



# Fostering New Graduate's Workplace Persistence



Findings from APLU's National Survey

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# Employability Skills

## FOUNDATIONAL DATA

APLU Series on Employability Skills in  
Agriculture & Natural Resources

- **2011 Comparative Analysis of Soft Skills: What is Important for New Graduates?** Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, & Fielitz
- **2017 APLU Survey Open-ended Response Analysis: Employability Skills Not Learned in College.** Smith
- **2017 Mini-Survey Borich Gap Analysis**  
Crawford, Fink, Warnick, Smith

## 1. COMMUNICATION

- Listen effectively
- Communicate accurately and concisely
- Effective oral communications
- Communicate pleasantly and professionally
- Effective written communications
- Ask good questions
- Communicate appropriately and professionally using social media

## 2. DECISION MAKING / PROBLEM SOLVING

- Identify and analyze problems
- Take effective and appropriate action
- Realize the effect of decisions
- Creative and have innovative solutions
- Transfer knowledge across situations
- Engage in life-long learning
- Think abstractly about problems

## 3. SELF-MANAGEMENT

- Efficient and effective work habits
- Self-starting
- Well-developed ethic, integrity and loyalty
- Sense of urgency to complete tasks
- Work well under pressure
- Adapt and apply appropriate technology
- Dedication to continued professional development

## 4. TEAMWORK

- Productive as a team member
- Positive and encouraging attitude
- Punctual and meets deadlines
- Maintains accountability to the team
- Work with multiple approaches
- Aware and sensitive to diversity
- Share ideas to multiple audiences

## 5. PROFESSIONALISM

- Effective relationships with customers, businesses and the public
- Accept critique and direction in the work place
- Trustworthy with sensitive information
- Understand role, realistic career expectations
- Deal effectively with ambiguity
- Maintain appropriate decorum and demeanor
- Select mentor and acceptance of advice

## 6. EXPERIENCES

- Related work or internship experiences
- Teamwork experiences
- Leadership experiences
- Project management experiences
- Cross disciplinary experiences
- Community engagement experiences
- International experiences

## 7. LEADERSHIP

- See the “big picture” and think strategically
- Recognize when to lead and when to follow
- Respect and acknowledge others contributions
- Recognize and deal constructively with conflict
- Build professional relationships
- Motivate and lead others
- Recognize change is needed and lead the change effort

# 2017 APLU Employability Open-ended Response Analysis: Employability Skills Not Learned in College.

Overall summary

Total data points: 5897

Total data points related to soft skills 5381

The open ended responses yielded similar frequencies to the rank scores noted in the quantitative analysis.

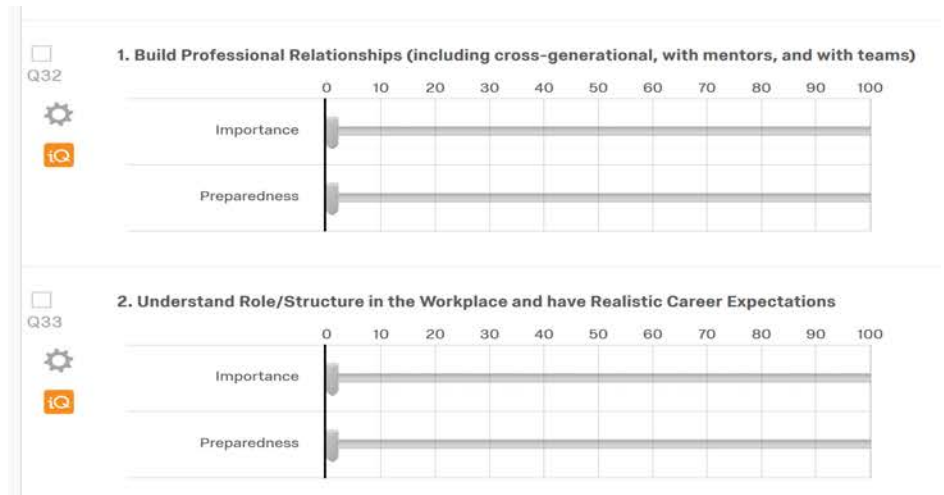
**Table 1. Data Summary of Top Ten Soft Skills Employees Did Not Know Prior to Employment**

Rank	Skill	f	%
1	Identify career opportunities and hiring procedures (new)	435	8.08
1	Recognize and deal constructively with conflict (L4)	384	7.14
3	Productive as a team member (T1)	251	4.66
4	Motivate and lead others (L6)	228	4.24
4	Build professional relationships (L5)	224	4.16
6	Maintain appropriate décor and demeanor (P6)	220	4.09
7	Understand their role and has realistic career expectations (P4)	216	4.01
8	Communicate pleasantly and professionally (C4)	212	3.94
9	Effective relationships with customers, businesses, and the public (P1)	204	3.79
10	Effective oral communications (C3)	182	3.38
10	Understands basic business structure and components (new)	180	3.35

Note: Parenthetical coding indicates category from the 2011 APLU Survey Instrument (Appendix A)

# 2017 Mini-Survey Borich Gap Analysis

- N=25 Academics & Employers
- Rate importance and preparedness of the 2011 Soft Skills



**Are Universities providing the needed employability skill training?**

“Experiencing failure is one of the best ways to learn these skills and many students that we see have rarely been presented with that concept or feeling while growing up.”

ACADEMIC

“Most employers don’t expect graduates to light the world on fire with strategic thinking and ground breaking innovative ideas... most are just looking for loyal, grounded, hard working individuals who can work well with others...”

EMPLOYER

# 2019

## From Academia to the Workforce:

### *Quantitative Analysis*

- Verifying **Critical Growth Areas** for Students Today

### *Qualitative Analysis*

- Preparing for **Persistence, Ambiguity, Change, and Conflict** in the Workplace

# APLU SURVEY COMMITTEE

- Nancy Barcus, COO, Agriculture Future of America (AFA)
- Joel Brendemuhl, Associate Dean, College of Agricultural & Life Sciences, University of Florida
- Cathy Carr, Alumni and Career Services, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Florida
- Pat Crawford, Associate Director, School of Planning, Design and Construction, Michigan State University
- Wendy Fink, Executive Director, Academic Programs Section, Board on Agriculture Assembly, APLU
- Tracy Hoover, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, College of Agricultural Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University
- Kelly Millenbah, Associate Dean, Academic & Student Affairs, College of Agriculture & Natural Resources, Michigan State University
- Erika Osmundson, Director of Marketing and Communications, AgCareers.com
- Kasee Smith, Assistant Professor, Ag & Extension Education, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, University of Idaho
- Mark Stewart, President and CEO, Agriculture Future of America (AFA)
- Susan Sumner, Associate Dean and Director, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Virginia Tech University
- Brian Warnick, Associate Dean for Academic Programs, College of Agriculture, Utah State University
- Christine White, Division Director, Leadership, Education, Assessment & Development Division, FFA



# Finding the critical growth areas

- Mini survey
  - Employers Borich Gap
  - Academics Borich Gap
- Smith Did Not Learn Analysis

**Bold** important in all 3

Borich Gap

\*\* Top 10 acad & empl.

\* Top 8 employers

+ acad over prepared/  
empl underprepared

Smith Analysis

^ did not learn

^^ committee discussion

	2018 employability skills identified as critical growth areas	2011 study skill cluster Rank order
1	Listen Effectively +	communication
2	Communicate Accurately and Concisely **	communication
3	Ask Good Questions *	communication
4	Realize the Effect of Decisions *	decision making
5	Identify and Analyze Problems *	decision making
6	Transfer Knowledge from One Situation to Another *	decision making
7	Understand Role/Structure in the Workplace and Realistic Career Expectations ^	professionalism
8	Accept and Apply Critique and Direction in the Workplace **	professionalism
9	<b>Build Professional Relationships (including cross-generational, with mentors, and with teams)</b>	professional
10	<b>Recognize and Deal Constructively with Conflict</b>	leadership
11	Navigate Change and Ambiguity ^^	(new)

# Rising Concerns

- 1) ability to **persist** in a new job,
- 2) dealing with **ambiguity** in job tasks and workplace expectations,
- 3) dealing with the pace and content of **change** in the workplace, and
- 4) how to manage **conflict** in the workplace.

# 2018 Survey

## On-line Survey Instrument



- 30 Universities participating
  - inviting students, faculty & alumni
- Employer invitations through
  - Universities
  - Ag Careers
  - AFA
  - APLU

# Participants

Male/Female 50/50

White 88%

Age

14% 17-18

34% 19-23

20% 39-53

26% 54-72

6% 73 plus

Stakeholder Group		
	Frequency	Percent
Alumni	4465	42.0
Current Student	2308	21.7
Employer	2528	23.8
Faculty	1222	11.5
Other	116	1.1
Total	10639	100.0

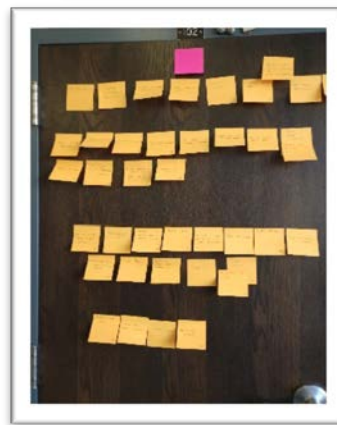
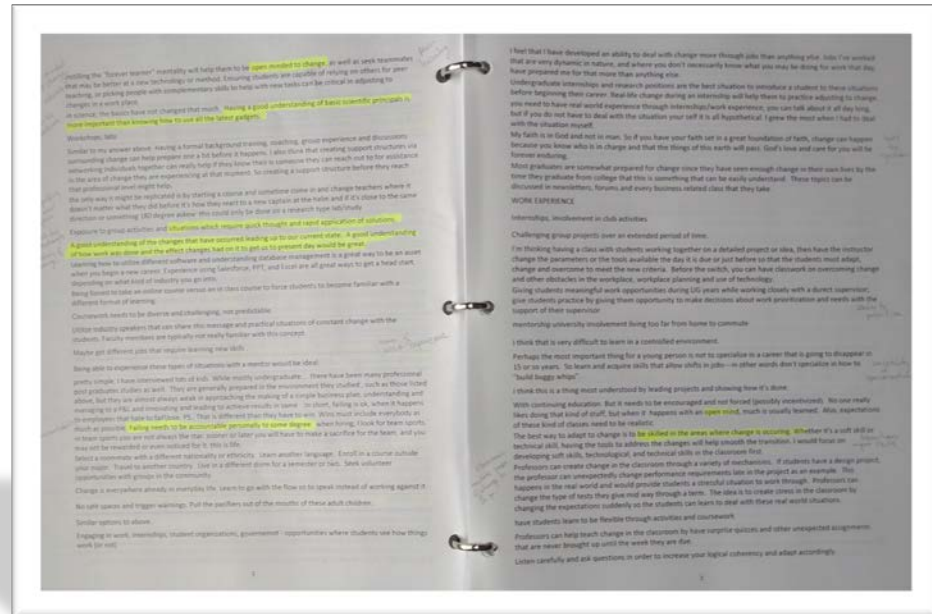
# Alumni - Fields

Organization Type (Q14)		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
(1) Agricultural Production	353	9.7
(2) Consulting / Service Providers	254	7.0
(3) Education	714	19.5
(4) Finance, Banking, Insurance, Real Estate	237	6.5
(5) Health Care	499	13.7
(6) Landscape Design or Construction	95	2.6
(7) Leisure and Hospitality	45	1.2
(8) Manufacturing	189	5.2
(9) Marketing, Media, or Communications	104	2.8
(10) Policy, Legal, or Government	299	8.2
(11) Sales	156	4.3
(12) Arts & Entertainment	19	0.5
(13) Social Services	54	1.5
(14) Military / Defense	23	0.6
(15) Energy	55	1.5
(16) Information Technology or Software Dev.	70	1.9
(17) Other	160	4.4
(18) Natural Resources Management	239	6.5
(19) Research	83	2.3
Total	3653	100.0

# Qualitative Data Codebook Creation

- 21,065 responses
- 1,104 pages
- single space  
10 pt font text

- Persistence 5,612
- Change 5,283
- Ambiguity 4,897
- Conflict 5,273





SOUTH DAKOTA  
STATE UNIVERSITY

APLU Series on Employability Skills in  
Agriculture & Natural Resources

# Consulting Team

Member	Area of Expertise
Dr. Don Marshall	<b>Agriculture, Food &amp; Environmental Sciences</b> Associate Dean of Academic Programs
Ms. Jana Hanson	<b>Institutional Assessment</b> Director
Dr. Karla Hunter	<b>Communication &amp; Journalism</b> Associate Professor
Dr. Gemechis Djira	<b>Mathematics &amp; Statistics</b> Associate Professor
Dr. Kyle Page	<b>Industrial/Organizational Sociology</b> Assistant Professor
Mr. Duncan Schwartz	<b>Sociology &amp; Human Services</b> Student

# Codebook Testing

## Meeting 1

- Review full response set (selected 50 pages)
- Review first draft codebook

## Meeting 2

- Pilot test NVivo application of codebook with Persistence data (1/3 of data set)
- Refinement of themes for codebook

## Meeting 3

- Review coded Persistence data by theme
- Analysis & interpretive observations



# 15 CODE THEMES

## 1) life transitions

career trajectory, environment/place, adulthood

## 2) orientation to the workplace

role & expectations, organization framework, social systems

## 3) coping mechanisms

## 4) individual character qualities

## 5) relationships & mentoring

# 15 CODE THEMES

- 6) seeking clarifying information
- 7) evolution of decision-making skills
- 8) conflict
- 9) knowledge evolution
- 10) independent thinking processes  
critical, creative, growth mindset

# 15 CODE THEMES

## 11) experiences

breadth of coursework  
real world in the classroom  
adapting to teaching styles  
research  
in-course activities

work anywhere  
work career related  
internships

International travel  
home/family  
high school

stretch experiences  
extra curricular  
sports  
performing arts

ROTC/reserve/military  
Ag organization groups

## 12) negative perceptions

educational system, new employees and students, employers

## 13) cannot be taught in university

# Persistence

“Students idealization of their first post-college job and the reality of that job can be quite different. It can be difficult to remain persistent and stick with the job through the early bumps and challenges.

How can skills to build persistence be honed in formal or informal settings before beginning a professional career?”

- 5,612 RESPONSES

# PERSISTENCE

## 5 PRIMARY THEMES

APLU Series on Employability Skills in  
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1

**ORIENTATION TO THE WORKPLACE**

**EXPECTATIONS & ATTITUDE**

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**PROVING GROUNDS & GROWING UP**

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**PROVING GROUNDS & GROWING UP**

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**COPING & ADAPTATION**

**FACING FAILURE & SELF-MANAGING**

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**FACING FAILURE & SELF-MANAGING**

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**RELATIONSHIPS & MENTORING**

**GET A MENTOR (NOT YOUR MOM)**



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**GET A MENTOR (NOT YOUR MOM)**

5

**EXPERIENCES**

**START EARLY, REPEAT OFTEN**

# Recommendations to Universities and Employers for fostering PERSISTENCE

## managing expectations

- Honest information about job prospects, entry experience & career trajectory
- Exposure to career pathway, twists, & challenges
- Rewards as more than salary & promotion

## failure as growth

- Provide opportunities to fail, work with minimal directions, repeat work assignments, and dealing with negative critique
- Setting goals and handling setbacks
- Growth mindset – “belief that basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work” Dweck

## professional behaviors & social skills

- Expect and encourage students to work - anywhere!
- Mentoring & networking with alumni, employers, peers (beyond family & faculty)
- Adulthood – “the practice of behaving in a way characteristic of a responsible adult, especially the accomplishment of mundane but necessary tasks” Google Dictionary