

6-10-2003

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Recommended Citation

University Marketing and Communications, "06/10/2003 - Summer Camps and Conferences Provide Economic and Recruiting Boost to EIU" (2003). 2003. 198.
https://thekeep.eiu.edu/press_releases_2003/198

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NEWS

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03-109

June 10, 2003

For Immediate Release:

SUMMER CAMPS/CONFERENCES PROVIDE ECONOMIC/RECRUITING BOOST TO EIU

CHARLESTON – Summer is a slow time of year at most universities. Campuses are often nearly deserted, facilities shut down and the pace of activity slackens.

But not at Eastern Illinois University.

At Eastern, summer is one of the busiest, most productive and most economically important periods on the calendar.

That's because Eastern's program of annual summer camps and conferences is an invaluable tool for showcasing the university, recruiting future students and – increasingly significant at this time when higher education in the state of Illinois faces budget challenges – a proven producer of income for the university as well as the Coles County business community.

In fact, Eastern's program of summer camps and conferences has been shown to be worth millions of dollars to the regional economy and the university.

Every year, Eastern hosts more than two dozen residential athletic, academic, cultural and other programs for schools, individuals, musicians, professionals, educators, students, senior citizens and others.

The impact is substantial, said Matt Boyer, conference coordinator for University Housing and Dining's Camps and Conferences Services, both in terms of the exposure the university receives and the income generated.

"Every summer we bring in between 13,000 and 14,000 guests," he said. "They range from junior high students to grandparents, from age 10 or 12, to 80."

The camps' economic impact is significant, he said. "All together, they generate about \$1 million a year in income directly for the university." And that money in turn ripples through the local economy at restaurants, motels and retailers, Boyer added.

A study by the Charleston Chamber of Commerce, for example, shows that Eastern's biggest events of the summer, the Illinois High School Association's boys' and girls' state track meets, by

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themselves attracted 23,500 visitors (19,000 of them adults) to town in 2001. Visitors spend money at motels, restaurants and retailers in Charleston and Mattoon and as far away as Arcola, Casey and Effingham, pouring an estimated \$1.95 million into the regional economy.

But while the university's summer programs are a proven income producer, of equal if not greater importance, Boyer said, is the recruitment function that the camps and conferences perform.

"Recruitment is the primary reason the program started," Boyer said. High school students who visit Eastern are able to sample the university's facilities, take note of its personableness and "try it on" as a fit.

Along those lines, Chamber of Commerce figures show that in 2001, for example, students from more than 380 high schools across the state visited Eastern for the state track meets alone.

"Camps provide an academic influence on students during the summer to encourage them to continue their education after high school," Boyer said. "They get into the setting of being on a college campus and experiencing what college is about – not just students but adults who go back and tell their neighbors and their own children or grandchildren."

The single biggest events of the year, of course, are the track meets, which occur each May. Hundreds of male and female athletes from Class A and AA enrollment high schools from throughout the entire state of Illinois converge on O'Brien Stadium and Lantz Field House. They are housed in university residence halls, utilize university facilities and become well acquainted with the campus, seeing first hand the advantages attending Eastern if they choose to continue their academic careers.

Later in the summer, from mid-June to mid-July, the university's Athletics Department sponsors a series of basketball, soccer, football, baseball, tennis and track and field camps for high school and junior high school students from throughout the state. These camps not only provide valuable training for young athletes but, again, showcase the university to potential future students.

Together, the state track meet and athletic camps are the biggest events on Eastern's summer schedule, generating about a quarter of a million dollars of income for the university.

But there are other important camps, as well. Those that Eastern has hosted include:

- Music camps for high school students musicians and band members;
- Smith Walbridge camps for marching band and color guards;
- Illinois Council of Teachers of Mathematics, giving math teachers an opportunity to update skills, present techniques and network with peers;
- Girls and Boys State, providing high school students a chance to develop leadership skills and learn about the workings of government;
- Cheerleading camps for high school cheerleading and performance squads;
- Art camps to render artistic and cultural opportunities to high school students;
- Elderhostel, to provide life learning opportunities to mature adults; and
- Band camps for various individual high schools from around the state.

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SUMMER CAMPS/CONFERENCES

This summer's schedule of more than 75 scheduled camps running from May 11 to Aug. 2 includes: National Science Foundation; boys' and girls' state track meets; Premier Boys State; Illini Girls State; Kankakee Upward Bound; Civil Air Patrol; various athletics and sports camps; cheerleading camps; Illinois Math and Science Academy; Illinois Press Foundation; Morton, Romeoville, Monticello, Metamora, Minooka, Watseka, Evansville and Herscher band camps; Smith Walbridge clinics; Project TOPS and Elderhostel.

Summer camps and conferences at Eastern date to the 1970s when Civil Air Patrol and band camps were first initiated. In the 1980s, the St. Louis Cardinals NFL team held its summer training camp at Eastern.