Assessing the need for a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension at King Saud University

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Assessing the need for a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension at King Saud University

by

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A creative component submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Agricultural Education

Program of Study Committee:
Dr. Gregory Miller, Major Professor
Dr. Michael Retallick
Dr. Scott Smalley

Iowa State University

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

UNESCO, a body of the United Nations, described education as instruction that is well organized and sustained for the purpose of communicating knowledge, skills, and valuable understanding about real-life activities (Abbas, 2017). Higher education refers to specialized education that universities or colleges provide (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). Students at this level of education receive more specialized training and teaching that prepares them for future employment, research, and business (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013).

Universities offer various academic degrees (IDP, 2019). The typical practice is for universities to offer bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees to students (IDP, 2019). However, some universities choose not to offer bachelor’s degrees, but only to concentrate on master’s and doctoral degrees (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, 2019). Universities usually have different reasons for such decisions. However, one would expect a university to offer a wide range of degrees to students, rather than only offering graduate degrees in some areas.

Statement of the Problem

There are many universities operating in Saudi Arabia. However, among all the institutions of higher learning, only King Saud University has an agricultural extension and rural society department. The department only grants master’s and doctoral degrees, not bachelor’s degrees. Some universities choose to avoid offering specific study programs if such a move is necessary for the effectiveness of the education they offer. Therefore, it was important to
investigate whether there is a need for and a capacity to deliver a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension at King Saud University.

**Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this special report was to assess the need for a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension at King Saud University. The objectives included:

- determining the level of demand for a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension among enrolling undergraduate students at King Saud University;
- determining the potential jobs for the bachelor’s degree program graduates in agricultural extension in Saudi Arabia; and
- investigating whether King Saud University has enough resources to offer a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension.

**Interview Questions**

1. What is the level of demand for a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension by new undergraduate students at King Saud University?

2. What are the potential jobs for bachelor’s degree program graduates in agricultural extension in Saudi Arabia?

3. Does King Saud University have enough faculty and staff members to deliver a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension? If not, what are the limiting factors?

4. Does King Saud University have a curriculum for a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension? If not, what are the limiting factors?
5. Does King Saud University have suitable facilities and equipment to deliver a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension? If not, what are the limiting factors?

**Significance of the Report**

The results from this special report created foundational knowledge for faculty members at King Saud University to understand whether there is a need for and a capacity to deliver a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension at King Saud University.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this special report was to assess the need for a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension at King Saud University. The objectives of the report were to determine the level of demand for the program and to determine potential jobs for the graduates. It also explored whether the university had enough resources to offer the program.

Demand

Various literature sources indicated that the demand for higher education has been on the rise in recent years. To match the growing demand, hundreds of thousands of additional university places will be necessary by 2030 (Busby, 2018). There is a strong connection between the level of demand for educational programs and the delivery of the programs. Individual factors such as future expectations and professional preference significantly affect the demand for educational programs (Aslan, 2014). In addition, sociocultural factors, such as a prestigious status in society, and economic factors, such as income expectations, affect the demand for educational programs (Aslan, 2014).

Educational economics classifies the factors that affect education demand among individuals into macro and micro factors as well as individual and institutional factors (Aslan, 2014). Consequently, new students often consider the potential of study programs to meet their goals in life, primary among them gainful employment and financial benefits (Aslan, 2014), which translates into higher demand for some programs. In comparison, many students seem to ignore programs that offer fewer employment opportunities, and such programs experience a relatively low demand among new students. It is worth noting that few students are willing to
take particular programs based on the pleasure of learning rather than to enhance a career. It is also worth noting that when many individuals graduate with a particular degree, the labor market for that degree becomes saturated, resulting in low demand for the degree in the market, hence, low demand for the subject among newly enrolled students.

**Employment**

Scholars have noted the existing link between education and employment as strong. Education prepares individuals for employment opportunities and ultimately makes it possible for graduates to find employment. A higher percentage of students and families often considers education as the only approved pathway to better careers and ultimately to a better future (ICEF Monitor, 2016). It is this expectation that mainly drives the demand for programs at the various educational levels (ICEF Monitor, 2016). Broad opportunities in the labor market coupled with the availability of various intellectual pursuits will always be key drivers of high enrollment of undergraduate students for particular programs (ICEF Monitor, 2016). Students seem to be cautious of the programs they enroll in to avoid problems of unemployment and the consequent choices that would follow such unemployment. In the absence of employment, there is confusion over what to do next, and the graduate may end up diverting to a different course where he or she feels employment is more likely (Target Jobs, 2018).

**Resources**

The availability of resources plays a crucial role in the effective delivery of educational programs. The delivery of educational programs relies on core services including a library and administrative support (Sabir, Ahmad, Ashraf, & Ahmad, 2013). Also, the curriculum is the roadmap that faculty members and students follow toward academic prosperity. It enables
lecturers to deliver effective and quality programs by acting with a measurable plan and a structure for the delivery of quality education (Ameyaw, Turnhout, Arts, & Wals, 2017). It is the channel through which colleges set the standards, goals, core competencies, and expected learning outcomes, enabling faculty members to decide whether students can move to the next level (Ameyaw et al., 2017).

Qualified faculty members and staff are also among factors that significantly affect the delivery of educational programs. Research indicates that a majority of students prefer to learn from qualified faculty members who are competent in content delivery (Sabir et al., 2013). It is noteworthy that top universities in various categories often feature in published lists, and that students tend to give such universities first priority during selection (Huang, 2012). Therefore, this implies that universities that do not stand out in terms of facilities, equipment, staff, faculty, and more will experience lower levels of enrollment than top universities. As a result, they are likely to receive low levels of demand for their educational programs.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this special report was to assess the need for a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension at King Saud University. The objectives included:

- determining the level of demand for a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension among enrolling undergraduate students at King Saud University;
- determining the potential jobs for the bachelor’s degree program graduates in agricultural extension in Saudi Arabia; and
- investigating whether King Saud University has enough resources to offer a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension.

The researcher conducted interviews with faculty members to write this special report. Only the committee and faculty members at King Saud University received copies. The target population was the faculty members of the Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Society at King Saud University, because they have backgrounds in agricultural extension and they have knowledge of the department history. The sample consisted of 10 faculty members from the department.

The questions for this report related to the objectives. To strengthen this, the researcher engaged two faculty members and a PhD student in the Department of Agricultural Education and Studies at Iowa State University who were familiar with the subject to review the questions to ensure the questions and objectives were relevant.

The researcher used telephone interviews because of the efficiency they afforded (Opdenakker, 2006). This eliminated the cost and time of travel to access the participants. The researcher contacted the participants for this report via e-mail before conducting the actual
interviews. The researcher also sent a consent form to each participant via e-mail. The response rate was 70%, as 7 of the 10 faculty members agreed to participate. Each interview took place on the telephone, as this enabled convenience and a prompt response. Each telephone call lasted between 15 and 20 minutes, depending on the participant’s availability and contribution.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

For the first question, participants confirmed that there is a demand for the program. They also confirmed that enrollment at the College of Food and Agriculture Sciences at King Saud University and the completion of three semesters is a prerequisite for selecting a major. The participants stated that after enrolling in college, many students enquired about the availability of a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension. Some participants attributed the students’ desire to join a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension to the rapid movement of the agricultural sector toward advanced and more efficient agricultural production, thus creating the need for more agricultural extension experts. Likewise, they indicated that there has been an increased need for more efficient food production to meet the demands of the population, and that this requires agricultural extension professionals.

For the second question, participants confirmed that there are many jobs for program graduates in Saudi Arabia, considering that the field of agricultural extension is broad, with the ability to absorb many graduates in different capacities. The jobs the participants commonly mentioned were teaching assistants and research assistants in the same university, teachers in the agricultural institutes, and agricultural specialists or agricultural researchers in the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture, Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, Ministry of Labor and Social Development, grains organizations, agricultural associations, or agricultural companies.

For the third question, participants confirmed that there are enough faculty and staff members in the university to deliver a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension.
The participants also stated that they were currently teaching and supervising the master’s and doctoral students, and they believed that they could handle more in terms of teaching bachelor’s students. Inasmuch as they could not quantify at that moment the number of students they could accommodate, they stressed that they could comfortably handle a good number of students. Aside from other responsibilities, they believed that their experience and planning made this worthwhile, and they had a strong conviction about their capacity to handle a sizable number of bachelor’s students.

For the fourth question, participants confirmed that the curriculum exists. According to the participants, the bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension was already there, and the university had been offering it. The participants also mentioned that the university stopped offering this program in 2005, but they did not give any reasons.

For the fifth question, participants confirmed that facilities and equipment are suitable for delivery of a bachelor’s degree program. According to the participants, there are well-equipped classrooms, an agricultural extension center, meeting halls, and a student lounge. Participants stated that the facilities and equipment have remained intact regardless of the suspension of the program in the past. They also stated that graduate students use these facilities along with members of other departments in the university.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

It is clear that King Saud University has the opportunity to fill the existing gap by adding a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension and to improve accessibility at the same time, as King Saud University is the only university in Saudi Arabia that has similar programs and at a more advanced level (i.e., the master’s and doctoral levels). By failing to offer a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension, the university may leave many students disappointed, since their desire to pursue a career in agricultural extension will no longer be feasible, given that this is the only university in Saudi Arabia that offers master’s and doctoral degrees in agricultural extension. As the results indicated, there is a student demand for a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension. Delivering a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension at the university would provide a stable base that would feed students into the master’s and doctoral degree programs while also enriching the future of both the individuals and the country in the field of agricultural extension.

It is also clear that agricultural extension needs in Saudi Arabia are high, indicating a high likelihood of program graduates finding employment after graduation. In the agricultural institutes, there is a demand for teachers, given a decline in the number of teachers of agricultural extension. Therefore, the graduates in agricultural extension could possibly take the available openings in the noble profession of teaching, while a considerable number could transition into the master’s and doctoral programs the university offers to specialize further and to teach at higher levels depending on their specialty. The available job opportunities for agricultural extension graduates are diverse, and they include research and teaching assistants within the
same university. Furthermore, graduates could pursue jobs in various departments such as the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture, Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, agricultural associations, and agricultural companies. If the bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension is not available, there will be a future strain in agricultural extension, since the available agricultural extension specialists are not adequate to address future needs effectively.

It is also evident that King Saud University has enough faculty and staff, and it is well prepared to deliver a bachelor’s degree program, as no participant mentioned any limiting factors. The response has a high degree of credibility, since the participants constituted key university officials and stakeholders in King Saud University. If the university does not implement the bachelor’s program in agricultural extension, it is not going to recruit new generations of faculty and staff. This is in part because the already available skilled and experienced faculty and staff members are not receiving enough students to transfer their skills.

Based on these results, the lack of a curriculum in the bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension is not a limiting factor in program delivery. This is because the program existed previously, and it stopped in 2005. Therefore, the university could use the previous curriculum to deliver the bachelor’s degree program.

The fact that suitable facilities and equipment are in place enhances the possibility of delivering a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension. The well-equipped classrooms, an agricultural extension center, meeting halls, and a student lounge minimize the need to focus on setting up the facilities, and they allow for a focus on program and curriculum development. The fact that graduate students and members of other departments use these facilities implies that
they are well equipped to meet the needs of students who wish to enroll in the bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension.

Conclusions

There is a need for and a capacity to deliver a bachelor’s degree program in agricultural extension at King Saud University, as there is a demand for the program among enrolled students, and the university is capable of delivering the program. The fact that there are many job opportunities for graduates in Saudi Arabia, both inside and outside the university, enhances this need.
REFERENCES


