

University Horse Camp for Children as Recruiting Tool for Animal Science

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Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine if a fund-raising activity which encouraged prospective students to visit a university campus had the potential to increase enrollment at that institution, increase student's desire to attend college in general, or increase interest in animal science. This study surveyed parents of 76 participants (n = 16 males; n = 60 females), ages 8 – 18, enrolled in 'Horse Lover's Day Camp' at the University of Arkansas in 2006. A four-question survey was given to the parents of the enrolled children pre- and post-camp. Overall, post-camp results revealed an increase in the number of children who planned to attend college, to attend The University of Arkansas and study animal science. There was a statistically significant post-camp increase interest in animal science. When analyzed by gender, results further revealed that a statistically significant ($P < 0.001$) proportion of the female students were interested in attending college, attending the University of Arkansas and studying animal science. This camp activity format could be a useful tool at other universities to help increase enrollment in specific institutions of higher education and in animal science.

Introduction

Activities that encourage prospective students to visit a university campus have the potential to increase enrollment at that institution (Yost and Tucker, 1995). A benefit to the admission effort could be seen, if attendance at an event hosted by a college or university increased potential enrollment. If a pre-admissions event increased enrollment in a specific department, then the event could be considered a recruiting tool not only for a specific department, but also for the college or university.

To identify successful strategies, researchers study the impact of recruiting tools on university enrollment. Case studies correlate campus visits by applicants with the proportion of applicants who matriculated at the institution they visited (Yost and Tucker, 1995). Researchers at the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs) at the University of Florida (UF) studied factors influencing recruitment to identify successful strategies. A

descriptive census study compared undergraduates who matriculated from high school, and two-year colleges into the CALS at UF. Those who matriculated rated 15 sources of information on a five-point Likert scale. Results indicated recruitment methods that had a significant impact on college choice included campus visits and participation in campus events (Yost and Tucker, 1995). In 2002, Aguilar and Gillespie found that marketing activity of a college before senior year of high school had a positive effect on the number of college applications. The two most influential recruiting techniques that found, based on beta coefficients, were student visits to the campus and college fairs. Frisbee et al. (2000) stated that campus visits continue to be recognized as an important tool for recruiting students. Frisbee et al. (2000) additionally recommended that recruiters try to persuade prospective students to visit the campus early in the recruitment process. In 2002, Donellan stated that campus visitation and information about a specific major were the most influential factors in marketing a college or university.

Recruiting college majors is an essential activity for any academic department (Kealy and Rockel, 1987). According to Strasser et al. (2002), high school courses, high school advisors, and parents do not appear to be influential in the initial choice of college major, whereas interest in subject matter has been shown to affect designated college major (Malgwi et al., 2005). Additionally, in 2002, Kim et al. reported that interest in subject matter was the most important factor for incoming freshmen, regardless of gender when determining a college. However, in 1981, Chapman reported that the choice of which college to attend is influenced foremost by the characteristics and background of the student's family and the institution's efforts to communicate with prospective students were rated second in importance. Myers et al. (2003) found that teacher-student contact was an effective recruitment strategy used by agriculture teachers.

Purpose and Objectives

This study was designed to determine if the University of Arkansas' Horse Lover's Day Camp [HLDC] could potentially be used as a recruitment

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strategy not only for college in general, but for the University of Arkansas and the Department of Animal Science.

More specifically, this study was designed to address the following research objectives:

1. Did attending Horse Lover's Day Camp at the University of Arkansas affect children's desire to attend college, attend the University of Arkansas or increase their interest in animal science as reported by their parents?

2. Did gender of children attending Horse Lover's Day Camp affect decisions to attend college, the University of Arkansas, or interest in animal science as reported by their parents?

3. Did the children enrolled in Horse Lover's Day Camp enjoy attending Horse Lover's Day Camp as reported by their parents?

Materials and Methods

Horse Lover's Day Camp

Camp consisted of riding instruction, hands-on learning experiences with horses stressing safety, educational games and activities, and interactive lectures covering basic animal science topics including nutrition, parasite control, and horse behavior. At the end of each camp session, the students were awarded a certificate of completion. The D.E. King Equine Program Director, staff, and volunteers served as instructors for the enrolled children. Camp was designed to be multipurpose: 1) a community outreach project to promote the mission of the University Equine Program among children in the region; 2) to expose children to horses in an educational environment; and 3) as a fundraiser to support the predominantly self-funded University of Arkansas D.E. King Equine Program.

Population

The target population for this study was parents of 8-18 year old children who attended HLDC hosted by D.E. King Equine Program at the University of Arkansas in 2006. A total of 79 children were enrolled in HLDC, however pre-camp and post-camp surveys were completed for 76 students (16 males and 60 females), resulting in a 96% response rate.

Instrument

The survey was a questionnaire developed by the researchers. This instrument was reviewed by a panel of experts to insure face validity. The panel consisted of an expert in survey research, and two Dale Bumper's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences professors who were involved in recruitment strategy. The University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the instrument. The survey asked the children's parents to respond to questions designed to determine if attending HLDC affected the future higher education goals of their children. Selected demographic data

about children was reported by their parents. Parents were surveyed at the time of enrollment and at the completion of camp, and were asked to discuss questions with their child prior to reporting answers. Questions posited pre- and post-camp were:

1. Does your child plan to attend college?

2. Does your child plan to attend the University of Arkansas?

3. Is your child interested in Animal Science?

Gender of child was reported pre-camp and parents reported post-camp if their child enjoyed attending HLDC.

Data Collection and Analysis

The pre-camp questionnaire was mailed to parents with HLDC information and an enrollment packet. The completed questionnaire was returned prior to HLDC. The post-camp questionnaire was physically handed to the parents of each child at the completion of HLDC.

Descriptive statistics were used to report frequencies and percentages of responses. 'Yes' responses from pre- and post-camp questions were analyzed by hand calculating Chi-square with significances set at the 0.05 level. Gender affects from pre- and post camp responses were analyzed using the Chi-square procedure of SAS.

Results and Discussion

"Yes" responses to the question "Does your child plan to attend college?" were not significantly different from pre- to post-camp, but numerically increased from 96.1% to 98.7%. When the parents were asked "Does your child plan to attend the University of Arkansas?", 57.9% of pre-camp responses were "yes" but post-camp, 72.4% of the responses were "yes." This was a numeric increase of 14.5%; however, this was not statistically significant. "Yes" responses to the question "Is your child interested in animal science?" were statistically different with an increase of 22.3%.

Female student's "yes" responses from pre- to post-camp were different ($P < 0.001$) for all three questions, whereas male student's "yes" responses did not differ ($P > 0.10$) for all three questions as reported in Table 2. For all questions, regardless of gender, there was a numerical increase in positive responses from pre- to post-camp.

Exposing children to basic animal science study topics and information, while incorporating games and activities, proved to be an experience the campers enjoyed.

As reported by respondents, 75 of 76 children enjoyed participating in HLDC.

Learning from and visiting with faculty and staff allowed campers the opportunity to explore the possibilities of an Animal Science degree. Many were unfamiliar with the Animal Science Department, and did not know that an equine science minor was

available at the University of Arkansas. Children's interest in animal science and plans to attend the University of Arkansas numerically increased (22.3% and 14.5% respectively) after the camp experience, as reported by parents for all groups of campers regardless of gender. HLDC could positively affect course of study pursued and future enrollment at the University of Arkansas.

D.E. King Equine Program. Other colleges and departments could follow this paradigm in an effort to incorporate recruitment strategies with educational fundraising activities hence benefiting all concerned.

Further research is needed. Repeating this study would add validity to these findings.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Involving pre-college age children in camps and activities sponsored by universities are potential recruiting tools for college in general and for specific departments.

2. Additional information on the children's ultimate choice of college and major should be tracked to gather further data.

3. Although our male population was small (n = 16) change in interest post-camp in animal science was considerable. Five of seven male campers developed an interest in animal science by the conclusion of camp. It would be beneficial to repeat the study with a larger group of males.

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Table 1. Responses to the Horse Lover's Day Camp questionnaire pre- and post-camp (n=76)

Question	Pre-Camp			Post-Camp			
	Responses, %						
	Yes	No	NRu	Yes	No	NR	X2v
Question 1w	96.1 (73)	2.6 (2)	1.3 (1)	98.7 (75)	0.0 (0)	1.3 (1)	0.07
Question 2x	57.9 (44)	11.8 (9)	30.3 (23)	72.4 (55)	15.8 (12)	11.8 (9)	3.63
Question 3yz	63.2 (48)	19.7 (15)	17.1 (13)	85.5 (65)	11.8 (9)	2.6 (2)	7.86*

u NR = Non-respondent.
 v Hand calculated Chi-square for 'yes' responses from pre- to post-camp.
 w Question 1 = Does child plan to attend college?
 x Question 2 = Does child plan to attend the University of Arkansas?
 y Question 3 = Is child interested in animal science?
 z 'Yes' responses were significantly different from pre- and post-camp at the 0.05 level.

Table 2. 'Yes' responses to questionnaire posited to parents pre-and post-camp for male (n=16) and female (n=60) children enrolled in Horse Lover's Day Camp

Question	Positive Responses				Percent unit change ^u
	Pre-Camp		Post-Camp		
	#Yes Responses	%	#Yes Responses	%	
Does child plan to attend college?					
Male (n=16) ^y	16	100.0	15	93.8	-6.2
Female (n=60) ^w	57	95.0	60	100.0	5.0
Does child plan to attend the U of A?					
Male (n=16) ^y	12	75.0	13	81.3	6.3
Female (n=60) ^w	32	53.3	42	70.0	16.7
Is child interested in animal science?					
Male (n=16) ^y	7	43.8	12	75.0	31.2
Female (n=60) ^w	41	68.3	53	88.3	20.0

^u Corresponds to the percent unit change from 'Yes' response from pre- to post-camp.
^y Nonstatistical difference for males answering 'yes' to all three questions using the Chi-square procedure of SAS; P> 0.10.
^w Statistical difference for females answering 'yes' to all three questions using the Chi-square procedure of SAS; P <0.001.

Summary and Recommendations

Campus visits and activities (Yost and Tucker, 1995) are proven recruitment strategies. Results of this study revealed an increase from pre- to post-camp of children who were interested in attending the University of Arkansas and had an interest in animal science. In 1993, Lively and Mercer reported that in times of tight budgets, effective recruiting strategies are needed so that limited resources can be used to attract the greatest number of college majors. This statement is as true today as it was in 1993. Decreasing budgets, the desire for increasing departmental enrollment, and effective recruitment strategies are virtually universal on today's college campuses. Promoting educational programs and expanding the recruitment base are essential goals for the admissions effort at any institution of higher education. Horse Lover's Day Camp proved valuable as a recruitment tool and a community outreach project while generating \$8,244.00 for the

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