A Case Study of Music Education Institutional Recruiting Practices at a Liberal Arts College

Scott N. Edgar, Ph.D.
Lake Forest College
The Problem
The Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of music education recruiting practices at a liberal arts college.

Research Questions

What are perspectives of the college’s admissions department, administration, music education program, and music education majors regarding recruiting for the college and music education?

What recruiting practices did the participant students find effective and ineffective?

How could recruiting practices be improved?
PRIOR LITERATURE
Why and When Students Choose to Be Music Educators

(Bergee & Demorest, 2003; Rickels, et al., 2010)

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(Jones & Parks, 2010)

(Bergee & Demorest, 2003; Madsen & Kelly, 2002; Rickels, et al., 2010)
The Admissions Process

Pool

Get them to Campus- Apply

Matriculate
What Works

(Noel-Levitz, 2013)

- campus open house events
- campus visit days for high school students
- encouraging prospective students to apply on the admissions website
- encouraging prospective students to schedule campus visits on the admissions website
- using enrolled students in recruitment/marketing
What Doesn’t

(Noel-Levitz, 2013)

- mailing course schedules
- online course fairs
- recruiting through business/industry
- asking current students/alumni for referrals
- online net price calculator
METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

- Intrinsic case study with elements of self-study (Stake, 1995; Lassonde & Galman, 2009; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009)
- Three phenomenological interviews per participant (Seidman, 2012)
- One focus group with all students
- Researcher journal
- A portfolio of recruitment materials
SETTING

• Program created in 2012.

• Small, four-year, liberal arts college located in a highly affluent area 30 miles North of Chicago.

  • The student population of 1,500 students (86% residential) represents 47 states, 78 countries, and has a faculty to student ratio of 13:1.

  • Tuition=$51,000 with extensive financial aid available.

  • At the time of the study there were four full-time music education majors (now 15).

  • Offers a music education major (BA & MAT) and a music education minor.
PARTICIPANTS

Students

Rebecca (19 y.o.) Second-year BA music education major, voice.

Nick (29 y.o.) Non-traditional MAT music education major, cello. (Returned to the college after earning his political science degree six years prior)

Catherine (22 y.o.) MAT student graduated with her BA in Music in 2014, violin.

Nancy (21 y.o.) Undergraduate transfer music education major, violin.
PARTICIPANTS

Faculty/Administration

Jennie- Senior Associate Director of Admissions. She has worked in the admissions office at the college since 2010 after completing her BA in business. Her responsibilities include: manager of communication, data, and technology team; liaison with marketing and communication department; manager of the application process; and manager of the admissions’ department budget.

Dean Amy- Associate Dean of Faculty. She has served as professor of art/art history and has assumed an administrative position overlooking student recruitment and faculty interactions. She has been at the college for 20 years. Her son is a professional musician and her perspectives provide insight into both her role at the college and that of a parent. The lack of a more robust parental perspective is a limitation of this study.

Prof. Scott Edgar (author). He is in his fourth (now sixth) year at the college serving as Assistant Professor of Music/Music Education Chair, and Director of Bands. He had extensive experience with K-12 instrumental music and recruiting efforts at that level prior to accepting the position to create and implement the music education program at the college.
FINDINGS
“What is this place? I’ve never heard of this place. I started doing some research and thought I was interested in going there” (Nancy)

“It’s very challenging to say music education is important but so is environmental studies. How do we as a department assist with marketing a program such as music education while not neglecting these other programs and making it equitable?” (Jennie)
Selling Points

Geographic location

“The location is terrific. The best of all worlds as far as I’m concerned. It’s a small liberal arts residential experience, but great metropolitan centers very, very close with all the opportunities that provides. Not surrounded by cornfields” (Dean Amy)

“It’s not as much of a selling point as they want to make it out to be. The concept that you can get there easily is great, but then with scheduling and cost, it’s not easy” (Nancy)

Scholarships

“People go to schools because of how much they give them. They’ll have two top choices and then ‘well I went here because they gave me more money” (Rebecca)

“Free music lessons is a big one!” (Rebecca)

Broad curriculum/rigor of the music education major

“In the reality of getting a job in this field, it’s going to be very beneficial. We prepare you for what this field really looks like today.” (Nick)
Selling Points

**Practical fieldwork experience in K-12 schools**

“The fact that music ed does fieldwork in every single one of their disciplines, the practical classes really help even before you student teach. All of the people in other disciplines were freaking out, ‘I’m going to be in front of a class.’ We were just like, whatever?! We’re not scared” (Nancy)

**Faculty**

“I feel that music education is a unique program on campus because it’s overseen by faculty who care very deeply. It’s probably something the music education program does better than any department on campus” (Jennie)

“The whole faculty here are a selling point. It’s a talented and very welcoming group” (Rebecca)

**Small college/program and community**

“This is the little family that we’ve cultivated. That atmosphere is a very comfortable one. They’re coming out of high school and want that. They want to see that communities are formed and we’re collaborating” (Nick)
Recruiting Efforts

Multifaceted approach
“Think about any company who has tried to sell or recruit you. They may have sent you 12 emails, and texts, or a billboard and you’re not sure what eventually triggers it, but something eventually does. Our communication plan has an electronic component, it has a mailed component, there are phone calls, there are text messages, there is a branding and web component” (Jennie)
“Whether it’s a postcard you get in the mail or a banner you see on Facebook page or on Twitter, those things are equally easy to ignore if you’re not interested” (Nick)
“I’m not sure flyers are always the best” (Catherine)

Individualized attention
“Maybe it’s not the best to be a constant thing, but I see the rationale for it. It was a little too much. But I mean, I came, so I guess it worked in the long run” (Catherine)
Recruiting Efforts

Campus visits/Faculty interactions

“The visit was what convinced me more than anything else that I wanted to be here. It’s one thing to get all of these things in the mail which you read and throw in the trash. To actually come here and see the campus and sit in on class, and as a senior in high school know ‘oh my god, this could be my life soon.’ That’s a lot more effective than a postcard that says ‘hey, come to our school’” (Nancy)

“You were very easy to get in contact with. Much easier to get in contact with than admissions” (Rebecca)

Current student interactions

“The student is just going to give it to you straight, versus a professor who might be working hard to sell it and get people to come here. They’re going to paint things in a different light and a student would just tell you how it is” (Nancy)
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See what music and music education look like at Chicago's liberal arts college.
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Scott N. Edgar, Lake Forest College

PURPOSE STATEMENT and RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of music education recruiting practices at a liberal arts college.

Key questions guiding this inquiry included:
- What are the perspectives of the colleges admissions department, administration, music education program, and music education majors regarding recruiting for the college and music education?
- What recruiting practices did the participating students find effective and ineffective?
- How could recruiting practices be improved?

PREVIOUS RESEARCH
- The primary reasons students chose to be music education majors included (a) the influence of music teachers (Johnson & Lemons, 2003; Kiefer, et al., 2010), (b) love of music (Johnson & Lemons, 2003), and (c) wanting to be a role model for future students (Hobbs & Parks, 2016). The vast majority of students desired to pursue a music education major in high school or earlier (Johnson & Lemons, 2003; Merson & Kelly, 2006; Kiefer, et al., 2010).
- However, most institutions fail to connect the dots between the music education major in high school and athletics, performing arts, and music industry internships.
- Conversely, the least effective strategies were: (a) mailing course schedules; (b) online course fairs; (c) recruiting through business/industry; (d) visiting schools/states; and (e) website price calculator (e.g., free music lessons, f.e., music lessons at the college).

FINDINGS
Small college/program challenges:
- Selecting the right students is difficult because of the high proportion of competitive applicants.
- How to attract students who already have music education majors.
- How to improve recruitment strategies.
- How to increase student retention.

Geographic location:
- Geographic location is a major factor in recruitment, as students tend to prioritize schools that are close to their home.

Scholarships:
- Scholarships are often the deciding factor for students, as they may be the only way to afford tuition costs.

Broad curriculum of the music education major:
- The curriculum should include courses in music theory, performance, and music history.

Recruiting efforts:
- Recruiters should use a variety of strategies, including social media, email, and phone calls.

Individualized attention:
- Prospective students should feel supported and valued by the music education program.

Current student interactions:
- Prospective students should be able to connect with current students to learn more about the program.

Application:
- The application process should be streamlined and user-friendly.

Counselors:
- Counselors should be informed about the music education program and its requirements.

Career preparation:
- The program should prepare students for a variety of career paths, including teaching, performing, and music industry.

Advising:
- Advisors should be knowledgeable about the music education program and its requirements.

Retention:
- Retention strategies should be implemented to keep students engaged in the program.

Evaluation:
- Evaluation should be based on student feedback and performance.

Institutional culture:
- The institutional culture should be supportive and encouraging of students' growth and development.

Institutional identity:
- The institutional identity should reflect the values and mission of the music education program.

Institutional resources:
- The institution should provide resources to support the music education program, including funding and facilities.

Institutional challenges:
- The institution should address any challenges that may impact the success of the music education program.

Institutional opportunities:
- The institution should identify opportunities for growth and development of the music education program.

Institutional strengths:
- The institution should highlight its strengths and areas of excellence in the music education program.
THANK YOU!

Scott N. Edgar
Lake Forest College
edgar@lakeforest.edu