

DISCUSSANT'S REMARKS

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FUTURE AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATORS' AWARENESS OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARD BIOTECHNOLOGY ISSUES REPORTED IN MASS MEDIA

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This study's purpose was to determine college students' awareness of and attitudes toward biotechnology issues reported in the mass media. The objectives were clear concise and measurable. Eleven different institutions in 10 different states participated in the study. Responses from 330 students contribute to the strength of this study. The authors do an excellent job of building a conceptual framework for their study. Graduate students looking for examples of how to develop a conceptual framework for their study would do well to use this as an example.

The authors report reliability for the different measurement scales that were used. All were deemed reliable. Significant differences between subgroups were determined using multivariate analyses.

A number of selected demographic variables were used to determine if student attitudes about biotechnology had a significant effect on their attitude. Evidence is presented that encourages scientists to communicate with students about biotechnology before they enter college. Why did you not specifically address the role of middle school and secondary agricultural education in that endeavor? I am curious as to why agricultural education and 4-H were not included as demographic factors. The Council for Agricultural Education, as well as state curriculum development centers, have distributed biotechnology materials for since the early 1990's. Those students who had taken an agricultural education class containing information about biotechnology will have formed an attitude toward biotechnology. The same might be said about 4-H members. Experiences in these areas may be just as influential, if not more so, than science classes. What classes were classified or defined as science classes?

The authors report that respondents "who were aware of biotechnology practices affecting the environment had a significant more positive attitude" Is there an explanation as to why?

When addressing the agricultural demographic factors, it seems that the three factors are very closely related. It may have been difficult for respondents to distinguish between living on a farm and working on a farm if they spent the summer working for a relative and stayed at the farm during the summer. What if parents owned agricultural property in another state and the property was leased out?

What suggestions do you have that would help curriculum planners create an interest in science when communications is their primary interest of students enrolled in communications programs?