

Factors Influencing College Choice of Agriculture Students College-Wide
Compared with Students Majoring in Agricultural Education

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Abstract

Colleges of Agriculture traditionally spend a great deal of time, energy, and financial resources in their marketing and recruitment programs. Often, these activities are not based on empirical research of the college choice process. Furthermore, as the agricultural education profession continues to struggle with a limited supply of teachers, effective recruitment of students interested in the teaching profession is certainly one way this concern can be addressed.

The purpose of this study was to examine recruitment efforts as they affect the decision-making processes of students admitted to a college of agriculture. Campus visits and printed university publications were the most widely utilized sources of information, while campus visits and conversations with professors were among the most useful sources of information. Differences existed in the level of use of information sources between students college-wide and agricultural education students, but relatively few differences were found in the degree of usefulness of the sources. Relatives who attended the university, parents, and graduates of the university were the most influential people for students college-wide, while agriculture teachers were clearly the most influential group in helping agricultural education majors select a post-secondary educational institution. Examination of degree program characteristics and institutional characteristics revealed that students were most influenced by career opportunities, the academic reputation of the university, preparation for employment, and opportunities after graduation.

Introduction/Theoretical Framework

Colleges of agriculture nationwide experienced a decline in undergraduate student enrollment in 1999 for the first time in the past decade (Goecker, Whatley & Gilmore, 2000). Coupled with the fact that the agricultural industry struggles annually to fill positions with qualified individuals (Goecker, et al., 2000), this decline in enrollment does not bode well for the future of what is touted by some as the nation's most important industry. In many instances, colleges of agriculture are working to increase or revise recruitment efforts to more effectively attract students.

Colleges of agriculture traditionally expend a great deal of time, energy, and financial resources in their marketing and recruitment programs. Often, these activities are not based on empirical research of the college choice process. Many institutions are still unsure which marketing and recruitment processes are effective (DesJardins, Dundar, & Hendel, 1999). As a result, research is warranted to determine those strategies that are most effective in assisting students in the decision-making process.

Several studies have been conducted in efforts to identify student characteristics that influence college choice (Kealy & Rockel, 1987; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Paulsen, 1990; DesJardins, et al., 1999), however, there is still a dearth of information about the factors that influence a student's decision to attend a particular post-secondary educational institution (Weiler, 1994). A limited pool of data also exists pertaining to the specific recruitment practices that impact students' choice of colleges of agriculture. Acknowledging that a student's college choice strongly influences his or her professional career (Hossler, et al., 1989), colleges of agriculture should evaluate strategies to effectively attract students in an effort to continue producing the future professionals needed by the agriculture, food, fiber and natural resource industry.

Previous studies focusing on recruitment issues in colleges of agriculture identified parents as a strong influence in students' decisions regarding post-secondary education (Cole & Thompson, 1999; Scofield, 1995; Taylor & Johnson, 1993). Printed recruitment literature was identified by Scofield (1995), and later by Cole and Thompson (1999) as being helpful in students' decision-making processes. Additional findings by Cole and Fanno (1999) and Scofield (1995) indicated that campus visits were beneficial to students during their selection process. A majority of the previous research was conducted campus-wide focusing on all academic majors.

Few studies have been conducted since the late 1980s to specifically evaluate recruitment efforts in agricultural education at the college/university level. In the most recent supply and demand report for secondary agriculture teachers, Camp (2000) indicated that in 1998, 575 new teachers were needed in the profession. He also noted that 70 teachers were needed but were not available when the school year began, and that 55 programs did not operate due to the lack of a qualified teacher. Effective recruitment of students interested in teaching as a profession is certainly one way this concern can be addressed. Cole and Fanno (1999) suggested that recruitment efforts should provide students with accurate information about majors. Hillison, Camp and Burke (1987) suggested that recruitment in agricultural education should focus on

influential people in the life of the prospect. In one study recently conducted focusing on the recruitment efforts of a post-secondary agricultural education department, Fritz and Sandall (1995) identified scholarships, contact with current students, and contact with faculty as important factors in the final decision of agricultural education prospects.

The theoretical basis for this study has its foundation in Chapman's (1981) work. His model of student college choice suggests that significant persons such as parents, friends, role models, and high school personnel influence students' perceptions of a college. The model further identifies the efforts of the college to communicate with the prospective student as consequential. Chapman's model identifies the fixed college characteristics, such as cost, availability of financial aid, location, and availability of particular academic programs as being particularly meaningful in students' ultimate decisions. The fixed characteristics of the college combined with the influence of significant people, and the college's efforts to communicate with the student have a significant impact on students' expectations of college life at a particular institution, thereby impacting their final choice of institution. Adapted to this study, Chapman's model of student college choice would suggest that obtaining a better understanding of the role of various influential people, the impact of recruitment practices, and the institutional characteristics important to prospective students would enable colleges of agriculture, and departments of agricultural education to more efficiently use their recruiting resources.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine recruitment efforts as they affect the decision-making processes of entering students in the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources at the University of Missouri. To guide the study, the following research objectives were developed:

1. Determine whether matriculants and non-matriculants were different based on admissions criteria, financial need, and resident status.
2. Determine if a difference existed between matriculants and non-matriculants in terms of their use of information sources and their perceived usefulness of those sources.
3. Determine if a difference existed between matriculants college-wide and those in agricultural education in terms of their use of information sources and their perceived usefulness of those sources.
4. Determine if a difference existed between matriculants college-wide and those in agricultural education in terms of the influence of degree program characteristics, institutional characteristics, and selected individuals on their college choice.

Methods/Procedures

The target population for this descriptive study consisted of first time enrollees (matriculants) in the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources at the University of Missouri for the Fall Semester, 2001 ($N = 307$), first time agricultural education enrollees at the

same institution ($N = 32$), and students who were admitted to the College, but chose not to enroll (non-matriculants) ($N = 155$).

An instrument to assess the use and usefulness of recruitment information sources and to examine when students began and finalized their college decisions was developed upon a review of the literature (Cole & Fanno, 1999; DesJardins, et al., 1997; Scofield, 1995; Taylor & Johnson, 1993; Kealy & Rockel, 1987) and drew heavily from an instrument used at Oregon State University by Cole and Thompson (1999). The instrument was reviewed by a panel of experts consisting of college of agriculture admissions personnel and teacher educators for face and content validity. After suggestions by the panel of experts were taken into account, modifications resulted in a 74-item instrument. The instrument was pilot tested with a group of 34 predominantly sophomore students in the college of agriculture who were not involved in the study. Data from the pilot test was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. A Spearman-Brown Split-half reliability analysis was performed resulting in a reliability of .70 (coefficient alpha). The instrument was modified slightly for applicability to the current situation of non-matriculants.

The matriculating student questionnaire was administered to all students who attended one of sixteen two-day University of Missouri Summer Welcome sessions. A total of 257 usable instruments were collected college-wide, resulting in a response rate of 84%. Responses were gathered from 32 agricultural education majors, a 100% response. The non-matriculant questionnaire was mailed to 151 of the non-matriculating students for whom valid mailing addresses were available. After the initial mailing and follow-up procedures, a total of 82 responses were received, resulting in a 54% response rate.

Results/Findings

To assess objective one, University admissions data, financial need figures, and home state of residence information were collected from the University's Office of Admissions. Evaluation of admissions criteria revealed no practical or significant difference between matriculants and non-matriculants with regard to their high school core GPA, high school class rank, ACT composite score, and university predicted GPA (Table 1).

Table 1. *Admissions Criteria for Matriculants and Non-Matriculants*

Criteria	Matriculants ($n = 257$)		Non-Matriculants ($n = 78$)		<i>t-value</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
High school core GPA	3.61	0.38	3.64	0.40	.67
High School Class Rank	84.6	13.53	85.6	12.51	.61
ACT composite score	26.1	5.11	26.1	3.40	.96
University Predicted GPA	3.00	0.38	3.03	0.42	.55

* $p < .05$

A comparison of financial need information was completed using financial aid information provided by the University financial need database. The financial aid office reported financial need in terms of negative or positive dollar amounts. Students with stronger negative amounts had greater need for financial assistance, while students with positive amounts had less need for financial aid.

The results illustrated that the largest proportion (37%) of the non-matriculant group had a range of financial need from \$-999 to \$+999, compared to 17% of the matriculants in the same need range (Table 2). The largest proportion of matriculating students (36%) did not apply for financial aid, compared to 16% of the non-matriculants in the same need range. A t-test for statistical difference was performed to determine whether the matriculant group's level of financial need was significantly different from the non-matriculant group's need. No significant difference was found for the mean financial needs of the two groups.

Table 2. *Financial Need of Matriculants and Non-Matriculants*

Need ^a	Matriculants (<i>n</i> = 257)		Non-Matriculants (<i>n</i> = 78)	
	<i>f</i>	Percent	<i>f</i>	Percent
\$-10,000 or less	22	8.8	7	9.1
\$-1,000 to \$-9,999	16	6.4	6	7.7
\$-999 to \$+999	43	16.8	29	37.2
\$+1,000 to \$+9,999	53	21.2	15	19.4
\$+10,000 or greater	27	10.8	8	10.3
Did Not Apply for Financial Aid	96	36.0	13	16.3
Total	257	100.0	78	100.0

^aNote. Negative amounts reflect greater need, positive amounts reflect less need for financial aid. *M* for matriculants = \$-898, *M* for non-matriculants = \$-128 (t-value = -.363, df = 224, *p* = .72)

Analysis of resident status revealed that 93% of the matriculating students were in-state residents compared to 72% of the non-matriculants (Table 3). Twenty one percent of the non-matriculating students were residents of bordering states, in contrast with 4% of the matriculants.

Table 3. *Resident Status of Matriculants and Non-Matriculants*

State of Residence	Matriculants (<i>n</i> = 257)		Non-Matriculants (<i>n</i> = 78)	
	<i>f</i>	Percent	<i>f</i>	Percent
In-state Resident	239	93.0	56	71.8
Resident of Bordering State	11	4.3	16	20.8
Resident of Non-bordering State	7	2.7	6	7.8
Total	257	100.0	78	100.0

The second objective had two intents. The first was to determine whether a difference existed between matriculants and non-matriculants in terms of the sources of information they used most frequently in selecting their postsecondary institution. Secondly, to determine whether a difference existed between matriculants and non-matriculants in terms of the level of usefulness of the sources of information. Matriculants and non-matriculants were asked to indicate whether they had or had not used each of the seventeen sources of information listed on the questionnaire, they were then asked to indicate the level of usefulness they found for each source they had used.

“Visits to campus,” “university publications,” and “letters mailed from university admissions representatives” were the three most commonly used sources of information for both matriculants and non-matriculants (Table 4). Ten of the 13 sources of information were used more frequently by matriculants than by non-matriculants. Non-matriculants used “university publications,” and “letters and/or information mailed by both admissions representatives” and “college representatives” more frequently than matriculating students. The source of information used least often by both groups of students was the college website.

In comparison to the other sources of information, matriculating students identified the following sources as the most useful: “participation in student activity events on campus,” “personal conversation with a professor,” “participation in an on-campus recruitment program,” and “visit to campus.” The least useful items relative to the total group of information sources for matriculants were “university information on a website,” “letter and/or information mailed from a college representative,” and “university publications.”

Non-matriculants identified “visit to campus,” “degree program information on a website,” “college information on a website,” and “university information on a website” as the most useful sources of information. The least useful sources of information for the non-matriculant group included “letter and/or information mailed from a college representative,” “letter and/or information mailed from a university admissions representative,” and “personal conversation with a university admissions representative.”

Regarding the usefulness of information, the most notable differences were on the following sources of information: “participation in student activity events on campus” (matriculant $M = 4.39$, non-matriculant $M = 3.64$), “participation in an on-campus recruitment program” (matriculant $M = 4.33$, non-matriculant $M = 3.93$), and “personal conversation with a university admissions representative” (matriculant $M = 4.01$, non-matriculant $M = 3.39$). Ten of the thirteen sources of information were rated more useful by matriculants than non-matriculants. The three sources of information rated slightly more useful by non-matriculants pertained to accessing information on a website.

Table 4. *Information Source Use and Usefulness*

Source of Information	Matriculants (<i>n</i> = 257)			Non-Matriculants (<i>n</i> = 78)		
	Used ^a Percent	Usefulness ^b <i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Used ^a Percent	Usefulness ^b <i>M</i> (rank)	<i>SD</i>
1. Participation in student activity events on campus	39.5	4.39	0.80	33.3	3.64 (8)	1.22
2. Personal conversation with a professor	29.5	4.39	0.95	12.8	3.90 (7)	0.74
3. Participation in an on-campus recruitment program	29.5	4.34	0.73	19.2	3.93 (5)	0.96
4. Visit to campus	75.2	4.30	0.79	59.0	4.26 (1)	0.88
5. Personal conversation with a college representative	33.3	4.22	0.79	19.2	3.93 (5)	0.80
6. Personal conversation with a university admission representative	36.0	4.01	0.87	24.4	3.39 (13)	0.98
6. Degree program information on a website	38.8	4.01	0.90	23.1	4.11 (2)	0.76
8. College information on a website	24.4	3.93	0.95	11.5	4.00 (3)	0.87
8. Letter/information mailed from a university admission representative	55.4	3.93	0.90	73.1	3.43 (12)	0.89
10. Letter and/or information mailed from a professor	27.9	3.89	0.83	26.9	3.57 (9)	1.03
11. University information on a website	46.5	3.87	0.86	34.6	4.00 (3)	0.73
12. Letter and/or information mailed from a college representative	35.3	3.86	0.86	37.2	3.52 (11)	1.05
13. University publications	73.3	3.80	0.86	83.3	3.56 (10)	1.03

^aYes or No

^bScale: 5 = Very Useful ... 1 = Not Useful

The third objective was to determine if a difference existed between sources of information used by students college-wide and those used by prospective agricultural education majors (Table 5). While the degree of usefulness of each source of information was virtually identical for both groups of students, the frequency of use of several sources differed greatly between the two groups. Most notable was participation in student activity events on campus, a source of information reported to be used by 94% of the agricultural education majors compared to 32% of the students college-wide. A relatively larger proportion of the agricultural education majors also reported having conversations with professors and college representatives, participating in on campus recruiting programs, accessing information on the internet, and receiving mailed information from a professor.

Table 5. *Comparison between Students College-wide and Agricultural Education Majors on Information Sources and Usefulness*

Source of Information	College (<i>n</i> = 225)			Agricultural Education (<i>n</i> = 32)		
	Used ^a Percent	Usefulness ^b <i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Used ^a Percent	Usefulness ^b <i>M</i> (rank)	<i>SD</i>
1. Personal conversation with a professor	25.8	4.42	0.79	56.3	4.28 (4)	0.83
2. Participation in an on-campus recruitment program	27.7	4.32	0.68	43.8	4.43 (2)	0.94
3. Visit to campus	74.1	4.30	0.80	87.5	4.32 (3)	0.72
4. Participation in student activity events on campus	32.1	4.25	1.01	93.8	4.70 (1)	0.70
5. Personal conversation with a college representative	30.5	4.25	0.76	56.3	4.11 (5)	0.90
6. Personal conversation with a university admission representative	38.0	4.02	0.87	28.1	3.89 (8)	0.93
6. Degree Program (major) information on a website	37.1	4.01	0.89	53.1	4.00 (6)	0.94
8. College information on a website	21.9	4.00	0.93	43.8	3.71 (11)	0.99
9. Letter and/or information mailed from a professor	24.3	3.98	0.84	56.3	3.61 (12)	0.78
10. Letter/information mailed from a university admission representative	56.8	3.93	0.85	56.3	3.94 (7)	1.21
11. University information on a website	45.8	3.87	0.89	53.1	3.88 (9)	0.70
12. Letter and/or information mailed from a college representative	33.6	3.85	0.82	50.0	3.88 (9)	1.09
13. University publications	72.8	3.85	0.82	81.3	3.50 (13)	1.03

^aYes or No

^bScale: 5 = Very Useful ... 1 = Not Useful

The fourth objective sought to determine if a difference existed between matriculants college-wide and those in agricultural education in terms of the influence of degree program characteristics, institutional characteristics, and selected individuals on their college choice (Table 6). The seven degree program characteristics examined had similar degrees of influence on students college-wide and those majoring in agricultural education. Students college-wide and those in agricultural education identified the availability of career opportunities as the most influential characteristic in their selection of an academic major. The most notable differences between the two groups were the greater influence that facilities had on students college-wide, and the stronger influence that faculty had on students in agricultural education.

Table 6. *Influence Of Degree Program Characteristics*

Characteristic	College (<i>n</i> = 225)		Ag. Education (<i>n</i> = 32)	
	<i>M</i> ^a	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> ^a (rank)	<i>SD</i>
1. Career opportunities available	4.42	0.81	4.74 (1)	0.51
2. Quality and reputation of courses	4.18	1.00	4.38 (3)	0.71
3. Quality of facilities	4.15	0.90	4.09 (5)	0.69
4. Quality and reputation of the faculty	4.12	1.01	4.44 (2)	0.76
5. Quality and reputation of the students	3.70	1.11	4.22 (4)	0.71
6. Size of classes	3.18	1.21	3.47 (6)	0.95
7. Number of students in major	2.95	1.25	3.44 (7)	1.19

^aScale: 5 = Very Influential ... 1 = Not Influential

Table 7 presents findings regarding the influence that characteristics of the institution had on student's college choice. Students college-wide and those in agricultural education were influenced most by the same three characteristics: "academic reputation of the university," "preparation for employment," and "opportunities after graduation." Furthermore, both groups were influenced the least by the same three characteristics: "campus safety and security," "size of classes," and "prominence of university athletic teams." Students in agricultural education were more influenced by "variety of majors offered" than were students college-wide, but were less influenced by distance from home than were students college-wide.

Table 7. *Influence Of Institutional Characteristics*

Characteristic	College (<i>n</i> = 225)		Ag. Education (<i>n</i> = 32)	
	<i>M</i> ^a	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> ^a (rank)	<i>SD</i>
1. Academic reputation of the university	4.36	0.74	4.56 (2)	0.72
2. Preparation for employment	4.25	0.95	4.56 (2)	0.84
3. Opportunities after graduation	4.20	0.99	4.69 (1)	0.64
4. Quality of facilities	4.18	0.85	4.00 (8)	0.92
5. Quality and reputation of the faculty	4.14	0.87	4.38 (4)	0.75
6. Prestige of the university	3.96	0.96	4.13 (5)	1.10
7. Quality and reputation of the students	3.81	1.00	4.03 (7)	0.93
8. Cost	3.75	1.08	3.66 (10)	1.07
9. Variety of majors offered	3.75	1.18	4.09 (6)	1.12
10. Scholarships awarded	3.70	1.27	3.87 (9)	1.18
11. Distance from home	3.53	1.22	3.31 (14)	1.28
12. City in which campus is located	3.47	1.26	3.34 (13)	1.21
13. Availability of other financial aid	3.31	1.29	3.47 (11)	1.29
14. Competitiveness of admission standards	3.27	1.09	3.39 (12)	1.05
15. Campus safety and security	3.08	1.14	3.09 (15)	1.20
16. Size of classes	2.86	1.13	2.75 (16)	1.14
17. Prominence of university athletic teams	2.52	1.31	2.72 (17)	1.33

^aScale: 5 = Very Influential ... 1 = Not Influential

Relatives who attended the university, parents or guardians and graduates of the university had the highest mean influence among students in the college of agriculture (Table 8). Other high school teachers, high school science teachers, and extension youth specialists had the lowest mean levels of influence for prospective students college-wide. Differences did exist between the two groups in this area, the most notable of which was the level of influence of the high school agriculture teacher. Agriculture teachers were rated by students majoring in agricultural education as the most influential individual in the selection of a postsecondary institution. Other noteworthy differences in level of influence for the two student groups included the influence of relatives who attended the university and parents. In ranked comparison of mean influence, relatives were the most influential for students college-wide and had the fifth highest mean for students in agricultural education. Similarly parents, who had the second highest mean influence for students college-wide had the seventh ranked mean for agricultural education students.

Table 8. *Influence Of People In Selection Of University*

	College (<i>n</i> = 257)		Ag. Education (<i>n</i> = 32)	
	<i>M</i> ^a	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> ^a (rank)	<i>SD</i>
1. Relative who attended the university	3.59	1.55	3.52 (5)	1.44
2. Parent or guardian	3.58	1.24	3.32 (7)	1.05
3. Graduate of the university	3.53	1.45	3.86 (2)	1.27
4. Friend in college	3.45	1.33	3.68 (3)	1.25
5. Graduate of the College	3.09	1.58	3.60 (4)	1.44
6. High school agriculture teacher	3.02	1.65	4.41 (1)	0.91
7. Friend in high school	2.93	1.38	3.03 (8)	1.48
8. Current student of the College	2.90	1.52	3.52 (5)	1.42
9. High school guidance counselor	2.73	1.32	2.69 (11)	1.31
10. Other high school teacher	2.48	1.27	2.79 (9)	1.32
11. High school science teacher	2.41	1.27	2.37 (12)	1.47
12. Extension youth specialist	1.83	1.07	2.79 (9)	1.50

^aScale: 5 = Very Influential ... 1 = Not Influential

Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications

This study assessed the college choice process of students in the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources at the University of Missouri and students majoring in agricultural education through the lens of the external college choice influences identified in Chapman's (1981) model. Specifically, student's personal backgrounds, the influence of the college's effort to communicate with students, the role of significant persons in the choice process, and the degree program and institutional characteristics were examined.

Matriculating and non-matriculating students backgrounds were found to be very similar in terms of level of academic aptitude, level of financial need, and resident status. As a whole, matriculating and non-matriculating students were found to value all sources of information they used related to their institution of interest. This study identified thirteen potential sources students might access to gather information about a college of agriculture. Students who used

the sources rated all thirteen with a mean of 3.5 or higher on a five-point scale of usefulness with five being very useful. Only four of the sources were reported to be used by fewer than 30% of the matriculating students compared to six sources used by fewer than 30% of the non-matriculants. Conversely however, only three sources were utilized by more than 50% of the two groups of prospective students.

Campus visits were very useful to students in making the selection of an institution. Not only did three-fourths of the matriculating students report having made a campus visit, but this item was also one of the most useful information sources for all students entering the college. These findings were consistent with those of Cole and Fanno (1999) and Scofield (1995). Additionally, the sources of information that would require students to be on campus – participation in a student activity event on campus, and participation in an on-campus recruitment program were equally useful. Interestingly, non-matriculating students heavily used the campus visit as well, and identified campus visits as the most useful source for their college decisions. Additional research examining the characteristics they found to be unfavorable would allow recruitment coordinators to tailor campus visits to more closely fit student needs.

While campus visits were already viewed as effective by the students who take advantage of them, the fact that so many students make campus visits leads one to believe that more could potentially be done to make them more effective. For instance, while 74% of the students reported having made a campus visit, only 26% claim to have had a personal conversation with a professor. Those students who reported having a conversation with a professor indicated that the conversation had a high degree of usefulness in their choice process. Taking both of these factors into consideration might raise the question, how much more meaningful would campus visits be if students were more strongly encouraged to visit with professors while on campus?

Another potential avenue for recruitment expansion is to increase college and departmental visibility during student activity events on campus. Thirty-two percent of the students who attended Summer Welcome reported having been involved in such events. While students do not attend such events specifically to gather information about a particular college or institution, this item was viewed by students college-wide and those in agricultural education as a very useful source of information. Do the department and college recruitment coordinators recognize this fact? Are department and college leaders doing all they can to increase their visibility at these events. Cole and Thompson (1999) identified that friendliness of faculty and positive first contacts with university personnel were crucial in effectively recruiting students. Taking these findings into consideration, student activities on campus may provide the ideal opportunity to make positive and friendly contacts with talented prospective students.

Understandably, the research conducted in this area during the mid 1980s did not examine the importance of the World Wide Web in recruitment efforts. Clearly, students today see the Internet as a valuable information source. Nearly half of the students surveyed reported gathering university information from the Internet. Non-matriculating students found information available on the Internet to be three of the four most useful sources of information. The concern raised by these results pertains not only to the attractiveness and navigation ease of departmental web sites, but also to the lack of personal contact with students who rely solely on Internet based information. Academic departments and the College administrators should

consider using the Internet to promote personal visits to campus and conversations with faculty members.

The role of influential people in the college selection process has been extensively addressed in prior research. Family members are consistently identified as having a high degree of influence on student's college choice (Cole & Thompson, 1999; Scofield, 1995; Taylor & Johnson, 1993). Findings from this study were no different. Relatives who attended the university, and parents or guardians, along with graduates of the university were the three most influential groups of people for students college-wide. These findings imply that direct contact by colleges and departments with parents and graduates may prove beneficial to students in the information gathering stage of their choice process, as was suggested by Hillison, Camp, and Burke (1987).

Chapman's (1981) model identified characteristics of the institution to be influential in students' college selections. This study supports this notion for students college-wide and those in agricultural education. Both groups valued the professional opportunities that would be afforded them with a degree from the institution of interest. Examination of both degree program characteristics and broader institutional characteristics revealed that students were most influenced by career opportunities, the academic reputation of the university, preparation for employment, and opportunities after graduation. The resulting recommendation is that these characteristics should be highlighted during recruitment activities and in promotional materials as they tend to strongly influence students' decisions.

The current study also attempted to determine if entering agricultural education majors were different from the college-wide populous in their information needs. While the findings for this group are largely consistent with those for the larger group of entering students, the following items are noteworthy exceptions. Nearly all students entering agricultural education had participated in student activity events on campus and found them to very useful in their decision process. One can infer that the role of the state FFA convention and career development events hosted on the campus of interest is extremely important to the students who elect to enroll in agricultural education.

Furthermore, proportionally twice as many agricultural education majors reported having personal conversations with a professor and receiving mailed information from a professor. The recruitment efforts of this department of agricultural education apparently impact students' selection of an academic major. Other academic programs college-wide should examine their own approaches to recruitment and determine whether they could implement activities following the agricultural education department's recruitment model.

The increased level of influence of high school agriculture teachers for agricultural education majors might be an anticipated difference from the college-wide population. What is interesting however is that high school agriculture teachers were drastically more influential in the selection of an institution than any other people for this group of students. These findings should be further examined on a larger scale and made available to high school agriculture teachers to help them realize the important role they play in student's selection of agricultural education as a major.

This study closely examined the recruitment practices impacting the college choice processes of students who chose to attend the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources at the University of Missouri. This project was undertaken in part to assist the College in making decisions regarding future recruitment activities, and efficient use of recruitment resources. Additional research is warranted that seeks to better understand the impact that recruitment practices had on students who chose not to attend after participating in recruitment activities. A closer examination of the use and usefulness of information sources for students who found a better fit with another institution could make future recruitment decisions even more meaningful.

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Factors Influencing College Choice of Agriculture Students College-Wide Compared with Students Majoring in Agricultural Education

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I would like to congratulate the authors on setting the stage for the reader by establishing the pressing need for this research. The problem is clearly defined and the literature review builds the necessary framework for the rest of the paper. The purpose of the study was to examine recruitment efforts of prospective students who chose to come to the University of Missouri compared with those who did not. The objectives clearly flowed from the purpose statement by examining differences based upon demographic variables, use and usefulness of sources of information, and choice of major.

The descriptive study used a reliable instrument for data collection, a convenience sampling technique during the summer orientation program, and a mailed questionnaire to non-matriculating students. Response rates were appropriate for descriptive statistics. The results were reported through narrative description and 8 data tables: Admissions Criteria, Financial Need, Resident Status, Information Source Use and Usefulness, Comparison College-Wide and Agricultural Education Majors, Influence of Degree Characteristics, Influence of Institutional Characteristics, and Influence of People. I particularly found the largest proportion of non-matriculating students having financial needs +/- \$999 to be interesting. Although there were no significant differences for the mean financial needs of the two groups, my thoughts drifted to the study by Fritz and Sandall (1995) in identifying *scholarships* as a factor in students' decisions. Coupled with the data reported in Table 3 that more non-matriculating students were from bordering states, additional expenses in out of state tuition could be impacting the choice to attend another institution. Were the non-matriculants asked where (or if) they were going to college? If so, was it closer to home, in state, less expensive, etc.?

I also found the information about the college website being used least very interesting and wanted to know *why*. Yet the non-matriculants found the website information more *useful*. Could this be due to the bordering state issue, with these students more frequently web searching for college information themselves rather than putting value on impersonal "form" letters received by the college or program?

I found the data about participation in a student activity event on campus and interactions with professors to be useful, particularly in regards to the agricultural education department. Our departments are typically more student-centered or friendly and the personal attention given to students translates into matriculation. The influence of agricultural science teachers is important. I was also curious why the ranks were only reported on the non-matriculants and agricultural education majors?

The conclusions and recommendations were right on target. It is important to note that campus visits were the most useful source for college decisions; so do we infer that non-matriculating students are choosing to go some place else based upon that visit as well? Your recommendations for improvements during on-campus visits are very important. I also wondered if the non-matriculants who were out of state could not afford the expense in time and money to travel to campus. Could the college website provide a "virtual tour" and features such as "ask a prof" through email, chat, or threads to provide interaction without a visit?