



Motivating Millennials

Using New Media to Recruit the Next Generation into Academic Programs of Agriculture

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Introduction

- Agricultural programs of study struggled with a significant decline in enrollment in the 1980s and 1990s (Donnermeyer & Kreps, 1994).
- Enrollments in colleges of agriculture have actually increased in the areas of business, social sciences, and pre-professional track programs (Turner, 2009).
 - Other program areas have seen a decline in enrollment.
- There is an opportunity for academic programs with declining enrollment to recruit students internally who do not meet the extreme standards for acceptance (Turner, 2009).

Current State of Affairs

- Competition to get into college has increased dramatically with more students wanting to go to college (Twenge, 2006).
- Millennials, i-generation, generation Y, or generation ME (Twenge, 2006).
 - Starts with those born after 1992 (Provitera-McGlynn, 2005) though
 - Some suggest it starts as early as those born after 1982 (Twenge, 2006).
- Marketing studies have found that the generation a person was born in is more likely to influence decision making than income, sex, or education (Twenge, 2006).
 - It is imperative that researchers determine how this generation communicates and interacts (Provitera-McGlynn, 2005) in order to effectively recruit students.

Literature Review

- Academic programs of agriculture have grown in offerings, but plant and animal majors still at the core (National Science Foundation, 2009).
- National employment opportunities for U.S. college graduates with expertise in food, agricultural, and natural resources remain high
 - Estimated 52,000 annual job openings
 - Only an estimated 32,300 college graduates expected annually during this same time frame (USDA CSREES, 2005-2010).



Literature Review

- In 1981, a study was conducted which concluded that printed materials were the single most important deciding factor for which college program a student would chose to attend (Chapman).
- Today, students have the ability to search hundreds of colleges each week without leaving their living room using the Internet.
- This change poses a challenge for institutions to keep up with Internet communication (Guernsey, 1998).
- Smaller institutions or programs often fail to provide interactive relationship building capabilities in to their on-line presence (Klassen, 2002).



Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to determine students' preferred mode of communication in an effort to assess appropriate recruitment techniques for the next generation of agriculturalists.
- One academic program, ornamental horticulture, was studied.
 - Discipline of horticulture concerned with growing and using flowering and ornamental plants for gardens, landscapes, and floral display.
 - Struggle with issues specific to their industry
 - Similar to other academic agricultural programs in their decline of student enrollment and communication challenges



Objectives

- RQ1: What are students' preferred modes and sources of communication for receiving career and major information?;
- RQ2: What are students' preferred characteristics in an industry where they would potentially work?



Methods

- Set of three focus groups in Fall of 2008
- A market research firm used random digit dialing (RDD) sampling to qualify potential participants
- Probability samples were generated using a predetermined sampling frame based for groups one and two.
- The third group was a purposive sample recruited by researchers through the University of Florida's Environmental Horticulture Student Organization.



Table 1
Breakdown of Participants by Focus Group

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
No. of Participants	10	10	8
Males	3	3	3
Females	7	7	5
Major in the College of Agriculture	0	10	10
Enrolled in an Introductory Plant Class for Non-Majors	9	0	0
Ornamental Horticulture Major/Minor	0	0	8



Results

RQ1: What are students' preferred modes of communication for receiving career and major information?

Results: RQ1

- Students desired to have contact with someone in the industry initially, followed by going to an interactive Web site for more information.
 - “I would talk to someone at a career fair and if I liked what they said, or thought they seemed like me, I would go to a Web site to watch a video about that career or something.”
 - “I don’ think anyone reads brochures anymore, just give me a postcard with a website where I can find more.”

Results: RQ1

- Students looked to programs at their university like career resource center, job fairs, and in-class guest speakers they could identify with.
- Students in all three groups brought up Facebook advertisements as a potential place to receive career or major information.
 - “ I would respond to an ad on Facebook that was like want an internship you will love...look here.”
 - “...You know I mean, Face Book is really good about using what’s on your profile to direct their marketing to your page so obviously they’d do it in an effective way where it would be people who are probably more likely to do it anyway.”



Results

What are students' preferred characteristics in an industry where they would potentially work?

Results: RQ2

- Need for Visibility of Companies in the Industry
 - “I want to be able to see a company I might work for when I am done .”
 - “Yeah, I mean I think the industry in general is just not that well known. I mean how many flower companies can you name? And how many engineering firms, how many financial firms, how many restaurants? There’s just not that much visibility compared to other markets, and I think that the industry as a whole needs to promote that in general.”



Results: RQ2

- Desire Job Security in a Secure Industry
 - “I am not sure if they would have money to pay new graduates since you never like hear about these jobs.”
 - “By not marketing themselves and putting it out there, like there are jobs for you to get, it kind of makes it sound to people like us that there really isn’t much of a job industry, since you never hear about them asking for people to work for them.”





Conclusions, Discussion & Recommendations

Conclusion & Discussion

- Provides support for the importance of marketing and branding the agricultural industry.
- Participants were under the impression that careers were not available in this academic program area and those that were available were low paying positions.



Recommendations

- There are opportunities to use new media effectively to recruit new students.
- Institutions of higher education need to partner with the agricultural industry to market and brand themselves.
 - Students were unlikely to chose a career if they did not recognize a company or organization in that field where they could work upon graduation.



Recommendations for Practitioners

- Don't waste money on brochures
- Use a one-page flyer or small postcard to promote careers and then include a Web site to learn more.
- The Web site **MUST** be interactive
 - Have video
 - Quizzes “is this career right for you”?
 - Have profiles of people that are “like the students you want to recruit”
- Need a catchy one-liner (tag line) to get people to recognize the industry or to visit a Web site.
- Use Facebook advertisements – NOT groups
- Get involved in seminar classes in other fields
- Attend career/major fairs with “cool” giveaways or bring people students can identify with



Recommendation for Future Research

- Future research is recommended to determine how to move forward with an appropriate strategic communication plan for academic programs of agriculture that includes new media options.





Questions?

Thank you

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