

Implications and Conclusions

If the potential students are presented with information on the evaluative criteria they consider to be most important when choosing a university or major, the probabilities for successful recruiting are increased. The results of the research described above indicate when students should receive promotional materials: (1) while high school juniors and seniors and (2) while college freshmen and sophomores. The research results also provide guidelines for the kind of information which should be included in the promotional materials. First, the basic message should describe the college's purpose as the application of science and technology to the study of agricultural issues. Second, the materials should appeal to the students' most important evaluative criteria for choosing a major: how interesting the major is, the associated job opportunities, and the salary potential. Some of the most important evaluative criteria for choosing among institutions appear to be the quality of the institution, the constraints of tuition and location, and specifics about the particular major in which the student is interested. Lastly, the only source of information students rate as being influential is printed material. Using this information in designing promotional materials should increase the effectiveness of Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' promotional plan.

Regarding the generalizability of the research results, the criteria for choosing a particular university may differ from one university to another and should be researched further. Some important influence

factors such as "Parents," "Aptitude Tests," "Job Opportunities," and "Printed Material," are very general and may well be important for students at other institutions. The variables identified as being relevant for students choosing particular majors such as Forestry and Wildlife Resources, Dairy Science, or Biochemistry and Nutrition are likely to apply to other students interested in those same majors at other institutions. Again, additional research is necessary to assess the generalizability of the results.

While the information presented here provides general guidelines for developing subject matter for recruiting materials, individual programs should conduct research among their own students. The important implication of this research is to provide an example of how this kind of research can be conducted and how the results can be used to address the problems of declining enrollment. By fully investigating the students' decision process of choosing a particular institution and major, administrators can then effectively develop promotional materials, thereby fulfilling Kotler's (1976) requirements for utilizing a marketing orientation to develop recruiting strategies.

References

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Student Retention Increased by Ag Partners

Galen W. Dodge and David L. Rocker

Attrition experts suggest that incoming students who closely identify themselves with other college students or groups will be less likely to drop out of college. Astin (1977) states that "Efforts to increase student involvement will not only enhance the student's ability to persist but will also intensify the impact of the undergraduate experience on the student's personality, behavior, career progress, and satisfaction." During the 1982 fall semester a program referred to as Ag Partners was initiated in the UN-L College of Agriculture. Ag Partners is a systematic college program that was designed to enhance the student's opportunity to personally identify with other students, student groups, and ultimately lower the attrition rate. Incoming freshmen are paired with a supportive upper class student who helps orient them to college, acquaints them with their advisor, introduces them to

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organizations and groups, and advises them on proper study habits.

During its first year of operation the program was evaluated using a control group of university freshmen enrolled in the College of Agriculture who were not matched with a partner. The results clearly indicated that the program made a positive difference in the participants and this difference became even more remarkable when comparisons with the control group were made.

Background

This study consists of a follow-up of two groups of freshmen participants in the Ag Partners program: those freshmen students who entered the University during the fall of 1982-83 and during the fall of 1983-84, respectively. It should be noted that the first group of freshmen (1982-83) was selected from students who were enrolled in an Agriculture Communication course. The second group of freshmen (1983-84) consisted of students who volunteered to participate in the program in response to a letter sent out to all incoming freshmen who planned to enroll in the College of Agriculture during the first semester 1983-84.

Table 1. Ag Partners Interview Questions

- *1. Are you still enrolled in the College of Agriculture? If no, please explain why.
2. What was your original major?
3. If you changed majors please explain why.
4. List any clubs, organizations or extracurricular activities you have been involved in.
5. Please list any leadership role you have held in the past two/three years both with in and outside of the University.
6. Please tell me your GPA.
7. Do you have a part time job? If yes, tell me about it.
- *8. Describe the effect Ag Partners had on you as a freshman.
- *9. Should Ag Partners be continued? Why or why not?
10. How do you feel Ag Partners could be improved.
- *11. Did you become an upperclass partner? If yes, what motivated your decision and how would you evaluate this experience.
12. How do you feel about the assistance you received from your advisor?
13. What are your ideas about how the College of Agriculture's advisor program can be improved?
14. What are your plans following graduation?
15. Now as you look back, what do you feel has been your most valuable college experience?

* Questions analyzed in this study

The upper class partners were selected from a group of students with agriculture majors who had completed an agriculture communications course. The communications course focuses primarily on communication and skills in interpersonal relationships. Although the course is not required, it is recommended to all incoming freshmen majoring in agriculture.

Methods

For the follow up, each of the participants were personally contacted and those students who remained at UN-L were personally interviewed during the month of March, 1985. The interview consisted of fifteen questions. A list of these questions may be found in Table 1. As may be noted in the table, a number of questions were included to gain specific ideas as to how the Ag Partners and advising programs might be improved. For the purpose of this study, only those questions which pertained to the impact of Ag Partners were analyzed. In order to increase the reliability of this interview, it was administered to five University students who were not participants in Ag Partners. As a result, some minor changes were made in the instrument.

All of the participants were located and contacted by telephone to determine their enrollment status and for those still enrolled at the University appointments for the interview were arranged. A total of 61 students were contacted. Of these students, 45 who were still enrolled at the University were interviewed. The interview was individually administered to the two groups (1982-83 and 1983-84 academic years) of freshmen participants still enrolled at UN-L. To insure consistency all of the interviews were administered and recorded by the same individual.

Analysis of Data

The percentage of freshmen Ag Partners' participants who dropped out of college was computed for the two groups and compared with the attrition rate of the University. Interview responses for each question were recorded and classified into categories according to similar content and themes. The number of responses carrying a similar theme was then compared to the total number of responses to compute the frequency of responses for each theme.

The attrition rate and the current status of those freshmen who participated in Ag Partners during the 1982-83 and 1983-84 school years may be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Current Status of 1982-83 and 1983-84 Ag Partners Participants

	Percent
1982-83 N=22	
Still enrolled at UN-L	72.7
Working	13.6
Attending other post-secondary institutions	9.1
Military	4.6
1983-84 N=39	
Still enrolled at UN-L	74.4
Attending other post-secondary institutions	15.4
Working	7.7
Working-will return in the Fall	2.5

As may be noted in the preceding table, 72.7% of the 1982-83 group of freshmen were still enrolled at UN-L. When this percentage is compared with an overall average of 58.8% of the students who continue at UN-L at this stage in their college career, the results show a 14.2% better retention rate.

Of the 1983-84 group of partners, 74.4% were still enrolled at UN-L. When compared with an average of 68.6% of the students who continue at UN-L at this stage in their college career, the results show a 5.8% better retention rate.

To determine what impact the Ag Partners Program had on freshmen participants, responses to the question concerning what effect Ag Partners had on them as a freshman were analyzed. Responses for both the 1982-83 and the 1983-84 groups were pooled and classified into categories according to similar content and themes. Percentages falling into each category were computed and the results may be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Categorized Responses of the Effect of Ag Partners of Freshmen

1. Provides a special friend to talk with, ask questions, and obtain information along with meeting people	57.8
2. Adjustment to college by acquainting them with physical surroundings and college life	28.9
3. Preparation for classes and tests	22.2
4. Did not have much effect	17.8
5. Involvement in UN-L organizations and groups	15.6
6. Did not have much effect because of duplication with a fraternities Big Brother program	8.9
7. Introduced to advisor	4.4
* Should be noted that students may have responses that fall within one or more of the above categories.	

In reviewing table 3, it becomes obvious that the freshmen perceive the fact that they have a special friend with whom to identify as one of the most significant values of the program.

As mentioned previously, all of the 45 freshmen participants who were interviewed, agreed Ag Partners was a most helpful program and should be continued. It is interesting to note that of the 45 freshmen participants, fifteen volunteered to become upperclass partners later in their college careers.

Conclusions

The purpose of Ag Partners, which was implemented in the Fall of 1982, was to match incoming freshmen students with an upperclassman enrolled in the College of Agriculture in a program designed to make the adjustment to college life easier for entering freshmen and in turn reduce attrition. As mentioned previously, the 1982-83 participants consisted of freshmen who were enrolled in an Agriculture Communications course and the 1983-84 participants consisted of incoming freshmen who volunteered to participate in the program.

The results of this follow-up investigation revealed that a noticeably higher percentage of freshmen who participated in the partners program persisted in school than UN-L freshmen who were not involved in the program. These figures become even more impressive when it is noted that the College of Agriculture's freshmen to sophomore attrition rate is slightly higher than the University average for the same period. Although the participants may not be a representative sample of University freshmen majoring in agriculture, the results strongly point to higher retention for these students.

The majority of the former freshmen participants felt that the program helped them identify closely with other students, groups, and organizations. This is in agreement with Astin's attrition studies, which indicate that these are characteristics of students who are less likely to drop-out of college.

The improved retention, help in meeting people and making friends, and overall adjustment to college makes a strong case for the continuation and expansion of the program until every entering freshman is paired with an upperclass partner.

References

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Guidelines for Coping Successfully to Avoid Burnout

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Previous research makes it evident that burnout is probably brought about by strain. This strain results from accumulated stress which the individual has not dissipated through effective coping strategies. Cherniss said it well: "Stress occurs when there is an imbalance between job demands and the worker's resources (skills, abilities, time, energy) for meeting them" (p. 158, 1980).

Hence if each faculty member can develop a better cadre of effective coping skills then it stands to reason the faculty member would effectively handle more stress which would not become strain. The end result should be a better quality of life. One would also expect that the person would be more productive, more content, and in general a more effective person.

One's Coping Repertoire

There are probably six key areas where one needs to develop and refine his or her coping skills. The areas are: knowledge of burnout, management skills, monitoring skills, interpersonal skills, activities to provide release of tension, and religion.

Knowledge of Burnout

It is important that all helping professionals come to have a clear understanding of the phenomenon of burnout. Readers are referred to the June, 1985 issue of the *NACTA Journal* (Newcomb & Clark, 1985) for at least an introductory treatment of the topic.

One also must develop a keen knowledge of self. Who am I? What are my strengths and weaknesses? Under what conditions do I perform best? What are the things that I allow to rattle my cage? It is essential that one answer questions such as these in order to develop a more accurate and complete understanding of self.

Each person is very much an individual. Until this is accepted then coping with daily stresses will be very difficult. Only you can accurately gauge your threshold of tolerance and begin to ameliorate the conditions that cause you to cross that threshold and begin to accumulate the strain that leads to burnout.

This means each person needs to spend some time thinking about specific things in the daily environment that are stressful. Consider environment, human interactions, external pressures placed on you as well as internal pressures that you bring to bear on yourself. Such self knowledge as related to stress will provide the foundation on which one can build a program to help alleviate unnecessary stress.

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