

Research Briefs

Professional Improvement Summary of Survey Findings

A questionnaire was mailed to agricultural communication major graduates from the University of Illinois.

The objectives of the study were to determine what professional improvement activities, experiences or courses

- (a) have been taken,
- (b) are known but not yet taken,
- (c) are considered that should be available,

by professional agricultural communicators.

Fifty questionnaires were returned, of which 36 were completed in sufficient detail to include in the analysis. Twelve of the respondents worked with publications, seven in advertising and sales, three in administration, three in public relations, two in extension, two self-employed, two copywriters, and five in other fields.

The main professional activities experienced were those organized by professional organizations such as AAEA and NAMA.

Inservice-training activities and university subjects were each taken by one third of the sample.

Five were completing graduate degrees at universities.

Time and money were named as the main limitations to professional development. Lack of information also restricted activities and 3 nominated their employer as a restriction to professional development experiences.

The priority given to professional development activities by the agricultural communicators influences their answer here. It could be argued that those with high motivation for professional development more readily allocate their own resources of time and money for this activity.

1. Professional organizations have a major role in providing professional development opportunities to agricultural communicators. This role is known and utilized by most professionals in the field. Employers of agricultural communicators should support the involvement of their staff in these activities.

2. Universities, with the scope and diversity of their courses, offer many subjects which can contribute to the professional development of agricultural communicators. Some non-credit short courses were also available. Graduate courses, however, were not always available to satisfy the expressed needs of agricultural communicators. A graduate course specifically identified in agricultural communications at the University of Illinois could be justified especially if media firms with rural interests supported such a course.

3. In-service training sessions also contribute to the professional development of agricultural communicators. However, the mixed rating given to these sessions by the recipients suggests there is need for greater variety and depth in these sessions. Additional outside resources should also be used.

4. The value of experiential learning in a different environment should be encouraged by employers rather than discouraged. This could be in the form of working in another organization, another system (possibly overseas), or any other sabbatical-type experience which would broaden and develop the perception of the agricultural communicator.

5. This study highlighted the need for a variety of skills. The two most critical skills needed are clearly:

- (a) penetrative questioning, and
- (b) concise writing.

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