

# Recruitment and Marketing to Millennials for Academic Agricultural Programs

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# Introduction

- The UF Department of Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC) wanted to know how to most effectively recruit and market to millennials.
- Incoming students may be using different communication channels to become informed about the major and about the UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

# Characteristics of Millennials

- Millennials like **technology**, expect it to work, and highly favor mobile technology (Solomon, 2014).
- Millennials are a **sociable** generation, both online and in real life. They like to stay connected through **social media** (Solomon, 2014).
- Millennials are **highly passionate about values**, including the companies, organizations and institutions they affiliate with (Solomon, 2014).
- Millennials are **achievement-oriented**. They are eager to pursue a degree that will guarantee them a **career** (Howe, 2014).

# Introduction

Mixed method approach:

- Survey – Current UF Department of Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC) Students
  - Qualtrics
- Group Interviews – Non-AEC Students
  - Conducted on campus
- Timeframe: October/November 2014

# Student Survey

Research objectives:

- Investigate Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC) undergraduate and graduate students' reasons for selecting the AEC major
- Identify students' preferred communication channels to receive information about the AEC major

# Student Survey

## Methodology:

- Population (n=250) – current AEC undergraduate and graduate students
- Online survey distributed by Qualtrics/email
  - Also announced in 7 AEC classes
- Response rate of 42% (n=105)

# Student Survey

## Focus:

- Information Search
- Perceptions of AEC Social Media
- Perceptions of AEC Website
- Image and Message Testing

Note: Similarities presented among graduate and undergraduate students, and specializations

# Information Search

- Majority of students visited their prospective college's website as a first resource
  - Only 15% (n=15) identified this resource as the most effective when deciding to major in AEC
  - Students identified "gatekeepers" as being effective resources:
    - AEC alumnus (22%, n=22)
    - Current AEC students (21%, n=21)
    - Current academic teacher/adviser (19%, n=19)
    - Other (20%, n=20)
      - Meeting faculty members, interest in AEC subjects

# Information Search

• More than two-thirds (73%, n=63) rated **passionate instructors** (mean = 4.65) and **job opportunities after graduation** (mean = 4.64) as very important, followed by:

- Versatility of specializations offered (4.55)
- Personalized instruction and “family” feel (4.42)
- Department reputation (4.38)
- Small class sizes (4.06)
- Personal ties to agriculture (3.81)
- Personal ties to FFA and 4-H (3.14)

**Scale of 1-5: 1=“very unimportant” to 5=“very important”**

# Social Media

- Students indicated **photos** (41%, n=34) were **most appealing** type of social media post (over infographics, videos, links to articles and news)
- **Preferred content:**
  - Job opportunities
  - Student and alumni spotlights
  - Upcoming events and deadlines
  - Photos of students and other multimedia
  - Content that highlights how AEC fulfills land grant mission

# Student Interviews

- Determine undergraduate students' preferred communication channels pertaining to helping making decisions about a college major

# Student Interviews

- Used in-depth group interviews to gather discussion-based qualitative data from undergraduates students outside the UF Department of Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC)
- Interviews were approximately 90 minutes

# Student Interviews

Focus:

- Information Search
- Image and Message Testing
- Perceptions of AEC Website
- Perceptions of AEC Social Media

Note: Similarities presented among each of the three interview groups

# Information Search

- Several participants noted that they had switched majors while at UF
  - P1: “When I first came here I was a chemistry major...”
  - P2: “I originally started out as a psych major...”
  - P7: “ I thought I knew what I wanted to do and started out in environmental science...”
- Several participants identified using the Internet and then meeting with an adviser to choose a major
  - P6: “I used the Internet ...And then an adviser steered me in the right direction...”
- Several participants identified their parents or roommates as a resource when choosing a major

# Image and Message Testing

- When describing AEC, several participants identified agriculture and working with farmers
  - P1: “Everything that has to do with agriculture, your water, livestock, everything . . . I want to think it’s more how to reach out to farmers and get them more educated about better practices and stuff like that”
  - P6: “Farming”
  - P7: “I think of crops.”

# Image and Message Testing

- Barriers to choosing the AEC major included job placement and lack of awareness of subject area/interest
  - P2: “I wasn’ t ever really interested in working in agriculture . . . Wouldn’ t want to spend my life working on a farm.”
  - P5: “Definitely job placement. I can’ t think of any jobs.”
  - P6: “I can’ t think of any jobs specific to that field.”
  - P7: “For me, it’ s a combination of job placement and financial. If I did take a job in this field I wouldn’ t know where I’ d live.”

# Website

- Several participants identified that seeing alumni spotlights/news is important
  - P3: “I think it’s what this person did after they graduated, like look how cool or different what they’re doing is and how different it is as a career.”
  - P4: “I think it provides the seeker more of an assurance that they’re going to do well in the future.:
- Several participants indicated that they would like to see more current students and events
  - P2: “It’s important to see that there’s students being promoted on here showing students in the department get awards and the department cares about its students and show student clubs and events.”

# Opportunities

## Information Search

- Almost all of the participants had switched majors at least once. Consider increasing awareness of how **agricultural education and communication minors can compliment different majors** among advisers.
- Many participants indicated they were not aware of the career outlook for this major. **Consider highlighting student projects and alumni** to showcase both **job security and opportunities** of interest.

# Opportunities

## Image and Message Testing

- Many students thought of traditional agriculture when thinking about agricultural education and communication. Consider highlighting **opportunities for students beyond traditional agriculture.**
- Capitalize on the personal attention and relationships students receive in the department. **Technology is the tool, but relationships are the key.**
- Utilize **gatekeepers** (current students or alumni), or people who provide a personal relationship or connection, to reach prospective students.

# Opportunities

## Website

- The majority of students visiting the website were seeking course information, including course syllabi. **Maintain a clean, well organized website layout.**
- **Feature current student and alumni spotlights** to show how the degree can be used.
- **Focus on the student experience.** Use photos showing action to showcase what students are up to.

# Opportunities

## Social Media

- **Create visual social media content.** Students indicated photos as being the most appealing type of social media post.
- When posting to social media, focus heavily on **job opportunities** for students upon graduation as well as **current student and alumni spotlights.**
- Use social media to **showcase the student experience** and engagement to prospective students.

# References

Howe, N. (2014). The millennial generation, “keep calm and carry on.” *Forbes Business*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/neilhowe/2014/09/04/the-millennial-generation-keep-calm-and-carry-on-part-6-of-7/>

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