

**SEEDS FOR THE FUTURE:  
WORKPLACE READINESS  
SKILLS FOR TOMORROW'S  
AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE**

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# INTRODUCTION

- **A GAP EXISTS BETWEEN EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS (JASCHICK, 2015)**
- **EMPLOYERS SEEK HIGHER-ORDER PERSONAL TRAITS AND BEHAVIORAL SKILLS (BENTLEY UNIVERSITY, 2014; PARANTO & KELKAR, 2000)**

# METHODOLOGY

- **ALUMNI WORKFORCE READINESS SURVEY (LANDRUM, HETTICH, & WILNER, 2010)**
  - Students selected and ranked their top 10 most important competencies from a list of 54
  - **They also identified ways that a college student might learn to strengthen each skill**
- **AGRICULTURAL JOB POSTINGS**
  - 50 entry-level positions in various agriculture-related fields
  - Collected from aghires.com, agcareers.com, and the National FFA Organization
  - **Analyzed for themes regarding desired employee traits**
- **PARTICIPANTS**
  - Professional Presentations in AELC (AELC 3333)
  - Professional Writing in Agriculture and Natural Resources (AELC 3203)
  - $N = 59$

# RESULTS

Students' Top 10 Skills	Employers' Top 10 Skills
1. Work well with others*	1. Presentation/verbal communication skills
2. Adapt to change*	2. Teamwork, communication, and attitude*
3. Work independently*	3. Written communication skills
4. Teach and learn from others on the job*	4. Time management, organization, and prioritization*
5. Manage several tasks at once*	5. Flexibility and adaptability*
6. Possess a positive attitude towards work*	6. Work without supervision/independently*
7. Handle conflict maturely*	7. Meeting customer needs
8. Demonstrate highly-developed social skills*	8. Problem and conflict management*
9. Function effectively in stressful situations	9. Ability to learn on the job*
10. Possess self-discipline, including punctual attendance and reliability*	10. Demonstrate personal integrity and responsibility*

\* = a skill or attribute from the student list that was matched with one from the employer list.

# LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

## 1. WORK WELL WITH OTHERS\*

- Group projects
- Clubs/social organizations
- Intramural sports

## 2. ADAPT TO CHANGE\*

- Change in the classroom (due dates, new projects, different teaching styles etc.)
- Working with new technology
- Trying new things
- Learning on the job

### **3. WORK INDEPENDENTLY\***

- INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS/ASSIGNMENTS
- HOMEWORK
- TESTS/EXAMS

### **4. TEACH AND LEARN FROM OTHERS ON THE JOB\***

- MENTOR OTHERS/RECEIVE MENTORING
- TUTOR OTHERS/RECEIVE TUTORING
- ALLOW STUDENTS TO TEACH
- GROUP PROJECTS
- WORK PART-TIME WHILE IN SCHOOL

## **5. MANAGE SEVERAL TASKS AT ONCE\***

- TAKE SEVERAL CLASSES IN ONE SEMESTER
- MANAGE DUE DATES
- WORK PART TIME WHILE IN SCHOOL

## **6. POSSESS A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS WORK\***

- CREATE A POSITIVE CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE
- OFFER INCENTIVES FOR STUDENTS TO WORK HARD
- GROUP PROJECTS
- KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE IN LIFE

## **7. HANDLE CONFLICT MATURELY\***

- CONFLICT DURING GROUP PROJECTS
- DEBATE AND DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES
- PROBLEM-SOLVING ACTIVITIES
- DISAGREEMENTS WITH PROFESSORS/CLASSMATES

## **8. DEMONSTRATE HIGHLY-DEVELOPED SOCIAL SKILLS\***

- STRUCTURED SOCIAL EVENTS/NETWORKING EVENTS
- ACTIVITIES REQUIRING COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION
- PUBLIC SPEAKING ACTIVITIES
- SCHOOL PROMOTION POSITIONS (TOUR GUIDE, RA, ETC.)



## **9. FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY IN STRESSFUL SITUATIONS**

- CLASS DEADLINES AND DUE DATES
- TIMED TESTS OR ASSIGNMENTS
- MANAGING DEMANDS OF SCHOOL, WORK, AND LIFE
- EXPOSURE TO NEW OR UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATIONS

## **10. POSSESS SELF-DISCIPLINE, INCLUDING PUNCTUAL ATTENDANCE AND RELIABILITY\***

- BE REQUIRED TO ATTEND CLASS
- REWARDS FOR PUNCTUALITY AND GOOD ATTENDANCE
- MANAGING DEMANDS OF SCHOOL, WORK, AND LIFE

# CONCLUSIONS

- **EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS MOSTLY AGREE ON WHAT TRAITS ARE NEEDED**
  - Work ethic, independence, responsibility, adaptability, ability to learn
- **VIEWS DIFFERED REGARDING COMMUNICATIONS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE SKILLS**
  - Employers seek those who can speak publicly and write well
  - Students did not value meeting customer or client needs
- **STUDENTS RECOGNIZE WAYS IN WHICH THEY CAN LEARN OR PRACTICE WORKFORCE READINESS SKILLS**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- **INSTRUCTORS SHOULD ACTIVELY UTILIZE STUDENTS' SUGGESTIONS FOR SKILL AND TRAIT LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**
  - Challenge students to attend class and complete assignments
  - Utilize more activities that involve communication, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities
- **PLACE ASSIGNMENTS IN A WORK-SPECIFIC CONTEXT AND MAKE THEM AS TRUE TO LIFE AS POSSIBLE**
  - Indicate or explain what skills are being learned and why they are important on the job
  - Demonstrate how both oral and written communications skills are used

# Recommendations

- **BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL INDUSTRY EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS.**
  - Connection to industry needs, news, and job leads
  - First hand information on job expectations
- **ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO GET INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY AND CAMPUS LIFE AND NETWORK WITH OTHERS**
- **FURTHER RESEARCH TO IDENTIFY NEEDS SPECIFIC TO INDUSTRY AND LOCATION**

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