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
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.”
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.”
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


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