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October 2001

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Jones, Wash A. Ph.D. and Larke, Alvin Jr., Ph.D., "Factors Influencing Career Choice of African American and Hispanic Graduates of a Land Grant Institution" (2001). *Sixth Annual National Conference, POCPWI*. 45.

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# Factors Influencing Career Choice of African American and Hispanic Graduates of a Land Grant Institution

## Abstract

*Presenters will identify and describe factors related to African American and Hispanic graduates' decisions to choose (or not to choose) a designated career prior to and/or after college. Additionally, presenters will examine the decision-making processes that individuals use in choosing a career in their designated field.*

### **Wash A. Jones, Ph.D.**

Director, Student Recruitment and Retention Programs, Agriculture and Life Sciences, Texas A&M University

### **Alvin Larke, Jr., Ph.D.**

Professor, Department of Agricultural Education, Texas A&M University

The presenters will identify and describe the factors that are related to African American and Hispanic graduates' decisions to choose (or not to choose) a career in a designated field prior to and/or after college. Additionally, presenters will examine the decision-making processes that individuals use in choosing a career in their designated field. Even though this study focused on agriculture-related disciplines, findings can be beneficial to other professions as well.

By 2006, the labor force in the United States will become increasingly diverse in that the number of Hispanics and African Americans in the labor force is expected to increase faster than whites, but overall, whites still will outnumber Hispanics and African Americans. Whites will comprise 73 percent of all the workforce in 2006, compared to 80 percent in 1986 and 75 percent in 1996 (Bowman, 1997). To sustain a particular career field at its current status, recruitment of outstanding individuals must be enhanced. To enhance recruitment, more effective recruitment strategies must be implemented. To develop effective recruitment strategies, it is necessary to research students' decision-making processes and their images of the particular career field (Lucas, 1993).

Career opportunities in agriculture and related fields, for instance, are continuing to expand; however, the number of individuals, particularly people of color, pursuing agricultural careers through college is declining continuously. To reverse this trend and to dispel the myths about the field, educational leaders must understand the motivational factors and rewards that lure people to a particular career (Zoldoske, 1996).

The following objectives regarding the selected population were identified to accomplish the purpose of the study:

1. To identify the respondents' demographic characteristics.
2. To identify the reasons for enrolling in a selected educational program and why graduates chose to select or not to select a career in their selected educational field.

3. To identify the degree to which significant others influenced career decisions.
4. To identify the degree to which enrollment in related, high school courses or the degree to which one's college experience influenced the decision to choose or not to choose a career in a designated field.
5. To compare members of the population by ethnicity in terms of factors influencing career choice.
6. To determine if interrelationships existed among the graduates' personal and situational characteristics, their reasons for enrolling in designated educational programs and their reasons for selecting or not selecting a career in a designated field.

The population for the study was all African American and Hispanic graduates who received an undergraduate degree from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at a land-grant institution from May 1990 through December 1997 ( $N = 551$ ) as identified by the institution's alumni association («X) University, 1999). This population was selected because the presenters desired to study a group that may have similar characteristics to prospective students today in terms of career interests, background, motivation and perceptions of career fields. Also, the presenters sought graduates who would have had at least one year in the job market.

To gather responses in this study, the researchers developed and mailed 551 written questionnaires to identify and analyze factors related to minority student enrollment and retention. The three-part survey sought information about the respondents' personal characteristics (demographics), professional characteristics (career path) and level of influence that selected factors had on the respondents' choice of their current career. The conclusions of this study are based on the major findings from data collected and analyzed in this investigation:

1. When respondents enrolled in their first agriculture related course did not affect the probability that they would select an agriculture related career. Likewise, one's college experience did not play a critical role in the choice to pursue agriculture as a career.
2. Parents' level of education did not play a critical role in the respondents' choosing their designated career.
3. Having people of color in a profession to serve merely as role *models* did not increase respondents' likelihood of pursuing the profession. However, having people of color, regardless of their profession, to *encourage* respondents to consider a designated career increased respondents' likelihood of pursuing that career.
4. Salary was not considered to have a statistically significant impact on respondents' choice of their career.
5. Having limited job opportunities in one's intended career (unable to find suitable employment in one's previously selected "ideal" career) respondents to choose a career other than one in their intended career field.
6. Compared to those employed in an agriculture related career, those not employed in an agriculture-related career tended to be influenced to a greater extent by

retirement plan (being guaranteed a comfortable retirement income) and job opportunities (unable to find suitable employment in one's previously selected "ideal" career).

### **References:**

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### **Presenters**

**Wash A. Jones** is Director of Student Recruitment and Retention Programs for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M University. A native of St. Matthews, S.C., Jones began his undergraduate education at the University of Missouri-Columbia and received his Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Journalism from Texas A&M University in 1985. He attained a Master of Education degree in Educational Administration in 1995 and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Agricultural Education in December 1999 from Texas A&M University. His professional background includes service in the U.S. Army Reserves, student recruitment and retention, teaching, university housing administration and communication. Jones gives various professional presentations annually about diverse topics to youth groups, community organizations, high schools, university audiences and professional colleagues. He is a member of St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church, Brenham, Texas, where he serves as minister of music, a trustee, a Bible study facilitator, a lay speaker, youth leader and editor of the church newsletter. He is a Life Member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., a member of the Texas A&M University Century Club, former national program chair, former President-elect and current President of the National Honor Society for Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences.

**Alvin Larke, Jr.** is a professor of Agricultural Education for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M University and a former American Council on Education Fellow. A native of Jackson, S.C., Larke received his Bachelor of Science and Master of Education degrees from South Carolina State College in Orangeburg in 1968 and 1974, respectively. He attained his Doctor of Philosophy degree in Agricultural Education from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1982. His professional background includes a public school teacher for 12 years, adult education teacher and a university faculty member. Larke gives various professional presentations annually about diverse topics to youth groups, community organizations,

high schools, university audiences and professional colleagues. He is an ordained minister and pastor of St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church, Brenham, Texas. He is a Life Member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.