

fortunately, many institutions put all of the responsibility for minority students on minority affairs personnel. As Gary Mason, a recruiter for Davidson College noted, "The institution relieves itself of the responsibilities and the staff is usually overworked and understaffed." p. 31. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 11, 1987). The fact is that minority recruitment and retention must be a sustained institutional priority and responsibility. If institutions, administrators and faculty members employ these tools of recruitment, there will be many more minorities entering and, more importantly, many more graduating from all our higher education institutions.

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Recruitment of Vocational Agriculture/FFA Students

Kenny Graham

In order to consider recruitment of high school students for your agriculture programs, it is important to reflect on your own experiences, which got you here and involved you in trying to teach students about agriculture at the college level. It is also important to reflect on what these root experiences have led you to imagine and to expect those high school students to be. Simply wanting to be a farmer when I was growing up is a far different expectation than the one I can see my high school students heading towards or moving away from.

Moreover, the background these students start from is also vastly different from many of the original farming experiences of their instructors at all levels. Let me use myself as a typical example of a standard issue agriculture instructor. I grew up on what was a traditional 240 acre Missouri farm. We had cattle, hogs, corn and put up a lot of hay in the summer. In addition, if I said I was a farmer, everybody I knew would have known that I lived in a rural area on a farm. However, that experience is obviously no longer one that I can routinely expect to be the experience my students will have had.

I have discovered through questioning them that they live in town and have had a small garden out back to have a project in order to be allowed in my classes. They are interested in agriculture, and some even wanted to work in the field of agriculture. Nevertheless, I had to adjust my thinking and realize that very few of those students were going to go back to a farm. They were not going to be farmers. In fact, unless

I did some careful work, many of the traditional farming students were not going to study agriculture, even in high school. While gaining a new group of students, we sure didn't want to lose our old ones. As a result, recruiting is both simpler and more time consuming than we may wish to deal with, but if we are going to recruit students into agriculture, we are going to have to deal with the students as they are.

When I started thinking and studying about the recruiting problem, I found that in the Midwest out of 23% of all in an ag-related occupation only 3% of those are involved in production agriculture. I started thinking, "What we don't need is a bunch of people going back to the farm; what we need is students from town who are interested in agriculture, who are willing to work in marketing and distribution of ag products."

I also started thinking of changing my whole program and my recruiting to what we still call a non-traditional ag school which would include students who live in town (young women in particular), and I found that it is difficult to change without recruiting these young people because they were interested. What was difficult was to maintain a coherent production ag program because these students needed to know more about cows and plows while the young men who came from the farm already had this experience. I then added into my program agri-business training, career awareness and leadership training which I thought needed to be emphasized.

Currently, I teach in a high school of about 1000 students grades 9-12. I did a survey this past year for the entire high school student body. I received about 90% response on the survey. I gave them some options of classes that I felt fitted in the ag program "What classes would you be interested in," I asked. I calculated the individuals' responses and there was at

Graham is a Vocational Agriculture Instructor from Farmington, MO. This invited paper was presented at the 33rd Annual NACTA Conference, June 14-17, 1987 at the University of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

least one class that each would be interested in. Some of the surprises to me were that there was 20% of the student body saying they were interested in taking a class in livestock production and only 5% said they were interested in ag mechanics. These production courses are what I considered traditional.

I think while there is some interest, we also have a big misconception of what agriculture is. I'm the man who used to teach farming to a bunch of young men in blue and gold jackets, but that is pretty far from the truth now. Teaching career awareness and trying to get students started on a career path in a large and diversified field is also a major part of my job. Moreover, many of my students are young women. In fact they are the big percentage of leaders in the program. It is important, if you want to recruit these students, to understand their attitudes.

First, ask yourselves, why should they go to college? These students have got to ask themselves that question. Few jobs today, they are told, require a college degree. Although our school brags about the fact that more than 50% of the high school student body goes on to college, it's hard for us to show any follow-up data indicating how many complete a four or five year degree. Consequently I have to use national averages I'm sure you are familiar with those. They do not, however, tell the story concretely.

A further problem occurs when students today are told, on TV, in the newspaper and at home, that agriculture is a dead and dying industry. "Why should I get involved in that course of study?", they can reasonably ask themselves. This growing perception of American agriculture in its death throes is one of the biggest stumbling blocks I had in recruiting students into high school agriculture. It's not necessarily the 8th grade student who I am talking about, but it is the parents whom I have to work with. For example, I had a really strong farm family, four boys in the family — three of whom took vocational agriculture; one graduated before I came to Farmington. Two of them while I was there were chapter presidents and State Farmers in the FFA. Chris, the youngest who was in 9th grade this past year, did not enroll in ag classes. I was greatly troubled by that. I thought that I really must have done something wrong since his mom and dad didn't want Chris to be in agriculture. I had taken field trips to their farm, registered their Polled Hereford breeders, and done judging workshops out there. I always thought I put them on top. I couldn't figure out what I had done wrong. I had not really worked on Chris because he was one of those students whom I expected to enroll in vocational agriculture. I thought I would just call his parents. I asked his mother, after school started, why Chris hadn't enrolled in ag. I was almost afraid to ask that question because I didn't want to hear the answer. Her answer was, "He's not going to farm anyway." After all the work I had done and all of the public relations I had done trying to let people know that agriculture is more than farming, I felt that

this was a poor excuse. I had also worked with the counselors at the 7th and 8th grades. Perhaps we had not given Chris enough information, but it was too late to change now. I'm troubled by students like that. Chris ended up not being in vocational agriculture, and I suspect he will not be in an occupation that is agriculture related. For whatever reasons — media suggestions or parental persuasion — an apparently ideal student took himself out of agriculture.

Students also hear about how troubled agribusiness is. They think that there are not very many jobs available. An agribusiness, we heard this morning, consolidated its laying off. In fact, I'm told the company is sticking to hiring new employees right out of college and high school in place of going for good farm folks who have the knowledge of a farming background, so we can get around that argument. In general I think we've got to overcome the poor attitudes right now about agriculture.

Four Reasons Why

I have four suggestions to make on the subject. They are the four reasons why I have trouble getting juniors and seniors to think about going on to college, and they are not new and startling. It costs too much. It's too far from home. It's too big and too impersonal. It's too hard. These are some of the reasons high school students are difficult to recruit. They are not very good reasons, but they are some of the excuses the students give for not considering a college education.

"Well, it costs too much compared to what?" ask them. "It's not a cost; it's an investment." I'm sure you hear just about the same point. I like to play down on the total cost. That seems to get publicized. Compare total cost to tuition and books if you must, but remind the students they've got to live somewhere. I use myself as an example when discussing costs. I paid for my own college education with no help from home. I was married, had a baby, yet I made it through with grants, loans and scholarships that were available as well as work study. I am proud of that, and I relay that to students. You can legitimately tease them that they must figure in all the beer that will be drunk on campus and movies that they go to when they talk about the cost of a college education. Try to get them to focus on the required cost as opposed to the acquired cost which they can control.

"It's too far from home," they say. "Well, is 180 miles a long way compared to a 3 hour drive or a 10 minute phone call. Tell them, "You're not really that far from home." You can remind them that, "Compared to college what will you do? get a job with a construction industry and be gone out of state for a good part of the year or are you going to join the armed forces and be around the world, perhaps in Iran? Some of those places are pretty far compared to college." Maybe it isn't too far if they really think about it. It could also be a plus to get away from mom and dad. Kids seem to really want to do that and experience life

for a while. "For the first time you may be away from big brother, big sister, little brother or little sister." Try to turn those excuses into valid reasons why they should go to college.

"It's too hard," they tell me. "I'm barely making it in high school." Well that's probably true. In fact I know it is. I know their class rank and grade point average, but I also know what they could do if they would apply themselves. I guess I was a good example of this kind of student. My high school counselor told me that I shouldn't go to college. I really should not have gone. I should have learned a trade. I had a C average. A good solid C in high school, and that was o.k. because that's all I needed to bring home, really, to stay in good with mom and dad. I knew I could have done better, but why should I have bothered? And so my high school counselor, God bless her soul, sat me down in her office and said that I didn't want to go to college. As I look back I wonder how many students she's pushed and counseled into college by playing that part. I'm pretty hard-headed, so I said "I'll show that old biddy." I only had a B average in the little community college that I attended. I went to the University of Missouri here in Columbia, and I earned 3 degrees and a pretty good GPA on my BS in agriculture. I showed old Mrs. Halter.

"Well it's too big, and it's too impersonal," they will say. I thought that too. The University of Missouri is that old big campus in the middle of the state. It's awfully big, but I guess I was lucky. I was the state officer of FFA, and I became one of those target populations or target markets who was going to be on the campus at the University of Missouri because I was a state officer in FFA. I guess if it weren't for a counselor giving me attention I wouldn't have come here. After a student gets on a campus, whether it's the University of Missouri or some other big institution, it's not big and impersonal. We know that, but to a high school junior it doesn't. So you think about that when you're on one of those big campuses. All of these reasons are just excuses, and they can be dealt with.

Charlie's Letter

Now, consider Charlie in FFA; I'm going to make some examples based on Charlie. What if Charlie, a sophomore in high school, went to the mailbox one day. He might receive three letters. Charlie first pulls out of the mailbox an eight by ten package of information from a four year college of the state in a big brown envelope with a computer mailing label on it. Right away, he is impressed with images of big and impersonal. There is a multicolor picture of a big fancy campus on a brochure inside the package, and a form letter that says: "Dear Student, you have just taken your PSAT; therefore, you must be considering a college. Let me remind you that we are one of the best colleges in the state in whatever major you decide. If your grades are good and if you meet our entrance requirements, we would like you to attend our great

campus. You will realize that a degree from our college with our name on your resume will put you above the pack when you decide to enter the working world in whatever field you choose. Fill out the college entrance application form enclosed and send all four copies along with a ten dollar processing fee into the computerized admissions center. Your application must be post marked by May 1 to be considered for the fall of next year." It's signed sincerely, Officer Gregstraw. Now that will really turn Charlie on won't it?

The Right Approach

There's another envelope, so he opens it next. It's got a personalized letter from a counselor from over at one of the community colleges. It says: "Dear Charlie, I want to congratulate you on your election to officer as treasurer of the area XIV in the Future Farmers of America. This achievement leads me to believe that you are a person who knows how to set goals in life and has a drive to achieve them. After visiting with your vocational agriculture teacher, I understand that you are interested in pursuing additional training in agriculture after you complete high school. I realize that this is still two years into your future, but I would like you to know about our two year program in agribusiness. David Smith, one of our students, will be contacting you within the next couple of weeks to invite you to come and visit the agri-business program at our college. David, I believe, is a past FFA president of your chapter, and we're proud of his competence. We would like you to visit our campus for a day to see what our program is all about. While you are here, we would like you to attend classes and look over our labs and facilities. Our instructors will be available to explain the courses to you, and I would like to meet with you and share some scholarship and financial aide information. We would also like you to attend our ag club barbecue that evening and be our guest at one of our school basketball games. Once again, we are proud of your accomplishments in the FFA and look forward to meeting you. We think your presence on our campus will be a valuable addition to our student body. Sincerely yours, Gloria Jones, counselor." Now that letter had a little bit of a different affect on Charlie because he is our more traditional student and responds to the more traditional, personal touch.

He then opened up the third one and it was from an armed forces recruiter. We all know what that one would say. It explained their desire to enlist Charlie in one of their programs and pay for his college while he served his country and learned a skill. Charlie already has had three meetings as a sophomore with a recruiter. Obviously, he could be very persuasive.

Clearly, the university needs to include strong, individual counseling as part of its recruitment in order to get Charlie. I never would have made it without one. This counselor has to shepherd Charlie through a community college, if need be, and then continue to offer help, or Charlie will never make it to the Big U.

Let me summarize this plan of action for universities interested in recruiting high school students. You need to target your audience early. I really think that 9th and 10th grade is where you need to make your target. Not juniors and seniors — definitely not seniors. Seventh graders in our school are already being attracted towards college bound high school courses. I guess this is one of my big stumbling blocks. Ag is not a college bound program in my school. It's vocational. I know my students are being trapped. I am not sure when kids start thinking of college, but I know that they get into it in 9th and 10th grade level and so should you.

Target your markets specifically. FFA chapter officers are leaders, and definitely area FFA officers are leaders. The students who are involved in the area, district and state vocational agriculture judging contests have what it takes to succeed in college. They have given an extra effort to be involved. You can get a list of those names. Some of you already have access to it. University of Missouri holds a presidents' breakfast in the spring during the convention to tell the Chapter FFA Presidents what the university is all about. Keep on with that good beginning.

I think personal contact is very important. We all write letters congratulating them or inviting them to the campus, but don't stop there. Class visits are a good form of personal contact. When I was in high school, I remember the college representatives coming into class. I don't see the big colleges doing that any more. I will share the example of a college recruiter who came into my class. I was in a class of thirteen, and by the end of the second day two more students enrolled. They hadn't even thought of schools clear across the state.

One on one is another good form. When I was a student rep in college, every county in the state was represented. We tried to target other people in the county, high potential students. We made personal contacts with these people and talked to them about coming on our campus. There were a few of those student reps who later got hired to visit with some of the students whom the student reps had identified. They visited the home and talked to mom and dad. It didn't cost a whole lot for those students to do this. I know they proved the personal touch was valuable.

From the dean to the college faculty, you've got to be seen. Dealing with the state and district FFA contests is a good way. Do you help out at these? Do you judge parliamentary procedure contests and public speaking contest? Are you at the state fair helping out? District fairs and FFA shows? Leadership camp speakers? There are all kinds of activities in FFA and other organizations too where you can see prospective students and parents.

Involve the parents. I don't have a carefully worked out plan for this, but I will relate a story. My chapter president two years ago was a girl named Brenda, good leader, top ten percent of her class, from

a farm family, doing things she wanted to do. She's smart and has a good personality. Mom didn't want Brenda to get too far away from home. She didn't want her to go to a four year college. The family didn't have a whole lot of money, so Brenda started looking for scholarships. She received several good scholarships because she was in the top five percent of her class. She picked a college with a sizable scholarship, but they didn't have agriculture in the college which meant she was unable to major in it. Brenda is now majoring in elementary education. She will be an excellent teacher, but I think we lost a good mind in agriculture, in part, because no one in agriculture reached out to the parents with scholarship information.

Finally, you've got to decide whether your name is big enough to draw people to your campus, or if you have to go out and sell your program to your market audience regardless of your bigness. Go for a recruitment action plan, and be seen. Get to know the students. Identify potential students and recruit them. I'd ask you if your campus had a counselor such as I had because I think if you don't, your not going to be very successful at getting students. Don't forget the FFA. We're just not training young men to farm. We've got young women and agribusiness students out there whom you also need to contact. The point is this. You must personally contact and counsel all these students early and often if you actually mean to recruit them.

The NACTA International Programs Committee is developing sets of 2x2 slides on international agriculture to make available to interested NACTA members for classroom instruction purposes. The format for these slide sets will be geographical and by disciplines (e.g. Animal Agriculture of South America). Any NACTA member or friend wishing to share high quality slides with the committee, please identify each slide before mailing to the chairman of this committee at the address below. We are hoping that this slide sets will aid our NACTA members to increase awareness of international agriculture in the college classroom.

Send to: Robert A. Godke, Chrm.
Animal Science Dept.
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803



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