

Recruitment Partnerships: Undergraduates and University Film Series

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Innovative Idea Poster

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

In today's competitive university setting, collegiate programs look to a variety of recruitment practices in order to maintain enrollment numbers by recruiting students directly from secondary institutions as well as from the undeclared major population already on campus (Bulger, Jones, Taliaferro, & Wayda, 2015; Vander Schee, 2009). However, recruitment across campus presents challenges for postsecondary programs. As a result of the diversity of available majors at the postsecondary level, collegiate programs must ensure their major is well marketed not only among high school students, but also across campus (Han, 2014). Unfortunately, ensuring visibility and recognition across campus requires considerable time and resources (Bulger et. al., 2015). This challenge is intensified by the rapidly changing demographic, economic, and social characteristics of the average college student. Thus, recruitment practices must also evolve to meet student needs (Han, 2014; Rau & Hyland, 2003). In addition to gaining the attention of students across campus, collegiate programs must also convince students with an undeclared major that their program is the best fit for their varied academic goals and needs (Bejou & Bejou, 2012; Mattern, Shaw, & Kobrin, 2010). Therefore, effective marketing and recruitment strategies must be identified and implemented. However, strategies will not be equally effective on all campuses or even for all collegiate programs as the target student population for each will differ (Bulger et. al., 2015).

As all collegiate majors face this issue, agricultural education programs must stay at the forefront of effective recruitment and marketing strategies in order to ensure the steady influx of high-quality students that is needed to alleviate the national need for agricultural educators (Foster, Lawver, & Smith, 2015). Because the target student populations, such as students with an undeclared major, include much diversity in terms of agricultural experience and various demographics, diverse recruitment and marketing strategies are needed. Furthermore, those marketing and recruitment strategies utilized must assist in the development of positive attitudes and a sense of value for the program (Fraze, Wingenbach, Rutherford, & Lawrence, 2011; Vincent, Henry, & Anderson, 2012).

How It Works/Methodology

First considered as a recruitment strategy in the summer before the 2016-2017 academic year, the Community and Leadership Development Department approached an on-campus student organization that shows current and popular films to students and university patrons for free in a theater-setting. Movie patrons can obtain prizes for regular attendance by maintaining a loyalty card with the organization. Film showings take place Wednesday-Friday nights at 7:00 and 10:00 p.m., resulting in six showings weekly. Because these films are intensely marketed by the organization across campus via flyers and digital communications, film showings attract diverse student audiences. Partnering with such a campus unit permits the department to promote an event with a primarily social nature and to foster a recruitment environment free of pressure or expectation. Moreover, this collaboration presents the department as a visible unit on campus that engages with students and programming outside of business hours. This is especially important as the college that houses the department is physically separated from the rest of campus.

Prior to each film collaboration, the department's Academic Coordinator, Agricultural Education faculty member, and a graduate student or other departmental staff person staged a recruitment table with materials about the program and promotional items. The table also featured a variety of beverage options that students could take to enjoy during the film. Students who arrived for the film showing were engaged by the departmental personnel about their social, academic, and professional interests. Film patrons were also encouraged to sign-in by providing their name, email address, and current program of study to be contacted about Agricultural Education and other events hosted by our department. At the start of the film, department faculty and staff packed the table and attended the film after providing a brief on stage introduction to our collaboration with the film series organization. The following day, those students who provided emails were contacted by the Academic Coordinator who thanked them for their attendance and offered to meet with them to discuss opportunities in Agricultural Education.

Results to Date/Implications

Through hosting two film collaborations with the film series organization, 442 students and film patrons were exposed to our program. Our first partnership yielded an audience of four students at a 7:00 p.m. showing. Our second partnership yielded an audience of 438 students at a 10:00 PM showing. Of the 442 students who attended the film series, approximately 100 of them were contacted via email. Provided that this social collaboration with a student organization for recruitment purposes was the first of its kind for the department, no benchmarking analytics are available.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Provided the low attendance in our first collaborative showing, it is necessary to research and identify any competition with other campus events such as the Homecoming football game and associated events. The dramatic increase in attendance at our second showing revealed value in selecting a new release, hosting a film later in the night, and ensuring that the showing is not in direct conflict with another highly attended campus event. Our department intends to continue this partnership with the film series organization in the coming academic year to show one film per semester. Promotional materials given at the film series will promote specific events for students to engage with rather than just program information. Fostering an ongoing partnership with a prominent student organizations will only stand to increase departmental visibility, rapport, and engagement on campus and yield stronger recruitment outcomes.

Costs/Resources Needed

At the start of the fiscal year, \$3,500 is budgeted for the purchase of promotional materials and hosting of recruitment events by the Academic Coordinator for the entirety of the academic year. We chose to contribute promotional materials and to provide sodas to movie goers in the hopes of drawing a larger crowd, all of which was previously purchased with the departmental promotional budget and was estimated to cost \$150 per film. Fortunately, the cost of purchasing screening rights for each film collaboration is funded by the university Student Center Offices. In the event that a program has a limited budget for marketing and recruitment strategies, events and collaborations with other social student organizations are possible.

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