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FACTORS Students Consider in Selecting A University or College

Lou E. Riesenberg

Background

In 1984, the University of Idaho established a Long-Range Plan with 15 goals with corresponding strategies to promote positive institutional development. Goal I, "To Attract and Retain Well-Qualified Students," contains in its discussion section the following:

> "...the University is adopting the... strategy of maintaining its current share of the projected increases in the (overall state) system, with modest increases of approximately two to two and one-half percent per year anticipated over the next decade."
>
> "The University does... see a need to focus its efforts on attracting and retaining high-quality students... The University currently attracts a significant percentage of the state's outstanding high school graduates. Still, it has been estimated that 45 to 50 percent of those academically superior students go out of state for their undergraduate education. This brain drain will probably increase in the next decade because enrollment declines of 20 to 25 percent are predicted for many states in the nation. This will cause first the private and then the public colleges and universities in other parts of the country to recruit more aggressively in states like Idaho. The University must actively counter such actions."

The Long-Range Plan suggests some counter strategies:

> "Develop a professional, comprehensive, well-coordinated recruitment case that emphasizes the University's strengths and promotes the enrollment of well-qualified students."
>
> "Improve communications with secondary school teachers, counselors and administrators."

Reisch (1985) made the following similar observations about college of agriculture recruiting and retention:

> "We are concerned about the declining enrollment in our agricultural programs nationwide. Enrollment in our land-grant colleges of agriculture has declined nearly 25 percent in the past five years. This, coupled with a shortage of agricultural scientists and an unusually high percentage of faculty who are of retirement age, has created a national concern for the expertise needed to respond to the challenges of the next 16 years and on into the 21st Century. ...The Joint Council on Food and Agricultural Sciences has ranked the development of Scientific Expertize second only to Basic Biotechnology Research in eight national priorities for 1985."
>
> "For years we've extolled the career opportunities in agriculture without really knowing the needs or desires of our customers, the prospective students. We are no longer in a sellers' market and must work hard to enhance the perceptions of agricultural careers and to convince a population with fewer and fewer rural people that there are career areas that will meet their needs. ...Marketing is the name of the game today, and we must get on with it. It is our task to continue the lifeblood of our programs, the vocational agriculture and agricultural background students, and also to attract those urban/suburban who are now enrolling in engineering, computer science, pre-medicine, pre-law, etc."

Ross (1980), additionally, states that decreases in enrollment in colleges of agriculture suggests the potential for increased competition among institutions of higher education in attracting students. One component of the knowledge needed to compete effectively concerns information from current students on reasons for their institutional selection, positive and negative aspects of the college, and selected socio-economic data from the students.

The University of Idaho and, assumedly, many other land-grant universities, are becoming increasingly aware of the shrinking pool of potential students. Colleges of agriculture, especially, are planning marketing strategies to attract the potential student who has been the mainstay of their enrollment. But, more importantly, colleges of agriculture are planning marketing strategies to attract those students who are outside the traditional target market.

Basic to any marketing strategy is the activity of informing the potential student, regardless of the pool, as to the strengths and/or "marketable" features of a particular university or college. If the "marketable" features of the university or college and the factors

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students rate important in selecting an institution are similar, the development of a marketing strategy is greatly enhanced.

In order to successfully compete with other universities and colleges, colleges of agriculture must identify with current market segment by some set of demographic indicators if it is to access individuals both inside and outside the usual pool of potential students. Colleges of agriculture are significantly different from other colleges in their delivery systems and products so as to require a unique marketing strategy.

Purpose of Study

The College of Agriculture at the University of Idaho began the development of a marketing strategy in 1985 to maintain its position as the delivery system for baccalaureate degrees in agriculture and home economics for those individuals in Idaho and the Pacific Northwest who need and/or can benefit from such degrees. In order to maintain a viable resident instruction component within the College, a critical number of students must be enrolled in individual degree programs.

This study is the first step in the information gathering process necessary for the development of an overall long-range marketing strategy. This study is designed to identify the current market segment of the College and the information (from all the information supplied to potential students) used by the aforementioned in the decision-making process.

Methodology

In the Fall 1985 Semester, the College of Agriculture at the University enrolled 109 new and/or transfer students. These students are the subjects of this study. The names and addresses of these subjects were supplied to the investigator by the College of Agriculture Resident Instruction Office.

A survey instrument was prepared and initially mailed to the subjects at their University of Idaho address on November 6, 1985, under a cover letter signed by the investigator.

A second mailing to the non-respondents was made on November 19, 1985. The same survey instrument, under a different cover letter, was used for the second mailing.

Returned survey instruments were checked for completeness and coding was added. The completed survey instruments were sent to Computer Sciences for keypunching and subsequent entering into a university computer data file. The SPSSx Statistical Package was used to reduce the data for the presentation.

Findings

Ninety-two (92) survey instruments were returned and used in the analysis of this study for an 84 percent response rate. The 92 students responding indicated 73 majors declared in the College of Agriculture and 27 majors declared in the School of Home Economics. All seven academic departments were represented in the majors declared by the students. Eight of the respondents reported double majors.

The incoming students of the College of Agriculture had the following characteristics:

* 45% reported a farm or ranch as home
* 57% were the first of their family to attend the University
* 77% were from Idaho
* 22% were 21 or older
* 15% were married
* 47% were female
* 50% had been enrolled in high school vocational agriculture
* 60% had been involved in 4-H
* 53% reported an average first scholarship of $781.00

The incoming students were asked whether the University of Idaho was their first, second or subsequent choice among all the colleges and universities they considered attending. Sixty-seven (67) percent of the respondents indicated the University of Idaho was their first choice of all the colleges and universities they considered attending (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency of Choice of the University of Idaho.

Choice	Percent
First Choice	67
Second Choice	23
Third Choice	4
Fourth Choice	4
Missing Responses	2
Total	100

The incoming students indicated a relative degree of sureness in their decision to attend the University of Idaho and to enroll in the College of Agriculture. However, they were not nearly as sure about their choice of a major or their career goal (Table 2). This difference in sureness indicates a critical need for good advising and retention activities by the College in assisting those students in working toward a major as well as a career goal.

Table 2. Sureness of Decisions to Attend the University of Idaho, to Enroll in the College of Agriculture, Choice of a Major and Career Goal.

Decision	Sureness Categories*				Mean
	1	2	3	4	
To attend the University of Idaho	63**	23	11	6	1.549
To major in the College of Agriculture	60	19	19	2	1.626
Choice of a Major	38	33	22	7	1.967
Choice of a career goal	34	33	29	4	2.033

* 1 = Absolutely Sure 2 = Somewhat Sure 3 = Somewhat Unsure 4 = Absolutely Unsure

** Percent of Responses

The incoming students were asked to rate 34 selected factors that students may consider in choosing a college or university to attend. They were asked to rate how important they regarded each factor in their selection of a college or university to attend. In an

Table 3. Factors Students Considered High-in-Importance in Selecting a College or University to Attend.

Factors	Importance Categories*					Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
Specific Academic Majors	51**	33	13	2	1	1.703
Cost	51	30	11	6	2	1.787
Employ. Opportunity After Graduation	40	31	21	1	7	2.045
Variety of Courses	30	44	20	2	4	2.089
Teaching Reputation	35	32	18	13	2	2.163
General Reputation	23	39	29	7	2	2.261
Academic Advising	27	37	23	7	6	2.267
Financial Aid	37	27	14	10	12	2.330
Faculty Reputation	27	27	26	13	7	2.462
Housing Opportunities	22	34	24	7	13	2.567
Career Counseling	22	27	29	12	10	2.611

* 1 = Very Important 2 = Quite Important 3 = Important 4 = Somewhat Important 5 = Not Important
** Percent of Responses

attempt to separate the 34 selected factors into meaningful groups, the factors were categorized into three groups; high-in-importance, average-in-importance, and low-in-importance. The criteria for grouping are as follows:

1. Approximately one-third of the factors appear in each group.
2. Since there were five importance categories, the high-in-importance group shall have at least 20 percent of its responses in the very important category.
3. The divisions between the groups shall be significant breaks in the ranking of the means.

Information about the factors in the high-in-importance group **must** be included in the "advertising" developed by the College of Agriculture and directed at its current market segment. Information about the factors in the average-in-importance group **should** be included in any "advertising" developed by the College for its current market segment.

Table 4. Factors Students Considered Average-in-Importance in Selecting a College or University to Attend

Factors	Importance Categories*					Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
Student/Faculty Ration	17*	34	27	12	10	2.630
Student Morale	15	31	37	8	9	2.637
Student Involvement	11	37	33	11	8	2.674
Student Help Services	17	28	32	14	9	2.711
Location of Campus	12	30	30	19	9	2.835
Qual. of Student Body	12	31	27	18	12	2.867
Attractive Campus	9	34	20	23	14	3.000
Research Reputation	11	27	24	19	19	3.066
Extra-curricular Activities	10	21	34	22	13	3.100
Emphasis on Graduate Programs	13	27	18	19	23	3.110
Distance from Home	10	24	22	21	23	3.231
Reputation of Alumni	7	22	30	21	21	3.275
Social activities	8	21	24	28	19	3.297
Size of School	11	16	23	27	23	3.363

* 1 = Very Important 2 = Quite Important 3 = Important 4 = Somewhat Important 5 = Not Important
** Percent of Responses

When grouping the factors students rated high-in-importance in selecting a college or university to attend, 11 of the 34 factors were chosen (Table 3). This group contains three factors that deal with reputation: teaching reputation, general reputation and faculty reputation. Three of the factors are related to finance: cost, employment opportunities after graduation and financial aid. Two factors are advising functions: academic advising and career counseling. And two of the factors deal with specific programs available: specific academic majors and variety of courses.

The group of factors students rated average-in-importance in selecting a college or university to attend includes 14 of the 34 selected factors (Table 4).

The group of factors students rated low-in-importance in selecting a college or university to attend includes nine of the 34 selected factors (Table 5). It should be noted that two factors, parent's preference and high school counselor's rating, are ranked in the middle of this low-in-importance group. This is different than many commonly held viewpoints.

Table 5. Factors Students Considered Low-in-Importance in Selecting a College or University to Attend

Factors	Importance Categories*					Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
Friend's Rating	10**	16	22	29	23	3.400
Honors Program	5	13	25	25	32	3.641
Athletic Facilities	5	17	16	28	34	3.652
Parent's Preference	10	10	18	22	40	3.736
High School Counselor's Rating	2	16	23	17	42	3.811
Varsity Sports	8	8	12	22	50	4.011
Intramural Sports	2	7	18	30	43	4.043
Male/Female Ratio	3	5	20	23	49	4.088
Ethnic Mix	0	3	14	19	64	4.444

* 1 = Very Important 2 = Quite Important 3 = Important 4 = Somewhat Important 5 = Not Important
** Percent of Responses

Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that the College's current market segment is traditional in-state vocational agriculture and home economics and agricultural background students. These students, with the University being their overwhelming primary choice of institution and the sureness of decisions, will continue to be the mainstay of the college enrollment. This traditional potential pool for the College of Agriculture includes approximately 800 high school graduates who have had secondary agricultural education. If the College could attract an additional five percent of the estimated traditional pool, enrollment would almost double without the nontraditional market segment which is not even considered in this estimation.

In order to provide the "marketable" information concerning those factors potential students rate as important in their decision of which university or college to attend, attention must be given to the

following factors: specific academic majors available, cost, employment opportunities after graduation, variety of courses available, teaching reputation, general reputation, academic advising, financial aid available, faculty reputation, housing opportunities and career counseling.

In developing a marketing strategy for its current market segment, the College can ignore the following factors: friend's rating, honors program, athletic facilities, parent's preference, high school counselor's rating, varsity sports, intramural sports, male/female ratio and ethnic mix.

Recommendations

A marketing strategy for a college of agriculture is specific and unique to the institution; however, the inputs to the strategy can be generalized somewhat more widely for comparison and contrast. The market segment identified by this study seems to be very much like other colleges have. It seems reasonable for colleges of agriculture to investigate if their traditional pool of students has been sufficiently exhausted.

This study is only the beginning step in the process of information gathering for input to the marketing strategy of the College of Agriculture at the University of Idaho. Substantial work needs yet to be done to verify these findings and to explore the existence of other potential market segments.

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Computer Literacy—An Alternative Approach

Gene W. Lewis

Just a few years ago a new buzzword exploded upon the American scene and it rapidly became a household expression. The new phrase was "computer literacy" and it stirred a lot of questions concerning "what is it?" and "how do we obtain it?". Though very few denied the significance of computer literacy as a societal issue, it soon became apparent that there were numerous definitions of the term. However, one aspect of the "how do we obtain it" question seemed to have almost universal acceptance from the start, and that was the issue of programming being a part of any computer literacy training.

A computer literacy requirement was implemented for all majors here at Delaware Valley College about five years ago and the initial course outline included a heavy orientation toward programming using the BASIC language on a microcomputer system. After a year of using this approach several results were observed. First of all the students taking the course almost never returned to the computer center to use the equipment for other course work once the literacy requirement was completed. The opinions expressed by a large number of the students was that if they had to be programmers in order to use a computer that they had no further interest in the technology. So, instead of turning the students on to the power of the computer, we had turned them off even further. We had countered our original objectives by placing an association in their minds that successful computer use required mastering the time-consuming and precise skills of programming. Our first attempt at literacy, as we observed it being implemented at other schools, had not had the positive results that we had originally targeted.

After taking a hard look at the issue, and keeping in mind our original goal of attempting to provide a positive learning experience that would stimulate our students to perceive the computer as a powerful contemporary tool, we decided to develop an alternative approach to the subject of computer literacy. Our new format would concentrate instead on illustrating several contemporary business applications using the computer in a hands-on setting. There would be no programming taught in this new approach.

The course would start with a fundamental definition of the difference between hardware and software. This would provide the lead in to the first part of the course, which would emphasize hardware vocabulary and basic system architecture from microcomputer to supercomputer. We would build, in a figurative sense, a generic computer from the inside out. Starting with the major components inside the "black box" such as the CPU and memory, we would then add on a family of input/output devices and auxiliary storage until we had created a completely functional system. Whenever possible we attempted to use such "show and tell" handouts as computer chips, printed circuit boards, hard disks, floppy disks, ribbon cable, etc.

This hardware-first approach had several goals in mind. First of all it helps to provide a fundamental systems vocabulary that is reinforced throughout the course. It also removes some of the mystery from the computer by breaking the device into its functional units and showing the relationships between these units. This becomes important when you start to introduce the concepts of "loading," "saving," and "printing" application software and data files. We also felt it was important to establish an understanding of

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