

PERCEPTIONS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS AT TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS TOWARD  
RECRUITMENT VISITS BY A CAMPUS REPRESENTATIVE AS AN EFFECTIVE  
RECRUITMENT TOOL FOR THE FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTION

BY

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THESIS

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## **Abstract**

As enrollment numbers continue to decrease for agricultural education programs and colleges of agriculture as a whole, more information needs to be known about the most effective methods of recruiting students to agricultural education programs at four-year institutions. Recruitment is not only an important topic to agricultural education programs because of the importance of filling agriculture educator positions across the country, but a decreased number of agriculture educators in the field may therefore cause a shortage of educated people to fill positions in the agriculture industry (Donnermeyer & Kreps, 1994). This study examined the perceptions of community and junior college students after participating in a recruitment presentation by a campus representative on the subject of the Agricultural Education program at the University of Illinois. This examination was undertaken through the use of a survey administered to 78 community and junior college agriculture students in Illinois. The data collected in this study shows recruitment visits by a campus representative can certainly be an effective recruitment tool for four-year institutions. Based on the data collected in this study, it is concluded that there was both an increase in the student's likelihood of applying to the Agricultural Education program at the University of Illinois, as well as an increase in the students' rating of visits by a campus representative on influencing their decision to apply to a particular college or program.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Background**

The recruitment of students into agricultural education continues to be a priority to maintain agricultural education programs (Thorson & Anderson II, 2010). Not only is the profession changing rapidly, but the patterns by which new teachers are educated and brought into the profession are undergoing dramatic revisions in most states (Lynch, 1996). The problem of teacher shortage has been a constant problem for agricultural education for at least the past 40 years (Kantrovich, 2010). Teacher shortages have the potential to reach epidemic proportions if we are unable to recruit additional students into the field of agricultural education and the continued growth in secondary agricultural education programs continues (Kantrovich, 2010).

According to a supply and demand survey by Kantrovich (2010), we continue to see strong numbers of newly qualified teachers being produced; however a decreasing number actually go on to teach. It was reported that of the estimated 785 newly qualified teachers that were prepared to enter the classroom in the fall of 2007, only 53% or only approximately 401 teachers actually taught in the fall of 2007 (Kantrovich, 2010). Unfortunately, according to state reports, there will be an expected 652 positions nationally to fill, leaving a gap of 251 or 38% left vacant. It was estimated that in fall of 2006, 40 programs could not operate due to lack of a qualified agricultural teacher and that there were 78 more positions nationally than there were qualified teachers. The simple fact is that nationally there are not enough newly qualified agricultural teachers being produced, not enough of the newly qualified are going into the profession, and that there are more positions opening than there are individuals willing or able to fill those open positions (Kantrovich, 2010).

Today, recruitment continues to be a priority for education programs. In recent decades there has been an alarming decline in the number of students choosing to pursue careers in agriculture (Smith, 2011). As a result, there will be a shortage of qualified professionals educated in agriculture and related fields to pursue the expected increase in available career opportunities in this field (Smith, 2011). Researchers have also found that there is a significant decline in the number of students from underrepresented populations entering agricultural programs at the secondary and postsecondary level (Esters, 2007; Scott & Laverne, 2004). Much of the recruitment research conducted thus far has focused on determining what factors influence a student to select a major in agriculture in order to better understand how recruitment strategies can be designed to target these students (Vincent, Ball, & Anderson II, 2009).

Previous studies focusing on recruitment issues in agriculture have found that participation in on-campus programs and events, conversations with teachers and professors, and campus visits were beneficial to students during the process of selecting their major and selecting an institution (Cole & Thompson, 1999; Scofield, 1995; Taylor & Johnson, 1993; Vincent, Ball, & Anderson II, 2009; Washburn, Garton & Vaughn, 2002). Studies also identified printed recruitment literature as being helpful in students' decision-making processes (Rocca & Washburn, 2005). However, it appears that no extensive research has been completed on the use of recruitment visits by a college representative in order to increase enrollment into agriculture majors, and more specifically agricultural education.

In Chimes and Gordon's article (2008), the authors realized that more often than not, college admission officer visits to high schools around the country are the final step in a specific college's marketing phase; one last chance to win over students and strengthen bonds among current recruits. When on the other hand, it may be more useful to start recruitment visits earlier

in the college's marketing phase in order to reach a younger set of students and start the recruitment process earlier before there college and major decisions have been made (Vincent, Ball, & Anderson II, 2009). Colleges must start to think about high school visits a little bit more and begin to realize what a fabulous tool visits can be for them. It could be their one opportunity to personalize the process and make real connections (Chimes & Gordon, 2008; Anderson II & Kim, 2009; Esters, 2007).

### **Statement of the Problem**

As enrollment numbers continue to decrease for agricultural education programs and colleges of agriculture as a whole, more information needs to be known about the most effective methods of recruiting students to agricultural education programs at the four-year institution. To this end, what are the perceptions of community and junior college students after they participate in a recruitment presentation by a campus representative on the subject of the Agricultural Education program at the University of Illinois?

This information can then be used to revise and/or increase recruitment efforts to more effectively attract students. The development and maintenance of a college-level educational curriculum is a never-ending process of assessment and revision (Donnermeyer & Kreps, 1994). In order to supply qualified agriculture teachers, teacher education programs must evaluate and possibly undergo reform. It is important that teacher education programs nationwide are preparing a new breed of teachers that understand the rapidly changing world of agriculture and have the ability to effectively teach the appropriate skills to their students while managing the myriad of other duties required of an agricultural educator (Thorson & Anderson II, 2010). In order for colleges to more effectively attract students, colleges of agriculture are challenged to seek new and innovative ways to appeal to potential students. Recruitment visits by a campus

representative may just be that new way for agricultural education programs to attract potential students.

### **Purpose of This Study**

Recruitment is a serious issue in the field of agricultural education and this study sought answers to a possible method of attracting future teachers into agricultural education. It is not yet known what student's perceptions are towards a campus representative who comes to their school and gives a presentation about a four-year agricultural education program. Information needs to be gathered on what the student's perceptions of the presentation and what factors increased or decreased the likelihood the student experience would be an effective tool for recruiting. The purpose of this study was to determine junior and community college student's perceptions of a recruitment presentation by a campus representative on the subject of the Agricultural Education program at the University of Illinois.

### **Research Objectives**

The research objectives guiding this study are:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the recruitment visit participants (age, gender, year in school, agriculture background, choice of major, and choice of transfer college or university)?
2. What are the students' perceptions of recruitment visits by a campus representative as opposed to other recruitment methods such as viewing a university's website, pamphlets, mailings, or campus visits?
3. What are the student's opinions of the University of Illinois Agricultural Education program before and after the presentation?

4. What is the student's likelihood of applying to the University of Illinois Agricultural Education program before and after the presentation?

### **Definitions**

- Campus representative - A university faculty, staff, or student who travels to high schools or community colleges in order to recruit students by presenting about the university as a whole or a specific program, as in the case of this study.
- Transfer college: The college or university that students have chosen to transfer to after completing their time at the community or junior college.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited by the number of community or junior college agriculture teachers in the state of Illinois that allowed for a campus representative to come present to their class and therefore the findings can only be generalized to the sample. In addition, this study did not measure the amount of students that are actually successfully recruited and that apply to the agricultural education program.

### **Research Justification**

Recruitment is not only an important topic to agricultural education programs because of the importance of filling agriculture educator positions across the country, but a decreased number of agricultural educators in the field may therefore cause a shortage of educated people to fill positions in the agriculture industry. Secondary agricultural education requires trained and motivated professional educators to maintain secondary agricultural education programs. Currently the profession is having difficulty filling secondary agricultural education positions because of a shortage of qualified applicants. Camp (2000) identified the agriculture teacher shortage problem as early as 1977, and the problem has continued well into its third decade



(Kantrovich, 2010; Walker, Garton, & Kitchel, 2004). A variety of attempts and strategies have been employed to address the teacher shortage. Some of these include forgiveness of student loans, special scholarships, tuition reimbursements, emergency and alternative certification programs, and the rehiring of retired teachers (Walker, Garton, & Kitchel, 2004). The debate continues to be whether the problem is a problem of recruitment or a problem of retention (Walker, Garton, & Kitchel, 2004). Either way, the teacher shortage is the number one issue facing the agricultural education program today (Cotton, 2005).

The USDA Employment Opportunities for College Graduates in Food, Renewable Energy, and the Environment study (2010) identifies 54,400 annual job openings for new graduates from 2010 through 2015. To fill these openings, an average of 29,300 graduates is expected annually from colleges of agriculture and life sciences, forestry and natural resources, and veterinary medicine (USDA, 2010). In addition, approximately 24,200 qualified graduates each year from allied fields, including biological sciences, engineering, health sciences, business, and communication will compete for these positions. Four major factors will define the market for graduates in the next 5 years: macroeconomic conditions and retirements; consumer preferences for nutritious and safe foods; food, energy, and environment public policy choices; and global market shifts in population, income, food, and energy (Goecker, Smith, Smith, & Goetz, 2010). Colleges and universities must continue to strengthen educational programs to produce graduates who can address the problems to be solved in the 21st century (Wildman & Torres, 2001). Moreover, Goecker, Whatley, and Gilmore (1999) claim that “much greater efforts will be required to attract sufficient numbers of outstanding students to prepare for very challenging careers in the world’s food, agricultural and natural resources system.”

Colleges of agriculture should evaluate strategies to effectively attract students in an effort to continue producing the future professionals needed by the agricultural and related industries (Rocca & Washburn, 2005). To date, the agricultural education profession has been only moderately effective in recruiting and retaining teachers (Camp, Broyles, & Skelton, 2002). The knowledge gained from this study can be utilized in the future by recruiters at universities in order to better design such recruitment strategies. This study will also add to the body of knowledge of recruitment in the field of agricultural education.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Declining Enrollment in Agriculture**

Concern about the substantial decline in agriculture student numbers has been significant, and much research has been devoted to identifying and addressing the problem (Wildman & Torres, 2001). An understanding of what is causing these decreases in enrollment is essential to examine what can be done with recruitment to increase the number of potential students into agricultural education. According to Gibbs (2005), this decline can be attributed to many people having little agricultural knowledge due to large populations moving from rural farm areas to more urbanized areas, which supports the need for agricultural education in today's schools (Gibbs, 2005). Early development of agricultural literacy and exposure to opportunities should be implemented to broaden students' perceptions of agriculture (Scott & Lavergne, 2004). Through their study, Jones and Larke (2001) also found that students chose careers in other fields unrelated to agriculture after experiencing limited employment opportunities within fields of agriculture that suited their "ideal" career. Therefore, students need to be aware of career fields within the agricultural industry, such as biotechnology, microbiology, veterinary science, agribusiness, management, landscape design, food science, etc. (Jackson & Williams, 2003). Each of the issues mentioned above can contribute as potential barriers to enrollment in high school and college agriculture programs (Smith, 2001).

### **Student's Decision to Enroll in Agriculture**

Before universities can develop recruitment strategies, it is important to have an understanding of what factors influence a student's decision to enroll in a particular college or major. According to Wildman and Torres (2001), while no single factor may influence a student's choice of major, investigating the variables that most influence students can help in

developing effective recruitment strategies for attracting students into agricultural education and the various majors in colleges of agriculture in order to meet the demands of the agricultural industry (Wildman & Torres, 2001).

In order to improve recruitment, agricultural educators need to understand what motivates students to enroll in agricultural education classes. They need to understand why students are or are not participating in agricultural classes today. With this knowledge they can better understand how to improve their programs and enrollments, and serve more students (Reis & Kahler, 1997). Reis and Kahler (1997) observed in their study of the factors influencing enrollment in agricultural education programs that the most often cited personal and organizational factor that influenced students to enroll in agricultural education were personal interests followed by personal desires and farm background. It also was observed that the person with the greatest influence on students' participation in agricultural education were their parents followed by the agriculture instructor and former agricultural education students (Reis & Kahler, 1997).

In Wildman and Torres's study (2001), they concluded that when compared to the selected sources of influence, "prior experiences" in agriculture was the highest ranked influence for a student selecting a major in agriculture. This finding supports Donnermeyer and Kreps (1994), who found that Ohio State University students also were influenced by prior experience in agriculture. Having other experiences in agriculture through 4-H or the FFA Organization, or being associated with relatives who are involved in agriculture also surfaced as experiences that influence student's choice of major. It is further concluded that the friendliness of departmental faculty and the overall friendly atmosphere in the college of agriculture led to selecting a career

area in agriculture. These data provide a basis for developing recruitment guidelines as faculty in agricultural education and others who seek to boost enrollment (Wildman & Torres, 2001).

Previous studies focusing on recruitment issues in agriculture have also found that participation in on-campus programs and events, conversations with teachers and professors, and campus visits were beneficial to students during the process of selecting their major and selecting an institution. They also identified printed recruitment literature as being helpful in students' decision-making processes. High school and transfer matriculants both rated personal contact with representatives of the school (professors, outreach representatives, and ambassadors) as highly useful; however, the findings suggest that such contact was made with less than one-third of the students. As a result, more effort should be made to increase contact with greater numbers of students (Rocca & Washburn, 2005).

Clearly, there is an increasingly diverse society and a projected shortage of available graduates expected in the food, agriculture, and natural resources system of the United States over the next few years (Goecker, Gilmore, Smith, & Smith, 2010; USDA, 2010). This phenomenon suggests that colleges of agriculture must assign student recruitment a priority to satisfy the workforce needs in the agricultural industry (Esters, 2007).

### **Recruitment Visits by a Campus Representative**

As shown, previous research has been conducted on various topics in recruitment, but it appears that not much is known about specific recruitment strategies, like recruitment visits by a campus representative. In a Chimes and Gordon's (2008) article, *What Works: A Student and Counselor Explore College Recruitment*, a director of college guidance and a high school Junior sat down to discuss the high school student recruitment process. When discussing college representative visits, Gordon states that more often than not, college admission officer visits to

high schools around the country are the final step in a specific college's marketing phase; one last chance to win over students and strengthen bonds among current recruits. The high school student states that he found college representative visits to high schools to be rather disappointing. He also states, "The college rep visit is the perfect vehicle to create or rekindle a personal connection, yet most fail to do so. In my opinion if you are visiting a school, why not take advantage of an opportunity to personalize your pitch? And if you are going to meet with prospective students, be prepared and try to make your presentation appealing. Colleges must start to think about high school visits a little bit more and begin to realize what a fabulous tool visits can be for them. It could be their one opportunity to personalize the process and make real connections (Chimes & Gordon, 2008)." Gordon's account of his experience with campus recruitment visits give us insight into what a typical student is looking for when interacting with a campus representative and how we can improve recruitment visits.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Understanding what factors contribute to a student's choice of which college to attend is essential knowledge to gain in order to better develop recruitment strategies. The general conceptual model created by David Chapman (1981) in his article, *A Model of Student Choice*, was used as the theoretical framework for this study. Figure 1 below presents a general conceptual model of student choice that specifies the important variable sets and their interrelationships as a means of guiding both future inquiry and current admissions practice. The model is longitudinal and suggests that, to understand a student's choice of which college to attend, it is necessary to take into account both background and current characteristics of the student, the student's family, and the characteristics of the college. The model is limited to describing the pattern of influences affecting traditional age (18-21) prospective students.

Components of the model may be relevant to a wider age range; however, there are special pressures and influences on older adults that are not reflected in the model (Chapman, 1981).

The model suggests that student college choice is influenced by a set of student characteristics in combination with a series of external influences. These external influences can be grouped into three general categories: 1) the influence of significant persons, 2) the fixed characteristics of the institution; and 3) the institution's own efforts to communicate with prospective students. Both the student characteristics and the external influences contribute to and, in turn, are shaped by students' generalized expectations of college life (Chapman, 1981).

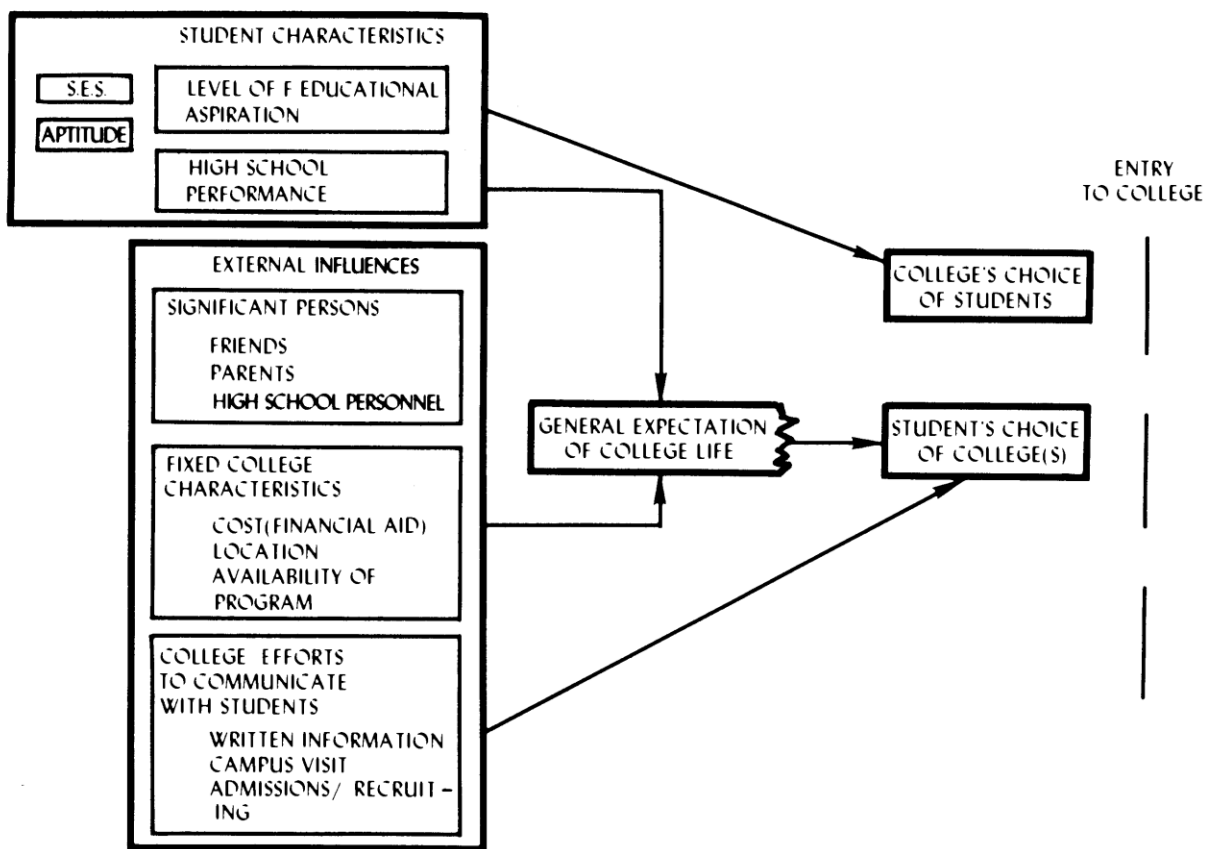


FIG. 1. Influences on Student College Choice

This model is appropriate for this study of recruitment research because it helps to understand what influences students choice of which college to attend. An understanding of these influences can then help institutions create a recruitment plan to better target students.

### Summary

As we see an overall decrease in enrollment across colleges of agriculture as a whole, it is important to understand what the cause of this decrease may be. The authors referenced in this study give several possible reasons including decreased number of persons in the 15-19 year-old cohort, decreasing farm population and the increasingly urban orientation of the rural population,



the generally pessimistic image of U.S. Agriculture and the influence that parents teachers and guidance counselors exert on high school graduates to consider non-agricultural careers. All of these factors must be taken into factor when trying to develop new recruitment strategies to increase enrollment in agriculture disciplines.

Understanding what influences a student's decision to enroll in agriculture is also imperative to recognizing why students are or are not participating in agricultural classes today and how recruitment can be improved. While no single factor may influence a student's choice of enrolling in agriculture, it can be seen that some of the most influencing factors include prior experience in agriculture, farm background, personal interests, personal desires, and the influence of parents, agriculture instructors, and former agriculture students. This literature review also provides a theoretical framework that can also be used as a guide in understanding what factors contribute to a student's choice of which college to attend. The model is longitudinal and suggests that, to understand a student's choice of which college to attend, it is necessary to take into account both background and current characteristics of the student, the student's family, and the characteristics of the college.

In addition, regarding recruitment visits by a campus representative, the authors referenced in this study state that more often than not, college admission officer visits to high schools around the country are the final step in a specific college's marketing phase; one last chance to win over students and strengthen bonds among current recruits. Colleges must start to think about high school visits a little bit more and begin to realize what a fabulous tool visits can be for them. It could be their one opportunity to personalize the process and make real connections. This study looked more specifically at these recruitment visits and whether these visits are really effective.

This study sought to cover a research topic largely unknown in agricultural education recruitment research. As a result, much of the information that is available at this time covers the broader topic of recruitment in college of agriculture and the factors influencing students to enroll in agriculture majors. This literature provides a valuable platform from which researchers can build off of to develop better recruitment strategies.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Research Design**

As part of this descriptive-survey research study community and junior college students in the state of Illinois studying agriculture were administered a questionnaire before and after a recruitment presentation in an attempt to explain the following:

- The perceptions of students towards recruitment visits by a campus representative as opposed to other recruitment methods
- The perceptions of students towards the agricultural education program at the University of Illinois before and after a recruitment presentation
- The likelihood of students applying to the University of Illinois agricultural education program before and after a recruitment presentation

This study also characterized the sample of students on the basis of age, gender, year in school, agriculture background, choice of major, and choice of transfer college or university.

### **Population and Sample**

Research aimed to address responses from Illinois community and junior college students studying agriculture. Previous research has shown that students with experience in agriculture and those who participate in agriculture classes are more likely to choose a major in agriculture (Wildman & Torres 2001), so this was the targeted population for this study. Community and junior college agriculture teachers in Illinois were emailed to seek permission to visit their classes and present about the agricultural education program at the University of Illinois. Five schools responded and these schools included Danville Area Community College in Danville IL, John Wood Community College in Quincy, IL, Joliet Junior College in Joliet, IL, Lakeland College in Mattoon, IL, and Parkland College in Champaign, IL. The classes presented to

include a Crop Sciences class, a Horticulture class, an Ag Mechanics Class, and three Agricultural education classes. No extra measures were taken to address non-response error because the survey was administered directly to the students and collected afterwards. There were 78 questionnaires returned making the response rate 95%. According to Lindner, Murphy, and Briers (2001), this is an acceptable rate.

### **Instrumentation**

Two questionnaires were created to gather data for this study; one for prior to the presentation and one for after the presentation (see Appendix A & B). Items included in the survey were as follows:

- Questions regarding the student's age, gender, year in school, agriculture background, participation in agriculture classes, choice of major, and choice of college or university
- Pretest questions to determine student's perceptions of recruitment visits by a campus representative as opposed to other recruitment methods such as viewing a university's website, pamphlets, mailings, or campus visits
- Pretest questions to determine the student's opinions of the University of Illinois Agricultural education program prior to the recruitment presentation
- Questions to determine the student's opinions of the University of Illinois Agricultural Education program after the recruitment presentation
- Pretest questions to determine the student's likelihood of applying to the University of Illinois Agricultural Education program before the presentation
- Questions to determine the student's likelihood of applying to the University of Illinois Agricultural Education program after the presentation

Face and content validity was addressed using a panel of experts consisting of professors and graduate students in agricultural education. Reliability was measured using test-retest. Items had a percent agreement of 95% or better.

### **Data Collection**

Recruitment visits and presentations were made by the graduate student researcher with the assistance of a few undergraduate agricultural education students. Participants were first given a brief introduction and then administered a consent form that explained the project. Participants were then administered quizzes before and after the recruitment presentation and allowed adequate time to complete the survey. The presentation given consisted of a PowerPoint presentation that explained the various aspects of the University of Illinois Agricultural Education program. Students also participated in an “Agricultural Education Bingo” activity throughout the presentation in order to regain their attention throughout the 15-20 minute presentation. The slides of this presentation can be seen in Appendix C.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

The results of this survey were divided into four sections: (1) demographic profile of survey responders, (2) student's response to questions prior to presentation, (3) student's response to questions following the presentation, and (4) the average change in the rating of influence of visits by a campus representative and likelihood of application following the presentation.

### **Demographic Data**

Seventy eight of the 82 surveyed students turned in both of their surveys after the presentation. The majority of the respondents were under the age of 21 years old and male with 82.1% and 61.5%, respectively. Of the 77 students that responded, the majority were first year college students at 59.7%, 21 (27.3%) were second year college students, and 10 (13%) were beyond second year college students. The majority (80.8%) of the students responded that they had come from a family involved in agriculture and the majority (73%) of the students responded that they had already chosen a college major.

Table 1 identifies the various majors that the students who responded yes and provided an answer had chosen. Of the 57 that responded yes, only 53 provided a chosen major. The majority (43.6%) of students responded that they had made a decision on what college to transfer to already (see Table 2), 33 (42.3%) responded that they had not decided yet, and 11 (14.1%) responded that they would be completing their degree at the community college.

Table 1

*Students' Chosen Majors (n = 53)*

<b>Major</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Animal Sciences	4	7.5%
Agriculture Business	23	43.4%
Either Agriculture Business or Agricultural Education	2	3.8%
Agriculture Communications	2	3.8%
Agricultural Education	10	18.9%
Agriculture Science	2	3.8%
Crop Science	1	1.9%
Golf Course Management	1	1.9%
Horticulture/Landscape Management	4	7.5%
Pre-Law	1	1.9%
Pre-Med	1	1.9%
Welding	2	3.8%

Table 2

*Students' Chosen Transfer College (n =34)*

<b>College</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Illinois State University	7	20.6%
University of Missouri	1	2.9%
Northern Illinois University	1	2.9%
Quincy University	1	2.9%
Southern Illinois University-Carbondale	7	20.6%
Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville	1	2.9%
University of Illinois	4	11.8%
Western Illinois University	8	23.5%
Western Kentucky University	1	2.9%
More than one college listed	3	8.8%

## Students' Responses to Questions Prior to the Presentation

Regarding whether students had a perception of the University of Illinois Agricultural Education Program prior to this visit, of the 77 students that responded, 20 (26%) responded yes and the majority at 57 (74%) responded no. Table 3 shows a summary of the perceptions of the participants about the program prior to the presentation.

Table 3

*Positive and Negative Perceptions of the University of Illinois Agricultural Education Program (n = 20)*

Positive Perceptions	Negative Perceptions
Heard it was a good program, never heard anything bad.	I would love to go into this program but I think it will be hard to keep up/ I'm not smart enough.
Example has been our instructor. He has a wide range of knowledge on the various subjects in our curriculum. Very rarely has to look material up- he's able to recall, which tells me his education at U of I was good.	Multiple teacher program is a plus, but the staff changes, among others made my decision to go to Western Illinois University a little easier.
I spoke with many students during the 2011 ExplorACES about the Ag Ed programs and have also had the chance to speak with a couple teachers who graduated from U of I.	I've heard the Ag Ed program is a little poorer than some other colleges but the Ag program over all is good.
I feel it has a good program.	Cost too much/Expensive.
Seems to have a good program and extension though.	I had heard that a lot of people were cocky and stuck up.
All I have heard is University of Illinois has one of the best Ag programs around.	Small farm, huge college, farther away.
	Agricultural Education program is smaller, more focused on leadership education.
	The classes are more theory based than hands on.
	Overrated.



Regarding the likelihood of students applying to the University of Illinois Agricultural Education program prior to this visit, the majority (29.3%) responded that they were highly unlikely to apply to the University of Illinois Agricultural Education program. Regarding the student's responses on the influence of visits by a campus representative on the student's decision to apply to a particular college program prior to the visit, the majority (44%) responded that it was somewhat influential. Regarding the student's responses on the influence of a college or university's website on their decision to apply to a particular college program, the majority (41.1%) responded that it was somewhat influential. Regarding the student's responses on the influence of a college or university's informational pamphlets on their decision to apply to a particular college program, the majority (28.8%) responded that they were neither influential nor not influential.

### **Students' Responses to Questions Following the Presentation**

Regarding the student's responses on the influence of visits by a campus representative on their decision to apply to a particular college program after the presentation, the majority (64.5%) responded that they were somewhat influential. Regarding the student's responses to whether they had a change in perception of the University of Illinois Agricultural Education Program after the recruitment presentation, the majority (65.3%) responded that they did have a change in perception.

The perceptions of the participants about the program following the presentation are as follows:

- You find your group and it isn't as big as you think. Nice campus with a lot of organizations.
- University of Illinois has small classes and hands on teaching.

- I didn't realize how small class sizes are at University of Illinois when you get into classes that pertain to your major.
- Sounds fun :)
- I may think about going to the University of Illinois.
- Sounds like a fun, educating time.
- I'm still eerie about the changes that are being made throughout the program.
- It's a good school with a good reputation that has a lot of opportunities for its kids.
- I feel more informed and interested after this presentation.
- Will apply and transfer my MSC Agricultural Education and see if I can get admitted.
- I understand that it is a very prestigious program with a lot of success.
- It's not as big as I thought and not as expensive.
- I didn't know much about it and this presentation gave me an insight.
- She was good at explaining what is offered at University of Illinois for the Agricultural Education program.
- More likely to apply to University of Illinois now.
- Before I simply didn't know anything about it. Now that I am more informed my perception has changed. It seems like a quality program.
- I didn't know very much about it before. I will be applying for University of Illinois when I look into transferring.
- I didn't realize that University of Illinois had all those programs and go on to graduate school.
- This it is a good start to a career.
- There is more offered than I thought.
- There is a lot of scholarship money offered to help cover costs. There are smaller class sizes than expected.

- It seems to be more opportunities.
- Consider going through the course.
- It showed me the many varieties of fields I can go into.
- I thought it was too expensive, but now I know about the scholarships and living off campus and how it can help the cost.
- It's not all big classes.
- Might be worthwhile to look into.
- More excitement towards University of Illinois, but still open to other options.
- Very interesting.
- I did mark no but it was because I have been looking into University of Illinois for a long time but it's just not reasonable to me. Good presentation though.
- I became more motivated to apply.

Regarding the likelihood of students applying to the University of Illinois Agricultural Education Program after the visit, the majority (35.5%) responded they were neither likely nor unlikely to apply.

### **Likelihood of Application and Influence of Campus Visits by a Campus Representative**

The students responses were quantified on a scale from zero (highly unlikely to apply) to five (already applied to the program) for the question of their likelihood of applying to the Agricultural Education program at the University of Illinois, and from zero (not influential at all) to four (very influential) for the question of the influence of visits by a campus representative on their decision of what college program to apply to. These responses were then averaged to see if there was a change before and after the presentation. The results show that prior to the presentation the average likelihood of applying was 1.75 and after the presentation, the likelihood rose to 2.22. In addition, the average rating on the influence of visits by a campus

representative was 2.31 prior to the presentation and the average rose to 2.97 following the presentation.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions**

### **Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to determine junior and community college student's perceptions of a recruitment presentation by a campus representative on the subject of the Agricultural Education program at the University of Illinois in order to develop better recruitment strategies. The findings did support the framework which suggests that college students' choices can be influenced by addressing specific student characteristics and external influences.

According to the framework, the student characteristics that are most impactful are SES, aptitude, level of degree aspiration, and high school performance. Because these students were in college, current academic performance was more impactful than high school performance. To that end, the sample reported before the presentation that reasons why they would not consider University of Illinois Agricultural Education was because it was expensive and they didn't believe they could keep up with the curriculum. However, after the presentation, which addressed some of these negative perceptions, the sample reported changes in their perception such as tuition not being as high as they thought, availability of scholarships, and the classes being more manageable. Based on these findings it is recommended that when making recruitment visits, one must focus on debunking the common misconceptions about the university because these visits could be their one opportunity to personalize the process and make real connections (Chimes & Gordon, 2008). It is also suggested that recruiters need to let potential students know the cost of tuition at their universities and the scholarships that are available to assist with these costs in order for students to overcome their misconceptions of their view about their socioeconomic status.

The majority of students in this study came from an agricultural background, particularly in rural areas, which can be identified as one of the external influences on the student's choice. The model outlines various external influences on the student's college choice such as the influence of significant persons like friends, parents, and high school personnel. The results from this study indicate that having a significant person in the student's life who is involved in agriculture can be influential in their choice of major. Similarly, the value placed on certain institutions by significant persons may have an impact on how that institution is perceived (Vincent, Ball, & Anderson II, 2009). Several of the students indicated that their perceptions of the program and likelihood to apply were based on what they heard from others versus what they had experienced or personally researched. Therefore, it is imperative that recruitment efforts not only target key individuals but directly address the misconceptions and concerns in the community and schools. An effective way of doing this is by having a consistent college contact in the community who can develop a rapport with significant persons and keep up to date on what is being said about the institution and program.

Another external influence is the fixed college characteristics like the cost, amount of financial aid available, the location, and the availability of the program. Based on the demographic data collected from this study, it was noted that the location of the junior or community college in relation to the university makes a difference in the amount of students that are willing to transfer. One of the visits made for this study was to John Woods Community College which is approximately three hours west of the University of Illinois. A large majority of the students reported that they were planning to transfer to Western Illinois University because it was closer. Accessibility to home is important for students in this study; therefore, it is important to point out key advantages of a program that is farther from home that will mitigate

the perceived disadvantage of distance. Several authors list the geographical location of the college as an important influence on students' college decision, so this will be an important influence for recruiters to address (Donnermeyer & Kreps, 1994; Wildman & Torres, 2001). It would also be recommended to make these recruitment visits early, while students are in high school and then following up their first year of college while they still have time to make their choice of transfer college.

The final external influence was college effort to communicate with the student. It was determined that recruitment visits, viewing a university's website, and informational pamphlets all were perceived as beneficial for providing information that influenced the students' decisions to apply to particular college programs. Students rated all three methods as somewhat influential prior to the presentation. However, following the presentation, there was an increase from 44% to 65% for the influence a visit by a campus representative has on their perception of the program. This is likely because the recruiter was able to answer specific questions about the program and therefore the visit was perceived to be more beneficial to the student. This goes to suggest that colleges must start to think about recruitment visits a little bit more and begin to realize what a fabulous tool visits can be for them. It could be their one opportunity to personalize the process and make real connections (Chimes & Gordon, 2008). Based on these findings, it is recommended that four-year institutions put more emphasis on having campus representatives who are knowledgeable about the specific programs participate in recruitment visits to community and junior colleges in order to recruit students to their institution. These visits offer a chance for the students to get a more personalized impression of the program and offer students a chance to ask any questions they may have.

According to the findings of this study, if the Agricultural Education Program can identify these characteristics and influences in the areas they are targeting and develop a recruitment effort that directly addresses them, then the effort is more likely to be successful. Because this study is limited in scope, it is recommended that it is replicated to validate findings. In addition, future studies should address if an actual increase in enrollment into the University of Illinois Agricultural Education Program was observed based on target recruitment efforts and what are the perceptions of high school students.



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## Appendix A: Survey Prior to the Presentation

1. What is your age?
  - ☐ 18-19
  - ☐ 20-21
  - ☐ 22-23
  - ☐ 24-25
  - ☐ 26-27
  - ☐ 28 or older
2. What is your gender?
  - ☐ Male
  - ☐ Female
3. What is your year in school?
  - ☐ First year college/university student
  - ☐ Second year college/university student
  - ☐ Beyond second year college/university student
4. Do you come from a family involved in agriculture in some way or form?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
5. Have you decided on a college/university **major** already?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
6. If you have chosen a college/university **major** already, what major have you chosen?  

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7. Have you decided on **what college** you transfer to after attending community college?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ I plan on completing my degree at the community college.

8. If you have decided **which college** you want to attend, which one college is your top choice?

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9. Did you have a perception of the University of Illinois agricultural education program prior to this visit?

☐ Yes

☐ No

10. If yes, please describe any perceptions you have had about the program, both positive and/or negative.

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11. Prior to this visit, what was your likelihood of applying to the University of Illinois agricultural education program?

- ☐ Highly unlikely to apply
- ☐ Somewhat unlikely to apply
- ☐ Neither likely or unlikely
- ☐ Somewhat likely to apply
- ☐ Highly likely to apply
- ☐ I have already applied

12. Prior to this visit, how would you rate the influence of the following on your decision to apply to a particular college program?

**Visits by a campus representative**

- ☐ Not influential at all
- ☐ Very limited influence

- ☐ Neither influential or not influential
- ☐ Somewhat influential
- ☐ Very influential

**College/University's website**

- ☐ Not influential at all
- ☐ Very limited influence
- ☐ Neither influential or not influential
- ☐ Somewhat influential
- ☐ Very influential

**College/University Informational Pamphlets**

- ☐ Not influential at all
- ☐ Very limited influence
- ☐ Neither influential or not influential
- ☐ Somewhat influential
- ☐ Very influential

## Appendix B: Survey Following the Presentation

1. After this visit, how would you rate the influence of the following on your decision to apply to a particular college program?

### Visits by campus representative

- ☐ Not influential at all
  - ☐ Very limited influence
  - ☐ Neither influential or not influential
  - ☐ Somewhat influential
  - ☐ Very influential
2. Do you have a changed perception of the University of Illinois agricultural education program after this presentation?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
  3. If yes, how has your perception changed?

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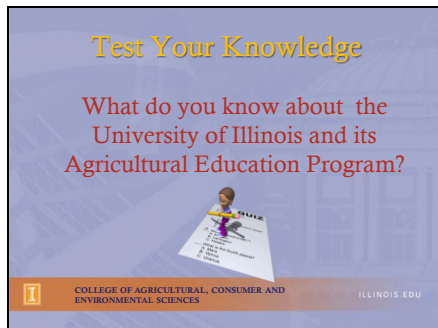
4. After this visit, what is your likelihood of applying to the University of Illinois agricultural education program?
  - ☐ Highly unlikely to apply
  - ☐ Somewhat unlikely to apply
  - ☐ Undecided
  - ☐ Somewhat likely to apply
  - ☐ Highly likely to apply
  - ☐ I have already applied

## Appendix C: Illinois Agricultural Education Presentation

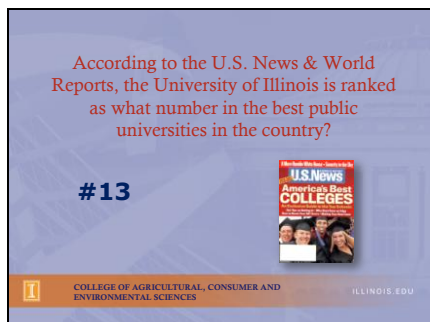
Slide 1



Slide 2



Slide 3

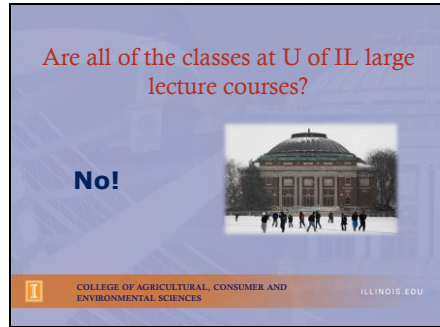


University of Illinois is ranked as #13 in top public universities in the country, and is ranked #45 in all universities.

This ranking moved up from last year by 2.



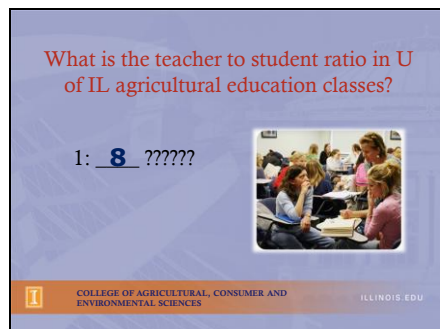
Slide 4



NO...most of the content area courses you need to take are small and even smaller than most high school class size.

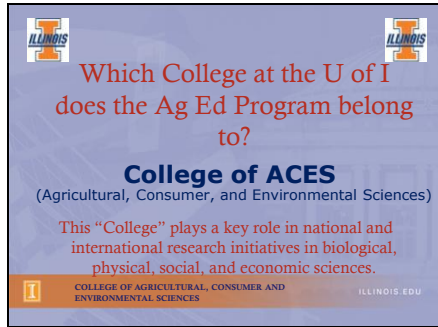
The Gen Ed courses are the large classes on campus, such as History.

Slide 5



At the University of Illinois, the teacher to student ratio is 1 faculty member per roughly 8 students. There are currently 5 full-time faculty members at the University of Illinois which makes us one of the largest Agricultural Education faculty in the state. Dr. James Anderson II is an Assistant Professor; Dr. Richard Clark is a Visiting Associate Professor; Dr. David Rosch is an Assistant Professor; and Corey Flournoy, Brandy Krapf, and Lisa Burgoon are Teaching Associates. The faculty bring with them a lot of experience from educational & classroom settings, from the 4-H world, business and industry background and their own business ventures.

Slide 6



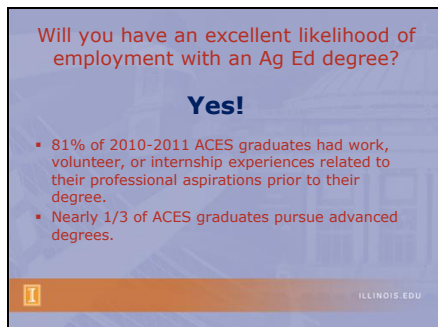
The Agricultural Education program is currently housed in the Human & Community Development Department and is part of the College of ACES (Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences).

Even though there are several thousand students who are on campus, there are approximately 2,300 undergraduates in the College of ACES which is small when you think of the big picture.

The "ACES" quad is considered to be on the South part of campus.

The College offers 11 undergraduate majors with 46 different concentrations.

Slide 7



University of Illinois was rated third nationally by company recruiters for outstanding graduates in a 2010 Wall Street Journal Report.

Recruiters in the WSJ survey said, "University of Illinois graduates...perform well and tend to stay with the company."

According to WSJ, "Recruiters say graduates of top public universities are often among the most prepared and well-rounded academically, and companies have found they fit well into their corporate cultures and over time have the best track record in their firms."

Slide 8



Agricultural Education at the University of Illinois is unique in that it provides education and prepares students for 2 different concentrations: 1 is Teacher Ed which is instructing in a formal educational setting and the other is Ag Leadership Education which is teaching and training in a non-formal educational setting. The Teacher Education Program is the concentration for those students who hope to get certified to teach agriculture and possibly other subjects, such as science or social science.

Slide 9

How many agriculturally-related fraternities and sororities does U of I have?

**6 Ag-related Sororities and Fraternities**

Nabor House, Farm House, Alpha Gamma Rho, Alpha Gamma Sigma, 4-H House, and Sigma Alpha



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There are 6 ag-related fraternities and sororities on campus which consist of Nabor House, Farm House, Alpha Gamma Rho (AGR), Alpha Gamma Sigma (AGS), 4-H House, and Sigma Alpha.

University of Illinois claims to have the largest Greek system with 69 fraternities and 36 sororities on campus.

Slide 10

The College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) awarded approximately how much in merit-based scholarships to its students for the current academic year?

**\$2,000,000!!!**



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Annually, there is approximately 2 million dollars given out to ACES students and are made available through the generous support of alumni and friends of the College.

A popular scholarship is the JBT (Jonathon Baldwin Turner) Scholarship that is a renewable scholarship for all four years assuming you maintain a GPA of 3.4 on a 4.0 scale. You would apply your senior year of high school.

The College of ACES has committed to a renewable scholarship for any section officer who decides to attend the University of Illinois and major in an agricultural-related area.

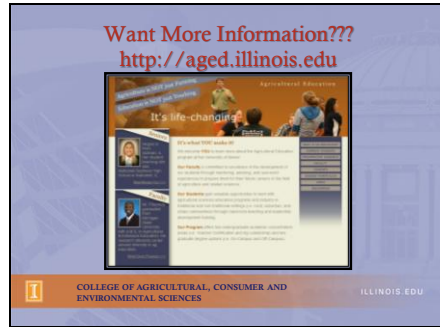


1 out of 4 students at the University of Illinois study abroad during his/her college career, and there are even opportunities for Agricultural Education students to participate as well. In the past, Agricultural Education students have had the opportunity to travel to China, Morrocco, Brazil and other places.

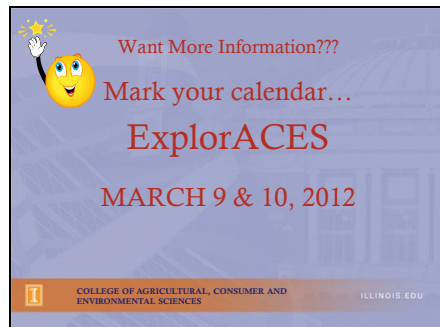
There is also plenty of opportunity to get involved in student organizations on campus. College of ACES student organizations are designed to further develop academic and career interests in an informal setting. We have 44 ACES clubs which include a variety of subject-matter specialties, honorary societies, and the College of ACES Student Council. Agricultural Education students can choose to become involved in the Agricultural Education Club and the honorary organization, Alpha Tau Alpha.

By becoming involved in organizations such as Agricultural Education Club, you get to really know the other students in the program since it is a small close-knit program through trips to National FFA Convention and ATA Conclave or the annual spring trip to visit other programs and industry locations. Through fundraising, these type of activities are available to the students in the program. Our current fundraiser is a T-Shirt Sales Program and a Holiday Program.

Slide 12



Slide 13



ExplorACES is a two-day event designed to acquaint prospective students and their families with the College of ACES at the University of Illinois, so mark your calendars to attend this event. You will have a chance to meet faculty members in all majors under the College of ACES, and University of Illinois Agricultural Education will be there with an interactive display.

Slide 14

