

University Ambassador Tour Structure: Applied with
The College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences

A Senior Project

presented to

The Faculty of the Agricultural Education and Communication Department California Polytechnic State
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Of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Science

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Introduction

College campus tours are an extremely important process to making a selection for where students will attend college. In fact, it has been concluded that campus tours are the most influential part of a students' college decision (Cohen, 2009). A campus tour allows students to experience aesthetics of the campus environment, community of campus and personal interactions (Okerson, 2016). Although students who participate in a campus tour are twice as likely to attend the university they visited, students do not always choose the university they toured, but do leave with a better understanding about the institution and what they offer (Brown 2010).

Utilizing the role of Poly Reps and the thousands of campus visitors they come in contact with, there are two main areas of opportunity. The first is the opportunity to implement a structure for easier training, as well as, overall campus visitor experience. The second opportunity is to use the newly created structure to provide an example for Poly Reps to use when talking about CAFES. Applying the newly created structure to CAFES as recommended in this report will supply Poly Reps and campus visitors with a greater understanding of the agriculture industry—improving agricultural communication and education, while recruiting prospective students to Cal Poly.

Background

California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly) has official university ambassadors, colloquially known as Poly Reps. The Poly Reps organization is a group of up to 40 volunteer students who gave tours to over 32,000 general campus visitors in the 2016-2017 school year (Cal Poly Admissions, 2017). In addition to tours, the organization works with Cal Poly alumni and the University President, in addition to, serving as public relation specialists for the university and as volunteers for the Office of Annual Giving. Although Poly Reps volunteer across campus, a majority of their time is spent giving tours and leading groups. The tours last 90-minutes explaining what Cal Poly is like and the key areas of focus. Such areas are: The University Union and Associated Students Incorporated (ASI), the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES), the College of Architecture and Environmental Design (CAED), the Orfalea College of Business (OCOB), the College of Engineering (CENG), the College of Liberal Arts (CLA), the College of Science and Mathematics (COSAM), University Athletics and any more areas the tour guide deems important to incorporate into the tour.

In order to be prepared for a 90-minute tour about the six colleges and any additional information the tour guide would like to provide, the Poly Reps go through training. The current training techniques include the memorization of a fact book, listening to veteran tour guides and asking questions. However, the current training does not include a structure for tour guides to utilize when they are first learning or be able to mold as they get more confident.

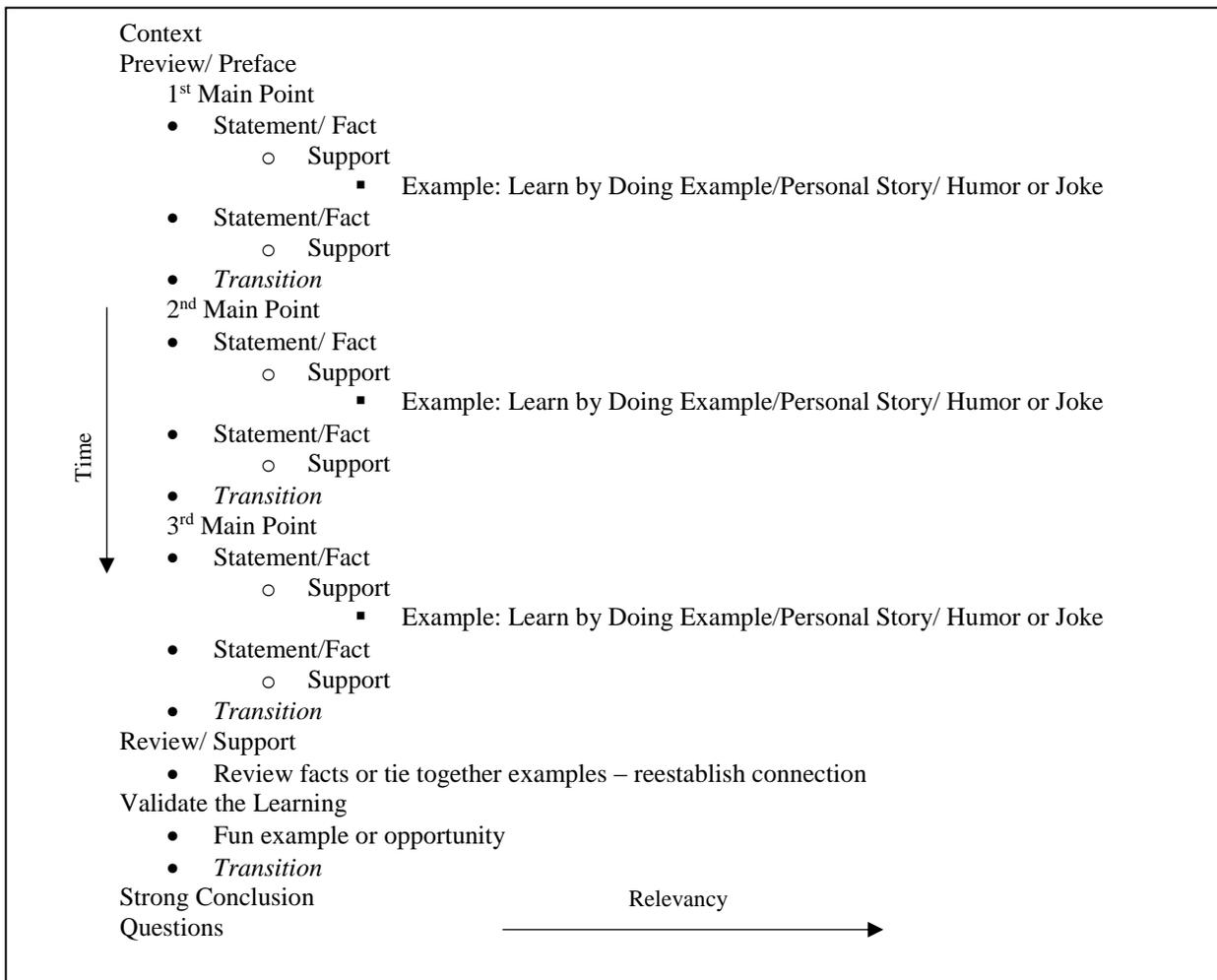
Currently, only three out of the forty Poly Reps study agriculture. While it is at no fault of the Poly Reps or the organization, it is a mere fact that most Poly Reps do not have a foundational understanding of agriculture, similar to the majority of the population visiting Cal Poly's campus. In fact, less than two percent of the United States population is involved with a farm or ranch (American Farm Bureau Federation 2018) and Cal Poly is only one of four universities in the California State University (CSU) system to teach agriculture (CSU, Agriculture 2018).

Methodology

The author conducted research in three components: evaluation of current methods, best practices in industry, and personal interviews, to create a comprehensive structure for Poly Reps to implement during training. These components will be used by Poly Reps and applied to CAFES to teach others about agriculture, regardless of whether prospective students chose to attend Cal Poly or not based on the quality tour given by the Poly Rep.

The author first evaluated currently used training tools in the Poly Reps organization like the fact book, tour training day and rotational workshops. The author also reviewed best practices for customer experience, information retention, teaching methods and successful public speaking to incorporate into the training structure. Further data collection consisted of interviewing past and newly admitted Poly Reps on their experiences being trained. Finally, interviews were conducted with Cal Poly Admissions and CAFES Ambassadors to identify best information for the application of the newly created structure.

Results



Notes and Reasoning

The above structure incorporates and focuses on three key themes emphasized in research, interviews and Poly Rep experience. The first is to portray information in a way that is digestible and effective for campus visitors. Utilizing effective teaching and retention methods to support understanding, the above structure allows for visitors to remember and learn from the tour guides' personal stories or examples. These examples and stories, specifically focused on agriculture and CAFES allow for nearly 22 times the amount of memory and engagement, as opposed to data or statistics (Aaker, 2014).

The second theme focuses on relevancy and personal connections to the campus visitors—allowing students to see themselves “fit” on campus (Borgeson, A, personal communication, 2018). The structure is set across a matrix of time and relevancy, realizing that based on the amount of time available and what rapport has been built with the campus visitors either prior or throughout the tour, the tour guide can dictate the type of structure implementation based on what will cater or connect with the audience more. When visitors can see themselves fitting on campus or identifying with an experience, there is higher success.

The third theme is overall tour guide confidence. Upon review of past and current Poly Rep experiences, allowing for a tour guide to create, mold and confidently claim their tour is a large contributor to their success. The structure outlined above allows Poly Reps to have freedom of crafting their tour, while ensuring the proper information is distributed in the most effective way possible.

Conclusion and Recommendation

There is a need for campus tour guides to give effective tours and since there is a lack of structure to improve the training process, one should be established. Additionally, with a large disconnect between agriculture and the general public, applying said structure to CAFES will improve agricultural communication. Therefore, the author recommends the structure produced by her findings and research.

The structure recommended by the author will be submitted to the Poly Rep advisors and tour training facilitator for their use during Poly Rep training days. Additionally, the structure plus the application of it will be provided to all Poly Reps via the training and information data base to use at their leisure. The next steps are to video record the structure and its application to CAFES for an additional method of learning for Poly Reps. In the future and to ensure consistency across the university, the author recommends that this structure be applied to all colleges at Cal Poly, not just CAFES, to ensure that the most proper information is being shared to campus visitors. Furthermore, that the structure be provided to college-wide ambassadors, in addition to Poly Reps, as they come in contact with many campus visitors as well.

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