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An Exploration of Graduate Student Satisfaction with Advising in Departments of Agricultural Education, Leadership, Communications, and Extension

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Graduate students depend on their advisors to assist them in accomplishing their career goals and ambitions. According to the mentoring–empowered model, as proposed by Selke and Wong (1993), the roles that an advisor plays are: teacher, encourager, role model, counselor, and sponsor–socializer. The purpose of this study was to determine the satisfaction of graduate students in a department of agricultural education, leadership, communications, and extension with their advisors in terms of communication, trust, openness, acceptance, and growth as illustrated in Selke and Wong (1993). The following research objectives were derived from the mentoring constructs found in the mentoring–empowered model (Selke & Wong, 1993). Overall agricultural education graduate students (N = 274) are satisfied with their advisor. Agricultural education graduate advisors are knowledgeable in the areas of: (a) research; (b) university and departmental policies and procedures; (c) funding opportunities; and 4) available coursework. Agricultural education advisors are student–oriented and care about their advisees' well–being, both academically and personally.

Keywords: graduate students; graduate advisors; relationships; satisfaction

Introduction

"Graduate students have many important roles in our colleges/universities…" (Dodson, Fernyhough, & Holman, 2006, p. 37) and according to a study done by the National Research Council (2010), "the majority of [graduate] students in five fields surveyed for the report – chemical engineering, physics, neuroscience, economics, and English – were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with the quality of their [graduate] program" (p. 4). When identifying an advisor for graduate school, the graduate student should consider various factors associated with becoming an advisee in a university's department of agricultural leadership, education, communications, and extension. According to Barrick, Clark, and Blaschek (2006), "the interaction between graduate students and their faculty mentors is central to the success of research programs and the graduate students" (p. 6). After a thorough review of the literature, researchers in the current study determined the issues for both graduate students and advisors to consider are: communication, understanding the mentoring role, the relationship between the graduate student and advisor, and graduate students understanding their role as a graduate student. Because it was not acknowledged to what degree graduate students in departments of agricultural education, leadership, communications, and extension in the United States were satisfied with the advising that they obtained during the course of completing their graduate degree programs, it was both appropriate and vital to undertake the study reported herein.

Communication

Communication between an advisor and the advisee is often limited and at times, can become a major problem for both the advisor and the advisee. In a 1998 study by Harvard University faculty (Powell, 1998), it was found that lack of communication was a recurring theme among graduate students and advisors who participated in a roundtable discussion examining relationships and communication between the two. In the same study, many of the graduate students did not know the director of graduate studies in their department. Furthermore, many faculty members were unaware of important developments among the graduate student community, such as a suicide of a graduate student the year before (Powell, 1998). While instances such as this are rare, it demonstrates the lack of communication that can potentially exist among faculty and graduate students in a particular graduate program.

Besides unawareness of ones' personal life (suicide and other major life changing catastrophes) there are many other potential problems that can stem from lack of communication. In addition, friction between graduate students and advisors is one example of many potential problems that can stem from lack of communication (Repak, n.d.). In most graduate programs, there is little or no emphasis placed on open communication between faculty and graduate students by administration. "Graduate students have needs in their development, but some cannot easily communicate those needs" (Barrick et al., 2006, p. 6). Furthermore, most students tend to avoid breaking down communication barriers between themselves and graduate advisors when relationships turn sour or are not as open as they originally may have been (Repak, n.d.).

Understanding the Mentoring Role

The strength of the advisor/advisee relationship has long been a determining factor in the success of students enrolled in graduate school. As in most successful relationships, both parties have obligations and responsibilities to fulfill, in an effort to determine success on both ends of the affiliation. Bell (2000), as cited in Wrench and Punyanunt (2004), defined a mentor as "someone who helps someone else learn something that he or she would have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all if left alone" (p. 53). Wrench and Punyanunt (2004) describe different roles of the advisor, one of which is helping their students prepare to be an academic professional. This is accomplished by helping their students learn about research, offering the student opportunities to collaborate on research and grant ideas, serving as a guide throughout the thesis or dissertation process, allowing for teaching and advising opportunities, determining the class schedule that is most suitable for the student, and allowing for participation or input during faculty meetings and retreats.

Additionally, teaching, ethics, the academic setting, and other crucial aspects of becoming an academic professional are also duties of the graduate advisor (Powell, 1998). In their study, Lovitts and Nelson (2000) concluded that the single most contributing factor to graduate student retention was directly related to the relationship with the faculty advisor. Moreover, a faculty member who is concerned about the well–being of their student is the best person to assess the graduate student's progress and reinforce self–worth. Advisors should make clear their expectations prior to the student's graduate career beginning. Not having said discussion can potentially cause later disappointment from the advisor and advisee (Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, & Hill, 2003).

Zhao, Golde, and McCormick (2005) cited the following characteristics of a good advisor: supportiveness (Long, 1987), high levels of interaction (Gerholm, 1990; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Hartnett, 1976; Weiss, 1981), purposefully assisting the student progress in a timely manner (Heiss, 1970; Lovitts, 2001; Rudd, 1986), providing regular reviews of progress (Harnett, 1976; Heiss, 1970), and treating the student as a junior colleague (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988). Zhao et al. (2005), go on to point out that even with this vast amount of knowledge of certain qualities of a good advisor, there is still a lack of information about "how advisor behaviors are related to satisfaction with the advising relationship" (p. 3).

The Relationship Between Graduate Student and Advisor

The dynamics of the relationship between advisors and advisees is a crucial element for determining the overall success of a graduate program. A positive relationship between the

two often lead to greater motivation that can ultimately lead to better and more successful career decisions. Zhao et al. (2005) stated the impact and success of the advising relationship can last beyond the years of graduate school for the graduate student. For example, the strength of an advisor's letter of recommendation following graduate school can affect future career options for the student. On the other hand, a negative relationship can lead to harsher and quicker decisions that can consequently allow for harmful career choices. According to a study conducted by the National Research Council (2010), "over 60% [of graduate students] in most fields felt they benefited from the program's intellectual environment, but only 40% or less of were satisfied with the program–sponsored social interaction" (p. 4).

According to Althaus (1997); Gorham and Millette (1997); and Scott and Rockwell (1997) little research has been done examining the advisor/advisee relationship. Most of the research that has been done has examined undergraduate student relationships with their advisors, rather than graduate student and graduate advisor relationships. In past research, graduate students have noted that mounting frustration with a graduate program can result in the graduate student to leave the program prematurely (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000).

Graduate Students Understanding Their Own Roles in the Advising Relationship

Schlosseret al. (2003) reported that students who are allowed to choose their advisor are typically more satisfied with their advisor. Further, they stated that allowing students the option of choosing their advisor gives the feeling of empowerment and a feeling of control in their graduate program. Conversely, students who were assigned an advisor are typically less satisfied. Thus, the "…simple procedure of allowing students to choose an advisor may facilitate the development of positive and successful advising relationship" (p. 186). Graduate students not having the option of choosing an advisor prior to beginning their graduate program allows for very little feeling of empowerment. However, being given the choice and opportunity to change advisors during their graduate program can allow for a graduate student to enhance the overall satisfaction level experienced while in their graduate program (Schlosser et al., 2003).

Most researchers recommend that graduate students make efforts to define the expectations from their advisor at the inception of their graduate program. In fact, Repak (n.d.) stated that the graduate student should determine the style and personality of the department in which they are working. Graduate students should be prepared to function with open dialogue and be prepared to communicate in a more informal atmosphere or use more restraint if necessary when getting to know major professors. Depending on the climate of the department, the graduate student can alter his or her communication skills to determine the expectations of the department. Prior to beginning graduate school, the incoming graduate student should spend time learning the culture of the department. In the beginning weeks of the semester, the graduate student should make efforts to determine the methods of which the professors and graduate students intermingle with each other. Lovitts and Nelson (2000) determined that students who do not finish their graduate degree often leave with a sense of personal failure. A Harvard University study (Powell, 1998) found several graduate students felt it was important for their advisors to respect them and create an atmosphere for open communication. Further, many graduate students expressed frustration that the criteria to which they are being evaluated and the guidelines for completing their degree requirements are not made clear to them at any time during their tenure as graduate student.

Conceptual Framework

The mentoring–empowered model (see Figure 1), as proposed by Selke and Wong (1993), served as the conceptual framework for this study. The mentoring–empowered model defines the roles that advisors play. At the center of this model is the principle that advisors should act as nurturers in the advising process. Along the outer edge of the model are five factors necessary to define the roles that advisors play. According to Selke and Wong (), the fives roles that a successful advisor must play are: teacher, encourager, role model, counselor, and sponsor–socializer.

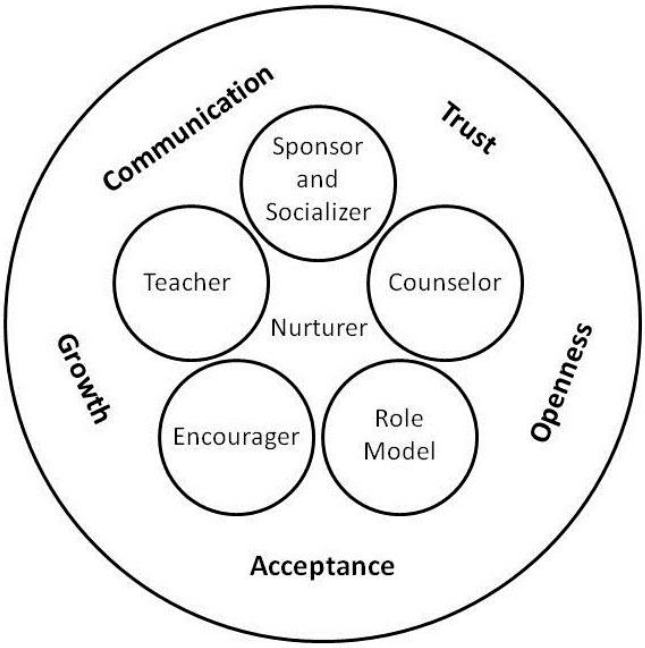

Figure 1. Mentoring–Empowered Model (Selke & Wong, 1993)

The mentoring–empowered model was chosen as the conceptual model for this study as it encompasses various roles and factors that define a successful graduate advisor. According to Selke and Wong (1993), "Academic advisement models have traditionally focused upon the needs of undergraduate students" (p. 2). Due to the characteristics of graduate students, the advisement needs of graduate students are different than those of the undergraduate counterparts. The mentoring–empowered model "…focuses upon the psychological and developmental needs inherent to adult graduate students" (Selke & Wong, 1993, p. 2) and therefore relates closely to the purpose of this study.

Purpose and Objectives

This study addresses the research priority area of Agricultural Education in University and Postsecondary Settings found in the National Research Agenda. Particularly, this study addresses RPA 3: Enhance the effectiveness of agricultural and life sciences faculty (Osborne, 2007). The purpose of this study was to determine the satisfaction of graduate students in a department of agricultural education, leadership, communications, and extension with their advisors in terms of communication, trust, openness, acceptance, and growth as illustrated in Selke and Wong (1993). The following research objectives were derived from the mentoring constructs found in the mentoring–empowered model (Selke & Wong, 1993):

1. Identify the graduate students' satisfaction with advisors in relation to meetings/communication.
2. Describe graduate students' satisfaction of graduate students in regard to their advisor's assistance in the area of degree planning.
3. Describe graduate students' advisors concern for the graduate students' interest.
4. Describe graduate students' advisors' overall knowledge of departmental policies and other issues regarding the success of a graduate program.
5. Describe graduate students' satisfaction with advisor support throughout the graduate school experience.

Methods and Procedures

Graduate program coordinators at four year institutions, which possess graduate degree programs within agricultural education (teacher education, communications, extension, and/or leadership) were initially contacted in the Fall of 2009 about participating in the study. Due to confidentiality of graduate student contact information, the researchers were required to send all correspondence to the graduate coordinators to be distributed to graduate students. The researchers contacted graduate coordinators up to a maximum of four times, via email, in an attempt to enlist their assistance. Graduate coordinators who did not respond after four email contacts were contacted either by telephone or through face to face communication, in an attempt to enlist their assistance. If contact was not made with the graduate coordinator via telephone or face to face, then the graduate coordinator's institution was removed from the participant list. Graduate coordinators, who agreed to participate, assisted in the distribution of the questionnaire. A web–based questionnaire was sent to graduate coordinators, along with a recruitment letter, to be distributed to agricultural education graduate students enrolled at all of the institutions who agreed to participate. After distributing the questionnaire and recruitment letter, graduate coordinators were asked to report the total number of graduate students, which had been included on their graduate student enrollment list. Graduate coordinators were contacted up to three times reminding them to distribute the questionnaire and to report the total number of graduate students in their program. Institutions, who did not report the total number of graduate students, were removed from the participant list and no further contact was made. Following this process, a total of 26 institutions participated in the study and the questionnaire was sent to 968 graduate students at the masters and doctorate levels.

This study was descriptive in nature. After a thorough review of the literature, a 48 question instrument was developed. The instrument consisted of five constructs: degree planning, student interests, advisor knowledge, support, and communication. Each construct consisted of five to twelve questions with a total number of questions equaling 48. All constructs consisted of Likert type questions: 0 = Not Applicable; 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Agree; and 4 = Strongly Agree, or multiple choice questions. An expert panel familiar with graduate student / graduate advisor relationships reviewed the questionnaire to establish content and face validity. A pilot test was conducted to establish reliability; $\alpha = .96$. The pilot test was distributed to all members of the Graduate Student Council at a southern university. Frequencies and percentages were reported.

Participants were contacted four times following the guidelines of Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009). Each point of contact consisted of an email, containing the link to the web–based questionnaire, being sent to the graduate coordinator at each of the participating institutions. Some of the institutions informed the researcher that they had distributed the questionnaire and others failed to do so. A response rate of 28.3% was achieved. Early and late responders were compared using an independent samples *t*–test to control for non–response error and no significant differences were found (Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001). Multiple attempts were made to solicit response from non–responders per Dillman's Tailored Design Method (Dillman et al., 2009). Due to third party involvement in data collection, the researchers exhausted all possible means to secure responses. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0) and frequencies and percentages were obtained. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe responses to scale items.

Findings and Results

A total of 274 graduate students participated in this study. This group of graduate students consisted of 62.2% females with males comprising 37.8% of the population. Eighty–six percent were white, 3.9 % were Hispanic, 3.1% were African–American, and 2.8% were Asian. Nearly two–thirds (66.5%) of the respondents were between the ages of 22 and 30. Almost half (48.4%) classified themselves as Master of Science students and 19.7 % reported they were Ph.D. seeking students. The remaining 31.9% were enrolled as master of education, master of art, doctor of education or education specialist. A majority (65.7%) described themselves as on–campus students, while 34.3% reported being

distance education students. Similarly, 61.8% were classified as full–time students and 38.2% classified themselves as part–time students.

When reporting the number of graduate credits earned, 33.5% had earned between zero and nine hours, 15.7 % had earned 10–18 hours of graduate credit, 21.7% had completed 19–30 hours of credit, and 29.1% had earned more than 31 graduate credits. A vast majority (94.9%) were affiliated with the college of agriculture at their institution. Nearly a third (29.9%) reported their focus area to be teacher education, followed by 25.2% reporting extension education as their focus. agricultural leadership accounted for 15.7% of the respondents and agricultural communications majors made up 9.8% of those who responded.

The graduate students in the study were also asked to provide demographic information on their advisors. Approximately one–fourth (27.8%) reported having a female advisor, with 72.2% having a male advisor. A large percentage (91.7%) stated their advisor was white, 4% were African American, and 3.2% had a Hispanic advisor. Graduate students were asked to estimate their advisor's age. Thirty – four percent estimated their advisor's age to be between 30–39 years. An additional 28.6% reported their advisor's age to be between the ages of 40 and 49 and 26.6% believed their advisor was between the ages of 50 and 59. Only 7.9% thought their advisor was over 60 years old. The final demographic characteristic reported by graduate students was their advisor's professorial level. Only 21.4% stated their advisor was an assistant professor, 38.1% of the graduate student's advisors were associate professors, and 40.5% of the graduate advisors were at the professor level.

Table 1 shows graduate student satisfaction with their advisors related to meetings. A four–point Likert type scale was used to summarize student responses on their level of agreement (1= Strongly disagree, 4 = Strongly agree) with the corresponding statements. It is noted that over 50% of the participants in this study, agree or strongly agree with each of the statements in this section.

Table 1
Graduate Student Satisfaction of Meetings with Advisors

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Not Applicable	
Satisfaction with meetings	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
My advisor is willing to meet with me before business hours (6am–8am)	14	5.3	16	6.1	71	27.1	57	21.8	104	39.7
My advisor is willing to meet with me after business hours (after 5pm)	11	4.2	8	3.1	88	33.6	88	33.6	67	25.6
My advisor's office door is always open and he/she is willing to have unscheduled meetings with me	7	2.7	10	3.8	93	35.5	129	49.2	23	8.8
My advisor is available when I have questions about research	7	2.7	6	2.3	85	32.4	130	49.6	34	13.0
My advisor is available when I have questions about my degree plan	6	2.3	6	2.3	104	39.7	138	52.7	8	3.1
My advisor is on time for appointments/meetings with me	5	1.9	9	3.4	94	35.9	140	53.4	14	5.3
My advisor informs me when he/she will not be able to attend scheduled meetings with me	3	1.1	7	2.7	89	34.0	134	51.1	29	11.1
My advisor allows me to call them at home with questions	6	2.3	19	7.3	73	27.9	77	29.4	87	33.2

In measuring graduate student satisfaction with the communication they have with their advisors, graduate students reported a wide range of frequencies related to the amount of communication with their advisor. Only five (1.9%) students reported never communicating with their advisor. Thirty–four (13%) said they communicate with their advisor less than once a month. Twenty–eight graduate students (10.7%) stated they communicate with their advisor once a month and 54 students (20.6%) reported they communicate every few weeks with their advisor. Forty–one students (15.6%) said they communicate with their advisor once a week, but the highest percentage, 58 students (22.1%) stated they communicate with their advisor a few times per week. Only 15 students (5.7%) communicate with their advisor daily and 27 graduate students (10.3%) reported they communicate with their advisor several times per day.

Graduate students were also asked how often they have scheduled meetings with their graduate advisor. Twenty students (7.6%) stated, never, while 101 (38.5%) reported meeting less than once a month. Only 35 students (13.4%) said they met with their advisor once a month. Fifty students (19.1%) reported meeting with their advisor every few weeks and 49 graduate students (18.7%) stated that they met with their advisor weekly. Only seven students (2.7%) met with their advisor on a daily basis.

Table 2 contains information about the satisfaction of graduate students in regard to their advisor's assistance in the area of degree planning. The results show that 52.7% of the participants strongly agree and 31.9% agree that they are satisfied with the support that their advisors are providing to them in the area of degree planning. A majority of the graduate students strongly agree (63.7%) or agree (30.8%) that their advisors encourage them to be actively involved in the degree planning process. According to the participants, their advisors recommend courses that will assist them in achieving both professional (strongly agree = 53.1%; agree = 38.5%) and personal goals (strongly agree = 49.1%; agree = 37.7%).

Table 2
Graduate Student Satisfaction with Degree Planning (*N* = 273)

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
Satisfaction with degree planning	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
My advisor clearly defines my degree requirements	2	.7	28	10.3	113	41.4	130	47.6
My advisor recommends courses that may help me achieve my professional goals	1	.4	22	8.1	105	38.5	145	53.1
My advisor recommends courses that may help me achieve my personal goals	3	1.1	33	12.1	103	37.7	134	49.1
My advisor encourages me to assume an active role in planning my academic program	2	.7	13	4.8	84	30.8	174	63.7
Overall, I am satisfied with the support my advisor provides in relation to degree planning	5	1.8	20	7.3	104	31.9	144	52.7

Table 3 contains information that addresses the advisors concern for the graduate students' interest. The data shows that a majority of graduate advisors, within agricultural education, possess a student–oriented attitude (strongly agree = 56.3%; agree = 37.7%) and are willing to converse about academic endeavors (strongly agree = 60.8%; agree = 32.5%) as well as personal problems (strongly agree = 34.3%; agree = 50.7%). A majority of the participants

strongly agree or agree that their advisor cares about their progress in the area of research (strongly agree = 45.5%; agree = 46.3%) and encourage them to be involved in student activities (strongly agree = 24.2%; agree = 45.9%) and join professional organizations (strongly agree = 37.3%; agree = 40.3%).

Table 3
Graduate Student Interests (*N* = 268)

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
Graduate Student Interests	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
My advisor cares about my progress in the area of research	4	1.5	18	6.7	124	46.3	122	45.5
My advisor encourages me to be involved in student activities	13	4.9	66	24.6	123	45.9	66	24.2
My advisor possesses a student–oriented attitude	2	.7	14	5.2	101	37.7	151	56.3
My advisor is easy to talk to about my academic endeavors	3	1.1	15	5.6	87	32.5	163	60.8
My advisor is willing to discuss my personal problems	6	2.2	34	12.7	136	50.7	92	34.3
My advisor provides a caring, open atmosphere	3	1.1	19	7.1	100	37.3	146	54.5
My advisor encourages me to join professional organizations	7	2.6	53	19.8	108	40.3	100	37.3

Table 4 contains information on graduate student advisors' knowledge. Overall, a majority of graduate students either strongly agree (77.4%) or agree (22.3%) that their advisor is knowledgeable in their field of study. A majority of the participants also strongly agree (62.3%) or agree (35.8%) that their advisor is knowledgeable about research skills. According to the results, a majority of participants strongly agree (68.3%) or agree (27.9%) that their advisors are knowledgeable about courses offered within their department.

Table 4
Graduate Student Satisfaction with Advisor Knowledge (*N* = 265)

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
Advisor Knowledge	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
My advisor is knowledgeable in his/her field of study	0	0	1	.4	59	22.3	205	77.4
My advisor is knowledgeable about research skills	0	0	5	1.9	95	35.8	165	62.3
My advisor is knowledgeable about sources of funding available for research	3	1.1	15	5.5	88	33.2	108	40.8
My advisor is knowledgeable about sources of funding available for participation in professional development and travel	3	1.1	18	6.8	100	37.7	92	34.7
My advisor is knowledgeable about courses that are offered within my department	0	0	10	3.8	74	27.9	181	68.3
My advisor is knowledgeable about courses offered outside my department	7	2.6	27	10.2	154	58.1	77	29.1
My advisor is knowledgeable about degree planning	2	.7	9	3.4	112	42.3	142	53.6
My advisor is knowledgeable about university policies and procedures	2	.8	14	5.3	119	44.9	130	49.1
My advisor is knowledgeable about professional organizations	3	1.1	14	5.1	130	49.1	118	44.5

Table 5 addresses the level of advisor support throughout the graduate school experience. A majority of graduate students strongly agree (45.8%) or agree (44.7%) that graduate advisors provide graduate students with the opportunity to improve their knowledge in their focus area. Most graduate advisors provide their graduate students with information about departmental procedures in relation to teaching (strongly agree = 34.4%; agree = 31.7%) and research (strongly agree = 35.9%; agree = 39.7%). A majority (strongly agree = 38.9%; agree = 41.2%) of graduate advisors provide their graduate students with an opportunity to improve their research skills. It is also noted that over 30% of the participants chose not applicable in regard to opportunities to teach undergraduate courses, assistance with securing funds for research, and providing an overview for departmental procedures when it pertains to travel.

Table 5
Graduate Student Satisfaction with Level of Advisor Support (*N* = 262)

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Not Applicable	
Level of Advisor Support	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
My advisor provides me with an overview of the departmental procedures in relation to research	4	1.5	25	9.5	104	39.7	94	35.9	35	13.4
My advisor provides me with an overview of the departmental procedures in relation to travel	4	1.5	29	11.1	87	33.2	57	21.8	85	32.4
My advisor provides me with an overview of the departmental procedures in relation to teaching	6	2.2	28	10.7	83	31.7	90	34.4	55	21.0
My advisor provides me with an opportunity to improve my research skills in my focus area	4	1.5	17	6.5	108	41.2	102	38.9	31	11.8
My advisor provides me with an opportunity to improve my knowledge in my focus area	5	1.9	12	4.6	117	44.7	120	45.8	8	3.1
My advisor provides me with advice on securing a job in my field of study	7	2.7	21	8.0	97	37.0	82	31.3	55	21.0
My advisor provides me with an understanding of my strengths and weaknesses	4	1.5	36	13.7	125	47.7	81	30.9	16	6.1
My advisor provides me with opportunities to make professional contacts within the profession	8	2.9	21	8.0	116	44.3	94	35.9	23	8.8
My advisor provides me with opportunities to conduct scholarly research	4	1.5	19	7.3	98	37.4	106	40.5	35	13.4
My advisor provides me with assistance in securing funds for research	5	1.9	35	12.8	75	28.6	53	20.2	94	35.9
My advisor provides me with opportunities to teach undergraduate courses	7	2.7	29	11.1	56	21.4	81	30.9	89	34.0
My advisor provides me with opportunities to establish career goals	5	1.9	22	8.4	100	38.2	106	40.5	29	11.1

Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications

Many graduate students communicate with their advisor several times per week. Moreover, numerous graduate students have scheduled meetings with their advisor at least once a week. This finding is consistent with the work done by Gerholm (1990), Girves and Wemmerus (1988), Hartnett (1976), and Weiss (1981), where they found high levels of interaction as being a contributing factor to a successful graduate student/advisor relationship. Overall graduate students within agricultural education are satisfied with the support that their advisors provide in the area of degree planning. Graduate advisors in the agricultural education profession are well versed in graduate student degree requirements, clearly define graduate student

degree requirements, and recommend courses that may help graduate students achieve professional and personal goals. Furthermore, agricultural education graduate advisors encourage graduate students to assume an active role in the planning of their own degree plan.

In regard to graduate student interests, agricultural education graduate advisors possess a student–oriented attitude and are open and willing to converse with their graduate students about academic endeavors as well as personal problems. Graduate advisors also encourage students to be involved in both student activities and professional organizations. Graduate advisors within agricultural education are knowledgeable in their field of study and in regard to the policies and procedures both in their department and at the university level. Graduate students perceive their advisors as being knowledgeable in research skills and in the area of funding available to conduct research and travel. Additionally, graduate advisors within agricultural education possess knowledge about courses offered within their department as well as outside of their department. Graduate advisors provide adequate support for graduate students in many important areas, but some graduate students do not feel that securing funds for research and travel, as well as the opportunities to teach undergraduate courses, are applicable to their graduate program. This particular finding differs slightly with the work done by Girves and Wemmerus (1988), where they found that treating the student as a junior colleague was a necessary component to the successful graduate student/advisor relationship. It also varies slightly with the work by Wrench and Punyanunt (2004), where they define the successful graduate student/advisor relationship as one where the advisor helps their students prepare to be an academic professional.

The results of this study imply that current graduate advisors are leading by example and fully preparing new faculty to successfully advise graduate students. Departments of agricultural leadership, education, extension, and communications are providing their graduate advisors with the proper means to be a successful advisor and provide a positive experience for the graduate students within the field of agricultural education.

Agricultural education departments should continue with current methods and procedures of professional growth and new faculty induction. Graduate advisors are well versed in many areas, but those areas are continually changing, therefore graduate advisors should continue to communicate within the profession to keep abreast of any changes that may develop. Data from this study should be further analyzed to determine if there is a difference between the ranks of professors and the frequency and means of communication. The researchers also recommend that a qualitative study, involving interviews with graduate students about this topic, should be conducted to add a richer description to the social interactions between the graduate students and their advisors. Additionally, future research should be conducted within colleges of agriculture to determine the perceptions of other agricultural related graduate students in regards to their relationship with their advisor. Moreover, studies should be conducted outside of the agricultural education profession and the results of the studies should be compared to determine if the advisors within agricultural education are communicating as often as, or more often than their counterparts in other departments.

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