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The Aspirations of Youth in Arkansas: A Comparison of Rural Locales

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The Aspirations of Youth in Arkansas: A Comparison of Rural Locales

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Abstract

Rural youth are leaving their home communities in search of economic opportunity. Students' residential, occupational, and educational aspirations are effective predictors of life choices, such as future residence. This study's purpose was to determine the aspirations of rural students in Arkansas overall, and by locale. This study used descriptive survey methodology and a stratified random sample of 15 rural schools to determine the respondents' (n = 133) aspirations, expectations for the future, and perception(s) of their home community.

Overall, a majority of respondents indicated they want to leave their home communities and obtain at least a bachelor's degree. Nearly half aspired to work in health sciences or education. Moderate associations were found between the respondents' residential and educational aspirations. Weak associations were also found for respondents' expectations and locale code. Students indicated that occupational and educational barriers were similar. Lack of money for school, poor job markets, and family responsibilities were the most frequent barriers for a majority of respondents overall. Good paying jobs, many chances to get ahead, and indoor entertainment were the community characteristics for which respondents indicated high importance, but low satisfaction. As for students' perceptions of their home communities, responses provided were fairly low to neutral. Negligible to small effect sizes were found when describing differences by rural code for perceptions of community, perceived importance of community characteristics, and satisfaction with community characteristics.

The residential aspirations of these respondents resemble individuals involved in the brain drain. Responses provided from respondents concerning their aspirations supports previous research regarding the aspirations of rural students. These students' responses also reflect concepts associated with achievement motivation, social comparison, and human capital

theory. Based on these findings, this study recommends conducting future research regarding more in-depth information concerning rural Arkansas youth's aspirations. Additionally, for school districts whose students are similar to those in this study, counselors and administrators should provide opportunities college prep, such as, applying for financial aid, and hosting ACT and college entrance requirement workshops. Finally, based on respondents' low perceptions of their communities, similar communities should consider providing opportunities such as job fairs, job shadowing, and mentorship programs.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Overview of the Literature

While defining rural America may be difficult, its importance to the country is undeniable (Carr & Kefalas, 2009a; United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS), 2014). However, people have been leaving these rural areas for more urban locales, resulting in depleted opportunities for those who remain (Carr & Kefalas, 2009a; Carr, Lichter, & Kefalas, 2012). Arkansas communities, like many other rural areas in the country have experienced a loss of manufacturing jobs, and overall employment decline (Farmer, Miller, & Moon, 2013). Research shows that this growing trend has created a greater need for college education among the members of these communities (Carr & Kefalas, 2009a; McGranahan & Beale, 2002; Sherman & Sage, 2011; USDA ERS, 2014). Heightened attention has been called to ensuring the quality of rural education in an effort to create active and effective members of their communities. Researchers have been investigating the differences in the aspirations of students from various locales as well as the relationships of these aspirations to the trends seen in rural America.

Need for the Study

The aspirations of youth have a profound impact on learning and serve as excellent predictors of life choices, such as their postsecondary educational attainment, occupational attainment, and place of residence (Bajema, Miller, & Williams, 2002; Brooks & Redlin, 2009; Meece et al., 2013). Many researchers have studied how community type plays into the development of aspirations in youth (Bajema et al., 2002; Brooks & Redlin, 2009; Brown, Copeland, Costello, Erkanli, & Worthman, 2009; Hu, 2003; Hutchins, Meece, Byun, & Farmer,

2012; McLaughlin, Shoff, & Demi, 2014; Meece et al., 2013; Talbert & Balschweid, 2006). However, research in rural education has been under criticism. These studies were primarily done in the Appalachian area (Byun, Meece, Irvin, & Hutchins, 2012; Howley, Harmon, & Leopold, 1996; King, 2012). Thus, the generalizability of the results is limited due to the differences in rural community cultures, occupational structure, and interactions with major cities (Byun et al., 2012; Racher, Vollman, & Annis, 2004; Singh & Dika, 2003). Also, as pointed out by Boxer, Goldstein, DeLorenzo, Savoy, and Mercado (2011), although students "are arguably the best reporters of certain types of data about themselves" (p. 616), additional data collected from parents, teachers, and school records should be obtained for more thorough findings. Coladarci (2007) argued that there is no single definition of rural, and that each study done in rural education encompasses an entirely different context of rural. Moreover, his observations led him to the conclusion that generalizability of results does not lie in the formation of a single definition of rural (Coladarci, 2007). Instead, it would be more beneficial for researchers to provide sufficient information about the context in which the research was conducted (Coladarci, 2007). Additional researchers have stated that "rural communities have special contexts, and research needs to be done to highlight the contexts so we can bring them to light" (Hellwege, O'Connor, Nugent, Kunz, & Sheridan, 2013, p. 5). These special contexts also shape the residential, occupational, and educational aspirations of rural youth (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). There is a need to describe the unique residential, occupational, and educational aspirations of rural youth in Arkansas. Raising awareness of rural youth's aspirations enables educators to improve students' learning experiences and the process of making life choices.

Problem Statement

Decreasing population in rural America has left a large portion of its communities in ruins (Carr & Kefalas, 2009a). Carr and Kefalas (2009a) explained that with too few tax payers, consumers, and workers, many rural towns are near extinction. While the populations of rural communities have been steadily declining, so have employment and educational opportunities (Carr & Kefalas, 2009a; McGranahan & Beale, 2002; Sherman & Sage, 2011; USDA ERS, 2014). In Arkansas alone, 36 of 75 counties in the state experienced significant population loss to urban areas in 2010 (Farmer et al., 2013). Much of this population loss is attributed to rural youth leaving in search of greater economic and educational opportunity. Researchers have termed this trend the rural brain drain and the causes, repercussions, and solutions are receiving increased attention. Often, rural students cannot achieve their educational and occupational aspirations in their home communities, a problem many researchers believe contributes to the rural brain drain (Carr & Kefalas, 2009a; Leavy & Smith, 2010). Aspirations have been identified as effective predictors of the future choices of youth and have become a significant portion of research in rural education (Bajema et al., 2002; Brooks & Redlin, 2009; Brown et al., 2009; Hektner, 1995; Hu, 2003; Meece et al., 2013; Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). The purpose of this study was to determine the educational, occupational, and residential aspirations of rural students in Arkansas and to compare the aspirations of students in different rural locales.

Objectives:

The specific objectives were to:

1. Describe the educational, occupational, and residential aspirations and expectations of rural high school students in Arkansas as a whole and by rural code;

2. Describe rural Arkansas students' perceived barriers to achieving educational, occupational, and residential aspirations as a whole and by rural code;
3. Describe rural youth's perceptions of importance and satisfaction with selected community characteristics as a whole and by rural code; and
4. Determine rural youth's overall perceptions of economic and educational opportunities, natural amenities, and quality of life associated with their home communities as a whole and by rural code

Definitions

The following words and their definitions were used to guide this study:

Aspiration: The student's ability to set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996).

Barrier: A law, rule, problem, etc., that makes something difficult or impossible (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

Brain Drain: A situation in which many educated or professional people leave a particular place or profession and move to another one that gives them better pay or living conditions (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

Expectations (educational, occupational, and residential): Defined as what the student perceives to be realistic outcomes for the future (Brooks & Redlin, 2009).

Rural: Defined in this study using the urban-centric National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2006) locale coding system. Rural areas are those that fall into the locale codes 41, 42, and 43. Rural areas are designated by the Census Bureau as those areas that do not lie inside an urbanized area or urban cluster (NCES, 2006).

Rural Distant: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster (NCES, 2006).

Rural Fringe: Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster (NCES, 2006).

Rural Remote: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster (NCES, 2006).

Urban Area: Densely settled "cores" of Census-defined blocks with adjacent densely settled surrounding areas. Core areas with populations of 50,000 or more are designated as urbanized areas (NCES, 2006).

Urban Cluster: Densely settled 'cores' of Census-defined blocks with adjacent densely settled surrounding areas. Core areas with populations between 2,500 and 50,000 are designated as urban clusters (NCES, 2006).

Chapter II

Literature Review

Whether they realize it or not, U.S. citizens are vitally affected by rural America every day. A majority of the food, fiber, and shelter consumed by Americans is produced in counties that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) considers rural (Carr & Kefalas, 2009b). In fact, according to the USDA Economic Research Service (2014), most (72%) of the counties in America are considered to be rural land area. Despite the geographic size of rural America, it only contains 15 percent of the U.S. population (USDA ERS, 2014). For decades, the rural population has been decreasing (McGranahan & Beale, 2002; Sherman & Sage, 2011; USDA ERS, 2014). Thousands of rural communities have lost citizens, namely youth, to urban areas in search of educational and economic opportunity (Carr & Kefalas, 2009a). This devastating loss of talented and educated young people could spell the end of rural America (Carr & Kefalas, 2009a).

Rural Arkansas: Industry, Economy, and Population

The state of Arkansas has deep roots in rural life and agriculture. Arkansas is the number one rice producing state in America, and number three in cotton and poultry production (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2013). Additionally, agriculture accounts for nearly 17 percent of jobs, labor income, and value added in Arkansas (Popp, English, & Miller, 2014). Researchers argue that the continued strength of agriculture in the state is of the utmost importance in maintaining the social and economic characteristics of rural Arkansas communities (Popp et al., 2014). Approximately 82 percent of the counties in Arkansas are considered rural and the residents of these counties account for 44 percent of the state's population (Farmer et al., 2013). Currently, as well as historically, Arkansas consistently has a

greater percentage of rural residents than the national average. However, the state has not been exempt from rural population decline. In 1900, 60 percent of the U.S. population lived in rural areas, yet 91 percent of Arkansans were considered to be rural residents at this time in history (McGranahan & Beale, 2002; Farmer et al., 2013). In 2010, 36 of Arkansas' 75 counties experienced population loss, despite a statewide population increase of 9.1 percent since 2000 (Farmer et al., 2013). Of the 36 counties which experienced population loss, 35 of them were considered rural counties (Farmer et al., 2013). The loss of population in Arkansas' rural communities has been attributed to outmigration as opposed to natural increase/decrease (Farmer et al., 2013).

Consistent with the population decline in rural communities, a large number of counties experienced a decline in employment between 2000 and 2010 (Farmer et al., 2013). Employment decline occurred in 47 counties, 45 of which were rural (Department of Workforce Services, 2014; Farmer et al., 2013). Despite the recession from 2008 to 2010, urban communities still experienced high employment growth from 2000 to 2010 (Department of Workforce Services, 2014; Farmer et al., 2013). While urban areas also suffered the loss of manufacturing jobs, the repercussions of this loss were significantly greater for rural areas. Of 69,000 lost manufacturing jobs, more than 54% of them were lost from rural counties (Farmer et al., 2013). According to Farmer and colleagues:

> When basic or export industries downsize or leave an area, it has a broader effect that reduces employment in the supplying, wholesale and retail trade and service industries. This broader effect, combined with the dominance of increasingly capital-intensive, natural resource-based industries, has resulted in fewer employment opportunities for people living in rural areas (Farmer et al., 2013, p. 23).

Consequently, rural areas must take their focus off manufacturing careers and instead adapt to the changing workforce (Farmer et al., 2013). For many younger rural residents, this requires the pursuit of a college education and a change in residence.

Education in Rural Arkansas

Investment in public education generates benefits that are beyond value and cannot be overstated (Mitra, 2010; Farmer et al., 2013). Kober (2007) from the Center on Education Policy stated that failure to invest in public education would result in the loss of the one institution that routinely brings together children from different walks of life. Research shows quality education reaps benefits such as more skilled, versatile, and employable workforces, lower poverty rates, stable families, and potentially active and productive citizens (Junn, 2005; Mitra, 2010; Farmer et al., 2013). Due to the fluctuating and often fragile job markets, particularly in rural communities, it is important that Arkansans have access to a quality education.

From 2009 to 2013, 83.7% of persons age 25 and older were considered high school graduates and only 20.1% had obtained their bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) developed a report describing the state of rural education in America. The report determines an overall average ranking, the Rural Education Priority, by combining five gauges that measure each state according to: 1) importance of rural schools in the state, 2) the diversity of rural students and their families, 3) socioeconomic challenges facing rural communities, 4) the educational policy context impacting rural schools, and 5) the educational outcomes of students in rural schools in each state (NCES, 2014). According to NCES (2014), nearly 54% of schools in Arkansas are located in rural communities with poverty indicators among the most severe in the country. Students who attend those schools account for more than one third of all students in Arkansas (NCES, 2014).

Arkansas has retained a high priority ranking over the years suggesting that rural education in the state is both important and in urgent need of attention (NCES, 2014). As indicated by the NCES (2014), "the higher the ranking on a gauge, the more important or the more urgent rural education matters are in a particular state" (p. 2). The cumulative ratings determined by the NCES (2014) placed Arkansas in the crucial quartile of the importance gauge and assigned a high priority ranking of eighth.

The Rural Brain Drain

There has been an increasing push toward the investigation of a national and global phenomenon known as the *brain drain*, or the outmigration of skilled workers and educated individuals from their home community to a region with a higher economic opportunity (Beine, Docuier, & Rapoport, 2001; Carr & Kefalas, 2009a; Iredale, 2001). Although the brain drain has only recently become an area of great interest, being identified in the 1960s, it is not a new concept (Iredale, 2001). For years, people have left developing countries for more developed countries in search of better jobs. In 2000, more than 20 million workers who were considered "highly skilled immigrants" moved from a developing country to a developed one, representing a 63.7% increase in 10 years as opposed to only a 14.4% increase in workers that were considered to be "unskilled immigrants" (Beine, Docuier, & Rapoport, 2008, p. 631).

On a national level, the brain drain has become an increasingly prevalent issue, particularly among rural America. Although research by Hansen, Ban, and Huggins (2003) found the brain drain exists not only in rural areas, but older industrial towns as well, Artz and Yu (2009) suggested that the consequences associated with a brain drain are more severe for a rural community as compared to a place such as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Research shows that rural areas continually exhibit slower growth, and even decline, in comparison to the rest of the

U.S. (USDA, ERS, 2014). Steadily declining rural populations have been explained by the following factors: rural areas lack natural amenities, their job markets are poor, and post-secondary education is often unavailable (Artz & Yu, 2009; Carr & Kefalas, 2009a; McGranahan & Beale, 2002). Researchers such as Sherman and Sage (2011) further argue that the loss of young adults is the main contributing factor to this decline. Glendinning, Nuttall, Hendry, Kloep, and Wood (2003) explained that "young people decide to leave their homes because it is impossible for them to follow their chosen career path due to lack of opportunities, or else, they want to see the world, or because they find local society restricting or claustrophobic" (p. 132). This pattern where rural youth leave their home communities in search of these opportunities is termed the "youth brain drain" (Demi, McLaughlin, & Snyder, 2009).

Aspirations and the Rural Brain Drain

A commonality throughout literature on the rural brain drain is the relationship of rural youths' educational and occupational aspirations to their residential preferences (Johnson, Elder, & Stern, 2005; Leavy & Smith, 2010). According to Hansen and McIntire (1989) student aspirations are commonly defined as "an individual's desire to obtain status objectives or goals such as a particular occupation or level of education" (p. 39). Furthermore, Qualia and Cobb (1996) proposed that students' aspirations represent their ability to set goals for the future as well as their inspiration to work toward those goals during the time at hand. It is these goals that influence learning and guide students when they are making life choices (Bajema et al., 2002).

Residential aspirations are said to "reflect thoughts about whether to leave a place, and then selecting a destination if youth prefer to leave" (McLaughlin et al., 2014, p. 454). Demi et al., (2009) noted that, as early as 7th grade, an individual's residential aspirations begin to form based on the structure of the individual's community, as well as their perceptions of the viability

of that community. Moreover, it is said that if students perceive their community as viable to support their future and like their community "a lot" this is a strong predictor of the student remaining in their rural home community (Demi et al., 2009). Demi et al. (2009) concluded that perceptions of community viability could be improved if accurate information regarding local and "within commuting distance" educational and career opportunities was disseminated to rural youth through programs such as Community Youth Development (CYD). Ultimately, according to McLaughlin et al. (2014), a student's residential aspirations hinge mostly on the student's perception of the quality of jobs in the community and the availability of their aspired occupation.

Programs such as Community Youth Development (CYD) have been suggested as a means of building positive youth perceptions of their rural home communities. Demi and colleagues (2009) explained that this type of program works through youth-adult-community relationships that should begin during the early stages of adolescence. Although these relationships are said to promote "positive youth development" and aid in making rural home communities better places for youth to grow up, they are not expected to "cure" the brain drain (Demi et al., 2009). The following is a list of benefits associated with this type of program: opportunities are created for rural youth to develop leadership skills and to connect with others in the community; the chances of rural youth becoming more involved in future community action are increased; long-term community engagement is more likely; and youth are encouraged to develop a "shared responsibility for their community" (Demi et al., 2009, p. 327). As noted by Demi and colleagues (2009), there is research to support the link between civic engagement and non-migration (Irwin, Tolbert, & Lyson, 1999); however, the scope of research regarding CYD

programs should be expanded to further explore the connection between CYD and residential aspirations.

McLaughlin and colleagues (2014) found that "good paying jobs, quality schools and teachers, and a clean environment" (p. 462) were considered by rural students as important community factors when selecting a future community. Additionally, rural youth that live in areas where "natural amenities are limited or disrupted and those who perceive more urban amenities as desirable and not available in their current communities," may prefer to move to an area that is more satisfactory (McLaughlin et al., 2014, p. 456). Interestingly, there is also a body of research that suggests the communities with more advantages are at greater risk of losing their youth to the rural brain drain (Demi et al., 2009). Demi et al. (2009) explained that "youth in these areas have the family support and opportunities needed to achieve their educational and occupational aspirations. These youth also receive more encouragement from adults to leave the community to achieve their goals" (p. 326). McLaughlin et al. (2014) identified four categories of factors that explain residential aspirations:

> "1) Perceptions of opportunities and lifestyles in the current community and possible destinations; 2) influences of parents, family, and friends; 3) aspirations and attributes of the individual youth; and, 4) satisfaction with the current community and the importance of future community characteristics for residential aspirations" (p. 455).

Haller and Virkler (1993) explained that both educational and occupational aspirations are developed through socialization. For example, researchers believe that students partially develop their occupational aspirations based on exposure to the various occupations in their communities (Haller & Virkler, 1993). For rural communities, the geographical and cultural contexts not only limit career diversity, but students' aspirations are also limited due to their narrow window of exposure (Bajema et al., 2002). Similarly, Meece et al. (2013), stated that

"many rural communities, schools and families have unique features and challenges that can constrain youth's postsecondary aspirations and attainment" (p. 175). Familiar barriers such as geographic isolation, limited postsecondary educational opportunities, narrow school curriculums, and social/cultural expectations hinder the development of high educational and occupational aspirations of rural students (Bajema et al., 2002; Brooks & Redlin, 2009; Meece et al., 2013). However, educational aspirations are on the rise for rural youth (Hutchins et al., 2012). In fact, according to Hutchins et al. (2012), "a recent report by the U.S. Department of Education suggests that rural youth have experienced the greatest increase in college attendance compared to youth in urban and suburban areas" (p. 7). Hutchins et al. (2012) and King (2012) suggested a number of strategies to further increase the number of rural students attending college. These strategies include providing opportunities for college campus visits, workshops for ACT preparation, admissions requirements, and identification of financial aid opportunities (Hutchins et al, 2012; King, 2012).

Brooks and Redlin (2009) supported this research and explained that an individual's occupational aspirations are the number one predictor of migration patterns of rural youth. Students who have high occupational aspirations will most likely be required to move away in order to attain the necessary education for their desired job (Hektner, 1995). Once these students acquire a college degree, the job markets of their home communities do not have the jobs for which they qualify (Brooks & Redlin, 2009). However, Hektner (1995) explained that youth who live in rural areas may alter their educational aspirations so they fit what they perceive as the occupational opportunities available locally. According to McLaughlin (2014) some of these jobs "require a college degree (e.g. education, health care), while others require technical education or on-the-job training (e.g. plumbers, electricians, truck drivers, workers in

manufacturing) or are low-skill, service sector jobs" (p. 455). Marré (2014) reported 41.5% of all jobs in rural areas that required a bachelor's degree or higher were in the education and health science sector. This was higher than the total employment for the next five largest employment sectors (39.2%). King (2012) argued that long and short term relationships between students and their community is an important component in the success of rural students. These relationships should include opportunities such as mentoring, career fairs, and job shadowing (King, 2012).

Expectations

MacBrayne (1987) defined expectations as "the individual's estimation of the likelihood of attaining those goals, plans, ambitions, or dreams" (p. 135) and concluded that aspirations of youth are typically higher than their expectations. Similarly, Brooks and Redlin (2009) noted that aspirations differ from expectations. They are ideals, whereas expectations are what one perceives to be realistic (Brooks & Redlin, 2009). Aspirations and expectations do not always line up. In fact, some research shows that student aspirations are similar across ethnic groups, yet social structures are often limiting and consequently lower the expectations of students, namely, Black and Hispanic groups (Brooks & Redlin, 2009). Leavy and Smith (2010) reported that the educational expectations for rural youth are typically lower than those of their more urban counterparts. Brown et al. (2009) found that many rural students are torn between their strong attachment to their home communities and finding economic opportunities elsewhere. Longitudinal studies conducted in the 1980's found that overtime, both aspirations and expectations tended to decline. However, Dunkelberger (1984) found that expectations, particularly educational expectations, tend to decline more dramatically than aspirations. He argued that this is because "educational goals are the first to come into contact with the limitations of personal ability, financial resources, and opportunities that are encountered in adult

life" (as cited by MacBrayne, 1987, p. 136). Farris, Boyd, and Shoffner (1985) found similar results for occupational aspirations and stated that "over time, occupational aspirations declined only slightly while occupational expectations declined dramatically for each time period" (as cited by MacBrayne, 1987, p. 135).

More recently, in research concerning occupational aspirations and expectations Rojewski (2005) explained that when discrepancies exist between aspirations and expectations it reflects the "individuals' views toward their particular circumstances, abilities, the likely effects of perceived barriers, and future opportunities" (p. 133). This discrepancy between aspiration and expectation usually results in people expecting to enter occupations that require less education that are associated with lower socioeconomic benefits (Rojewski, 2005). Much research has focused on factors that might be related to aspirations-expectation discrepancy and lowered occupational expectations. Boxer et al. (2011) noted that "the economic reality of high tuition costs and the social reality of poor family support or lack of parental modeling of achievement" commonly discourages even the most motivated and well-performing students from attending college (p. 610). Rojewski (2005) identified four categories of barriers to occupational aspirations. He noted that expectations could be lowered when students:

> …do not feel (accurately or inaccurately) that they have the abilities to succeed in their aspired occupation; think that the educational or entry-level requirements are beyond their current resources; are not supported by, or are incongruent with, family and friends about what they should do occupationally; and perceive significant community or societal barriers to entry into, or success in, their occupational aspirations." (Rojewski, 2005, p. 4)

However, researchers in the field, such as Boxer and colleges (2011), have noted that although students are considered by many to be the best sources of data concerning themselves, such research should ideally acquire information from various individuals (parents, teachers, peers) as well as school records. Researchers such as Brooks and Redlin (2009) and Hutchins et al.

(2012), argue that qualitative information and more prolonged, longitudinal studies would not only increase understanding regarding the types of constraints existing in rural America, but it would allow researchers to assess the fulfillment of rural students aspirations and the accuracy of their expectations.

Theoretical Framework

Due to the complex nature of the brain drain this study was guided by multiple theories from various disciplines. The first driving theory is achievement motivation theory, followed by social comparison theory and human capital theory.

Achievement motivation theory.

An increased interest in aspiration research during the late 1940s through the 1960s led to the development of the achievement motivation theory which states that there is a drive, conscious or unconscious, to do well in an achievement-oriented activity (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). Research has shown that achievement motivation is a trait that is acquired at an early age and may be molded by the person's social environment (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). For students, the educational environment serves as a critical factor within the process of aspiration formation. The relationship between students and their teachers, peers, parents, and others within their social environment involves knowledge of the group expectations and standards (Bajema et al., 2002; Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). Achievement motivation theory suggests that these group standards significantly impact and limit the aspiration level of the individual and are more pronounced in smaller, more isolated groups. The fear of being ostracized overpowers even those with an inner drive to achieve their aspirations (Bajema et al., 2002; Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). In a study completed by Bajema et al. (2002), the researchers found the constructs of achievement motivation theory were present in the educational and occupational aspirations of

rural youth. The study also identified a link between group identity and career goals (Bajema et al., 2002).

Social comparison theory.

Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory argues that people are driven to compare themselves to groups that are similar to themselves in beliefs and abilities (Bajema et al., 2002; Rojewski, 1999; Wood, 1989). Similar to the achievement motivation theory, social psychology theorists like Festinger argued the need for social comparison leads to a need for affiliation (Bajema et al., 2002; Festinger, 1954; Quaglia & Cobb, 1996; Wood, 1989). Consequently, the inherent pressure toward uniformity within groups creates a powerful anchor that limits the degree to which individuals form their levels of aspirations (Bajema et al., 2002; Quaglia & Cobb, 1996; Wood, 1989). Social comparison theory has previously been used in research regarding the educational and occupational aspirations of youth. Cooney, Jahoda, Gumley, and Knott (2006) determined that social comparison of students to various social groups made an impact on the student's choice of occupation type (professional or blue-collar).

Human capital theory.

Human capital theory, one of the most influential economic theories of Western education, is an economic device that has been setting the framework for government policies since the early 1960s (Fitzsimons, 1999). The premise of human capital theory is that "people move to find employment and remuneration more appropriate to their formal education and training" (Iredale, 2001, p. 8). Education and training produce human capital as opposed to physical or financial capital because "you cannot separate a person from his or her knowledge, skills, health, or values the way it is possible to move financial and physical assets while the owner stays put" (Becker, 1993, p. 16). In his seminal work on human capital theory, Becker

(1993) explained that the demand for education fluctuates according to each society. The educational demand differences seen in these communities have largely impacted regional and national economic growth. The outmigration of rural residents to urban areas for the purpose of finding a job that is either more suited to their skill sets, pays more money, and so forth is an example of the manifestation of human capital theory. Taylor and Martin (2001) used human capital theory to guide their study on migration and rural population change. Their research led them to the conclusion that migrants do not typically represent a random sample of the overall rural population. Instead, they are "disproportionately young, better-educated, less risk-averse, and more achievement-oriented and tend to have better personal contacts in destination areas than the general population in the region of outmigration" (Toardo, 1980, as cited by Taylor & Martin, 2001, p. 8).

Summary

The review of this literature indicates that rural America is a vital part of the U.S. Unfortunately, these rural areas are facing a problem identified as the rural brain drain, which involves America's rural youth. A large portion of Arkansas is considered rural and has suffered from trends of economic decline and population loss, a reflection of those seen nationally as a result of the brain drain. Theories such as achievement motivation, social comparison, and human capital all work together to explain various components of the brain drain. Aspirations have been identified as a key research topic related to the problem. Theorists explained that aspirations are developed by a drive to do well, and are molded by environmental conditions such as schools, teachers, peers, etc. In Arkansas, one third of students are considered rural and, therefore, shape their aspirations around rural community environments. Research has shown that students' aspirations affect their migration choices, thus studies regarding these aspirations

have been deemed valuable in ameliorating the effects of the brain drain. The following figure demonstrates how this study uses these three theories to explain the brain drain (see Figure 1).

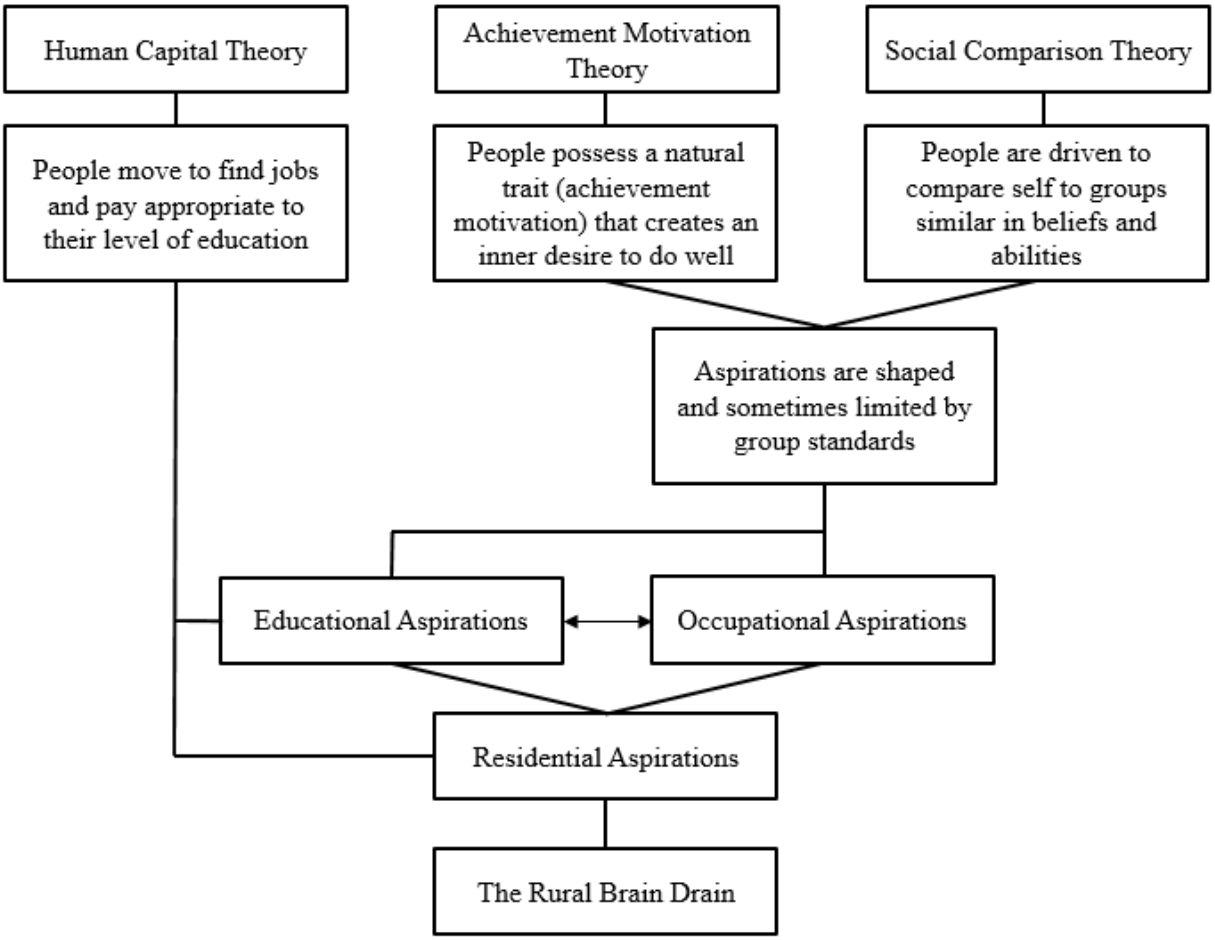

Figure 1. Theory behind the rural brain drain. This figure illustrates how the three theories used in this study work together to explain the rural brain drain.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Research Design

Modeling similar studies (Brooks & Redlin, 2009; Demi et al., 2009; Johnson, et al., 2005; McLaughlin et al., 2014; Meece et al., 2013; Talbert & Balschweid, 2006) which examined various aspirations of rural students across the country, this quantitative study used a descriptive survey methodology to determine and compare the educational, occupational, and residential aspirations of rural high school students in Arkansas.

Classifying Rural School Districts

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released a locale coding system for U.S. school districts in 2006 that classifies school districts into 12 different "urban-centric locale" categories: a) city-large (locale code 11), b) city-midsize (locale code 12), c) city-small (locale code 13), d) suburb-large (locale code 21), e) suburb-midsize (locale code 22), f) suburb-small (locale code 23), g) town-fringe (locale code 31), h) town-distant (locale code 32), i) town-remote (locale code 33), j) rural-fringe (locale code 41), k) rural-distant (locale code 42), and l) rural-remote (locale code 43). Each category was based upon the school district's size and proximity to an urbanized area. Specifically, rural school districts were distinguished based upon their distance from urbanized areas and clusters. Urbanized areas and clusters are densely settled cores of census blocks with adjacent densely settled surrounding areas (NCES, 2006). To qualify as an urban area, the core must contain a population of 50,000 or more (NCES, 2006). Urban clusters are core areas with populations between 2,500 and 50,000 (NCES, 2006). Based upon their distance from these, rural school districts were more precisely classified as rural fringe, rural distant, or rural remote.

According to Lichter and Brown (2011), "America today contains many rural Americas, all of which are linked in fundamental but different ways with urban America and big cities" (p. 568). Of the rural locale codes defined by the NCES (2006), perhaps the rural-fringe areas are more closely linked to urban areas than rural-distant and rural-remote. Based upon the definitions provided by the NCES (2006), a rural-fringe school district is one that has been defined by the Census Bureau as being a rural territory. Thus, the school district must be in a territory with a population less than 2,500 people (United States Census Bureau, 2014). Furthermore, the NCES (2006) requires that a rural-fringe school district must be located less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, but should also be less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster. Rural fringe schools account for 25% of rural school districts in the United States, 28% of rural school districts in Arkansas, and 20% of all Arkansas school districts combined (NCES, 2012). These areas might be referred to as bedroom communities (Partridge, Ali, & Olfert, 2010), or exurbia—hybrid spaces that blur the lines of rural and urban (Lichter & Brown, 2011). The rural-urban commuting commonly found in rural-fringe communities acts as a link between the social and economic activities of rural and urban regions (Lichter & Brown, 2011). Stuit and Doan (2012) explained that rural-fringe school districts have "easier access to the economic resources, cultural institutions, and talent pools available in their neighboring cities" (p. 4).

A rural-distant school district is classified by the NCES (2006) as one that is more than 5 miles from an urbanized area, but no more than 25 miles. This type of school district should also be more than 2.5 miles from an urban cluster, and at the most, 10 miles (NCES, 2006). Rural-distant school districts typically serve as buffers between so-called bedroom communities and the most extreme rural atmospheres. A majority (42%) of rural school districts in America are

classified as rural-distant (NCES, 2012). Similarly, 42% of rural Arkansas school districts are considered rural-distant and account for 30% of all Arkansas school districts combined (NCES, 2012).

Rural-remote districts are the farthest from urbanized areas and clusters. These districts are more than 25 miles from any urbanized area (NCES, 2006). Additionally, these districts are more than 10 miles away from any urban cluster (NCES, 2006). Nationally, 33% of rural school districts are rural-remote (NCES, 2012). Rural-remote districts in Arkansas account for 30% of rural school districts and 21% of all districts in the state (NCES, 2012).

Population and Sample

The population of this study was high school students' who attended school districts in Arkansas that are classified as rural. A sample size of 15 school districts was used for this study. Using stratified random sampling, the sample was composed of students enrolled in junior and senior level English courses from 15 randomly selected school districts within the state of Arkansas. The school districts were first categorized based upon codes assigned by the NCES (2006) locale coding system. Five districts were randomly selected from each of the following categories: rural-fringe (locale code 41), rural-distant (locale code 42), and rural-remote (locale code 43). One school district from each locale code was randomly selected from each region of the state (central, northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest).

Data Collection

The following procedure was used to collect data from each school district. To begin, the most current (2012-13) list of Arkansas school districts and their counties, classified by "urban-centric locale" was obtained using the Elementary/Secondary Information System (ElSi) table generator provided by the NCES website (www.https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/). The school

districts were further categorized based on the region of Arkansas in which they lie. The regions were determined based on the region classifications given by the Encyclopedia of Arkansas (2009). The random function in Microsoft Excel was then used to select one school from each rural school district type and region. Following the random selection of each school, the researcher attempted to contact the high school counselor via phone and email (when available). In anticipation of non-response the number of schools contacted was doubled for the initial contacting process. At least two attempts were made to contact each counselor. Unsuccessful communication resulted in the random selection of another school. Despite the efforts of the researcher, some regions are not represented for each rural school district type due to unsuccessful communication or opposition to participation (see Figure 2). Table 1 represents the schools for which permission was granted to conduct the survey, the number of juniors and seniors within their school, and the school district's region.

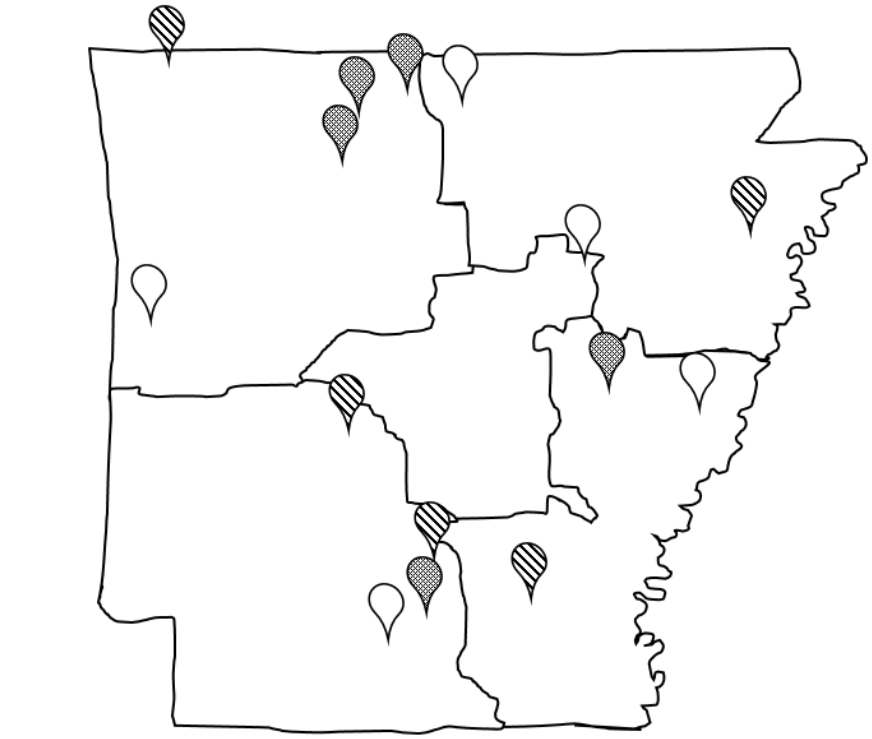

Figure 2. Geographic location and rural locale classification of school districts agreeing to participate.

Table 1

Randomly Selected School Districts, their Region, Rural Code, and Number of Students

School	Region in Arkansas	Rural Code	Number of Juniors and Seniors
A	Southwest	Rural Fringe	140
B	Southwest	Rural Fringe	90
C	Southeast	Rural Fringe	350
D	Northwest	Rural Fringe	250
E	Northeast	Rural Fringe	110
F	Southwest	Rural Distant	140
G	Southeast	Rural Distant	125
H	Central	Rural Distant	85
I	Northwest	Rural Distant	160
J	Northeast	Rural Distant	90
K	Southwest	Rural Remote	70
L	Southeast	Rural Remote	100
M	Northwest	Rural Remote	35
N	Northwest	Rural Remote	145
O	Northwest	Rural Remote	30

Note. These School districts represent only those for which permission was granted.

Upon agreement to participate, each counselor was sent a box containing the needed surveys (appendix C), permission forms (appendix A), and instructions (appendix B) for survey administration. Counselors were first asked to distribute the parent permission form to all students in the junior and senior level English classes. In an effort to comply with institutional requirements, the parent permission forms were provided for informed consent. Only those students with signed parental permission forms were allowed to participate in the study. Approximately a week after the materials were sent out, each counselor received an email and/or phone call to confirm that the packages had been delivered successfully. An additional three to four follow-up attempts were made, when necessary, in the subsequent weeks. Once the surveys were completed, counselors were instructed to return both surveys and permission forms using the self-addressed return label provided to them.

Instrumentation

The research instrument used in this study was based on previous research by Demi et al. (2009), which examined the educational, occupational, and residential aspirations of rural youth. See appendix C for a copy of the survey instrument. The questionnaire was administered by the teacher in the students' English classes and consisted of four sections—a section on the students' plans for the future, factors influencing their goals and expectations, the students' perceptions of their community, and finally, general demographic information.

The first section of the instrument was composed of six questions and was intended to determine the students' aspirations and expectations for their residence, education, and career. Residential and educational aspirations and expectations were assessed with fixed-response options. For residential aspirations and expectations students were asked where they wanted to live when they were 30, as well as where they expected to live. Students were provided with seven response options: 1) same community as now, 2) a rural community other than my current community, 3) a town near my current community, 4) a town far away from my current community, 5) a city near my current community, 6) a city far away from my current community, and 7) I don't know. Similarly, students were then provided with 6 response options regarding the highest level of education the wanted and expected to get in their life: 1) finish high school or get a GED, 2) complete vocational, trade, or business school, 3) graduate from a 2-year community college, 4) graduate from a 4-year college, 5) obtain a master's degree or PhD, and 6) don't know. Occupational aspirations were assessed based on the open-ended question "what job do you want to have when you are 30 years old". Responses were coded based on career clusters defined by the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium (2014). Finally, the respondents were provided with four fixed

response options when asked "how sure are you that you will be doing this job when you are 30 years old". Response options included: 1) very sure, 2) somewhat sure, 3) somewhat unsure, and 4) not at all sure.

Section two of the questionnaire consisted of 13 Likert-type statements which inquired about perceived financial, family, and personal barriers that the students might have that would inhibit them from achieving their educational and occupational aspirations. Students were asked to indicate the degree to which they anticipated the barriers in each statement to prevent them from achieving their goals using a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = "not at all" and 4 = "a lot").

The third section of the survey focused on the student's perception of their current community. According to McLaughlin et al. (2014) "those studying residential aspirations and migration intentions need to ask individuals what they value in their current community, what they seek, and what is most important to them in their ideal community" (p. 471-472). This section consisted of 19 items for which students were given a 4-point Likert-type scale to indicate how important (1 = "not important" to 4 = "very important") each community characteristic was to them as well as how satisfied (1 = "not satisfied" to 4 = "very satisfied") they were with each characteristic within their home community. Theodori and Theodori (2014) concluded that studies regarding "youth perceptions regarding their hometowns and rural upbringings – and how these perceptions may be influential in their [migration related decisions] – can only support rural communities trying to maintain populace" (p. 118). Thus, students were also provided with 12 additional items regarding their perceptions of their home community's economic and educational opportunities and quality of life. A 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 4 = "strongly agree") was provided for questions such as "I could get a job

in this area", "I can stay in this area and get a good education", and "I enjoy the community that I live in now".

Finally, a section requesting student demographic information was included. Information about the respondents such as gender, grade in school, and how long they have lived in their current community were included. Additionally, information about the respondents' parents was included using two fixed response questions. For both mothers/female guardians and fathers/male guardians, students were asked to indicate the highest level of education by choosing one of seven response options: 1) less than high school diploma or GED, 2) high school diploma or GED, 3) vocational/technical school or some college, 4) bachelor's degree, 5) master's degree or PhD, 6) don't know, and 7) N/A. Students were also provided with four response options when they were asked to indicate how long their parents/guardians had lived in their current area: 1) less than one year, 2) from one to less than five years, 3) from five to less than ten years, and 4) 10 years or more.

Validity, Reliability and Pilot Testing

A panel of four with expertise in survey methods and rural education and sociology reviewed the survey instrument to assure face and content validity. A revised instrument was then pilot tested by the researcher in one teacher's English classes and another's agriculture classes of one rural high school (n = 101). These students were selected to complete the pilot test because their school district is classified as rural-distant (locale code 42) and is consistent with the scope of the study. Upon the completion of the pilot test, further revisions were made based upon frequent questions asked by the students and additional observation. Cognitive interviews were held with three to four students from each class period. Students were asked to describe what they thought each question was asking. They were also asked to identify any

questions that they found to be confusing, difficult to answer, etc. To determine instrument stability, a test-retest procedure was completed at a 14 day interval involving a convenience sample of nine high school students. These students were chosen because a majority of them are similar in background to the study's population, and were relatively close in age. Based on this test-retest procedure, the coefficient of stability for the instrument overall was an acceptable 0.70 (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Stability of the instrument was also assessed for each section and was found to range between low and moderate. The reliability coefficients were as follows: 0.79 for items regarding student aspirations and expectations, 0.65 for items regarding perceived barriers to student achievement, 0.81 for items regarding importance of community characteristics, and 0.58 for satisfaction with community characteristics, 0.71 for items regarding student perception of home community economic and education opportunities, natural amenities, and quality of life, and 0.99 for demographic information. Nunnally (1967) argued that moderate reliabilities such as .50 and .60 are acceptable during early stages of research.

Human Subjects and IRB Approval

Under requirement of the University of Arkansas, this study was submitted for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. It was determined that the participants in the study would not be exposed to more than minimal risk and that their confidentiality would be maintained and IRB approval was obtained (Appendix D).

Data Analysis

All data collected from the survey were entered into Microsoft Excel. Data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics according to the study's objectives using SAS©9.3 (Carry, NC). Effect sizes were calculated as descriptive measures to further describe the results (Cohen,

1988; Rea & Parker, 1992). Cohen (1988) argues that effect sizes may indicate practical or meaningful differences between groups.

Mean weighted discrepancy scores were used as descriptive measures for the section regarding student perceived importance of and satisfaction with community factors (section three). Similar to Borich's (1980) model of needs assessment, mean weighted discrepancy scores (MWDS) were calculated by first obtaining an importance rating for each community characteristic. A discrepancy score was then calculated based on the difference between the students' importance and satisfaction scores for each characteristic. Weighted discrepancy scores were determined for each community characteristic by multiplying each student's discrepancy score to the overall mean importance score for that characteristic. The sum of each students weighted discrepancy score was then divided by the total number of respondents, resulting in the final mean weighted discrepancy score.

Summary

A quantitative design was used as a guide for determining the community satisfaction and the educational, occupational, and residential aspirations of rural students in Arkansas. The study was further guided by the previous research in the field regarding the aspirations and expectations of rural students as well as their perceptions of their home community. Additionally, Demi et al.'s (2009) research guided the development of the instrumentation. The following chapter will discuss the results of the current study. The reported results reflect the data collected through the administered survey.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The quantitative results presented in this study were obtained through a questionnaire, which was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Student responses to the survey questions provided insights about their residential, educational, and occupational aspirations, as well as their expectations. The questionnaire responses also revealed student perceptions regarding barriers to goal achievement, the importance of and their satisfaction with selected community resources, and perceptions of their community as a whole.

Response Rate

The sample consisted of junior and seniors students at 15 rural high schools in Arkansas during the spring 2015 semester (N = 1,745). The purposive sample included five rural fringe schools, five rural distant schools, and five rural remote schools. Responses were received from 133 students from nine rural school districts, which resulted in a student response rate of 7.62%. Several guidance counselors indicated that students' failure to return parent permission forms was problematic, resulting in few students who were eligible to participate. Despite numerous efforts at communication, some schools, who initially granted permission to conduct the survey, failed to return their materials and are not represented in the study. Usable responses were received from 2 rural fringe schools (n = 24), 3 rural distant schools (n = 62), and 4 rural remote schools (n = 47) (see Figure 3). Because of low response rate and the consequent potential for non-response bias, the results of this study should not be generalized beyond these specific respondents. Table 2 represents the schools who engaged in the survey, the region they are from, how many juniors and seniors are enrolled in their district, and the final number of respondents.

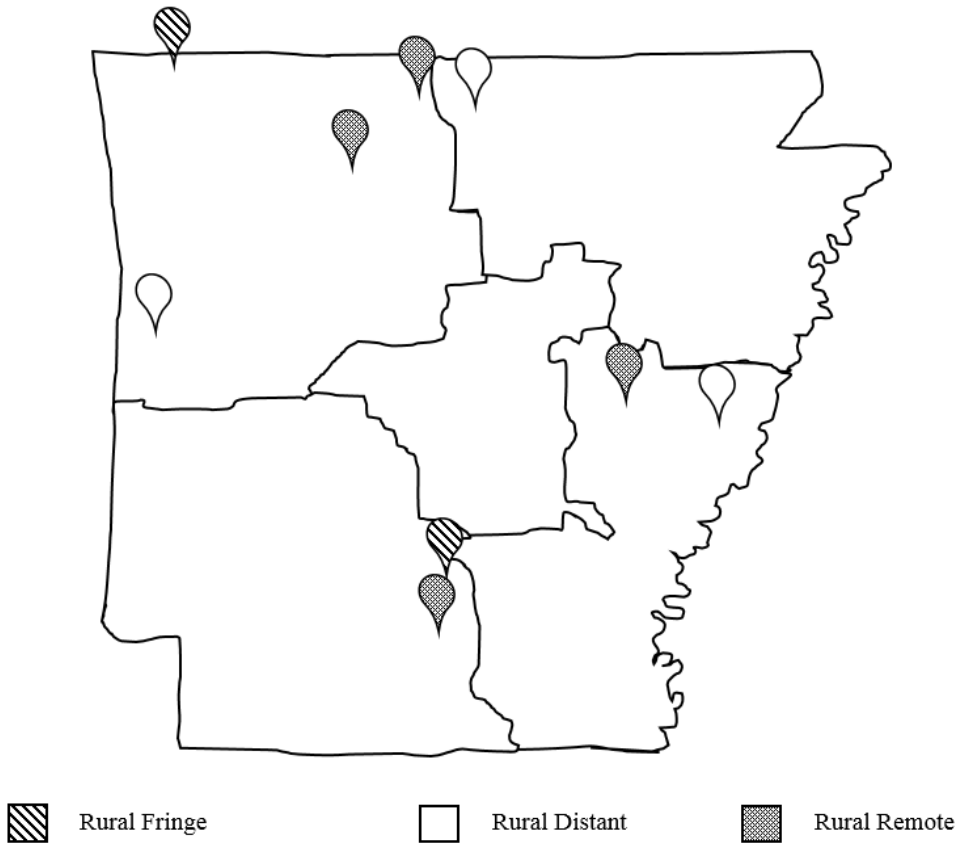

Figure 3. Geographic location and rural locale classification of participating school districts.

Table 2

Participating Schools, their Region, Rural Code, Enrollment Totals, and Number of Respondents

School	Region in Arkansas	Rural Code	Number of Juniors and Seniors	Number of Respondents
A	Southwest	Rural Fringe	140	12
D	Northwest	Rural Fringe	250	12
G	Southeast	Rural Distant	125	14
I	Northwest	Rural Distant	160	39
J	Northeast	Rural Distant	90	9
K	Southwest	Rural Remote	70	7
M	Northwest	Rural Remote	35	16
N	Northwest	Rural Remote	145	8
O	Northwest	Rural Remote	30	16

Note. $N = 133$.

Student Demographics

Overall, a majority of respondents were females (63.16%), in the 12th grade (65.41%), and had lived in their current community for ten years or more (78.20%). This was fairly consistent throughout all three rural school categories with the exception of rural fringe, which had a greater percentage of junior respondents (54.17%). It is also notable that, of the three rural locales, a higher percentage of respondents from rural distant school districts (11.29%) had lived in their current community for less than one year.

Similarly, a majority (83.46%) of the respondents' parents had lived in the students' current community for more than ten years. This is most strongly represented in the rural remote group, in which 91.49% of respondents' parents had lived in the area for ten years or more. In all rural codes, a majority (55.73%) of female parents/guardians had achieved some level of post-secondary education. Rural distant students responded more frequently that their mothers had either a bachelor's degree (26.23%) or a master's degree (9.84%) compared to the responses of the students from the other school districts. Fathers/male guardians were most commonly (40.46%) reported to have completed high school or their GED, both overall and in each of the three rural school district types. Table 3 provides descriptive statistics for respondent demographic characteristics, by rural school district type and overall.

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents and Parents/Guardians by Type of Rural School District and Overall

	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
Characteristic	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Gender								
Male	6	25.00	26	41.94	17	36.17	49	36.84
Female	18	75.00	36	58.06	30	63.83	84	63.16

Table 3 (Cont.)

Characteristic	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Class at time of survey								
10th	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	2.13	1	0.75
11th	13	54.17	17	27.42	15	31.91	45	33.83
12th	11	45.83	45	72.58	31	65.96	87	65.41
Number of years living in current community								
Less than 1year	0	0.00	7	11.29	1	2.13	8	6.02
From 1 to < 5 years	2	8.33	5	8.06	1	2.13	8	6.02
From 5 to < 10 years	3	12.50	6	9.68	4	8.51	13	9.77
10 years or more	19	79.17	44	70.97	41	87.23	104	78.20
Number of years parents/guardians have lived in current community								
Less than 1year	0	0.00	2	3.23	0	0.00	2	1.50
From 1 to < 5 years	2	8.33	4	6.45	0	0.00	6	4.51
From 5 to < 10 years	3	12.50	7	11.29	4	8.51	14	10.53
10 years or more	19	79.17	49	79.03	43	91.49	111	83.46
Mother/ Female Guardian Education Level								
Less than high school diploma	3	12.50	1	1.64	2	4.35	6	4.58
High school diploma or GED	10	41.67	20	32.79	22	47.83	52	39.69
Vocational/technical school or some college	3	12.50	10	16.39	10	21.74	23	17.56
Bachelor's degree	5	20.83	16	26.23	5	10.87	26	19.85
Master's or PhD	1	4.17	6	9.84	2	4.35	9	6.87
Don't know	2	8.33	8	13.11	5	10.87	15	11.45
N/A	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Father/ Male Guardian Education Level								
Less than high school diploma	2	8.33	4	6.56	3	6.52	9	6.87
High school diploma or GED	13	54.17	20	32.79	20	43.48	53	40.46
Vocational/technical school or some college	6	25.00	17	27.87	6	13.04	29	22.14
Bachelor's degree	1	4.17	10	16.39	4	8.70	15	11.45

Table 3 (Cont.)

Characteristic	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Father/ Male Guardian Education Level								
Master's degree or PhD	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	4.35	2	1.53
Don't know	2	8.33	8	13.11	7	15.22	17	12.98
N/A	0	0.00	2	3.28	4	8.70	6	4.58

Note. $N = 133$.

Objective One: Residential, Educational, and Occupational Aspirations and Expectations

Residential aspirations and expectations.

Objective one was to describe the residential, educational, and occupational aspirations and expectations of rural youth in Arkansas. To accomplish this, the questionnaire began with several questions regarding the students' plans and expectations for the future. To begin, students were asked where they would like to live when they are 30 years old, followed by where they expect to live at that time. Overall, a majority (79.84%) of respondents aspired to leave their home community. Of those, 73.64% aspired to live in a non-rural community. However, the largest percentage of students aspired to remain in their home communities (20.16%) or to live in a town nearby (20.16%). As for rural fringe respondents, the largest percentage (41.67%) of them indicated that they would prefer to live in a town of 2,500 to 50,000 people, near their current community, followed by either a town far away from their current community (20.83%) or a city far away (20.83%). The largest percentage of rural distant respondents (22.03%) aspired to live in a city that was far away from their current community. This was the largest percentage of students who aspired to moving to the city for each of the three rural school district types. More than one-quarter (32.61%) of rural remote students aspired to remain in their home communities, making rural remote the group with the largest percent of students aspiring to

remain in their home community. Rural remote students also had the highest percentage of students that were unsure of where they would like to live at age 30. Table 4 contains complete residential aspiration frequencies and percentages for the full sample and individual rural categories.

Table 4

Residential Aspirations of Respondents by Type of Rural School District and Overall

	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
Community Types	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Same community as now	1	4.17	10	16.95	15	32.61	26	20.16
Rural community other than home community	1	4.17	6	10.17	1	2.17	8	6.20
A town near my current community	10	41.67	8	13.56	8	17.39	26	20.16
A town far away from my current community	5	20.83	10	16.95	7	15.22	22	17.05
A city near my current community	1	4.17	2	3.39	1	2.17	4	3.10
A city far away from my current community	5	20.83	13	22.03	5	10.87	23	17.83
Unsure	1	4.17	10	16.95	9	19.57	20	15.50

Note. $N = 129$. A town was defined as having 2,500 to 50,000 people and a city as having 50,000 or more people.

For a deeper look into the residential aspirations of these respondents, a chi-square analysis was conducted in order to assess the association between students' residential aspirations and the type of rural school district attended. Residential aspirations were collapsed into three categories (non-urban, urban, and unsure) for this analysis due to the low number of student responses in some categories. A weak association ($\phi = 0.14$) was found between the students' residential aspirations and their type of rural community (Rea & Parker, 1992). Overall, more than half (63.57%) of the students wished to remain in a rural community or a small town (non-urban). This remained consistent for students from all rural locales. Rural fringe (25.00%) and rural distant (25.42%) respondents had the greatest percentage of students

who wished to live in urban communities while rural remote (19.57%) had the greatest percent of students who were unsure of their residential aspirations. Frequencies and percentages for the combined residential aspiration categories are represented in Table 5.

Table 5

Condensed Residential Aspirations of Respondents by Rural School District Type and Overall

	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
Community Types	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Non-Urban	17	70.83	34	57.63	31	67.39	82	63.57
Urban	6	25.00	15	25.42	6	13.04	27	20.93
Unsure	1	4.17	10	16.95	9	19.57	20	15.50

Note. $N = 129$.

Students were also asked to indicate the type of community they expected to be living in at the age of 30. For this question, student responses were diverse. Overall, a larger percentage (20.00%) of students expected to live in a town near their current community. This was followed by a town far away from their current community (18.46%). The most frequently given answer (25.00%) for rural fringe students was that they would live in a town far away from their current communities. Similarly, rural distant students most frequently said that they would be living in a town far away from their current community (22.03%) or a city far away from their current community (22.03%). The largest percentage (25.53%) of respondents from rural remote school districts indicated they expected to live in their current community at the age of 30. Again, rural remote school districts had the largest percentage (21.28%) of students who were unsure of their residential expectations. Table 6 includes residential expectation frequencies and percentages for the sample as a whole as well as each rural category.

Table 6

Residential Expectations of Respondents by Rural School District Type and Overall

	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
Community Types	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Same community as now	3	12.50	7	11.86	12	25.53	22	16.92
Rural community other than home community	2	8.33	6	10.17	4	8.51	12	9.23
A town near my current community	5	20.83	11	18.64	10	21.28	26	20.00
A town far away from my current community	6	25.00	13	22.03	5	10.64	24	18.46
A city near my current community	1	4.17	1	1.69	0	0.00	2	1.54
A city far away from my current community	3	12.50	13	22.03	6	12.77	22	16.92
Unsure	4	16.67	8	13.56	10	21.28	22	16.92

Note. N = 130. A town was defined as having 2,500 to 50,000 people and a city as having 50,000 or more people.

Association between student residence and student residential expectations were assessed based on a chi-square analysis. Due to the low number of respondents, several of the community type options had to be collapsed in order to proceed with this analysis. The rural community options were combined with the town options to create a new "non-urban" group, while the city options, near and far, were combined for a new "urban" grouping. A weak association ($\phi = 0.10$) existed between the students' residential expectations and their type of rural community (Rea & Parker, 1992). Consistent with their residential aspirations, a majority (64.62%) of the students expected to remain in a non-urban area. Students from each rural locale reflected a majority "non-urban" expectation. However, rural distant students indicated that a larger percentage (23.73%) of those students expected to live in an urban community than did students from other locales. In addition, a higher percentage of rural remote students (21.28%) indicated they were unsure where they would live in the future as compared to their rural fringe and rural distant counterparts. Frequencies and percentages for the combined

residential expectation categories are presented in Table 7 for each rural category and for the sample as whole.

Table 7

Condensed Residential Expectations of Respondents by Rural School District Type and Overall

	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
Community Type	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Non-Urban	16	66.67	37	62.71	31	65.96	84	64.62
Urban	4	16.67	14	23.73	6	12.77	24	18.46
Unsure	4	16.67	8	13.56	10	21.28	22	16.92

Note. $N = 130$.

When the residential aspirations and expectations of the respondents were compared, they did not mirror one another. In fact, for each rural school district type, there were some substantial shifts between aspirations and expectations. Overall, the largest shift between aspirations and expectations was for students aspiring to live in their home community. Just over 20.16% of students aspired to live in their home community, while only 16.92% expected to. For rural fringe students, the largest difference was for those aspiring to live in a town near their home community. Over 41.67% of respondents from rural fringe school districts wished to live in a town near their home community, but only 20.83% had the same expectation. Additionally, the number of rural fringe respondents who were unsure of their expectations increased by 12.51%. As for rural distant respondents, their aspirations and expectations were relatively similar with a few minor shifts. Those who wanted to remain in their home community comprised 16.95% of rural distant respondents while only 11.86% of respondents expected to stay in the rural area. Responses from rural remote school districts revealed that 7.09% fewer students expected to remain in their home community than aspired to.

Educational aspirations and expectations.

The second part of the plans and expectations section of the questionnaire explored educational aspirations and expectations. Students were asked what was the highest level of education they wanted to earn, and nearly half (44.27%) of all students said that they would like to graduate from a four year college or university. Additionally, 29.01% noted that they would like to obtain either a master's or doctoral degree. Thus, 72.38% of these rural respondents aspired to earn either bachelor's or graduate degrees. Overall, 6.11% of these mostly (99.25%) junior and senior students indicated they were unsure of their educational aspirations.

Students from rural fringe school district had the greatest percentage (41.67%) of students who wanted to earn graduate degrees, while rural distant districts had the largest percentage (48.33%) of students who wanted to earn only a bachelor's degree. Rural remote school districts had the largest percentage of respondents (12.77%) whose highest educational aspirations was to finish high school or complete the General Educational Development (GED) program. Frequencies and percentages for the educational goals of respondents from each rural school district type and for the respondents as a whole are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Educational Aspirations of Respondents by Rural School District Type and Overall

Highest Level of	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
Desired Education	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
High School Diploma or GED	1	4.17	1	1.67	6	12.77	8	6.11
Vocational, Trade, or Business School	0	0.00	5	8.33	0	0.00	5	3.82
Two year Community College	2	8.33	8	13.33	4	8.51	14	10.69
Four year College or University	9	37.50	29	48.33	20	42.55	58	44.27
Master's Degree or PhD	10	41.67	15	25.00	13	27.66	38	29.01
Unsure	2	8.33	2	3.33	4	8.51	8	6.11

Note. $N = 131$.

To determine the association between rural code and educational aspirations student responses were combined into three levels: community college or less, four year college or university, and graduate school. Response categories were combined because of the low number of responses in some of the categories. The chi-square analysis revealed a weak association ($\phi = 0.11$) between the level of education each student wanted to achieve and their rural school district type (Rea & Parker, 1992). The highest percentage (45.45%) of students who wanted to obtain a master's or doctoral degree were from rural fringe communities, which was the most frequent response for those students. Rural distant and rural remote students were similar in their responses. Nearly one-quarter of rural distant (24.14%) and rural remote (23.26%) respondents aspired to community college or less as their highest level of education. The largest percentage (50.00% and 46.51%, respectively) of students from rural distant and remote school districts wanted to earn a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education. Table 9 displays the educational aspiration frequencies and percentages for the full sample and individual rural locales.

Table 9

Condensed Educational Aspirations of Respondents by Rural School District Type and Overall

	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
Education Level	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Community College or Less	3	13.64	14	24.14	10	23.26	27	21.95
Four year College or University	9	40.91	29	50.00	20	46.51	58	46.15
Master's Degree or PhD	10	45.45	15	25.86	13	30.23	38	30.89

Note. $N = 123$.

When students were asked about the highest level of education they expected to complete, the respondents as a whole exhibited high educational expectations. Nearly half

(47.33%) of all respondents expected to earn the bachelor's degree as their highest degree and an additional 21.37% expected to also earn a graduate degree. Because earning a bachelor's degree is a prerequisite to earning a graduate degree, 68.70% of all respondents expected to earn at least a bachelor's degree. It should be noted that students from rural remote school districts had the largest percentage (12.77%) of students whose highest expected level of education was a high school diploma or GED. Table 10 represents the educational expectations of the respondents overall, as well as by each rural school district type.

Table 10

Educational Expectations of Respondents by Rural School District Type and Overall

Highest Level of Desired Education	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
High School Diploma or GED	0	0.00	2	3.33	6	12.77	8	6.11
Vocational, Trade, or Business School	0	0.00	9	15.00	0	0.00	9	6.87
Two year Community College	2	8.33	9	15.00	7	14.89	18	13.74
Four year College or University	13	54.17	27	45.00	22	46.81	62	47.33
Master's Degree or PhD	8	33.33	13	21.67	7	14.89	28	21.37
Unsure	1	4.17	0	0.00	5	10.64	6	4.58

Note. $N = 131$.

The association between rural school district type and educational expectations was weak ($\phi = 0.16$) (Rea & Parker, 1992). Once responses were condensed into the four educational categories, nearly half (49.19%) of the combined responses were in the four year college or university category. Although 41.67% of rural fringe students aspired to obtain a graduate degree, a majority (56.52%) of them only expected to graduate from a four year college or university. However, rural fringe students still had the largest percentage (34.78%) of students who expected to obtain their master's or doctoral degree when compared to students from other

locales. Similar to their aspirations, larger percentages of the rural distant (45.00%) and rural remote (52.38%) respondents indicated that they would complete their education at a four year college or university. It should be noted, however, that for both rural distant and rural remote, the percent of students who expected to obtain their master's or doctoral degree decreased (21.67% and 16.67%, respectively) while the percent of students who expected to complete community college or less increased (33.33% and 30.95%, respectively). Frequencies and percentages representing the association between rural school district type and educational expectations are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Condensed Educational Expectations of Respondents by Rural School District Type and Overall

	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
Education Level	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Community College or Less	2	8.70	20	33.33	13	30.95	35	28.00
Four year College or University	13	56.52	27	45.00	22	52.38	62	49.60
Master's Degree or PhD	8	34.78	13	21.67	7	16.67	28	22.40

Note. $N = 125$.

There were several differences noted between respondents' educational aspirations and expectations. To begin, there was a 7.64% decrease in the number of respondents, overall, who expected to obtain a graduate degree as compared to their aspirations. Overall, the percentage of respondents who expected to complete vocational, trade, or business school, or two year community colleges dropped by 3.05% when compared to their aspirations. However, 3.05% more respondents expected to graduate with a bachelor's degree than aspired to. Similar to the overall findings, the largest percentage (41.67%) of respondents from rural fringe school districts aspired to obtain a graduate degree, however, this decreased to only 33.33% for their

expectations. Additionally, the number of students who expected to graduate with a bachelor's degree increased by 16.67% compared to their aspirations, meaning that over half of all rural fringe respondents expected to obtain a bachelor's degree. For rural distant respondents, the largest difference between aspirations and expectations was for vocational, trade, or business school. Only 8.33% of students aspired to this type of education, however, 15.00% of rural distant respondents indicated that this is what they expected. Finally, rural remote responses changed the most in reference to obtaining a master's or doctoral degree. There were 12.77% more students who indicated that they expected to complete graduate school when compared to those who aspired to complete graduate school.

Association between Residential and Educational Aspirations.

A chi-square analysis was used in order determine any association between the respondents' residential and educational aspirations. The analysis was based on condensed categories for both residential and educational aspirations and revealed a moderate association between the two ($\phi = 0.40$). A majority (59.26%) of respondents who aspired to complete community college or less indicated that they would prefer to live in a non-urban area. This was followed by students who were unsure (37.04%) and those who aspired to live in an urban area (3.70%). These had the largest percentage of students who were unsure of their residential aspirations. Respondents who indicated they would like to get their bachelor's degree also indicated that they would prefer to live in a non-urban area a majority (73.68%) of the time. This was the largest percentage of students aspiring to live in a non-urban area. Additionally, 19.30% aspired to live in an urban area, and 7.02% were unsure. Finally, a majority (57.89%) of respondents aspiring to graduate degrees indicated that they would like to live in a non-urban area. However, 31.58% of students aspiring to obtain a graduate degree also aspired to live in an

urban area. This was the largest percentage of respondents who wished to live in an urban area. Table 12 represents the frequencies and percentages for the respondents' condensed residential and educational aspirations.

Table 12

Condensed Residential and Educational Aspirations

Residential Aspirations	Community College or Less		Four year College or University		Master's Degree or PhD	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Non-Urban	16	59.26	42	73.68	22	57.89
Urban	1	3.70	11	19.30	12	31.58
Unsure	10	37.04	4	7.02	4	10.53

Note. $N = 122$.

Occupational Aspirations and Expectations.

In order to determine the students' occupational aspirations, students completed an open-response question that asked what job they wanted to have when they were 30 years old. Responses were coded according to the Career and Technology Education Consortium's 16 career clusters (NASDCTEc, 2015). Two additional coding options were created to accommodate student responses related to military careers, and for those who were unsure about their future career. Overall, careers related to health sciences had the greatest percentage (30.77%) of responses, followed by education and training (16.92%). Collectively, professions within education and training and health sciences accounted for a majority (66.66%) of the occupational aspirations of respondents from rural fringe school district types. Health science was also the occupation with the largest percentage (35.59%) of student interest for rural distant respondents. This was also followed by education and training (15.25%). Like their rural fringe and rural distant counterparts, the largest percentage (23.40%) of rural remote respondents aspired to health sciences for their future occupations. Additionally, at 14.89%, respondents from rural remote school districts were the most likely to specify jobs in agriculture, food, and

natural resources. Rural fringe schools had the largest percentage (12.50%) of respondents who aspired to occupations relating to human services. Table 13 presents the career clusters that correspond to the students' occupational aspirations and the frequency with which the sample as a whole and each rural school district type chose each career cluster.

Table 13

Occupational Aspirations of Respondents by Rural School District Type and Overall

	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
Career Clusters	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources	1	4.17	3	5.08	7	14.89	11	8.46
Architecture and Construction	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	1.54	2	1.54
Arts, A/V Technology and Communications	0	0.00	1	1.69	3	6.38	4	3.08
Business, Management, and Administration	0	0.00	1	1.69	3	6.38	4	3.08
Education and Training	8	33.33	9	15.25	5	10.64	22	16.92
Finance	0	0.00	2	3.39	2	4.26	4	3.08
Government and Public Administration	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Health Sciences	8	33.33	21	35.59	11	23.40	40	30.77
Hospitality and Tourism	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Human Services	3	12.50	2	3.39	1	2.13	6	4.62
Information Technology	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Law, Public Safety, Corrections, and Security	1	4.17	4	6.78	2	4.26	7	5.38
Manufacturing	1	4.17	3	5.08	3	6.38	7	5.38
Marketing, Sales, and Service	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Military	0	0.00	3	5.08	1	2.13	4	3.08
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics	1	4.17	5	8.47	1	2.13	7	5.38
Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics	0	0.00	2	3.39	1	2.13	3	2.31
Undecided	0	0.00	2	3.39	2	4.26	4	3.08
Other	1	4.17	1	1.69	3	6.38	5	3.85

Note. $N = 130$.

The first section of the questionnaire ended by asking students how sure they were they would be doing the type of job they wanted when they were 30 years old. Responses ranged from "very sure" to "not sure at all". A majority of respondents had some degree of certainty they would be employed in the same field they wished to be, with 43.08% being "very sure" and 44.62% being "somewhat sure". More than half (56.52%) of rural fringe respondents were very sure of their future careers. Rural distant students were also fairly confident of achieving their occupational expectations with 43.33% being "very sure", and 45.00% being somewhat sure. Respondents from rural remote school districts exhibited far less certainty about achieving their career goals, with 12.77% indicating that they were "not at all sure". Table 14 includes complete occupational expectation frequencies and percentages for students combined and the separate rural categories.

Table 14

Respondents Degree of Certainty for Achieving Occupational Aspirations by Rural School District Type and Overall

Expectation Level	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Very sure	13	56.52	26	43.33	17	36.17	56	43.08
Somewhat sure	9	39.13	27	45.00	22	46.81	58	44.61
Somewhat unsure	1	4.35	3	5.00	2	4.26	6	4.62
Not at all sure	0	0.00	4	6.67	6	12.77	10	7.69

Note. $N = 130$

To determine the association between rural code and the certainty with which students believe that they will achieve their occupational aspirations, student responses were combined into two levels, sure and unsure. Due to the low number of responses in some categories, it was necessary to collapse the "very sure" response option with "somewhat unsure" and the "somewhat unsure" and "not at all sure" response options. The chi-square analysis identified a weak association ($\phi = 0.13$) between how certain each student was about achieving their

occupational goals and their rural school district type (Rea & Parker, 1992). The largest percentage (87.69%) of respondents were sure, to some degree, that they would attain their occupational aspirations. This was consistent for all rural school district types. Rural fringe respondents had the largest percentage (95.65%) of students who were sure to some degree of achieving their occupational goals, while rural remote respondents had the largest percentage (17.02%) of students who were unsure of achieving these goals. This is consistent with the findings for residential aspirations and expectations as well as educational expectations, for which rural remote students had the largest percentage of students who were "unsure". Table 15 represents the degree of certainty with which the respondents can expect to achieve their occupational goals by rural school district type and overall, once they have been combined.

Table 15

Condensed Degrees of Certainty for Achieving Occupational Aspirations by Rural School District Type and Overall

Expectation Level	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
	f	*%*	*f*	*%*	*f*	*%*	*f*	*%*
Sure	22	95.65	53	88.33	39	82.98	114	87.69
Unsure	1	4.35	7	11.67	8	17.02	16	12.31

Note. $N = 130$

Objective Two: Student Perceived Barriers

Objective two was to describe the respondents' perceived barriers to achieving their educational and occupational aspirations. Students were given a series of questions that asked them to indicate the degree to which they anticipated various issues and hardships would keep them from achieving their educational goals. Overall, four of the seven educational barriers were perceived as a problem to some degree for a majority of respondents. In response to "[school] costs more than I can afford", a total of 84.96% of students indicated some degree of concern for this barrier, with 33.08% of student who indicated "only a little", 31.91% said it would affect

their educational achievement “some”, and 29.79 % of rural fringe students indicated that this barrier would affect them “a lot”. Following school cost, the need to work was a problem to some degree for a majority (78.95%) of students. More specifically, 27.82% of respondents said that needing to work would affect them “only a little”, while 36.09% indicated this would affect them “some”, and 15.04% indicated that it would affect them “a lot”. Over half (57.89%) of respondents overall said that family responsibilities would have some effect on achieving their educational goals. For 27.82% of students, this barrier was perceived as affecting them “only a little”, while 17.29% indicated it would affect them “some”, and 12.78% indicated it would affect them “a lot”. Finally, a majority (54.55%) of respondents noted that their motivation level was a barrier, to some degree, to their educational aspiration achievement. Overall, approximately one-quarter (25.76%) of students indicated that their motivation level would affect them “only a little”. However, 18.94% of respondents selected the “some” response and 9.85% selected the “a lot” response.

Similar to the overall findings, a majority of rural fringe respondents indicated their concern for school costs (83.33% of responses between “only a little” and “a lot”) and needing to work (70.83% of responses between “only a little” and “a lot”). However, unlike the overall majority, more than half (66.67% and 70.83%, respectively) of rural fringe respondents indicated that motivation level and family responsibilities were “not at all” a problem for them. Also, “I am not smart enough” was perceived as affecting 54.17% of rural fringe respondents “only a little” (29.17%) and “some” (25.00%). More than one-quarter (33.33%) of rural fringe students indicated that their parents’ desire for them to go far is school was a barrier to their educational achievement to some degree. This was the largest percentage of students concerned with this barrier from any of the rural school district types.

A majority (85.49%) of respondents from rural distant school districts indicated that the cost of school was a barrier, to some degree, to the attainment of their educational aspirations. Although 41.94% of respondents indicated that this would affect them "only a little", 25.81% indicated it would affect them "some", and 17.74% indicated it would affect them "a lot". Similar to the overall findings, 32.26% of rural distant respondents indicated that needing to work would affect them "only a little", while 30.65% indicated "some", and 14.52% indicated it would affect them "a lot". Over half (62.90%) of respondents from rural distant school districts also indicated that family responsibilities were barriers, to some degree ("only a little" to "a lot"), to their educational aspiration achievement. However, rural distant respondents had the largest percentage (70.97%) of students who indicated that being smart enough was "not at all" a barrier to their education.

Like their rural distant counterparts, a majority of rural remote respondents perceived the cost of school, needing to work, and family responsibilities as educational barriers to some degree. However, for each barrier, the rural remote school district type had the highest percentage of students who indicated that these barriers would affect them "some" or "a lot". For the cost of school, 31.91% of rural remote respondents indicated that it would affect them "some", and 29.79% indicated that it would affect them "a lot". Nearly half (42.55%) of rural remote respondents said that needing to work would affect them "some", and 19.15 % said this barrier would affect them "a lot". One-quarter (25.53%) of rural remote respondents indicated that their motivation level would inhibit them some while 12.77% indicated it would inhibit them "a lot". Family responsibilities were perceived by 19.15% of rural remote respondents as a barrier that would affect their educational goal attainment "a lot". However, while most students, overall and by rural school district type, did not indicate that parents were a barrier to

their educational goals, rural remote students had the largest percent of students that responded in such a way. All barriers are presented in Table 16 along with the frequencies and percentages for each rural school district type and the overall total.

Table 16

Respondents Perceived Barriers to Achievement of Educational Aspirations by Rural School District Type and Overall

	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
Types of Barriers	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
It costs more than I can afford								
Not at all	4	16.67	9	14.52	7	14.89	20	15.04
Only a little	7	29.17	26	41.94	11	23.40	44	33.08
Some	7	29.17	16	25.81	15	31.91	38	28.57
A lot	6	25.00	11	17.74	14	29.79	31	23.31
My parents do not want me to go far in school								
Not at all	16	66.67	51	82.26	42	89.36	109	81.95
Only a little	3	12.50	3	4.84	1	2.13	7	5.26
Some	3	12.50	4	6.45	2	4.26	9	6.77
A lot	2	8.33	4	6.45	2	4.26	8	6.02
I need to work								
Not at all	7	29.17	14	22.58	7	14.89	28	21.05
Only a little	6	25.00	20	32.26	11	23.40	37	27.82
Some	9	37.50	19	30.65	20	42.55	48	36.09
A lot	2	8.33	9	14.52	9	19.15	20	15.04
I am not smart enough								
Not at all	11	45.83	44	70.97	21	44.68	76	57.14
Only a little	7	29.17	10	16.13	13	27.66	30	22.56
Some	6	25.00	7	11.29	10	21.28	23	17.29
A lot	0	0.00	1	1.61	3	6.38	4	3.01
I do not have good enough grades								
Not at all	15	62.50	42	67.74	27	57.45	84	63.16
Only a little	5	20.83	14	22.58	12	25.53	31	23.31
Some	2	8.33	4	6.45	5	10.64	11	8.27
A lot	2	8.33	2	3.23	3	6.38	7	5.26
My motivation level								
Not at all	16	66.67	32	52.46	12	25.53	60	45.45
Only a little	4	16.67	13	21.31	17	36.17	34	25.76
Some	2	8.33	11	18.03	12	25.53	25	18.94
A lot	2	8.33	5	8.20	6	12.77	13	9.85

Table 16 (Cont.)

Types of Barriers	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
I have family responsibilities								
Not at all	17	70.83	23	37.10	16	34.04	56	42.11
Only a little	2	8.33	21	33.87	14	29.79	37	27.82
Some	3	12.50	12	19.35	8	17.02	23	17.29
A lot	2	8.33	6	9.68	9	19.15	17	12.78

Note. $N = 133$

The occupational barriers presented to the students ranged from lack of money for education to the students' own motivation level. Overall, there were three barriers for which a majority of respondents indicated some level of concern in regards to their occupational aspirations. The barrier with the largest percentage (67.66%) of respondents who expressed some concern was "lack of money for education". One-quarter (25.56%) of respondents indicated that this would affect them "only a little". However, 21.80% indicated this would affect them "some", and 20.30% of respondents indicated that this would affect them "a lot". The lack of jobs/bad economy was a barrier, to some degree, for 67.41% of respondents, 37.59% of whom indicated it would affect them "only a little", and 19.55% indicated it would affect them "some". One-half (50.38%) of respondents indicated that family/ home responsibilities were possible barriers to achieving their occupational aspirations. There were 27.07% of respondents who indicated that these responsibilities would affect them "only a little" and 18.05% of respondents who indicate that they would affect them "some". Additionally, combined student responses indicated that, for the majority of respondents, the following barriers were "not at all a problem": "there is no college or other place to get training near my home" (71.43%), "my motivation level" (56.39%), and "I am not smart enough" (65.91%).

A majority of rural fringe respondents indicated that only two of the provided occupational aspiration barriers were of concern to them, to some degree. Lack of money for education was the first, receiving 66.67% of responses between "only a little" and "a lot". Next, was the lack of jobs/ bad economy. Although nearly half (45.83%) of the rural fringe respondents said this barrier would affect them "only a little", 4.17% said it would affect them "some", and 12.50% said it would affect them "a lot". Again, rural fringe school districts had the largest percentage (70.83% and 70.83%, respectively) of students who indicated that family/ home responsibilities and motivation level were "not at all" a problem to their occupational aspirations.

Similar to the overall findings, more than half (69.35%) of rural distant respondents indicated some level of concern with not having enough money for the educational requirements associated with their desired occupation. This was the barrier with the largest percentage of rural distant respondents who indicated that it would affect them to some degree. Lack of jobs/ bad economy was next with 62.90% of rural distant respondents indicating that this would be an issue for them as well. However, the largest percentage (40.32%) of these students indicated that this would affect them "only a little", while 14.52% said it would affect them "some" and 8.06% said it would affect them "a lot". Family and home responsibilities was the final barrier for which a majority (53.23%) of rural distant respondents indicated that it would have some effect on them. Again, largest percent (29.03%) of students who responded in this manner indicated that the barrier would affect them "only a little", 17.74% indicated that it would affect them "some", and 6.45 indicated that it would affect them "a lot".

Responses from rural remote students revealed that a majority of students felt that four of the listed barriers would affect them to some degree. The barrier with the largest percentage

(70.21%) of rural remote students with concern was lack of jobs/bad economy. When the responses are further broken down, 29.79% of rural remote respondents indicated that this barrier would affect them "only a little", while 34.04% indicated that it would affect them "some" and another 6.38% of rural remote respondents indicated that it would affect them "a lot". Having enough money for education was next, with 65.96% of rural remote students choosing responses options between "only a little" and "a lot". Notably, 25.53% of rural remote students indicated that this barrier would affect them "some" and another 25.53% of them indicated that it would affect them "a lot". For both response options, "some" and "a lot", rural remote respondents had the highest percentage of students who chose these, compared to each of the other rural school district types. The third barrier for which a majority (57.45%) of rural remote respondents indicated some level of concern was having family or home responsibilities. Motivation level served as the fourth, and final barrier that would affect a majority (55.32%) of respondents to some degree. Table 17 includes each occupational barrier along with the frequencies and percentages for each rural district type and sample as a whole.

Table 17

Respondents Perceived Barriers to Achievement of Occupational Aspirations by Rural School District Type and Overall

	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
Types of Barriers	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Lack of money for education								
Not at all	8	33.33	19	30.65	16	34.04	43	32.33
Only a little	5	20.83	22	35.48	7	14.89	34	25.56
Some	6	25.00	11	17.74	12	25.53	29	21.80
A lot	5	20.83	10	16.13	12	25.53	27	20.30
Lack of jobs/bad economy								
Not at all	9	37.50	23	37.10	14	29.79	46	34.59
Only a little	11	45.83	25	40.32	14	29.79	50	37.59
Some	1	4.17	9	14.52	16	34.04	26	19.55
A lot	3	12.50	5	8.06	3	6.38	11	8.27

Table 17 (Cont.)

Types of Barriers	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Family or home responsibilities								
Not at all	17	70.83	29	46.77	20	42.55	66	49.62
Only a little	4	16.67	18	29.03	14	29.79	36	27.07
Some	3	12.50	11	17.74	10	21.28	24	18.05
A lot	0	0.00	4	6.45	3	6.38	7	5.26
There is no college or other place to get training near my home								
Not at all	17	70.83	45	72.58	33	70.21	95	71.43
Only a little	4	16.67	12	19.35	8	17.02	24	18.05
Some	2	8.33	5	8.06	4	8.51	11	8.27
A lot	1	4.17	0	0.00	2	4.26	3	2.26
My motivation level								
Not at all	17	70.83	40	64.52	21	44.68	75	56.39
Only a little	3	12.50	12	19.35	17	36.17	32	24.06
Some	4	16.67	5	8.06	6	12.77	15	11.28
A lot	0	0.00	5	8.06	3	6.38	8	6.02
I am not smart enough								
Not at all	17	73.91	43	69.35	27	57.45	87	65.91
Only a little	4	17.39	14	22.58	12	25.53	30	22.73
Some	2	8.70	3	4.84	7	14.89	12	9.09
A lot	0	0.00	2	3.23	1	2.13	3	2.27

Note. $N = 133$.

Objective Three: Respondents' Perceptions of and Satisfaction with Community

The third objective was to determine rural youth's perceptions of importance and satisfaction with selected community characteristics. Students were asked to indicate how important various community characteristics are in selecting where they want to live as well as how satisfied they were with those same characteristics in their home communities. Respondents were provided with a 4 Likert-type scale (1 = not satisfied to 4 = very satisfied/ not important to very important) for record of their perception in each section. Means and standard deviations were calculated in order to determine the average perception of each community factor.

Respondents indicated overall, that a majority of the listed community factors were important or very important. Reasonable cost of living (M = 3.59, SD = 0.71), cell phone service (M = 3.52, SD = 0.69), good paying jobs (M = 3.47, SD = 0.78), and a clean environment (M = 3.47, SD = 0.65) were ranked as the most important of the listed community characteristics. Rural fringe students indicated that cell phone coverage (M = 3.78, SD = 0.52), access to high-speed internet connection at home (M = 3.74, SD = 0.45), and good preschool/childcare options (M = 3.61, SD = 0.66) are the most important, while rural distant students responses indicated that reasonable cost of living (M = 3.65, SD = 0.61), cell phone coverage (M = 3.61, SD = 0.56), and quality schools and teachers (M = 3.55, SD = 0.72) are the most important. Similarly, rural remote students ranked reasonable cost of living (M = 3.55, SD = 0.80) as most important. However, good paying jobs (M = 3.49, SD = 0.75) received the second highest score for rural remote students.

Cultural opportunities, such as concerts and museums were, overall, ranked among the least important, along with the community having an internet café or coffee house (M = 2.83 and M = 2.63, respectively). Students from rural remote school districts were unique in their responses to the importance of the listed community characteristics. Responses from students in these areas indicated that they place lower importance on characteristics such as places for people their age to hang out (M = 2.74, SD = 0.97) and agencies to help people solve problems (M = 2.78, SD = 0.92), than their rural fringe and rural distant counterparts. The combined means of student ratings for the importance of community characteristics, as well the ratings from each rural code, are presented in Table 18.

Table 18

Respondents' Perceptions of the Importance of Selected Community Characteristics by Rural School District Type and Overall

Community Characteristics	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Good paying jobs	3.38	0.71	3.50	0.83	3.49	0.75	3.47	0.78
Clean environment	3.58	0.58	3.53	0.60	3.32	0.73	3.47	0.65
Places for people my age to hang out	3.42	0.83	3.10	1.00	2.74	0.97	3.03	0.98
Quality schools and teachers	3.63	0.49	3.55	0.72	3.19	0.99	3.44	0.81
Good stores and shopping facilities	3.25	0.90	3.23	0.81	2.98	0.87	3.15	0.85
Cultural opportunities, such as concerts and museums	2.79	0.88	2.95	1.02	2.70	0.95	2.83	0.97
Many chances to get ahead	3.33	0.70	3.37	0.86	3.02	0.92	3.24	0.87
People share my views	3.21	0.98	3.00	0.82	2.91	1.02	3.01	0.92
People who share my religious values	3.26	0.96	3.07	0.98	3.02	1.01	3.09	0.98
Tolerance of different religions and cultures	3.17	1.07	3.25	0.88	2.83	1.09	3.08	1.00
Indoor entertainment (movies, bowling, arcades)	3.17	0.96	3.13	0.93	2.85	0.96	3.04	0.95
Agencies to help people solve problems	3.21	0.93	3.17	0.94	2.78	0.92	3.04	0.94
Land that can be used for hiking, hunting, skiing, camping, and other recreation	3.17	0.94	3.23	0.84	3.36	0.82	3.27	0.85
Access to high-speed internet connection at home	3.74	0.45	3.48	0.79	3.38	0.85	3.49	0.77
Internet café or coffee house	2.91	1.16	2.62	1.06	2.51	1.00	2.63	1.06
Good preschool and childcare options	3.61	0.66	3.52	0.81	3.26	0.91	3.44	0.83
Reasonable cost of living	3.52	0.79	3.65	0.61	3.55	0.80	3.59	0.71
Cell phone coverage	3.78	0.52	3.61	0.56	3.28	0.83	3.52	0.69
Opinions of people your age are sought and valued	3.43	0.66	3.38	0.83	3.15	0.86	3.31	0.82

Note. N = 133; Likert Scale used was 1 = Not Important, 2 = Somewhat Important, 3 = Important, and 4 = Very Important.

Combined student responses indicated that, as a whole, their satisfaction with the selected community characteristics was low. Only a few categories received average scores within the "satisfied" range. Those characteristics include cell phone coverage (M = 3.03, SD = 0.88) and land that can be used for hiking, hunting, skiing, camping, and other recreation (M = 3.02, SD = 1.07). Cell phone coverage was among the most highly ranked categories for each rural locale. Responses from rural distant (M = 3.03, SD = 1.01) and rural remote (M = 3.35, SD = 0.90) students indicated they were more satisfied with the outdoor recreation opportunities provided by their communities than students from rural fringe communities (M = 2.33, SD = 1.24).

A majority of the community characteristics received scores within the "not satisfied" to "somewhat satisfied" range. Cultural opportunities, such as concerts and museums, received the lowest average score (M = 1.57, SD = 0.90) for combined student responses and was among the lowest ranked categories for each of the three rural locales. Responses from rural remote students (M = 1.39, SD = 0.71) were exceptionally low for this category. Overall, students indicated they were not satisfied (M = 1.73, SD = 0.94) with the presence of internet cafés and/or coffee houses in their communities. This was true for both rural fringe (M = 1.50, SD = 0.78) and rural remote (M = 1.51, SD = 0.69) students. Students from rural fringe (M = 1.79, SD = 1.10) and rural distant (M = 1.66, SD = 1.05) areas also ranked their satisfaction with indoor entertainment opportunities very low. Table 19 represents the community characteristics listed in the questionnaire and the mean of the ratings for each rural category and sample as a whole.

Table 19

Rural Arkansas Youths' Satisfaction with Selected Community Characteristics

Community Characteristics	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Combined	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Good paying jobs	2.46	0.78	1.92	0.98	2.04	0.92	2.06	0.94
Clean environment	2.75	0.90	2.44	0.98	2.62	0.79	2.58	0.90
Places for people my age to hang out	2.29	1.08	1.77	0.93	2.04	1.05	1.96	1.01
Quality schools and teachers	2.88	0.85	2.59	0.88	2.78	0.84	2.71	0.86
Good stores and shopping facilities	2.42	1.10	2.20	0.95	1.91	0.84	2.14	0.95
Cultural opportunities, such as concerts and museums	1.92	1.02	1.56	0.95	1.39	0.71	1.57	0.90
Many chances to get ahead	2.21	0.83	2.02	0.90	1.98	0.86	2.04	0.87
People share my views	2.63	1.13	2.48	0.84	2.48	0.98	2.51	0.95
People who share my religious values	3.04	0.91	2.98	0.86	2.72	1.09	2.81	0.96
Tolerance of different religions and cultures	2.83	0.96	2.63	0.97	2.47	1.01	2.61	0.99
Indoor entertainment (movies, bowling, arcades)	1.79	1.10	1.66	1.05	1.96	1.01	1.79	1.05
Agencies to help people solve problems	2.17	0.92	1.85	0.99	1.91	0.97	1.93	0.97
Land that can be used for hiking, hunting, skiing, camping, and other recreation	2.33	1.24	3.03	1.01	3.35	0.90	3.02	1.07
Access to high-speed internet connection at home	3.00	1.10	2.74	1.12	2.91	0.92	2.85	1.05
Internet café or coffee house	1.50	0.78	1.98	1.09	1.51	0.69	1.73	0.94
Good preschool and childcare options	2.79	0.78	2.67	0.85	2.52	0.91	2.64	0.86
Reasonable cost of living	2.92	0.83	2.98	0.69	2.63	0.90	2.85	0.81
Cell phone coverage	3.17	0.82	3.02	0.93	2.98	0.86	3.03	0.88
Opinions of people your age are sought and valued	2.96	0.82	2.37	1.00	2.26	0.83	2.44	0.94

Note. N = 133; Likert Scale used was 1 = Not Satisfied, 2 = Somewhat Satisfied, 3 = Satisfied, and 4 = Very Satisfied

In order to assess the differences between the community characteristics that respondents considered important and their satisfaction with those characteristics, mean weighted discrepancy scores were calculated. The maximum possible mean weighted discrepancy score was 12.00, however, no community characteristic received a discrepancy score more than 6. There was also a lot of variability between students. The community characteristic with the overall greatest disparity between importance and satisfaction was good paying jobs (*MWDS* = 4.90, SD = 4.34). While good paying jobs were considered an important community characteristic when choosing a place to live, these students indicated that they were not equally as satisfied. This was followed by many chances to advance in the community (*MWDS* = 3.93, SD = 3.91) and the availability of indoor entertainment (*MWDS* = 3.82, SD = 4.50). Although some community characteristics received fairly high discrepancy scores, there was still a large amount of variability among student responses. Overall, moderate discrepancy scores were found for community factors such as "clean environment" (*MWDS* = 3.10, SD = 3.65) and "reasonable cost of living" (*MWDS* = 2.73, SD = 3.57). Land that can be used for recreation received one of the lowest overall mean weighted discrepancy scores (*MWDS* = 0.76, SD = 3.79), along with "people who share my religious values" (*MWDS* = 0.62, SD = 2.87).

Responses from rural fringe students differed from the overall findings. Indoor entertainment was the community characteristic for which rural fringe students indicated the largest discrepancy (*MWDS* = 4.36, SD = 4.56) between importance and satisfaction. This was followed by "internet café or coffee houses" (*MWDS* = 4.05, SD = 4.45) and "places for people my age to hang out" (*MWDS* = 3.85, SD = 4.43). Rural distant student responses were similar to the overall findings and indicated the largest discrepancies between importance and satisfaction

for the following: good paying jobs (*MWDS* = 5.48, SD = 4.71), indoor entertainment, such as movies, bowling, and arcades *(MWDS* = 4.54, SD = 4.80), and many chances to get ahead (*MWDS* = 4.49, SD = 4.33). Rural remote responses were also slightly different than the overall findings. The largest discrepancy found for rural remote respondents was good paying jobs (*MWDS* = 5.08, *SD* = 4.01), followed by reasonable cost of living (*MWDS* = 3.40, SD = 3.59), and many chances to get ahead (*MWDS* = 3.28, SD = 3.65).

Rural distant and rural remote respondents perceived the largest discrepancy scores in reference to good paying jobs (*MWDS* = 5.48, SD = 4.71 and *MWDS* = 5.08, SD = 4.01, respectively). Their scores exceeded both the overall discrepancy score (*MWDS* = 4.90, SD = 4.34) and the discrepancy score for rural fringe respondents (*MWDS* = 3.10, SD = 3.58). However, rural fringe responses indicated the largest disparity between importance and satisfaction for internet café or coffee houses when compared to rural distant (MWDS = 1.70, SD = 3.26) and rural remote students (*MWDS* = 2.40, SD = 3.16). Rural distant students' discrepancy score (*MWDS* = 4.49, SD = 4.33) for many chances to get ahead exceeded the overall mean (*MWDS* = 3.93, SD = 3.91) as well as rural fringe (*MWDS* = 3.75, SD = 3.15) and rural remote (*MWDS* = 3.28, SD = 3.65). Interestingly, for the community characteristic "indoor entertainment", such as movies and bowling, rural fringe and rural distant student responses indicated a much higher discrepancy between importance and satisfaction (*MWDS* = 4.36, SD = 4.56 and *MWDS* = 4.54, SD = 4.80, respectively) than did responses from rural remote students (*MWDS* = 2.60, SD = 3.84). Similarly, rural distant respondents indicated the largest discrepancy (*MWDS* = 4.08, SD = 4.21) for the communities' various cultural opportunities, followed by rural remote students (*MWDS* = 3.52, SD = 3.11) and rural fringe students (*M* =

2.44, SD = 3.89). Table 20 displays the means and standard deviations for each rural school district type as well as overall.

Table 20

Mean Weighted Discrepancy Scores for Respondents' Perceived Importance of and Satisfaction with Community Factors

Community Characteristics	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
	MWDS	*SD*	*MWDS*	*SD*	*MWDS*	*SD*	*MWDS*	*SD*
Good paying jobs	3.10	3.58	5.48	4.71	5.08	4.01	4.90	4.34
Many chances to get ahead	3.75	3.15	4.49	4.33	3.28	3.65	3.93	3.91
Indoor entertainment (movies, bowling, arcades)	4.36	4.56	4.54	4.80	2.60	3.84	3.82	4.50
Cultural opportunities, such as concerts and museums	2.44	3.89	4.08	4.21	3.52	3.11	3.58	3.81
Agencies to help people solve problems	3.34	4.18	4.07	4.05	2.41	3.54	3.35	3.94
Places for people my age to hang out	3.85	4.43	4.03	4.43	1.85	3.17	3.22	4.13
Good stores and shopping facilities	2.71	4.25	3.23	3.65	3.24	3.19	3.14	3.59
Clean environment	2.98	3.45	3.83	3.89	2.24	3.29	3.10	3.65
Opinions of people your age are sought and valued	1.64	3.41	3.55	4.19	2.88	3.24	2.97	3.78
Good preschool and childcare options	2.98	3.55	3.04	3.67	2.54	3.60	2.85	3.60
Reasonable cost of living	1.99	4.35	2.49	3.19	3.40	3.59	2.73	3.57
Quality schools and teachers	2.72	3.26	3.43	3.73	1.39	3.60	2.57	3.69
Internet café or coffee house	4.05	4.45	1.70	3.26	2.40	3.16	2.37	3.55
Access to high-speed internet connection at home	2.44	4.16	2.73	4.06	1.65	3.65	2.30	3.94
Cell phone coverage	1.97	3.58	2.08	3.74	1.00	2.91	1.67	3.45
People share my views	1.87	3.40	1.61	3.71	1.39	3.29	1.58	3.48

Table 20 (Cont.)

Community Characteristics	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
	MWDS	*SD*	*MWDS*	*SD*	*MWDS*	*SD*	*MWDS*	*SD*
Tolerance of different religions and cultures	1.10	3.39	2.02	4.21	1.01	2.96	1.49	3.67
Land that can be used for hiking, hunting, skiing, camping, and other recreation	2.48	4.96	0.69	3.83	0.00	2.74	0.76	3.79
People who share my religious values	0.57	2.53	0.41	3.08	0.92	2.77	0.62	2.87

Note. $N = 133$; Likert Scale used for Importance was 1 = Not Important, 2 = Somewhat Important, 3 = Important, and 4 = Very Important; Likert Scale used for Satisfaction was 1 = Not Satisfied, 2 = Somewhat Satisfied, 3 = Satisfied, and 4 = Very Satisfied

Objective Four: Perception of Home Community Economic and Educational Opportunities and Quality of Life

The final objective was to determine rural youth's perceptions of the economic and educational opportunities, natural amenities, and quality of life associated with their home communities. Students were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements found in Table 21. As a whole, the respondents indicated that they had low perceptions of their communities. The most notable category related to people respecting the privacy of others. Overall, students indicated that they disagreed ($M = 1.83$, SD = 0.96) with the following statement "people in this community mind their own business". This response was most negative in rural fringe ($M = 1.54$, SD = 0.83) and rural distant communities ($M = 1.80$, SD = 0.87). When students were asked about their perception of their community as a good place to raise a family, the response was still within the "disagree" range ($M = 2.89$, SD = 0.92), but was the highest ranked item in the list of community characteristics. Individually, rural fringe ($M = 3.04$, SD = 1.00) and rural remote ($M = 3.02$, SD = 0.87) students agreed to this statement to a greater degree. The mean scores for rural distant respondents fell within the "strongly disagree"

to “disagree” range for all characteristics, indicating an overall low perception of community for rural distant respondents. Table 21 represents the participants’ perceptions of their home communities, by rural school district type and overall.

Table 21

Respondents’ Perceptions of their Communities, by Rural School District and Overall

Community Characteristics	Rural Fringe		Rural Distant		Rural Remote		Overall	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
This is a good place to raise a family	3.04	1.00	2.74	0.90	3.02	0.87	2.89	0.92
I can stay in this area and get a good education	2.75	1.11	2.42	0.90	2.45	0.85	2.49	0.93
I could get a job in this area	2.17	1.13	2.21	0.91	2.32	0.84	2.24	0.92
There are enough jobs in the area for the people who want them	2.00	1.10	2.10	0.88	2.13	0.90	2.09	0.92
I can get the education I want in this area	1.96	1.12	2.13	1.06	2.38	1.09	2.19	1.09
I can get the type of job I want in this area	1.96	1.00	2.08	1.04	2.13	1.03	2.08	1.03
People in this community trust people my age	2.08	0.93	2.33	0.83	2.13	0.95	2.21	0.89
People in this community mind their own business	1.54	0.83	1.80	0.87	2.02	1.09	1.83	0.96
People in this community accept you even if you are different	2.29	1.00	2.34	0.91	2.28	1.02	2.31	0.96
It does not take long for people in this community to accept newcomers	2.58	1.06	2.75	0.99	2.62	0.90	2.67	0.97
I enjoy the community that I live in now	2.71	1.08	2.67	1.01	2.79	1.08	2.72	1.04
The people in my community are trying to make it a better place for people my age to live	2.75	0.99	2.38	0.94	2.43	0.88	2.47	0.93

Note. N = 133. Items that appeared in the questionnaire as negative statements have been re-written as positive statements and re-coded. Likert Scale used was 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree

To further analyze the community data, an ANOVA procedure was used to calculate effect sizes to describe differences by rural code for the students' perceptions of their community and their perceived importance of and satisfaction with various community resources. For perceptions of community, student responses were similar across all rural locales. Thus, the effect size (Cohen's F = 0.04) for this variable was negligible (Cohen, 1988, p. 285). A small effect size was found for both perceived importance of community resources (F = 0.22) and student satisfaction with community resources (F = 0.15). Although the difference between scores was small, rural fringe students rated both the importance of community resources (M = 3.36, SD = 0.40) and their satisfaction with those resources higher than did rural distant or rural remote respondents. Means, standard deviations, and effect sizes can be found for each rural school district type's student perceptions in Table 22.

Table 22

Effect Sizes for Student Perceptions of Community, Perceived Importance of and Satisfaction with Community Resources

Student Perceptions	Rural Fringe			Rural Distant			Rural Remote			
	n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*F*
Perceptions of Community	24	2.32	0.60	58	2.34	0.63	47	2.39	.50	0.04
Importance of Community Resources	23	3.36	0.40	57	3.28	0.52	45	3.08	0.51	0.22
Satisfaction with Community Resources	23	2.57	.54	53	2.36	0.60	43	2.37	0.45	0.15

Note. N = 129; Likert Scale used for Perceptions of Community was 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree; Likert Scale used for Importance of Community Resources was 1 = Not Important, 2 = Somewhat Important, 3 = Important, and 4 = Very Important; Likert Scale used for Satisfaction with Community Resources was 1 = Not satisfied, 2 = Somewhat Satisfied, 3 = Satisfied, and 4 = Very Satisfied

CHAPTER V

Conclusions

This study attempted to achieve the following objectives: to determine the residential, educational, and occupational aspirations and expectations of rural Arkansas students; to determine rural Arkansas students' perceived barriers to achieving their aspirations; to determine rural Arkansas students' perceptions of importance and satisfaction with various community characteristics within their home communities; and to determine rural Arkansas students' perception of their home community's economic and educational opportunities, natural amenities, and quality of life. Unfortunately the especially low response rate significantly limits the generalizability of the results. Thus, these conclusions are only descriptive of the respondents in this study.

Objective One: Residential, Educational, and Occupational Aspirations and Expectations

McLaughlin et al. (2014) stated that residential aspirations are the reflection of an individual's thoughts concerning whether to leave a place, and then selecting a new destination if the individual does desire to leave. A majority of the responses from the individuals in this study reflected a desire to leave their home communities. Considering the study's limitations, this finding suggests the presence of the previously noted brain drain (Carr & Kefalas, 2009a). However, when looking at the responses from each school district type, the variability becomes a little more evident. Rural remote respondents had the largest percentage of students who were "unsure" of their residential aspirations. This finding became the start of a trend for rural remote respondents in regards to their aspirations and expectations. A large percentage of rural fringe respondents indicated that they aspired to live in a town near their current community while a majority of the remaining rural fringe respondents wanted to live in a town far away from their

current community or in some type of city. This finding is similar to that of Demi et al. (2009) who, when studying the residential aspirations of rural youth, stated that communities with more advantages are at greater risk of losing their youth. It is arguable that because rural fringe school districts are closer in proximity to more urbanized areas they are considered as having an advantage compared to their rural distant and rural remote counterparts. Additionally, McLaughlin et al. (2014) stated that when youth live in rural areas where natural amenities have been limited or disrupted and additionally perceive amenities associated with urban life as desirable, they may prefer to live elsewhere as an adult.

When the respondents aspirations were compared to their expectations there was not much change overall, see Figure 4 for a visual representation of the differences between residential aspirations and expectations. A majority of the respondents still expected to live in a non-urban area while the rest either wanted to live in an urban area or were unsure. Iredale (2001) explained that the premise of human capital theory is that "people move to find employment and remuneration more appropriate to their formal education and training" (p. 8). The results of this study may highlight this concept when residential preferences and educational aspirations are compared to one another. Respondents with higher educational aspirations were more likely to indicate a desire to live in an urban community than those respondents who aspired to only complete community college or less. Furthermore, a majority of the rural fringe respondents aspired to live in a place more urbanized than their home community. They were also the group with the highest percentage of students who aspired and expected to obtain a graduate degree. Considering that large bodies of research have noted a lack of job opportunities in rural America which necessitate graduate level college degrees (Carr & Kefalas, 2009a), it seems feasible to say that these respondents' desire to migrate to more urbanized areas could, in

part, relate to their desire for higher education. It is important to note that rural remote respondents, again, belonged to the rural school district type with the largest percentage of students who "unsure" of their residential expectations.

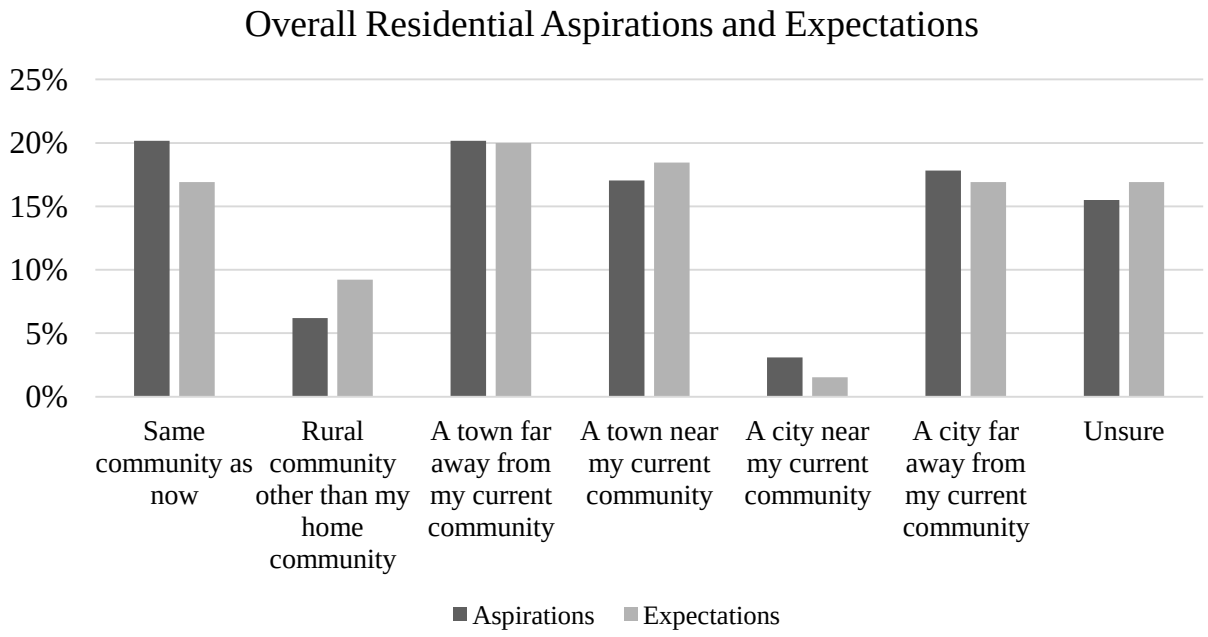

Figure 4. Comparison of Respondents' Residential Aspirations and Expectations. Figure 4 displays the differences in the respondents' residential aspirations and expectations overall.

Achievement motivation theory states that there is a drive, conscious or unconscious, to do well in an achievement-oriented activity such as school (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). Consistent with this theory, most of the respondents in this study indicated high educational aspirations; with more than 70% of them aspiring to obtain either a bachelor's or graduate degree. Interestingly, only 20% of Arkansans 25 and older have their bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). This too may be explained by achievement motivation theory. Quaglia and Cobb (1996) noted that achievement motivation is a trait that is developed at an early age and is significantly impacted by group standards. Thus, even those with an inner drive to achieve their aspirations are subject to being overpowered by the fear of being ostracized by the

group (Bajema et al., 2002; Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). With the likely non-response bias of this study in mind, it is still notable that researchers have found that the educational aspirations of rural youth are on the rise (Hutchins et al., 2012). Although the responses across all of the rural school district types were fairly similar, it should be noted that the rural fringe school district type had a larger percentage students indicate they aspire to obtain a graduate degree. Similarly, Hu (2003) found that when the educational aspirations of more urban students were compared to those of their non-urban counterparts, the differences were not substantial. However, as in the current study, Hu (2003) found that a slightly higher percentage of the more urban students had aspirations to obtain a graduate degree. These findings may be representative of Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, which argues that people compare themselves to groups that are similar to themselves (Bajema et al., 2002). It is possible that rural fringe students' aspirations are similar to their nearby urban neighbors because they have the potential to compare themselves to more urbanized groups. Likewise, it is possible that students from rural distant and rural remote school district types resemble each other's aspirations more closely because they have similar cohort groups.

The educational expectations of the respondents were slightly different than their aspirations, see Figure 5 for the differences between educational aspirations and expectations. For each rural school district type and overall, the percent of students that aspired to obtain a graduate degree decreased. For rural distant and rural remote students this shift in expectations resulted in a larger percentage of respondents expecting to only complete community college or less. Rural fringe students saw a decrease in respondents expecting to obtain graduate degrees. Thus, bachelor's degrees became the most common expectation for rural fringe students. Researchers have suggested that educational aspirations are the first to encounter problems and

limitations which may result in the lowering of educational expectations (Dunkelberger, 1984). Still, the rural fringe respondents had the largest percentage of students expecting to obtain a graduate degree. Previous research says that the educational expectations for rural youth tend to be lower than youth from more urban areas (Leavy & Smith, 2010). Perhaps the previously stated concepts associated with social comparison theory and the proximity of these rural fringe respondents to urban areas and clusters predisposes them to higher expectations than those associated with more rural students.

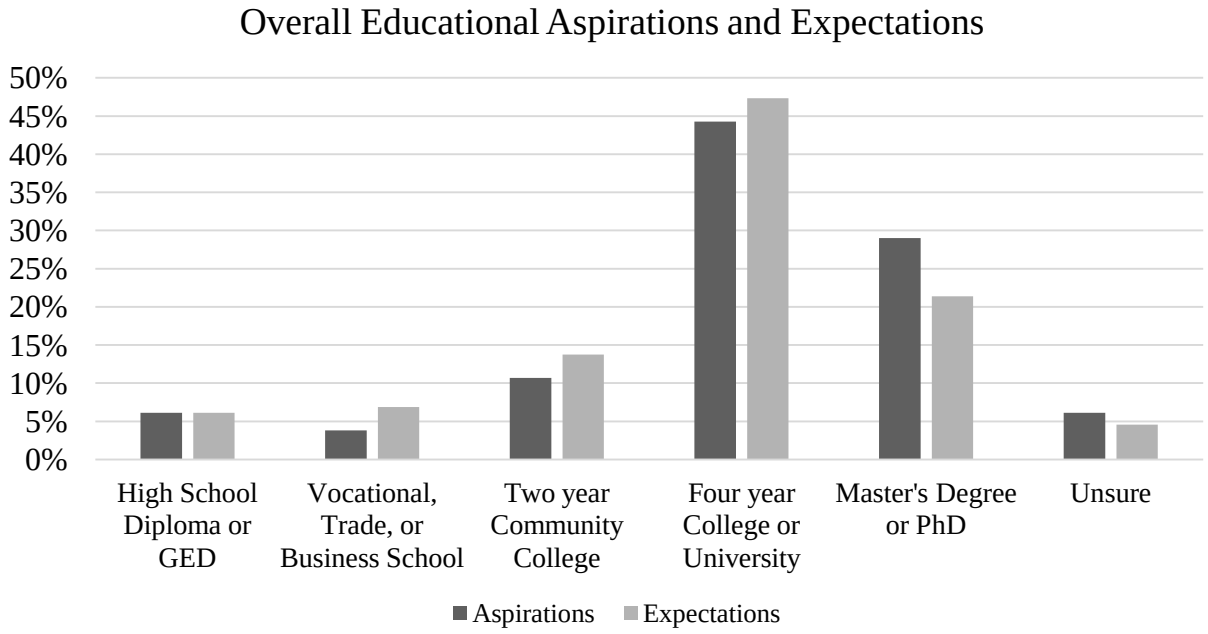

Figure 5. Comparison of Respondents' Educational Aspirations and Expectations. Figure 5 displays the differences in the respondents' educational aspirations and expectations overall.

The career clusters which received the largest percentages of responses from the students in this study were as follows: health sciences, education and training, agriculture, food and natural resources, and manufacturing. These careers are consistent with the occupations said to be available in rural communities (education and health services) (Marré, 2014; McLaughlin et al., 2014). Additionally, rural remote respondents had the highest percentage of students who

aspired to work in an agriculture related field. Perhaps this can be explained by Haller and Virkler (1993) who noted that students develop occupational aspirations based on their exposure to available occupations within their communities. Since agricultural occupations are associated with more rural areas, the rural remote respondents may have been more exposed to agricultural careers than the respondents from the other rural school district types. Likewise, rural fringe respondents had the highest percentage of students who aspired to an education-related career. Again, the proximity and availability of rural fringe respondents to larger towns and larger schools could be an explanation for this.

As for occupational expectations, a majority of respondents indicated that they were very sure or somewhat sure that they would be doing the job they aspire to do when they are 30 years old. Rural fringe respondents were the most certain while rural remote students were the most uncertain. This was part of the previously noted "unsure" trend for rural remote students. Brooks and Redlin (2009) noted that occupational aspirations and expectations differ because one represents ideals whereas the other represents what one perceives to be realistic, respectively. With this is mind, the certainty that rural fringe respondents noted about their expectations could be linked to the perception that their occupational aspirations are more realistic because they have resigned to urban living. As the respondents became more rural, their certainty of their future occupation declined, which could coincide with Brown and colleagues (2009) research that noted a rift between community attachment and economic opportunity. This level of uncertainty could also be partially attributed to a lack of aspirations. Additionally, paired with the fact that a majority of these more rural respondents aspired to live in a non-urban community and that a majority of respondents aspired to obtain a bachelor's or graduate degree, this finding is consistent with previous research which stated that some rural youth may adjust

their aspirations to be more consistent with the occupational opportunities available in their home communities (Hektner, 1995).

Objective Two: Student Perceived Barriers

Of the seven educational barriers presented to the respondents, four of them were perceived as a problem to more than half of the respondents. Economic and family limitations such as not having enough money, needing to work, and having family responsibilities were a problem for most students. Personal barriers such as motivation level were also perceived as an issue for majority of students. Similar findings are prevalent in previous research. Boxer et al. (2011) explained that even well-performing and motivated students who want to attend college become discouraged from doing so when "the economic reality of high tuition costs and the social reality of poor family support or lack of parental modeling of achievement" (p. 610) becomes apparent in the students' lives. Similarly, the occupational barriers noted by a majority of the students as an issue were the same as those noted as educational barriers. The lack of money for education and availability of jobs in the community along with family responsibilities received the greatest amount of concern from the respondents. These barriers align with Rojewski's (2005) educational and community/societal barrier categories that are believed to lower student expectations.

Objective Three: Youths' Perception of and Satisfaction with Community

As suggested by McLaughlin et al. (2014), this study sought to determine what the students "value in their current community, what they seek, and what is most important to them in their ideal community" (p. 471). Overall, there was a large amount of variability among the respondents. However, despite the wide array of responses there were some community factors for which students indicated a discrepancy between importance and satisfaction. Consistent with

previous research, the complete set of respondents placed high importance on clean environment, good paying jobs, and reasonable cost of living (McLaughlin et al., 2014). When compared to the respondents' satisfaction with those same community characteristics, the discrepancy between importance and satisfaction was the greatest for good paying jobs (*MWDS* = 4.90, SD = 4.34), followed by moderate discrepancies for clean environment (*MWDS* = 3.10, SD = 3.65) and reasonable cost of living (*MWDS* = 2.73, SD = 3.57). This discrepancy for good paying jobs is understandable considering the employment decline occurring in rural Arkansas (Department of Workforce Services, 2014; Farmer et al., 2013). As indicated by the moderate discrepancy means for clean environment and reasonable cost of living, these two characteristics do not have as prominent of an effect on community satisfaction as the availability of good paying jobs.

For rural fringe respondents, indoor entertainment and access to internet cafés and coffee houses were the areas of the highest discrepancy. Rural distant students indicated that good paying jobs and indoor entertainment were the areas of highest discrepancy. Good paying jobs and cultural opportunities were noted as the areas of highest discrepancy for rural remote respondents. Previous research by McLaughlin et al. (2014) stated that "those who perceive more urban amenities as desirable" may find their current communities as unsatisfactory (p. 456). Thus, the findings noted indicate that respondents farther from urbanized areas prioritize necessities (i.e. good paying jobs) as opposed to the amenities (i.e. indoor entertainment and internet cafés) prioritized by those closer to urban areas.

Objective Four: Perception of Home Community Economic and Education Opportunities, and Quality of Life

Even though a majority of the students indicated that they aspired to live in a non-urban area, the respondents' perception of their home communities' economic and educational

opportunities, and quality of life, the overall mean of each community characteristic indicated that perceptions were fairly low. However, when the rural school district types were assessed individually, the differences became more apparent. Overall, rural distant students strongly disagreed that the people in their community mind their business however they were in agreement that it does not take people long in their community to accept newcomers. Rural fringe and rural remote students agreed that their community was good place to raise a family, yet they indicated that the educational and career opportunities there were less than satisfactory. Despite previous research that says "youth who like their communities and who see their communities as viable are more likely to want to stay" (Demi et al., 2009, p. 326), the responses from rural remote students in the study indicated that many of them were not satisfied with the community characteristics provided, yet the largest percentage of respondents aspired to live in a rural community.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be taken into consideration when considering the presented results. First, although the original sample size was considered representative of the population, the small response rate presented likely biased results. The results and conclusions of this study should not be generalized beyond those respondents. Secondly, the questionnaire used for data collection required self-reporting from the students. While research says that "adolescents are arguably the best reporters of certain types of data about themselves," it also suggests that ideally, the study would "include data from other sources, such as parents, teachers, peers, and/or school records" (Boxer et al., 2011, p. 616). Third, the study was cross-sectional. Longitudinal work would provide a better idea of the students' attainment of their various goals. Finally, it is important to remember that rural

communities across the U.S. are very diverse in their cultures, occupational structure, and interactions with major cities (Byun et al., 2012; Meece et al., 2013). Thus, even the findings for a representative sample of the rural students in Arkansas would not necessarily apply to all rural communities (Meece et al., 2013).

Recommendations and Implications

The conclusions from this study point towards several recommendations for rural educators and counselors. Recommendations from this study include providing students with information related to their occupational and educational aspirations and consequently raising expectations, and developing mentorship-type programs that foster positive perceptions of home communities. Researchers agree that counselors should make an effort to disseminate information regarding both post-secondary education requirements and financial resources, as well as enriching occupational opportunities available in home communities and within commuting distance (Demi et al., 2009; Hutchins et al., 2012).

First, the results of this study showed that nearly one quarter of rural distant and rural remote respondents aspired to community college or less for their highest level of educational attainment. More specifically, rural remote students had the largest percentage of students aspiring to only complete high school and rural distant students had the largest percentage of students aspiring to vocational, trade or business school, which is consistent with research conducted by Meece et al. (2013). Rural school districts and communities with students whose aspirations are similar to those of the participants of this study should consider collaborating with community colleges in order to provide vocational-technical school opportunities in high school as college credit courses. For students who perceive the lack of money for education and needing to work as barriers to educational aspirations, Hutchins and colleagues (2012) suggested

that “one possibility would be to help rural youth identify and apply for grants, scholarships, and/or loans to help reduce the number of hours rural youth must work” (p. 17). Furthermore, this study also supports King’s (2012) suggested ACT prep and financial aid workshops designed for both parents and students so that college entrance requirements are understood. Only 12% of respondents indicated that their fathers/male guardians and 27% of mothers/female guardians had obtained bachelor’s or graduate degrees, meaning that for a majority of respondents, they would be first generation college students. Thus, it is important that college information is delivered in a manner that is accessible not only to the students, but to the parents as well. As for career opportunities, students should be provided with mentoring, job fairs, and job shadowing opportunities within the community. Previous research suggested that these are important steps for communities to take to make sure that students can connect to local professionals who can provide encouragement and wisdom as they make life decisions (King, 2012). The dissemination of this type of information, as well as the development of these types of relationships could be a step in the direction of improving rural youths’ perceptions of their communities’ viability (Demi et al., 2009). As stated by McLaughlin et al. (2014), “the ultimate decision about living elsewhere as an adult would hinge, in good part, on whether the occupation or quality of jobs is perceived to be available in the rural community” (p. 455). However, Demi et al. (2009) cautioned that efforts to improve rural youths’ perception of community viability will only be successful if the opportunities shared with rural students are actually available within or near their home community.

Secondly, the implementation of a Community Youth Development (CYD) program through the local high school, similar to that described by Demi and colleagues (2009), is recommended. Despite the likely non-response bias associated with the current study’s findings,

a program similar to the CYD program is a possible means of building positive youth perceptions of rural home communities through youth-adult community partnerships. Demi et al. (2009) explained that the combination between positive perceptions of home community and attachments to adults within the community may make youth more likely to want to stay, although there is little research to prove this relationship. Additional anticipated benefits include the development of leadership skills and likelihood to be involved in future community actions (Demi et al., 2009). While CYD are not expected to "cure" the rural brain drain, the idea behind them is to provide communities with opportunities to "aggressively pursue broader community and economic development strategies" (Demi et al., 2009, p. 328) that consequently improve, for all community residents, the overall quality of life.

While the results of this study may be limited in nature due to the small number of respondents, they certainly raise many questions and implications that should be addressed in future research. First, it is important to remember the words of Hellwege and colleagues (2013) who stated that "rural communities have special contexts, and research needs to be done to highlight the contexts so we can bring them to light" (p. 5). Research regarding the various contexts of rural Arkansas and its youth should be further explored (Byun et al., 2012). Specific to the findings of this study, additional research should further assess the aspirations and expectations of rural Arkansas students and should further investigate the previously noted "unsure" trend for rural remote respondents. Future research should determine the differences in aspirations of individuals who remain in rural communities (i.e. those who intend to stay there and those who do not have a clear plan for the future).

Finally, because rural community cultures, occupational structures, and interactions with major cities are unique (Byun et al., 2012), qualitative "context-rich information" could be of

infinite value to Arkansas policy makers as well as educators (Hutchins et al., 2012). Brooks and Redlin (2009) argue that "qualitative interview[s] can better capture what types of experiences, opportunities, and constraints the existing structure of rural America provides for varying groups" (p. 148). Similarly, the methods of this study required cross-sectional data collection. While we were able to determine the aspirations and expectations of the respondents, we do not know their attainment of these goals. Longitudinal studies should be conducted in order to assess how rural students' aspirations/expectations line up with real-life attainment of those goals (Brooks & Redlin, 2009). Finally, similar studies should look further into how, and if, Arkansas youth's perceptions of their rural hometowns and upbringings influence their decisions to remain in or move away from their home communities (Theodori & Theodori, 2014). Theodori and Theodori (2014) explained that such studies "can only support rural communities trying to maintain populace" (p. 118) and avert the effects of the rural brain drain.

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Appendix A: Parent Permission Form

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE

Department of
Agricultural and Extension Education

UNIVERSITY of ARKANSAS
DALE BUMPERS COLLEGE
of AGRICULTURAL, FOOD AND LIFE SCIENCES

205 Agriculture Building, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
479-575-2035 • Fax 479-575-2610

July 13, 2015

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s) and Student:

I am a graduate student at the University of Arkansas working on research for my thesis. I am investigating the aspirations of rural high school students in Arkansas in relation to the population loss seen in rural areas. The goal of the research is to compare these aspirations to those of students from different types of rural areas around the state. This would improve our knowledge of why students choose to leave their rural home communities for more urbanized areas.

Your student was chosen for this study because he/she is enrolled in an agricultural science course in a school district that is considered rural by the National Center for Education Statistics. A total of approximately 5000 students from 15 Arkansas public schools have been asked to participate in this study. Students will be asked to complete a 20 minute survey regarding their plans for the future as well as their perceptions of various aspects of their home communities. This information will help us to understand the choices of rural Arkansas' youth.

There are no risks connected to this project. The benefit of participation in this study is that your student's responses can be used in the future to develop resources that allow rural students to achieve their aspirations, despite current economic trends. The decision to allow your child's responses to be used in recording and analyzing data for this project is completely voluntary.

All information collected will be kept confidential to the extent required by law and University policy. All surveys will be anonymous—no information will be collected that will link your student to their responses. In addition, no identifiers linking you or your student to the study will be included in any report or publication.

By signing below you authorize your child to participate in the research project and have data collected. Your student may still choose not to participate or to change their mind about participating at any time without problems. If you have any questions, you can contact me using the information listed below. Thank you for your support and participation.

Sincerely,

Hanna K. Estes, Graduate Assistant
Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
University of Arkansas
205 Agriculture Building Fayetteville, AR 72701

Donald M. Johnson, Professor
Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
University of Arkansas
205 Agriculture Building Fayetteville, AR 72701

Participant (Student): _____ _____ _____
Print Name Signature Date

Parent / Guardian: _____ _____ _____
Print Name Signature Date

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Arkansas. For research-related problems or questions regarding students' rights, you can contact Ro Windwalker, the University's Compliance Coordinator, at (479) 575-2208 or e-mail irb@uark.edu.

Appendix B: Counselor Survey Administration Instructions

UofA
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE

Department of
Agricultural and Extension Education

UNIVERSITY of ARKANSAS
DALE BUMPERS COLLEGE
of AGRICULTURAL, FOOD AND LIFE SCIENCES

205 Agriculture Building, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
479-575-2035 • Fax 479-575-2610

Dear [Counselor],

Thank you so much for allowing the students at [School Name] to participate in this study! Nearly 2000 rural students from across the state of Arkansas will be involved in this project and we are excited to have your cooperation. This project is similar to studies that have been done across the nation concerning a phenomenon known as the rural brain. By participating, your students will provide new insight about the educational, occupational, and residential aspirations of Arkansas youth. This insight can be used to develop resources that allow rural students to achieve their aspirations, despite current economic trends.

The contents of this envelope should include a parent permission form and questionnaire booklet for each student, as well as a stamped envelope that is ready to be sent back to us. We request that the parent permission form be sent home with the 11th and 12th grade students as soon as possible. Once these have been collected, students with permission should complete the 15 minute survey in their English class. Please place the completed booklets inside the return envelope and mail them back by February 28th. Again, your cooperation is greatly appreciated. In gratitude of the time you've given for this study, you will receive a copy of the results upon the completion of the project. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at any time using the information listed below.

Sincerely,

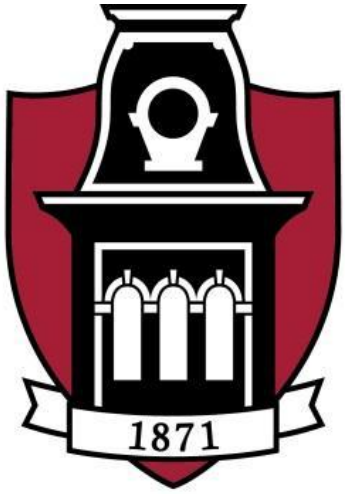
Hanna Estes, Graduate Assistant
Department of AECT
University of Arkansas
205 Agriculture Building
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Donald M. Johnson, Professor
Department of AECT
University of Arkansas
205 Agriculture Building
Fayetteville, AR 72701

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Arkansas. For research-related problems or questions regarding students' rights, you can contact Ro Windwalker, the University's Compliance Coordinator, at (479) 575-2208 or e-mail irb@uark.edu.

Appendix C: Questionnaire

The Aspirations of Rural Youth in Arkansas



UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS®

Section I. Plans and expectations for the future

This section is intended to determine your plans and expectations for the future. These questions are in a multiple choice format; please select one answer that is the most accurate and appropriate for you.

1. Where do you **WANT** to live when you are 30 years old? **(Select one)**
    a. Same community as now
    b. A rural community other than my home community
    c. A town (2,500-50,000 people) near my current community
    d. A town (2,500-50,000 people) far away from my current community
    e. A city (50,000 people or more) near my current community
    f. A city(50,000 people or more) far away from my current community
    g. I don't know

2. Where do you **EXPECT** you will live when you are 30 years old? **(Select one)**
    a. Same community as now
    b. A rural community other than my home community
    c. A town (2,500-50,000 people) near my current community
    d. A town (2,500-50,000 people) far away from my current community
    e. A city (50,000 people or more) near my current community
    f. A city(50,000 people or more) far away from my current community
    g. I don't know

3. What is the highest level of education you **WANT** to get in your life? **(Select one)**
    a. I want to finish high school or get a GED
    b. I want to complete vocational, trade, or business school
    c. I want to graduate from a 2-year community college
    d. I want to graduate from a 4-year college
    e. I want to obtain a master's degree or PhD
    f. Don't know

4. What is the highest level of education you **EXPECT** to get in your life? **(Select one)**
    a. I expect to finish high school or get a GED
    b. I expect to complete vocational, trade, or business school
    c. I expect to graduate from a 2-year community college
    d. I expect to graduate from a 4-year college
    e. I expect to obtain a master's degree or PhD
    f. Don't know

Please continue to next page…

Section I. Plans and expectations for the future (continued)

5. What job do you **WANT** to have when you are 30 years old?

   _____

6. How SURE are you that you will be doing this job when you are 30 years old?
   a. Very sure
   b. Somewhat sure
   c. Somewhat unsure
   d. Not at all sure

Section II. Factors Influencing Goals and Expectations

In this section we would like to know about any barriers that you have that would keep you from achieving your goals for the future. Please indicate the degree to which you anticipate the barriers in each of the following statements to prevent you from achieving your goals.

1. How much will each of the following things **prevent** you from going as far in **school** as you **WANT**?

1= Not at all 2= Only a little 3= Some 4= A lot				
It costs more than I can afford	1	2	3	4
My parents do not want me to go far in school	1	2	3	4
I need to work	1	2	3	4
I am not smart enough	1	2	3	4
I do not have good enough grades	1	2	3	4
My motivation level	1	2	3	4
I have family responsibilities	1	2	3	4

2. How much will each of the following things **prevent** you from getting the kind of **job** you **WANT**?

1= Not at all 2= Only a little 3= Some 4= A lot				
Lack of money for education	1	2	3	4
Lack of jobs/bad economy	1	2	3	4

Please continue to next page…

Section II. Factors Influencing Goals and Expectations (continued)

Family or home responsibilities	1	2	3	4
There is no college or other place to get training near my home	1	2	3	4
My motivation level	1	2	3	4
I am not smart enough	1	2	3	4

Section III. Perception of Community

This section is intended to determine your perceptions of your current community as well as what is important to you about a community. Please select the most appropriate response for each statement.

1. First, please indicate how SATISFIED you are with the following things in regards to your current community. Then, indicate how IMPORTANT these things would be in selecting where you want to live in the future.

How **SATISFIED** are you with these resources in your community? 1= Not satisfied; 2= Somewhat satisfied; 3= Satisfied; 4= Very satisfied				Community Resources	How **IMPORTANT** are these resources in selecting where you want to live? 1= Not important; 2= Somewhat important; 3= Important; 4= Very Important			
1	2	3	4	Good paying jobs	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	Clean environment	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	Places for people my age to hang out	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	Quality schools and teachers	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	Good stores and shopping facilities	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	Cultural opportunities, such as concerts and museums	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	Many chances to get ahead	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	People share my views	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	People who share my religious values	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	Tolerance of different religions and cultures	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	Indoor entertainment (movies, bowling, arcades)	1	2	3	4

Please continue to next page…

Section III. Perception of Community (continued)

How **SATISFIED** are you with these resources in your community? 1= Not satisfied; 2= Somewhat satisfied; 3= Satisfied; 4= Very satisfied	Community Resources	How **IMPORTANT** are these resources in selecting where you want to live? 1= Not important; 2= Somewhat important; 3= Important; 4= Very important
1 2 3 4	Agencies to help people solve problems	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Land that can be used for hiking, hunting, skiing, camping, and other recreation	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Access to high-speed internet connection at home	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Internet café or coffee house	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Good preschool and childcare options	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Reasonable cost of living	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Cell phone coverage	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Opinions of people your age are sought and valued	1 2 3 4

2. With your **current community in mind**, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Agree 4= Strongly Agree				
This is a good place to raise a family	1	2	3	4
I can stay in this area and get a good education	1	2	3	4
I could get a good job in this area	1	2	3	4
There are enough jobs in this area for the people who want them	1	2	3	4
I will need to move away to get the education I want	1	2	3	4
I would have to move away to get the job I want	1	2	3	4
People in this community trust people my age	1	2	3	4
Everyone knows your business in this community	1	2	3	4
People in this community don't like you if you are different	1	2	3	4
It takes a long time for people in this community to accept newcomers	1	2	3	4

Please continue to next page…

Section III. Perception of Community (continued)

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Agree 4= Strongly Agree				
I enjoy the community that I live in now	1	2	3	4
The people in my community are trying to make my community a better place for people my age to live	1	2	3	4

Section V. Demographic Information

1. Gender
    a. Male
    b. Female
2. My current grade in school is:
    a. 9th
    b. 10th
    c. 11th
    d. 12th
3. How long have you lived in this area?
    a. Less than one year
    b. From one to less than five years
    c. From five to less than ten years
    d. Ten years or more
4. How long have your parents/guardians lived in this area?
    a. Less than one year
    b. From one to less than five years
    c. From five to less than ten years
    d. Ten years or more
5. What is the highest level of education achieved by your mother/female guardian?
    a. Less than high school diploma or GED
    b. High school diploma or GED
    c. Vocational/technical school or some college
    d. Bachelor's degree
    e. Master's degree or PhD
    f. Don't know
    g. N/A
6. What is the highest level of education achieved by your father/male guardian?
    a. Less than high school diploma or GED
    b. High school diploma or GED
    c. Vocational/technical school or some college
    d. Bachelor's degree
    e. Master's degree or PhD
    f. Don't know
    g. N/A

Appendix D

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

December 18, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO:	Hanna Estes Donald M. Johnson
FROM:	Ro Windwalker IRB Coordinator
RE:	New Protocol Approval
IRB Protocol #:	14-11-308
Protocol Title:	*The Aspirations of Rural Youth in Arkansas: A Comparison of Rural Locales*
Review Type:	☐ EXEMPT ☒ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 12/18/2014 Expiration Date: 12/14/2015Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.
This protocol has been approved for 5,000 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu