

FACTORS INFLUENCING GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS' COLLEGE DECISIONS

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Abstract

The agricultural industry as a whole and educators in particular, face the challenge of attracting qualified candidates to pursue careers in agriculture. Gifted and talented students have the skills and knowledge to meet the employment needs of the industry. The purpose of this study was to determine the demographic makeup of the 2005 Virginia Governor's School for Agriculture (VGSA), the factors that influence the students' decision to pursue post-secondary education, and the factors that influence the students' choice of post-secondary institution. The findings showed that the 2005 VGSA students (N = 93) were primarily female (67%) and White (74%). The factors (n = 84) with the highest influence on the students' decision to pursue post-secondary education were their career goals, learning opportunities, self-motivation, earning potential, and their mothers. Factors most strongly influencing the students' choice of post-secondary institution were desired field of study, career goals, campus environment/atmosphere, the institution's reputation, and campus location.

Introduction

The agricultural industry is much different than it was 50 or even 20 years ago. Advances in science and technology have made production more efficient, requiring fewer workers. Nevertheless, a steady supply of well-trained and highly-educated professionals will be needed to meet the complex demands of modern American agriculture (Betts & Newcomb, 1986; Edwards, Leising, & Parr, 2002). Many careers in agriculture require knowledge and skills in science and math (Shelley-Tolbert, Conroy, & Dailey, 2000), offer high salaries, and appear in profitable sectors such as food processing and agricultural finance (National Research Council, 1988). Gifted and talented students potentially have the skills to meet the demands of the agricultural job market.

The agricultural industry is faced with the challenge of recruiting gifted and talented students to pursue higher education, which would in turn lead them to careers in agriculture. As the NRC's (1988) findings on agricultural education pointed out in the late 1980s, "Neither students nor Americans in general have a realistic view of agriculture's scope, career possibilities, or involvement with scientific progress and the use of sophisticated biological, chemical, mechanical, and electronic technologies" (NRC, 1988, p. 22). Researchers predict that approximately 52,000 jobs will be available annually in agriculture between the years 2005 and 2010, with only 49,300 qualified college graduates available to fill them (Goecker, Gilmore, Smith, & Smith, 2005).

Agricultural educators need to understand the process that gifted and talented students use to make important decisions, such as whether and where to pursue post-secondary education. This study sought to determine the factors that influenced these decisions by surveying students who completed the 2005 VGSA.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers have conducted numerous studies on the college decision making process (Espinoza, Bradshaw, & Hausman, 2000). To describe the process, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) created a three-stage model: predisposition, search, and choice. During the predisposition stage, typically from grades seven through nine (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000), students will decide whether or not to continue their formal education after high school (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Several factors influence students at this stage, including individual characteristics, the attitudes of significant others, and educational activities (Espinoza, et al. 2000). Parental traits, such as encouragement, socioeconomic status, and collegiate experiences, also play a prominent role, as do the students' ability, high school academic resources, and access to college information. Students at this time develop career and educational aspirations and may enroll in college-preparatory curricula (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).

In the second stage, search, usually between grades 10 and 12 (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000), students start to consider specific colleges, universities, and vocational schools. Research has shown that students assess location and academic programs when

choosing their institution (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Occupational and educational aspirations, ability, parental encouragement, family socioeconomic status, and high school academic resources also influence students during the search stage (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). The outcome of this stage results in the students developing a narrowed list of prospective institutions with information on each (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).

Choice, the final stage, begins when students submit applications to institutions, usually during grades 11 and 12. Factors that influence a student's final decision include the institutions' academic reputations, costs, and locations (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Parental encouragement and socioeconomic status continue to influence the students' decisions, along with occupational and educational aspirations and ability (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Students are aware of college expenses, financial aid, institutional attributes, and admission standards (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). This stage concludes with a commitment marked by pre-registration, attendance, and financial aid application for the desired institution (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).

Parents have been found to have the most influence on educational and career decisions (Esters & Bowen, 2005; Esters, 2005; Broekemier & Seshadri, 1999; Fisher & Griggs, 1995; Houser & Yoder, 1992; Kotrlik & Harrison, 1989). Specifically, alumni from urban secondary agricultural-education programs who went on to complete higher education indicated in a survey by Esters (2005) that parents and/or guardians were the strongest influence on their decision to pursue post-secondary education. Furthermore, mothers had more influence than fathers (Esters, 2005). Broekemier and Seshadri (1999) also found that parents, followed by high school friends, had the most influence on students' college choices.

Specifically regarding gifted and talented students, Houser and Yoder (1992) found that summer enrichment programs, parents, representatives of a profession, and high school teachers had the strongest influence in determining college major, and students weigh personal interests, happiness, abilities and skills, and career interests most heavily. (Houser & Yoder, 1992). Houser and Yoder (1992) used a population similar to this study: gifted and talented students attending a summer enrichment program for agriculture. Cannon (2005) found that gifted and talented students' choices of college, field of study, and career were influenced by the summer enrichment program for agriculture in which they participated. Galotti and Mark (1994) argued that high-ability students structure the decision-making process in a more complex and thorough way than other students. Note that Galotti and Mack were referring to high-ability students, not the gifted and talented. Galotti and Mack (1994) used academic achievement in characterizing students as high-ability. Gifted and talented students are defined as "those identified by professional and qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance" (Marland, 1972, p. 2). Academic ability is not the only characteristic used to determine if a child is gifted or talented (Cannon, 2005).

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that influenced the college

choice of gifted and talented students in the late search stage or early choice stage of the decision-making process. This study was guided by research conducted by Esters (2005) and Esters and Bowen (2005). Those studies attempted to determine the factors which influenced college and career choices by urban agricultural education students. Comparisons were made by the researchers based on gender (Esters, 2005; Esters & Bowen, 2005). Specific objectives for this study were to determine:

1. The demographic profile of the gifted and talented students in this study;
2. The factors that influence students' decision to pursue post-secondary education with a comparison of those factors by gender and ethnicity; and
3. The factors that influence students' choice of post-secondary institution with a comparison of those factors by gender and ethnicity.

Methods and Procedures

A review of relevant literature from related studies (Esters, 2005; Esters & Bowen, 2005; Hodges & Barbuto, 2002; Houser & Yoder, 1992) was conducted before developing the instrument, and a panel of students and faculty of the Virginia Tech Department of Agricultural and Extension Education reviewed the instrument during its development. The students who completed the 2005 VGSA, a summer residential program for gifted and talented students from Virginia hosted by the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, constituted the population (N = 93) for this study.

The researchers used the 94 students who began the VGSA as a focus group to develop the final instrument. During the first week of the VGSA, an email was sent to all students, asking them to identify their immediate plans upon graduation from high school. Sixty-seven students (71%) responded, with 62 indicating that they planned to attend college. Subsequently, the researchers sent an email to those who had indicated that they would attend college and asked them to identify the factors that influenced their decision to attend college and their selection of a specific college or university. Table 1 displays the 23 factors students claimed influenced their decision to attend college. Table 2 displays the 32 factors students identified that influenced their choice of institution of higher learning.

Table 1

Student Responses of Factors that Influence the Decision to Attend College

Factor	# of Responses	Factor	# of Responses
Parents	14	HS Accomplishments	2
Career Goals	10	Love of Learning	2
Earning Potential	6	Peers	2
Self-Motivation	5	Entrance Requirements	1
Desire for Higher Ed	3	Father	1
Learning Opportunities	3	Friends	1
Life Opportunities	3	Guidance Counselors	1
Teachers	3	Desire for New Experience	1
Family	2	Peer Pressure	1
Field of Study	2	Desire for Recognition	1
Finances	2	Siblings	1

Table 2

Student Responses of Factors that Influence Choice of Higher Education Institution

Factor	# of Responses	Factor	# of Responses
Field of Study	18	Facilities	2
Environment/Atmosphere	11	Guidance Counselors	2
Location	11	Athletic Team	2
Relatives	8	University Ranking	1
Campus Visit	7	Summer Programs	1
Friends	6	Society	1
College Reputation	6	College Resources	1
Parents	6	Graduate Studies	1
Finances	5	College Fairs	1
Career Goals	3	School Website	1
Entrance Requirements	3	Boyfriend	1
Teachers	3	Books	1
Siblings	3	Internet Sites	1
University Faculty	3	Food	1
Peers	2	Size	1

The responses to the second email were used to develop the final instrument, which consisted of two parts. The first asked students to rate the influence each factor had on their decision to pursue higher education on a Likert-type scale. The 23 factors identified by the students were narrowed to 15 for the instrument. A five-point Likert-type scale was used, with one being no influence and five being very high influence. A Cronbach's Alpha of .83 was established for this portion of the instrument. The second part asked the students to rate the influence each factor had on their choice of institution on a Likert-type scale. The 33 factors identified by the students were narrowed to 23 for the instrument. A five-point Likert-type scale was used, with one being no influence and five being very high influence. A Cronbach's Alpha of .92 was established for this part of

the instrument. The instrument was given to 93 students during the final week of the VGSA (Note: one student left the program before the final week). Eighty-four students (90%) completed and returned the instrument. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 13.0 Student Version for Windows) was used to code and analyze data. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were used for data analysis.

Findings

Research Objective One: The demographic profile of the gifted and talented students in this study.

The researchers used data provided by the Virginia Department of Education to analyze the demographics of the population. Sixty-two females (67%) and 31 males (33%) completed the program, 69 (74%) being White and 24 (26%) Non-White. (Asian and Black students constituted the Non-Whites.). Of the students who completed the instrument, 54 were females (64%) and 30 were males (36%); 62 (74%) White and 22 (26%) Non-White.

Research Objective Two: The factors that influence students' decision to pursue post-secondary education.

Table 3 shows data on the influence of different factors on the choice to pursue post-secondary education. The students indicated that career goals had the strongest influence ($M = 4.64$). Other factors with high influence were learning opportunities ($M = 4.58$), self-motivation ($M = 4.54$), earnings potential ($M = 4.45$), mothers ($M = 4.35$), field of study ($M = 4.24$), fathers ($M = 4.24$), and recognition ($M = 4.04$). Mothers received a higher mean score than fathers, and other relatives ($M = 3.22$) had a slightly higher score than siblings ($M = 3.19$). As for educational professionals, teachers ($M = 3.90$) scored higher than guidance counselors ($M = 3.29$). It is also interesting to note that friends ($M = 3.65$) received a higher score than siblings, other relatives, and guidance counselors.

When the data were analyzed by gender, career goals, earning potential, self-motivation, and learning opportunities were the top four factors for both males and females. Both male and female students rated mothers ($M = 4.40$ for males and $M = 4.31$ for females) as having a slightly higher influence than fathers ($M = 4.37$ for males and $M = 4.17$). With the exception of learning opportunities and friends, male students had higher mean scores for all factors that influenced the decision to attend a post-secondary institution.

Table 3

Factors Influencing Student Decision to Attend Post-Secondary Education by Gender

Factors	Overall n=84			Males n=30			Females n=54		
	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Career Goals	1	4.64	0.69	1	4.70	0.79	2	4.61	0.63
Learning Opportunities	2	4.58	0.70	4	4.40	0.89	1	4.68	0.55
Self-Motivation	3	4.54	0.74	3	4.57	0.63	3	4.52	0.79
Earning Potential	4	4.45	0.86	2	4.63	0.89	4	4.35	0.83
Mother	5	4.35	1.00	4	4.40	0.97	5	4.31	1.02
Father	6	4.24	1.07	7	4.37	1.00	6	4.17	1.11
Field of Study	6	4.24	0.82	4	4.40	0.67	7	4.15	0.89
Recognition	8	4.04	1.11	8	4.30	1.06	8	3.89	1.13
Teachers	9	3.90	0.93	9	4.10	0.99	9	3.80	0.88
High School Accomplishments	10	3.87	1.21	9	4.10	1.09	10	3.74	1.23
Finances	11	3.69	1.30	11	3.87	1.31	12	3.59	1.30
Friends	12	3.65	1.28	13	3.52	1.33	11	3.72	1.23
Guidance Counselors	13	3.29	1.34	12	3.57	1.48	13	3.13	1.24
Relatives	14	3.22	1.52	14	3.38	1.61	13	3.13	1.48
Siblings	15	3.19	1.64	15	3.28	1.67	13	3.13	1.63

Note. Scale: 1=No Influence, 2=Very Low, 3=Low, 4=High, and 5=Very High.

White students and Non-White students both ranked career goals as the factor with the most influence, as shown in Table 4, which presents data by race/ethnicity. White students ranked learning opportunities and earning potential second ($M = 4.59$), self-motivation fourth ($M = 4.55$), and mothers fifth ($M = 4.26$). Non-Whites ranked mothers second ($M = 4.59$), learning opportunities third ($M = 4.55$), self-motivation fourth ($M = 4.50$), and earning potential fifth ($M = 4.45$). Whites ($M = 3.72$) ranked friends higher than did Non-Whites ($M = 3.45$), whereas Non-Whites ($M = 3.59$) rated relatives higher than Whites ($M = 3.08$).

Table 4
Factors Influencing VGSA Student Decisions to Attend Post-Secondary Education by Race/Ethnicity

Factors	Overall n=84			White n=62			Non-White n=22		
	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Career Goals	1	4.64	0.69	1	4.65	0.75	1	4.64	0.49
Learning Opportunities	2	4.58	0.70	2	4.59	0.69	3	4.55	0.74
Self Motivation	3	4.54	0.74	4	4.55	0.76	4	4.50	0.67
Earning Potential	4	4.45	0.86	2	4.59	0.69	5	4.45	0.67
Mother	5	4.35	1.00	5	4.26	1.02	2	4.59	0.91
Father	6	4.24	1.07	7	4.19	1.02	6	4.36	1.22
Field of Study	6	4.24	0.82	6	4.24	0.82	8	4.23	0.83
Recognition	8	4.04	1.11	8	3.95	1.08	7	4.27	1.20
Teachers	9	3.90	0.93	10	3.82	0.97	9	4.14	0.77
High School									
Accomplishments	10	3.87	1.21	9	3.89	1.23	11	3.82	1.18
Financial	11	3.69	1.30	12	3.54	1.26	10	4.09	1.34
Friends	12	3.65	1.28	11	3.72	1.28	13	3.45	1.30
Guidance									
Counselors	13	3.29	1.34	13	3.27	1.30	15	3.32	1.49
Relatives	14	3.22	1.52	15	3.08	1.55	12	3.59	1.40
Siblings	15	3.19	1.64	14	3.13	1.61	14	3.33	1.74

Note. Scale: 1=No Influence, 2=Very Low, 3=Low, 4=High, and 5=Very High.

Research Objective Three: The factors that influence students' choice of post-secondary institution.

Data on factors influencing the VGSA students' choice of post-secondary institution by gender are displayed in Table 5. Field of study ranked highest overall ($M = 4.56$), for males ($M = 4.48$), and for females ($M = 4.61$). Career goals was second overall ($M = 4.49$), and for males ($M = 4.45$) and females ($M = 4.52$). Campus environment/atmosphere ($M = 4.44$), the institution's reputation ($M = 4.41$), and location ($M = 4.32$) rounded out the top five. It should be noted that parents were in the middle of the pack, with male students rating fathers ($M = 3.79$) slightly higher than mothers ($M = 3.76$); and female students rating mothers ($M = 3.56$) slightly higher than fathers ($M = 3.46$). Significant others ($M = 2.46$) received the lowest score.

Table 5

Factors Influencing VGSA Students' Choice of Institution of Higher Learning by Gender

Factors	Overall n=84			Male n=30			Female n=54		
	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Field of Study	1	4.56	0.67	1	4.48	0.74	1	4.61	0.63
Career Goals	2	4.49	0.68	2	4.45	0.74	2	4.52	0.65
Campus Environment/Atmosphere	3	4.44	0.67	3	4.36	0.73	3	4.49	0.64
Institution's Reputation	4	4.41	0.69	4	4.28	0.75	3	4.49	0.64
Location	5	4.32	0.70	6	4.14	0.58	5	4.42	0.75
Campus Visit	6	4.19	0.81	5	4.21	0.72	6	4.17	0.81
University Facilities	7	4.01	0.92	7	4.11	0.83	8	3.96	0.97
Entrance Requirements	8	4.00	0.89	8	3.97	0.94	7	4.02	0.87
Finances	9	3.85	1.21	13	3.72	1.25	9	3.92	1.20
HS Teachers	10	3.71	1.12	9	3.93	1.03	11	3.60	1.16
University Faculty	11	3.70	1.16	14	3.64	1.25	10	3.73	1.12
Graduate Programs	12	3.64	1.25	10	3.83	1.17	13	3.53	1.29
Mother	13	3.63	1.29	12	3.76	1.21	12	3.56	1.33
Father	14	3.58	1.31	11	3.79	1.26	15	3.46	1.34
Summer Programs	15	3.50	1.26	15	3.46	1.43	14	3.52	1.18
Friends/Peers	16	3.35	1.18	16	3.24	1.06	16	3.41	1.25
Websites	17	2.98	1.34	17	3.14	1.43	17	2.88	1.29
Other Relatives	18	2.90	1.51	18	3.10	1.50	20	2.78	1.53
Siblings	19	2.88	1.60	19	3.00	1.56	19	2.82	1.64
Guidance Counselors	20	2.84	1.32	19	3.00	1.41	22	2.75	1.28
Athletic Teams	21	2.83	1.36	21	2.93	1.31	21	2.76	1.39
University Marketing	21	2.81	1.36	22	2.76	1.41	18	2.85	1.35
Significant Other	22	2.46	1.43	23	2.55	1.45	23	2.40	1.43

Note. Scale: 1=No Influence, 2=Very Low, 3=Low, 4=High, and 5=Very High.

Table 6 contains data concerning the factors influencing the VGSA students' choice of post-secondary education by race/ethnicity. Field of study had the most influence on both White ($M = 4.53$) and Non-White students ($M = 4.64$). Career goals ranked second for White ($M = 4.49$) and Non-White students ($M = 4.50$). Campus environment/atmosphere ($M = 4.46$), institutional reputation ($M = 4.41$), and location ($M = 4.36$) were listed third, fourth, and fifth respectively by White students. Non-White students ranked campus environment/atmosphere and institutional reputation ($M = 4.41$) third and entrance requirements ($M = 4.27$) fifth. It is interesting to note that Non-White students rated entrance requirements, father, and mother higher than did White students.

Table 6
Factors Influencing VGSA Student Choice of Institution of Higher Learning by Race/Ethnicity

Factors	Overall n=84			White n=62			Non-White n=22		
	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Field of Study	1	4.56	0.67	1	4.53	0.68	1	4.64	0.66
Career Goals	2	4.49	0.68	2	4.49	0.68	2	4.50	0.67
Campus									
Environment/Atmosphere	3	4.44	0.67	3	4.46	0.71	3	4.41	0.59
Institution's Reputation	4	4.41	0.69	4	4.41	0.68	3	4.41	0.73
Location	5	4.32	0.70	5	4.36	0.69	6	4.22	0.75
Campus Visit	6	4.19	0.81	6	4.19	0.84	7	4.18	0.73
University Facilities	7	4.01	0.92	7	4.07	0.90	11	3.86	0.99
Entrance Requirements	8	4.00	0.89	8	3.90	0.94	5	4.27	0.70
Financial	9	3.85	1.21	9	3.78	1.14	9	4.05	1.40
Teachers	10	3.71	1.12	11	3.68	1.18	12	3.82	0.96
HS University Faculty	11	3.70	1.16	10	3.69	1.25	13	3.73	0.94
Graduate Programs	12	3.64	1.25	12	3.64	1.22	14	3.64	1.33
Mother	13	3.63	1.29	14	3.42	1.33	7	4.18	1.01
Father	14	3.58	1.31	15	3.41	1.31	9	4.05	1.21
Summer Programs	15	3.50	1.26	13	3.59	1.26	16	3.27	1.28
Friends/Peers	16	3.35	1.18	16	3.29	1.15	15	3.50	1.26
Websites	17	2.98	1.34	19	2.88	1.31	18	3.22	1.41
Other Relatives	18	2.90	1.51	22	2.74	1.51	17	3.32	1.49
Siblings	19	2.88	1.60	19	2.88	1.60	20	2.90	1.64
Guidance Counselors	20	2.84	1.32	18	2.89	1.32	21	2.68	1.36
Athletic Teams	21	2.83	1.36	17	2.91	1.35	22	2.59	1.37
University Marketing	21	2.81	1.36	21	2.78	1.37	19	2.91	1.38
Significant Other	23	2.46	1.43	23	2.46	1.44	23	2.45	1.44

Note. Scale: 1=No Influence, 2=Very Low, 3=Low, 4=High, and 5=Very High.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on the findings of this study and apply only to the population of the study. That population was the students who completed the 2005 VGSA, and the population of this study is unlike those cited from previous research. The majority of the students who attended the 2005 VGSA were White females. This supports findings from previous studies of the VGSA (Cannon, 2005; Duncan & Broyles, 2004).

The students who comprised the population of this study were entering either the 11th or 12th grade of high school in the succeeding school year. It can be inferred from previous research that the population of this study had completed the predisposition phase of the college selection process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).

It can be inferred, then, that some were in the search stage, while others were in the choice phase (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Career goals, learning opportunities, self-motivation, and earning potential had the strongest influence on their decisions to seek post-secondary education. This does not support other findings that parents, and in particular mothers, had the most influence on that choice (Esters & Bowen, 2005; Esters, 2005; Broekemier & Seshadri, 1999; Fisher & Griggs, 1995; Houser & Yoder, 1992; Kotlik & Harrison, 1989). However, the findings show that parents do strongly affect the decision-making process. It must be noted that the population of this study was unlike the populations cited in the guiding studies.

The students indicated that the most important factors in selecting a college or university were chosen field of study, career goals, campus environment/atmosphere, and campus location. These findings partially support Houser and Yoder (1992), who found that career interests were important in the selection of a college or university. Other factors, such as parents and summer programs, which Houser and Yoder (1992) argued had strong influence, were not as powerful with this population.

Implications/Discussion

The students of the 2005 VGSA indicated that career goals and future educational opportunities had the most influence on their decisions to attend a post-secondary school. Realizing that agricultural education prepares students for careers in the industry, and given the importance of career-related factors for gifted and talented students, school systems could institute a curriculum that exposes those students to diverse agricultural careers. This supports Esters and Brown's conclusions (2005) from their study of former urban agricultural-education students. Studies forecast a shortage of qualified college graduates to fill positions in the industry through the year 2010 (Goecker, Gilmore, Smith, & Smith, 2005), and those well paying, challenging jobs await gifted and talented students.

Many gifted and talented students do not have the opportunity to enroll in agricultural education. Agricultural educators and the industry could continue to improve the curriculum so that more schools can provide courses in agriculture. Gifted and talented students should have more opportunities, particularly during the predisposition stage, to expose them to agricultural careers. One possibility would be to offer an agricultural program to gifted and talented students earlier in their academic careers.

Although parents did not influence students as much as career-related factors did, they remain instrumental in their children's college decisions. It is important that agricultural educators provide parents with information about the many careers in the industry. Teachers have the opportunity to influence students' decisions by familiarizing them with career opportunities in the agricultural industry.

The findings also showed the importance of career goals and desired field of study in the choice of college or university. Agricultural educators and knowledgeable guidance counselors can provide information on universities with agricultural programs

that help gifted and talented students meet their career goals. It is also important for colleges of agriculture to market fields of study that help these students reach their goals. Colleges and universities can also tout their campus environments, reputations, and locations to gifted and talented students.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings and conclusions of this study:

1. Gifted and talented students should be exposed to the diverse careers in the agricultural industry during the predisposition stage of the college choice process;
2. Opportunities should be extended to gifted and talented students who do not attend the VGSA or have the chance to enroll in agricultural education programs.

The following are recommendations for further research:

1. Research should be conducted on other Governor's Schools for Agriculture or similar schools to compare the results from the 2005 VGSA;
2. Research should be conducted on other gifted and talented programs to determine whether generalizations exist for the college-decision-making process;
3. Follow-up research should be conducted on VGSA students to discover which institutions and fields of study the students pursue; and
4. Further research should be conducted to determine the impact of the VGSA on the college-decision-making process;

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