

Factors Influencing College Choice of Matriculants and Non-Matriculants: A Generational Comparison

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INTRODUCTION

- The rate of jobs in agriculture, food and natural resources (AFNR) industries is expected to grow by about 2.6% between 2020 and 2025 (Fernandez et al., 2019). These industries create about 59,4000 jobs every year.
- The current trajectory of AFNR graduates able to fill those jobs is around 36,100 – 61% of the overall graduate pool. This projection means that about 40% of jobs within AFNR industries will be filled by people without AFNR degrees.
- One important consideration is the characteristics of current high school students: Generation Z. Recruiting Gen-Z students requires colleges of agriculture (COAs) to revise their tactics as they transition from recruiting Millennials to Gen Z'ers.
- This study goes two steps further. First, it compares both matriculants and non-matriculants at a large, Midwestern COA. Second, since this study is a replication of a 2002 study (Washburn, 2002), it also compares factors influencing college choice across two generations at the same COA.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Compare the levels of influence of significant persons, fixed characteristics, and sources of information impacting decision to attend CAFNR between matriculants and non-matriculants.
2. Compare trends in college choice decision-making processes among matriculating and non-matriculating students between fall 2001 and fall 2020.

FRAMEWORK

- This study utilized Chapman's (1981) Model of Student College Choice, which describes factors that influence a student's decision to attend a college, including: (a) fixed college characteristics, such as quality of education, safety of campus, and costs; (b) significant persons, such as parents, friends, and agriculture teachers; and (c) college communications, such as campus visits, personal contact from a faculty member, or mailings

METHODS

- This descriptive, self-reported survey research study (Ary et al., 2013) was a census of matriculating (n=585) and non-matriculating (n=908) students in CAFNR at Mizzou during the fall semester of 2020.
- In 2020, matriculants were administered the questionnaire and received a 66.6% response rate of usable questionnaires (n=390). Non-matriculants received a 15.2% response rate of usable questionnaires (n=138).

CONCLUSIONS

- **Significant Persons:** Parent/guardian was the top ranked person of influence for both matriculants and non-matriculants. Among matriculants, "High school agriculture teacher" fell from fifth place in 2001 to 10th today
- **Fixed characteristics** of the institution: "opportunities after graduation" was a primary factor for both matriculants (first) and non-matriculants (second).
- **Communications:** matriculants and non-matriculants shared the same rank order of the top four sources of information: "visit to campus," "degree program website," "personal conversation with a representative," and "university website."

RESULTS

Comparison of Gen-Z matriculants' top five factors in each external influences category to Millennials

Factor	Gen-Z n=337				Millennials n=257 (Washburn, 2002)			
	Rank	Used	M	SD	Rank	Used	M	SD
Sources of Information								
Visit to campus	1	76%	4.26	.895	4	75.2%	4.30	.790
Degree program (major) information on website	2	82.5%	4.13	.872	6	38.8%	4.01	.870
Personal conversation with CAFNR representative	3	55.9%	4.08	.795	5	33.3%	4.22	.079
University information on website	4	79.6%	3.97	.937	11	46.5%	3.87	.860
Personal conversation with a professor	5	37.8%	3.91	1.091	1	29.5%	4.39%	.800
Fixed Characteristics								
Opportunities after graduation	1	-	4.24	.963	3	-	4.26	.970
Preparation for employment	2	-	4.20	.959	2	-	4.29	.950
Quality of the facilities	3	-	4.17	.851	5	-	4.16	.860
Quality and reputation of the faculty	4	-	3.96	.999	4	-	4.17	.086
Scholarship awarded	5	-	3.91	1.183	10	-	3.72	1.26
Significant Persons								
Parent or guardian	1	-	3.47	1.395	3	-	3.54	1.22
University graduate	2	-	2.95	1.709	1	-	3.58	1.22
Relative who attended the university	3	-	2.83	1.706	1	-	3.58	1.43
Friend in college	4	-	2.71	1.633	4	-	3.49	1.32
Friend in high school	5	-	2.63	1.516	8	-	2.94	1.39

Note: Ranking is by usefulness, not most used. "Other" high school teacher is any teacher not an agriculture or science teacher. 1=not influential, 2=slightly influential, 3=moderately influential, 4=influential, and 5=very influential

Comparison of Gen-Z non-matriculants' top five factors in each external influences category to Millennials

Factor	Gen-Z n=138				Millennials n=78 (Washburn, 2002)			
	Rank	Used	M	SD	Rank	Used	M	SD
Sources of Information								
Visit to campus	1	39.6%	3.94	1.136	1	59%	4.26	.88
Degree program (major) information on website	2	71.4%	3.75	.914	2	23.1%	4.11	.760
Personal conversation with a CAFNR representative	3	22.2%	3.68	1.427	5	19.2%	3.93	.800
University information on website	4	70.7%	3.66	.959	3	34.6%	4.00	.730
CAFNR Information on a website	5	50.6%	3.60	1.083	3	11.5%	4.00	.870
Fixed Characteristics								
Cost (tuition, room, board)	1	-	4.08	1.296	3	-	3.91	1.27
Opportunities after graduation	2	-	4.06	1.119	7	-	3.59	1.20
Scholarships awarded	3	-	4.03	1.314	2	-	3.95	1.37
Preparation for employment	4	-	3.96	1.077	4	-	3.80	.980
Variety of majors offered	5	-	3.85	1.231	11	-	3.43	1.10
Significant Persons								
Parent or guardian	1	-	3.27	1.491	1	-	3.41	1.35
Other High School Teacher	2	-	2.21	1.638	9	-	2.25	1.46
Graduate of the major you selected	3	-	2.20	1.573	5	-	2.68	1.63
Friend in college	4	-	2.09	1.463	6	-	2.54	1.43
Relative who attended the college or university	5	-	2.07	1.478	3	-	2.73	1.50

Note: Ranking is by usefulness, not most used. "Other" high school teacher is any teacher not an agriculture or science teacher. 1=not influential, 2=slightly influential, 3=moderately influential, 4=influential, and 5=very influential

