



Kansas State University College of Agriculture Communicating with Prospective Students in Their Comfort Zones

Situation

With 13 degree programs and a national reputation for excellence in agriculture, the Kansas State University College of Agriculture wanted to improve its strategy for reaching prospective students, particularly those who would pursue non-traditional majors such as horticulture, bakery science and food science, and multicultural students.

We identified three critical strategies for the College:

- Increase understanding among all audiences regarding the College's depth and breadth of programming beyond its traditional production agriculture degree programs,
- Find balance between enhancing historically strong programs while continuing to build and expand new programs, and
- Reach students where they are most comfortable and ready to listen.

Approach

Based on the College of Ag's needs and goals, our team outlined a dynamic, multi-year communications plan to enhance recruitment.

The first step was identification and prioritization of target audiences. By focusing

on the highest potential subsets of prospective students (those most likely to enroll), we were able to use communications vehicles that reached prospective students where they lived – which was largely on the internet – while identifying opportunities to engage multicultural students and their families in familiar environments.

We also worked with the College to audit its existing communications vehicles, and facilitated one-on-one and group sessions to develop fresh, clear messages that would resonate with young college-bound students. The message development was especially important as the College has many representative voices including faculty, current students, alumni and university representatives.

Solutions

Developing key messages for the College provided consistency across communications, departments and offices while also creating a better understanding of the College's strengths among faculty, students and prospective students. By implementing emerging, youth-





frequented communications tools, including two Facebook groups and online videos, we were able to connect the College of Ag with students exploring their college options.

Multicultural student outreach was kicked off with an event in Kansas City, Kan., an area of the Kansas City metro that is often neglected by K-State and other large university recruiters. Held on a Sunday afternoon, the event featured representatives from each College of Agriculture department, current students from urban and rural backgrounds and representatives from agricultural businesses. The event, titled “Unexpected Destinations,” demonstrated the range of opportunities available through the College of Agriculture while allowing students and their parents ample one-on-one time with College and University representatives.

Using insightful new messaging and formats, our team helped the College refine its web site content and develop new printed recruitment materials and publications that will truly stand out among the barrage of mailing high school students receive from higher education institutions. In addition, a new parent-focused section of the Web site and a video podcast is under development.

Tracking Results

The College is actively engaged with prospective and current students through the online tools established

under the strategic communications plan. The “Future Students Considering the K-State College of Agriculture” Facebook group currently has more than 300 members with prospective students posting questions about college life for current students to answer on a regular basis while the group for current students serves as a vital communication tool for the College to keep students informed about events, deadlines and College news. The College’s presence on Facebook has also led to the establishment of a K-State Ag Alumni Facebook group adding another opportunity for the College to reconnect with alumni, who are often effective recruiters.

Since the new recruitment campaign has been launched, the new student enrollment in the College has increased by 9.5 percent. In fall 2008, minority student enrollment increased by 26 percent accounting for nearly 8 percent of the total College enrollment and campus visits grew 16 percent. The College has also received several compliments from students, their parents and college and university personnel regarding the creativity and unique nature of the materials.

