Graduates of Agricultural Programs
Attitudes Regarding Basic Employability Skills

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Introduction I

• Students enter college with the expectation that they will acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities to enter the workforce.

• Employers have an expectation college graduates possess the employability skills required to perform their jobs.

• Faculty consider they are providing students with critical knowledge and capabilities for their careers.
However, there is increasing concern in industry, government and academe that:
  – graduates lack basic ‘employability’ skills.
  – there is a misalignment between academic preparation, the perceptions of students and the needs of employers
• This results in costly remedial training
  – leading some to question the real value of a degree and the higher education system
• This concern is also evident in Agriculture.
Purpose

• To develop a triangular study, investigating the alignment of academic preparation, employers needs, and graduate capabilities in the agricultural field.

• By examining the attitudes of recent graduates, the faculty who taught them, and human resource managers who recruit them.

• The project obtained support from the California Agricultural Research Institute.
Objective of this study

• This study describes the attitudes of Cal Poly Pomona College of Agriculture graduates regarding
  – the basic employability skills received in college,
  – the importance of these skills in their first job upon graduation, and
  – their competency in these skills in their first job.
Design/Methodology/Approach

• A two part survey was designed using 5-point Likert scales.
• Part I included the 10 dimensions of basic employability skills - comprising 60 items.
• Part II included nine demographic items.
• 1,100 invitations were deployed via email.
• 137 surveys were fully completed using surveymonkey.com.
• = 12.5% response rate
Critical Employability Skills /Measurement Items

1. **Communication skills** – the ability to read, write, speak, and listen; and to interpret, assemble and articulate information

2. **Math skills** – ability to perform basic mathematical procedures to solve practical problems

3. **Problem solving skills** - ability to think creatively, make decisions, and solve problems

4. **Management skills** - the activities of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling to meet organizational goals

5. **Interpersonal skills** - ability to work in teams, help others to learn, negotiate, and work in a multicultural organization

6. **Customer service skills** - ability to anticipate and meet the needs of both internal and external customers

7. **Leadership skills** - ability to motivate others to achieve organizational goals

8. **Life-long learning skills** - willingness to assess and recognize one’s own strengths and weaknesses and to pursue self-development

9. **Technology skills** - the ability to select procedures, equipment, and tools to acquire and evaluate data

10. **Work ethic** - includes attendance, punctuality, motivation, the ability to meet deadlines, and realistic expectations
Importance of Skills in First Job

- Interpersonal Skills: 4.61
- Work Ethic Skills: 4.56
- Leadership Skills: 4.5
- Management Skills: 4.42
- Technology Skills: 4.38
- Problem Solving Skills: 4.33
- Lifelong Learning Skills: 4.29
- Communication Skills: 4.08
- Math Skills: 3.91
- Customer Service Skills: 3.18

N=137
Reception of Skills in College

- Technology Skills: 4.17
- Communication Skills: 4.07
- Leadership Skills: 3.98
- Management Skills: 3.96
- Work Ethic Skills: 3.95
- Interpersonal Skills: 3.88
- Lifelong Learning Skills: 3.87
- Problem Solving Skills: 3.83
- Math Skills: 3.78
- Customer Service Skills: 3.49

Importance Ranking:
- Technology Skills: 5
- Communication Skills: 8
- Leadership Skills: 3
- Management Skills: 4
- Work Ethic Skills: 2
- Interpersonal Skills: 1
- Lifelong Learning Skills: 7
- Problem Solving Skills: 6
- Math Skills: 9
- Customer Service Skills: 10

N=137
Competency in their First Job

N=137
Preliminary Conclusions

• Overall, findings diverge from expectations.
  – Importance of math, communication and problem solving skills emphasized in the literature
    • and is heavily reinforced throughout college programs.
  – However, they suggest support for the literature in terms of misalignment and the need for remedial training.
Limitations/ Next Steps

• A small sample
  – graduates in one College.

• Need for a bigger study
  – Multiple colleges

• Implementation of a triangular study
  – A structural model has been developed to examine hypotheses of alignment between employers needs, graduate skills, and program outcomes regarding employability skills.
  • Survey of employer perceptions (in process)
  • Survey of faculty perceptions (in process)

• We hope to report on that next year.
• We would like to find partners to collaborate on a broader national survey.

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• THANK YOU