

GOT SKILLS?

PERSPECTIVES OF AGRIBUSINESS GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

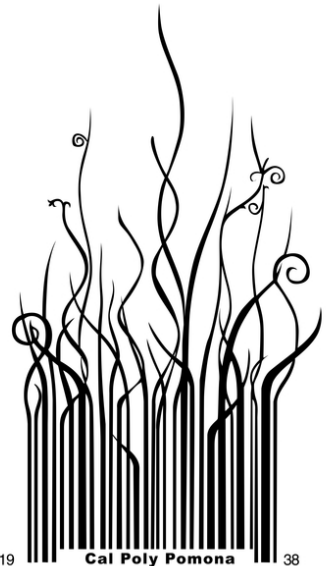


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Problem Statement

- There are challenges in the communication process between higher education and agribusiness industry professionals.
- Both entities need to seek ways to collaborate in the determination of key employability skills necessary for agribusiness graduates.



Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to identify the necessary employability (soft) skills for Agribusiness graduates to be successful in the agribusiness industry, as perceived by agribusiness professionals
- There has historically been a lack of research and studies conducted to identify just what employability skills characteristics a successful graduate from an agricultural business program should possess.



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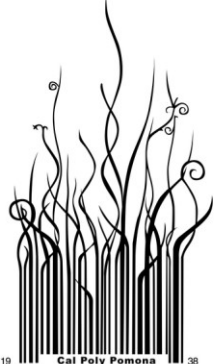
Overarching Question

- **What are agribusiness industry employers' perceptions of the skills needed by today's graduates to be successful in agribusiness?**



Research Sub-Questions

1. What is the level of importance of key employability skills from the perspective of agribusiness industry employers and professionals?
2. What specific additional skills are today's agribusiness industry professionals seeking in qualified agribusiness graduates?
3. What are recent entry-level agribusiness graduates' perceptions of the skills needed to succeed in their jobs?
4. What are the experiences and challenges of recent entry-level agribusiness graduates with respect to maintaining employment within the California agribusiness sector?

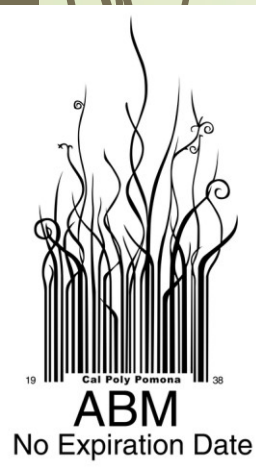


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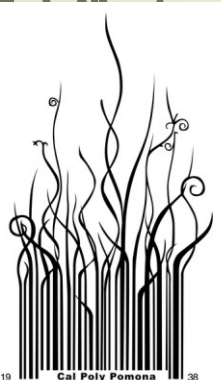
Employability Defined:

- An individual's assets: comprised of their knowledge, skills and attitudes,
- An individual's deployment: a linked set of abilities including career management skills (self-awareness, decision-making, etc.), job search skills and the ability to adapt to changes within the labor market,
- An individual's presentation: the ability to demonstrate assets and abilities in order to successfully convey employability and suitability for a position, and
- An individual's personal and external circumstances such as familial responsibilities and macro-economic environments that may inhibit successful acquisition of employment. (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, pp. 1-2)

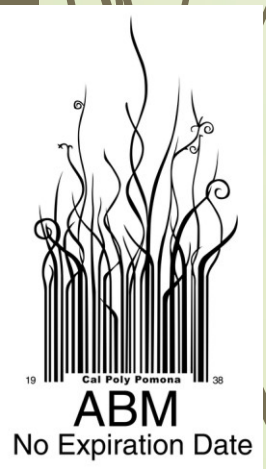
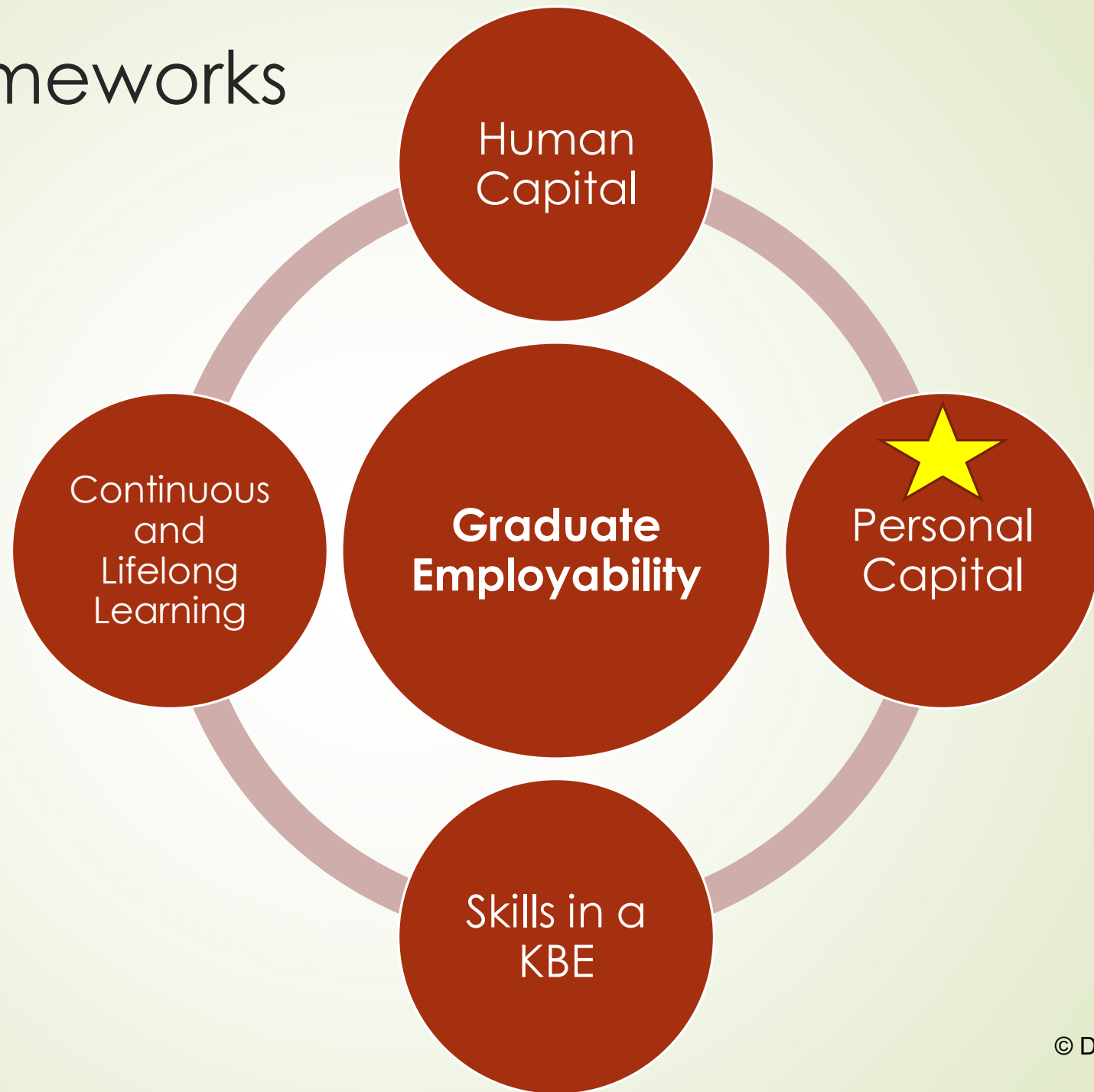


► Review of Relevant Literature

- Employability Skills – Soft Skills Believed to Lead to Success
- Theoretical Frameworks Informing Models of Perceived Employability
- Employer Perceptions of Graduates
- Employer-Institutional Interaction
- Undergraduate Readiness to Enter Workforce



Frameworks



Human Capital

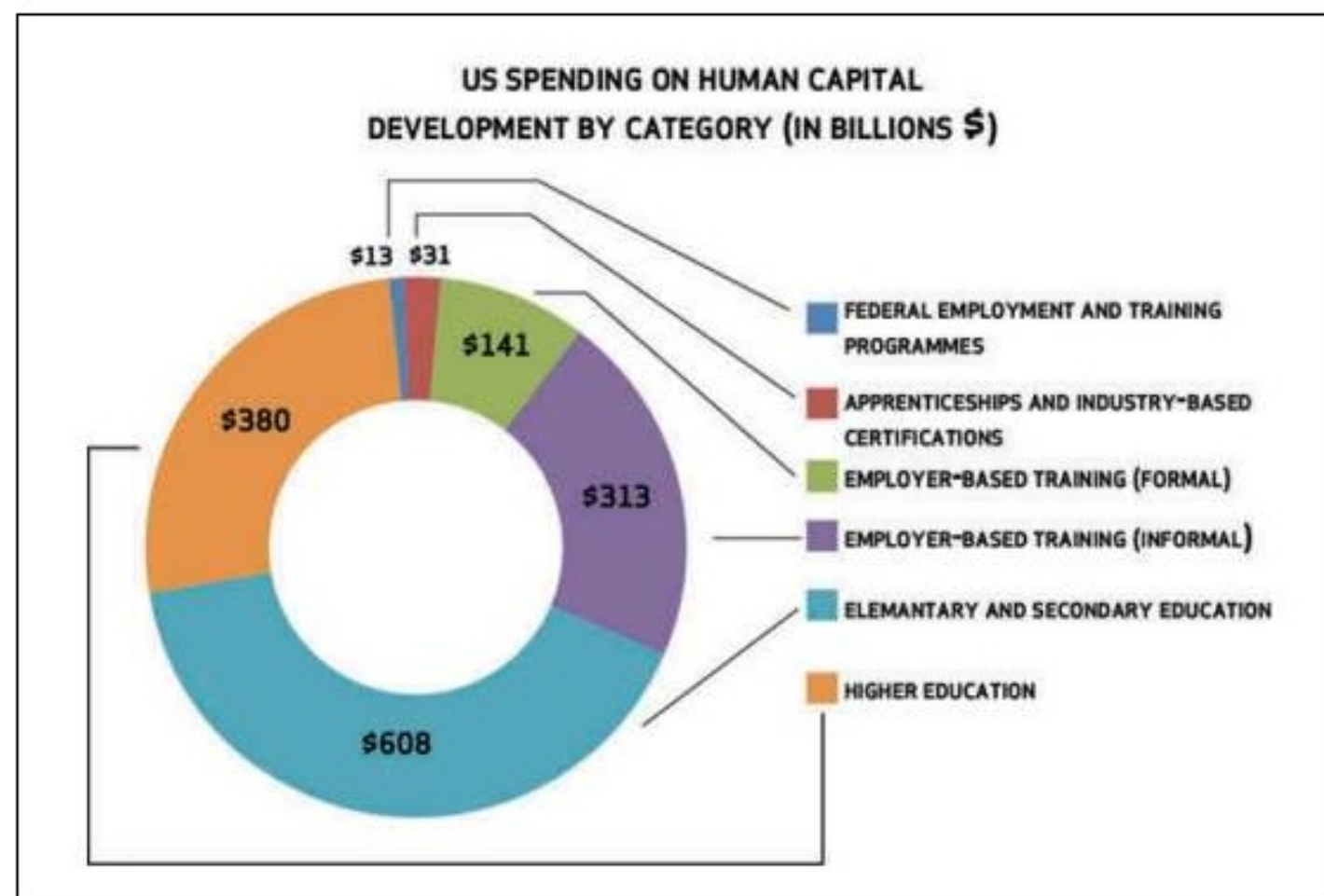


Figure 2.3

The U. S. Human Capital Development System (Carnevale & Smith, 2013, p. 492).

SKILLS AND ABILITIES IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

BASIC SKILLS: READING, WRITING, AND MATHEMATICS

FOUNDATION SKILLS: KNOWING HOW TO LEARN

COMMUNICATION SKILLS: LISTENING AND ORAL COMMUNICATION

ADAPTABILITY: PROBLEM SOLVING AND CREATIVE THINKING

GROUP EFFECTIVENESS: INTERPERSONAL SKILLS, NEGOTIATION , AND TEAMWORK

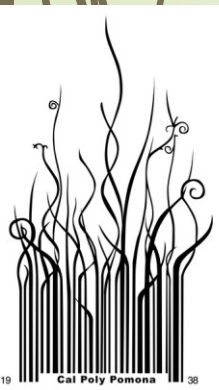
INFLUENCE: ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND LEADERSHIP

PERSONAL MANAGEMENT: SELF-ESTEEM AND MOTIVATION/GOAL SETTING

ATTITUDE: COGNITIVE STYLE

APPLIED SKILLS: OCCUPATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES

Figure 2.5 Skills and abilities in the KBE (Carnevale & Smith, 2013, p. 494)



Personal Capital

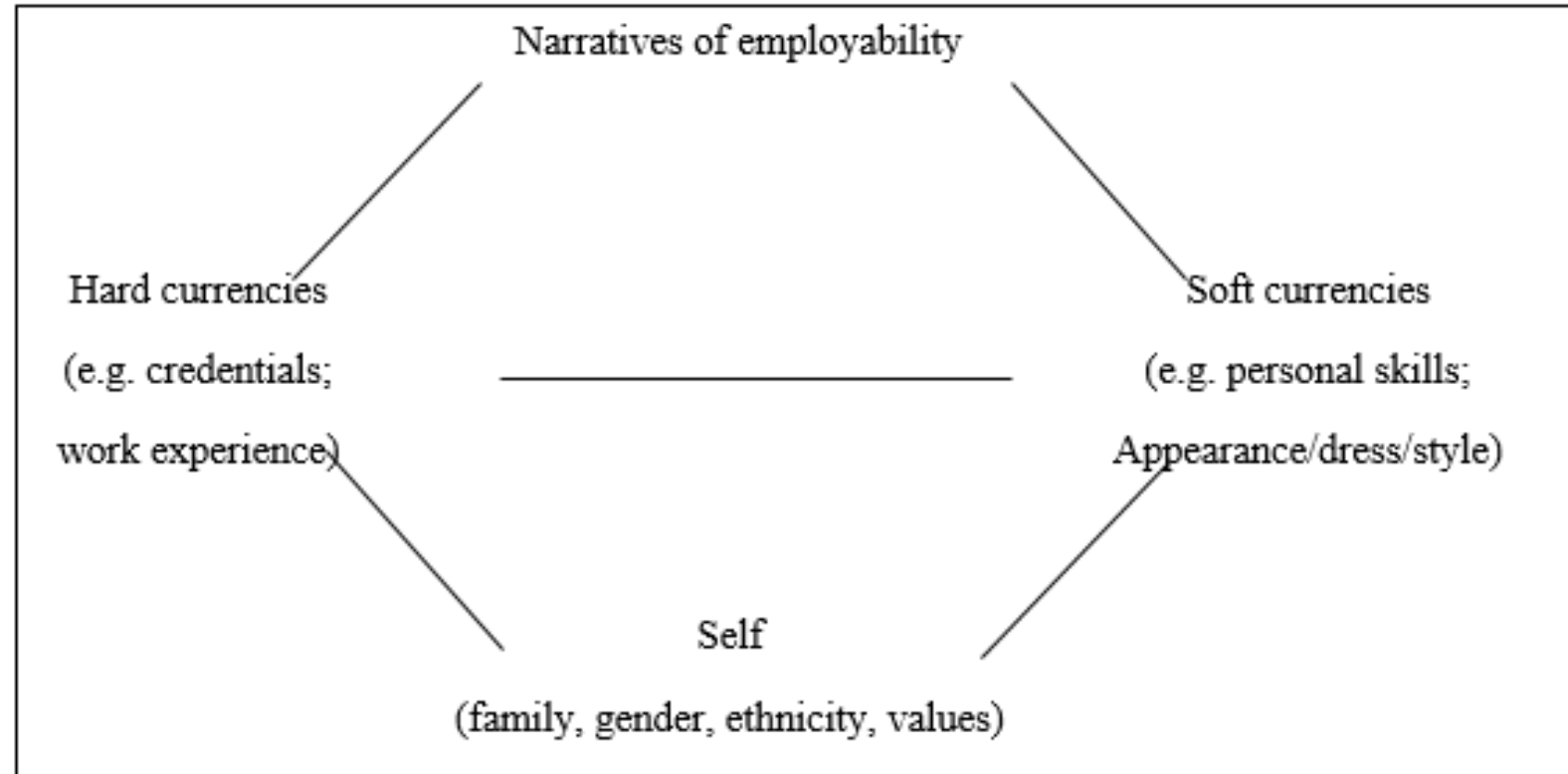
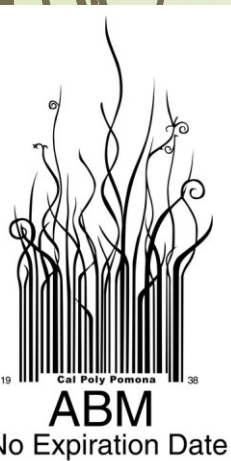
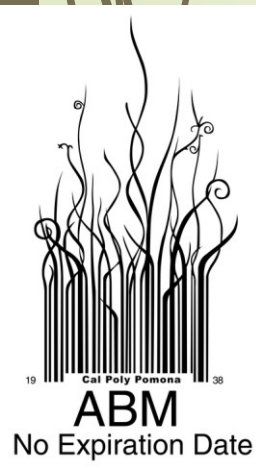
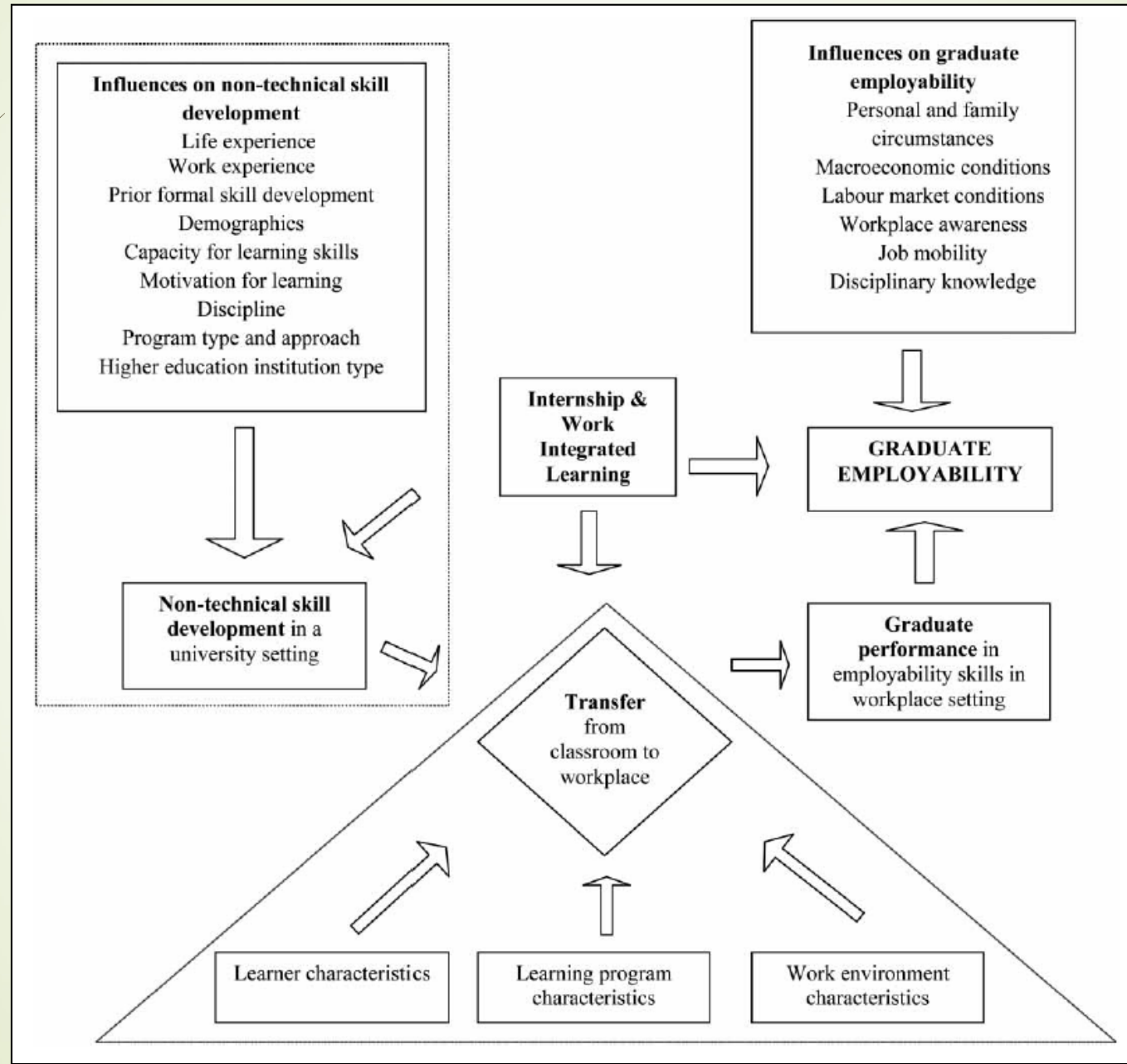


Figure 2.4 The social construction of personal capital (Brown & Hesketh, 2004, p. 35)



Models of Employability



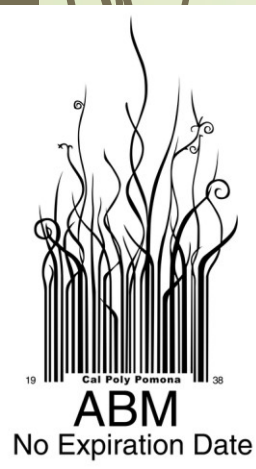
Methodology → Embedded Mixed Method

▶ Quantitative

- ▶ Survey professionals and employers within the agribusiness industry.

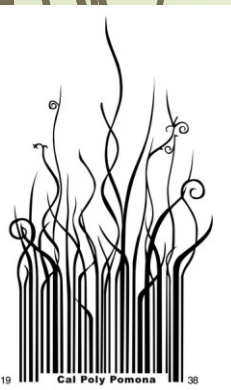
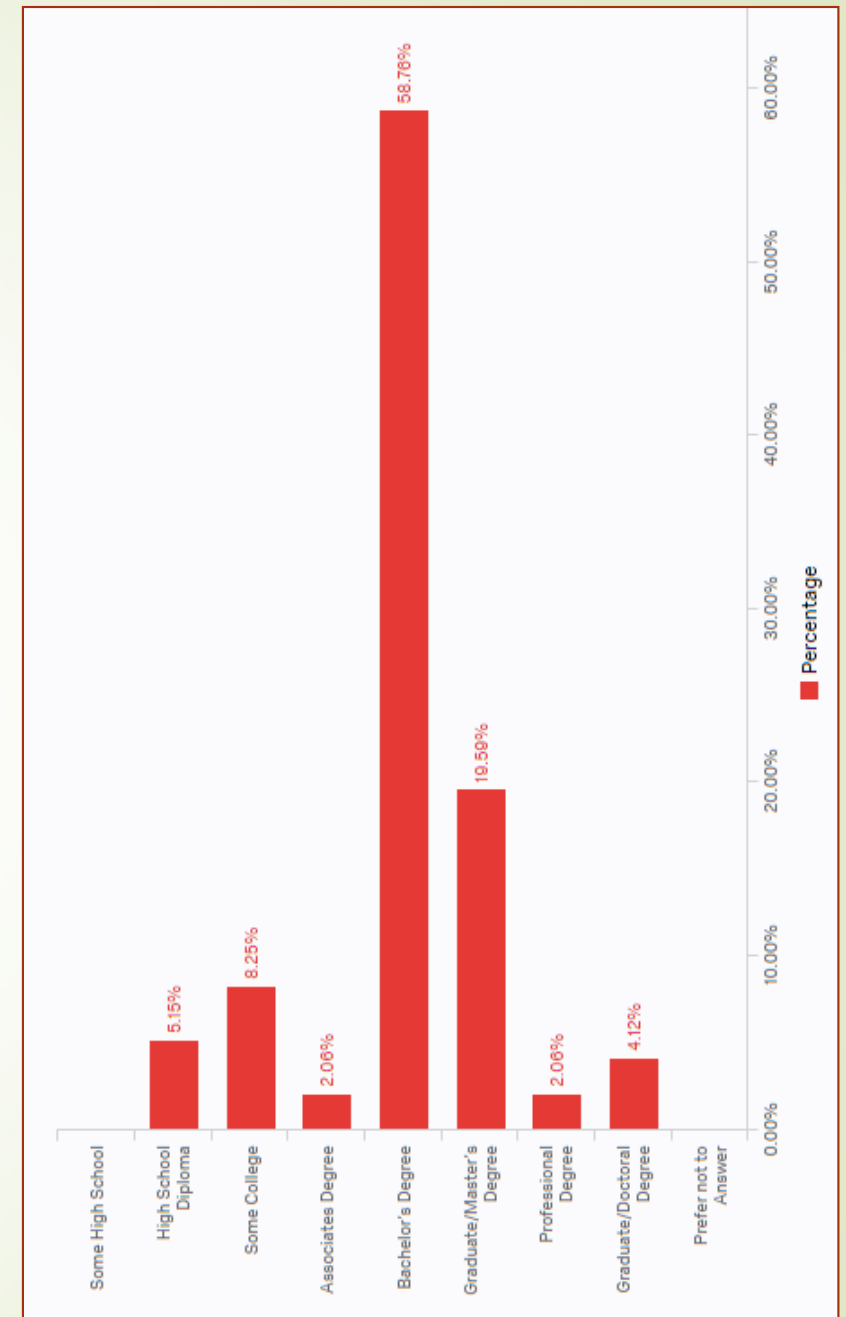
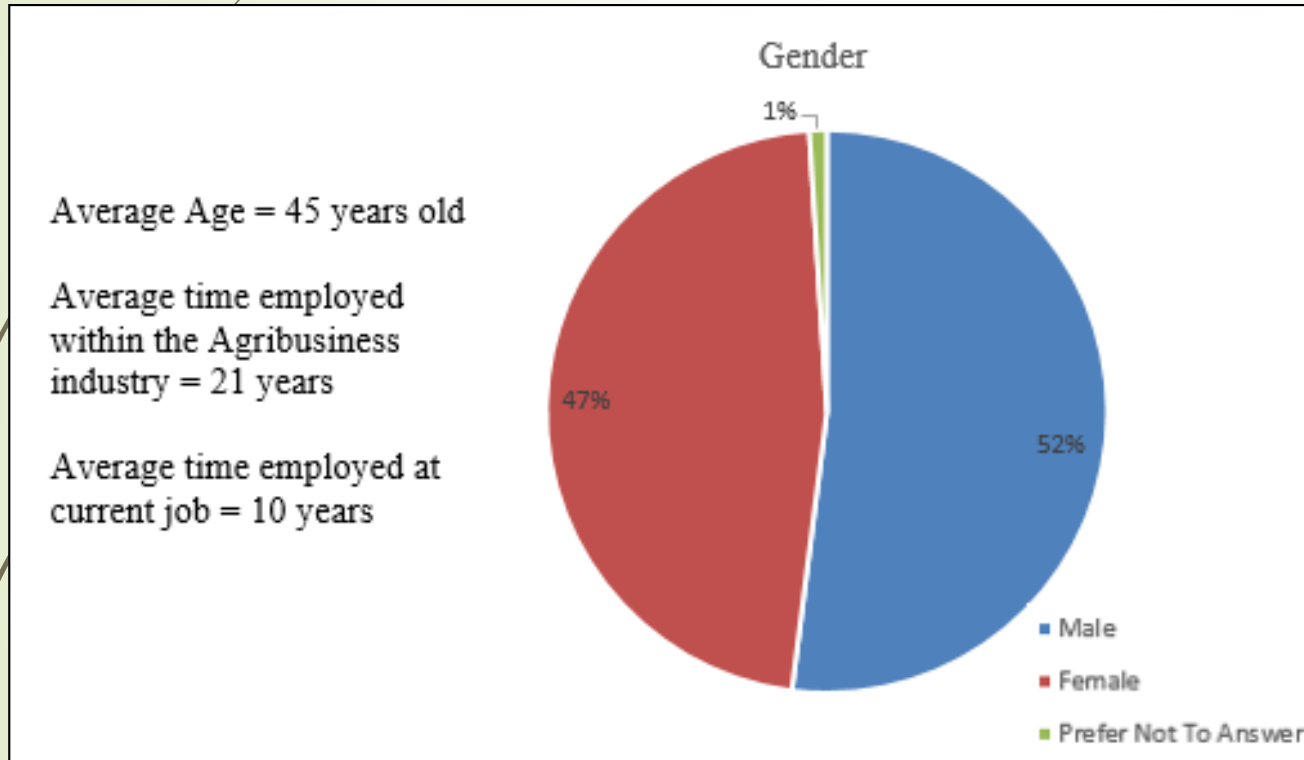
▶ Qualitative

- ▶ Conduct Focus Group Interviews with recent agribusiness graduates
 - ▶ 6 months to 2 years experience in agribusiness industry



Survey Population

➔ 104 completed responses = 20% response rate



Employability Constructs as Modified by Garton (2006 from Evers, Rush and Berdrow (1996))

Problem Solving and Analytic

1. Identifying problems.
2. Prioritizing problems.
3. Solving problems.
4. Contributing to group problem solving.
5. Identifying essential components of the problem.
6. Sorting out the relevant data to solve the problem.

Decision-Making

7. Making decisions in a short time period.
8. Assessing long-term effects of decisions.
9. Making decisions on the basis of thorough analysis of the situation.
10. Identifying political implications of the decision to be made.
11. Knowing ethical implications of decisions.
12. Recognizing the effects of decisions to be made.

Organization and Time Management

13. Establishing the critical events to be completed.
14. Assigning/delegating responsibility.
15. Monitoring progress against the plan.
16. Integrating strategic considerations in the plans made.
17. Revising plans to include new information.
18. Setting priorities.
19. Allocating time efficiently.
20. Managing/overseeing several tasks at once.
21. Meeting deadlines.

Risk Taking

22. Taking reasonable job-related risks.
23. Identifying potential negative outcomes when considering a risky venture.
24. Monitoring progress toward objectives in risky ventures.
25. Recognizing alternative routes in meeting objectives.

Oral Communication

26. Conveying information one-to-one.
27. Communicating ideas verbally to groups.
28. Making effective business presentations.
29. Making impromptu presentations.

Written Communication

30. Writing reports.
31. Writing external business communication.
32. Writing internal business communication.
33. Using proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Listening

34. Listening attentively.
35. Responding to others' comments during a conversation.

Interpersonal Relations

36. Working well with fellow employees.
37. Relating well with supervisors.
38. Establishing good rapport with subordinates.
39. Empathizing with others.
40. Understanding the needs of others.

Managing Conflict

41. Identifying sources of conflict among people.
42. Resolving conflicts.

Leadership and Influence

43. Supervising the work of others.
44. Giving direction and guidance to others.
45. Delegating work to peers.
46. Delegating work to subordinates.

Coordinating

47. Coordinating the work of peers.
48. Coordinating the work of subordinates.

Creativity, Innovation, and Change

49. Providing novel solutions to problems.
50. Adapting to situations of change.
51. Initiating change to enhance productivity.
52. Keeping up-to-date with external realities related to your company's success.
53. Reconceptualizing your role in response to changing corporate realities.

Visioning

54. Conceptualizing a future for the company.
55. Providing innovative paths for the company to follow for future development.

Ability to Conceptualize

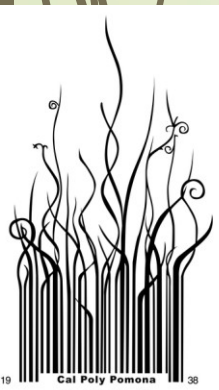
56. Combining relevant information from a number of sources.
57. Applying information to new or broader contexts.
58. Integrating information into more general contexts.

Lifelong Learning

59. Keeping up-to-date on developments in the field.
60. Gaining new knowledge in areas outside the immediate job.
61. Gaining new knowledge from everyday experiences.

Motivation-Personal Strengths

62. Maintaining a high energy level.
63. Functioning at an optimal level of performance.
64. Responding positively to constructive criticism.
65. Maintaining a positive attitude.
66. Functioning well in stressful situations.
67. Ability to work independently.



Quantitative Data Collection

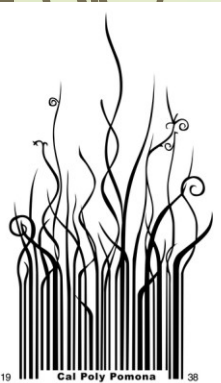
Please respond to the following items by choosing the response that most adequately reflects your perception of the importance of the following skills in agribusiness graduates. Remember this survey is ANONYMOUS and no identifying factors will be linked to you. Please answer openly and truthfully.

Please Rank the Importance of the following Problem Solving and Analytic skills

	No Importance (1)	Minor Importance (2)	Moderate Importance (3)	Major Importance (4)
1. Identifying problems. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Prioritizing problems. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Solving problems. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Contributing to group problem solving. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Identifying essential components of the problem. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Sorting out the relevant data to solve the problem. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please Rank the Importance of the following Decision-Making skills

	No Importance (1)	Minor Importance (2)	Moderate Importance (3)	Major Importance (4)
7. Making decisions in a short time period. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Assessing long-term effects of decisions. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Making decisions on the basis of thorough analysis of the situation. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Identifying political implications of the decision to be made. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Knowing ethical implications of decisions. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Recognizing the effects of decisions to be made. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



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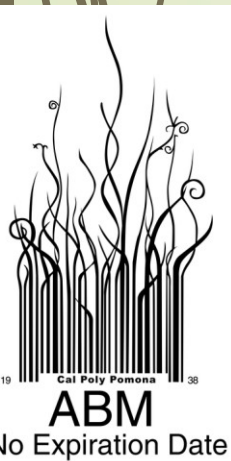
Research Findings for Question One

1. *What is the level of importance of key employability skills from the perspective of agribusiness industry employers and professionals?*

Table 7

Employers' Perceptions of the Importance of Employability Skills (n = 104)

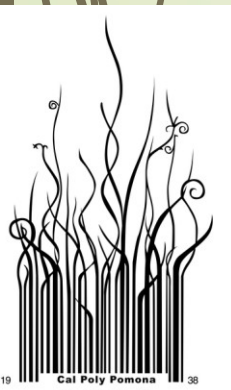
Rank	Employability Skill	M	SD
1.	Listening attentively	3.89	0.34
2.	Adapting to situations of change	3.84	0.4
3.	Functioning well in stressful situations	3.81	0.4
4.	Maintaining a positive attitude	3.80	0.43
5.	Meeting deadlines	3.79	0.48
6.	Conveying information one-to-one	3.77	0.47
7.	Using proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation	3.77	0.51
8.	Allocating time efficiently	3.76	0.45
9.	Working well with fellow employees	3.76	0.43
10.	Setting priorities	3.75	0.5



Research Findings for Question Two

2. *What specific additional skills are today's agribusiness industry professionals seeking in qualified agribusiness graduates?*

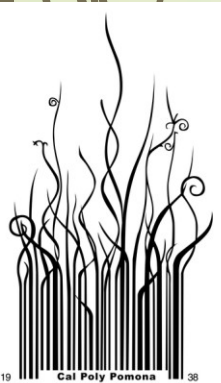
Adaptability Common Sense Coping skills Engagement
Analyze Data Street Smarts Stress Management Creative Thinker
Self-Motivated Communication Skills Innovation Customer Service
Accountability Bilingual Think Outside the Box
Negotiation Well Rounded Finance Emotional Intelligence
Adapt to Change Persistence Self-Discipline
Accounting Positive Time Management Not just book knowledge
Flexibility Sense of Humor Written Communication Skills
Teamwork Passion
Genuine Multitasking Product Knowledge
Work Ethic Multimedia Skills Internships Willingness to Learn
Ambition Presentation skills Commitment
Integrity Perspective Strategic Thinking Jack of all Trades



Research Findings for Question Two

2. *What specific additional skills are today's agribusiness industry professionals seeking in qualified agribusiness graduates?*

- The four skills that emerged most fully were:
 - **Motivation**
 - **Adaptability**
 - **Self - Discipline**
 - **Willingness to Learn**
- These skills are components of the term **Work Ethic**, which was viewed as the overarching theme of the responses.



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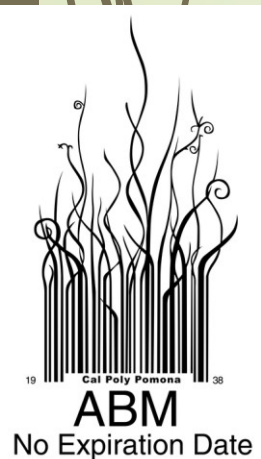
Employer Perspectives of Emergent Skills

➤ **Motivation:**

- “Maintaining a clear and definite connection to the reasons (motivation) for doing their job. Maintaining self-passion and motivation by staying connected to why they chose this line of work to begin with. A desire to be connected to the reason their company is in business, and a buy-in to the larger vision or mission of the company. We need workers that are doing their job because that is what they love to do, not workers that just work for a paycheck”.

➤ **Adaptability:**

- “The biggest areas in my job are being able to adapt to changing situations and working in a team environment. A lot of success or failure in what we do is based on those two areas”.



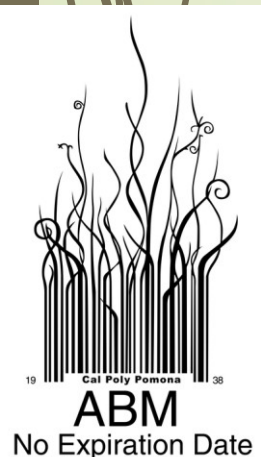
Employer Perspectives of Emergent Skills

➤ **Self-Discipline/Self-Management:**

- Thinking strategically. Our current academia programs do not do a good job of getting new business professionals to think outside the box and critically about initiatives--the process of analyzing the situation (internal and external), formulating strategies based on critical success factors, and then executing those strategies.

➤ **Willingness to Learn:**

- "...a willingness to do a good job and learn to become the best you can be...",
- "Emotional Intelligence",
- "Thinking outside the box",
- "Common Sense"



Qualitative Data Collection

Table 5

Demographics of Graduates from institution's ABM Program (n = 79)

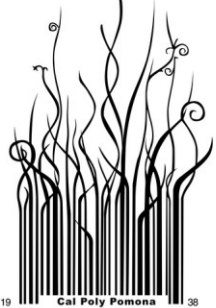
Graduating Year	Gender			
	Female		Male	
	f	%	f	%
2014	34	69.4	15	30.6
2015	25	83.3	5	16.7
Total	59	75.0	20	25.0

Source: University Institutional Data

Table 6

Demographics of ABM Graduate Participants in Focus Groups (n = 18)

Graduating Year	Gender			
	Female		Male	
	f	%	f	%
2014	5	83.3	1	16.7
2015	6	50.0	6	50.0
Total	11	61.1	7	38.9



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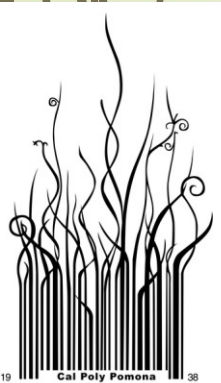
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Focus Group Questions

1. Reflect on your undergraduate educational experience. Describe your perception of how prepared you were upon graduation, in both technical and soft skills, for successful employment in the agribusiness industry.
2. What were some of the most beneficial experiences, activities or coursework that you felt best prepared you with the necessary skill set to succeed in the agribusiness industry?
3. What have been some of the challenges you faced when first starting out working in the agribusiness industry?
4. What skill(s) allowed you to successfully address challenges you faced when first starting out in the agribusiness industry?
5. What types of skill(s) did you find most useful when first beginning your careers?

6. What are your aspirations for your future career? How do you see yourself progressing through the agribusiness industry?
7. What would you say in response to employer concerns that new graduates don't remain for long in positions and tend to lack "staying power"?
8. How important is having a "voice" in your position?
9. What does the term "work outside of your job description" mean to you?
10. Speak to your freshman self – what would you tell yourself in your first year?
11. Imagine having a conversation with a new agribusiness graduate. What would you advise them on with respect to the soft skills needed in the agribusiness industry?
12. Imagine you are in charge of hiring. What soft skills would you look for in a new ABM graduate?
13. What do you think employers want/expect in new ABM graduates?
14. Now imagine having a conversation with an agribusiness faculty member at a university. What advice/suggestions would you give to create a program that successfully prepares graduates for work within the agribusiness industry?

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Research Findings for Question Three

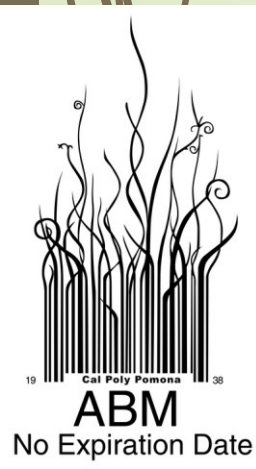
3. *What are recent entry-level agribusiness graduates' perceptions of the skills needed to succeed in their jobs?*

➤ **Work Ethic**

- Continuous Learning
- Emotional Intelligence
- Thinking Outside the Box

➤ **Best Management Practices for undergraduate preparation**

- Beneficial courses and experiential learning
- Suggestions for undergraduate program alignment



Graduate Perspectives of Work Ethic

► Continuous Learning

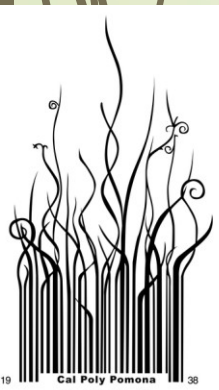
- “This goes back to the old saying that going to college shows an employer that you can be taught. Especially for agriculture, since it’s an old business, that’s exactly what they’re looking for. They want someone that has the discipline to be taught...everything they know the way they’ve been doing it” (James)

► Emotional Intelligence

- Several classes...taught me how to approach and react to different personalities. It taught me how to work with leaders. I knew what they were looking for in me, what to say to them, how to approach different situations, and always being proactive because managers and bosses look for that more than technical skills. Our company, when we are looking for new employees, always says, “You can teach them about produce, you can teach them the industry knowledge, but you can’t teach them how to be proactive”. You can’t teach someone integrity. (Gella)

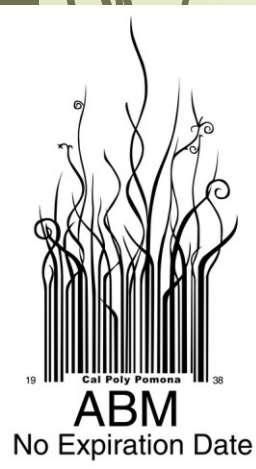
► Thinking Outside the Box

- As a new grad, you tend to be part of a younger generation so the people that hire you are looking for new and fresh ideas. They would like to see initiative from you. For example, maybe you can improve a process and the daily operations, or make something more efficient. (Francis)



Graduate Perceptions of BMPs for Undergraduate Success

Table 9			
Courses and Experiential Learning Activities Perceived as Beneficial by ABM Graduates			
Undergraduate ABM Courses		Experiential Learning Activities	
Agribusiness Marketing Applications		Group/Team Projects	
Advertising and Promotion		Industry Project Partnerships	
Accounting for Agribusiness		Speaking Presentations	
Agribusiness Finance		Career Fairs	
Data Analysis for Agribusiness		Internships	
Ethical Issues in Agriculture		Field Trips	
Agricultural Leadership		Tradeshows	
Senior Feasibility Study		Club Involvement	



Graduate Suggestions for Undergraduate Program Alignment

Table 10

Additional Course Topics and Experiential Learning Activities Suggested by ABM Graduates

Additional Courses/Topics

Additional Experiential Learning

Graphic Design

Mandatory Internships

Sales/Personal Selling

Industry Mentors

Negotiation

Portfolio (Hard Copy and Electronic)

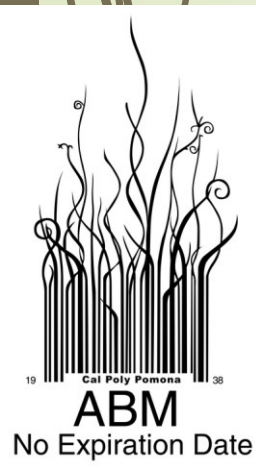
Excel, MS Dynamics, Adobe Suite

Logistics/Supply Chain Management

Customer Relationship Management

Compliance/Regulation

Professional Development “Polish”

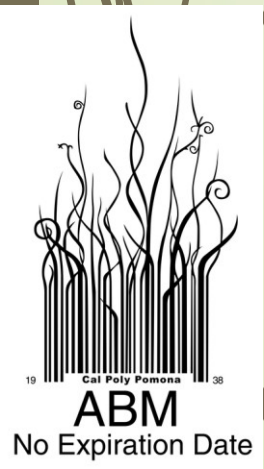


Research Findings for Question Four

4. *What are the experiences and challenges of recent entry-level agribusiness graduates with respect to maintaining employment within the California agribusiness sector?*

► **Challenges faced in the agribusiness workplace**

- The “Hump before the Jump”
- Gender gaps in agribusiness

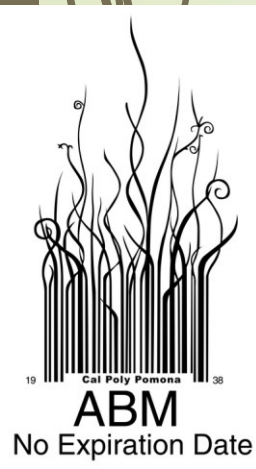


Graduate Perspectives on Workplace Challenges

► The “Hump before the Jump”

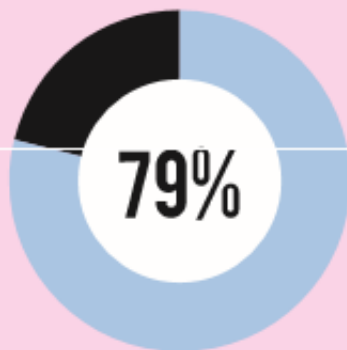
- Feeling underutilized
 - Experiencing a lack of “voice”
 - Lack of clear “path to promotion” within organization
 - Organizational unwillingness to entertain graduates’ ideas for change and innovation (old vs. new)
- Honestly, that’s very important because part of the thing that gets us invested in the position is if we can actually contribute to it. Most of my bosses are twice my age. They are all the end of the baby-boomers so they have a very fixed set of viewpoints on how the world should work. We grew up in the current economy....We have different viewpoints on how the world is working now. And honestly, we could contribute and help shape the future of our companies, but until they actually start listening to us, we’ll continue to feel marginalized which leads to the hump which causes us to jump which causes all the rumors that we’re lazy, and we don’t want to work. (Jack)

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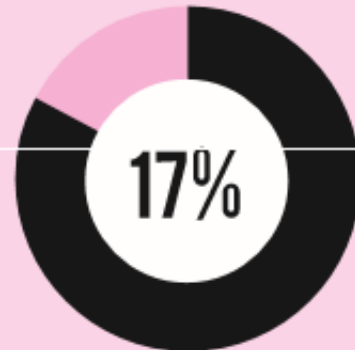
Gender Gaps in Agribusiness

79% of women feel there is gender inequality in agribusiness. Just 47% of men feel the same.



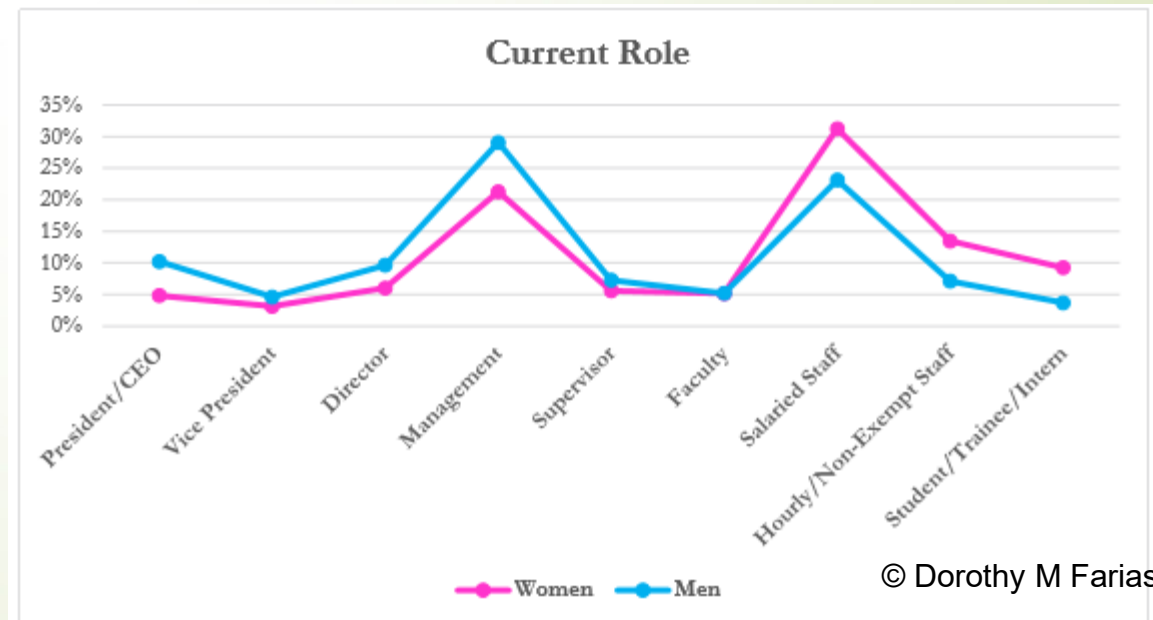
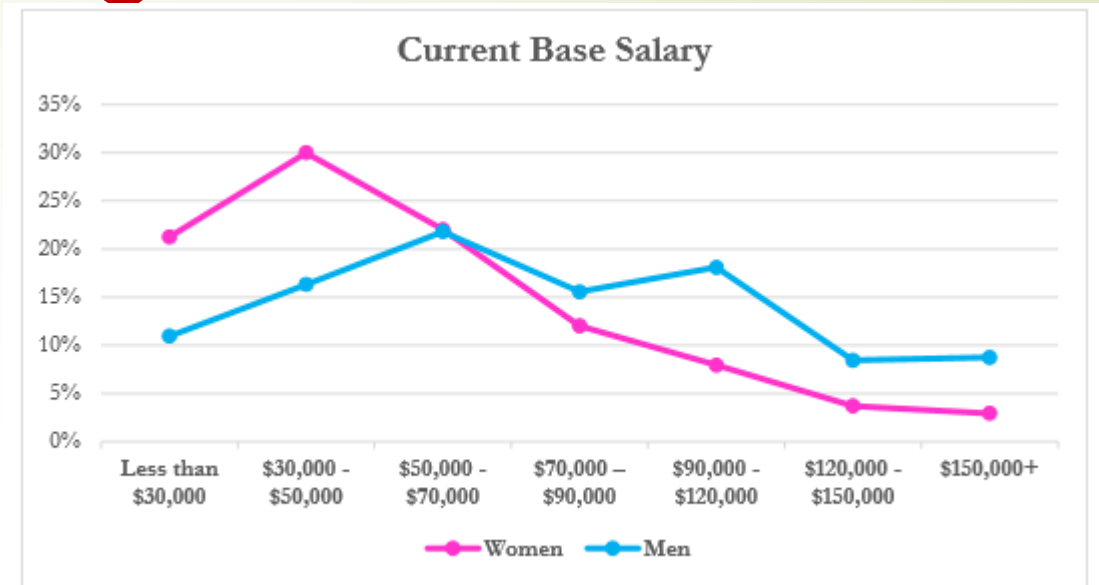
of men surveyed said they felt they were respected and treated equally in their workplace

while

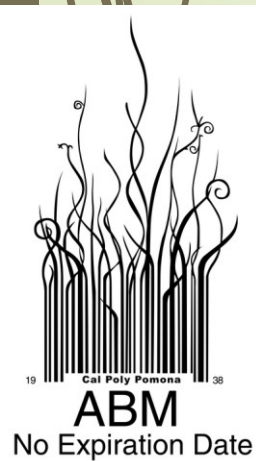


of women felt they were not as respected as their male coworkers.

Source: AgCareers.com, 2016



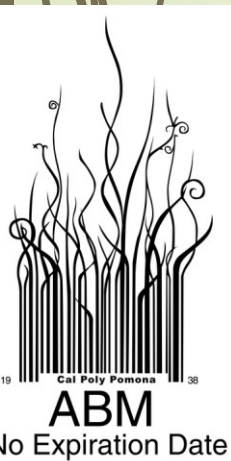
© Dorothy M Farias 2017



Graduate Perspectives on Workplace Challenges

➤ Gender Gaps in agribusiness

- I'd talk to male customers, and they'd be surprised that I know so much about the industry...It's just the fact that I'm a woman that they don't take me seriously. It's been a lot of work, and it's been a struggle definitely in marketing and sales, but it's a work in progress. (Victoria)
- Half of our sales reps are men, and half are women. Our women actually have higher sales. Yet, the men are the ones who have higher titles and the higher salaries. So, it is interesting because yes, the females are very charismatic. They're great at what they do, and they probably do get some of those extra sales, yet, in our company, the men are all given separate titles, and they have higher paying salaries. But the women are the ones out there, actually hustling it. (Bridget)

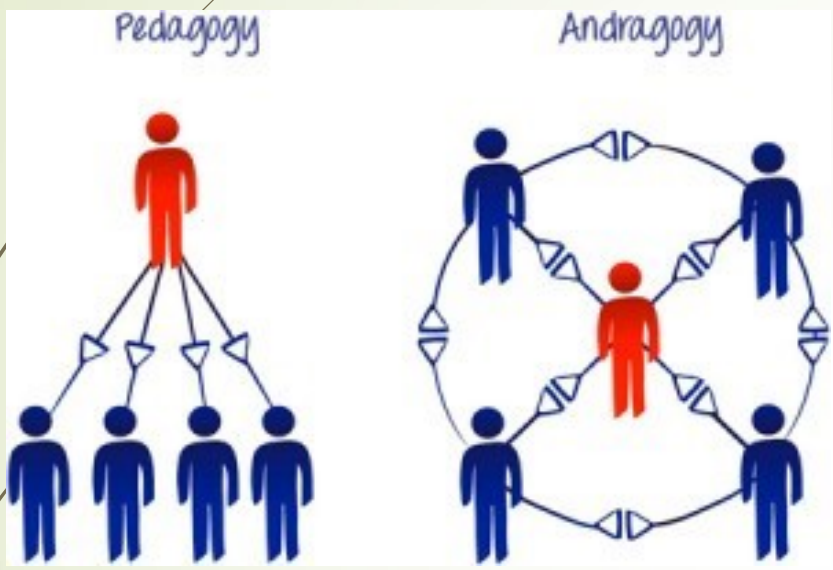


Implications for Undergraduate Programs

- Employers, Educators and Graduate Collaboration on Skill Development
- Experiential Learning as the Key to Skill Development and Lifelong Learners
- Graduate Narratives of Employability Need to be Heard



Continuous Learning

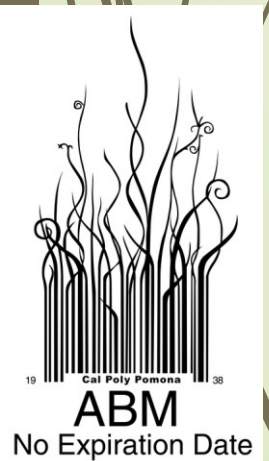
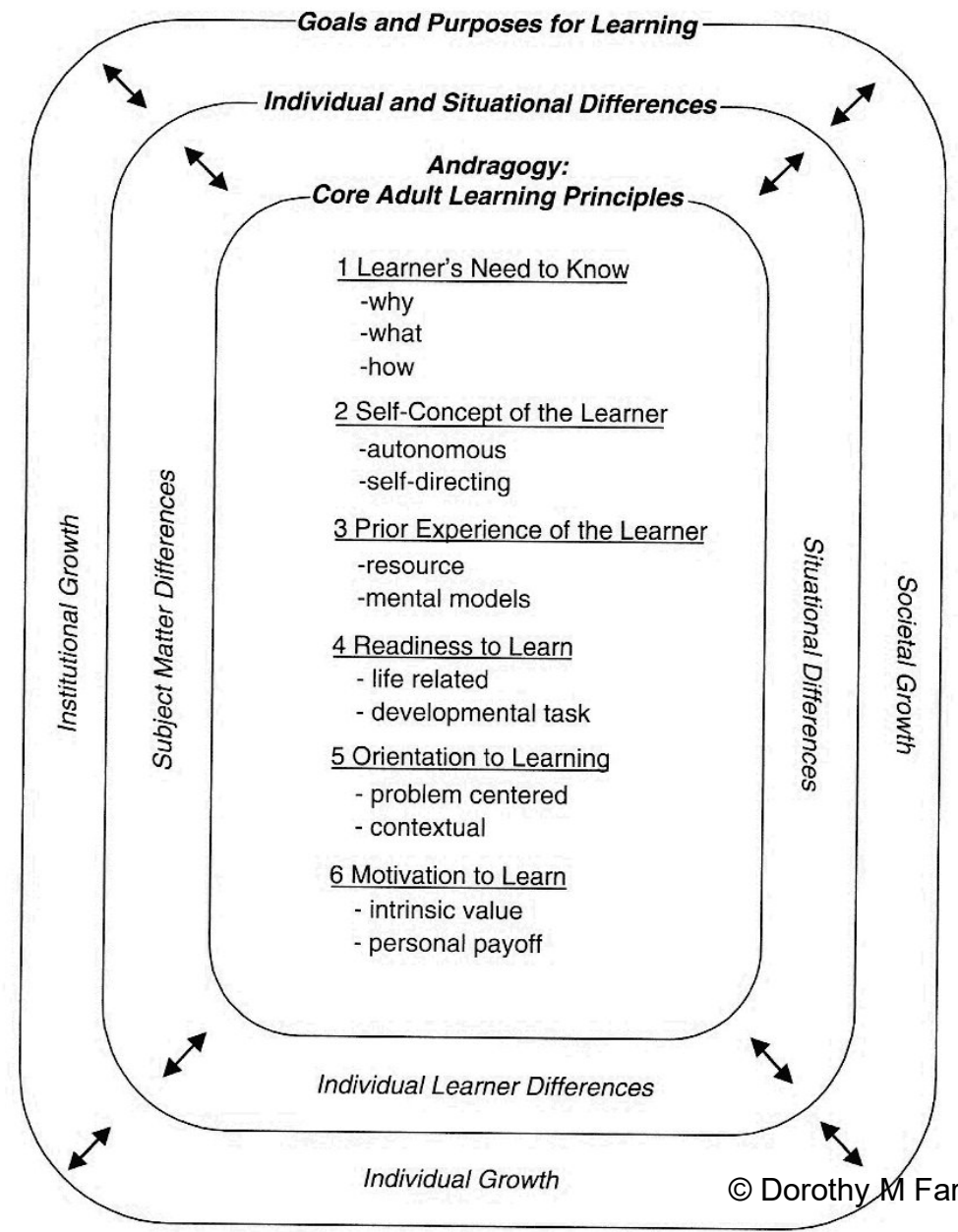


it's better to know how to learn than to know.

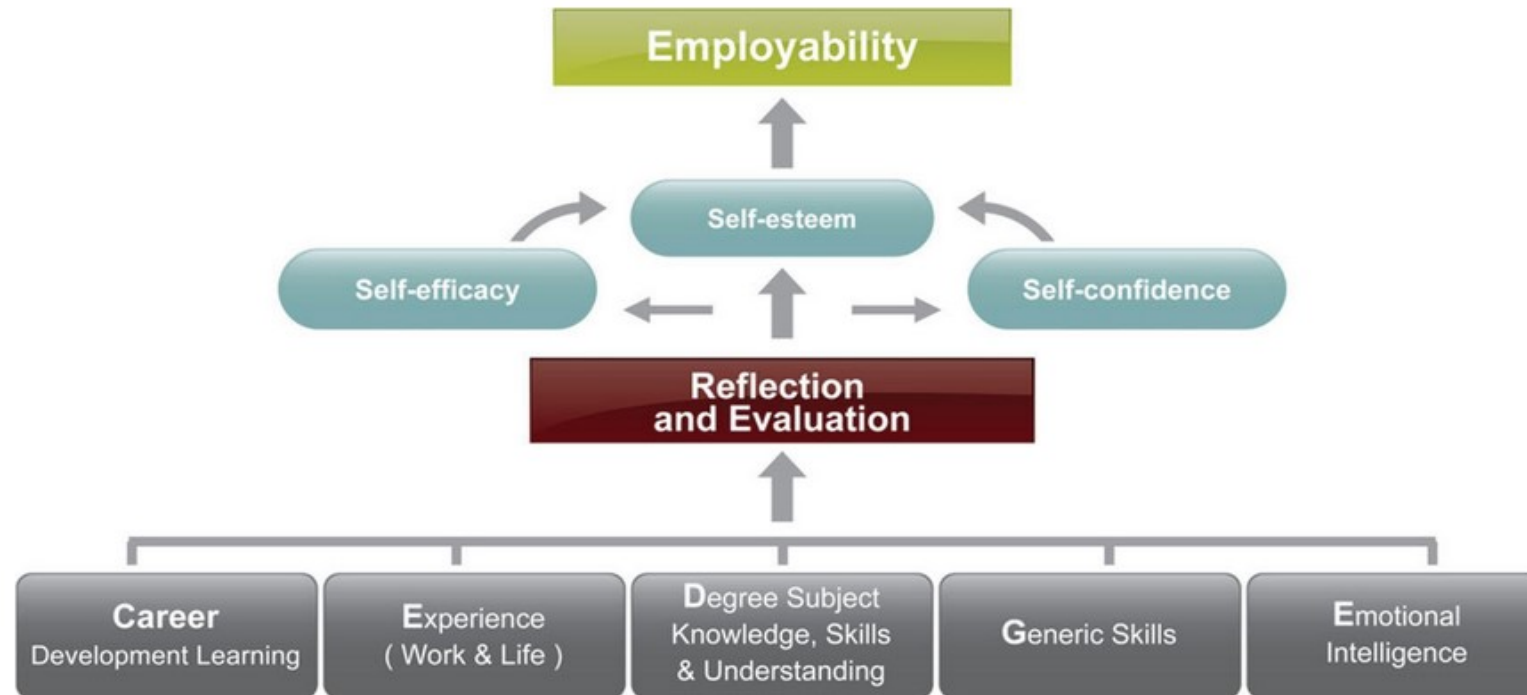
-dr. seuss

ANDRAGOGY IN PRACTICE

(Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 1998)



Models of Employability



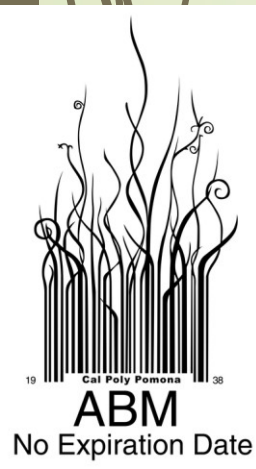
Career Development Learning
Experience (work and life)
Degree Subject Knowledge, Skills and Understanding
Generic Skills
Emotional Intelligence

Source: Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007)

Recommendations

➤ **Recommendations for Undergraduate Programs in Agribusiness**

- Realign curriculum for inclusion of additional support courses
- Embed key employability skills across all courses
- Continue to utilize experiential learning
- Update academic advising program to include career counseling
- Require mandatory internships
- Create ABM Capstone course
- Establish ABM Advisory board.
- Create ABM mentor program



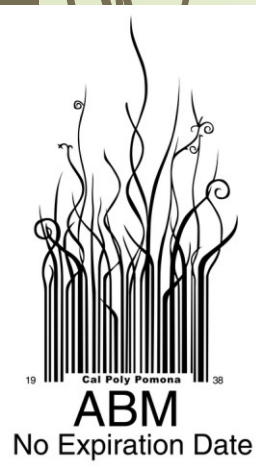
Recommendations

➤ **Recommendations for Agribusiness Industry Professionals and Employers**

- Participate in advisory boards and maintain connection with higher education.
- Create internship programs with higher education
- Become more involved in recruiting
- Assess training practices within organizations
- Create career pathways for new hires

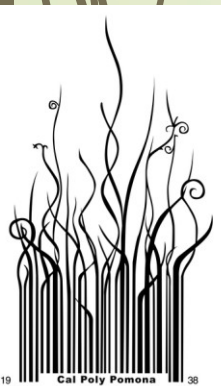
➤ **Recommendations for Agribusiness Students and Graduates**

- Utilize academic advising all throughout undergraduate career
- Get involved. Whether through clubs, field trips or internships, students must take a proactive approach to seeking opportunities within their desired career path
- As graduates, stay connected



Recommendations for Future Research

- ▶ Curriculum model research – ascertain best practices and approaches for instructional design, delivery and assessment.
- ▶ Research of current students – determine their perceptions of employability skills needed, as well as self-perceived competence of those skills.
- ▶ In-depth qualitative research of employer perspectives – acquire the narrative of expectations and experiences of agribusiness employers with regards to entry level graduates and employability skills.
- ▶ Research into disconnects between graduate and employer expectations of entry level jobs should be pursued. What are employer perceptions and beliefs regarding why graduates make the “jump”?
- ▶ Graduate narratives – specifically seeking to describe graduate encounters with job obstacles they considered a “hump” in order to determine the root causes of the “jump”.
- ▶ Gender gap in agribusiness
 - ▶ Further research can include studies on the hiring and promotion trends within agribusiness. In addition, studies analyzing the perspectives of females working throughout the agribusiness sector should be completed to ascertain what, if any, gender biases exist and how best to diminish them.



ABM

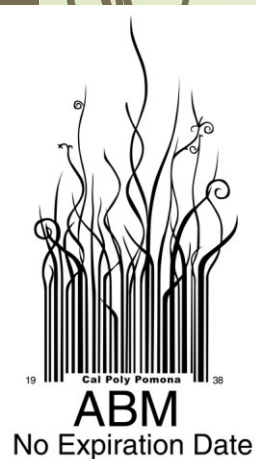
No Expiration Date

Closing

- Both the employer and graduate perspectives are invaluable to the alignment of undergraduate curricular programs in order to better prepare future agribusiness graduates for the realities of work. In order to produce the highest quality value-added graduates, the mechanism of higher education must collaborate with the raw inputs (graduates) and end consumers (employers) to ensure the process (learning) is operating at its optimal efficiency, guaranteeing fruitful returns for all shareholders

- **The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn...how to adapt and change.**

➤ *Carl Rogers*





QUESTIONS?

