

An Educational Approach to Student Recruitment

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Introduction

As a result of the continued declining enrollment in colleges and schools of agriculture, many schools have initiated active student recruitment programs. Some schools have one or more full-time recruiters for agricultural programs alone. At some schools, faculty may be directly involved in recruiting activities.

Faculty can have a tremendous impact in the area of recruiting (Elliot, 1987). However, they must be genuinely interested and concerned about students. In developing an educational program such as the one described here, faculty can be invaluable in the presentation of programs on current topics on research in the agricultural sciences, thus exposing students to alternatives to traditional agriculture.

Mosley (1987) stated that recruiting programs should not be designed primarily to persuade students to choose agriculture over other majors. Recruiting programs should be developed that make potential students aware of the opportunities in agriculture and to see these as viable options as they make career choices.

Recruiting activities at Clemson University at the time this program was implemented were coordinated by a faculty member who had a 20% administrative appointment in Resident Instruction. The College of Agricultural Sciences Recruiting Committee was composed of one representative from each of the twelve academic departments and was chaired by the Recruiting Coordinator. This committee planned and conducted various recruiting activities and educational programs.

In an effort to educate potential students on the highly technical areas of agricultural sciences and to make them more aware of the exciting career opportunities awaiting graduates, a program utilizing research and teaching faculty was developed for presentation in high schools. State regulations are very strict about the amount of time students spend on outside class activities. Because this program is an educational one, it is well received by the biology, chemistry and physics teachers and it qualifies as a class activity.

Program Procedure

Programs may be presented at any size high school. For smaller schools, a regional program can be held with participating schools being responsible for transportation of students to the host high school. Contacts are made with a teacher or guidance counselor. The contact person(s) then selects the classes (usually honors biology, chemistry and physics) so that approximately 200 students participate in each presentation. Students are assigned to one of four

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groups, convene for a short introduction, and are presented a schedule with four concurrent sessions: three lectures and a display area focusing on career opportunities (Fig. 1). Each group then attends the four programs on a rotating basis so that at any given time, three groups will be attending lectures and one group will be visiting the displays. At the completion of the scheduled rotation all groups assemble for a summary and question period.

Lectures

Three topics are selected and approved by the contact teacher and the recruiting coordinator. Topics are selected that represent different areas in Agricultural Sciences and also ones that might bridge several departments. Research areas are usually basic and biotechnically oriented. The speaker gives as much background as necessary as an introduction and to get the students to a level of understanding. The following three lectures were presented at one of the programs:

1. "Embryo Manipulations" by a reproductive physiologist in Dairy Science
2. "Non-contact Measurements" by several faculty in Agricultural Engineering
3. "Nucleic Acid Separation" by a biochemist in Food Science

Other topics that have been used in similar programs include:
"Tissue Culture and Plant Biotechnology" by a geneticist in Agronomy
"The Shark as a Model in Agricultural Research" by a biochemist in Dairy Science
"Insect Behavior" by an insect physiologist in Entomology

Departmental Displays

Each of the participating departments sends representatives with a display to emphasize career opportunities for their graduates. At least one faculty representative as well as graduate and/or undergraduate students are available to visit with the students during their time in this area. The displays must be attractive and eye-catching. The most effective displays at our programs have been by Dairy Science (embryos under a microscope), Entomology (large cockroach collection) and Agricultural Engineering (computer-generated imaging of the students). These displays drew more students and therefore, the representatives had a chance to talk more about careers as well as the display.

To obtain names and addresses for future contacts, a door prize was presented to one student in each group during the time that group visited the display area. Door prizes consisted of caps, T-shirts or sweatshirts donated by participating departments. In order to be eligible for a door prize, students completed a card with spaces for name, address,

telephone number, high school and date of graduation. In addition, the 17 degree programs were listed so the students could request additional information about one or more programs.

Results and Discussion

Almost every student attending the program completed the information cards. If a student did not request information about any program, his/her card was discarded. Others were distributed to the respective departments for further contact. Out of approximately 650 students attending three programs recently, 197 requested information on only one program; 75 requested information on two programs; and 100 requested information on three or more programs. Therefore, we have 372 contacts from just one school district (out of 92) in South Carolina. Similar results were seen with programs at other schools.

A study by Daniels et al. (1987) indicated that many high school science teachers in South Carolina do not relate agricultural research with scientific research. The authors attributed this belief to a lack of knowledge on the part of the teachers. In planning a program, some teachers are skeptical of the academic value of the programs. They have been misled by recruiters from other schools and academic areas

Figure 1. Sample Schedule for an Agricultural Sciences Program in a Public High School.

Afternoon Schedule				
12:30-12:40	Assembly - All Groups, A-V Room			
	Meeting Rooms			
	Room 404	Room 410	A-V Room	Library
12:45-1:10	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
1:15-1:40	4	1	2	3
1:45-2:10	3	4	1	2
2:15-2:40	2	3	4	1
2:45-3:00	All Groups, A-V Room			
	Summary - Questions from students			

and are turned off by the idea of a program strictly oriented toward recruiting. However, by making the major thrust of the program an educational one, the teachers become more receptive. Many have commented afterwards on the educational quality of the programs. They are able to easily coordinate the program topics with classroom studies.

The program requires a high level of cooperation from the contact person(s) in the school district. It is time-consuming to plan and expensive to present; therefore, only a limited number of programs are planned for each school year and follow-up programs to date have not been used. Fifteen to 25 teaching and research faculty are taken away from their labs and classrooms for at least two days. However, the faculty in the College of Agricultural Sciences at Clemson are aware of the importance of such a program and willingly participate. Because the programs are presented to students in grades 9-12, we now have contacts (potential students) for the next several years.

Freshman enrollment in the College of Agricultural Sciences was 100% greater in 1988 than in 1987. Enrollment levels for the fall of 1989 were an additional 15% greater

than for 1988. Because these educational programs have been only a part of the recruiting activities of the College of Agricultural Sciences, we are not sure how much of the increase in enrollment can be attributed to these programs. However, we are convinced that they have changed many common misconceptions high school students have about agriculture and careers in the agricultural sciences.

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