

FAULTY AND STAFF PERSPECTIVES

A survey of University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (UTIA) faculty and staff was conducted in September 2017 to support UTIA’s strategic planning effort. The survey was online and voluntary and faculty and staff were invited to participate in a series of emails. Three open listening sessions (two in-person on the Knoxville campus and one online) were also conducted with the objective of understanding internal perspectives of the Institute’s strengths, challenges, and opportunities. The outcomes and key themes are summarized below.

SURVEY PARTICIPANT PROFILE

A total of 468 faculty and staff responded to the survey, representing 31% of total UTIA faculty and staff. The survey engaged 150 faculty members, 298 staff, and 20 administrators. All UTIA units (CASNR, AgResearch, UT Extension, Veterinary Medicine) were represented in the responses. Examples of UTIA Services represented in the survey included IT Services, Marketing and Communication, Advancement, International Programs.

What is your role at UTIA?



Note: Administrators = 4%

Your appointment is with which unit(s)? Check all that apply



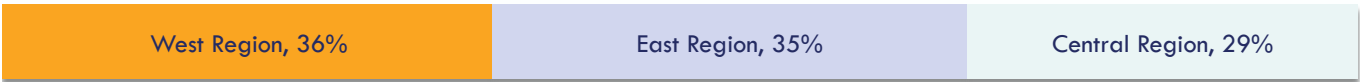
Note: UTIA Services - 7%

Over 60% of respondents were from the Knoxville campus with the other 40% from RECs, County or Region Extension offices. For those faculty and staff outside of the Knoxville campus, representation was fairly evenly spread across the western, eastern and central regions.

Where is your UTIA duty station located?



Please designate your region.



More than half of respondents have been employed by UTIA for over ten years.

How long have you been employed by UTIA?



CHANGING STUDENT NEEDS

In this section of the survey faculty and staff who have a role in student instruction were asked how student needs have changed in the past ten years and how they expected student needs to change in the next ten years. A total of 129 respondents provided answers to these open-ended questions. We separated out Veterinary Medicine responses due to the different student profile and expectations of those students (39 responses). The remaining 90 responses were reviewed for insight on CASNR students.

STUDENT NEEDS – VETERINARY MEDICINE ONLY

Responses to the “how have student needs changed in the past ten years” question fell into the following thematic categories:

- **Accommodations (23% mentioned)** – Respondents most frequently noted the increase in accommodations related to disabilities or other special needs.
- **Personal Attention (17%)** – Respondents have noticed a greater need for more personal attention, including one-on-one time with students.
- **Technology/ Information (17%)** – Use of technology and individual devices has along with student expectations for use.
- **Stress (10%)** – Many respondents cited an increase in student stress levels as a trend.
- **Other** – Other comments related to an increase in overall student quality, greater levels of student debt, more diversity, higher expectations from students due to tuition costs, less flexibility on the part of students, greater challenges with parking, and more administrative requirements in clinics.

When asked “how do you expect student needs to change over the next ten years,” respondents noted that they expect current trends to intensify:

- **Technology (28% mentioned)** – The most frequent point was a continued emphasis on technology across the board, from individual devices to the classroom to the clinic experience.
- **Accommodations (13%)** – Many expect the need for accommodations for students to increase.
- **Personal Attention (9%)** – Respondents feel that students will require and expect even more personal attention and one-on-one time.

FACUTLY AND STAFF
VOICE: CHANGING
STUDENT NEEDS

“All students bring their own devices, and given the 100% need to use it during class and clinic, our support for student devices, along with increasing computers in all areas, has increased workload without increase in staffing or management tools.”

“More requests for special accommodations”

“Students are less prepared to handle stressful environments and situations.”

“I don't feel student needs have ever changed. They need education; they don't need to be entertained.”

“Need more help to pay for school. Need more help finding jobs.”

STUDENT NEEDS – CASNR ONLY

Responses to the “how have student needs changed in the past ten years” question fell into the following thematic categories:

- **Technology (36% mentioned)** – Respondents noted the impact of mobile devices and expectations for technology in education. Participants also commented that technology is resulting in less student engagement. While students are more connected, they are not as well versed in technical software packages.
- **Non-Agriculture Background (10%)** – A frequent theme was more students from non-agricultural backgrounds, including more from urban and suburban areas. As a result, these students come in with less familiarity of agriculture basics.
- **Careers (8%)** – Students must meet higher expectations from employers than in previous years.
- **Personal Attention (8%)** – Students require more personal attention, less independent.

Other – Other comments related to the increase in students who work part-time, need for critical thinking, desire for more experience learning, higher academic achievement of incoming students, and a greater global perspective.

When asked “how do you expect student needs to change over the next ten years,” respondents noted that they expect current trends to intensify:

- **Technology (62% mentioned)** – Student will expect more engagement through technology, online courses, and flexibility due to the availability of technology.
- **Experience Learning (8%)** – Experience learning will be more important to supplementing education. Due to the trends, hands on experience will become more essential.
- **Critical Thinking (8%)** – The need for critical thinking skills will increase due to the impact of technology.
- **Other** – Participants also expect the following to continue:
 - Increased change in student profile – more students from suburban/urban backgrounds and non-traditional backgrounds (military, transfer students)
 - Increased need for personal attention
 - Increased attention on the value of a college degree; need for financial scholarships due to growing cost of tuition

FACUTLY AND STAFF VOICE: CHANGING STUDENT NEEDS

“Demographics of our students are changing from rural to suburban students, and thus, they have fewer prior experience in agriculture to build upon during instruction...”

“Students feel they are very tech-savvy and often want more use of outlets such as social media in courses. However, they often don't know how to research reputable materials and utilize library resources...”

“More technology driven; shorter attention spans coupled with access to quick, easy answers. This has decreased skill set to dig into information, process and learn.”

“Students increasingly need a more global and integrated perspective of their discipline.”

“Need more help to pay for school. Need more help finding jobs.”

UTIA SERVICES

234 respondents indicated that they served external stakeholders (other than students). Participants reported experience with farmers/producers, 4-H, agencies (federal, state, local), youth, consumer groups, animal hospital clients, homeowners, and community groups.

Responses to the “how have stakeholder needs changed in the past ten years” question fell into the following thematic categories:

- **Technology and Information (38% mentioned)** – Participants noted widespread impact from changing farming to the expectation of on-demand information. Clientele are more technologically savvy, from the use of mobile devices to advances in big data in agriculture.
- **Farming Changes (18%)** – Trends in farming include fewer full-time farmers and larger farm size. Farmers are more knowledgeable with greater use of consultants. Greater competition, increase in exotic pests, and stagnating commodity prices (some markets). New entrepreneurs.
- **Animal Owners (10%)** – Greater willingness to invest in pets, but affordability issues. Higher expectations of care by pet owners.
- **More Support (6%)** – Growing demand for services.
- **4-H (5%)** – Challenges related to declining enrollment, capturing student interest, and increasing number of student activities.
- **Other** – Other changes include attention to sustainability, changing demographics, accountability, community challenges, and political climate.

Based on responses, the following are likely to have a future impact on UTIA:

- **Technology and Information (42% mentioned)** – Technology and information are predicted to be the greatest drivers of change.
- **Farming Changes (10%)** – Continued trends in farming include larger sizes, greater competition, and challenges like invasive pests.
- **Demand/Accountability/ Funding (9%)** – Respondents anticipate greater demand for services, but more accountability from sponsors.
- **Urban/Rural (6%)** – Changing demographics are expected to be a force for change in services.
- **Sustainability (5%)** – Respondents predict a greater emphasis on sustainability, from water quality to animal production to land use.
- **Other** – Participants identified important trends to include growing complexity in families, greater need for specialization, greater needs among an older demographic, and greater demand for animal care.

FACULTY AND STAFF VOICE: CHANGING STAKEHOLDER NEEDS

“Technology has driven huge changes -- changes in the way people communicate and the way they farm...”

“They are more educated and have already done their own research before they contact us...”

“Big data is here and will continue to play a role.”

“Consumers seem to be driving the organic, non-GMO movement and that will likely continue. Producers are looking for ways to sharpen their pencils, as well as have an interest in emerging technologies”

“Reduced funding, more accountability”

“Our community is changing from rural to suburban.”

“Less land, larger population, more weed resistance. See the problem!”

UTIA STRENGTHS

Faculty and staff were asked to identify UTIA strengths that need to be preserved during the strategic planning process.

Responses fell into the following thematic categories:

- **Community/ People (25% mentioned)** – Faculty and staff frequently mentioned the sense of community in the workplace as a core strength. Respect for the expertise and commitment of colleagues was also a common theme.
- **Mission/ Service to Tennessee (17%)** – Survey participants noted pride and passion for the land grant mission and service to Tennessee. There was a frequent sense of personal fulfillment in working in service to various stakeholder groups.
- **Relationships/ County Presence (17%)** – Respondents identified county-based Extension as a core strength. The approach to building and managing community relationships allows UTIA to be a leader in the state.
- **Research-Based (16%)** – The objective, research-based foundation of the work at UTIA was noted as a strength.
- **Academic Excellence (8%)** – Participants identified commitment to academic excellence as a strength.
- **Agriculture Focus (8%)** – The industry focus on agriculture and connection to farmers was important to respondents.
- **Programs (6%)** – The quality and variety of educational programs, including 4-H, was also a frequent theme.

FACULTY AND STAFF VOICE: STRENGTHS

“Working for the Institute has always been one of my greatest accomplishments. The people of UTIA should always be its greatest attribute.”

“The overall understanding that we exist to serve the needs of our communities. I feel that very strongly in all of UT Extension and it makes me proud to be an employee of an organization that is “doing good in the world”.”

“Unbiased source of information that is of high quality, conducted with the highest levels of integrity. Our reputation is very strong and must be preserved!”

“UTIA must maintain a strong in-person presence in communities through Extension and Ag Research, because that personal contact is one of our main strengths and has helped us survive budget challenges.”

“Focus on agriculture, first and foremost”

“Our connection with the people of Tennessee.”

CHALLENGES

Survey participants were asked to describe in their own words “what are the most important challenges facing UTIA over the next ten years.”

Responses fell into the following thematic categories:

- **Relevancy in the Face of Change (25% mentions)** – Participants noted the challenges of maintaining relevancy in the face of pervasive change, from demographics in the state to student and community engagement to the agricultural and related industries. The theme was to evolve programs and research to be relevant for the future.
- **Funding (24%)** – Funding challenges are expected to continue with the higher expectation for services and more demand for programs without additional funding.
- **Staffing (14%)** – Respondents noted that staffing constraints exist in certain units for faculty and staff. The challenge will be to address staffing levels and retention issues due to salary gaps.
- **Technology/Information (9%)** – Technology and information was identified as a major external trend and addressing this issue is expected to be a challenge.
- **Internal Collaboration/ Effectiveness (6%)** – Existing issues with internal collaboration and split appointments results in administrative complexity.
- **Other** – Other comments related to:
 - Competition in external research; challenges to research growth
 - Space constraints and facility upgrades
 - Communication with the public on UTIA services
 - Building a global perspective
 - Funding graduate education

FACULTY AND STAFF VOICE: CHALLENGES

“Continuing to educate and interest stakeholders in the importance of the University of Tennessee's land grant mission and its value to stakeholders and the Tennessee economy.”

“FACULTY, FACULTY, FACULTY.”

“Financial and public support for the Land Grant Mission - which go hand-in-hand.”

“The biggest challenge is seeing ourselves as one united Institute, and putting forth that united front. We can only truly hope to have a lasting impact if we work together, and realize that we really are capable of bigger, better things when we work as one Institute, rather than small factions or even on an individual unit basis.”

“Maintaining our strengths with a declining number of faculty and staff. Meeting new challenges with our existing number of faculty and staff who already 'have a full plate'.”

OPPORTUNITIES

Stakeholders were asked to describe in their own words “what are the greatest opportunities for UTIA over the next ten years?”

Responses fell into the following thematic categories:

- **Research (15% mentions)** – Continue the emphasis on research and focus on specific areas. Participants outlined several areas of potential interest that ranged from sustainability topics to opportunities to increase agricultural production.
- **Program Innovation and Expansion (13%)** – Innovate programs based on changing needs and scale impact by using technology, including online education.
- **Technology/ Information (12%)** – Disseminate information faster through use of technology and lead in providing technology-forward research for constituents.
- **Outreach (12%)** – Improve outreach to general public to foster UTIA’s impact on communities and continue with the strong relationships developed as a result of county-based Extension.
- **Collaboration (8%)** – Improve collaboration, both internally and with external partners, to more effectively serve stakeholders.
- **National and International Scale (6%)** – Scale research and discoveries to the national and international level. Continue to work on programs that have an impact on Tennessee, but seek to apply solutions globally.
- **People (5%)** – Invest in the retention of current faculty and staff and recruit to fill gaps, especially with pending retirements.
- **Agriculture Focus (5%)** – Adapt to the changing needs of the agricultural industry. Maintain strong relationships and continue position as a relevant, objective advisor in the field.