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Introduction

The increased migration of youth from rural areas for educational and economic reasons has been present in the past, but this loss of youth from rural areas in the latter quarter of the 20th century and first decade of the 21st century “could spell the end of small-town America” (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, p. 2).

By focusing on degrees in demand in the rural job market and cultivating opportunities for returning, many rural youth are able to return to their rural communities (von Reichert, Cromartie, & Arthun 2011).

This study examined the extent to which rural or non-rural origin was related to choice of major and residence after graduation.

Methods

This study described relationships between home community (rural or non-rural), major, and the community (rural or non-rural) where graduates lived 6-7 years after graduation for 2007 and 2008 graduates from the University of Arkansas Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences.

Institutional data that included parental address, graduates’ current address, and choice of major for 2007 and 2008 graduates was provided by the University of Arkansas Alumni Association.

Chi square goodness-of-fit tests were used to determine significant differences ($p < .05$) between each major and the college as a whole.

Results

Rural Graduates and Movement of Rural and Non-rural Graduates (N = 650) to Rural Areas by Major Compared to the College Overall

	Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology (n = 37)	Agricultural Business (n = 104)	Animal Science (n = 70)	Apparel Studies (n = 126)	Crop and Pest Management (n = 14)	Environmental, Soil and Water Science (n = 41)
Graduates from rural areas	56.8%	58.7%	60.0%	45.2%	85.7%**	58.5%
Rural graduates to rural areas	71.4%	60.7%	69.0%	66.7%	66.7%	37.5%*
Non-rural graduates to rural areas	25.0%	18.6%	21.4%	13.0%	0.0%	11.8%

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

	Food Science (n = 31)	Food, Human Nutrition and Hospitality (n = 105)	Human Environmental Sciences (n = 73)	Horticulture, Landscape and Turf Sciences (n = 26)	Poultry Science (n = 23)	College (n = 650)
Graduates from rural areas	48.4%	49.5%***	34.3%***	76.9%*	78.3%*	53.4%
Rural graduates to rural areas	20.0%**	48.1%	56.0%	85.0%*	83.3%*	60.5%
Non-rural graduates to rural areas	6.3%	5.7%	4.2%	0.0%	40.0%	12.2%

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Discussion

Rural Arkansas youth who desire to return to rural areas after graduating from the Bumpers College should consider majoring in horticulture, landscape and turf sciences or poultry science.

Human environmental sciences attracted a significantly higher percentage of students from non-rural areas compared to the college average.

Rural students who plan on majoring in environmental, soil and water science or food science should be prepared to live in non-rural areas after graduation.

Future research should determine how important area of residence after graduation is to graduates and if it is a factor in choice of major.

References

- Carr, P. J., & Kefalas, M. J. (2009). *Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What It Means for America*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.
- von Reichert, C., Cromartie, J. B., & Arthun, R. O. (2011). Returning home and making a living: Employment strategies of returning migrants to rural U.S. communities. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 6(2), 35-52.