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**Skills Desired by Recruiters for Graduates from Food, Agriculture and
Wine Fields of Study**

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Skills Desired by Recruiters for Graduates from Food, Agriculture and Wine Fields of Study

Purpose: Examine the skills recruiters desire in college graduates in the food, agriculture and wine industries to provide guidance in curriculum evaluation and development. Further, identify how recruiters use social media as a means to contact students and as an instrument to evaluate potential candidates to inform students.

Methodology: Survey research was conducted among 296 recruiters from firms that hire college graduates from all fields of study. There were 118 respondents that hire students from the food, agriculture and wine fields of study. Two methods were used to conduct the survey research: personal interview method and internet survey method. The personal interview method was used to collect 138 surveys at a Career Fair at California Polytechnic State University on October 9 and 10, 2012. In addition, emails and LinkedIn connections were used to add 159 survey respondents to the sample during October and November 2012.

Findings. Recruiters indicate that soft skills are the most desirable skills of potential job candidates. The use of an info-graphic resume or portfolio that communicates soft skills was considered useful to recruiters of college graduates in the fields of food, agriculture and wine. Social media was used by most of the respondents to contact and evaluate student recruits.

Practical implications: Developers of curriculum should include courses that allow students in the fields of food, agriculture and wine to develop their soft skills and clearly communicate them to recruiters. Students must be aware of the importance of their image on social media sites such as Facebook when searching for a job in the fields of food, agriculture and wine.

Key Words: College graduate skills; Soft skills; Recruiters; Students in the fields of Food, Agriculture and Wine; Social Media

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1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Research Concerning Skills Required by College Recruiters

Recent research by Noel and Qenani (2012) found that employers in the agribusiness industry are looking for graduates that are creative and have strong communication and critical thinking skills. A national survey of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U 2013) with business and non-profit leaders sheds light on the employer's priorities for the kinds of skills in college students today. Employers surveyed indicate that they give hiring preference to college graduates with skills that will enable them to contribute to innovation in the workplace, and demonstrate a capacity to think critically, communicate clearly and solve complex problems. A study conducted by Hart Research Associates (2006) revealed that employers value graduates with attributes such as teamwork, critical thinking and oral communication skills. What skills do recruiters in the the food and wine industries desire of the graduates they hire?

1.2 Use of Social Media for Recruiting

A recent report by Stonebridge Research Group estimates that the wine industry contributes approximately \$50 billion to the US economy and employs over 300,000 people across the US (Stonebridge Research Group 2012). A survey conducted by Jobvite with 1,000 human resources professionals indicated that 92% of employers used or planned to use social media as a recruiting tool in 2012 (Jobvite 2012). Another survey conducted by ABLE Social Media Marketing revealed that 94% of American wineries are on Facebook and 73% are on twitter (ABLE Social Media Marketing 2012). The heavy use of social media has changed the way business is conducted. Since the wine industry contributes significantly to the US economy and the industry is heavily using social media, it is important to understand how recruiters use social media in their recruitment process of college students.

Recruiters proactively use social media to identify potential candidates instead of waiting for resumes from candidates. If a job candidate doesn't have a social media presence – on LinkedIn, Twitter, or personal website – chances to get noticed are diminished. Companies utilize social media for various purposes and social media will become even more important in the future.

1.3 Research Objectives

There are several objectives of this research. First, to identify the skills recruiters value the most in college graduates in the food, agriculture and wine fields. Second, to examine how recruiters use social media to contact students, and how social media is used as an instrument to evaluate students for specific positions. Finally, this research examines uses of social media to showcase students' use of their desirable skills such as: written communication skills, critical thinking, and a passion for the field through industry news readership and discussions.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Survey research was conducted among 296 recruiters from firms that hire college graduates. Two methods were used to conduct the survey research: personal interview method and internet survey method. Through personal interviews, a total of 137 surveys of college recruiters were obtained at the Career Fair at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo on October 9 and 10, 2012. In addition, email and LinkedIn recruiters' connections were used to add 159 completed surveys to the sample

during October and November 2012. The composition of the recruiters' sample makes it most applicable to student recruits from Cal Poly. Over half of the respondents (59%), were Cal Poly alumni. The respondents hire students from all fields of study: accounting/finance, architecture, business, communication or graphic arts, computer programming, education, engineering, environmental sciences, food, agriculture and wine, health and medicine, humanities and arts information technology, science and math, social science, politics and law, and technology. The top four fields of study hired by respondents were business, engineering, accounting/finance, and food, agriculture and wine. There were 118 respondents that hire students from the fields of food, agriculture and wine. This research statistically compares the responses for the recruiters of students from the fields of food, agriculture, and wine to respondents that do not recruit from those fields using chi-square and t-tests. When significant differences were not found, only total sample responses are reported.

3. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

3.1 Importance of Major and Desirable Characteristics

Forty-seven percent of recruiters agree that “when evaluating college students for a position at my firm, the most important characteristic is the major field of study”. Recruiters of students in the food, wine and agriculture fields are more likely to indicate that field of study is not the most important characteristic they look for in a future hire. Only 36% of recruiters in the food, wine and agriculture fields indicate that major field of study is the most important attribute, compared to 54% of recruiters for other fields that consider student' major to be the most important attribute in their search process (Table 1).

Table 1. Major Field of Study as the Most Important Attribute during Recruitment

	FAW ¹	Not FAW	Total	P ²
Strongly agree	4%	16%	12%	
Agree	32%	38%	36%	
Disagree	53%	38%	44%	
Strongly disagree	11%	7%	9%	.003**

¹Food, Agriculture and Wine ² Chi-Square Test ** Significant at .05 level

If major is not the most important characteristic recruiters desire in college graduates, what is? Recruiters were asked to rate the desirability to them of 17 characteristics or skills of a college graduate. A five-point interval desirability scale was used where: 5 = extremely desirable, 4 = very desirable, 3 = somewhat desirable, 2 = slightly desirable, 1 = not desirable at all. Most of the top ten desirable skills were soft skills: strong oral communication skills, team player, self-starter, shows a passion for field, strong written communication skills, evidence of high ethical and moral standards, strong critical thinking skills, highly focused, creative thinker and strong social skills (Table 2).

Recruiters of students in the fields of food, agriculture and wine rate the soft skills such as strong oral communication skills, evidence of high ethical and moral standards, and strong social skills higher than other recruiters. Although it appears to be less important, knowing a foreign language is perceived as a more valuable skill by recruiters

in the fields of food, agriculture and wine (Table 2). Recruiters of students from other fields rate: strong critical thinking skills, strong quantitative skills, specific technical skills, and strong IT/MIS skills higher (Table 2). Designers of curriculum for food, agriculture and wine studies should incorporate soft skills that develop the collegiality of team players that can also work with little guidance and demonstrate strong oral communication skills.

Table 2. Skills Desired	Total Mean	P ²	FAW ¹	Not FAW	P ³
<i>Very to Extremely Desirable</i>					
Team player	4.51		4.49	4.53	0.578
Strong oral communication skills	4.51	0.82	4.55	4.49	0.353
Self-starter	4.49	0.75	4.57	4.44	0.067*
Shows a passion for field	4.43	0.16	4.42	4.45	0.669
Strong written communication skills	4.40	0.69	4.42	4.39	0.78
Evidence of high ethical and moral standards	4.37	0.64	4.52	4.28	0.003**
Strong critical thinking skills	4.36	0.70	4.27	<u>4.42</u>	0.09*
<i>Very Desirable</i>					
Highly focused	4.26	.06*	4.27	4.42	0.945
Creative thinker	4.19	0.22	4.26	4.26	0.147
Strong social skills	4.19	0.90	4.41	4.04	0**
<i>Somewhat to Very Desirable</i>					
Strong quantitative skills	3.92	0**	3.83	3.98	0.096*
Has specific technical skills for field of work	3.81	0.11	3.53	4.00	0**
<i>Somewhat Desirable</i>					
Internship experience	3.57	0**	3.67	3.51	0.114
Strong information technology/MIS skills	3.51	0.32	3.32	3.63	0.004**
<i>Slightly to Somewhat Desirable</i>					
Has certificates and/or licenses in field of work	3.13	0**	3.14	3.12	0.912
Study/work abroad experience	2.72	0**	2.79	2.67	0.227
Good foreign language skills	2.61	.02**	2.75	2.51	0.031**

¹ Food, Agriculture, and Wine ² Paired Sample T-Test Comparing Skills

³ Independent Sample T-test, comparing ratings between groups.

** Significant at .05 Level * Significant at .10 level

3.2. Social Media Methods Used to Contact and Evaluate Students

Social media was used by most of the respondents, 85%, as a means to contact student recruits. The top three social methods used to contact students were company websites, LinkedIn, and Facebook (Table 3).

<u>Table 3. Methods Used to Contact</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Company website	63%
LinkedIn	63%
Facebook	37%
Twitter	13%
YouTube	8%
Blogs	6%
Mobile apps	6%
Google docs/reader/+	5%

Social media is also used by most of the respondents as an instrument to evaluate potential candidates. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) use one of the listed social media platforms to evaluate students. The top two social methods used by recruiters to evaluate students were LinkedIn and Facebook. Over a quarter of the recruiters indicated that they use the students' personal websites to evaluate them (Table 4).

<u>Table 4. Used to Evaluate Students/Recruits for Firm</u>	<u>Percent</u>
LinkedIn	55%
Facebook	41%
Personal website	28%
Blogs	13%
Twitter	10%
Google docs/reader/+	8%
YouTube	7%
Mobile apps	2%

It is interesting to note that while 37% of the recruiters contact students using Facebook, 41% indicate that they evaluate students using Facebook (Tables 3 and 4). Further, only 49% of the recruiters that contact students using Facebook also evaluate them using Facebook. Therefore, "stealth" evaluations were observed in this research. "Stealth" evaluations occur when recruiters do not contact students through Facebook, but actually evaluate them through Facebook. Respondents that hire students in the food, agriculture and wine fields were more likely to evaluate students using Facebook and engage in "stealth" evaluations (Table 5) than other recruiters. Almost half of recruiters use Facebook to evaluate job candidates in the food, agriculture and wine fields. Forty-five percent of the recruiters for food, agriculture and wine industry that do not to contact students through Facebook actually evaluate them through Facebook. Only 25% of the recruiters of students in other fields engage in these "stealth" evaluations (Table 5).

Table 5. Facebook Used to Evaluate Students	<u>FAW¹</u>	<u>Not FAW</u>	<u>P²</u>
Evaluate Using Facebook	47%	32%	.014**
"Stealth" Facebook Evaluations	45%	25%	.005**

¹Food, Agriculture, and Wine ² Chi-Square-Test ** Significant at .05 level

3.3 Using Social Media to Showcase Industry Activity

The research indicates that recruiters are using social media to contact and evaluate students for jobs. Students need to be creative with social media to show recruiters that they are worthy candidates. They can create their own websites and blogs or use Facebook and LinkedIn to show their knowledge. Students at Cal Poly are using a new social content and discussion forum, ValuePulse, to supplement outdated texts and journals with current content. The forum enables students to read current news about the wine and food industries and discuss the news in written form with no character limit like on Twitter.

Recruiters were given an explanation of the new social platform and shown how a student's activity on it can be used to showcase knowledge and skills in a portfolio and summarized in an info-graphic resume. Recruiters were shown an info-graphic resume that summarized a student's activity on the social site. Recruiters for the food, agriculture and wine fields rated the soft skills higher and were more likely to indicate that such a resume is useful for evaluating recruits. Almost half indicated it is extremely or very useful in evaluating job candidates and 87% it was at least somewhat useful (Table 6).

Table 4. Info-graphic	<u>FAW¹</u>	<u>Not FAW</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>P²</u>
Extremely useful	<u>8%</u>	5%	6%	
Very useful	<u>41%</u>	27%	32%	
Somewhat useful	38%	38%	38%	
Not very useful	9%	<u>19%</u>	15%	
Not at all useful	5%	<u>11%</u>	9%	.01**

¹Food, Agriculture, and Wine ² Chi-Square-Test ** Significant at .05 level

4.0 MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Recruiters rate soft skills as the top skills desired for college candidates for their jobs. In addition, many aspects of business including recruiting have adopted the use of social media. Designers of curriculum for food, agriculture and wine studies should incorporate soft skills that develop the collegiality of team players that can also work with little guidance and demonstrate strong oral communication skills. Perhaps social media can be used to help students engage in collaborative social skills development. Recruiters use social media to contact and evaluate students. They find an info-graphic resume that showcases the soft skills to be very or extremely useful. College career centers and students should use these results to improve their opportunities for being hired in the food, agriculture and wine industries.

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