Four Skills to Cultivate on Your Way to a Career in Agriculture

By Kristin Hawkins

Your journey as a student considering a future in agriculture could take you in many directions. Whether it is the need to earn a higher degree, or pursue a specific career path, it’s important to develop skills that will help you succeed. Some skills are universally helpful once you have that diploma in your hand.

So how do you know what skills employers need? What abilities might give you an extra edge over the other applicants? Knowing the answers to these questions can help you decide what coursework and activities you can add to your resume to make sure you are the best pick of the bunch.

Dr. Kim McCuistion, Interim Dean of the Honors College, and Associate Professor with the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management and Department of Animal, Rangeland, and Wildlife Sciences at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, says that regardless of a student’s major, cultivating the right skill sets is a benefit for all future graduates.

McCuistion provides the following advice on skills that can make you a more attractive applicant and successful employee.

Leadership

Students need to develop their leadership potential and their ability to work well with others. The ability to lead is often developed through involvement in campus organizations and extra-curricular activities. Team or group projects in class are also a great way to practice and implement leadership skills. If leadership trainings are available on or off campus, consider attending.

Communication skills

Today’s undergraduates should focus on enhancing their ability to communicate with their peers and in the workplace. This includes developing their writing and critical thinking skills, as well as using effective communication techniques.

Experiences

For many students, the first step is to get hands-on learning and experiences. Most university programs are available through internships, co-op, or simply working on a ranch.

Some students may not wait until graduation to choose to work in agriculture. Many choose to start their career while they are still members of their school’s cattle industry club.

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ing their ability to communicate effectively. Courses such as technical writing and speech will help students develop proper written and oral communication skills and allow them to communicate their ideas clearly to peers and future employers. Students should also think about how their future employers communicate and develop habits to communicate in the same way, such as using email instead of relying on social media to communicate information.

Experiential learning

For many of us involved in agriculture, we “learn” by “doing.” Experiential learning means that students learn and retain information better through their experiences. Experiential learning opportunities may be available through internships, job shadowing, research, or simply a student worker position on campus.

Some students may choose to start their career upon graduation with a bachelor’s degree, while others may choose to attend graduate school. If a student wants to start their career immediately, collaboration with members of the agricultural community while still in school can lead to internship opportunities. These industry experiences expand a student’s knowledge base while the relationships they develop increases their networking ability. If graduate school is the goal, research experiences on campus can improve cognitive skills, further develop speaking skills, and build confidence. Experiential learning can be a valuable tool to increase a student’s marketability upon graduation.

Business courses

If a student is looking for additional courses that would benefit them upon graduation, consider taking a few courses in business or obtain a minor in business. A good place to start might be a course on the principles of agribusiness management. More specific business courses could also help prepare a student for any career in agriculture, including managerial accounting and/or finance.

Rounding out your qualifications with practical skills shows future employers that you are prepared, competent and have the ability to build on your knowledge base to become an asset on which their company can depend.

They are taking a chance by hiring someone relatively unproven. Having the right skills says that you are a good bet. TC