

Student Recruitment Strategies for Agricultural Education and Communication

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Introduction

Acknowledgements

Mixed method approach:

- Survey – Current AEC Students
 - Qualtrics
- Group Interviews – Non-AEC Students
 - Conducted on campus
- Timeframe: October/November 2014

AEC Student Survey

Research objectives:

- Investigate Agricultural Education and Communication undergraduate and graduate students' reasons for selecting the AEC major
- Identify students' preferred communication channels to receive information about the AEC major

AEC Student Survey

Methodology:

- Population (n=250) – current AEC undergraduate and graduate students
- Online survey distributed by Qualtrics/email
 - Also announced in 7 AEC classes
- Response rate of 42% (n=105)

AEC Student Survey

Focus:

- Information Search
- Perceptions of AEC Social Media
- Perceptions of AEC Website
- Image and Message Testing

Note: Similarities presented among graduate and undergraduate students, and specializations

Information Search

Highlighted Results:

- 43% (n=99) of students visited their prospective college's website as a first resource
 - Only 15% (n=15) identified this resource as the most effective when deciding to major in AEC
 - Other resources identified as most effective are:
 - AEC alumnus (22%, n=22)
 - Current AEC students (21%, n=21)
 - Current academic teacher/adviser (19%, n=19)
 - Other (20%, n=20)
 - Meeting faculty members, interest in AEC subjects

Table 1							
Students' perceptions of resource effectiveness of helping decide to major in AEC							
	Very Ineffective (1)	Ineffective (2)	Neutral (3)	Effective (4)	Very Effective (5)	Total Responses	Mean
Effectiveness of guidance counselor/community college academic adviser	20	9	25	16	22	92	3.12
Effectiveness of AEC social media in deciding to major in AEC	25	6	46	6	8	91	2.63
Effectiveness of AEC website in helping decide to major in AEC	1	1	20	40	29	91	4.04
Effectiveness of AEC students in helping decide to major in AEC	8	3	28	27	25	91	3.64
Effectiveness of AEC alumni in helping decide to major in AEC	11	4	39	16	21	91	3.35

Information Search

Highlighted Results:

- More than two-thirds (73%, n=63) rated passionate instructors (mean = 4.65) and job opportunities after graduation (mean = 4.64) as very important, followed by:
 - Versatility of specializations offered (mean = 4.55)
 - Personalized instruction and “family” feel (mean = 4.42)
 - Department reputation (mean = 4.38)
 - Small class sizes (mean = 4.06)
 - Personal ties to agriculture (mean = 3.81)
 - Personal ties to FFA and 4-H (mean = 3.14)

Table 2							
Importance of aspects of the AEC Department in deciding to major in AEC							
	Very Unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Neutral (3)	Important (4)	Very Important (5)	Total Responses	Mean
Department reputation	0	2	12	23	49	86	4.38
Versatility of the specializations offered	0	1	4	28	53	86	4.55
Small class sizes	2	6	14	27	37	86	4.06
Personalized instruction/ a “family” feel	1	2	9	22	52	86	4.42
Passionate instructors	0	0	7	16	63	86	4.65
Job opportunities upon graduation	0	0	8	15	63	86	4.64
Personal ties to agriculture	8	9	11	21	37	86	3.81
Personal ties to FFA and 4-H	19	12	17	14	24	86	3.14

Information Search

Highlighted Results:

- Careers in mind include
 - Faculty/research positions*
 - Communication and Media Specialist positions
 - Agricultural Education positions*
 - Extension positions
 - Law policy positions
 - Sales positions

*Popular positions reported among graduate students

Information Search

Highlighted Results:

- Barriers to applying into AEC major
 - Undergraduate students
 - Difficulty in applying or transferring in to AEC
 - Awareness of job opportunities after graduation
 - Graduate students
 - Concerns about future employer perceptions of degree title including “agriculture”
 - Funding considerations
 - Balancing professional employment and academic schedules

Social Media

Table 3

Effectiveness of AEC social media

	Very Ineffective (1)	Ineffective (2)	Neutral (3)	Effective (4)	Very Effective (5)	Total Responses	Mean
Effectiveness of AEC social media in finding out about department events	12	7	32	19	13	83	3.17
Effectiveness of AEC social media in finding out about college-wide events	9	9	38	17	10	83	3.12
Effectiveness of AEC social media in finding out important information including academic dates and course registration information	11	9	31	24	8	83	3.11

Social Media

Highlighted Results:

- Students indicated photos (41%, n=34) were most appealing type of social media post (over infographics, videos, links to articles and news)
- Preferred content:
 - Job opportunities
 - Student and alumni spotlights
 - Upcoming events and deadlines
 - Photos of students and other multimedia
 - Content that highlights how AEC fulfills land grant mission

Website

Highlighted Results:

- Most common frequency of website visits
 - 44% (n=35) visited website on a monthly basis
 - 25% (n=20) visited on a weekly basis
 - 21% (n=17) visited once per semester
- Types of information students search for
 - Course information and syllabi (43%, n=33)
 - Information and events (23% , n=18)
 - Scholarship information (10%, n=8)
 - Department clubs and organizations (1%, n=1)
 - Other (10%, n=8)
 - Ex: academic calendar, student handbook, all of the above, varies

Website

Highlighted Results:

- Important content
 - Course information and syllabi
 - Scholarship information
 - Instructor information

Figure 1: Effectiveness of AEC website in helping participants find what they need

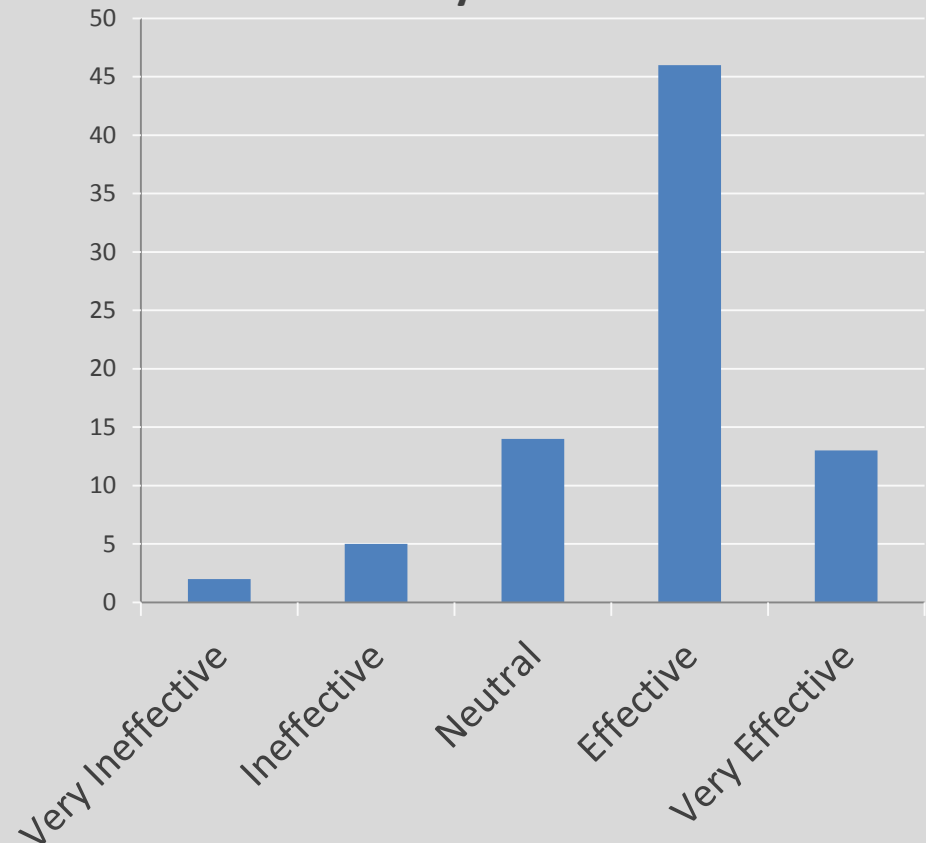


Image Testing

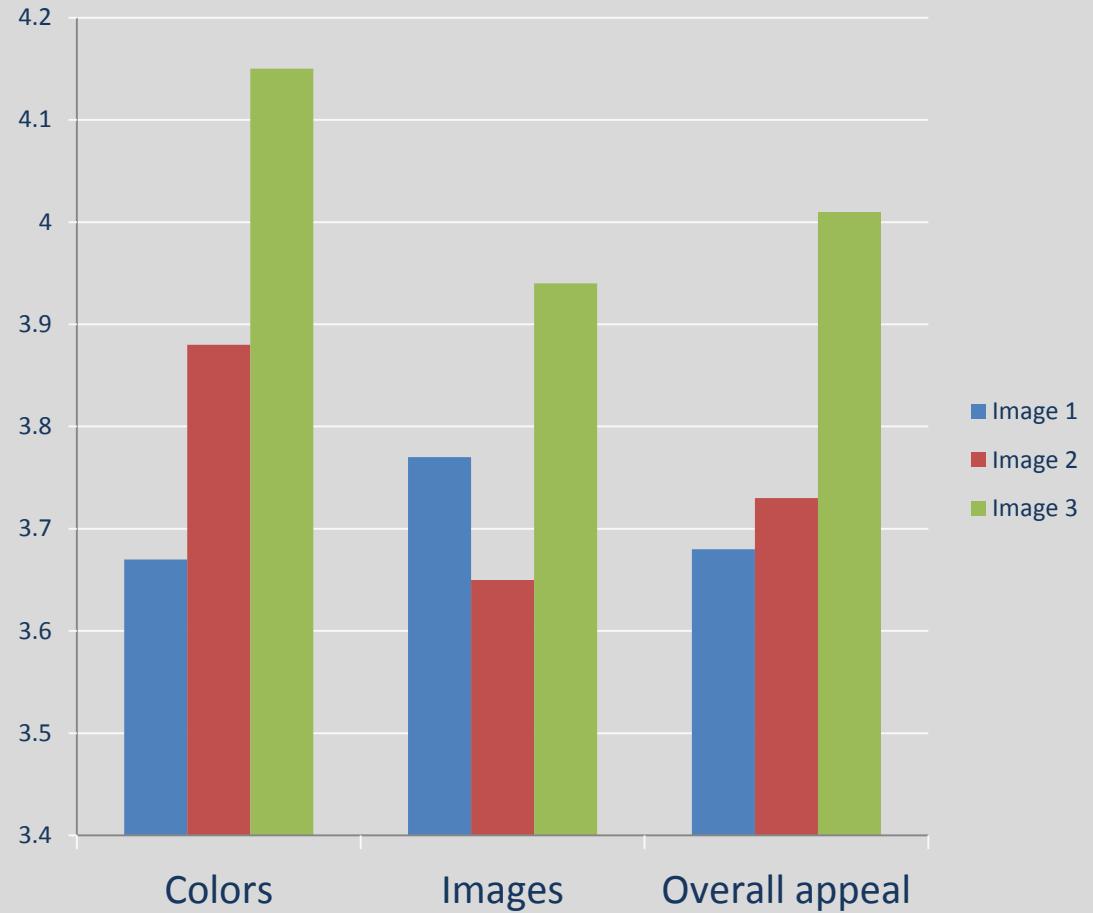
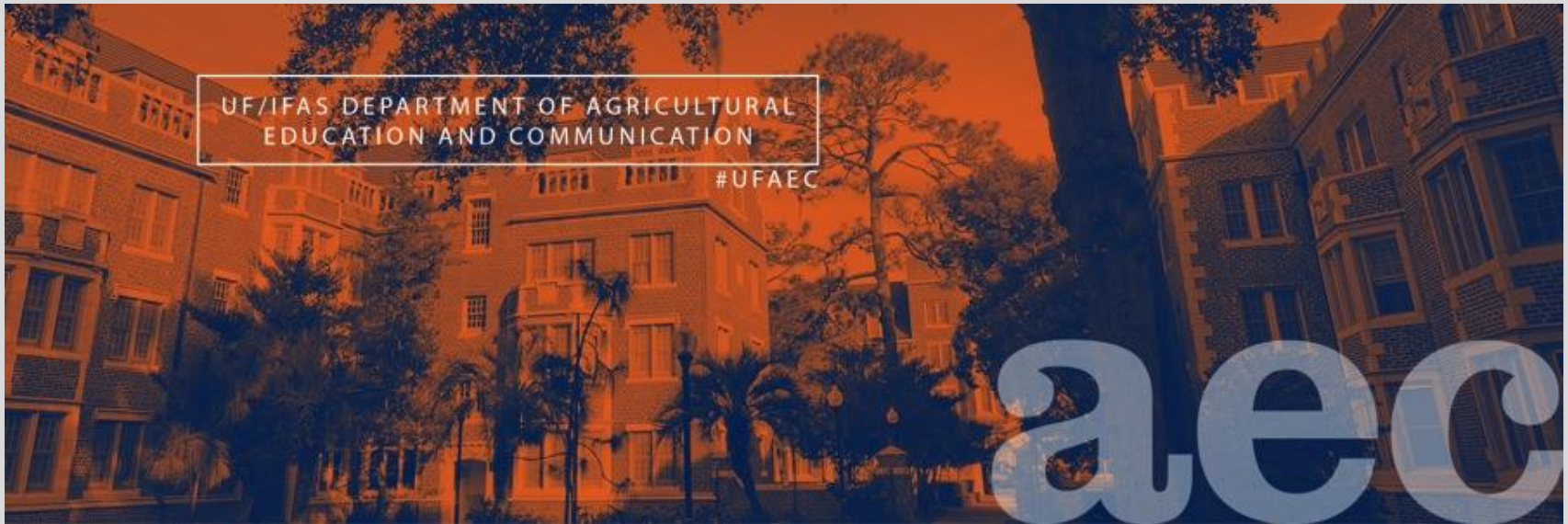


Image Testing



Positive Feedback:

- “Classic” and “traditional” feel of campus buildings
- Orange and blue
- AEC logo

Negative Feedback:

- Image is “unclear”
- Text difficult to read
- Image did not communicate what “AEC was all about”

Image Testing



Positive Feedback:

- Brightness and diversity of photos
- Application of each AEC field
- Personable, friendly

Negative Feedback:

- Lacks ethnic diversity
- Photo on left seems washed out
- AEC logo difficult to read

Image Testing



Positive Feedback:

- Bold, simple, good color scheme
- Easy to understand what “AEC” stands for

Negative Feedback:

- Image seemed “dated” and “simple”
- Did not seem to convey anything “special” about AEC

Logo Testing

Table 5							
Student perceptions of the effectiveness of sample slogans							
	Very Ineffective (1)	Ineffective (2)	Neutral (3)	Effective (4)	Very Effective (5)	Total Responses	Mean
“Personalized. Passionate. Professional.”	3	3	9	26	31	72	4.10
“Connecting People With Agriculture”	0	5	5	35	27	72	4.17

Message Testing

“Personalized. Passionate. Professional.”

Positive Feedback:

- “Alliteration” of the “three Ps”
- “Clear” and “simple”
- Accurately reflects experiences in the department

Negative Feedback:

- Did not seem to be specific to AEC department
- Did not express relationship to agriculture

Message Testing

“Connecting People With Agriculture”

Positive Feedback:

- Appropriately represents the AEC department
- “Directly shows what we do”
- True for all specializations

Negative Feedback:

- Perceived limitations of phrase because it includes “agriculture”
- “We connect more than just people and more than just ag.”

Student-Generated Messages

How would you describe the AEC department?

- Department feels like family
- Provides personal attention
- Application or hands-on approach to learning
- Opportunity to make a difference
- Degree is flexible, major not just about agriculture

Student-Generated Messages

What one AEC course would you recommend to a non-AEC student?

- Agricultural Issues
- Technical writing
- Advanced video production
- Agribusiness management
- Leadership or interpersonal leadership
- Intercultural Communication
- Challenge 2050 courses
- Agricultural education lab
- Writing in ag communication
- Event Planning

Demographics

- Undergraduate Students: (53%, n=37)
 - Male (31%, n=22)
 - Female (69%, n=48)
 - CLD (71%, n=27)
 - TCH (29%, n=11)
- Graduate Students (47%, n=33)
 - Leadership Development (35%, n=25)
 - Agricultural Communication (24%, n=17)
 - Agricultural Education (23%, n=16)
 - Extension Education (18%, n=13)

Opportunities

Information Search

- Continue to strengthen the AEC website as a resource for potential students.
- Empower “gatekeepers,” or people who provide the personal relationship or connection to the department with the information and resources needed to effectively educate potential students about the AEC major.
- Social media could be utilized to showcase the student experience and engagement to potential applicants and future AEC students.

Opportunities

Information Search

- Bridge the connection between potential student and alumni to raise awareness of the opportunities available to graduates.
- Educate potential studies about opportunities with combining AEC majors and minors with other programs.

Opportunities

Social Media

- Consider developing an editorial calendar for AEC social media in order to post content in desired content categories, such as student engagement, relevant articles, upcoming events, etc. The editorial calendar could help prepare for the inclusion of photos in posts, which were identified as desirable.
- Consider providing training and AEC-branded resources for AEC department clubs and organizations, and a policy or guidelines on how AEC organizations should use social media and interact with AEC, CALS, and UF pages. This is an opportunity to coordinate sharing event information.

Opportunities

Website

- Consider building a website editorial calendar in conjunction with the social media editorial calendar.
- If available, consider using a content management system that generates unique links for content to be shared on social media in an effective and visually appealing way.
- Student and alumni spotlights were requested types of content; consider posting in a video or other interactive format.
- The website was overall rated as effective and is used by the students. Consider evaluating how the content on the website can be differentiated from social content and/or how the two medias can support each other.

Opportunities

Logo Testing

- Develop images that clearly communicate what “AEC” means. Students identified that they liked the blue and orange color schemes and clear identification with the University of Florida.

Message Testing

- Consider continuing to test these messages along with other communication design elements, including written and digital materials.

Non-AEC Student Interviews

Research objectives:

- Determine undergraduate students' preferred communication channels pertaining to helping making decisions about a college major

Non-AEC Student Interviews

Methodology:

- Used in-depth group interviews to gather discussion-based qualitative data from undergraduates students
- Interviews were approximately 90 minutes

Non-AEC Student Interviews

Focus:

- Information Search
- Image and Message Testing
- Perceptions of AEC Website
- Perceptions of AEC Social Media

Note: Similarities presented among each of the three interview groups

Non-AEC Student Interviews

Overview of Participants

Group 1

P1: Environmental science major, senior

P2: Wildlife ecology and conservation major, senior

Group 2

P3: Nutrition major, pre-pharmacy

P4: Advertising major, pre-optometry

Group 3

P5: Biology major, switching to communication

P6: Health education and behavior major

P7: Environmental engineering major, 5th year

Information Search

Highlighted Results:

- Several participants noted that they had switched majors while at UF
 - P1: “When I first came here I was a chemistry major...”
 - P2: “I originally started out as a psych major...”
 - P7: “ I thought I knew what I wanted to do and started out in environmental science...”
- Several participants identified using the Internet and then meeting with an adviser to choose a major
 - P6: “I used the Internet ...And then an adviser steered me in the right direction...”
- Several participants identified their parents or roommates as a resource when choosing a major

Information Search

Highlighted Results:

- Several participants were aware of the AEC major
 - P2: “I’m in my second class in AEC, so I knew about the major, but I don’t really know anything it has to do with.”
 - P4: “I honestly did not know there was a specific major like that here.”
 - P1: “I’ve seen the AEC classes when looking at courses on ISIS”
- That awareness is limited
 - P5: “I never really knew much about it”
 - P7: “I knew the major existed, but didn’t really have an idea
 - P3: “I don’t really know much because I haven’t taken any of the classes and I’m not geared to that”

Information Search

Highlighted Results:

- When describing AEC, several participants identified agriculture and working with farmers
 - P1: “Everything that has to do with agriculture, your water, livestock, everything . . . I want to think it’s more how to reach out to farmers and get them more educated about better practices and stuff like that”
 - P6: “Farming”
 - P7: “I think of crops.”

Information Search

Highlighted Results:

- When asked about minors, several participants identified extension and leadership
 - P3: “I think leadership is one”
 - P1: “I’ve definitely heard about extension”
 - P4: “Leadership, but that’s it”
 - P6: “I was aware of leadership because my lecturer mentioned it in 3033.”

Information Search

Highlighted Results:

- Barriers to choosing the AEC major included job placement and lack of awareness of subject area/interest
 - P2: “I wasn’t ever really interested in working in agriculture ... Wouldn’t want to spend my life working on a farm.”
 - P5: “Definitely job placement. I can’t think of any jobs.”
 - P6: “I can’t think of any jobs specific to that field.”
 - P7: “For me, it’s a combination of job placement and financial. If I did take a job in this field I wouldn’t know where I’d live.”

Information Search

Highlighted Results:

- Several participants had previously taken AEC courses.
 - P2:“AEC 3030 and AEC 3033”
 - P3:“I’m in effective oral communication now and I took technical writing last spring”
 - P6:“I’ve taken AEC 3030”
 - P5:“I took 3030”

Image and Message Testing

Undergraduate Recruitment Card:

- Several participants were surprised that the card did not reflect traditional agriculture, and that opportunities within this major existed
 - P1: “I did notice that there aren’t any farms on the front cover. When you think of agricultural education you think of farms. Shows you don’t have to be on a farm somewhere.”
 - P3: “I think this shows opportunity, like on the front with the girl in Washington and the guy filming.”
 - P2: “There’s a lot of options for specializations and minors. The front for me is confusing because the person on the front with the video camera – reminds me of the telecommunication college, not too much with the agricultural part of it.”

Image and Message Testing

Undergraduate Recruitment Card:

- Several participants liked that the card portrayed the department as personal
 - P3: “I like that it says small class sizes and you receive personalized attention. This is a huge university.”
 - P4: “I just like that it has pictures because I feel like it gives it a more personal touch and to see people enjoying what they’re doing shows that it’s a tight knit program.”

Image and Message Testing

Undergraduate Recruitment Card:

- Several participants identified that they would prefer more context to what “AEC” means
 - P2: “I don’t like that you can’t actually see what the major is. You see the initials, but you have to read to see the name of the major.”
 - P6: “The logo in the corner could be more drawing and could provide more context to what AEC means”
 - P7: “The pictures don’t mean much. If AEC were trying to recruit me, I would want to see a logo, college, and other information.”

Image and Message Testing

Graduate Recruitment Card:

- Several participants identified that they liked the specializations offered
 - P1: “There are a lot of specializations included, which are really overlooked. It’s cool to have that information on there.”
 - P5: “It’s simple but it tells you what you need to know, like that certificates and specializations you can have in the field are highlighted.”
- Several participants also identified that they liked the multimedia aspects of the card
 - P3: “The first thing I noticed was the QR code. A lot of people have smart phones and people can see interactive videos.”
 - P1: “ I like that you can download an app and scan pictures from the front, which goes straight to videos.”

Message Testing

“Personalized. Passionate. Professional.”

Positive Feedback:

- P2:“ I also like the alliteration and that it’s short. I like the professional at the end that you can get a job from this major.”
- P7:“It’s easy to remember.”

Negative Feedback:

- P4:“If you guys were talking about a specific major, we wouldn’t know we’re talking about anything. Anything could be this.”
- P5:“It should be more specific.”

Message Testing

“Connecting People With Agriculture”

Positive Feedback:

- P7: “I like this one better. I like the connecting part.”
- P2: “It shows more of a community feel. It’s not just working with farmers, it’s working with the community to show them how agriculture benefits society”
- P4: I like that it connects more to the AEC topic

Negative Feedback:

- P3: “I feel like if I were to read this, I think of farmers and sustainability, and I think, what careers are there in agriculture really? It seems kind of small.”

Perceptions of AEC Website

- Several participants identified that the website looks easy to navigate and find information
 - P1:“ It looks very easy to navigate.The tabs at the top are appealing versus a search bar.”
 - P4:“I think it’s really well done.”
 - P3:“ I like how right about the slider there are links to student opportunities and a link for prospective students.”
 - P2:“Nothing seems to be hidden from other pages. It’s straightforward.”

Perceptions of AEC Website

- Several participants identified that seeing alumni spotlights/news is important
 - P3: “I think it’s what this person did after they graduated, like look how cool or different what they’re doing is and how different it is as a career.”
 - P4: “I think it provides the seeker more of an assurance that they’re going to do well in the future.:
- Several participants indicated that they would like to see more current students and events
 - P2: “It’s important to see that there’s students being promoted on here showing students in the department get awards and the department cares about its students and show student clubs and events.”

Perceptions of AEC Website

- The photo sliders and clean layout of the site were popular features of the website among participants
 - P2: “I like the sliders because it shows multiple links without taking up too much space.”
 - P1: “I like the pictures in the sliders.”
 - P3: “It’s not too jumped and whatever I’m looking for, I can find it.”
 - P7: “It’s crisp. It’s easy to navigate and there aren’t huge blocks of text.””

Perceptions of AEC Website

- Several participants indicated they would like to see more photos and student engagement
 - P2: “I don’t like how the homepage shows a faculty spotlight. They’re not the target of this website. I feel like students should be the target and have more student spotlights.”
 - P3: “If it doesn’t have a face [photo], I would skim right over it because I don’t know who the person is.”
 - P4: “When I saw the faculty spotlight, I didn’t know it was there. I think a picture would give it a more esteemed touch or make me want to see them.”

Perceptions of AEC Social Media

- Several participants indicated they use social media to keep up with friends and learn about events
 - P2: “I use social media to keep up with my friends and to follow things that are of interest to me. You can see the history of old posts that you can’t see in emails.”
 - P1: “I guess it would be to keep up not only with my friends but things like this. I use it a lot for club meetings and stuff. Emails are overwhelming.”
 - P6: “Besides my friends, I use it for updates and following organizations, as well as to get invitations to events.”

Perceptions of AEC Social Media

- Several participants identified preferring photos and truncated posts or headlines on social media
 - P1: “Pictures to me are most appealing. I tend to not play videos because of sound.”
 - P2: “ I like photos because they’re easy to use.”
 - P3: “Articles and videos, and videos can be really powerful in a 2 or 3 minute thing.”
 - P5: “I like photos that are edited to have some sort of information on them. I don’t always have time to stop and look at a video or play it out loud.”
 - P7: “I like photos.”

Perceptions of AEC Social Media

- Several participants indicated they were most likely to share something funny or that related to their followers on social media.
 - P2: “I share things I’m interested in that my friends would find interesting.”
 - P3: “I post things that are relatable, or if it has an emotional thing.”
 - P7: “Whether it’s funny or not.”
 - P6: “For me, it’s if it’s funny or something my followers would want to see”

Perceptions of AEC Social Media

- Hashtag use varied between participants and social media platform
 - P2: “I sometimes use them on Instagram, but I don’t have Twitter and I don’t use them on Facebook.”
 - P3: “I’m not a huge hashtagger on Instagram. I don’t do it on Facebook. Some people go hashtag crazy.”
 - P6: “I use them on Instagram, but not on Facebook and I don’t have Twitter.”

Perceptions of AEC Social Media

AEC Facebook Page

- Participants indicated that they did not like the Century Tower header and QR code profile picture
 - P2: “It seems very impersonal to me. The cover photo is just buildings and the profile picture is just a QR code. I see that it just talks about UF, but that doesn’t have much to do with the actual department.”
 - P5: “I think the header and profile picture are kind of clashy. I don’t like the code thing. It’s distracting.”
 - P7: “Why is the profile picture a bar code or scan code? I would choose a different photo.”

Perceptions of AEC Social Media

AEC Facebook Page

- Participants indicated that they liked that the page was frequently updated
 - P4: “I like that it tries to be updated and intrigues you more.”
 - P2: “I like that there’s an update on what people in the major are doing or should be doing.”
 - P7: “It looks like there’s current events.”

Perceptions of AEC Social Media

AEC Twitter Page

- Several participants liked the content on the page, but were not active Twitter users
 - P3: “I don’t have Twitter, but I wish I did now. There’s so much going on here. It’s very informative.”
 - P7: “For a person like me [who doesn’t have Twitter], how do I find this information? All of the social stuff is on Twitter and I wouldn’t see it.”
 - P4: “This makes me want to use Twitter more. It’s very concise and everything is three lines or less and I like the photo.”

Perceptions of AEC Social Media

AEC Twitter Page

- Several participants indicated that they would like to see more posts that are about or include students
 - P1: “As far as the timeline, we’ve got, there’s one picture of the students. I think I’d like to see pictures, not links.”
 - P2: “More students show more of what’s going on in the department through photos. I like photos because they show more of the personality of the department and the students within it.”

Opportunities

Information Search

- Almost all of the participants had switched majors at least once. Consider increasing awareness of how AEC minors can compliment different majors among advisers.
- Many participants indicated they were not aware of the career outlook for this major. Consider highlighting student projects and alumni to showcase both job security and opportunities of interest.

Opportunities

Image and Message Testing

- Clearly spell out what “AEC” stands for on promotional and information materials.
- Consider further communications collateral testing. Many participants perceived AEC as focused solely on “traditional” agriculture, and did not understand why other images and messaging were used.
- Capitalize on the personal attention and relationships students receive in the department.
- In terms of a catchphrase, participants seemed to prefer verbiage that had an obvious connection with the department, but were not sure about the meaning of “agriculture.”

Opportunities

Website

- Consider building a website editorial calendar in conjunction with the social media editorial calendar.
- Student and alumni spotlights were requested types of content; consider posting in a video, photo or other interactive format.
- The website was overall perceived as well organized and designed. Continue to use photos and a clean layout.
- Use photos and showcase the “people” of the department.

Opportunities

Social Media

- Consider developing an editorial calendar for AEC social media in order to post content in desired content categories, such as student engagement, relevant articles, upcoming events, etc. The editorial calendar could help prepare for the inclusion of photos in posts, which were identified as desirable.
- Consider providing training and AEC-branded resources for AEC department clubs and organizations, and a policy or guidelines on how AEC organizations should use social media and interact with AEC, CALS, and UF pages. This is an opportunity to coordinate sharing event information.

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION/COLLEGE OF
AGRICULTURAL AND LIFE SCIENCES /INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL
SCIENCES**

FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR'S GUIDE
**FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW- Department of Agricultural Education and
Communication Message/Image Testing**

Location: University of Florida

WELCOME/GROUP PROCESS & PURPOSE (5 minutes)

Moderator reads: Hello and welcome to our focus group session. Thank you for taking time to join our discussion today. My name is Andrea and I will be moderating this session. This is _____ and he/she is my assistant moderator.

You have been invited here today because we are interested in having a general discussion with you about selecting a college major. We are very interested in knowing what you think.

My role here is to ask questions and listen. I won't be participating in the conversation. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Please speak up. Only one person should talk at a time. I'll be asking around 25 questions, and I'll be moving the discussion from one question to the next. Sometimes there is a tendency in these discussions for some people to talk a lot and some people not to say much, but it is important for us to hear from each of you today because you have different experiences. So if one of you is sharing a lot, I may ask you to let others respond. And if you aren't saying much, I may ask for your opinion.

We welcome all opinions and will keep them confidential, so please feel free to say what you think. Additionally, we encourage you all to keep this discussion confidential. However, we cannot guarantee that you all will do so. There is no particular order for the responses, and there are no correct/incorrect answers to any of the questions. This session will be recorded so that we are able to consider your views later. For the sake of clarity, please speak one at a time and be sure to speak loudly and clearly so that our recorders can pick up your comments.

You can see that we have placed name cards on the table in front of you. That is because we will be on a first-name basis, but in our later reports there will not be any names attached to comments. You may be assured of confidentiality.

Our session will last about two hours and we will take a break half way through. If you have your cell phone with you, we would appreciate it if you could turn it off while we are in the discussion.

I hope that everyone will feel comfortable with the process, and will feel free to share their opinions as we proceed. If you did not fill out a waiver when you arrived, please see _____ and complete this form before we begin our discussion. Are there any questions before we begin?

ICEBREAKER/GROUP INTRODUCTIONS (5 minutes)

Let's find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time. Tell us your name and a little about you, including what your major is here at the University of Florida.

Group 1

Participant 1: I'm an environmental science major. I'm a senior and I graduate in May.

Participant 2: I'm a wildlife ecology and conservation major. I'm a senior and I probably will not graduate until next year.

Group 2

Participant 3: I'm pre-pharm, but I'm a nutrition major.

Participant 4: I'm an advertising major, but I'm on the pre-optometry track.

Group 3

Participant 5: I'm a biology major, switching to communication. I'm from Miami.

Participant 6: I'm majoring in health education and behavior, and I'm from Pembroke Pines.

Participant 7: I'm in engineering, in my fifth year, and I'm from Gainesville.

INFORMATION SEARCH (20 minutes)

- What resources did you go to first when choosing a major?
 - *Probes:* Website, social media, an adviser, a friend, etc?

Group 1

Participant 1: When I first came here, I was a chemistry major. My advisor in the CALS department, when I decided to change majors because I wasn't doing so well looked at what I had already taken and looked at what major matched those courses that took up some of the courses that I needed and matched my interests. The environmental science was definitely the first one and all the requirements needed really peaked my interests.

Participant 2: For me, I had multiple majors at UF, but I guess when I decided to switch to WEC, I decided to do it based on my interests and hobbies, rather than what would put me into a career that I would want. I figured that if I had a major that I was interested in then it would lead to a career that I was interested in.

Group 2

Participant 3: I originally started as a psychology major and realized that it wasn't for me. My college roommate my freshman year was a nutrition major and after we talked I thought that was more geared toward what I wanted to learn about and do.

Participant 4: I was a biology major when I arrived and focused on biology because my cousin was an optometrist and that's what he did. I realized I wasn't enjoying my classes and switched over to advertising because I felt like I could relate because I had a video business. So, I'm taking pre-opt prerequisites and majoring in advertising.

Group 3

Participant 6: I used the Internet for potential careers, and then an adviser steered me in the right direction.

Participant 5: I used the Internet and bounced around. I'm still figuring things out.

Participant 7: I thought I understood what I wanted to do and started out in environmental science. I switched to engineering because I wanted something with more math.

- Which resources helped most?

Group 1

Participant 1: Definitely the advisers here on campus, from my other majors, and from future major. I went literally degree shopping and talked to all of the departments that I was looking into for all the different majors and got their opinions and what classes I can use toward this, because I didn't want to take those classes and not use them toward anything, and they were really helpful. And I'm much more of a person to person, I want your opinion, I just want to talk to you face to face kind of thing. That was really helpful.

Participant 2: It's kind of the same for me. I searched on ISIS to see like what classes are offered for the majors or required, but I definitely went to the advisors when I was seriously considering majors, the ones at the University of Florida. And I talked to them about what the majors like, everything about that.

Group 2

Participant 3: I don't think it was one resource in particular. It was a combination of things. I was asking my friends questions about nutrition and then joined a pre-health club where people were taking similar classes, and then I started reading online and talked to the advisor. I got to take the pre-pharm prerequisites and it was still science based, which I liked.

Participant 4: I agree because you can't grab everything from one place. I think the reason I chose advertising with optometry, is because I can balance the creativity with the medical.

Group 3

Participant 7: I never really went to a resource. I talked with my parents and they helped me decide.

Participant 5: I started out with the Internet, and it wasn't much help. My preview adviser helped, but then my parents helped me make the decision about my major.

Participant 6: My mom brought me into her work to shadow an occupational therapist to get in person experience, which confirmed what I wanted to do.

- *Read brief description of what the AEC department is: "The University of Florida's Department of Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC) is among the country's best in developing leaders, educators, and communicators to meet society's challenges in agricultural and life sciences."*
- Were you aware that there was an Agricultural Education and Communication major at UF?

Group 1

Participant 1: I definitely was. I've always seen when looking at like classes on ISIS, the different categories and that was a major category in there where all of my interests, the classes that were offered there were very interesting. I guess I haven't taken one in the particular college and that might be because of core requirements.

Participant 2: I'm in my second class in AEC, so I knew about the major, but I didn't really know anything that the major had to do with.

Group 2

Participant 3: I knew there was some people that I know had a leadership minor or something to do with communication, but I didn't know the full name of it because it's not really my field. I was only aware of the science classes.

Participant 4: I honestly did not know there was a specific major like that here, the only other things I've seen are communication studies or linguistics.

Participant 3: I knew about FYCS and telecomm.

Group 3

Participant 7: Yes, I was.

- What do you currently know about the Agricultural Education and Communication major here at UF?

Group 1

Participant 1: I don't know much, but a few of my professors talk about it in their lectures also as resources for group projects and referring people to talk to them but that's about it.

Participant 2: Same for me. I've taken a couple of classes, but I haven't really heard much about what career paths people who are in this major go down once they get a degree in this major.

Group 2

Participant 3: I don't really know much because I haven't taken any of the classes and I'm not geared to that. I have taken the writing or public speaking stuff because of the CALS requirement. I figured more people were more leadership driven or learning how to do presentations.

Participant 4: I feel that advertising touches on brand awareness and this particular major is not aware to other people until they're drawn into it for some reason.

Participant 3: Most people only know about the "big" majors like biology or anthropology and until I did research, I had no idea how many majors or minors there were.

Group 3

Participant 6: There was a student in my AEC 3030C lab that is in CALS, and both speeches had something to do with that. They were interested in growing crops and talked about mistreatment of animals.

Participant 5: I never really knew much about it.

Participant 7: I knew the major existed, but didn't really have an idea.

- What comes to mind when you think of Agricultural Education and Communication

Group 1

Participant 1: Definitely natural resources, plant growth, anything crop wise, like agricultural quality, mostly natural resources, I guess that's mostly where my interest is. But that's a huge part of it. And understanding the chemical processes and everything that you do with the agriculture, the, your water, livestock, everything. And communications, I want to think is more, like, I don't know really. I don't know, how to reach out to farmers and get them more educated about BMPs and better practices and stuff like that.

Participant 2: For me, I figure if someone wants to be in this major, they want to become a leader who works with farmers to educate them on new innovations and technologies in the agricultural field. And I guess communicating with them... I don't really know about the communications part, there's communications in every career.

Group 2

No response

Group 3

Participant 6: Farming.

Participant 5: My lecturer who talks about ag.

Participant 5: I think of crops.

- What do you currently know about the minors offered in Agricultural Education and Communication?

Group 1

Participant 1: I do not know any minors offered, but I would like to know.

Participant 2: I don't know anything about the minors.

Group 2

No response

Group 3

No response.

- *Probes:* Are you aware of these minors—ag communications, leadership, extension education?

Group 1

Participant 1: I've definitely heard about extension.

Participant 2: I heard about leadership development. I considered it, but I'm too far behind in my college career to pick up a minor.

Group 2

Participant 3: I think leadership is one.

Participant 4: Leadership, but that's it.

Participant 3: I didn't know about extension.

Participant 4: Is extension like a research opportunity with professors?

Group 3

Participant 6: I was aware of leadership because my lecturer mentioned it in 3033.

Participant 5: I was aware.

Participant 7: I wasn't.

- What, if anything, do you see as being barriers to choosing to major in Agricultural Education and Communication?
 - Probes: Job placement upon graduation, financial reasons, interests, etc?

Group 1

Participant 1: I feel like a lot of people take agriculture for granted, agricultural things, they think it's not anything big. I've taken enough classes to know that we wouldn't be in this state of development if it weren't for agriculture in this country. So, I think a lot of people don't realize that whatsoever and if people did they would give it more respect.

Participant 2: For me I guess I didn't know much about the major, so I'm not going to go into a major blindly. I guess I could have researched more, but I haven't. Also, I wasn't ever really interested in working in agriculture. I guess I wouldn't want to spend my life working on a farm or with farmers.

Group 2

Participant 3: I would say the job market. I feel like even with pharmacy there is a surplus of people and they can't find jobs. I feel like the job market across the board for any major is hard to find a job after graduation.

Participant 4: I agree and most undergraduates I've talked to the most important thing is financial stability. I feel like not being well known is why people would not know about this particular major.

Participant 3: If you're in a bio major, you don't have to be a biologist, you can apply to a lot of pre-professional tracks. But they may not know what to do with a smaller major. Even my friend who is in anthropology doesn't want to be an anthropologist.

Group 3

Participant 5: Definitely job placement. I can't off of the top of my head think of any jobs, probably because I haven't researched it.

Participant 6: I can't think of any specific jobs in that field that come to mind.

Participant 7: For me it's a combination of job placement and financial, and if I did take a job in this field I wouldn't know where I would live.

- Have you ever taken any courses in Agricultural Education and Communication?
 - *Probes:* AEC3030 Effective Oral Communication, AEC3033 Research and Technical Writing, AEC3073 Intercultural Communication, AEC4465 Global Leadership, AEC3414 Leadership Development, AEC3413 Interpersonal Leadership, AEC4434 Leadership in Groups and Teams?

Group 1

Participant 1: I'm trying to think. I'm in ag and environmental quality right now. Is that one? I think that's ALS. I'm also in the Challenge 2050 class.

Participant 2: AEC 3030 and AEC 3033.

Group 2

Participant 3: I'm in effective oral communication now and I took technical writing last spring.

Participant 4: I haven't taken any and wasn't aware of them.

Group 3

Participant 6: I've taken AEC 3030.

Participant 5: I took 3030.

Participant 7: I might have taken 3030.

MESSAGE/IMAGE TESTING (20 minutes)

- *Pass out new AEC square cards for **undergraduate** students.*
- You've all been given a copy of a promotional card with information regarding AEC. Take a minute to look it over and then we will discuss it.
 - Looking at the card, how easy is the information to read?

Group 1

Participant 1: I think it's very easy.

Participant 2: It's not difficult by any means.

Group 2

Participant 3: I think it's easy to read.

Participant 4: I believe it's easy to read as well.

Group 3

No response

- Describe what come to mind when you see this card?

Group 1

Participant 1: It definitely has everything that I would be looking for information. That it's personalized, the different minors, specializations. I did notice that there aren't any farms on the front cover. When you think of agricultural education you think of farms. Shows you don't have to be on a farm somewhere.

Participant 2: It gives everything I want to know about the major without being too in depth. Feels inviting for someone who is interested in this field. Small class sizes makes you feel taken care of in this major. There's a lot of options for specializations and minors. The front for me is confusing because the person on the front with the video camera – reminds me of the telecommunication college, not too much with the agricultural part of it.

Group 2

Participant 3: I think it shows opportunity, like on the front with the girl in Washington and the guy filming. It's not just be this major to do teaching or something, it's other things that you can do. They kind of went a little brief into other opportunities you can do with it.

Participant 4: I also agree with that. Looking at this from an ad perspective, they really incorporated aspects from the program into one cohesive card. This made me think of a friend of mine who is a bioengineer and I think she would have minored in this if they knew it was available.

Participant 3: I think a lot of people just don't know about the opportunities. CALS is so much smaller than liberal arts, and I wouldn't know that AEC isn't just farming. I didn't even know we offered this.

Group 3

Participant 7: It's very easy to read.

Participant 6: I think it's wordy and close together. Maybe it could be spaced out a little bit more to make it not seem so congested. The pictured don't really group together to make anything. You just see a guy with a video camera, a girl in DC, and girls with a plant. The AEC is kind of blank and you don't see anything that encompasses agriculture.

Participant 5: I think it draws you in to make you want to know more about the program. I want to know how the girl got to the Capitol or how the guy is with the video camera and how this makes sense for AEC.

Participant 7: It just seems like another card. It doesn't differentiate anything.

- What do you like about this card?

Group 1

Participant 1: I like how they're saying we're personalized, passionate, professional.

Participant 2: I like how it's easy to look at the different categories, specializations, minors, contact. For me if I want to look for more information, I'd obviously go to the contact and that's easy to find.

Group 2

Participant 3: I like how it gives a brief synopsis of what they do, why they offered and who it would appeal to. I like that it says small class sizes and you receive personalized attention. This is a huge university and I feel like in a small class you get to know your classmate and professor more.

Participant 4: I just like the fact that it has pictures because I feel like it gives it a more personal touch and to see people enjoying what they're doing shows that it's a tight knit program.

Participant 3: I think also if people are worried about getting a job, you can see that these students are dressed professionally and are doing something and can find jobs and opportunities.

Participant 4: It showcases networking.

Group 3

Participant 6: It's good quality and seems professionally done. It's on quality paper and you can tell whoever made this has experience in design and layout. It gives you the three Ps: personalized, passionate and professional.

Participant 5: I like that it's concise and that I can stay interested.

Participant 7: I like that there was a description on the back.

- What do you dislike about this card?

Group 1

Participant 1: I'm noticing there's not an actual personal name on the card. I want a person's name and actual email, not a general academic coordinator. Like having their name and email would be better for me.

Participant 2: I don't like that you can't actually see what the major is. You see the initials, but you have to read to see the name of the major. It's in the first sentence, but it's small print.

Group 2

Participant 4: I kind of what to know what they mean by connecting people with agriculture. I read it and I didn't understand. It makes me want to inquire more.

Participant 3: I get that, too. The thing that comes to mind, I don't know.

Group 3

Participant 5: It feels like the picture on the back could be higher quality or crisper.

Participant 6: The logo in the corner could be more drawing and could provide more context to what AEC means.

Participant 7: The pictures don't mean much. If AEC were trying to recruit me, I would want to see a logo, college and other information.

- What information is missing from this card?

Group 1

Participant 1: Definitely the name of the coordinator and needing to spell out Agricultural Education and Communication somewhere.

Participant 2: For me, I guess it would help me to know what careers you can get out of this major, but I don't know if you want to overcomplicate the card because it's just an introduction.

Group 2

Participant 3: I think it's just very brief and its giving an overview. If I got this I would think it's really brief and I know it's a flyer, but I'd have to do more research about the majors and minors and what classes sound interesting.

Participant 4: In a way it is a flyer to inform you and make you inquire, so I guess it is doing its job. I would want it to include more information like a YouTube link and I would like to see videos about what people are doing in this program.

Participant 3: I feel like a lot of people don't know about the specializations and the minors and stuff but if you show a little YouTube thing about the major and internships that would be more informative, too.

Group 3

Participant 6: It doesn't have bold anywhere what AEC is. It should be more broadly labeled so you're not just confused.

Participant 7: I don't know.

- *Pass out new AEC square cards for **graduate** students. "You've all been given a copy of a promotional card with information regarding AEC. Take a minute to look it over and then we will discuss it."*
 - Looking at the card, how easy is the information to read?

Group 1

Participant 1: It's about the same as the other, easy to read, categorized well.

Participant 2: Yes, looks like same exact card, except for graduates.

Group 2

Participant 3: It's still easy to read.

Participant 4: I think it's easy to read, it's just how to understand it.

Group 3

Participant 7: Same as before, pretty easy.

- Describe what come to mind when you see this card?

Group 1

Participant 1: You get graduate program. You think OK, what kind of grad school would I be going into? There are also certificates included, which are really overlooked a lot. It's cool to have that information there. It's good that they give the same categories and format as other card, same format, I like that.

Participant 2: When you look at it, you see older people, which is inviting for people who aren't straight out of undergrad, which would bring in people who want to go back to school after being in careers.

Group 2

Participant 3: The first thing I noticed was the QR code and that's what we were talking about it. A lot of people have smartphones and people can see interactive videos. I also like how on the front people are in professional settings. It looks good to people who are concerned about the job market.

Participant 4: I like the unified format and that the photos are the similar topics to the undergraduate program.

Group 3

Participant 5: I don't know who made the card, but they really want to focus in on something that happens with the major in the Capitol in Washington, and camera use of some sort. If I had both of these cards, I would want to know what is happening that both of these things need to be on both of these cards.

Participant 7: Looks really familiar.

Participant 6: People on the card look a little older.

- What do you like about this card?

Group 1

Participant 1: I like that you can download an app and scan the pictures from the front, which goes straight to videos you can watch, which would be helpful if you want to watch videos and don't have time to sit down and go through the website.

Participant 2: I like that it's simple but tells you everything you need to know. Like that certificates and specializations you can have in the field are highlighted.

Group 2

Participant 3: I didn't know what the undergraduates were doing in the bottom left of the card with the plant stuff. On this card, I can tell what these people are doing. And I like how they look so prepared for the professional world.

Participant 4: I feel like the same emotions as what I saw on the first flyer compared to this one. I like that everyone looks happy in the photos.

Group 3

Participant 7: It's colorful. I like that.

Participant 6: The quality is really, like the other one, high quality. I like that you know who to contact and the different pictures.

Participant 5: Same as the last.

- What do you dislike about this card?

Group 1

Participant 1: It's the same for me, spelling out AEC somewhere on the card.

Participant 2: Comparing the two cards, all of the information on the back side is the same, which makes me wonder if you got an undergrad in this major, how is the graduate degree different? That would be important for me to know.

Group 2

Participant 3: I think this is on the undergraduate thing, and I don't like the rewarding careers in agricultural and natural resources because I don't know what that is or what jobs are available other than in non-profits. What career can you get in agriculture; I don't know if it pays much.

Participant 4: Honestly, aesthetic wise, I wish that the pictures weren't so blurry. To go back on the early question, I like the information about how to use a QR code.

Participant 3: I wouldn't have paid attention to the QR code without the instructions and description.

Group 3

Participant 7: I feel like the text on the back is really general and broad, stuff like, "our faculty work closely with our students to help them achieve their passions." I would hope so. Who wouldn't want to choose a major where professors don't help them.

Participant 5: What's written on the back is almost exactly the same as what's written on the back of the other card. It is a graduate program, so information should be more specific and upper level.

Participant 6: I think that being that it's a graduate program, it should be a little more... show that it's competitive, prestigious, and why students should want to go to this program. What makes it the best?

- What information is missing from this card?

Group 1

Participant 1: Again, there's no actual name for contact for the website or email address.

Participant 2: Just need to show how the graduate program is useful, rather than just the department itself.

Group 2

Participant 3: I don't know if its missing anything because it's a flyer but I think it tells you what you need to know about the specializations and the certificates and a little bit about what they can do for you.

Participant 4: Going in the most concise way, this is a good way to go about it, but I think there needs to be YouTube or Instagram, and showing what these people do in a real format.

Group 3

No response

- *Pass out pieces of paper with AEC slogans/catchphrases "Personalized, passionate, professional" written on it. "You've all been given a piece of paper with a slogan or catchphrase written on it. Take a minute to look it over and then we will discuss it.*
 - Describe what comes to mind when you read this phrase?

Group 1

Participant 1: It's definitely what they put on the flyers, definitely trying to describe the program. You may not get that there are small class sizes from personalized, more that an adviser would help me walk through a degree.

Participant 2: For me, it's really inviting to see that they're going to care about you in this major. At UF it's easy to get lost because there are tens of thousands of people. It's hard to get that there are small class sizes, personalized for me means more options vs attention from professors.

Group 2

Participant 4: Honestly, I think the three Ps and something you would hear in a leadership lecture.

Participant 3: It's easy to remember and memorize like "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle". It's short but it's something that could stick in your head.

Group 3

Participant 6: When I first think personalized, I think a product, not a program. I like the three Ps, but I don't think it makes you think of a university or a major.

Participant 5: I like the alliteration, but I wouldn't be able to explain to anyone what I just saw or what it's about.

Participant 7: It's alright.

- What do you like about this catchphrase?

Group 1

Participant 1: I like the three Ps. It's short and to the point.

Participant 2: I also like the alliteration, and that it's short. I like the professional at the end to see that you can get a job from a major.

Group 2

Participant 3: I like the personalized and professional part, I guess the passionate, I'd hope someone would have a passion for what they're doing. The personalized I like because everyone wants that attention and professional, everyone wants a job.

Participant 4: I feel like this is something that a head person would communicate this to an audience to tell us that this is how we need to be.

Group 3

Participant 6: The alliteration.

Participant 5: The alliteration. That it's easy to remember.

Participant 7: It's easy to remember.

- What do you dislike about this catchphrase?

Group 1

Participant 1: I don't think I dislike anything.

Participant 2: For me, I guess if you didn't know which department you're talking about, it's very generic. I feel like any department could choose this catchphrase.

Group 2

Participant 3: Nothing really.

Group 3

Participant 6: I don't really dislike anything about it.

Participant 7: I think it's boring.

Participant 5: I'm thinking it should be more specific, but then again it's a catchphrase.

- What is missing from this catchphrase?

Group 1

Participant 1: I think it's a good point to include something with the program into the catchphrase. Try to include agricultural education or something.

Participant 2: Just make it more specific to the major or the department.

Group 2

Participant 4: If you guys were talking about a specific major, we wouldn't even know we're talking about anything. Anything could be this.

Group 3

Participant 6: I would think a catchphrase should lure in a potential audience and be more motivational.

Participant 5: It should be more specific.

- *Pass out pieces of paper with AEC slogans/catchphrases "Connecting People with Agriculture" written on it. "You've all been given a piece of paper with a slogan or catchphrase written on it. Take a minute to look it over and then we will discuss it.*
 - Describe what comes to mind when you read this phrase?

Group 1

Participant 1: I think about connecting people with agriculture versus connecting people in agriculture, using agriculture to connect people either around the world or within the major. But it's definitely a completely different saying than connecting people in agriculture.

Participant 2: It shows more of a community feel. It's not just working with farmers; it's working with the community to show them how agriculture benefits society. Feels very hands on, it's not just sending spam emails or flyers. Shows people going to colleges and interacting with them, setting up tents on campus lawn, to show them.

Group 2

Participant 3: I feel like if I were to read this I think of like farms, sustainability, and I think what careers are there in agriculture really? It seems kind of small.

Participant 4: When I read it I saw connecting people and it makes me think of what kind of person and if that person would connect to me.

Participant 3: If people don't care about agriculture food or nature, I don't know. I feel like those are the kind of people who would like agriculture or want to be a park ranger or something.

Group 3

Participant 7: I like this one a lot better. I like the connecting part. When I think about an organization, I want to know how I'm going to connect with people. I would think they would share the same interests as me if I were interested in agriculture.

Participant 5: This one is more specific and explains how it relates to agriculture.

Participant 6: This one is a lot more productive and explains what you're going to do.

- What do you like about this catchphrase?

Group 1

Participant 1: It's showing the compassion and passion about it. Showing that we can be more hands on, more personal. I definitely see the connection.

Participant 2: It shows how you can use your degree, if you're the one who's connecting people, you can teach other people, not just a service but education for the community.

Group 2

Participant 4: I like that it connects more to the AEC topic.

Group 3

Participant 6: That it's more specific.

Participant 7: I agree.

- What do you dislike about this catchphrase?

Group 1

Participant 1: I don't think I dislike anything. I think it's nice.

Participant 2: I guess it doesn't really show that you're going to be working with farmers. It shows that you're on the teaching side of it. I don't know if you would go into this degree to work with farmers and teach them about innovations or to teach the community about what agriculture provides.

Group 2

Participant 4: I guess the ambiguity -- with agriculture there's so many sectors.

Group 3

No response

- What is missing from this catchphrase?

Group 1

Participant 1: It's not missing anything if used with the other catchphrase on a card or flyer. I like them used together.

Participant 2: I can't think of anything. I guess it shows what you would do with the degree.

Group 2

Participant 3: I guess maybe the opportunities it would provide. If you're trying to persuade someone it needs to say what it's going to do for me. It's a pressure to find a job, so what is this major going to provide me if I'm going to spend four years in college to take all of these classes I want it to have a return?

Participant 4: I was looking for grammatical. Why? Connecting people with agriculture to? What's the objective or reason?

Group 3

Participant 7: Maybe it needs an exclamation mark or something.

Participant 5: You could add in something about education.

Participant 6: Punctuation? Also maybe use a different or more specific noun than "people," like "students."

- Based upon your knowledge of what the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication is, how would you describe it in a catchphrase/slogan?

Group 1

Participant 1: Maybe something like a program... a personalized, passionate, professional program, connecting people with agriculture. I really like the two together and showing that it could be undergrad or grad.

Participant 2: I guess I would try to include, to bring the personalized part in, it's your program. I like the connecting the world of agriculture in the real world, something like that.

Group 2

Participant 3: I think of sustainability for some reason.

Participant 4: I don't know, right off the bat – creating leaders with a green thumb because you stress so much on leadership and a green thumb because of agriculture and giving your future a thumbs up.

Participant 3: That gives the best of both worlds with agriculture and leadership.

Participant 4: I feel like these slogans are trying to inspire an emotion but these are giving a point blank what it's about that's more metaphorical that connects both things.

Group 3

Participant 6: Maybe something that shows how the AEC department producers leaders versus just farmers, maybe "students today and leaders tomorrow" or something like that.

Participant 7: I'm at a loss for words on this one.

Participant 5: I would think something that ties in the camera thing because it's represented in both programs.

BREAK (5 minutes)

WEB (20 minutes)

- When you visit a website, what are you typically looking for?

Group 1

Participant 1: Looking for a summary of what the program, school or club whatever it is may be, but also giving resources, names, whatever it may be. Summary, names, and where I can find people in person.

Participant 2: I look for what I went to the website to look for – want to find tabs that lead to content I'm looking for.

Group 2

Participant 4: Information.

Group 3

Participant 6: Information.

Participant 5: I usually go straight to the “about us” page.

Participant 7: To figure out more about what it is and what I want to find.

- What characteristics of a website do you find the most appealing?

Group 1

Participant 1: Pictures of people in the programs in whatever I’m looking into, not just advertisements pictures of random people. To see the social media and that they’re active. The different tabs at the top instead of searching for things – easy access.

Participant 2: Needs to be easy to access, look nice, easy to find links, like the big images shown on here. If I’m going for a certain reason, easily found tabs to navigate to what I want to find.

Group 2

Participant 3: I like the things where it has a bunch of pictures and it’s a slideshow.

Participant 4: I like pictures because it shows exactly what people are doing.

Participant 3: I like quickly scrolling through and then being able to reading about it.

Participant 4: I like links to social media. It makes it feel connected to each other.

Participant 3: I don’t have a Twitter but I like reading what other people posted and stuff.

Group 3

Participant 6: The visuals and if content is easy to locate.

Participant 5: I like crisp, clean websites.

Participant 7: I’m a pretty visual person, so I like images with text. I like the specific tabs up top to navigate.

- *Introduce AEC website via screenshots of site **or** pull up website on projector screen.*
“Shown here is the Agricultural Education and Communication website. Take a minute to look it over and then we will discuss it.”
 - Based upon what you know of the AEC site, how navigable is this site?

Group 1

Participant 1: It looks very easy to navigate. I can see all of the quick links for admissions, undergrad majors, but also the tabs at the top are appealing to me on a website versus a search bar. I think it’s pretty easy to navigate. Once you click on undergraduate it takes you to the program.

Participant 2: I also think it's easy, the hyperlink is blue so you can see it's different than regular text, and there's not hoops you have to jump through to get to any certain page.

Group 2

Participant 4: I think it's very well done.

Participant 3: I think it's really easy. The tabs and subdivisions – it's not hard to search for something. You have your explicit tabs and stuff.

Group 3

Participant 5: I feel like it's very easy to navigate. I will point out that I won't know what extension is. Each of these subjects says the same things. I want to know what I'm clicking on before I click it.

Participant 6: I don't know if the tabs give subheadings, but that would be helpful.

Do you think you could find what you need as a student?

Group 1

Participant 1: Absolutely – I think it's very clear, easy to find resources and the directory.

Participant 2: Nothing seems to be hidden from the other pages. It's straightforward.

Group 2

Participant 3: Yeah, I like how right above the slider there are student opportunities and a link for prospective students.

Participant 4: I agree with that.

Participant 3: The easy quick links, it's organized.

Group 3

All nodded yes.

- Do you feel it is important to promote alumni and career options?

Group 1

Participant 1: I feel like it is, yeah, definitely, which I'm not seeing.

Participant 2: From a student's perspective, maybe careers people go into, but I guess I don't really care about the whole... I would overlook it unless I was an alumni. If I were alumni, I would want to see a connection after I'm done with the college.

Group 2

Participant 3: I think it's what this person did after they graduated, like look how cool or different what they're doing is and how different it is as a career.

Participant 4: I think it provides the seeker more of an assurance that they're going to do well in the future.

Group 3

Participant 5: I think it's very important.

- Do you feel it is important to promote current students/current student events?

Group 1

Participant 1: Yes. And having the social media parts on the website would be very helpful with that.

Participant 2: I guess it's important to see that there's students being promoted on here showing that students in this department get awards and that this is a prestigious department and to show that the department cares about its students and show student clubs and events for students who may be interested in the major or just starting out and looking for ways to connect within the major.

Group 2

Participant 3: Yes, maybe like recently there was a little social thing or congratulations to this person who won this thing or whatever. If I was a prospective student, I would want to see what they're doing.

Participant 4: Like have a student spotlight like the faculty spotlight.

Group 3

All nodded yes.

Participant 7: Definitely so.

- How important do you feel multimedia is on a website?
 - *Probes:* videos, photo sliders, etc.?

Group 1

Participant 1: I'm iffy. I like the sliders, but I find myself going back to things. I get lost and forget what I'm looking for. Active videos as soon as you get to the website might also be a distraction, but links that send you to the video might be OK.

Participant 2: I like the sliders because it shows multiple links without taking up too much space. I don't really watch videos because I'm usually in an area where I can't use sound. I guess videos don't do much for me.

Group 2

Participant 4: Coming from someone who has been a director of a multimedia committee, I think it's important to be interactive from an outside third person view.

Participant 3: Someone who doesn't know about it can see what it's all about.

Group 3

Participant 5: I think videos are important for people who want quick information.

Participant 6: I like photo sliders and easy links.

Participant 7: I like the slideshow, too.

- What do you like about the AEC site?

Group 1

Participant 1: I like the pictures in the sliders. They're very innovative, like using the world for extension. I like the colors, they're simple. Same font, but different sizes, that's always appealing to me.

Participant 2: I like the simplicity of the site in general, especially the home page. Not many words and I don't get distracted or lost on the first page. Easily navigable, and you can click tabs to find different topics for what you're looking for and the different interest links on the home page.

Group 2

Participant 4: I like the slider.

Participant 3: I like the photos and the "click here" to see what they've been up to and the featured news and stuff.

Participant 4: I like how it's very clean cut.

Participant 3: Yes, it's not too jumbled whatever I'm looking for I can find it.

Participant 4: It's a lot of information and they organized it pretty well.

Group 3

Participant 6: I like that it's organized and it doesn't distract you. It has a basic color scheme and headings that makes it easy to differentiate between different topics. It seems well made and is informative.

Participant 5: I agree. It's not super flashy, and I know if I'm looking for a certain thing. It's easy to navigate.

Participant 7: It's crisp. It's easy to navigate and there aren't huge blocks of text.

- What do you dislike about the AEC site?

Group 1

Participant 1: I don't think I dislike anything. I was going to comment on it just saying anything, but I do see the spell out small at the top.

Participant 2: I don't like how the homepage shows a faculty spotlight, but they're not target audience of this website. I feel like students should be the target and have more student spotlights instead of faculty spotlight on the home page. Once you get into the specific pages, the font seems kind of small for different things. I usually go to UF websites on my phone, and if I was on my phone this would be really hard to read.

Group 2

Participant 3: The front picture with the person holding the world, I couldn't see the letters.

Participant 4: When I saw the faculty spotlight I forgot it was there. I think a picture would help give it a more esteemed touch or I want to see them.

Participant 3: If it doesn't have a face, I would skim right over it because I don't know who the person is. I guess our brain likes to associate something with a picture.

Group 3

Participant 5: It seems like all of the tabs are things I would want to use.

Participant 7: I don't know what's under the resources section, but I would want to see scholarships, clubs, or what I can connect with.

Participant 5: This is the easiest website to navigate of the academic websites I've been to.

SOCIAL MEDIA (20 minutes)

- Why do you follow social media?

Group 1

Participant 1: In general, it's a good question. I guess it would be to keep up with not only friends and past friends, but things like this. I use it a lot for club meetings and stuff. There's so many different things I would like to get involved with or see what they're about. Emails are overwhelming, and I'm more likely to see something and pay attention when I'm casually scrolling.

Participant 2: I use social media to keep up with friends and to follow things that are of interest to me. You can see the history of old posts that you can't see in emails.

Group 2

Participant 3: For Facebook, people post a lot of different articles or cool reads so I feel like...

Participant 4: I use Facebook as a messaging tool to connect with people if I don't have their phone number. I see it as a personalized email account.

Group 3

Participant 7: I use it for my friends, and for group conversations. I don't post a lot of things to my timeline, but I use it for group conversations.

Participant 5: I'm into music so I follow my favorite artists on Twitter so I can be updated.

Participant 6: Besides my friends, I use it for updates and following organizations, as well as to get invitations to events.

- Do you follow any UF social media?
 - *Probes:* What accounts do you follow? Your department? Major? College?

Group 1

Participant 1: I do, quite a few. I follow the college, as far as department, SNRE doesn't have their own Facebook page, but the student council takes care of that. I follow some clubs – the American Water Association, bee keeping, and agronomy.

Participant 2: I follow a lot of the student groups and for my major. I don't think I follow the actual major or college, but the club for my major.

Group 2

Participant 4: I follow their Twitter page.

Participant 3: I've gone to the "it's great UF" hashtag.

Participant 4: Most of the organizations I'm apart of are derived from Facebook.

Group 3

Participant 6: I follow the ACCENT group.

Participant 7: I'm sure I do, I just don't know which ones I follow.

Participant 5: I follow something in this college but I'm not sure which ones.

Participant 7: I used to follow my major, department and college.

Participant 5: I've changed my major too many times to know.

- What types of social media posts do you find most appealing?
 - *Probes*: Videos, photos, links to articles, posts containing important information?

Group 1

Participant 1: Pictures to me are most appealing. I tend not to play videos because of sound. Definitely photos with important content. I don't like long posts, but a shorter post with a link.

Participant 2: I like photos because they're easy to see, and you can draw in for more info. I also like links because you can click on them and look for more info.

Group 2

Participant 3: Articles and videos, and videos can be really powerful in a 2 or 3 minute thing.

Participant 4: It can't be one or two different platforms. If it's interesting you're going to be drawn to it.

Participant 3: I like headlines.

Participant 4: If it just looks interesting.

Participant 3: I like shared content and then I will share it to so everyone can see it.

Group 3

Participant 6: I like photos that are edited to have some sort of information on them. I don't always have time to stop and look at a video or play it out loud, but photos are a great way to get information across.

Participant 5: I like videos if they're short. I don't want to watch a 5-minute informational video.

Participant 7: I like photos.

- How do you decide what posts to share/like/comment on/retweet?

Group 1

Participant 1: I normally share stuff that I'm personally doing. If I'm not in it or active, I'm not going to share it.

Participant 2: I share things I'm interested in that my friends would find interesting

Group 2

Participant 4: I love reposting things that are funny.

Participant 3: I post things that are relatable, or if it had an emotional thing.

Participant 4: And then people will like it or comment on it and then people start debates.

Participant 3: I like the debates because everyone has a different opinion and its fun even if I do or don't like or comment I like reading what other people had to say.

Group 3

Participant 7: Whether they're funny or not.

Participant 5: Same for me.

Participant 6: For me, it's if they're funny or crazy or scandalous or something my followers would want to see.

- How often do you use hashtags?

Group 1

Participant 1: Very seldom.

Participant 2: I sometimes use them on Instagram, but I don't have Twitter and I don't use them on Facebook.

Group 2

Participant 4: I use hashtags but they don't make sense..

Participant 3: I'm not a huge hashtagger on Instagram. I don't do it on Facebook. Some people go hashtag crazy.

Participant 4: I think the best hashtags are the ones that are clever.

Participant 3: On YikYak, like when something is sarcastic and someone says #itsgreatUF is funny.

Group 3

Participant 5: Every day.

Participant 7: Never

Participant 6: I use them on Instagram, but not on Facebook and I don't have Twitter.

- Based upon what you know of AEC, what would you identify as being a good hashtag for AEC social media?

Group 1

Participant 1: I think #AEC is pretty to the point, maybe #AECgrad or #AECundergrad.

Participant 2: I would use #UFAEC.

Group 2

Participant 4: Since it revolves around agriculture I would say #greenculture.

Participant 3: I think #leader or #leadership or #leading.

Participant 4: But it has to be unique because hashtags get jumbled.

Participant 3: It can't be a long one because it's hard to read. I hate long hashtags.

Group 3

Participant 6: I see #UFAEC, which seems like a good one. Maybe something that is more agricultural than AEC, like #AgEd.

Participant 7: I don't know. I don't use hashtags.

- *Introduce AEC Facebook account via screenshots of account or pull up on projector screen. "Shown here is the official Facebook account for the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication. Take a minute to look it over and then we will discuss it."*
 - Describe what comes to mind when you read this page?

Group 1

Participant 1: I can tell without reading that it's a UF associated thing with the Century Tower being one of the pictures.

Participant 2: It seems very impersonal to me. The cover photo is just buildings and the profile picture is just a QR code. I like that there's an update on what people in the major are doing or should be doing. I see that it just talks about UF, but that doesn't have much to do with the actual department.

Group 2

Participant 3: I like how it tags other things and the hashtags and the graduation caps and when people are getting awards.

Participant 4: It looks like it tries to be updated and it intrigues you even more.

Group 3

Participant 5: The header and the profile picture. I think they're kind of clashy. I don't think the code thing. It's kind of distracting.

Participant 6: You can't read the text on the cover photo. The #53 in global universities stuck out to me.

Participant 7: Why is the profile picture a bar code or scan code? I would choose a different photo.

- What do you like about this page?

Group 1

Participant 1: I like that the "about" is on the side where you can get a glimpse of it without searching for it. The left side is showing interaction. I've never really seen reviews before. I like the "liked by this page" section, and you can find pages you want to follow and keep up with. I like the pictures for the ad for commencement. As for using a lot of hashtags, not sure if I like that.

Participant 2: I like the "about" part, it gives a brief summary of the department, and I like that there is a link to the website, too. I like the link to the Twitter page, as well. I like that it's updated pretty regularly, almost every day. It shows that there is actually someone they put on the account rather than it sitting idle all day.

Group 2

Participant 3: I like the course offerings in the spring around registration times. That's convenient. I really like the videos and the pictures because you can scroll through it really quickly.

Participant 4: It would be nice to see alums, and it's nice to see this picture of Jake getting legislator of the year.

Group 3

Participant 6: I r that things are separated. There's a variety of posts, pictures and sharing other content.

Participant 5: It looks like a standard page. It's organized.

Participant 7: It looks like there's current events.

- What do you dislike about this page?

Group 1

Participant 1: I do dislike the profile picture of the QR code. I think the QR could be somewhere else, maybe in the cover photo.

Participant 2: I don't like the QR code or cover photo. The cover photo and smaller font is hard to read. I guess it would be nice to see students, or something about how the website home page had a couple of students to show the educational side of the department.

Group 2

Participant 4: I think it's a common thing with pages but it gives me a headache because I don't know what I'm looking at or for.

Participant 3: There's nothing I don't like.

Group 3

Participant 6: Not really anything. It seems like a basic Facebook page and that it's updated pretty often.

Participant 7: I'll go back to the social aspect. I don't see anything telling me about an event where it's just a casual get together to meet people in the department.

Participant 5: Back to the visual stuff... I feel like it's really classy. The header and then the really distracting profile picture, and then the AEC watermark on that photo that I don't feel like should be there.

- What is missing from this page?

Group 1

Participant 1: Pictures of the students. I see the picture of the alumni rep, and a link to check out what our graduate students are doing. I feel like fall commencement is a generic photo, so definitely more personable stuff.

Participant 2: To add I think it would also help to see ways to get involved in the department. You can read about it, but there's no "come out and join us for this" or "get involved with this club that we have."

Group 2

Participant 3: Not much, there's an about and photos and videos and other recent posts and I can find a good amount of things by this page.

Participant 4: I agree as well. I guess maybe more up to date things are happening. I feel very confused and I don't know why.

Participant 3: Maybe upcoming events. I went to this story slam thing that I think was in AEC and that could be on here.

Group 3

Participant 7: Scholarships.

Participants 5 and 6: Nothing.

- *Introduce AEC Twitter account via screenshots of account or pull up on projector screen. "Shown here is the official Twitter account for the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication. Take a minute to look it over and then we will discuss it."*

- Describe what comes to mind when you read this page?

Group 1

Participant 1: I'm not that familiar with Twitter, but I'm noticing some pictures, but that some have a link to the picture. Is it a link or is it a photo? I don't like the inconsistency of that. Also, there are lots of hashtags, but not consistent hashtags.

Participant 2: I don't use Twitter either. There is lots of text, not many pictures. Pictures capture your eye. It's easy to scroll through text. I don't like the profile picture or cover photo. I like that the hashtag in the about section and links to different websites.

Group 2

Participant 3: I really, I don't have Twitter but I wish I did now, there's so much going on here. It's very informative. It's really catchy.

Participant 4: I think the reason I have a Twitter account and don't use it religiously. With this it makes me want to use Twitter more. It's very concise and everything is three lines or less and I like the photo.

Group 3

Participant 6: It's obviously affiliated with UF because it's got a lot of orange and blue. There's a lot of snippets of information.

Participant 7: For a person like me, how do I find this information? All of the social stuff is on Twitter and I wouldn't see these.

Participant 5: For me, the header works a lot better for me for Twitter because there aren't any words inside the header. It looks cleaner.

- What do you like about this page?

Group 1

Participant 1: I like some of the posts classes that are advertised for people within the program. Posts like that are neat. On the side where it says photos and videos, they're all right there. That's convenient. I like the link to the website also.

Participant 2: I like the about part and the links to the different websites. I feel like the tweets seem personal, so it's not just giving information. It's directing information to you, saying "come discuss or help" and invite people to join in the events that you have. I like that you have tweeted or retweeted stuff like be safe and show that the department actually cares, not a thing without people behind it.

Group 2

Participant 3: I like how informative it is about what's going on now. It can appeal to a lot of people.

Participant 4: I agree and I think it is informative at a good timing. It's very current. With Facebook, you won't be able to see unless you connect to the Facebook app.

Group 3

Participant 6: I like the "it's great UF" hashtag and that they're communicating with other colleges at UF and within UF.

Participant 5: It's a great way to reach people who would not go to Facebook. The snippets of info with links to Facebook are good.

- What do you dislike about this page?

Group 1

Participant 1: The QR profile picture. It's very simplistic, so there's not really much to look at besides the feed, so I feel like pictures need to be incorporated.

Participant 2: I feel like for the amount of posts the actual Twitter account has, there are a lot of retweeting posts, but not original tweets. I don't usually click the links.

Group 2

Participant 3: Nothing, it's pretty cool. I wish I had a Twitter.

Participant 4: I think it's pretty good. With the Facebook page it had a Ted talk displayed. Basing this off of what I see now I would never know that AEC had TED talks at UF. I like on the Facebook page there is Jake's picture. Having a picture is important.

Participant 3: Seeing the picture would impact me more.

Group 3

Participant 6: Not really anything.

Participant 5: I like it.

- What is missing from this page?

Group 1

Participant 1: As far as the timeline we've got, there's one picture of the students. I think I'd like to see pictures, not links. I get lost when trying to click on links. It's much easier to see in the feed.

Participant 2: More students show more of what's going on in the department through photos. I like photos because they show more of the personality of the department and the students within it.

Group 2

No response

Group 3

Participant 7: Maybe some more hashtags. (Laughs.)

Participant 6: I don't know of anything that's missing. What is #CALSmajors?

Participant 7: It's the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

Participant 6: Maybe it should mention something about CALS because that's what the department is part of.

Participant 5: These sites have their own kind of layout that you can't really add or subtract from. I think it's done its job at reaching students.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

As we've talked today about your perceptions and feelings toward the images and messages provided:

- Have you thought of anything else you'd like to say that we have not discussed?

Group 1

Participant 1: I don't think so. Given the information about all of the programs, majors, minors and certificates, I feel like we've covered it all.

Participant 2: Putting the students first is the most important thing for any of the images provided. Making sure students are shown.

Group 2

No response

Group 3

No response

I am now going to try to summarize the main points from today's discussion (key messages and big ideas that developed from the discussion). The main topics were....

- Is this an adequate summary?

Group 1

No response

Group 2

No response

Group 3

No response

As was explained at the beginning of the session, the purpose of this focus group was to get your feedback and opinions about messages and images. Your comments today will be useful in developing materials to better communicate with prospective and current college students.

- Have we missed anything or are there any other comments at this time?

Group 1

No response

Group 2

No response

Group 3

No response

Thank you for taking time out of your day to share your opinions. Now that we have finished, I can now tell you that I represent the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication at the University of Florida. We are gathering research regarding students' decisions to choose particular college majors. Your participation is greatly appreciated and has provided valuable insight into this topic.

Student Recruitment Strategies for Agricultural Education and Communication

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate agricultural education and communication (AEC) undergraduate and graduate students' reasons for selecting the AEC major, and to identify students' preferred communication channels to receive information about the AEC major. An online survey was conducted with current AEC undergraduate and graduate students. Results indicate that the AEC department website is highly utilized and valued by students as a preferred and effective communication channel for students. The findings suggest that other communication channels, such as social media, could be better utilized to communicate about the department, including sharing events and other timely information. This study also identifies students' preferences for visually branding the AEC department.

Introduction and Research Objectives

The University of Florida's Department of Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC) surveyed students enrolled in the department to evaluate their perceptions of the department. The AEC department offers a bachelor's degree with specializations in agricultural education (TCH) and communication and leadership development (CLD), and graduate degrees (master's and doctor of philosophy) with specializations in agricultural communication, agricultural education, extension education and leadership development. The respondents in this study are pursuing one of these degrees.

The purposes of this study were to:

- Investigate Agricultural Education and Communication undergraduate and graduate students' reasons for selecting the AEC major, and
- Identify students' preferred communication channels to receive information about the AEC major.

Methodology

The population for this research (N=250) includes current AEC undergraduate and graduate students. There were 105 responses (42%). An online survey was distributed by Qualtrics to the students for voluntary participation via email. The survey was also announced to students in five undergraduate and two graduate courses.

The survey instrument was researcher-developed to address the objectives of this study. The instrument was tailored to meet the needs of understanding students' perceptions of the AEC department. Four sections were addressed: (1) students' information search for information about the AEC department,

(2) students' perceptions of AEC social media, (3) students' perceptions of the AEC website, and (4) message and logo testing. The survey instrument was reviewed by a panel of experts in the AEC department.

Students' identities and responses will remain anonymous and survey data is stored on a password-protected computer. Consent was collected at the beginning of the survey.

Results

Information Search

In this section, students identified where and how they found information about their current major. When searching for information about college majors to which to apply, 43% (n=99) of students went to their prospective college's website as a first resource. However, 15% (n=15) of students identified their prospective college's website as the most effective resource in helping decide to major in Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC). Other resources identified as most effective in helping decide to major in AEC were the students' current academic adviser/teacher (19%, n=19), an alumnus who majored in AEC (22%, n=22), and a current student pursuing a major in AEC (21%, n=21). Students also identified other resources (20%, n=20) as most effective in helping to decide to major in AEC, which included meeting faculty members in the department and interest in the AEC subject area. Almost half (49%, n=48) sought information regarding whom to contact to learn more about AEC from their perspective college's website, whereas none reported seeking contact information on social media.

The AEC website was considered most effective in helping students decide to major in AEC (see Table 1). AEC social media was considered least effective among students. Guidance counselor/community college academic advisers, AEC students and AEC alumni were considered neutral to effective in helping students decide to major in AEC.

Students were asked to rank the effectiveness of several resources when making the decision to major in AEC on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very ineffective) to 5 (very effective). Students rated the AEC website as the most effective resource, with a mean score of 4.04. Only 2.2% (n=2) rated the AEC website as very ineffective or ineffective, while 75.8% (n=69) rated the AEC website as effective or very effective. In addition, 22% (n=20) rated the AEC website's effectiveness as neutral.

AEC students were the second most effective resource, with a mean score of 3.64. AEC alumni were rated as the third most effective resource, with a mean score of 3.35. Students rated guidance counselors or community college academic advisers with a mean score of 3.32. When rating this resource, 23.9% (n=22) reported finding the resource very effective, 27.2% (n=25) rated the resource's effectiveness as neutral, and 21.7% (n=20) rated the resource's effectiveness as very ineffective.

Students rated the effectiveness of AEC social media with a mean score of 2.63. About half (50.5%, n=46) rated this resource as neutral, and 27.4% (n=25) rated this resource as very ineffective. In addition, 8.7% (n=8) rated this resource as very effective, 6.6% (n=6) rated this resource as effective, and 6.6% (n=6) rated this resource as ineffective.

Table 1							
<i>Students' perceptions of resource effectiveness of helping decide to major in AEC</i>							
	Very Ineffective (1)	Ineffective (2)	Neutral (3)	Effective (4)	Very Effective (5)	Total Responses	Mean
Effectiveness of guidance counselor/community college academic adviser	20	9	25	16	22	92	3.12
Effectiveness of AEC social media in deciding to major in AEC	25	6	46	6	8	91	2.63
Effectiveness of AEC website in helping decide to major in AEC	1	1	20	40	29	91	4.04
Effectiveness of AEC students in helping decide to major in AEC	8	3	28	27	25	91	3.64
Effectiveness of AEC alumni in helping decide to major in AEC	11	4	39	16	21	91	3.35

Students were asked to rank the importance of several aspects of the AEC department when making the decision to major in AEC on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very ineffective) to 5 (very effective). Passionate instructors, job opportunities, and versatility of the specializations offered were considered the most important (see Table 2). More than two-thirds (73.3%, n=63) rated both passionate instructors and job opportunities after graduation as very important. Students rated passionate instructors with a mean score of 4.65 and job opportunities after graduation with a mean score of 4.64. Versatility of specializations offered received a mean score of 4.55, with 61.6% (n=53) rating this aspect as very important, and 32.5% (n=28) rating it as important. Personalized instruction and “family” feel received a mean score of 4.42, with 60.4% (n=52) rating this aspect as very important and 25.6% (n=22) rating it as important. Department reputation received a mean score of 4.38, and 56.9% (n=49) rated this aspect as very important and 26.7% (n=23) rated it as important. Small class sizes received a mean score of 4.06, and 43% (n=37) rated this aspect as very important and 31.4% (n=27) of participated rated it as important.

Personal ties to agriculture and personal ties to FFA and 4-H were considered the least important aspects of the AEC department in deciding to major in AEC. Personal ties to agriculture received a mean score of 3.81, with 43% (n=37) rating this aspect as very important, 24.4% (n=21) rating it as important, 12.7% rating it as neutral, 10.5% (n=9) rating it as unimportant, and 9.3% (n=8) rating it as very unimportant. Personal ties to FFA and 4-H received a mean score of 3.14, with 27.9% (n=24) rating this aspect as very important, 16.3% (n=14) rating it as important, 19.8% (n=17) rating it as neutral, 10.5% (n=9) rating it as unimportant, and 9.3% (n=8) rating it as very unimportant.

Table 2							
<i>Importance of aspects of the AEC Department in deciding to major in AEC</i>							
	Very Unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Neutral (3)	Important (4)	Very Important (5)	Total Responses	Mean
Department reputation	0	2	12	23	49	86	4.38
Versatility of the specializations offered	0	1	4	28	53	86	4.55
Small class sizes	2	6	14	27	37	86	4.06
Personalized instruction/ a “family” feel	1	2	9	22	52	86	4.42
Passionate instructors	0	0	7	16	63	86	4.65
Job opportunities upon graduation	0	0	8	15	63	86	4.64
Personal ties to agriculture	8	9	11	21	37	86	3.81
Personal ties to FFA and 4-H	19	12	17	14	24	86	3.14

When asked if they had a specific career in mind when deciding to major in AEC, students identified several types of careers, including faculty/research positions, communication and media specialist positions, agricultural education positions, extension positions, law/policy positions and sales positions. Several students identified that they did not have a specific career in mind when deciding to major in AEC. While undergraduate students reported a variety of career choices reflected in the categories above, the most common career identified among graduate students was in teaching, research and seeking faculty positions.

Students were asked if any barriers or difficulties were encountered when deciding to major in AEC. Most indicated that they did not encounter any barriers or difficulties. However, the most common barrier reported was a perception that the name of the degree would be difficult to communicate to future employers, or a lack of familiarity with the degree due to not having an agricultural background.

Two barriers were most common among undergraduate students: difficulty in applying or transferring into the AEC major, and awareness of job opportunities after graduation. Barriers reported from graduate students included concerns about future employer perceptions of a degree title that includes “agriculture,” funding considerations, and balancing professional employment and academic schedules. For example, one student stated, “I was told that there were significant online courses that would accommodate my full-time job but then upon entry learned that Gainesville residents don’t qualify for many of those course offerings.” Another student noted that the “[c]ommunication major isn’t offered in distance learning.”

Social Media

In this section, students identified how they use social media to obtain information. When asked about which AEC social media accounts they followed or interacted with, most identified Facebook and Twitter accounts. A small number indicated that they follow an Instagram account, although the AEC

department does not have an official Instagram account. Several mentioned that they followed AECGSA, ACLT and Collegiate FFA accounts, as well as CALS accounts.

More than one-third rated the effectiveness of AEC social media for finding out about department events (38.6%, n=32), college-wide events (44.2%, n=38), and important information including academic dates and course registration information (36%, n=31) as neutral (see Table 3).

Table 3							
<i>Effectiveness of AEC social media</i>							
	Very Ineffective (1)	Ineffective (2)	Neutral (3)	Effective (4)	Very Effective (5)	Total Responses	Mean
Effectiveness of AEC social media in finding out about department events	12	7	32	19	13	83	3.17
Effectiveness of AEC social media in finding out about college-wide events	9	9	38	17	10	83	3.12
Effectiveness of AEC social media in finding out important information including academic dates and course registration information	11	9	31	24	8	83	3.11

Students indicated that photos (41%, n=34) were the most appealing type of social media post, over videos, infographics, links to articles of interest, and posts containing department, college or university news.

When asked what type of content they would like to see featured on AEC social media, students identified a variety of topics. The most common were job opportunities, student and alumni spotlights, upcoming events and deadlines, photos of students and other multimedia, and content that highlights how AEC fulfills the land grant mission. Several indicated that they do not follow AEC on social media.

Undergraduate students reported that they would like to see more student engagement opportunities, including student highlights, upcoming dates and important information, and opportunities to become involved in clubs and attend events. Graduate students reported that they would like to see more news articles and research opportunities and highlights, in addition to the other types of posts identified.

Students overwhelmingly identified LinkedIn and Instagram as the types of accounts they would like AEC to use in addition to existing accounts. Pinterest was also mentioned.

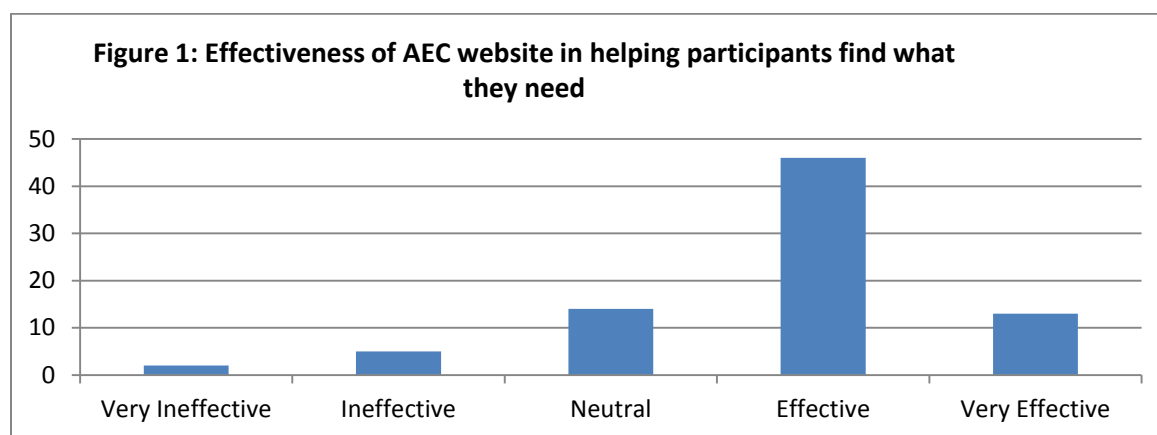
Website

In this section, students were asked to evaluate the AEC department's website. When asked about how often they visit the AEC website, 44% (n=35) indicated that they visited the website on a monthly basis, while 25% (n=20) visited the website on a weekly basis and 21% (n=17) visited the website once per

semester. Five percent (n=4) reported visiting the website on a daily basis, and an additional 5% (n=4) reported never visiting the website.

When asked about the type of information students typically search for on the AEC website, 41% (n=33) reported searching for course information and syllabi, and 23% reported searching for information and events. In addition, 15% (n=12) reported searching for instructor information, 10% (n=8) reported searching for scholarship information and 1% (n=1) reported searching for information about department clubs and organizations. Ten percent chose “Other,” and reported searching for “academic calendar,” “student handbook,” and “all of the above” or “varies.”

Students rated the effectiveness of the AEC website as neutral to very effective. The majority (53.5%, n=46) indicated that the AEC website is effective in helping them find what they need (Figure 1).



Students were asked to rate the importance of different types of content on the AEC website from very unimportant (1) to very important (5). The mean score for all types of content is greater than 3.7 (see Table 4). Course information and syllabi, scholarship information, and instructor information were rated as the most important types of content on the AEC website. More than half (62.3%, n=48) rated course information and syllabi as very important, and 28.6% (n=22) rated this content as important. Similarly, 61% (n=47) rated scholarship information as very important, and 25.9% (n=20) rated this content as important. More than half (53.2%, n=41) also rated instructor information as very important, and 36.4% (n=28) rated this content as important.

	Very Unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Neutral (3)	Important (4)	Very Important (5)	Total Responses	Mean
Course information and syllabi	0	1	6	22	48	77	4.52
Scholarship information	2	0	8	20	47	77	4.43
Instructor information	0	1	7	28	41	77	4.42
Information on teaching	0	3	16	37	21	77	3.99
News stories about AEC faculty, staff and students	0	1	19	39	18	77	3.96
Information about clubs/organizations	2	3	18	29	25	77	3.94
Information on departmental research	1	5	16	34	21	77	3.90
AEC awards and honors	0	3	20	39	15	77	3.86
Information on departmental extension	3	6	14	31	23	77	3.84
Informational videos about the department	2	5	22	26	22	77	3.79
Faculty spotlights	0	7	24	8	18	77	3.74
Alumni spotlights	0	5	26	31	15	77	3.73
Student spotlights	0	7	27	24	19	77	3.71

When asked to provide feedback about the types of content they would like to see on the AEC website, students identified content in the following themes: research opportunities and faculty spotlights, student spotlights and involvement opportunities, job opportunities and alumni profiles, important dates and academic information, more in-depth course and degree information, and videos. The types of content requested were similar between undergraduate and graduate students.

Logo Testing

In this section, students were asked what messages and images they found favorable (see Figure 2).

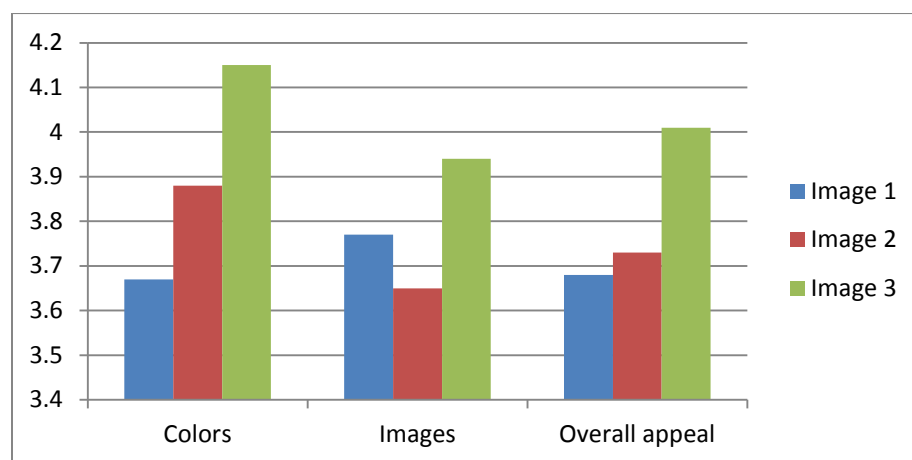


Figure 2: Mean of students' perceptions of color, images and overall appeal of test images

Image 1:



When asked about what they liked about Image 1, students identified the “classic” and “traditional” feel of the buildings and the depiction of campus, the orange and blue colors, and that the AEC logo stands out.

Students indicated that they did not like that the image seemed unclear, the text was difficult to read, and that the image did not communicate “what AEC is about” or how the buildings connect to the AEC department.

Image 2:



When asked about what they liked about Image 2, students identified the brightness and diversity of the photos, the application of each field of study within the AEC program, and that it comes across as “personable” or “friendly,” showcasing the “people” aspect of the department.

Students indicated that they didn’t like that the image seemed to lack ethnic diversity, that the photo to the left seemed “washed out” or a “lower quality image,” and that the AEC logo was difficult to read.

Image 3:



When asked about what they liked about Image 3, students identified that the image is “bold” and “simple” with a “good color scheme,” that it is “easy to understand what AEC stands for,” and the image is overall very “appealing to the eye.”

Students indicated that they didn’t like that the image seemed “dated,” that the image was “simple,” and that the image did not seem to convey anything “special” about the department or its programs.

Message Testing

Students were asked to rate the effectiveness of two slogan samples (see Table 5).

Table 5							
<i>Student perceptions of the effectiveness of sample slogans</i>							
	Very Ineffective (1)	Ineffective (2)	Neutral (3)	Effective (4)	Very Effective (5)	Total Responses	Mean
“Personalized. Passionate. Professional.”	3	3	9	26	31	72	4.10
“Connecting People With Agriculture”	0	5	5	35	27	72	4.17

Sample Slogan 1: “Personalized. Passionate. Professional.”

When asked about what they liked about this phrase, students identified the “alliteration” of the “three Ps,” that the phrase is “clear and simple” and that it accurately reflected their experiences in the department. For example, one student wrote, “It is completely true. The classes and major are personalized to me. The professors are passionate about the classes. There is an opportunity for me to develop professionally.”

Several students indicated that they did not like the phrase, but were not specific in their explanation. For example, one student said that they were “not really crazy about anything about it.” Another student said that they liked “[n]othing, for the AEC anyway.” The most common criticisms of the phrase is that it does not seem to be specific to the AEC department, and that it does not express a relationship

to agriculture. One student stated, “Those are popular buzz words that may sound good to the publisher but have little meaning to any outside stakeholders.”

Sample Slogan 2: “Connecting People With Agriculture”

When asked about what they liked about this phrase, students identified that the phrase appropriately represents the AEC department, saying that it “directly shows what we do” and “tells what we try to do in the department and what one of our main goals are.” Students also noted that it is “succinct” and “simple.” Another student stated, “This is a true statement for all specializations. This is a better fit for what the department actually represents.”

Students indicated concerns about perceived limitations of the phrase. For example, one student said, “People could take it the wrong way and feel that it’s all about cows, farms, and dirt.” Another student stated, “The word ‘agriculture’ since it is contextual. Individuals have different operational definitions of the term. I think the vagueness of the term could give individuals an alternate from what the AEC department does as a whole. The phrase should contain more terms to encompass more disciplines under the umbrella of ‘agriculture.’” Other feedback included: “I feel like it’s broad and a little unoriginal; everyone in the industry tries to connect people and consumers with agriculture,” and, “We connect more than just people and more than just ag.”

Student-Generated Messages

When asked how they would describe the AEC program, undergraduates and graduates identified several common themes: that the department feels like a family or provides personal attention, there is an application or hands-on approach to learning, the opportunity to make a difference, the degree is flexible, and that the major is not just about agriculture.

When asked to identify one course they would recommend to a student outside of the AEC department, undergraduate students identified these courses: agricultural issues, technical writing, advanced video production, agribusiness management, leadership, intercultural communication, Challenge 2050 courses, agricultural education lab, writing in ag communication, event planning, and interpersonal leadership. Graduate students identified the following: experiential learning, teaching methods, program delivery, methods of planned change, program evaluation, statistics, communication technology, interpersonal leadership, organizational leadership, and history of agriculture.

Demographics

More than half (53%, n=37) indicated that they were undergraduate students, and 47% (n=33) indicated that they were graduate students. Most undergraduates (71%, n=27) reported being enrolled in the communication and leadership development specialization, while (29%, n=11) reported being enrolled in the teacher education specialization. The undergraduate participants were 31% (n=22) male and 69% (n=48) female. Graduate student participants identified as being enrolled the following graduate specializations: leadership development (35%, n=25), agricultural communication (24%, n=17), agricultural education (23%, n=16) and extension education (18%, n=13).

Recommendations

Information Search

Both undergraduate and graduate students identified the AEC department's website as important to helping them select their major. After the website, personal relationships were the most important, including relationships with guidance counselors, alumni, and current students. Social media was rated least effective, and was also an underutilized resource.

- Opportunities:
 - Continue to strengthen the AEC website as a resource for potential students. Consider conducting a usability study with potential students and "gatekeepers."
 - Empower "gatekeepers," or people who provide the personal relationship or connection to the department with the information and resources needed to effectively educate potential students about the AEC major.
 - An outreach program could be geared toward high school and community college guidance counselors to increase their awareness of the AEC program, the potential job market, and AEC, CALS and UF application and transfer requirements.
 - An offering of a formal mentorship program with alumni could help recruit potential students by connecting them with a solid relationship into their future professional network.
 - An AEC ambassador program could help connect potential and current students across all of the specializations.
 - Social media could be utilized to showcase the student experience and engagement to potential applicants and future AEC students.

Students identified passionate instructors, job opportunities after graduation, and versatility of the specializations offered as most important when deciding to major in AEC. One of the most common barriers identified is the inclusion of "agriculture" in the degree title, and the potential difficulty in communicating the degree title to future employers. Most with specific career paths in mind when deciding to major in AEC identified career paths that are to be expected for the AEC specializations.

- Opportunities
 - Bridge the connection between potential student and alumni to raise awareness of the opportunities available to graduates.
 - Consider developing an alumni group on LinkedIn so that potential and current students can research the job opportunities and history for recent graduates, in addition to the typical alumni relations benefits of an online alumni group.
 - Highlight alumni who are working outside of the agriculture industry or "nontraditional" roles for AEC graduates.
 - Consider developing an employer relations program or communications materials to educate potential employers of recent graduates about the AEC

major, skill sets acquired through the major, and how a graduate with a degree in AEC can benefit their organization.

- Educate potential studies about opportunities with combining AEC majors and minors with other programs.
 - For example, several identified that they were interested in pursuing a career in law or policy. There is an opportunity to showcase how an AEC major could provide synergy along with an agricultural law minor, or how the AEC leadership minor could provide an additional skill set to an agribusiness major.

Social Media

The students indicated that they would like to see a variety of content posted on the AEC social channels, and that photos were the most desirable content type. Facebook and Twitter were the most commonly followed social accounts, and students expressed an interest in following an AEC Instagram account and joining a LinkedIn group.

- Opportunities:
 - Consider developing an editorial calendar for AEC social media in order to post content in the desired content categories, such as student engagement, relevant articles, upcoming events, etc. The editorial calendar could help prepare for the inclusion of photos in posts, which were identified as desirable.
 - Consider providing training and AEC-branded resources for AEC department clubs and organizations, and a policy or guidelines on how AEC organizations should use social media and interact with the AEC, CALS and UF pages. Students expressed a desire to see event information on social media. This is an opportunity to coordinate sharing the event information.

Website

Most visited the AEC website once per month, and were most likely to search for course information and syllabi, followed by events and information. Students expressed a desire to see more student and alumni spotlights, events and information, and multimedia.

- Opportunities:
 - Consider building a website editorial calendar in conjunction with the social media editorial calendar.
 - If available, consider using a content management system that generates unique links for content to be shared on social media in an effective and visually appealing way.
 - Student and alumni spotlights were requested types of content; consider posting in a video or other interactive format.
 - The website was overall rated as effective and is used by the students. Consider evaluating how the content on the website can be differentiated from social content and/or how the two medias can support each other.

Logo Testing

Students identified the third image as the most appealing, although strengths were identified in all three images.

- Opportunities:
 - Develop images that clearly communicate what “AEC” means. Students identified that they liked the blue and orange color schemes and clear identification with the University of Florida.

Message Testing and Student-Generated Messages

In terms of evaluating the two sample slogans, the students did not identify one clear preferred slogan over the other; both slogans were liked. Participants expressed that the first slogan was too broad, but the second could be exclusive, due to the use of “agriculture.” When asked to describe the AEC program, students identified themes that are consistent with both slogans. When asked to identify one course that they would recommend to students outside of the department, a variety of responses were shared. This indicates to the researcher that many students identify strongly with their specialization within the AEC major, and most likely more so than with the department as a whole, which could create a challenge when trying to communicate the AEC brand.

- Opportunities:
 - Consider continuing to test these messages along with other communication design elements, including written and digital materials.