

**Embracing the Undergraduate Experience: An Approach to Recruiting Secondary
Agricultural Education Students**

Submitted to:

American Association for Agricultural Educators
2017 Southern Region Conference

Innovative Idea Poster

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

As vast amounts of millennials graduate from secondary schools and begin to research and apply for admittance to postsecondary institutions, recruiters from various colleges, specifically, recruiters from individual collegiate programs, must develop effective recruitment strategies in order to maintain enrollment numbers (Bulger, Jones, Taliaferro, & Wayda, 2015; Vander Schee, 2009). Recruitment presents challenges for postsecondary institutions. Because of the diversity in post-secondary education options, traditional college programs must compete for student consideration (Han, 2014). Recruiters for college programs must also be committed to dedicating the considerable resources and effort needed for attracting quality students (Bulger et. al., 2015). Institutions face changing demographic, social, and economic factors, which affect the decisions of students and the recruitment strategies, which attract them (Han, 2014; Rau & Hyland, 2003). Post-secondary institutions must develop a sales pitch designed to appeal to high school students in order to convince students they are the best academic fit for their goals (Bejou & Bejou, 2012; Mattern, Shaw, & Kobrin, 2010). Therefore, college programs must determine which recruitment strategies are the most effective. However, this task is made significantly more difficult as recruitment strategies do not fit all students or universities; rather, different institutions and different programs require different strategies as do different types of target student populations (Bulger et. al., 2015). Thus, Agricultural Education programs must develop specific strategies to attain high-quality pre-service teachers.

There is a national need for agricultural educators (Foster, Lawver, & Smith, 2015). Thus, universities with agricultural education programs must be strategic and aggressive in recruiting students. In order to recruit a diverse group of students to an agricultural education program, specific strategies must also be utilized (LaVergne, Larket, Elbert, & Jones, 2011). Developing a positive attitude toward agricultural education is important when recruiting pre-service teachers (Fraze, Wingenbach, Rutherford, & Lawrence, 2011). Furthermore, agricultural education programs must work to build value in their program among recruits (Vincent, Henry, & Anderson, 2012).

How It Works/Methodology

This innovative idea was put into action during the fall semester of 2011 and has evolved each year to include new aspects of recruitment. During the summer, potential recruits were identified at the State FFA Convention, the Institute for Future Agricultural Leaders, and through teacher recommendations. Throughout the semester, contact was made with the potential recruits via email and phone calls, and each recruit was invited to campus for a personalized college experience. Each student's college visit consisted of a meeting with the Director of Student Relations for the college, a tour with an Agriculture Ambassador, a meeting with the Academic Coordinator for Agricultural Education, lunch with current Agricultural Education students, attendance in an Agricultural Education course, and a Q&A with the Director of Undergraduate Studies for the Agricultural Education program. Promotional materials (folders and inserts) were developed to highlight the program and shared with students during their visit.

Prior to each student's visit, welcome flyers were made and posted in the building's elevator and in the foyer of the department. Upon arrival, students received a parking spot located near the college's main academic building. Students and parents had the opportunity to ask any questions they may have regarding the major or college in general. The students received a tentative schedule for their collegiate years. Dual credit and AP credit were discussed and adjusted for in the tentative schedule. The Academic Coordinator facilitated a discussion about agricultural minors and assisted the students in incorporating the classes for their desired minor(s) into their potential schedule without adding additional courses beyond the required agricultural electives. During lunch, current Agricultural Education students met with the student to share their experiences in the program. Recruits were then escorted to the introductory course, where they sat among the students and participated in the day's lesson. Following the visit, the student received a thank you note from the academic coordinator.

Results to Date/Implications

Prior to utilizing these recruitment practices, the enrollment in the Agricultural Education program was 37, with only in-state students. The current enrollment has doubled with approximately 70-80 students, with approximately 15% of that number being out of state students. In the spring of 2016, over 50% of Agricultural Education students earned recognition on the Dean's List. The majority of students are now planning to earn anywhere from one to three academic minors, while some students are also pursuing a second agricultural Bachelor's Degree. Prior to implementing these practices, few Agricultural Education students were active in extracurricular organizations on campus. Currently, the majority of students are active in various organizations, including Ag Ambassadors, Student Government Association, and MANRRS. By the end of the 2017 spring semester, ten undergraduate students who have shown academic and social maturity were selected to complete half of student teaching in Australia.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

The implemented recruitment practices have become a way to recruit high-level students to the Agricultural Education program. Each year, the number and quality of recruits will continue to rise. As recruitment continues, the demographics of students will also increase. Additional practices will be implemented to augment the current practices, including taking pictures with the new recruits for social media posts and hosting a "Signing Day" for committed recruits at the annual Field Day. Increasing our number of recruits will assist in fulfilling the national need for agriculture teachers.

Costs/Resources Needed

During the summer, \$1000 is budgeted for the purchase of promotional materials for the entirety of the academic year. Moreover, a professional printed folder and informational handouts were developed at the beginning of the academic year for \$800. College tours were provided by the university at no cost. Flyers and personalized stationery were designed and printed in house. The cost of lunch during the college visit was the recruit's responsibility. However, meeting time must be scheduled with faculty and Agricultural Education students.

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