

VT Impact of Virginia Tech Summer Academy on Student Intended Major

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Purpose of Study

Most transition or summer bridge programs are concerned with first generation or underrepresented minorities attending college. The VTSA is designed for incoming, accepted first year students who want to begin their academic career at Virginia Tech early. Because of the amount of time, money, and resources that the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences puts into having some of their courses taught in the Summer Academy, we want to know why students are motivated to come to summer academy, especially those that are enrolled in CALS classes. We also want to know why they chose a particular track and whether the Summer Academy class had any influence on their intended major.

Program Overview

- 25 Tracks
- 240 students
- Modeled after Penn State
- Designed for incoming accepted first year or transfer students who would like to jump start their academic career
- Purpose of VTSA is to ease the transition from high school to a large, undergraduate university while becoming familiar with campus life, academic expectations, and a new community.
- Began in 2012
- All tracks consisted of two discipline-specific classes.

Literature Review

The average price of a public, four-year college has risen to nearly \$14,000 per year. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). With the rising cost of higher education and the lack of preparedness of rising college students, summer bridge programs have been implemented in high schools, colleges and universities across the nation (Anastasi, 2007; Garcia & Paz, 2009; Kallison & Stader, 2012; Nartgun, Ozen, & Nartgun, 2012; Walpole et al., 2008; White, 1999). Many summer bridge programs have been used for traditionally underrepresented or at risk students to help them ease the transition to college. However, with rising educational costs, students are electing to attend summer programs to progress towards their degree faster, acquire new skills, or become acclimated with university life sooner (White, 1999).

Students choose to attend summer programs for a variety of reasons. The smaller class size encourages a more focused learning environment and classes tend to be more comfortable and relaxed (Anastasi, 2007; Nartgun et al., 2012; White, 1999). Summer classes can ease course load the following semester (Al-Dosary & Raziuddin, 2001). Prerequisites that may be difficult to enroll in during regular semesters can also be fulfilled during the summer which allows students to stay on track and graduate on time (White, 1999). With many students switching majors or transferring schools, summer sessions can allow students to get back on track or compensate for failures in previous academic years (Nartgun et al., 2012; Dainow, 2001). Socially, summer classes, especially in a college bridge or transition program, can bring peers together with similar adjustment anxieties (Garcia & Paz, 2009). Allowing peers with similar concerns or anxieties to come together in a comfortable, unique learning atmosphere can help in forming a foundation for their academic or social support network (Garcia & Paz, 2009). Having this support, both socially and academically so early in a college career can encourage retention, especially among first generation or underrepresented students (Garcia & Paz, 2009).

Methods

Survey on Qualtrics

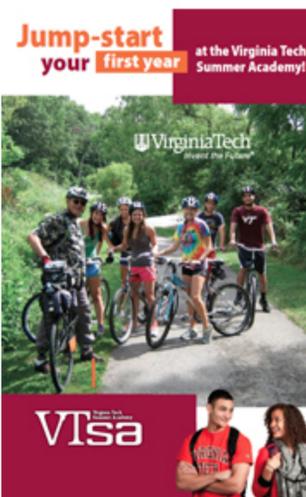
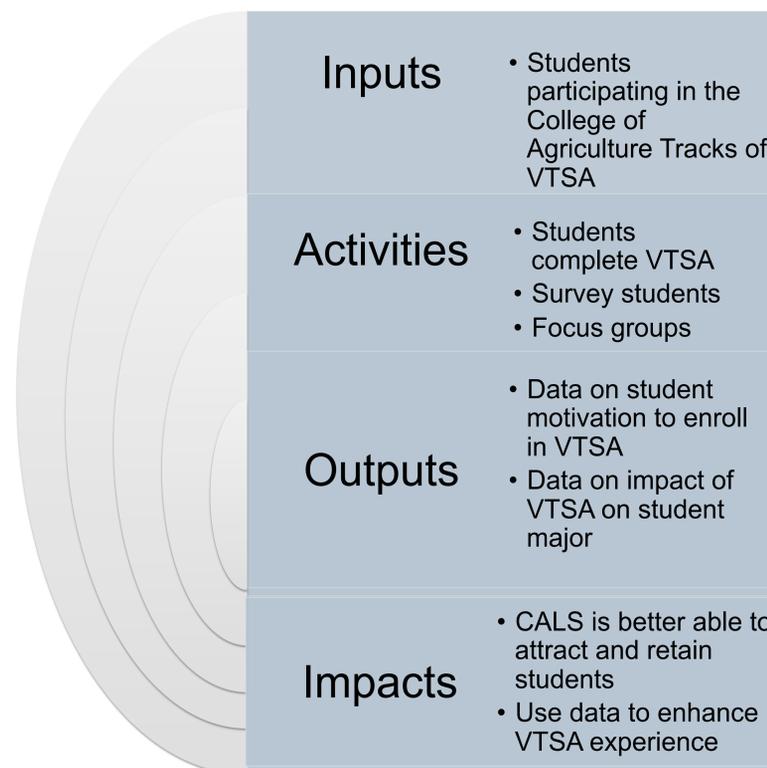
For the purpose of this study, we focused on students enrolled in the five tracks within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS).

The objectives of this study were

- (1) examine the factors influencing the students' participation in the VTSA program,
- (2) examine the factors influencing students choice of CALS,
- (3) determine if the VTSA classes impacted their choice of intended major.

At the conclusion of the summer program, 42 students were asked to participate in an online survey and 23 total responses were collected. Students were contacted for participation in focus groups. 5 agreed to participate. Interviews were conducted, transcribed and coded for themes.

Logic Model



Results

Survey

- **“Getting a head start” and “family influence” were primary reasons for attending VTSA**
- **28% of students responded that VTSA had an impact on their intended major**
- **Confirmed their major choice**
- **Major in a subject that they took during the summer**

Focus Group

- **Small classes size and lab size was a huge benefit**
- **Personal connection to professors**
- **Elimination of prerequisites/gen eds., ability to double major, guaranteed housing, buffer zone for GPA also reasons to attend**
- **Hokie Camp was great, but might be too long and redundant**
- **Great at building relationships over diverse population of students**
- **Impact on Major**
- **Gave student access to discipline unaware before and now will double major it in**
- **Garnered interest in disciplines**
- **Confirmed major choice**

Future Research and Implications

The next step in this research project is to follow up with students as they progress. We plan to continue the study with new groups of VTSA Summer Academy students and gather a larger data set. Additionally we would like to expand data collection beyond just the CALS related tracks to the entire summer academy. Additionally we will track students class selection, GPA, and overall university outlook to investigate the question of whether the VTSA impacted them long-term.

Implications and recommendations include better peer monitoring and screening for the program, an “a la carte” options to allow students to create their own track and the continuation of the study with the existing students and additional groups.

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