

THE SELF-PERCEIVED IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE TEXAS 4-H COUNCIL BY FORMER COUNCIL MEMBERS

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Abstract

This paper discusses the self-perceived impact of participating in the Texas 4-H Council by former council members. The impact was determined by the members' educational attainment, career choice, and community involvement. The study helped create a basic profile of Texas 4-H Council members and identified the educational strategies, career choices, and community involvement that contributed to the success of these 4-H members. This information should provide feedback to the Texas Agricultural Extension Service (TAEX) on the success of its educational programs and in turn allow TAEX officials to provide better and more effective programs.

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Young men and women who traditionally attain the highest levels of achievement in 4-H programs are typically very successful in other aspects of life as well (Weber & McCullers, 1986). Boyd, Herring, and Briers (1992) stated that the level of 4-H participation was a significant predictor of leadership life skills development scores among 4-H youth in Texas. They observed higher leadership life skills development for 4-H members than non-members.

Membership in the Texas 4-H Council is the highest level of leadership attained at the state level in this organization. The Texas 4-H Council consists of two member delegates from each District 4-H Council and elected delegates-at-large. These members provide leadership at state events and act as a sounding board to identify needs and interests of 4-H youth, suggest and explore action programs that will meet the needs and interests of youth, and to advise in the determination of future 4-H programs. With this high level of leadership it would suggest that members of the Texas 4-H Council should have higher life skills development.

Leadership life skills development has been and continues to be a major goal of most youth programs. The 4-H youth development program of the Cooperative Extension Service is no exception (Dormody & SeEVERS, 1994).

As the world enters the 21st century many youth programs, including 4-H are focusing on the effectiveness of their leadership training. A general perception prevails that participation in a variety of activities or programs such as public speaking or holding office develops leadership life skills and self-understanding (Dormody & Seevers, 1994).

Rockwell's (1981) survey of Nebraska 4-H alumni revealed that over 90% of the respondents felt that the leadership experiences they had as members were helpful in some degree in preparing them for adult leadership roles. Benefits cited most frequently included learning a specific skill and having a chance to meet people. Other helpful experiences noted included public speaking experiences, competitive opportunities, project experiences, and preparation for occupations. Also, 4-H alumni were found to be more likely to become involved in community activities than non-alumni (Miller, 1987).

Cox (1988) found that leaders tend to be more highly educated than the general population and have strong family origins both in terms of spending their childhood in traditional families with both parents and in terms of their current marital status. They also have been active in organizations and their communities as youth and have mentors, role models, and other nurturers.

The 4-H Leadership Project Leader Guide states that the purpose of the 4-H Leadership Project is to teach life skills necessary for effective leadership. The project is based on the rationale that every person needs leadership skills during his lifetime--to become a leader or have control over his own personal life, to provide leadership as parents and to provide leadership in groups. Lastly, this project is based on the rationale that every person has potential leadership abilities and that leadership skills can be learned (4-H Leadership Project Leader Guide, 1994).

A study of recent officers of Michigan state vocational organizations to determine the usefulness of state officer leadership training for later life demonstrated that personal facilitation skills such as communication, social etiquette, time and racial equity were used most frequently by former officers in all organizations (Peterson, 1984). Studies by Bass and Stogdill (1981) indicated that leadership exhibited in organizations at the high school level may persist in college and in later vocational, professional, and community life.

The 4-H organization is one of the oldest and largest experiential education programs for youth in the United States. From its beginning, the 4-H program has used a system of clubs and competitive activities to promote learning and the development of the specific skills of 4-H members (Ladewig & Thomas, 1987).

Conrad and Hedin's 1981 study showed that youth involved in experiential education programs entered into more meaningful relationships with adults, experienced more positive attitudes and behaviors, and placed a value on community participation. In addition, the youth also reported having developed more positive attitudes toward careers with better self-concepts and self-esteem in relation to others.

While the basic purpose of the 4-H program was originally the development of boys and girls for farm life, today's 4-H program is designed to enhance the development of responsible and capable citizens, regardless of homelife or family background (Kelsey & Hearne, 1963).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine the self-perceived impact of participation in the Texas 4-H Council by former members of the Council. The impact was determined by the members' educational attainment, career choice, and community involvement. As a means of accomplishing this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What is the demographic profile of former Texas 4-H Council members?
2. What was the Texas 4-H Council's impact on the educational attainment of its members?
3. What was the Texas 4-H Council's impact on the career choices of its members?
4. What was the Texas 4-H Council's impact on the community involvement of its members?
5. What was the overall effect of serving on Texas 4-H Council?

Methods and Procedures

The population for the study was Texas 4-H Council members from 1979-1989. A mailed questionnaire, prepared in part by the researcher using the Total Design Method (Dillman, 1978), was used as the data collection instrument. A panel of experts in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communications at Texas Tech University, and former Texas 4-H Council members from years other than 1979-1989, were used to determine reliability and validity of the instrument.

One hundred sixty-nine people were sampled from the population of 300. Names were randomly selected from a list provided by the State 4-H Office. Individuals selected for the sample were surveyed starting December 17, 1999 and continuing through the first week of March 2000. Fifty-four percent of the people sampled responded to the survey.

Table 1. Scope of the Study

	Number of Surveys Mailed	Number of Surveys Available for Response	Number Responded	Percent Responded
Texas 4-H Council Members, 1979-1989	169	130 ^a	92	70.8

^a39 surveys were returned with comments such as no forwarding address on file, deceased, address unknown, etc.

Table 1 illustrates the scope of the study. One hundred sixty-nine addresses were obtained from the State 4-H office. Of this 169, 39 were returned with comments such as no forwarding address on file, address unknown, deceased, etc. This reduced the number of potential respondents to 130. Of the 130, 92 responded for a response rate of 70.8 percent.

Survey instrument responses were coded and transferred into a computer file for analysis. Statistical analysis of the data files was completed using SPSS for the Macintosh. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data pertaining to: (a) the demographics of the former Texas 4-H Council members, (b) educational attainment of the former Texas 4-H Council members, (c) the career choices of the former Texas 4-H Council members, and (d) the community involvement of the former Texas 4-H Council members.

Results

The majority of the respondents were male Caucasian/Americans. Most of them grew up on a farm or ranch or in a rural area. Over eighty percent of them were married and one-third of their spouses grew up on a farm or ranch, while another one-fourth of the spouses were at the other end of the spectrum being raised in a city of more than 50,000 people.

All of the respondents attended college with one-third attending Texas Tech University and slightly over one-third attending Texas A&M University. Most of the respondents had a GPA of 2.5 or better with just under half having between a 3.0 and a 3.5. Slightly over one-fourth had a 3.5 or higher.

Table 2 includes data regarding the highest level of education completed by the respondents. Over half (57.1%) received a bachelor's degree. More than one-fourth (28.6%) had a master's degree and 7.7% had a doctoral degree. Less than 5 percent (4.4%) reported having an associate degree and 2.2% completed some college.

Table 2. Highest level of education completed by respondents

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Some college	2	2.2
Associate degree	4	4.4
bachelor's degree	52	57.1
master's degree	26	28.6
doctoral degree	7	7.7
TOTAL	91 ^a	100.0

^aN=92, one missing response

The majority (62.3%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that serving on the Texas 4-H Council influenced their decision to attend college. Over one-half (52.8%) of the

respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that serving on Council affected their decision on what college to attend. All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the college they attended.

Table 3 indicates former Council member’s responses to the statement, “I believe the Texas 4-H Council contributed to my college success.” A large majority either agreed or strongly agreed. About 40% strongly agreed and 46.2% agreed. Only 4.4% disagreed and 1.1% strongly disagreed; 7.7% were uncertain.

Table 3. Response to statement “I believe the Texas 4-H Council contributed to my college success.”

Amount of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	37	40.7
Agree	42	46.2
Uncertain	7	7.7
Disagree	4	4.4
Strongly Disagree	1	1.1
TOTAL	91 ^a	100.0

^aN=92, one missing response

One of the variables included in the study was the current occupation of the respondent. Table 4 indicates that the largest percentage (28.6%) of respondents were in the education, communications, or information specialist cluster. Slightly less than one-fifth (18.7%) were a manager or financial specialist, about one-sixth (16.5%) were involved in marketing, merchandising, or sales, and 6.6% were involved in production agriculture. Only 3.3% were a scientist, engineer, or related specialist. Over one-fourth had occupations that did not fit in any of these categories.

Table 4. Current occupation of respondent

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Scientist, Engineer, or Related Specialist	3	3.3
Manager or Financial Specialist	17	18.7
Marketing, Merchandising, or Sales Representative	15	16.5
Education, Communications, or Information Specialist	26	28.6
Agricultural Production Specialist	6	6.6
Other	24	26.4
TOTAL	91 ^a	100.0

^aN=92, one missing response

Table 5 reflects the respondents’ annual gross income. Less than one-tenth (8.1%) of the respondents made less than \$20,000, 7% made between \$20,000 and 24,999, and 8.1% made

between 25,000 and 29,999. Less than one-sixth (15.1%) of the respondents reported earning between \$30,000 and \$34,999 and the same percentage were earning between \$35,000 to \$39,999. The largest percentage (16.3%) of respondents earned between \$40,000 and \$49,999 and the same percentage earned above \$80,000. There were 3.5% earning \$50,000 to \$59,999, 8.1% made \$60,000 to \$69,000, and only 2.3% made \$70,000 to \$79,999.

In Table 6, respondents were asked to respond to the statement, “I believe the Texas 4-H Council has contributed to my career success.” A large majority either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Sixty percent strongly agreed and 30% agreed. Only 2.2% disagreed and 1.1% strongly disagreed. Less than one-tenth (6.7%) were uncertain.

Table 5. Annual gross income of respondents

Income	Frequency	Percentage
Below \$20,000	7	8.1
\$20,000 to \$24,999	6	7.0
\$25,000 to \$29,999	7	8.1
\$30,000 to \$34,999	13	15.1
\$35,000 to \$39,999	13	15.1
\$40,000 to \$49,999	14	16.3
\$50,000 to \$59,999	3	3.5
\$60,000 to \$69,999	7	8.1
\$70,000 to \$79,999	2	2.3
Above \$80,000	14	16.3
TOTAL	86 ^a	100.0

^aN=92, six missing responses

Table 6. Response to statement “I believe the Texas 4-H Council has contributed to my career success.”

Amount of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	54	60.0
Agree	27	30.0
Uncertain	6	6.7
Disagree	2	2.2
Strongly Disagree	1	1.1
TOTAL	90 ^a	100.0

^aN=92, two missing responses

Most (63%) of the former Council members either agreed or strongly agreed that serving on the Texas 4-H Council influenced their career choice and a large majority (92.2%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their career.

Respondents were asked in which civic organizations they participate. Table 7 illustrates that half (50%) of the respondents are active in professional organizations and 62% are active in church organizations. Slightly over one-fifth (20.7%) belong to the 4-H Volunteer Leaders

Association, 14.1% belong to the PTA/PTO, 5.4% are active in the Lions Club, and 4.3% are members of the Junior League. Only 2.2% belong to both the Rotary Club and Women’s Auxillary respectively, and 1.1% are Masons. None of the respondents participated in Kiwanis and 33.7% indicate they are active in organizations other than these.

Table 7. Participation in civic organizations

Organization	Percent Involved
Lions Club	5.4
Rotary Club	2.2
Women’s Auxillary	2.2
Kiwanis	0.0
PTA/PTO	14.1
Masons	1.1
Junior League	4.3
Professional Organization	50.0
4-H Volunteer Leaders Association	20.7
Church Organizations	62.0
Other	33.7

Not many respondents tended to hold an elected position in a public office, but were much more likely to hold an elected position in agricultural organizations.

Over three-fourths (75.9%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that serving on Texas 4-H Council influenced their decision to join organizations. A large majority (81.4%) either agreed or strongly agreed that serving on Council had an effect on them being elected to leadership positions.

Table 8 represents former Council members’ responses to the statement, “I believe the Texas 4-H Council has contributed to my level of community involvement.” Over three-fourths of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Over one half (51.1%) agreed and 26.7% strongly agreed. Under one-tenth (7.8%) disagreed and 4.4% strongly disagreed. Ten percent were uncertain.

Table 8. Response to statement “I believe the Texas 4-H Council has contributed to my level of community involvement.”

Amount of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	24	26.7
Agree	46	51.1
Uncertain	9	10.0
Disagree	7	7.8
Strongly Disagree	4	4.4
TOTAL	90 ^a	100.0

^aN=92, two missing responses

Tables 9-11 indicate the participants' responses to open-ended questions which were asked in order to allow them to explain how their educational attainment, career choices, and community involvement were affected by their experiences on the Texas 4-H Council.

Table 9. Responses to the question "How did serving on the Texas 4-H Council affect your educational attainment?"

Council's Effect	Frequency
Taught skills that helped me succeed (public speaking, leadership, goal setting, etc.)	22
Allowed opportunities to investigate colleges & gain contacts within the college	10
Improved self-esteem, confidence, and social skills	7
Influenced/reassured degree in agriculture	6
Exposure to contacts and experiences that encouraged higher education	6
Council friends going to college influenced choice; peer pressure	6
Provided scholarship opportunities	5
Encourage success and to be the best in everything	3
Council did not influence/Already knew I was going to college	8

Table 10. Responses to the question "How did serving on the Texas 4-H Council affect your career choice?"

Council's Effect	Frequency
Helped develop skills used in my career (public speaking, people skills, leadership, goal setting, organization, etc)	19
Prepared and encouraged me to work with and help others	15
Influenced a career in agriculture/family and consumer sciences	7
Influenced degree choice	6
Increased exposure to and awareness of opportunities	4
Networking opportunities/Contacts	4
Did not affect career choice/Career already determined	17

Table 11. Responses to the question "How did serving on the Texas 4-H Council affect your community involvement?"

Council's Effect	Frequency
Taught me the importance of community involvement (making a difference, youth involvement, leadership)	20
Taught skills that are helpful in community involvement (leadership, public speaking, people skills)	12
Encouraged me to "give back" and help others	8
Set my need to serve into action; once involved,	

always involved	7
Once I am settled or move to a smaller town or have children involved, I will be more involved	6
Not afraid to get involved and join organizations	6
Did not affect community involvement/Not involved	12

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on interpretations of data presented in the study and are restricted to the population surveyed. They also are subject to the limitations outlined in Chapter I of the study. The conclusions are as follows:

1. Most of the former Texas 4-H Council members are Caucasian/White.
2. There was a low divorce rate among the Council members with only 3.3 percent having divorced compared to the national average of 9.8 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 1998).
3. Most of the former Texas 4-H Council members attained a high level of education with all of them having attended some college.
4. The members of the Texas 4-H Council were more highly educated than the general public with 57.1 percent having earned a bachelor's degree and 28.6 percent having a master's degree. This is compared to the national average where 24.4 percent have a bachelor's degree or more (U.S. Census Bureau, 1998).
5. The majority of the Texas 4-H Council members felt that serving on Council benefited them in attaining a college education. Specifically, the members stated that it taught them skills such as public speaking, leadership, and goal setting that helped them throughout their college career.
6. Most Council members agreed that the Texas 4-H Council contributed to their career success by teaching them skills such as public speaking and people skills that they use daily in their careers.
7. Over 90 percent of the Texas 4-H Council members were satisfied with their current occupation.
8. There was a high range of salaries earned by the former Texas 4-H Council members. The largest percentages reported earning between \$40,000 - \$49,999 and above \$80,000. This is compared to the national average of \$40,478 for a person with a bachelor's degree.
9. Most Council members were actively involved in their community with the largest majority being involved in professional organizations and church.

10. The majority of the Council members believed that serving on the Texas 4-H Council positively influenced their community involvement by teaching them the importance of community involvement and teaching skills that are helpful when working with the community. Some of the skills they listed were leadership and public speaking.
11. An accurate mailing list for former Texas 4-H Council members was not available.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made by the investigator as a result of having made this study:

1. It is recommended that the benefits of serving on Texas 4-H Council identified in this study be publicized to extension personnel so that they might use this information as a recruitment tool. It should be noted that all the respondents in this study felt that serving on Texas 4-H Council benefited them in the areas of educational attainment, career choice, and community involvement. The benefits listed most commonly were learning public speaking skills, leadership skills, goal setting, and people skills.
2. The Texas 4-H Council should look to increase the level of minority involvement and their minority recruitment efforts as evidenced by the fact that only 6.5 percent were non-Caucasian.
3. Most of the former Texas 4-H Council members were either from a farm or ranch or a rural area; therefore, the need exists to increase the awareness of 4-H and the Texas 4-H Council opportunities in urban areas.
4. The Texas 4-H Council should do more to instill the importance of community involvement throughout life, rather than just during the 4-H years.
5. Some of the same opportunities that are available to Texas 4-H Council members should be made available at the District and County levels. These opportunities would include: networking, visits to and contacts within universities, more public speaking opportunities, and exposure to new fields.
6. The State 4-H office and the 4-H Foundation should keep an updated database to help in maintaining alumni relations and to assist in future research.

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