

**A Comparison of Effective Recruitment Methods of In-state and Out-of-state Students in
the Department of Agricultural Sciences at West Texas A&M University**

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Introduction/Need for Research

As competition among universities intensifies, a need for a thorough understanding of the student market is becoming more vital. Recruitment strategies employed by a university are an important factor attracting and retaining enrollment numbers and maintaining the university's growth. The Department of Agricultural Sciences at West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) has seen an increase in out-of-state enrollment in recent years. It is believed this increase is in reference to recruitment efforts; however, there is no data to support this conclusion.

The purpose of this study was to determine which recruitment methods being used by the Department of Agricultural Sciences at WTAMU are most successful and beneficial when appealing to both in-state and out-of-state students. Research objectives for this study included:

1. Identify the most effective recruitment methods employed by the Department of Agricultural Sciences for attracting both out-of-state and in-state students.
2. Identify major factors other than current recruiting methods which influence attendance of students from out-of-state and in-state to the Department of Agricultural Sciences.

Theoretical Framework

Chapman's Model of Student College Choice is one of the most well-known models used to explain recruitment of students into higher education institutions. Chapman's Model (1981) shows two areas that influence a student's college choice: student characteristics and external influences. Student Characteristics can be simplified into four factors; 1) socioeconomic status (SES), 2) level of educational aspirations, 3) aptitude and 4) high school performance. External influences can be broken into three categories that include: significant persons, fixed college characteristics, and college efforts to communicate with prospective students.

Methodology

The target population of this study consisted of 722 undergraduate students enrolled in classes in the Department of Agricultural Sciences at WTAMU. The response rate was 32.5%.

The instrument was adapted from Chapman's (1981) Model of Student College Choice and Wildman and Torres' (2001) study of factors identified when selecting a major in agriculture. Responses were based on a seven-point Likert-type scale, with descriptors including: (1) very bad, (2) bad, (3) poor, (4) neither good nor bad, (5) fair, (6) good and (7) very good. The survey instrument was separated into seven sections, including the effectiveness of recruiting factors and identifying the influence of major factors beyond recruiting measures, and was completed on a voluntary basis. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated (.906) post hoc to determine reliability. This statistic (.906) showed that the survey questions were reliable (Reynold & Santos, 1999).

Results/Findings

For both in-state ($M = 5.48$, $SD = 1.04$) and out-of-state ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 1.27$) participants, having a personal conversation with a Department of Agricultural Sciences professor on campus was the most effective recruitment strategy. In-state students found a

conversation with a departmental representative to also be highly influential ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 0.88$). Out-of-state students identified participation in student activities/events on campus as the second most influential factor ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 1.42$). The majority of both in-state ($n=104$, 61.5%) and out-of-state ($n=30$, 61.2%) participants made an on-campus visit prior to enrolling in the Department of Agricultural Sciences at WTAMU.

The least effective connections for the in-state group were having a departmental representative at their high school ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.67$); audio/visual media advertisement about the department ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.65$); and departmental social media ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.57$). For out-of-state participants, the least effective connections were having a departmental representative at their high school ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.99$); departmental social media ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.95$); and participation in an on-campus recruitment program ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.80$).

In-state participants identified small class sizes ($M = 6.29$, $SD = 1.42$) and low cost of tuition ($M = 5.98$, $SD = 1.21$) as the most influential external influences of college choice while out-of-state participants indicated low cost of student fees ($M = 6.47$, $SD = 1.58$) and low cost of tuition ($M = 6.37$, $SD = 1.54$) as most influential. Both in-state and out-of-state students also ranked the welcoming atmosphere of the department to be the most influential departmental factor ($n=41$, 22.9%; $n=15$, 34.9%, respectively) in their attendance to WTAMU.

Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications

Both in-state and out-of-state participants identified personal conversations with a departmental faculty/representative as influential to college choice. Faculty and personnel should keep this in mind by making personal conversations with students a priority, especially when FFA and 4-H events bring prospective students onto campus. Since parent(s) and guardian(s) continue to be influential people in a student's college decision, faculty should aim to address their concerns and questions, which then increases confidence in their student's college choice. While personal conversations remain highly effective, faculty and personnel should consider traveling to both in-state and out-of-state events such as State FFA Conventions and State 4-H gatherings to recruit prospective students. While at events, faculty and personnel should strive to create rapport with prospective students, thus making them feel more confident in their decision to attend West Texas A&M University.

Knowing that university and college websites are important sources of information (Hoyt & Brown, 2003), it should raise concern to faculty and personnel that both groups of students identified departmental social media, the department's website, and media advertisements as having a low impact on their decision to attend WTAMU. With this in mind, the department should focus on strengthening the impact of their website by improving user experience. Additionally, social media pages should focus on engaging with prospective students.

In-state and out-of-state participants found university factors such as small class size, low tuition, low cost of student fees, and campus safety and security all to be highly influential in their college decision. Tuition rates, student fees, and campus security are fixed college characteristics. As such, recruiting strategies cannot change in those areas beyond highlighting them in recruitment efforts. Students find these highly attractive, along with the department's welcoming atmosphere. This needs to be utilized as a tool to recruit both in-state and out-of-state students by departmental faculty.

Readers should be aware that there was a lower response rate from out-of-state students compared to in-state students. Thus, those results with higher standard deviations should be considered when discussing the implications of this study.

The results from this study can be used to assist WTAMU and other educational institutions in increasing their knowledge of the student market from which they recruit.

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