

Idaho 4-H Teen Conference encourages teens to “go on” after high school

AT A GLANCE

Each year, Idaho 4-H provides an opportunity for teens to visit and live on a college campus. The result is strong friendships and a tendency to explore opportunities after high school.

The Situation

The go on rate is defined as the number of “students who enrolled at a postsecondary institution within 12 months of graduating from high school” (Idaho State Board of Education, 2015). Idaho’s go on rate was 53 percent in 2013. Most estimates put Idaho’s go on rate as one of the five lowest in the country. Despite significant efforts from a local nonprofit organization, the rate has even declined in recent years (Walters, 2014). Low go on rates suggest that Idaho youth will not be adequately prepared to compete in a world that has become increasingly reliant on education after high school.

Our Response

Idaho 4-H Teen Conference has been a cornerstone event of the Idaho 4-H teen program since 1923. Though it has undergone several name changes over the years, the main premise has always been the same: provide an opportunity for Idaho teens to visit the University of Idaho campus in Moscow to learn project, leadership, civic and/or career building skills.

Teen Conference is open to youth who have completed eighth through twelfth grades. Delegates stay in dorms, eat in the residence dining hall, and have meetings, workshops and activities in different buildings throughout campus. Combined with other teen activities throughout the year, many teens that attend 4-H Teen Conference develop relationships with oth-



Delegates have fun learning about “The Science of Cookies” in a workshop at Idaho 4-H Teen Conference in June.

er teens across Idaho that often last well beyond their 4-H experience.

In recent years, the Teen Conference planning committee has made a concerted effort to provide workshops that encourage youth to explore career options, and has also made connections with university faculty and staff that promote the educational opportunities available at the University of Idaho. The efforts open up new opportunities for teens from across the state. The designed effect of the planning committee’s efforts is to encourage more youth affiliated with Idaho 4-H Teen Conference — open to all teens in Idaho — to consider attending college after high school.

Program Outcomes

In order to assess the likelihood of Teen Conference delegates to go on to college after high school, the 2016 evaluation included the question, “Are you considering attending the University of Idaho after high

school?" Data were collected from electronic response cards. Potential responses and results are outlined in the table below.

Response	Count	Percent
1. Not planning on attending school	12	9%
2. Going to another school	37	27%
3. UI is on my list	65	47%
4. I am going to UI	24	17%
Totals	138	100%

It is encouraging that a four-day career and leadership development workshop on a university campus in the summer produces such positive responses. With over 90 percent of respondents indicating that they are considering college in the future, these data suggest that exposing youth to the opportunities available to them after high school can have a positive impact on their decisions.

More than 60 percent of the respondents were between 13 and 16 years old at the time of the survey, and will be eligible to attend the conference for at least two more years. Attending the conference multiple years will not only increase exposure to the university and campus life, but will also provide them opportunities to strengthen relationships with peers attending the conference, and to make plans to attend the University of Idaho together, which often happens.

The Future

Efforts to recruit more teens to attend Idaho 4-H Teen Conference are underway. Idaho 4-H is re-vamping its teen programming efforts in an attempt to create a year-round pipeline that will encourage youth in Idaho to participate in 4-H teen programs all year. Additionally, each Extension district – in northern, southwest, south-central and eastern Idaho – will host regional events for youth as young as 12 years old in an effort to get them excited about staying in 4-H and learning more leadership, citizenship and career skills. Programming efforts not only help develop outstanding young people prepare for the challenges of adulthood, they also provide a strong resume of activities and skills that can significantly increase their chances of securing financial support for their postsecondary education.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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