

College of Agriculture Sciences and Natural Resources

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

An undergraduate student experience survey was conducted in September 2017 at the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) to support the UTIA strategic planning effort. The survey was voluntary and all CASNR students were sent a series of emails inviting them to participate. Teaching faculty were also asked to invite students to participate. The outcomes and key themes are summarized below.

RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

- High proportion of in-state students and students from suburban environments
- Specific professions, programs, or general passions cited as reasons for enrolling in CASNR
- Nearly all (95%) of respondents are satisfied with decision to attend CASNR
- Nearly one-fourth of students participated in FFA or 4-H in high school
- Coursework is considered to be rigorous, experiential, and relevant to future career plans
- Vast majority (92%) rate quality of instruction as outstanding or good
- Respondents identify academic advising and experiential learning as highly impactful to their education; however, participation rates in experiential learning programs are lower
- When respondents contemplated leaving, it was often linked to financial reasons
- Community (size and family feel), experience learning and faculty/staff noted as CASNR strengths
- Parking/transportation, class size/offerings, and academic support are themes for improvement

STUDENT PROFILE

178 students completed the survey, representing about 11% of undergraduate enrollment, and spanning academic levels.

What is Your Year in School?



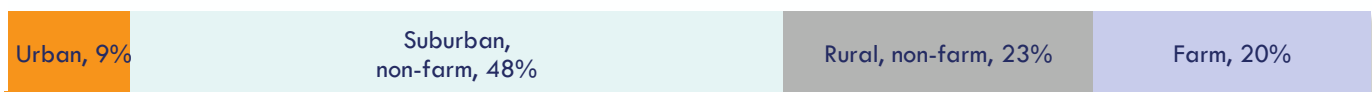
The majority (81%) of students were from Tennessee with 53% from the eastern region, 37% from the middle region, and 11% from the western region.

Where Are You From?



The largest proportion of survey respondents were from suburban, non-farm environments. However, a combined 44% of respondents were from farm and/or rural environments.

Which Describes Your Home Environment Prior to Attending UT?



CHOOSING CASNR

Respondents typically chose CASNR as a first-time student from high school. However, one-fourth of survey respondents joined as transfers from another institution.

Which of the following describes your path to CASNR?

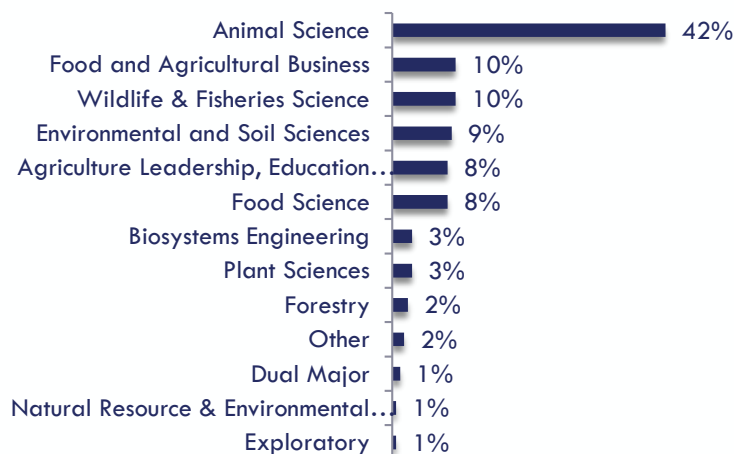
Enrolled as a First-Time Freshmen	Enrolled as a Transfer Student	Enrolled from Another UTK College
67%	25%	8%

Survey participants were given the opportunity to describe in their own words why they decided to enroll in CASNR. The responses aligned with the following themes:

- **Profession (33%)** – Students enrolled with a specific professional goal in mind. A veterinary career was most frequently cited.
- **Programs (33%)** – Students were attracted to a specific program with no explicit professional goal identified.
- **General Passion (18%)** – Students expressed a passion for agriculture, animals or the environment.
- **Family/Agriculture Background (10%)** – Students noted a family background in agriculture or experience in FFA or 4-H.
- **Other (10%)** – Other reasons included the UTK campus, experience with CASNR faculty or staff, and value/availability of in-state financial aid.

Animal science majors comprised 42% of respondents, approximating current enrollment patterns.

What is your major at CASNR?



STUDENT VOICE: WHY CASNR?

“Becoming a wildlife biologist is my passion.”

“I grew up on a farm and knew I wanted to go into the ag field.”

“I want to be a veterinarian.”

“Because of the prestigious animal science program.”

“I want to help take care of the environment.”

“Agriculture is all I have ever known.”

“I wanted to go to a large school, and I needed it to have an agricultural program and to be in Tennessee.”

“Pre-professional concentration in food science.”

“To me CASNR offers the best agricultural degree in the state and coming here

OVERALL STUDENT SATISFACTION

95% of respondents are satisfied with their decision to enroll in CASNR.

You are satisfied with your decision to enroll in CANR and would do so again if you had it to do over:

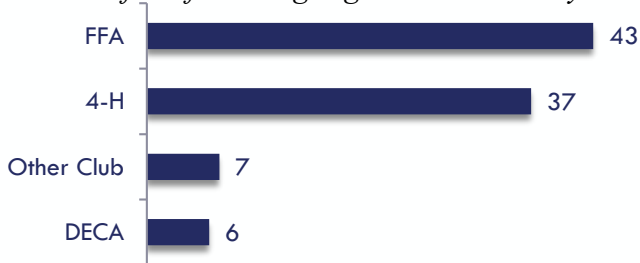


Note: Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 2%, Somewhat Disagree = 3%, Strongly Disagree = 1%

HIGH SCHOOL PREPARATION

43 of the 178 respondents (24%) participated in Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 37 (20%) participated in 4-H as high school students.

In which of the following organizations were you active in high school (check all that apply):



Of the students who participated in 4-H or FFA, 73% noted a positive impact in their decision to pursue a degree in agriculture or natural sciences.

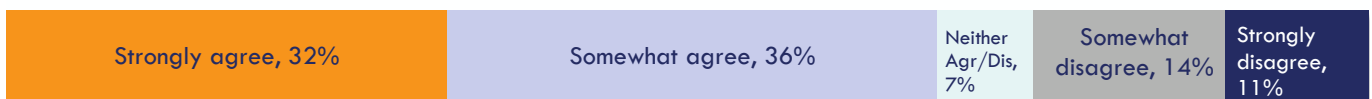
Your participation in 4-H or FFA positively influenced your decision to pursue a degree in agriculture sciences or natural resources.



Note: Somewhat Disagree = 3%, Strongly Disagree = 5%

Most (68%) respondents felt that their high school education prepared them for academic success. However, 25% of respondents did not feel adequately prepared for college.

Your high school education adequately prepared you for academic success.



ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

81% of survey respondents report GPAs exceeding 3.0. These numbers may indicate response bias in the survey with higher response rates among strong academic performers.

Your current GPA falls within which of the following ranges?



Survey respondents note that coursework is relevant to future professional ambitions and academically rigorous. Respondents also responded positively to understanding future career options and gaining essential hands-on experience to be successful in their chosen fields.

The courses required for your major are relevant to your future career and/or graduate education plans.



Note: - Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 5%, Somewhat Disagree = 5%, Strongly Disagree = 1%

The courses taught by CASNR faculty are academically rigorous.



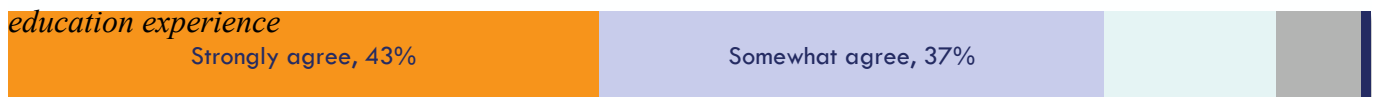
Note: Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 13%, Somewhat Disagree = 4%, Strongly Disagree = 1%

You have a clear understanding of your career options.



Note: Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 6%, Somewhat Disagree = 6%, Strongly Disagree = 1%

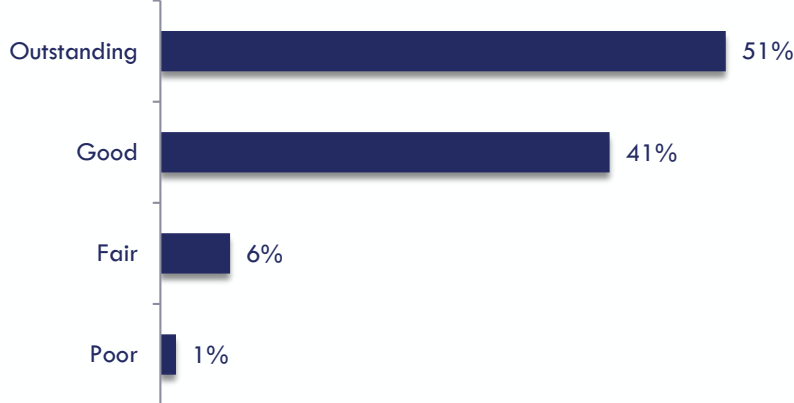
You are gaining the hands-on experience you need to be successful in your chosen career or graduate education experience



Note: Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 13%, Somewhat Disagree = 6%, Strongly Disagree = 1%

92% of survey respondents rated the quality of instruction at CASNR as outstanding or good.

How would you describe the overall quality of instruction by CASNR faculty?



Most respondents appear to know where to go for academic help and support. However, respondents did not rate the related services high in the student experience section of the survey.

Do you know where to go for help if you struggle academically?

Yes – 82%

No – 18%

STUDENT EXPERIENCE/ EXPERIENCE-BASED LEARNING

More than half of respondents have participated in a club or organization at CASNR

Are you or have you been an active member in a CASNR club or organization?

Yes – 60%

No – 40%

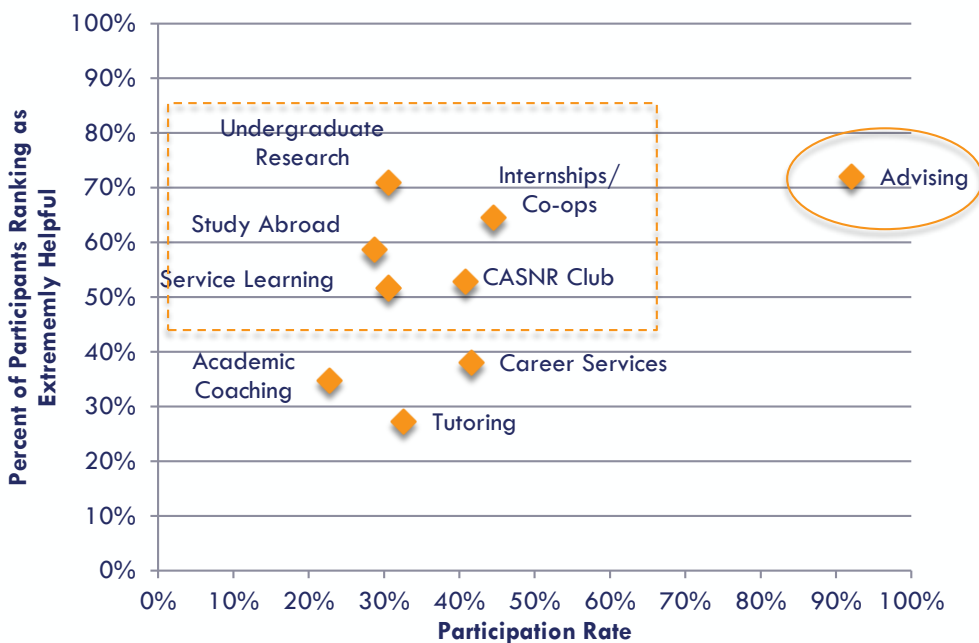
Most frequently cited organizations were Collegiate FFA, Block and Bridle, Pre-Veterinary Association, Poultry Club, 4-H, Wildlife and Fisheries Society, Food Science Club, CASNR Ambassadors, Ag Business Club, Turf Club, Dairy Club, Judging Team, Sigma Alpha, and the Equestrian Team

Survey respondents were asked to indicate participation in 8 different programs and services. They were also asked to characterize the impact of those programs and services on their education.

Since questions relate to the student experience and persistence, we removed responses from first year respondents for this portion of the survey.

The chart below shows the programs and services plotted against participation rates and percentage of students rating the program or service as extremely helpful to their education.

How would you characterize the impact of each of the following programs and services have had on your education while you have been enrolled in a program at CASNR?



- **Academic Advising:** Advising had the highest participation rate and highest percentage of students identifying the service as extremely helpful.
- **Experience-Based Learning:** Services and programs related to experience learning typically had lower participation rates. However, respondents who did participate rated the experience as extremely helpful.
- **Student Success and Career Services:** Services provided in conjunction with UTK main campus (academic coaching, tutoring and career services) had lower participation and student impact ratings.

To understand potential areas of challenge in the student experience at CASNR, nine questionnaire items were used to break the population into three groups based on response options: “never made me want to leave,” “made me consider leaving but was resolved,” or “led me to sit out for at least one semester.” Students were then categorized as stayers (never considered leaving), contemplators (considered leaving at some point), or returners (left and returned) based on the questions.

Overall, the study showed relatively low levels of “contemplation” with less than 30% of respondents contemplating leaving at some point in their academic career for the reasons identified.

Respondents that considered leaving, or left and returned, identified financial reasons as a main driver, citing “trouble paying the bills.” 26% of respondents contemplated leaving due to challenges adjusting to academic demands, while 23% experienced challenges with finding a “fit.”

Some respondents also noted that mental health issues had led them to contemplate leaving or sit out for at least one semester.

	Stayers	Contemplators	Returners
Financial			
Trouble paying bills	68%	27%	5%
Lost Hope scholarship	84%	11%	4%
Lost other financial aid	80%	15%	5%
Academic			
Difficulty adjusting to academic demands	72%	26%	2%
Faculty did not support me	80%	20%	--
Wanted a major not at UT	91%	9%	--
Fit			
Felt like I didn't fit in	76%	23%	2%
Homesick	91%	9%	--
Wanted to be closer to home	91%	9%	--

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT BEING A STUDENT AT CASNR?

Survey participants were asked to describe in their own words “the best thing about being a student at CASNR.” Responses fell into the following thematic categories:

- **Community (55%)** – Respondents overwhelmingly identified the sense of community contributing to a positive student experience at CASNR. Of those who identified community in their response, 44% specifically noted that they liked the size of the CASNR campus and 28% noted a sense of family and collegiality.
- **Learning Experience (22%)** – Respondents were positive on the learning experience at CASNR, especially the “hands-on” opportunities offered as part of the academic experience.
- **Faculty and Staff (16%)** – Respondents described faculty, staff and advisors that cared about their success. Students also noted the accomplishments and accessibility of faculty.
- **Other (7%)** – Respondents were positive about the campus infrastructure and resources on CASNR.

STUDENT VOICE: WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT CASNR?

“The professors and students within the CASNR program are a cut above the rest.”

“Community, hands-down. I am a part of an amazing family.”

“Having a small, close-knit community, but still all the resources of a large research institution.”

“I think CASNR provides some resources that are more specialized such as the Pendergrass library.”

“The community is very close, and having a separate and very beautiful campus really gets me in the learning mindset. There are so many study and career-related resources available specifically to us, and the staff really cares that we are getting the best education possible.”

“Whether it is something you want to do after undergraduate or not, it's hands on, fun, educational,

HOW COULD THE CASNR STUDENT EXPERIENCE BE IMPROVED?

Student participants were asked to describe in their own words “how could the CASNR student experience be improved?” Responses fell into the following thematic categories:

- **Parking and Transportation (24%)** – Respondents frequently noted challenges with parking and transportation associated with CASNR. Students feel the lack of parking often makes it difficult to make it to class on time and causes other inconveniences, especially for commuter students.
- **Class Size and Offerings (24%)** – As an area for improvement, respondents recommended offering more opportunities for smaller courses. Respondents also offered specific suggestions around offerings and curriculum requirements to make the coursework more relevant.
- **Academic Support and Advising (19%)** – Respondents suggested more emphasis on academic support and quality advising. Respondents frequently noted the need to support students with a non-farm background and offer encouragement for students in rigorous and competitive fields such as pre-veterinary medicine. Respondents also noted specific areas for improvement in academic advising.
- **Student Experience (10%)** – Respondents suggested hosting more campus events to support the CASNR student experience.
- **Facilities (7%)** – Respondents recommended improvement in physical infrastructure, including more spaces to connect across campus.
- **Other** – Respondents also noted opportunities for improvement in career support, financial support for students, diversity and inclusion, marketing/communications, and establishing connections with UTK.

STUDENT VOICE: IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

“There is a huge disconnect and division between students who have an agriculture background versus those who are from city backgrounds or transfer here internationally.”

“I think we also need more spaces where students can hang out and study. Other than Pendergrass, the study room in Brehm or Mabel's there aren't any spaces for students to go.”

“The Ag campus itself could be improved by adding a parking garage, more places to eat, and updating the transit system. Parking is certainly the most important issue of these three. It is often difficult to find parking and make it to class on time. I regularly have to park on the main campus and ride the bus over because both commuter lots are full.”

“There also needs to be a bigger presence in the career services section of CASNR.”