Identifying Predictors of Post-Graduation Employment Location for Veterinary Medicine Students

Project Overview + Summary ///

The College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) seeks to identify and understand variables that may predict a graduate's choice of employment location upon degree completion. According to the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, a shortage of veterinarians practicing rural area food animal medicine exists in several states (n.d.). This shortage has raised concern nationwide about the disastrous situations that could arise if enough veterinarians are not available to care for livestock populations (Prince et al., 2006). In response to these concerns, Academic Insight is supporting the CVM by analyzing post-graduation career outcome data for a group of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) graduates across five class years. The goal of this project is to identify variables that are connected to employment locations of DVM graduates and to inform recruiting and admissions decisions faced by college administration.

Project Initiation ///

The project began in April of 2022 at an initial meeting between the CVM administration and Academic Insight staff. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the objectives and purpose of the new QEP and to identify potential projects within the college that could be supported through the QEP. Issues faced by the CVM regarding the employment locations of graduates were identified and discussed in relation to the purpose of the University's proposed QEP. Plans were set to seek IRB approval before data were shared and analyzed.

Specification of the Problem, Opportunity, and Target ///

The USDA has identified 17 counties (*Veterinary services shortage situations map: National Institute of Food and Agriculture, n.d.*) within Alabama experiencing a shortage of private practice rural food animal medicine veterinarians for the 2022 fiscal year. Of the approximately 600 students who have completed the DVM program between 2018 and 2022, only five students reported that their first position after graduation was located in one of these 17 counties, and some of the five students reported work in small-animal settings rather than large food animal operations.

Connections to AUBURNACHIEVE ///

This project within the CVM seeks to influence the quality of career outcomes as identified in AUBURNACHIEVE Objective 2(b): Students will place into high quality careers. The items selected to capture a measurement for quality include satisfaction with employment location, among others. As stated above, the CVM is concerned that too few students are selecting rural locations for initial employment after graduation, under the initial assumption that students would be dissatisfied with a rural employment location. This project seeks to discover why students may be dissatisfied with rural locations and to identify variables that may increase satisfaction with a rural employment location serving large food animal operations. In doing so, this project also aligns with the original land-grant mission of the University, which was also aligned with supporting agriculture within the state by further legislation. (*Morrill Act (1862),* National Research Council, 1995)

Current Status ///

After being initiated in the spring 2022 semester, the current steps have been completed or are in progress:
- Initial meeting: April 2022
- IRB approved: July 2022
- Second meeting between CVM administration and Academic Insight staff: August 2022
- Career outcomes data shared: August 2022
- Academic Insight staff compiling and cleaning the career outcome data (at present)

Future Steps ///

Based on our current progress, the project team hopes to complete the following steps within the coming months:
- Analyze data and prepare report of initial findings for the CVM administration
- Based on the findings, identify an intervention and decide when and how implementation of the intervention should occur. (Potential interventions may include educating students on opportunities for veterinarians in rural areas and recruiting students who may be more likely to serve in rural areas.)

Assessment Plan ///

This project will utilize measurements of career outcome quality via employment location to assess the impact of the intervention. Currently, student employment locations for DVM classes back to 2018 have been mapped to rural food animal veterinarian shortage areas in Alabama as identified by the USDA. A comprehensive assessment would identify all DVM graduate locations in relation to their status as shortage areas, particularly those in Kentucky, a state from which several students typically attend the DVM program. Once an intervention has been identified and implemented, outcome analysis will be completed by comparing employment location data to that of previous years. Since demand is high for veterinarians, this project assumes that students choose employers and employment locations according to what satisfies their lifestyle and goals; however, further data collection on career satisfaction variables will better inform the proposed interventions.