Dispelling the Myth of Interior Design: Summer Camp Experience for Rural High School Students

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Abstract

Enrollment in interior design as a college major has significantly increased since 2000. This increase is due primarily to the influx of designed-related reality television home improvement and design shows (Waxman & Clemons, 2005). While entertaining, most shows do not depict the profession of interior design in any manner that relates to the practice of interior design. Freshmen enrolled in interior design courses are quickly disillusioned by the technical and rigorous curriculum content upon which an interior design degree is based. These students drop out quickly realizing that their perception of interior design was solely based on television shows. How can interior design programs recruit students who have an accurate perception of the profession of interior design?

One university explored the opportunity of utilizing design camps to introduce the profession of interior design to high school students. The Gear Up Program, sponsored by the United States Department of Education, is designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education (www.ed.gov/print/programs/gearup/index.html). Summer design camps offered in 2006 and 2007 were designed with two specific goals. One goal of the camp was to expose a diverse group of students to the possibilities in design fields such as architecture, art and interior design. A second and equally important goal for the camp
was to assist students in understanding the college life environment and to develop personal skills that will aid them in achieving the goal of a college degree.

Activities for the camp were designed to be educational, creative, physical and experiential. Content-specific courses were developed that targeted specific skills necessary in design professions. Model building, sketching, rendering, computer applications, principles of design, design psychology and career opportunities in design were some course modules that were offered during the week long residential camp experience. The university offered personality and career assessments as well as college admissions review.

Campers in the 2007 participated in a pre and post survey which revealed significant data such as:

- Students were questioned about their consideration of art, interior design, and architecture as a career. Differences were seen in the pre and post surveys. Those considering art as a career differed in the pre and post from 26% in the pre survey to 35% in the post. Those considering interior design as a career increased from 26% in the pre survey to 45% in the post. However interest in architecture went down from 47% in the pre survey to 35% in the post survey.

- The post survey also indicated that 33% of the campers had changed their minds about their college major after the camp experience.

Successful recruiting and retention will continue to be challenges to universities and programs such as interior design. Design camps are a perfect venue to introduce career opportunities to pre-college student populations and correct the misconceptions about the profession.
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Narrative

Universities across the country are using summer camp experiences targeted at high school and middle school students for a variety of reasons and hoping to achieve a specific result. Some are trying to recruit certain segments of the population such as the underserved including minorities or high school students who would be the first in their family to attend college. Other universities are devising these camp experiences to create excitement and interest in a particular career area. These camp experiences vary from day camps where students are sometimes bussed onto campus and participate in activities only during the day to residential camps where students experience college life by living in dorms and participating in planned activities during the day and night. Camps vary in their fee structure from cost free camps financed through corporate or government sponsors to camps charging a small fee with universities underwriting the balance while still other camps have fees attached to them that cover the entire camp expense.

Universities are not only trying to recruit with these camps but also assist students in deciding upon a major. These camps expose students to various professional programs. Research reveals that only 21% of students entering college are sure of their decision about their major course of study (Kazmer, 2004). When reviewing results of this research, researchers found that many incoming students do not understand their selected discipline. Only 10% of incoming students had participated in some type of college outreach program such as a summer camp. This leaves the majority of students not having the opportunity to
participate in an outreach program which might aid them in their decision making (Kazmer, 2004).

Many college career areas from engineering to interior design face the same problem of students not understanding their majors. Popular reality televisions shows like those on the Home and Garden channel are influencing students to pursue careers in interior design. Bellevue Community College’s interior design program had 359 students enrolled in 1999 and in 2003 their numbers had increased to 568 (Long, 2004). Florida State University typically had a freshman class of approximately 50 students and in the fall of 2005 freshman enrollment was more than 120 students. This increase was due primarily to the influx of designed-related reality television home improvement and design shows (Waxman & Clemons, 2005). These shows are for entertainment and do not depict the profession of interior design in any manner that relates to the practice of interior design. Can a camp experience recruit students who have an accurate perception of the profession of interior design?

There are many summer camp models that can be studied such as a summer camp at the University of Colorado at Boulder which has established a camp whose focus is on their Business Leadership Program. Their primary goal is showing high school juniors and seniors the importance of a college education not specifically to direct them to careers in business. Theirs is a statewide program aimed at minorities but they encourage rural students and students with international experience to attend as well. This camp was founded more than a decade ago and accepts approximately 30 students per year (Shinn, 2003). Wayne State University holds a camp, E-Commerce, whose primary focus covers the development of technical skills such as Web design, PowerPoint and Excel as well as
finance. These are residential camps which are funded by corporate sponsors and are free to all participants. Some of these sponsors offer college scholarships to students who attend the camp program. Two thirds of these campers will enroll in college at the universities where they attended camp (Shinn, 2003).

Another type of camp is run by Education Unlimited (EU) with nearly 500 students attending six camps at campuses in California, Massachusetts, and New York state. This particular camp focuses on college-admissions prep from one-on-one college counseling, lectures on study skills, time management, and SAT-preparation classes. This is a residential camp experience with the camper being charged for the experience (Tonn, 2005).

The state of Maine offers summer camps and other activities to encourage high school students to aspire to attending college. Central Maine Community College holds summer camp for 10 to 14 year olds who are interested in criminal justice careers. This exposure to potential careers encourages students to work hard in high school and take college prep courses (Plimpton & Quint, 2007).

The College of Architecture, Art, and Design at Mississippi State University explored the opportunity of utilizing design camps to introduce the profession of interior design and related design careers to high school students. Interior design, art, and architecture faculty prepared and submitted a proposal for funding of a camp to the Gear Up Program, sponsored by the United States Department of Education. Gear UP is designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education (www.ed.gov/print/programs/gearup/index.html).
The proposal was accepted and summer design camps were offered in 2006 and 2007. These camps were designed with two specific goals. One goal of the camp was to expose a diverse group of students to the possibilities in design fields such as architecture, art and interior design. A second and equally important goal for the camp was to assist students in understanding the college life environment and to develop personal skills that will aid them in achieving the goal of a college degree.

Counselors from participating Gear Up schools were contacted and informational packets were mailed. The faculty at MSU began making personal e-mail inquiries to interested students and recruiting participants for the camp. The summer camp in 2006 had two sessions with 8 participants in the first session and 17 in the second session. In 2007 one session of camp was held with 21 campers.

Activities for the camp were designed to be educational, creative, physical and experiential. Content-specific courses were developed that targeted specific skills necessary in design professions. Model building, sketching, rendering, computer applications, principles of design, design psychology and career opportunities in design were some course modules that were offered during the week long residential camp experience. The university offered personality and career assessments as well as college admissions review. Campers were not only immersed in design but also were exposed to the process of college entrance and application.

A pre and post survey was developed which was IRB approved and at registration parents and students signed consent forms allowing the camp faculty to acquire and publish information from the survey instrument. The data collected revealed that students’ awareness and knowledge of design had increased. An increase in their self-confidence
and feeling of accomplishment from the camp experience was disclosed. A significant number expressed considering interior design as a career after participating in the camp. The gender composition of the camp was half female and half male which is very different from the current interior design student population which is predominantly female.

Based on information gathered from the previous camp experiences, future design camps at MSU will charge tuition and offer scholarships. Students will be recruited who have an interest or talent in design. We will continue to offer the curriculum that was developed which exposes students to the opportunities and challenges of a career in interior design. Camps are an invaluable and informational tool for recruiting and exposing students to a major and a career. They assist students in their preparation for their college experience and should be strongly supported by colleges and universities.
References
(APA Style)


