

Parental Influence...

Collaborating with Parents to Communicate the Importance of Agricultural Science Careers to Inner-city Youth

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USDA funded an innovative college recruitment program for underrepresented, inner-city high school students with no agricultural background. The program focused on careers in agricultural communications through hands-on activities in digital photography, news writing, digital video production, and Web design to deepen students' interests in pursuing post-secondary degrees in the agricultural sciences.



The purpose of this research was to explore the impact of forming collaborative relationships with students' parents to communicate the importance of agricultural science careers to inner-city youth. Parental encouragement has been identified as one of the strongest influences on a student's college choice. Dick and Rallis (1991) also identified parents as the strongest social influence on a student's career choice. Other influencers included teachers and counselors. Therefore, parents were identified as an essential component to the success of the BC2BC objectives.

Pre-workshop "parents' meetings" and school visits were held in Houston and San Antonio (two years) to convince parents about the value of having their sons and/or daughters enroll in non-mandatory summer workshops for agricultural communications. The parent meetings were augmented by additional follow-up visits with high school teachers and administrators.

Significantly more students registered for the summer workshops in Houston and San Antonio (twice) than did students in other workshops (Atlanta, Chicago, and El Paso). The Big City, Big Country recruitment project helped change underrepresented, inner-city high school students' perceptions about agricultural science careers. However, an essential component for changing students' perceptions is preceded by changing inner-city parents' perceptions of agricultural science careers.

At the end of the workshop parents were invited to participate in admissions and financial aid sessions provided by the collaborating colleges and universities. This meeting provided parents with support resources for choosing colleges and majors in the agricultural sciences. Since most workshop participants will be first-generation college students this collaboration and communication was an essential component for changing perceptions about careers in agricultural sciences, an especially important outcome for USDA careers.