

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED!

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Introduction

Excitement fills the air every semester when teacher educators in agricultural education learn of the magnitude of freshman enrollments, numbers of transfer students and student teacher counts. For many departments of agricultural education these “bragging rights” are anxiously waited upon during each semester. Although these eagerly anticipated counts are entertaining and sometimes depressing, much significance is placed on them because they speak to us about our health as a department, state/region and academic discipline.

Student recruitment for agricultural education is intensely conducted on students who are familiar with what we do in agricultural education. Camps, conventions, workshops, livestock shows, contests, degree checks, and meetings are available on college campuses for all students, especially the active, but what are we doing to recruit those who we see at only one or two events? Additionally, are we working hard enough to recruit the students that we see multiple times during the year? We know that if we can get students to our campuses the likelihood of recruitment is multiplied. Therefore, while students are on campus, should we not take additional steps to immerse them in the benefits of a career in agriculture, and more specifically, a career in agricultural education?

On its 75th anniversary contest season, the College of Agriculture & Human Sciences at Tarleton State University seeks to review its current recruitment efforts while considering the implementation of new and innovative techniques. Since 1928 Tarleton has offered judging and leadership contests for youth interested in agriculture. Currently, the university host’s six contests throughout the year, which includes its “flagship” contest, the Tarleton State University Invitational. The Invitational is the largest of its kind in the nation and plays host six to seven thousand students annually. This large influx of secondary students on a Thursday in March poses many opportunities as well as dilemmas. Another invitational contest, The Tarleton Invitational Leadership Contest, has shown significant growth since its inception, which was just a few years ago. State qualification contests as well as a state contest make-up the remainder of the contests held on campus. Still, the question begs; “Are we doing enough to invite students into our programs?”

Current and Proposed Measures

The purpose of this poster is to spark dialogue that focuses on what we in agricultural education can do to effectively take advantage of recruiting opportunities as well as to share ideas related to innovative recruitment and programs in the Western Region of the AAEE. Currently, Tarleton utilizes many traditional forms of recruitment during leadership and career development events hosted by the university. These include; university and college recruitment staff, individual awards, team awards, publicity of winners, university sponsored scholarships, secondary and undergraduate student

interaction, community and business involvement, and the utilization of state staff and state FFA officers.

As the market for quality students becomes more competitive each year, more aggressive approaches may be called for. Proposed practices include; teacher incentives for recruitment, development of scholarships that are awarded to local FFA chapters in addition to individual scholarships offered by corporate sponsors, and the involvement of corporate sponsors that consists of articulation from college to career agreements. Other considerations include; departmental degree seminars offered to students who are interested in areas other than agriculture, campus tours, contest “bucks” good at local businesses, and finally, contacting students prior to the contest date in order to tailor a recruitment experience for themselves or their chapter.

Results to Date

A recent informal study of n=293 freshmen at Tarleton State University was conducted by the authors. When considering agricultural majors, results indicated that student participation in contests hosted on campus significantly impacted their decision to attend the university. Non-agricultural majors also indicated significant correlations in this area. Most significant for agricultural majors and non-agricultural majors was participation in the Tarleton State University Invitational, ($r=.752$ & $r=.549$, *respectively*).

When asked if participating in contests at the university affected their decision to attend Tarleton, 58.2 percent of agricultural majors agreed or strongly agreed that attending contests on campus was a major reason for choosing Tarleton. Non-agricultural majors indicated far less agreement, only 14 percent indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that attending contests on campus was a major reason for choosing Tarleton.

Future Plans

Considering the significant number of students that are present during the six contests hosted by Tarleton, as well as the freshman survey results, the authors have planned to implement select proposed recruitment practices during the 2003 contest season. The Tarleton State University Invitational will receive high billing in our efforts. Emphasis will also be placed on students who plan to major in agriculture, while efforts will be made to expose students not interested in a career in agriculture to the university.

Resources

Resources for our efforts will include three distinct groups. First, university recruitment staff will be looked to for informational support for students. Second, chamber of commerce support will be solicited in order to receive community recognition. Finally, available faculty will be invited to visit with interested and prospective students following their contest activities.