

**Rural Compared to Nonrural: Does Hometown Size Affect
Career Certainty in College Freshmen?**

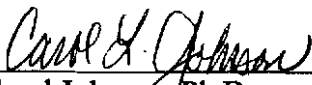
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ABSTRACT

Providing career exploration opportunities remains a goal for school counselors who work with students at all grade levels. The geographical location of the community the school counselor serves may create unique challenges when trying to plan a comprehensive career development program for students. Rural students may have fewer opportunities for career development than their nonrural peers. Because students may have less exposure to diverse career paths they may be less aware of postsecondary options (Anderson & Brown, 1997; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Conroy, 1997; Haller & Virkler, 1993; Vermeulen & Minor, 1998). Others suggest that rural youth also have an *attachment to place* that contributes to the difficulty in making a career decision and interferes with their postsecondary aspirations (Ali & Saunders, 2006; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Hektner, 1995; Howley, 2006; Taylor, 2001). Rural families have stronger relationships with the people, culture and environment in their communities, which gives them a sense of attachment and a feeling of belonging to the community in which they live (Howley, 2006; Hummon, 1992). These students may struggle

over the decision to move out of their rural town to attend college or pursue a career in a new location.

The purpose of this study was to examine the difference between the levels of career certainty of college freshman at a mid-size liberal arts college in the Midwest who are from various hometown sizes and to make recommendations to aid school counselors and college career counselors in providing career development opportunities that are specific to the needs of their students.

Data was collected from 270 college freshmen, and the results revealed that when taking hometown size into effect, rural participants were more decided on a career and major, and were more comfortable with the decision compared to their nonrural counterparts. In looking at who had the most impact on career choice, rural participants chose parents more often than former teachers and nonrural participants chose former teachers more often than parents. Also, in looking at reasons for career uncertainty regardless of hometown size, the college freshmen participants agreed more with being challenged by having to make a career decision, needing more information about careers, and having a hard time deciding between the many careers that appeal to them.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Adolescents have many factors that influence their career choice, including parental influence, local job market, personality traits, interests, and gender. Another influence to consider in career development is geographical location. Students growing up in a rural community may have less exposure to the variety of businesses and occupations that are accessible to nonrural students. From interviews, Vermeulen and Minor (1998) reported the opinions of adults on how growing up in a rural community influenced their career decision. Many of the adults reported having a limited availability of career information and that few occupations were modeled for them. They chose careers based on what they knew and had experienced in their community.

For example, one woman initially wanted to be a veterinarian because of her experiences growing up on a farm and being around livestock. Another woman dreamed about working in fashion, but never thought about it seriously because she thought it was a “big city” career. Since she did not know of anyone locally in that field, it seemed out of reach to her. JoAnn Harris-Bowlsbey (cited in Schmidt, 2001), the past president of the National Career Development Association, emphasized the importance of student awareness of career options and alternatives. She stated, “No one can choose an alternative if they don’t know that it exists,” thus, rural students may be at a disadvantage because of their limited exposure to a variety of careers (cited in Schmidt, 2001, p. 10).

Rural communities typically have jobs that align with the available natural resources. For example, a rural Arkansas town has jobs in timber, oil, farming and manufacturing because of the abundance of forests, oil and farmland (Berkes, 2005). The careers that are found locally may also determine what opportunities are available to rural youth. Often the rural job market consists of many trade and service jobs. According to research by Conroy (1997), male students who

reported earning lower grades may have a variety of jobs available that suit their interests and abilities such as manufacturing, mechanics and transportation. In contrast, females who reported earning higher grades and who aspired to be in a professional occupation other than teaching or nursing may have a very small pool of available jobs in their rural community. Either these females understand the job market and realize they will have to move to secure the jobs they desire, or they realize the limited job opportunities during college and modify their career goals. Also, only a small percentage of industrial and commercial growth is ever experienced in rural areas (Yorke & Stewart, 1990). Information about newly created jobs, and the skills and training that go along with them, are often not visible to rural students. As small businesses shut down or move out of small communities, more rural workers are either commuting or moving to more metropolitan areas (Toepfer, 1997).

Not only does the limited availability of career information affect rural students' career decisions, but the size of the high school and the amount of resources the school offers in the area of career development impact their decisions as well. Many rural schools, particularly small ones, are not as well-staffed or equipped and may have less of a variety of programs-of-study than larger urban or suburban schools (Running, 1975). Also, rural youth typically receive less career counseling because of higher student-to-counselor ratios. As a result, these students may be less informed about job opportunities and less prepared to make an informed career decision.

A large influence on the career development of young adults from any geographical location is their parents' educational level and career. When considering postsecondary aspirations, young adults whose parents did not attend college are less likely to plan to attend college and actually enroll in college (Ali & Saunders, 2006; Hektner, 1990; Taylor, 2001).

In the Appalachian region of the United States in particular, only 12.3% of the population over age 18, holds a college degree compared with the national average of 21%. In a study of 750 secondary students in a rural Pennsylvania school district, 21% of fathers and 14% of mothers received less than a high school education; 46% of fathers and 52% of mothers finished high school; and 10% of fathers and 12% of mothers received a 4-year college degree (Conroy, 1997). These rural youth exemplify exposure to fewer role models with a college education and may also have a weaker support system for learning about postsecondary educational opportunities.

The careers their parents hold also influence the career development of their children. In a rural Pennsylvania school district, most fathers (70%) worked in the skilled or semi-skilled trades and service and labor jobs combined, while 48% mothers worked in labor and service jobs. A larger percentage of mothers were employed in a professional career; 15% compared to 9% of fathers. This is directly linked to the fact that 85% of the professional mothers were either a teacher or nurse, which are two predominately female professions. With these results, Conroy (1997) concluded that 62% of students reported their ideal job would require at least some level of postsecondary education, with some requiring a graduate degree or special licensing. The students had high aspirations for their careers and beginning salaries, however, looking at the job market in their area and looking at what jobs they reported their parents having, the types of jobs that students desired were not available. This is especially important because many students stated they wanted to stay in the area.

It is recognized that the most effective approach for students to make an informed career decision is through career education and exposure to a variety of career options (Conroy, 1997). In 1994, President Clinton signed the School-to-Work Opportunities Act to help states better

prepare students for making a career decision and help students ease into the world-of-work (Harmon, 2000). This Act established a national framework where each state created a school-wide school-to-work system that gives students the opportunity to experience first-hand what a job entails and earn transferable credits. The key components of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act could be beneficial in exposing rural youth to various careers and act as a career counseling intervention.

All of the social, family and personal experiences of a child combine to form a path for their future career (Conroy, 1997). Students tend to think about their future in terms of career aspirations based on what they like to do and what they think they can do well. If students have not experienced or are not even aware of all the career options that are available, they may not be as likely to have a diverse set of occupations in their future.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the difference between the levels of career certainty of college freshman at a mid-size liberal arts college in the Midwest who are from various hometown sizes. Therefore, the problem was, does hometown size affect career certainty of college freshmen? The data was collected from a web survey in the spring 2008 semester. The data may assist counseling professionals in middle and high schools and career counselors in postsecondary schools in aiding their students who come from diverse hometown sizes.

Research Objectives

The research objectives were:

1. To determine if there was a difference in the level of career certainty of college freshmen from rural hometowns compared with nonrural hometowns.

2. To determine what factors may cause career uncertainty in college freshmen from rural and nonrural hometown sizes.

Definition of Terms

For clarity of understanding of the study, the following terms are defined.

Aspiration – the ability to set goals for the future and work toward those goals in the present (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996).

Attachment to Place – the relationship formed by people giving cultural and emotional meanings to a particular place that provides the basis for an individual's understanding and relationship to the environment (Low, 1992).

Career Certainty – refers to the “degree to which individuals feel confident, or decided, about their occupational plans” (Hartung, 1995, p. 1).

Career Development – the process that takes place over a lifetime of exploring one's self and interests, and how that relates to various careers (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986).

Career Guidance – counseling based on the developmental needs of all students that fosters career development at various age levels.

Career Indecisiveness – a personality characteristic inherent in a person no matter the level of occupational knowledge attained or opportunities presented to the person.

Career Uncertainty – the degree of indecision in an individual's career direction. (Orndorff & Herr, 1996).

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that all subjects would respond to the survey in a thoughtful and honest manner concerning their level of career certainty or uncertainty. A limitation to this study is that it is being conducted with college freshmen age 18 and older in a specific liberal arts university

in the Midwest. This may limit the findings to be generalized only to this community in the Midwest and to this age level.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will start out with a brief history of career development theories by comparing and contrasting different approaches. In addition, the effects of the contextual influences on rural youth will be discussed.

Theories of Career Development

Career development theories started with the idea that one could match an individual's abilities and interests with occupational factors and their career decision-making process would be complete (Feldman, 2002). Theorists have introduced the idea that a career decision is developmental in nature, impacted by societal and environmental circumstances, influenced by personality factors, or shaped by observation and interaction in their environment (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).

Historically, one can trace the origin of career decision-making and the interest of career development to Frank Parsons, whose book *Choosing A Vocation* was published in 1909 during America's period of industrial expansion. He established a three-step model of developmental tasks: understanding of self, knowing the requirements of different occupations, and using informed reasoning to incorporate the understanding of self and knowledge of occupations to make a vocational decision (cited in Feldman, 2002). Parsons emphasized that young people needed to be actively involved in making career decisions. Parsons' work provided the framework for career development theory and emphasized that both employees and employers would benefit from careful career choices as opposed to more haphazard job searches and drifting into and out of jobs (cited in Feldman, 2002).

The next milestone in career development theory was the growth of the “testing movement,” which was built on the ideas of Sir Francis Galton and Alfred Binet. Binet developed testing instruments to differentiate children with mental retardation from those with stronger intellectual abilities (cited in Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). The first paper and pencil IQ test was the Army Alpha Test, which was initially used to classify military recruits. It soon led to a mass production method to crudely measure intellectual potential and other cognitive and personality attributes. After World War I, vocational testing expanded due to the rehabilitation of disabled soldiers who returned from the war. Over 100 different trade tests were devised, standardized, and administered by the Rehabilitation Division of the U.S. Army Medical Corps (Feldman, 2002).

Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, and Herma (1951) collaborated to produce a rationale describing career choice. Their resulting theory was a reaction to the absence of a comprehensive theoretical idea in vocational psychology (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). They believed vocational choice was an irreversible process, occurring through developmental stages, where a series of compromises between wishes and possibilities were made. Their first stage was the *Fantasy stage*, where a child’s tentative choices do not take reality into consideration. In the *Tentative stage*, children would ask themselves what their interests were, what intrinsically motivated them, and what their skills were. After they integrated their likes and dislikes with their capabilities, young adults moved to the *Realistic stage*, where they would gain actual experience and then gauge their successes and failures. A clear vocational pattern would emerge and the individual would choose a position or professional specialty (cited in Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).

Ginzberg and associates (1951) were the first to offer the idea of stages of vocational decision-making, but it was Donald Super whose longitudinal research ultimately made the case that career choice is a developmental process. Super's developmental self-concept theory "stressed the interaction of personal and environmental variables" (cited in Feldman, 2002, p. 198). His theory suggested that people strive to enhance their self-concept by choosing to enter a vocation that will most likely allow them to express themselves. He suggested that as people mature, their self-concept becomes more stable. Therefore, attempts at making a career decision are different at adolescence than at middle-age because of different developmental self-concepts. His theory also was one of the first to propose that choosing a career is also dependent upon external factors such as parents/family, school curriculum, and amount of cultural stimulation (Super, cited in Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).

Like Super's developmental self-concept theory, the social learning theory also addresses both the personal and environmental events that shape an individual's career decisions. In 1967, John Krumboltz introduced the social learning theory, which considers inherited attributes such as race, gender, and physical appearance and their impact on career choice. It also includes environmental attributes such as social climate, individual experiences, the current job market, training opportunities available, and social policies (cited in Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). In summary, Krumboltz's theory suggested that an individual was born with certain genetic characteristics and learned from experiences as he or she encountered environmental, economic, social, and cultural events (cited in Isaacson & Brown, 2000).

John Holland also had theories on the influence that environment had on career choice, but more specifically on how an individual's personality fit with his or her work environment. According to Holland, most people in American culture can be identified as one of six types:

Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Enterprising, Social, and Conventional. People are assumed to be “most satisfied, successful, and stable in a work environment that is congruent with their personality type” (Holland, cited in Miller & Miller, 2005, p. 20). Holland’s two basic assumptions were (a) people in a certain career have similar personalities and (b) people tend to choose occupational environments or college majors congruent to their personality type. In measuring Holland’s personality types, instruments such as the Vocational Preference Inventory and the Self-Directed Search have been used regularly with college students to assist in choosing a career.

While some theorists try to explain why people make the choices they do, others stress the development of career choices over time. However, there are more similarities between career development theories than there are differences. According to Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996), the different theories emphasize the same kinds of critical influences and periods of career development. Overall, the differences between theories are in the area of emphasis, research methods suitable to each, and the degree to which they specify the relationships between variables (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).

Contextual Influences on Career Choice of Rural Adolescents

Rural areas in the United States are sometimes described as having a lack of educational and career opportunities, increasing unemployment, a decreasing number of skilled employees, and poverty (Ali & Saunders, 2006). This section will explore the geographical isolation, parental influence and commitment to location that particularly affect the career decision-making of rural youth.

Geographical isolation. The awareness of occupations and exposure to career opportunities are necessary for adolescents to develop career aspirations. According to Conroy

(1997), adolescents begin to have interest in certain careers and want to explore different careers when they are provided information through awareness. Research has found a relationship between the amount of exposure to occupations and the future job aspirations of adolescents (Anderson & Brown, 1997; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Conroy, 1997; Haller & Virkler, 1993; Vermeulen & Minor, 1998). Rojewski (1999) argued that “the increased likelihood of narrow school curricula, restricted labor markets, and fewer college and professional role models influence rural youth to disproportionately select agricultural, service, and manual occupations as adults” (p. 142). In the study conducted by Rojewski (1999), high school seniors from rural areas were much more likely to be employed part-time in a farm-related job than their nonrural peers, and nonrural seniors were more likely to report sales-related part-time employment than their rural peers.

In another study, Vermeulen and Minor (1998) interviewed adult women who had grown up in rural communities. The women reported that they had limited availability of information about careers and had few occupational role models because of the small size of their community. One aspired to be a physician and another a fashion designer, but both said that since they did not know of anyone locally that was in that occupation, they felt it was out of reach or that it was a “big city career” (Vermeulen & Minor, 1998, p. 4).

Haller and Virkler (1993) found that fewer students from rural areas aspired to professional and technical careers, with the exception of wanting to become a teacher. Schools are a daily part of many children’s lives so the teaching profession is a career choice that is familiar to most adolescents regardless of the size of their hometown. Others have found similar results concerning the role models available to students in their rural communities.

“Brain drain” happens when rural areas lose educated youth to more metropolitan areas. Studies have shown that “financial benefits for skills and education are higher in urban areas, giving cities an advantage in attracting college-educated workers” (Artz, 2003). When students in the community go to college and stay to work in larger cities, it deprives rural youth of talented role models who have earned a postsecondary degree and who earn a higher wage (Anderson & Brown, 1997; Ali & Saunders, 2006). It also deprives the small town educational system of tax dollars.

The regional isolation also affects the ability of high school counselors to obtain and update career and college information (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004). In a study of high school seniors from rural West Virginia, “lack of information regarding college” and “lack of information regarding financial aid” were the second and third most frequently reported concerns regarding the college decision process (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004, p. 10). Lack of financial resources was listed as the number one concern.

Anderson and Brown (1997) found that rural high school seniors scored significantly higher than urban seniors on career development knowledge and skills. This may be a result of a recent heightened awareness within rural communities of competitive job markets and scarce opportunities. Career preparation may now be emphasized more than previously in rural schools and homes. School counselors are encouraging career exploration and awareness of the outside job market by exposing students to career assessments and other resources (Allen & James, 1990). While limited exposure to occupations may negatively affect the career interest in rural students, Anderson and Brown (1997) found that poverty and the need to survive may negatively affect the career interest in urban students. Urban students may experience frustration, poor

motivation and feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness when it comes to making a career decision.

This limited exposure to occupations for rural adolescents results in a lack of understanding of the jobs outside of the community (Taylor, 2001). There are also fewer role models for adolescents as they are deciding on a career path for their future. As a result, adolescents must rely on the role models that are available to them, which usually are primarily their parents.

Parent influence. Parents provide their children with different levels of economic resources, social modeling, enriching material at home and encouragement. Examining the influence of parents is important to consider when looking at the career aspirations of adolescents. The educational values and attitudes about school and work of parents have a long-term impact on their children's educational and career plans (Lankard, 1995).

Conroy (1997) found that father's occupations were a significant predictor of occupational aspirations of their adolescent children. Taylor (2001) found that rural adolescents were more likely to be influenced by the amount of education their parents completed than nonrural adolescents when setting career goals. Also, rural and suburban adolescents rely on their parents' occupations when setting career goals to a greater degree than urban adolescents (Taylor, 2001; Trice, 1990). This could be because adolescents in nonrural areas have a variety of other resources available for them to rely on for career decision-making guidance. Those extra resources allow them to rely less on the influence of their parents when exploring careers.

Hektner (1995) and Taylor (2001) found that the higher the parents' level of education, the higher the educational aspirations adolescents will have for themselves. Eighth grade adolescents in urban areas had significantly higher educational aspirations than their counterparts

residing in rural areas (Cobb, McIntire, & Pratt, 1989; Taylor, 2001). Hektner (1995) delineated more specifically between the educational expectations of rural, suburban and urban students. He found that both urban and rural students have less ambitious educational expectations than suburban students. Of the rural and urban students, 54% expected to complete four years or more of postsecondary education, compared to 91% of the suburban students. According to Cobb, McIntire, and Pratt (1989), rural students also reported having less confidence in their abilities to eventually complete a college education. It seems that the parents' level of education may suggest to their children that they must complete at least the same amount of education (Taylor, 2001). Parents may unintentionally influence their adolescents to achieve the same level of education that they completed.

Also, when adolescents *perceive* their parents to have high educational or occupational expectations for them, adolescents are more likely to have higher aspirations for themselves as well (Taylor, 2001). According to Taylor (2001), "the higher the level of education a parent has completed, along with a higher family income, the higher the expectations parents have for their children" (p. 45). Students whose families have a higher income may know that their parents can help them finance college so making the decision to attend may be easier. These adolescents also may know they want to own the same material goods as their parents in the future so they may aspire to certain careers that will allow them a similar level of income.

Cobb, McIntire, and Pratt (1989) found that a larger percent of rural parents, guidance counselors and teachers were less supportive of their students attending a college full-time than those from urban areas. Parents, guidance counselors and teachers living and working in rural areas were more supportive of full time jobs, trade schools or the military upon high school graduation. These rural adolescents responded that they picture themselves less often in higher

level positions and more often in less skilled careers. The rural subjects expected more frequently to be in careers such as clerical, craftsman, farmer, housewife, laborer, operator, proprietor-owner and service. The urban subjects were more likely to select careers such as managerial, administration, accounting, nursing, engineering, medicine, law and college teaching.

Knowing the limited opportunities in their community, some parents may consciously make efforts to expose their children to various careers paths. Depending on their ties to their community and the values they hold, parents may encourage their children to either stay in the community or leave to seek different opportunities.

Commitment to location. The experience of growing up in a rural community and acquiring rural values may also influence the career aspirations of rural youth. Some researchers have credited the lower educational and occupational aspirations of rural youth to cultural values that do not emphasize education while attending mediocre school systems with the lack of exposure to career fields outside the local community (Beaulieu & Gibbs, 2005; Conroy, 1997; Green, 2005; Vermeulen & Minor, 1998; Yorke & Stewart, 1990). Other researchers suggested that rural youth also have an *attachment to place* that causes an internal conflict in making a career decision and interferes with their postsecondary aspirations (Ali & Saunders, 2006; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Hektner, 1995; Howley, 2006; Taylor, 2001).

Rural families have stronger relationships with the people, culture and environment in their communities, which gives them a sense of attachment and feeling of belonging to the community in which they live (Howley, 2006; Hummon, 1992). As a result, families build and retain a strong bond to farms, land and neighbors. Rural citizens also “tend to maintain close family ties, in both geographic proximity and interpersonal relations” (Chenoweth & Galliher,

2004, p. 4). Extended family members usually live in the same small community creating a greater emotional tie to family-of-origin. This is supported by the fact that a large number of individuals who grow up in rural communities continue to work and raise families of their own in the area.

Rural youth experience the value that is often placed on the history of their community, the natural resources and the strong commitment to family-of-origin. They are likely to aspire to live in the same area (or a similar community) when they are adults. Because of this, rural youth are more likely than nonrural youth to have conflicting aspirations for the level of education they wish to obtain and where they would like to live in the future (Hektner, 1995; Howley, 2006). Rural students who aspire to live and work in their community as adults may be distraught over the fact that they may have to move to more urban areas to pursue educational or occupational opportunities. It can be distressing to realize that the career opportunities available to them in their rural area could be limited because of the local job market. Conversely, urban and suburban adolescents may seamlessly go to college and find professional jobs in their metropolitan areas with much less internal conflict about moving to a different location.

Hektner (1995) found that more rural adolescents than nonrural adolescents are conflicted over whether to live close to parents or to leave their area of the country. The subjects showed internal conflict if they reported wanting to live close to parents *and* wanting to move out of the community in the future. For high school sophomores in this study, many more in the nonconflict group expected to finish four or more years of college than those in the conflict group. For the rural adolescents who were conflicted over living close to parents or moving out of the community, the majority (55%) said they did not expect to stay in college long enough to earn a bachelor's degree (Hektner, 1995).

For the high school seniors in this study, both the nonconflict group and the conflict group had about the same percentage (75%) of the participants reporting that they expected to finish four years or more of higher education. The strong cultural norm of going to college influences most seniors from any size hometown to at least say that they are going to attend college. With these seniors however, there were significantly more in the conflict group who were planning on waiting a year or more before starting college. The question of staying close to home or going away to college is seen by adolescents delaying their postsecondary plans. In the end, Hektner (1995) found that rural students are more confident about their plans for higher education, but they are more hesitant and likely to plan to wait a year or more before starting college.

When rating how adolescents from various communities felt about making a career decision, those from rural areas tend to express more anger and emptiness than students from nonrural areas (Hektner, 1995). When thinking about their future, the curiosity and confidence of nonrural adolescents increased as they progressed from 8th grade to high school graduation. Conversely, as the rural adolescents increased in grade level, they responded with lower levels of curiosity and confidence when thinking about their future.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter will include information about how the sample was selected, a description of the sample and a description of the instrument that was used. In addition, data collection and data analysis procedures will be described. The chapter will conclude with the methodological limitations.

Sample Selection and Description

The mid-size Midwestern university that participated in the study was chosen because of its selection of liberal arts majors and minors. While some programs of study are designed toward a certain occupation or career path, the majority of the university's majors are broad areas of study that could lead to many occupations. The goal in selecting a university with less career-specific programs was to capture the level of career certainty of freshmen students who had chosen a university with a broad selection of liberal arts programs.

There was a total of 1868 freshman students who were enrolled at the university during the spring semester of 2008 and who were at least 18-years-old. All freshmen students in this sample were invited to participate in the study. The survey for this study was web-based, and an email with a link to the survey was sent to each student using their university email account. Along with the link to the survey, the email contained an implied consent form (see Appendix A). A total of 270 freshmen students participated in the study, composed of 206 females and 54 males. The researcher was given research approval from the university's Human Subjects and Institutional Review Board Chair and Registrar, who were provided with a rationale for the study, a consent form, and a survey (see Appendix B).

Instrumentation

The researcher developed a measurement instrument specifically for the purpose of this research as there was not an instrument that met the specific needs of this study. The items in the survey for this study were constructed using the Career Decision Scale as a model (Osipow, 1987). Because it was created specifically for this study, there were no measures of validity or reliability documented. A copy of the finalized survey that was sent via email is included in Appendix B.

The survey consisted of 18 questions and/or statements. The first 13 items were in a modified Likert format, where the subject chose “not at all like me,” “only slightly like me,” “very much like me,” and “exactly like me.” The first two items addressed career certainty, which measured the degree of certainty students felt regarding their decision about a career and their decision about a major. Items 3 through 10 addressed career choice uncertainty, which measured the career uncertainty of the student. Items 11 through 13 addressed the influence of community size on the student’s career decision. Item 14 addressed who the student thought had the most impact on their career decision. Items 15 through 18 addressed demographics in order to gain information on the background of the subjects. The demographic statements addressed the population of the students’ hometown while in high school; whether they considered their hometown to be rural, suburban, or urban; and their age and gender.

Data Collection Procedures

The subjects were sent an email with the link to the survey and with text that served as a cover letter to the survey. The text of the email included information on risks and benefits, confidentiality, withdrawing, and Institutional Review Board approval. There was also an implied consent statement informing students that, if they complete the survey, they are agreeing

to participate in the study. When subjects visited the link that was in the email and completed the survey, their responses were electronically recorded in the online survey tool that the University of Wisconsin-Stout uses. The name or email address of the subjects who responded was not recorded by the survey tool. Also, the data collected does not show which subjects responded and which did not.

Data Analysis

Appropriate descriptive statistics were used on the data. Certainty and uncertainty scores of the entire sample were examined and then the nonrural and rural responses were compared. T-tests were also used to determine any significant differences in the responses of nonrural and rural responses.

Limitations

Even though the researcher understands there are different levels of career certainty, outside factors could affect the research results. First, the findings of this study will not be generalized to all freshman college students, since only one university was assessed. Future research may further examine whether or not these same results would be revealed in other regions of the country. Second, the reading level, cultural background, and/or any disability a student had could influence career assessment results. Third, some students may not have taken the survey seriously or wanted to come across as more confident in their career choice, therefore, did not answer the items accurately. Finally, as mentioned earlier, the survey used was created specifically for the purposes of this study and reliability and validity measurements had not been assessed.

Chapter Four: Results

A survey concerning the difference between the level of career certainty of college freshmen from rural and nonrural hometowns had 270 participants from a mid-size Midwestern university. This chapter will include a summary of demographic information, an analysis of the survey items and results of statistical significance. The chapter will conclude with a relation of the results and the research objectives.

Demographics

Of the 1868 emails that were sent with the link to the online survey, 270 college freshmen students completed it, which represents a total group response rate of 14.45%. The sample consisted of 79.2% (n=206) females and 20.8% (n=54) males. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 40, with 90.3% of them being 18 or 19-years-old. The most frequent age reported was 19 at 54.8% (n=142). Participants were asked to identify the population range of their hometown while they were in high school. The most frequent population range reported was “0 to 10,000 people” at 38.5% (n=104). The subsequent population ranges had the frequencies as shown in Table 1. The participants were also asked to describe their hometown while they were in high school as “rural,” “suburban,” or “urban.” Definitions and examples of rural, suburban, and urban were also given. “Rural” was chosen most frequently at 42.5% (n=110), while “suburban” was close behind at 40.5% (n=105) and “urban” was at 17.0% (n=44). Because of the nature of these results, the researcher combined the “suburban” and “urban” respondents into a category called “nonrural.” In making comparisons, the researcher compared the “rural” responses to the “nonrural” responses. Not counting those who did not answer the item, the “rural” participants made up 42.5% (n=110) of the sample and the “nonrural” participants made up 57.5% (n=149) of the sample.

Table 1

Population Distribution of Participants

Population Range	Number of Responses	Percent of Response	Cumulative Percent
0 to 10,000 people	104	38.5	38.5
10,001 to 20,000 people	31	11.5	50.0
20,001 to 30,000 people	9	7.0	57.0
30,001 to 40,000 people	13	4.8	61.8
40,001 to 50,000 people	8	3.0	64.8
50,001 to 60,000 people	9	3.3	68.1
60,001 to 70,000 people	26	9.6	77.7
70,001 to 80,000 people	12	4.4	82.1
80,001 to 90,000 people	5	1.9	84.0
90,001 to 100,000 people	7	2.6	86.6
100,001 to 110,000 people	7	2.6	89.2
More than 110,000 people	15	5.6	94.8
Did not answer item	14	5.2	100.0
Total	270	100.0	

Item Analysis

This section will give information on each survey item for the entire sample and then by comparing the responses of rural and nonrural participants. The first 13 items were in a modified Likert format, where the subject chose “not at all like me,” “only slightly like me,” “very much like me,” and “exactly like me.”

The first survey item stated, “I have decided on a career and feel comfortable with it.” Of the rural participants, 64.5% reported either “very much like me” or “exactly like me,” while fewer nonrural participants (57.0%) reported those same responses (see Figure 1). The second survey item stated, “I have decided on a major and feel comfortable with it.” Of the rural participants, 75.4% reported either “very much like me” or “exactly like me,” while fewer nonrural participants (65.1%) reported those same responses (see Figure 2).

When not taking hometown size into effect, the freshmen participants in general were more comfortable with their choice in major than in their choice of career. Overall, of the 270 participants, 20.0% (n=54) reported “exactly like me” for having decided on a career while 31.1% (n=84) of the participants reported “exactly like me” for having decided on a major (see Figure 3). When taking hometown size into effect, the results from these first two items showed that rural participants were more decided on a career and major and comfortable with the decision compared to their nonrural counterparts.

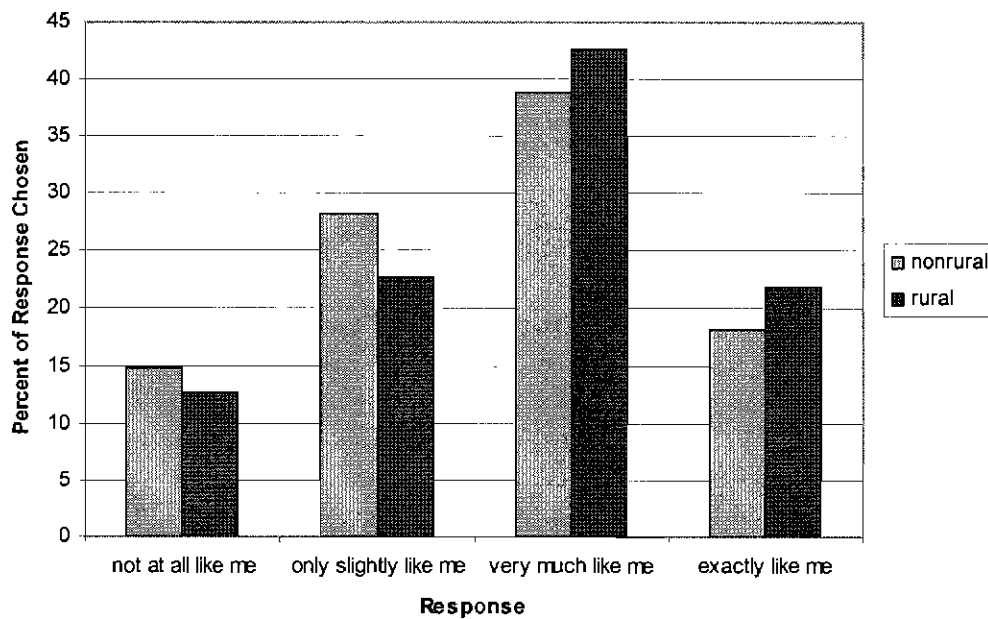


Figure 1. I have decided on a career and feel comfortable with it, comparing nonrural responses and rural responses.

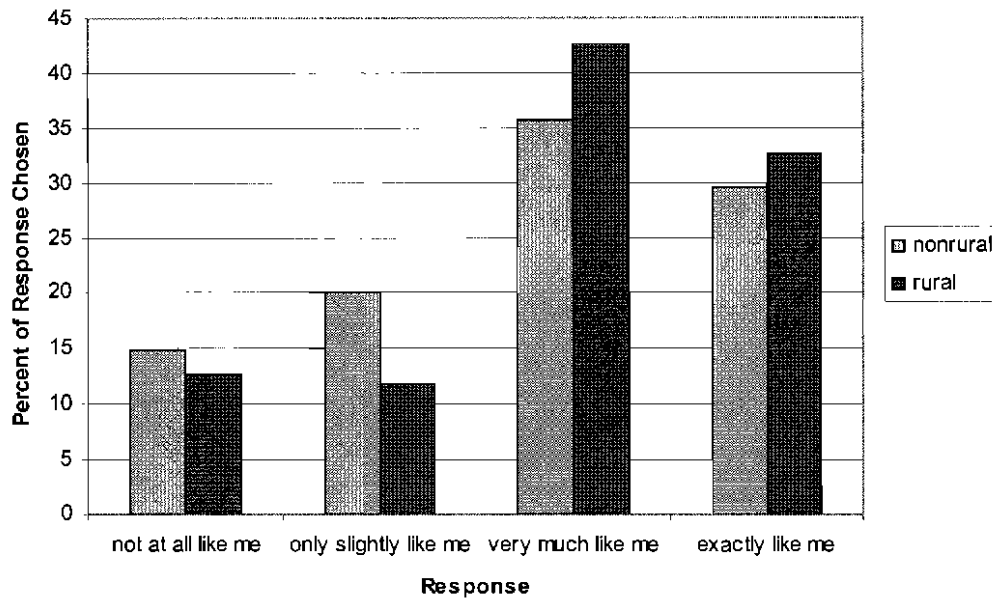


Figure 2. I have decided on a major and feel comfortable with it, comparing nonrural responses and rural responses.

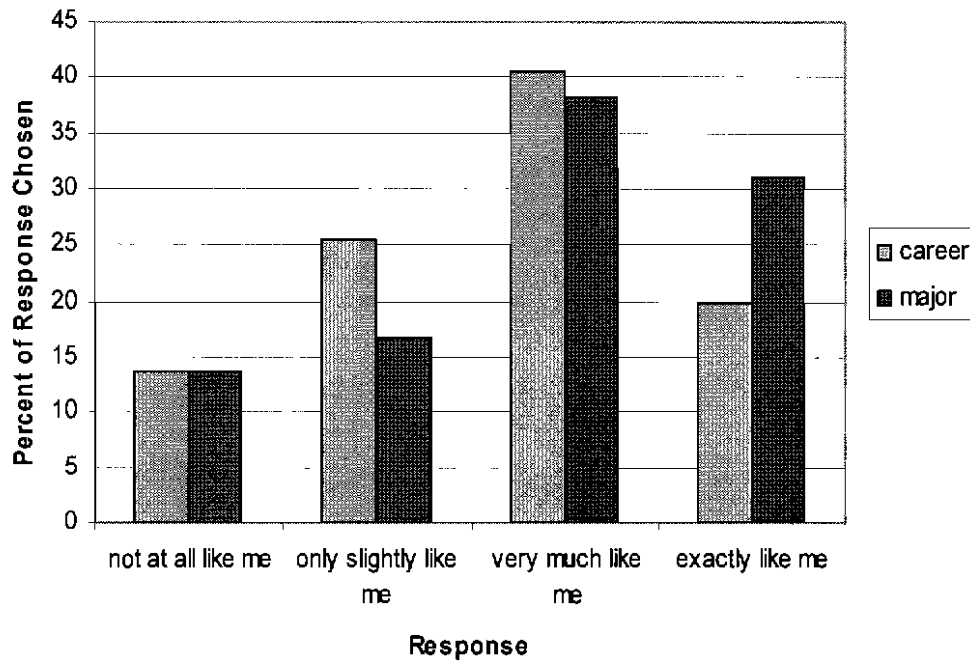


Figure 3. Comparing responses between the first two survey items ("I have decided on a career and feel comfortable with it" and "I have decided on a major and feel comfortable with it") of the entire sample of college freshmen.

Survey items three through ten were worded such that agreement with the statement (i.e. selecting “very much like me” or “exactly like me”) indicated a higher level of career uncertainty. The third survey item stated, “I have difficulty deciding among the many careers that appeal to me.” A larger percentage of nonrural participants (34.9%) compared to rural participants (25.5%) reported “very much like me” or “exactly like me” to this item (see Table 2). The nonrural college freshmen in this study were more likely to have difficulty deciding among the many careers that appeal to them.

Table 2

Survey Item 3: I Have Difficulty Deciding Among the Many Careers That Appeal To Me.

Response	Percent of Response		
	Entire Sample	Nonrural	Rural
Not at all like me	26.4%	24.2%	28.2%
Only slightly like me	43.5%	40.9%	46.4%
Very much like me	21.9%	28.2%	15.5%
Exactly like me	8.2%	6.7%	10.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The fourth survey item stated, “None of the careers I know about appeal to me.” The results for this item were similar between rural and nonrural participants (see Table 3). Both groups had about 5% that responded either “very much like me” or “exactly like me,” and had about 95% that responded either “only slightly like me” or “not at all like me.” The majority of the college freshmen participants reported that at least some careers they know about appeal to them.

Table 3

Survey Item 4: None of the Careers I Know About Appeal To Me.

Response	Percent of Response		
	Entire Sample	Nonrural	Rural
Not at all like me	74.8%	71.1%	78.9%
Only slightly like me	20.2%	23.5%	16.5%
Very much like me	3.4%	4.7%	1.8%
Exactly like me	1.5%	0.7%	2.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The fifth survey item stated, “I haven’t given much thought to choosing a career.” Of the rural participants, 2.8% reported either “very much like me” or “exactly like me,” while more nonrural participants reported those same responses (6.1%). Also, a larger percentage of rural participants disagreed with this item and responded “not at all like me” (81.3% compared to 71.1% of nonrural participants). Even though most freshmen reported that this statement did not describe them, slightly more nonrural students had not given much thought to choosing a career (see Table 4).

The sixth survey item stated, “Having to make a career decision bothers me.” Slightly more nonrural participants (38.2%) than rural participants (31.2%) reported either “very much like me” or “exactly like me” to this statement (see Table 5). While most freshmen reported that making a career decision does not bother them or only slightly bothers them, a larger percentage of nonrural participants were concerned about having to make a career decision.

Table 4

Survey Item 5: I Haven't Given Much Thought to Choosing a Career.

Response	Percent of Response		
	Entire Sample	Nonrural	Rural
Not at all like me	75.8%	71.1%	81.3%
Only slightly like me	19.6%	22.8%	15.9%
Very much like me	3.8%	5.4%	1.9%
Exactly like me	0.8%	0.7%	0.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5

Survey Item 6: Having to Make a Career Decision Bothers Me.

Response	Percent of Response		
	Entire Sample	Nonrural	Rural
Not at all like me	21.4%	16.8%	26.6%
Only slightly like me	43.5%	45.0%	42.2%
Very much like me	23.7%	24.8%	22.9%
Exactly like me	11.5%	13.4%	8.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The seventh survey item stated, "I can't make a career choice now because I don't know what my abilities are." The results for this item were generally similar between rural and nonrural participants. However on the extreme end, 3.7% of the rural participants reported this

statement to be “exactly like me,” while only 1.3% of nonrural participants reported that same response (see Table 6). Slightly more rural participants felt they could not make a career choice at the present time because they were not aware of their abilities.

Table 6

Survey Item 7: I Can't Make a Career Decision Now Because I Don't Know What My Abilities Are.

Response	Percent of Response		
	Entire Sample	Nonrural	Rural
Not at all like me	49.0%	47.7%	52.3%
Only slightly like me	37.9%	39.6%	33.9%
Very much like me	10.7%	11.4%	10.1%
Exactly like me	2.3%	1.3%	3.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The eighth survey item stated, “I don't know how my interests are related in any way to my career possibilities.” The results for this item were similar between rural and nonrural participants (see Table 7). Both groups had about 11% that responded either “very much like me” or “exactly like me,” and had about 89% that responded either “only slightly like me” or “not at all like me.” The majority of the college freshmen participants reported that they knew how their interests were related to career possibilities.

The ninth survey item stated, “I need more information about what different occupations are like before I can make a career decision.” Interestingly, more of the nonrural participants reported that they needed more information about occupations before they could make a career decision (see Table 8). Of the rural participants, 25.7% responded either “very much like me” or

“exactly like me” to this statement, while 36.2% of nonrural participants reported those same responses.

Table 7

Survey Item 8: I Don't Know How My Interests Are Related In Any Way to my Career Possibilities.

Response	Percent of Response		
	Entire Sample	Nonrural	Rural
Not at all like me	53.6%	50.3%	58.7%
Only slightly like me	34.9%	37.6%	30.3%
Very much like me	8.0%	9.4%	6.4%
Exactly like me	3.4%	2.7%	4.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 8

Survey Item 9: I Need More Information About What Different Occupations Are Like Before I Can Make a Career Decision.

Response	Percent of Response		
	Entire Sample	Nonrural	Rural
Not at all like me	28.7%	24.8%	34.9%
Only slightly like me	39.8%	38.9%	39.4%
Very much like me	22.6%	27.5%	16.5%
Exactly like me	8.8%	8.7%	9.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The tenth survey item stated, “I think I know what to major in, but I feel I need some additional personal support for it as a choice for myself.” The results for this item were similar between rural and nonrural participants (see Table 9). Both groups had about 10% that responded either “very much like me” or “exactly like me,” and had about 90% that responded either “only slightly like me” or “not at all like me.” The majority of the college freshmen participants reported that they did not need additional personal support for their current choice of major.

Table 9

Survey Item 10: I Think I Know What To Major In, But I Feel I Need Some Additional Personal Support For It as a Choice For Myself.

Response	Percent of Response		
	Entire Sample	Nonrural	Rural
Not at all like me	62.0%	61.1%	63.9%
Only slightly like me	27.9%	28.2%	26.9%
Very much like me	8.1%	8.7%	7.4%
Exactly like me	1.9%	2.0%	1.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The eleventh survey item stated, “I was exposed to and learned about many careers while growing up.” The responses for this statement were generally similar between rural and nonrural participants. However, looking at the extreme responses in Table 10, there is an interesting pattern. A larger percentage of rural participants reported “not at all like me” (13.0% compared to 10.1% of nonrural participants), and a larger percentage of nonrural participants reported “exactly like me” (12.1% compared to 8.3% of rural participants). This would suggest that more nonrural participants thought they were exposed to many careers while growing up.

Table 10

Survey Item 11: I Was Exposed To And Learned About Many Careers While Growing Up.

Response	Percent of Response		
	Entire Sample	Nonrural	Rural
Not at all like me	11.2%	10.1%	13.0%
Only slightly like me	34.5%	36.2%	32.4%
Very much like me	43.8%	41.6%	46.3%
Exactly like me	10.5%	12.1%	8.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The twelfth survey item stated, “The size of my hometown community has impacted my career choice.” The results for this item were similar between rural and nonrural participants (see Table 11). Both groups had about 25% that responded either “very much like me” or “exactly like me,” and had about 75% that responded either “only slightly like me” or “not at all like me.” The majority of the college freshmen participants reported that the size of their hometown while in high school did not impact their career choice.

The thirteenth survey item stated, “The size of my hometown community has impacted my awareness of different careers.” As shown in Table 12, only 24.8% of the rural participants responded either “very much like me” or “exactly like me” to whether they thought their hometown size impacted their awareness of different careers. Of the nonrural participants, 44.3% reported those same responses. A significantly larger percentage of nonrural participants reported that their awareness of different careers was impacted by the size of their hometown community.

Table 11

Survey Item 12: The Size of My Hometown Community Has Impacted My Career Choice.

Response	Percent of Response		
	Entire Sample	Nonrural	Rural
Not at all like me	38.4%	41.6%	33.3%
Only slightly like me	38.4%	36.2%	41.7%
Very much like me	19.8%	18.1%	22.2%
Exactly like me	3.5%	4.0%	2.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 12

Survey Item 13: The Size of My Hometown Community Has Impacted My Awareness of Different Careers.

Response	Percent of Response				
	Entire Sample	Nonrural	Responses Grouped	Rural	Responses Grouped
Not at all like me	17.0%	13.4%	55.7%	21.1%	75.2%
Only slightly like me	47.1%	42.3%		54.1%	
Very much like me	30.5%	36.9%	44.3%	22.0%	24.8%
Exactly like me	5.4%	7.4%		2.8%	
Total	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	

The fourteenth survey item asked, "Who or what has had the most impact on your career choice?" Participants chose between parent, friend or classmate, school counselor, teacher,

coach/supervisor, a job they've had in the past, or other. Because of the little response in the coach/supervisor and school counselor categories, they were combined with the teacher category to make a new category called "School professional." Table 13 shows the frequencies and percents of rural and nonrural responses, and Figure 4 shows a graphical representation of the different responses. Of the rural participants, 30.1% said a parent had the most impact on their career decision. Only 23.1% of nonrural participants ranked parents as having the most impact. Conversely, 31.5% of the nonrural participants said a school professional (teacher, school counselor, or coach) had the most impact on their career decision. Only 22.3% of rural participants ranked a school employee as having the most impact. While "Other" was the most frequent response for all of the college freshmen participants, the nonrural participants ranked a school professional as their second choice, and the rural participants ranked a parent as their second choice.

Table 13

Survey Item 14: Who or What Has Had the Most Impact on Your Career Choice?

Response	Entire Sample		Nonrural		Rural	
	Number of Responses	Percent of Sample	Number of Responses	Percent of Nonrural	Number of Responses	Percent of Rural
Parent	64	26.0%	33	23.1%	31	30.1%
School professional	68	27.6%	45	31.5%	23	22.3%
Friend or classmate	12	4.9%	7	4.9%	5	4.9%
A job I've had in the past	23	9.3%	12	8.4%	11	10.7%
Other	79	32.1%	46	32.2%	33	32.1%
Total	246	100%	143	100%	103	100%

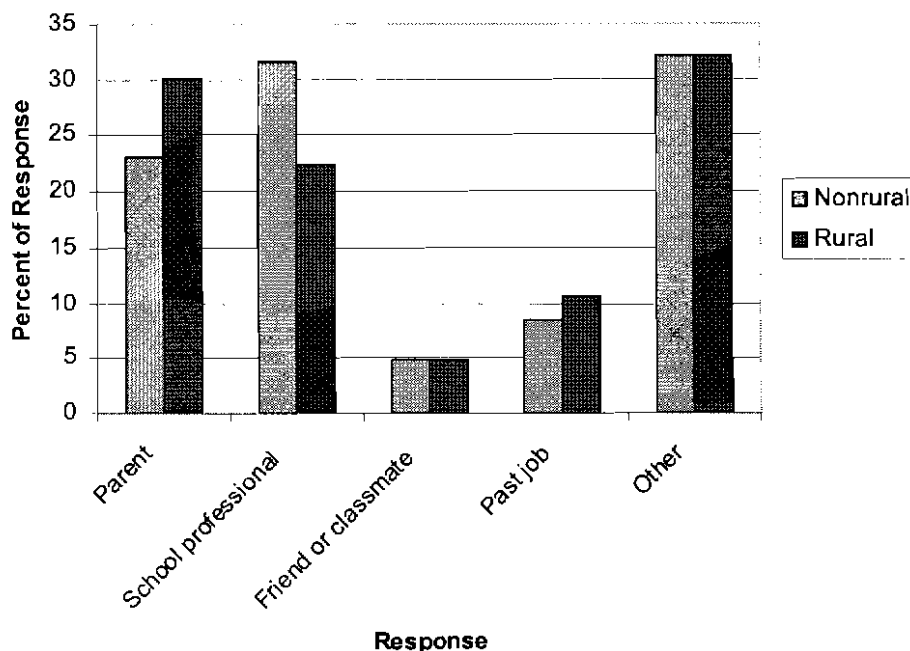


Figure 4. Who or what has had the most impact on your career choice?

Research Objectives

Research objective 1. The first research objective was to determine if there was a difference in the level of career certainty of college freshmen from rural hometowns compared with college freshmen from nonrural hometowns. To determine this, the responses for the first 10 survey items were coded with a value from 1 to 4. Each participant's responses to the first 10 survey items were added together. A higher sum meant the participant was more certain in his or her career choice, while a lower sum meant the participant was less certain in his or her career choice. The first two survey items were coded as follows: "not at all like me" = 1, "only slightly like me" = 2, "very much like me" = 3, and "exactly like me" = 4. Survey items three through ten were coded in the reverse order: "not at all like me" = 4, "only slightly like me" = 3, "very much like me" = 2, and "exactly like me" = 1. The survey items were coded differently because agreement with the first two survey statements (i.e. selecting "very much like me" or "exactly like me") indicated career certainty, and agreement with survey statements three through ten (i.e.

selecting “very much like me” or “exactly like me”) indicated career uncertainty. The lowest score on the certainty scale would be a 10 (if a participant selected all of the responses coded with a value of 1), and the highest score would be a 40 (if a participant selected all of the responses coded with a value of 4).

Out of the first 10 survey items, 256 out of the 270 participants responded to all 10 statements. The certainty scores from all participants ranged from 16 to 40, with 31.6 being the mean and 36 being the most frequent score. The mean certainty scores for the two groups were similar: 32.25 for the rural participants and 31.15 for the nonrural participants. Figure 5 shows the mode of the certainty score of rural participants to be 36, while the certainty score for the nonrural participants is bimodal with 26 and 36 both being the most frequent scores. Figure 5 also shows that the rural certainty scores are slightly higher than the nonrural scores. The college freshmen participants from rural hometowns were slightly more career certain than the participants from nonrural hometowns. A t-test was used to see if there was a significant difference between the certainty scores of rural and nonrural participants, but no significant difference was found, $t(253) = -1.512, p > .05$ (see Table 14).

Besides comparing the difference between the overall career certainty of nonrural and rural participants, the researcher also compared the difference between the average responses of nonrural and rural participants for each survey item. T-tests were used on the first 13 survey items to see if there was a significant difference between the average responses of rural and nonrural participants (see Table 14). The mean for each item was calculated by coding the responses as follows: “not at all like me” = 1, “only slightly like me” = 2, “very much like me” = 3, and “exactly like me” = 4. Survey item 13, which stated, “The size of my hometown

community has impacted my awareness of different careers,” was the only item to show a significant difference between the rural and nonrural responses, $t(244) = 3.287, p < .05$.

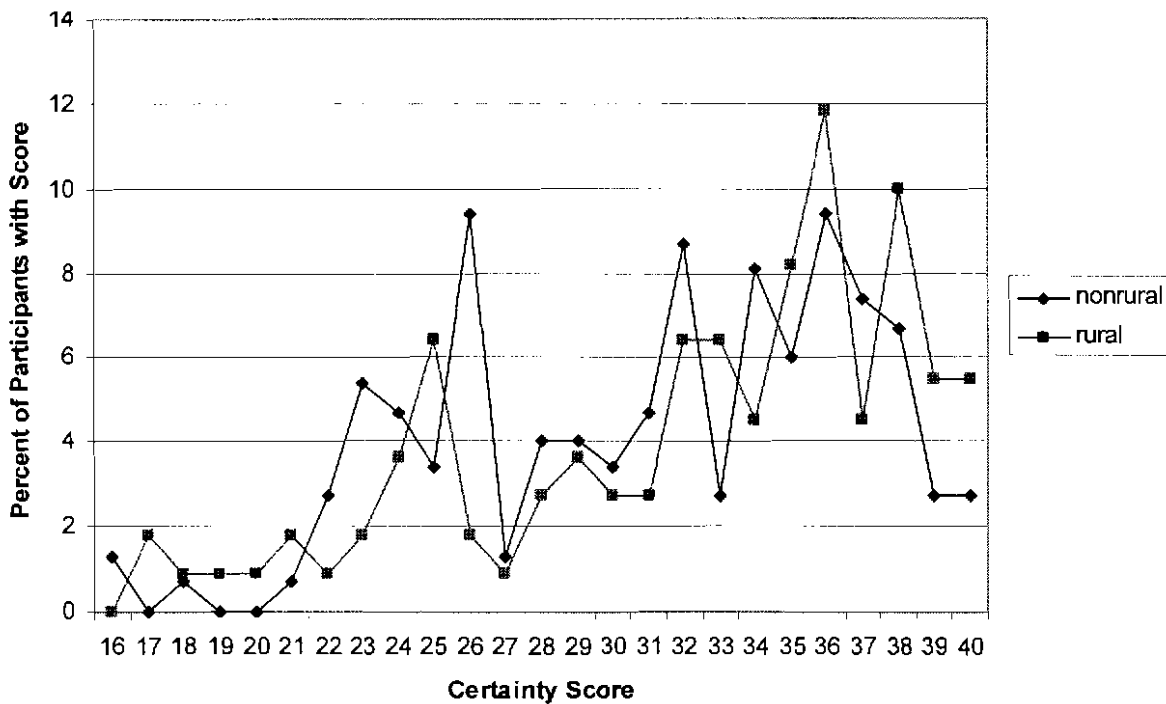


Figure 5. Certainty scale scores for college freshmen from rural and nonrural hometowns.

Research objective 2. The second research objective was to determine what factors may be associated with uncertainty in college freshmen from rural and nonrural hometown sizes. The researcher considered all 270 of the responses to survey items three through ten to determine factors that may be associated with career uncertainty in college freshmen regardless of hometown size. Only items three through ten were analyzed for the second research objective because they were concerned with career uncertainty. Survey items three through ten were worded so that agreement with the statement (i.e. selecting “very much like me” or “exactly like me”) indicated higher levels of career uncertainty. In comparing the responses of survey items three through ten, survey items three, six, and nine had larger percentages of “very much like me” and “exactly like me” responses than the rest of the items (see Table 15).

Table 14

T-test Results for Overall Certainty Score and Survey Items One through Thirteen

Survey Item		Mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Prob.
Overall Certainty Score	Nonrural	31.15	-1.512	.132	p>.05
	Rural	32.25			
1. I have decided on a career and feel comfortable with it.	Nonrural	2.60	-1.110	.268	p>.05
	Rural	2.74			
2. I have decided on a major and feel comfortable with it.	Nonrural	2.80	-1.231	.219	p>.05
	Rural	2.95			
3. I have difficulty deciding among the many careers that appeal to me.	Nonrural	2.17	.907	.365	p>.05
	Rural	2.07			
4. None of the careers I know about appeal to me.	Nonrural	1.35	.828	.408	p>.05
	Rural	1.28			
5. I haven't given much thought to choosing a career.	Nonrural	1.36	1.846	.066	p>.05
	Rural	1.22			
6. Having to make a career decision bothers me.	Nonrural	2.35	1.923	.056	p>.05
	Rural	2.13			
7. I can't make a career choice now because I don't know what my abilities are.	Nonrural	1.66	.135	.892	p>.05
	Rural	1.65			
8. I don't know how my interests are related in any way to my career possibilities.	Nonrural	1.64	.765	.445	p>.05
	Rural	1.57			
9. I need more information about what different occupations are like before I can make a career decision.	Nonrural	2.20	1.723	.086	p>.05
	Rural	2.00			
10. I think I know what to major in, but I feel I need some additional personal support for it as a choice for myself.	Nonrural	1.52	.483	.630	p>.05
	Rural	1.47			
11. I was exposed to and learned about many careers while growing up.	Nonrural	2.56	.544	.587	p>.05
	Rural	2.50			
12. The size of my hometown community has impacted my career choice.	Nonrural	1.85	-.928	.354	p>.05
	Rural	1.94			
13. The size of my hometown community has impacted my awareness of different careers.	Nonrural	2.38	3.287	.001	p<.05
	Rural	2.06			

Also, Table 14 shows the mean scores of survey items three, six, and nine being larger than items four, five, seven, eight, and ten. A higher mean meant more agreement with the uncertainty statement.

Table 15

Percentages of “Very Much Like Me” and “Exactly Like Me” Responses for Survey Items Three through Ten from All Participants

Survey Item	% of “Very Much Like Me” and “Exactly Like Me” Responses (Combined)
3. I have difficulty deciding among the many careers that appeal to me.	30.1%
4. None of the careers I know about appeal to me.	4.9%
5. I haven’t given much thought to choosing a career.	4.6%
6. Having to make a career decision bothers me.	35.2%
7. I can’t make a career choice now because I don’t know what my abilities are.	13.0%
8. I don’t know how my interests are related in any way to my career possibilities.	11.4%
9. I need more information about what different occupations are like before I can make a career decision.	31.4%
10. I think I know what to major in, but I feel I need some additional personal support for it as a choice for myself.	10.0%

Survey item six, which stated, “Having to make a career decision bothers me,” had 262 total responses with 35.2% (n=92) indicating either “very much like me” or “exactly like me.” As noted earlier, slightly more nonrural participants than rural participants reported either “very much like me” or “exactly like me” to this statement.

Survey item nine, which stated, “I need more information about what different occupations are like before I can make a career decision,” had 261 total responses with 31.4%

(n=82) indicating either “very much like me” or “exactly like me.” As noted earlier, more of the nonrural participants reported that they needed more information about occupations before they could make a career decision. Of the rural participants, 25.7% responded either “very much like me” or “exactly like me” to this statement, while 36.2% of nonrural participants reported those same responses.

Survey item three, which stated, “I have difficulty deciding among the many careers that appeal to me,” had 269 total responses with 30.1% (n=81) indicating either “very much like me” or “exactly like me.” As noted earlier, a larger percentage of nonrural participants (34.9%) compared to rural participants (25.5%) reported “very much like me” or “exactly like me” to this item. The nonrural college freshmen in this study were more likely to have difficulty deciding among the many careers that appeal to them. Interestingly, the nonrural participants agreed more often than the rural participants with these three uncertainty items.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter will include a discussion and conclusion of the study's findings. This chapter will end with recommendations for further study.

The purpose of this study was to examine the difference between the levels of career certainty of college freshman at a mid-size liberal arts college in the Midwest who are from various hometown sizes. It is important for middle and high school counselors and college career counselors to be aware of the specific career development needs of students from various hometown settings. The review of literature showed that different factors influence the career choice of rural and nonrural adolescents. Specifically, rural students may be faced with less exposure to a variety of careers (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Conroy, 1997; Haller & Virkler, 1993), may be more influenced by their parents' level of education and occupation than nonrural students (Taylor, 2001; Trice, 1990), and may have an attachment to their community that may cause them internal conflict in choosing a career that will result in moving away from their rural hometown (Hektner, 1995; Howley, 2006).

Limitations

This study was only intended to represent the career certainty of college freshmen age 18 and older in a specific liberal arts university in the Midwest. This may limit the findings to be generalized only to this community in the Midwest and to this age level.

Conclusions

The first area of results showed that the majority of freshmen students at this university indicated that they had made a career decision and academic major decision and felt comfortable with the decision. The students were slightly more decided on an academic major than they were on a career decision. Since freshmen students will choose a major before ultimately choosing a

career, it makes sense for them to respond with greater certainty in choosing a major. The fact that rural and nonrural participants in this study had similar levels of career certainty supports the idea of heightened awareness within rural communities regarding the lack of career exposure and opportunities that Anderson and Brown (1997) concluded with their study. They also concluded that different factors, such as poverty and the need to survive, may negatively influence the career development of nonrural students. Technology and the Internet may be a cause for the increase in awareness of diverse job markets for both rural and nonrural adolescents.

Researchers also found that rural adolescents pictured themselves in less skilled positions with higher frequency, while urban adolescents pictured themselves in higher level positions more often (Cobb, McIntire, & Pratt, 1989). This study did not determine *which* careers the college freshmen students were interested in and was only concerned with how certain they felt in their career decisions. The results may show that the rural and nonrural participants were at similar career certainty levels, but the results do not show how many different careers each group would have selected or if they would have chosen careers that are commonly seen in their hometowns.

It is also unique to the current study that the subjects were college freshmen at a university. High school graduates who pursue a four-year degree at a liberal arts college are only a subset of all adolescents. As a group, adolescents who choose to go to a four-year university may have similar levels of career certainty regardless of hometown size. Similarly, adolescents who do not pursue a four-year university may also have similar levels of career certainty regardless of hometown size.

Based on the results of this study, nonrural participants were more likely to report difficulty in deciding among the many careers that appeal to them. More nonrural than rural participants indicated that they were exposed to many careers while growing up, therefore, nonrural college freshmen may have a harder time deciding between careers because they know about and were exposed to more careers. Knowing about more careers to choose from may make deciding on a career more difficult.

Another important finding is that more nonrural than rural participants had not given much thought to choosing a career. According to Hektner (1995), more nonrural students expect to complete four years of postsecondary education than rural students. For the nonrural participants in the current study, receiving a Bachelor's degree could be their main goal and they may feel satisfied with many careers that require that degree level. The rural participants may have decided to attend college because the specific career that they are pursuing requires a Bachelor's degree. However, that does not explain why slightly more nonrural participants are distressed having to make a career decision.

The nonrural participants could feel more intimidated by making a career decision because they feel more pressure from their parents to complete a certain level of education and secure a job with a certain level of prestige. This would be consistent with the previous findings that the higher the parents' level of education, the higher the educational aspirations adolescents will hold for themselves and that urban adolescents held significantly higher educational aspirations than rural adolescents (Cobb, McIntire, & Pratt, 1989; Hektner, 1995; Taylor, 2001). Rural adolescents may not feel the same amount of pressure from their families to graduate college and secure a professional job as they may feel less stressed by having to make a career decision. This would be consistent with the previous findings that a larger percent of rural

parents, guidance counselors and teachers were less supportive of their students attending college full-time than those from urban areas (Cobb, McIntire, & Pratt, 1989).

A significantly larger amount of nonrural participants reported that their awareness of different careers was impacted by the size of their hometown community. Nonrural college freshmen may realize that being exposed to many diverse careers helped to increase their awareness of the many career opportunities available. However, looking at their responses to previous statements, the nonrural participants are not more career certain or less apprehensive about making a career decision than the rural participants. It may prove interesting to see the difference between the level of job satisfaction of adults who grew up in rural and nonrural hometowns, and to find if they think an increased awareness of many diverse careers led them to make a more informed career decision.

Parents influenced rural participants more often while school professionals impacted nonrural participants more often. These results are consistent with the previous findings that rural adolescents were more likely to be influenced by their parents than nonrural adolescents when setting career goals (Taylor, 2001). Also, rural and suburban adolescents rely on their parents' occupations when setting career goals to a greater degree than urban adolescents (Taylor, 2001; Trice, 1990). Adolescents in nonrural areas may have a variety of other resources available to rely on for career decision-making guidance, and may utilize their teachers and school counselor more often than their parents.

The rural participants in this study may have had slightly higher career certainty scores because they were impacted more by their parents, compared to the nonrural participants who were more impacted by their former teachers or school counselor. College freshmen who rely more on their parents for career advice may receive more personal support for their current

career choice. The nonrural participants may not be receiving much support anymore from their past teachers because they may be attending a college far from their hometown and may not have much contact with them anymore. The nonrural participants possibly feel less support for their career choice from school professionals than the rural participants feel from their parents.

Recommendations

Overall, the students in this study may benefit from a comprehensive developmental career guidance program that addresses self-competencies, career exploration and research, and understanding the world-of-work. Specifically, these students showed the most uncertainty in the area of being overwhelmed by making career decisions. Making a career decision can be seen as one of the most important decisions that face adolescents, but they should also be made aware that there are many different paths to get to the same career and that adults change jobs eight times on average over a lifetime. This does not mean that students should not take the decision seriously, but school counselors could ease the worries of those students who are so anxious about making the right decision that it is affecting their daily life.

Participants also largely reported needing more information on careers as an area of uncertainty. Along with providing resources for career exploration and research, school counselors can strive to build relationships with community members in order to establish informational interviews for students. Students can learn about different careers through reading about them, but it is more effective when they can visit an actual workplace and speak directly to people who are in the profession and/or observe them performing their job. Classroom guest speakers, job shadowing, field trips, career events, internships, volunteering, and work experience may enhance effective career guidance programs that would be beneficial for all high school students.

For school counselors of rural high school students, it would be wise to prepare students for the reality that they may need to relocate if there is a certain career field that interests them. A goal for rural adolescents to become more self-aware of their feelings surrounding relocating for postsecondary options or a career should be a priority. This goal could be met through individual counseling sessions with students while they are in high school. Also, more rural than nonrural participants reported that they did not know what their abilities were and how they related to choosing a career. School counselors in rural areas can provide classroom guidance lessons that specifically address self-awareness of skills and abilities and how they relate to different career fields.

Future research in this area could explore the difference between the career choices of rural and nonrural college freshmen as well as their level of career certainty. Studies have shown that rural and nonrural *high school* students choose careers more often that are stereotypical of their geographic regions. It may be worthy of further research to determine if rural or nonrural *college* respond in a similar manner. As our nation moves to develop more leaders in the global work force, students may wish to have more opportunity to explore careers beyond the boundaries of their home towns whether rural or nonrural.

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Appendix A: Implied Consent Form

Dear “university” Freshman Student,

I am conducting a survey for a research project on career certainty and would greatly appreciate your response. I am finishing my School Counseling graduate degree at UW-Stout.

The link to the survey is:
#SurveyLink#

Again, your participation in the study would be greatly appreciated!

Thank you,
Kathy Rapienski
UW-Stout Graduate Student

Project Title:

Rural Compared to Nonrural: Does Hometown Size Affect Career Certainty in College Freshmen?

Investigator:

Kathy Rapienski

Research Advisor:

Carol Johnson, UW-Stout
715-232-1619, 407 McCalmont Hall

Description:

This study will examine the difference between the level of career certainty of college freshman at the “university” who are from various hometown sizes.

Time Commitment:

This survey should take about 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

Risks and Benefits:

A risk of this study is that it could produce anxiety in those who are uncertain about their career choice. Hopefully taking this survey will provide an opportunity to reflect on your current level of career certainty and encourage you to explore different careers and take self-assessments, which are the benefits of the study. The “university” career services office has resources, self-assessments, and career counselors to assist in the career exploration process. A benefit to society is greater knowledge about whether hometown size can affect career certainty and choice. This knowledge may influence how school counselors and college career counselors approach career counseling in the communities they work in.

Confidentiality:

The investigator of this study will not know who responds to the survey and who does not. Your name, email address, or student identification number will not be included on any webpages, emails, or results. We do not believe that you can be identified from any of the information you provide.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose to not participate without any adverse consequences to you. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify your anonymous document after it is sent to the investigator.

IRB Approval:

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

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Statement of Consent:

By completing the following survey, you agree to participate in the project entitled, *Rural Compared to Nonrural: Does Hometown Size Affect Career Certainty in College Freshmen?*

Appendix B: Survey

RURAL COMPARED TO NONRURAL: DOES HOMETOWN SIZE AFFECT CAREER CERTAINTY IN COLLEGE FRESHMEN?**Choose the answer that best fits you:**

1. I have decided on a career and feel comfortable with it.
 - ☐ not at all like me
 - ☐ only slightly like me
 - ☐ very much like me
 - ☐ exactly like me
2. I have decided on a major and feel comfortable with it.
 - ☐ not at all like me
 - ☐ only slightly like me
 - ☐ very much like me
 - ☐ exactly like me
3. I have difficulty deciding among the many careers that appeal to me.
 - ☐ not at all like me
 - ☐ only slightly like me
 - ☐ very much like me
 - ☐ exactly like me
4. None of the careers I know about appeal to me.
 - ☐ not at all like me
 - ☐ only slightly like me
 - ☐ very much like me
 - ☐ exactly like me
5. I haven't given much thought to choosing a career.
 - ☐ not at all like me
 - ☐ only slightly like me
 - ☐ very much like me
 - ☐ exactly like me
6. Having to make a career decision bothers me.
 - ☐ not at all like me
 - ☐ only slightly like me
 - ☐ very much like me
 - ☐ exactly like me

7. I can't make a career choice now because I don't know what my abilities are.

- ☐ not at all like me
- ☐ only slightly like me
- ☐ very much like me
- ☐ exactly like me

8. I don't know how my interests are related in any way to my career possibilities.

- ☐ not at all like me
- ☐ only slightly like me
- ☐ very much like me
- ☐ exactly like me

9. I need more information about what different occupations are like before I can make a career decision.

- ☐ not at all like me
- ☐ only slightly like me
- ☐ very much like me
- ☐ exactly like me

10. I think I know what to major in, but I feel I need some additional personal support for it as a choice for myself.

- ☐ not at all like me
- ☐ only slightly like me
- ☐ very much like me
- ☐ exactly like me

11. I was exposed to and learned about many careers while growing up.

- ☐ not at all like me
- ☐ only slightly like me
- ☐ very much like me
- ☐ exactly like me

12. The size of my hometown community has impacted my career choice.

- ☐ not at all like me
- ☐ only slightly like me
- ☐ very much like me
- ☐ exactly like me

13. The size of my hometown community has impacted my awareness of different careers.

- ☐ not at all like me
- ☐ only slightly like me
- ☐ very much like me
- ☐ exactly like me

Choose the answer that best fits you:

*These were drop-down menus

14. Who or what has had the most impact your career choice?

- a. Parent
- b. Friend or classmate
- c. School Counselor
- d. Teacher
- e. Coach/Supervisor
- f. A job I've had in the past
- g. Other

15. What was the population of your hometown while you were in high school?

- a. 0 – 10,000 people
- b. 10,001 – 20,000 people
- c. 20,001 – 30,000 people
- d. 30,001 – 40,000 people
- e. 40,001 – 50,000 people
- f. 50,001 – 60,000 people
- g. 60,001 – 70,000 people
- h. 80,001 – 90,000 people
- i. 90,001 – 100,000 people
- j. 100,001 – 110,000 people
- k. more than 110,000 people

16. Would you describe your hometown (while in high school) as:

- a. Rural (country living)
- b. Suburban (a community lying immediately outside a city)
- c. Urban (city living)

17. What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female

18. What is your age?

- a. 18
- b. 19
- c. 20
- d. 21
- e. 22
- f. 23
- g. 24
- h. 25
- i. 26
- j. 27
- k. 28
- l. 29
- m. 30
- n. 31
- o. 32
- p. 33
- q. 34
- r. 35
- s. 36
- t. 37
- u. 38
- v. 39
- w. 40