaction can come from the quality of classrooms, technological equipment, and labs and supplies. There were mixed views of the quality of the facilities where one participant thought the facilities were "awesome" while others thought the facilities could utilize a "facelift". This could indicate overall dissatisfaction with the facilities and technology provided to students.

The University of Florida uses the exit instrument to evaluate the alumni perceptions of current skills taught within the department when they ask level of preparedness received from the program, level of importance for communications skills, skills currently being used in jobs, and skills alumni wish were taught to them in the program (R. Telg, personal communication, January 4, 2017). Kansas State University also asked questions of perceived preparedness for next job, most valuable courses, and least valuable courses (K. Gurik, personal communication, January 10, 2017). The TTU Department of Animal and Food Science also evaluated the environment of their department with questions regarding most liked components of the program, components of the program to change (J. Brooks, personal communication, February 13, 2017). Dr. Segarra touched on the faculty element of environment when the students complete a set of course evaluations where students complete their opinions about every class they took within their degree program and determine if they would recommend the class and the professor. “We will ask, who was your professor in this class and what were the good parts about it and would you take it again and things like that” (E. Segarra, personal communication, March 1, 2017).

The survey questions encompassing research objective two and the environment element of Astin’s (1993) I-E-O Model are:

- Did you live on campus?
- In which residence hall did you live?
- Did you live within the CASNR Learning Community?

- How would you rate the quality of the faculty of agricultural communications based on your expectations?
  - Quality of teaching you've received
  - Availability outside of class
  - Ability to answer questions
  - Advice on courses to take
  - Approachability
  - Helpfulness with assignments and paperwork
  - Practical knowledge of the industry
  - Knowledge of current agricultural issues
  - Advice on careers and internships
  - Advice on extracurricular activities
  - Usefulness of advice
  - Advice on personal matters
- How would you rate the quality of the agricultural communications facilities based on your expectations?
  - Classrooms
  - Projectors and screens
  - Computer labs
  - Equipment in computer labs
  - Photography equipment
  - Videography equipment

- Considering your skill set when entering college, please rate your level of agreement on how the agricultural communications program developed these skills. 1 = strongly disagree the program developed your skills and 5= strongly agree the program developed your skills.
  - Web Design
  - Graphic design
  - Adobe Photoshop
  - Adobe Illustrator
  - Adobe InDesign
  - News Writing
  - Public Relations Writing
  - Video Production
  - Photography
  - Public Speaking
  - Campaigns
  - Magazine
  - Agricultural knowledge
- What components of the program do you like the most?
- What components of the program would you change?
- Overall, have your expectations been met with the agricultural communications program?
- Did you complete an internship?
- Did you study abroad?

- What organizations/teams were you involved with during your college career?

### **Research Objective Three**

The third research objective sought to understand the student satisfaction of the program to understand the outcomes the program produces. Astin (1993) looked at satisfaction as an outcome of the student experience and development within a program. Athiyaman (1997) found the satisfaction is a product of attitude and can be developed from all elements of the program, including the facilities and environment of the program.

Hadre and Hackett (2015) recommend programs listen to the pattern of perception (repeated statements of approval) from all students in order to better support and educate them. All of the participants eluded to a diverse skill set they have learned through the program. Annabeth said feeling well prepared overall as a student and adult, “I really think that I’ve, I’m better equipped even as a citizen. That sounds kind of cheesy, [but] there’s just things that like it [character skills] makes me better at” (Interview 4, p. 6). This could indicate the satisfaction of the content of the program as it prepares students for the future.

Another statement from participants regarding this satisfaction within the degree program comes when the students were recommending the program. Wanda said she would recommend the program because of “the benefits that we reap going through this program are exclusive to our program and abundant in spilling out into even the people that we come into contact” (Interview 3, p. 7).

There is importance in knowing the plans of students post-graduation as Dr. Segarra points out. The interview used within his department allows, “The chairman

feels it out and we collect data if they have jobs, or not. How much they are making and things like that, so we keep that, those records" (E. Segarra, personal communication, March 1, 2017). The TTU Department of Animal and Food Sciences was a survey that asked for contact information and employment post-graduation (J. Brooks, personal communication, February 13, 2017). Kansas State University also asked plans post-graduation (K. Gurik, personal communication, January 10, 2017).

The survey questions encompassing research objective two and the outcomes element of Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model are:

- What are you plans post-graduation?
  - Graduate/professional school
    - What school are you attending?
    - What degree are you seeking?
    - What is your expected graduation date?
  - Workforce
    - With what company are you employed?
    - What is your job title?
    - What is your salary?
    - How did you hear about the position?
  - Unsure
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Overall, have your expectations of higher education opportunities been met with the agricultural communications program?

### **Implications**

Doerfert and Miller (2006) said “it is the responsibility of higher education and agricultural communications programs to observe and keep pace with the ever-changing workplace to ensure that they can provide the preparation and skills that produce high-quality graduates” (p. 21). The evaluation of the current curriculum of a program through the eyes of a student is valuable. Meyers (2005) emphasized the need for candid student comments when it comes to the evaluation of curriculum, not just administrator evaluation. The insights of the program provided by the qualitative interviews in this study could help change the program. The creation of the quantitative survey from this study will help the program’s administrators evaluate its curriculum each semester. From there, proposed changes to the program would be based on data, not just anecdotal evidence. The quantitative survey can be located in Appendix A.

With the information provided within the study, it is apparent that instruments measuring satisfaction should include a variety of different factors and elements. Students recognize the importance of not only understanding the skills, but being able to apply the skills taught within the internship or “real life” experiences. Hergert (2009) reiterated this point emphasizing the connection between classroom and workplace when it comes to internships. Students are involved with the environment element of the model through the internships and the organizations. More emphasis and scholarship should be available and emphasized for students to be involved. Students are satisfied with the people in the program, but lack the same

confidence when it comes to the facilities. This is something that should be of focus within the future.

Overall, students seemed willing to provide information regarding their experience, but might need an extra incentive to complete an exit instrument. It could be a prize drawing or a requirement for a class, but something to help push the students to complete something at the end of their college career is essential. The most feasible would be to withhold senior audits sign offs or to have a quiz grade in the block to complete the survey.

### **Recommendations for Faculty and Program Administrators**

In order to understand a student's overall inputs, improve environments, and outcomes for successful student development, the researcher recommends the followings to faculty and program administrators.

- Place more emphasis on study abroad and undergraduate research experiences for students. These experiences could be valuable aspects of the college experience in which not all students receive. Undergraduate research can bring in extra funding for the department, and can help recruit students to further their education either in the program or programs across the country.
- Showcase more student success and involvement on social media for recruitment efforts. There was one participant that said she was influenced to attend TTU based on social media interaction. Showcasing work could influence future students to attend.

- Ensure faculty know of extracurricular opportunities and promote those within classes and advising meetings. Not all students know of these opportunities and will lean on the faculty to inform them of these decisions.
- Internships should be continued to be required as students find these valuable opportunities to apply the materials learned within the classrooms.
- Incorporate agricultural knowledge and background into more classes to help all students have a more impactful college experience even for students of different backgrounds.
- A reassessment of exit instrument questions should be completed every three years to ensure the content is applicable to the current program and societal norms. Many elements of programs change over the years and in order to reflect those changes within an industry and a university, researchers will need to reassess and make sure the instrument is measuring the items that need to be measured.
- Exit instruments should be administered within the last two months of the last semester of a student's career. This will help students give full evaluations of the whole program as well as complete it before senioritis kicks in.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

A group of experts will need to review the instrument for content and face validity. This step will lead to a pilot test of the instrument (Burton & Mazerolle, 2011). When pilot testing, researchers must consider sample size, composition, initial reliability, and validity-related aspects of the instrument design. “Current sample size recommendation for pilot testing an instrument include either a minimum of 10

respondents per instrument item or a minimum overall sample of 300 respondents'' (Burton and Mazerolle, 2011, p. 29). This pilot test sample size recommendation should encourage researchers to consider length of the survey and populations available. After the pilot test, researchers would examine the data collected to ensure the instrument is meeting the needs of the research questions and the purpose of the overall instrument.

Future research should reassess the needs of the students based on the evolving technological world around them and the ever-changing agricultural industry. Student expectations and even employers' needs from graduates can change over time causing involvement with extracurricular activities and classes as something that would need to change to stay up to date. Cannon et al. (2016) evaluated the current curriculum across the nation to discover what was being taught to students enrolled in the different programs. Future research should consider evaluating programs across the nation in order to properly assess all programs, not just one specific program.

Future research should evaluate the alumni of programs after five to 10 years within the workforce to see if feelings and satisfaction are the same after spending time applying the skills taught within the program. After alumni have had more time to apply the information taught, it would be valuable to see if the same classes and information is valued after graduation.

Future research should also look at the degree of influence social media could have on potentially incoming students as well as current students. This could be an

element of the student satisfaction that this not directly explored by other means of research.

The quantitative instrument can and should be adapted for the students graduating with degrees in interdisciplinary agriculture. Also, an instrument for the department's master's and doctoral degree recipients could also be patterned off this instrument and used as an evaluation tool.

This research should be used to help other programs develop their own instrument and should measure the inputs, environment, and outcomes of graduating seniors from the TTU agricultural communications program. This could lead to a better understanding of the curriculum and development of the curriculum within the programs across the country.

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## APPENDIX A

### CREATED EXIT SURVEY

This survey is designed to assess your satisfaction with the agricultural communications degree program. Please answer the questions truthfully and to the best of your ability. Your input will help the program improve and grow to help students like you in the future.

Who influenced you to attend Texas Tech University? (Select all that apply.)

- Family
- Friends
- Current Students
- Current Faculty
- High School Teacher(s)
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

What influenced you to attend the Texas Tech agricultural communications program? (Select all that apply.)

- Smaller class sizes
- Sense of home
- Faculty advisors
- Current student recommendations
- Employment opportunities
- Content of the degree
- Number one program in the nation ranking
- Campus Visit
- University publications
- Academic reputation
- University athletic teams
- College competitive teams
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Did you enter Texas Tech as a freshman?

- Yes
- No, I transferred into the university \_\_\_\_\_ credit hours

Condition: Yes Is Selected. Skip To: Where did you transfer from?

Where did you transfer from?

Did you live on campus?

- Yes
- No

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: How would you rate the quality of the faculty of agricultural communications based on your expectations?

In which residence hall did you live? (Select all that apply)

- Bledsoe
- Gordon
- Sneed
- Horn
- Knapp
- Wall
- Gates
- Hulen
- Clement
- Coleman
- Chitwood
- Weymouth
- Stangel
- Murdough
- Honors
- Murray
- Carpenter/Wells
- West Village
- Talkington

Did you live within the CASNR Learning Community?

- Yes
- No

How would you rate the quality of the faculty of agricultural communications based on your expectations?

	Much less than expected	Less than expected	Matched expectations	Exceeded expectations	Greatly exceeded expectations
Quality of teaching you've received	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Availability outside of classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to answer questions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Advice on courses to take	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Approachability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helpfulness with assignments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Practical knowledge of the industry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knowledge of current agricultural issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Advice on careers and internships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Advice on extracurricular activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Usefulness of advice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Advice on personal matters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How would you rate the quality of the agricultural communications facilities based on your expectations?

	Much less than expected	Less than expected	Matched expectations	Matched expectations	Greatly exceeded expectations
Classrooms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Projectors and screens	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Computer labs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Equipment in computer labs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Photography equipment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Videography equipment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Considering your skill set when entering college, please rate how well the agricultural communications program developed these skills. 1 = strongly disagree that the program developed your skills and 5= strongly agree the program developed your skills.

	1=Strongly disagree	2=Disagree	3=Neither agree or disagree	4=Agree	5=Strongly agree
Web Design	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Graphic design	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adobe Photoshop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adobe Illustrator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adobe InDesign	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
News Writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public Relations Writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video Production	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Photography	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public Speaking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Campaign Development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazine Production	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Agricultural knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Web Design	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What components of the program do you like the most?

What components of the program would you change?

Overall, have your expectations been met with the agricultural communications program?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Did you complete an internship?

- Yes
- No

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: Did you study abroad?

With what company/organization was your internship?

Did the company you interned for hire you for post-graduation employment?

Did you study abroad?

- Yes
- No

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: What organizations/teams were you inv....

Where did you study?

Was your trip a Texas Tech sponsored study trip?

- Yes
- No

What organizations/teams were you involved with during your college career? (Select all that apply.)

- Academic Quadrathalon
- Ag Ambassadors Discussion Team
- Ag Council
- Agri-Techsans
- Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow
- Agronomy Quizbowl Team
- Alpha Gamma Rho
- Ambassadors for Agriculture
- Block and Bridle
- Chancellor's Ambassadors
- Collegiate 4-H
- Collegiate FFA
- Collegiate Turf Bowl Exam
- Equestrian team
- FarmHouse Fraternity
- Horse Judging Team
- Institute of Food Technologists College Bowl
- Livestock Judging Team
- Livestock and Meat Animal Evaluation Team
- MANRRS
- Meat Judging Team
- Meat Science Quiz Bowl Team
- Phi Alpha Xi
- President's Select
- Raider's Uncorked
- Ranch Horse Team
- Range Plant ID & Range Management Team
- Rodeo Team
- Sigma Alpha – Professional Agriculture Sorority
- Soil Judging Team
- Wildlife Quizbowl Team
- Wool Judging Team
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following best describes where you grew up?

- Rural Area (On a Farm)
- Rural Area (Not on a Farm)
- Suburban Area
- Urban Area

Please select all that apply to you.

- I was a member of FFA
- I was a member of 4-H
- My parents make a living from farming and/or ranching
- I grew up on a production farm and/or ranch
- My grandparents make a living from farming and/or ranching
- I have no prior involvement with the agricultural industry
- I am currently engaged in farming and/or ranching
- I took a course in agricultural and/or natural resources in high school
- I have taken a course in agriculture and/or natural resources while in college

What are your plans post-graduation?

- 1. Graduate/professional school
- 2. Workforce
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Condition: 2. Workforce Is Selected. Skip To: With what company is your job?

Condition: 3. Unsure Is Selected. Skip To: End of Block.

Condition: 4. Other (please specify) Is Not Empty. Skip To: End of Block.

What school are you attending?

What degree are you seeking?

What is your expected graduation date?

Overall, have your expectations of higher education opportunities been met with the agricultural communications program?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Condition: Strongly agree Is Selected. Skip To: End of Block.

Condition: Somewhat agree Is Selected. Skip To: End of Block.

Condition: Neither agree nor disagree Is Selected. Skip To: End of Block.

Condition: Somewhat disagree Is Selected. Skip To: End of Block.

Condition: Strongly disagree Is Selected. Skip To: End of Block.

With what company are you employed?

What is your job title?

What is your salary?

How did you hear about the position?

- Email from the department
- Internship networks/position
- Current employee
- Online listing
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Overall, have your expectations of employment opportunities been met with the agricultural communications program?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

What is your ethnicity?

- White
- Black or African America
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

What is your age?

This section of the survey is for contact information only. The information you provide here will be for contact purposes only.

What is your name?

What is a good email to reach you after you graduate?

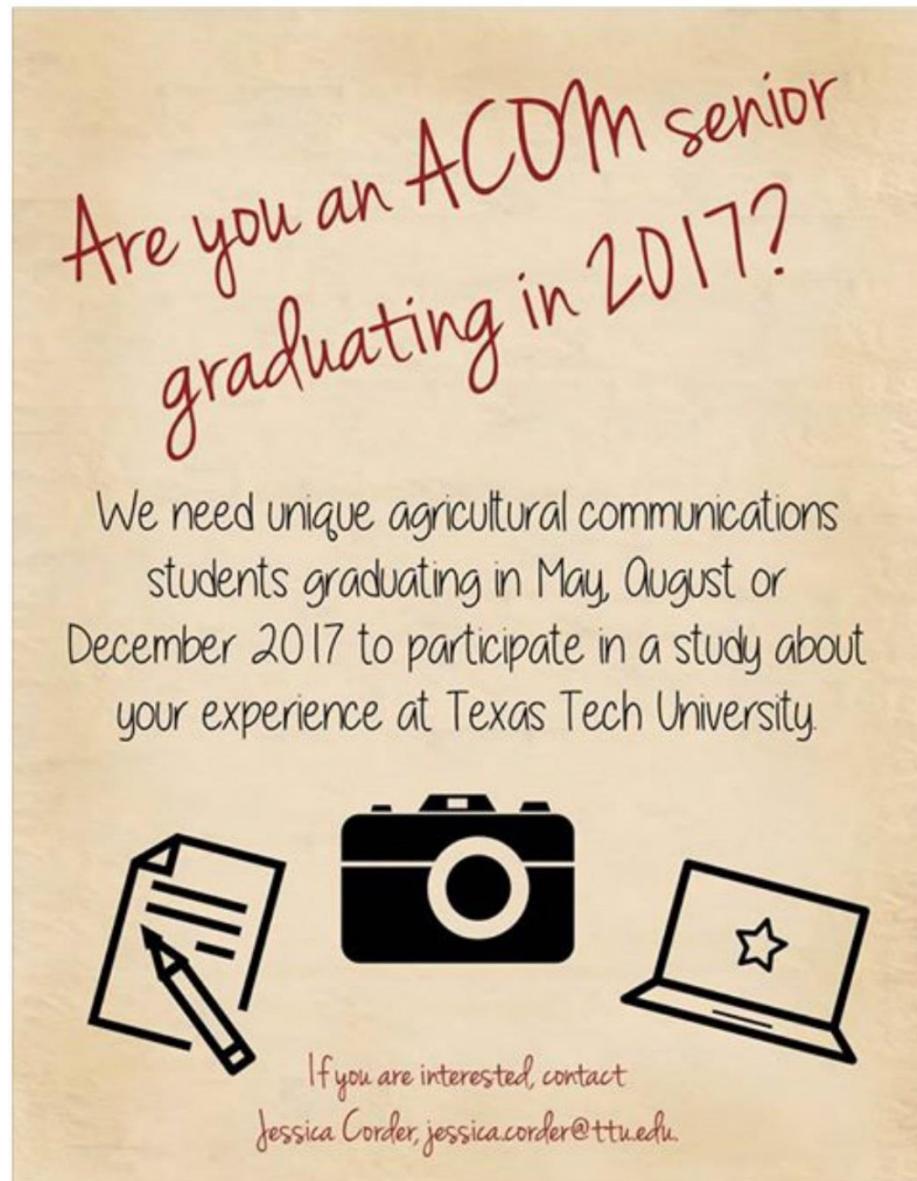
Do you want updates about the program after you graduate?

- Yes
- No

## APPENDIX B

### SOCIAL MEDIA FLIER

Are you graduating in May, August or December 2017? We need you to participate in a study about your experience at Texas Tech! Contact Jessica Corder, [jessica.corder@ttu.edu](mailto:jessica.corder@ttu.edu), if you would like to participate!



## APPENDIX C

### RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR STUDENTS

Hello \_\_\_\_\_ !

My name is Jessica Corder and I am a graduate student here at Texas Tech University. I am working on completing my thesis and am looking for students graduating in May, August or December 2017 to provide information regarding the agricultural communications program in order to create a survey for years to come.

My thesis research is comprised of interviews in order to create this survey for our graduating seniors to complete as a way for us to assess the agricultural communications program. In order to create that exit survey for our department, I am wanting to complete interviews with students and faculty. For the student interviews, I would love to complete in-person interviews in the AGED Building on campus. I would love to have these complete within the next two weeks. Each interview should not take longer than 45 minutes.

If you are a senior graduating in May, August or December 2017, I would love to talk to you about your experience here at Texas Tech. Please let me know if you are willing to assist with this research. Your help will go to benefit our program for many years in the future.

Thank you for your time,

#### **Jessica Corder**

*Graduate Assistant for Training and Development*

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Achiever | Intellection | Learner | Empathy | Connectedness

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STUDENT INTERVIEWS

#### Interview Guide for Students

##### Introduction

You were asked to participate in this study because you are a senior in the Texas Tech University agricultural communications program. Your experience within agricultural communications is a vital experience as you move toward post-graduation activities. I am interested in learning more about your experience through a series of questions. Your identity will not be associated with any of the information provided.

1. What brought you to Texas Tech University?
2. Did anyone influence your decision to attend Texas Tech University? Who?
3. What made you choose agricultural communications? Why?
4. How would you describe your experience in the Texas Tech agricultural communications program?
5. Describe your favorite ACOM class.
6. Describe your favorite ACOM professor.
7. How were the facilities?
8. What organizations or teams were you involved with?
  - a. What drew you to these organizations? Tell me about your involvement with that organization.
9. Did you take a service learning course?
  - a. If so, which class was it and what was your project?
  - b. How do you feel this course helped you grasp the concepts taught in the course?
10. Did you complete any internships within your college experience?
  - a. In what field were the internships focused?
  - b. How did you find out about the internship?
11. Did you participate in any study abroad trips within your college experience?
  - a. Describe your experience.
  - b. What influenced you to go study abroad?
  - c. If you had to do your study abroad experience over again, would you select the same experience? Why?
12. Did you participate in undergraduate research?
  - a. Describe your experience.
  - b. What influenced you to complete research?
  - c. Would you recommend undergraduate research to another? Why?
13. Did you live in any of the residence halls on campus?

- a. If so, which one?
  - b. Was it a learning community? Did you participate in activities there?
14. Do you feel a connection or sense of belonging with the agricultural communications program through faculty/staff and/or the students?
- a. Can you describe the feeling?
  - b. How did this develop?
15. Was there a class you wish you would have taken that we didn't offer?
16. If you had to do this over again, would you select TTU ACOM again? Why?
17. Please rate your satisfaction with the following items where 1 = strongly dissatisfied to 5 = strongly satisfied.
- a. Communication skills
  - b. Technical skills
  - c. Agricultural knowledge
  - d. Employment or higher education opportunities
  - e. Overall satisfaction with the degree program
18. How have your classes prepared for your future?
19. What are your plans post-graduation?
20. What suggestions for improvement do you have for the program?
21. What would motivate you to complete an interview or survey at the end of your college career?
22. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time.

## APPENDIX E

### IRB EXEMPTION



Jan 17, 2017 8:11 AM CST

Erica Irlbeck  
Ag Education and Communication

Re: IRB2016-1056 Understanding the satisfaction of graduating seniors and creating an assessment for future graduates

**Findings:** If the transcriptions are de-identified you do not have to get rid of them after three years. The recordings are what needs to be destroyed after transcription.

**Expiration Date:** Dec 31, 2017

Dear Dr. Erica Irlbeck, ,Jessica Corder:

A Texas Tech University IRB reviewer has approved the proposal referenced above within the expedited category of:

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

The approval is effective from Jan 16, 2017 to Dec 31, 2017. The expiration date must appear on your consent document(s).

Expedited research requires continuing IRB review. You will receive an automated email approximately 30 days before Dec 31, 2017. At this time, should you wish to continue your protocol, a **Renewal Submission** will be necessary. Any change to your protocol requires a **Modification Submission** for review and approval before implementation.

Your study may be selected for a Post-Approval Review (PAR). A

PAR investigator may contact you to observe your data collection procedures, including the consent process. You will be notified if your study has been chosen for a PAR.

Should a subject be harmed or a deviation occur from either the approved protocol or federal regulations (45 CFR 46), please complete an **Incident Submission** form.

When your research is complete and no identifiable data remains, please use a **Closure Submission** to terminate this protocol.

Sincerely,

Kelly C. Cukrowicz, Ph.D.  
Chair, Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board  
Associate Professor, Department of Psychological Sciences  
357 Administration Building. Box 41075  
Lubbock, Texas 79409-1075  
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## APPENDIX F

### GLOSSARY

Active learning: When students ask questions in class, participate in discussion, perform community service and service learning through class initiatives and collaborate with others to complete projects (Kuh, 2003). The operational definition for this study is the act of students learning in the classroom through service learning assignments, hands-on group projects, active discussions, and critical thinking situations.

Agricultural communicators: Representatives of the complete agricultural industry who promote awareness, discuss the purpose, and inform the audience of the industry through the use of multiple communication channels (Kurtzo et al., 2016). The operational definition for this study is a field that focuses on communication about agriculture-related information among agricultural stakeholders and between agricultural and non-agricultural stakeholders.

College experience: Opportunities for a student to develop intellectually, personally and physically, and socially through challenges of new community living environments, financial negotiation, and leadership roles all in a new environment (Midili, 2013). The operational definition for this study is an instance of personally encountering or undergoing an institution of higher learning and trying to understand what they want in the future of their career and from their degree.

Environments: The aspects and activities that students experience while attending an educational program (Astin, 1993). The operational definition for this study is the activities and experiences that a student engages in during an educational program that could influence the outcomes the researchers are examining.

Extracurricular activities: Activities and experiences outside the academic curriculum that can help boost school spirit, fun for participants, and community relations (Armenta, 2011). The operational definition for this study is school sponsored organizations, internships, intramurals, and professional conferences that are outside the regular curriculum or program of courses.

Inputs: The personal characteristics that influence a student's decisions to attend a college or a program (Astin, 1993). The operational definition for this study is personal influences and factors that bring a student to the college/university and the program in which the student attends.

Internship: An experience that allows a student the opportunity to apply theory and techniques with practical and close supervision and guidance (Merrifield, 1959). The operational definition for this study is any official or formal hands-on program to provide practical experience for beginners in an occupation or profession of a selected field outside of the classroom for a week or longer.

Outcomes: The attributes of a college experience that can impact the college experience and the college program (Astin, 1993). The operational definition for this study is the knowledge, skills, and attitudes a student has when leaving the university or program that could impact/influence overall student satisfaction.

Sense of belonging: Occurs when a person experiences being valued, needed or important with respect to other people and groups as well as experiencing a fit with other people and groups (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992). The operational definition for this study is the idea and feeling of being wanted and important within an environment or group.

Study abroad: When a student separates from their home culture to a new culture then returns to the student's home culture bringing the values and insights of the experience abroad (Calderwood, 2011). The operational definition for this study is an educational trip that is outside of the country for two weeks or longer.

Undergraduate research: A process to answer an inquiry or question seeking original intellect performed by an undergraduate student (Council of Undergraduate Research, 2016). The operational definition for this study is when an undergraduate student works with faculty members and/or graduate students to complete a research paper or poster.

## APPENDIX G

### STUDENT CONSENT FORM

#### **Understanding the satisfaction of graduating seniors and creating an assessment for future graduates Consent Form**

Please share your thoughts in our research project.

##### **What is this project studying?**

The study is called “Understanding the satisfaction of graduating seniors and creating an assessment for future graduates.” This study will help us learn how the Texas Tech University agricultural communications program has prepared you for the future and what the program can do better for the students. What we learn may help develop the program to better prepare students for the career field, and we hope to publish this study widely to make it as beneficial as possible.

##### **What would I do if I participate?**

In this study, you will be asked to share your college experiences. The questions will regard your experiences within Texas Tech University and the agricultural communications program. Some questions will be about the classes, some questions will be about your involvement within the university, and some questions will be about how you decided to attend Texas Tech University and enroll in the agricultural communications program.

##### **How will I benefit from participating?**

The information you provide will help the Texas Tech agricultural communication program understand how they prepare their students for the future and will help benefit the development of new improvements in the future.

##### **Can I quit if I become uncomfortable?**

Yes, absolutely. Your participation is completely voluntary. Dr. Erica Irlbeck and the Institutional Review Board have reviewed the questions and think you can answer them comfortably. You may skip any question you do not feel comfortable answering. You can also stop answering questions at any time. Participating is your choice. However, we do appreciate any help you are able to provide.

##### **How long will participation take?**

We are asking for 45-60 minutes of your time.

##### **How are you protecting privacy?**

Your name will not be linked to any documentation and any use of this material in reports, publications or presentations will never be associated with participants in this study without permission. No one other than the researchers associated with this

project will have access to the raw data. All related documentation will be stored either in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office or on a password protected computer.

**I have some questions about this study. Who can I ask?**

Dr. Erica Irlbeck is the Primary Investigator of this research and can answer any further questions you may have about this study. Her email address is [erica.irlbeck@ttu.edu](mailto:erica.irlbeck@ttu.edu), and her phone number is \_\_\_\_\_. Jessica Corder is the researcher and can be contacted by email, [jessica.corder@ttu.edu](mailto:jessica.corder@ttu.edu), or phone at \_\_\_\_\_.

TTU also has a Board that protects the rights of people who participate in research. You can ask them questions at 806-742-2064. You can also mail your questions to the Human Research Protection Program, Office of the Vice President for Research, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409 or email them to [hrpp@ttu.edu](mailto:hrpp@ttu.edu).

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Signature

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Date

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Printed Name

This consent form is not valid after December 31, 2017.