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Lessons Learned in Recruiting Minorities into Food and Agribusiness Industries

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess the attitudes of high school students of the millennial generation towards academic experiences and career exploration in agribusiness using an 1890 land-grant summer residential program as a case study. The objectives were as follow: (1) to evaluate the curriculum for a summer residential food and agribusiness industries program and (2) to assess the attitudes of participants in the residential program and their plans to explore careers in food and agribusiness industries.

Data were obtained from surveys issued to participants in the Food and Agribusiness Industries Summer Program during the summers of 2009 to 2011. The Likert method was used and has been widely utilized in evaluating the ‘intensity of feelings.’ Objective (1) involved the development of a curriculum which focused on five major competency areas [(#1) interpersonal characteristics, (#2) communication skills, (#3) business and economics, (#4) technical skills, and (#5) computer, quantitative, and management information] sought in new hires and future agribusiness leaders as found in Litzenberg & Schneiger (1987) and Boland & Akridge (2004). In

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objective (2), surveys were conducted to assess the attitudes of participants in the residential program and their plans to explore careers in the food and agribusiness industries.

We summarized the findings from the survey as ‘lessons learned’ in utilizing a residential summer program as a recruitment strategy for prospective millennial students into the food and agribusiness industries. These lessons were as follow: (1) include multiple uses of technology in coursework, (2) train faculty on technological advances for classrooms, (3) convert traditional classroom setting into more virtual settings, (4) increase dialogue between agribusiness firms in person and in video/Internet formats, (5) relate technological innovations with agricultural business, (6) connect salaries with actual job titles/descriptions, (7) recruit through parents and/or trusted high school teachers/counselors, (8) nurture students’ interests in agricultural economics (agribusiness) prior to high school, (9) selection of institutions may come first, then majors by prospective students, and (10) selection of major by minority students with higher aptitudes in math, science, and business are more likely to select other traditional fields of study. Although participants’ overall satisfaction and understanding of the program were increased, their attitude towards applying to the university and selecting Agribusiness as a major only increased a ‘little bit, maybe.’

Keywords: agribusiness careers, teaching, recruitment, and retention

References

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