

# Agriculture Ambassador State Conference

James Broaddus and Quincie Gourley, California Polytechnic State University  
Dr. Sherri Freeman and Megan Silcott,  
Agricultural Education and Communication Department

## Introduction

The Agriculture Ambassador organization at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo focuses on promotion of higher education, agriculture, and professional development among its members and community contacts. In 2018, the organization hosted the Agriculture Ambassador State Conference to bring together Californian Agriculture Ambassadors and industry professionals for workshops and advocacy planning. "Exposure to the different forms of leadership through out-of-classroom involvement offers concrete experiences and background knowledge upon which students can draw as they integrate leadership theories and skills," (Fritz, S., 1998, p.58). Industry professionals have cited the need to emphasize soft skill development through college level education (Robles, 2012).

Measurement of soft skills gained at the State Conference, through workshops and networking, can provide quantitative measurement of soft skills and prove the benefit of Agriculture Ambassadors attending training sessions like those offered at ambassador events (Platt, 2008). To analyze potential soft skills gained, this project utilized the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire, (LEQ-H Method) focusing upon Time Management, Social Competence, Achievement Motivation, Intellectual Flexibility, Task Management, Emotional Control, Active Initiative, and Self Confidence. By tracking individual students pre and post event, a composite score was calculated for each question, which determined soft skill development. Results concluded positive growth in all areas of soft skills occurred for attending ambassadors with Task Management and Intellectual Flexibility rating two of the highest soft skills improved at the 2018 Agriculture Ambassador Conference.

## Background

Ambassadors and advisors are aware of the need to better inform the public about agriculture practices, sustainable systems management, and career opportunities in agriculture (Allen, 2017). By hosting the Agriculture Ambassador State Conference, it presented the Agriculture Ambassadors an opportunity to gain knowledge in agriculture issues, career opportunities, and share that knowledge with statewide student leaders and pass that knowledge onto the public when attendees returned home. The 2018 Agriculture Ambassador State Conference took place January 27-28, 2018 and visiting Agriculture Ambassadors participated in the two-day seminar. Each university ambassador group presented workshops that taught other Agriculture Ambassadors how to promote agriculture literacy. Representatives from leading Agribusinesses joined the groups to share information regarding, marketing, product research, sustainable practices, and agriculture trends. Industry representatives from Dow Dupont, Davey Tree, Farm Credit West, Farm Supply, and California Department of Food and Agriculture, are among those who participated in the 2018 State Ag Ambassador Conference. Mixers allowed students to mingle with industry representatives giving the students an opportunity to ask questions and allow representatives to recruit interns and employees.

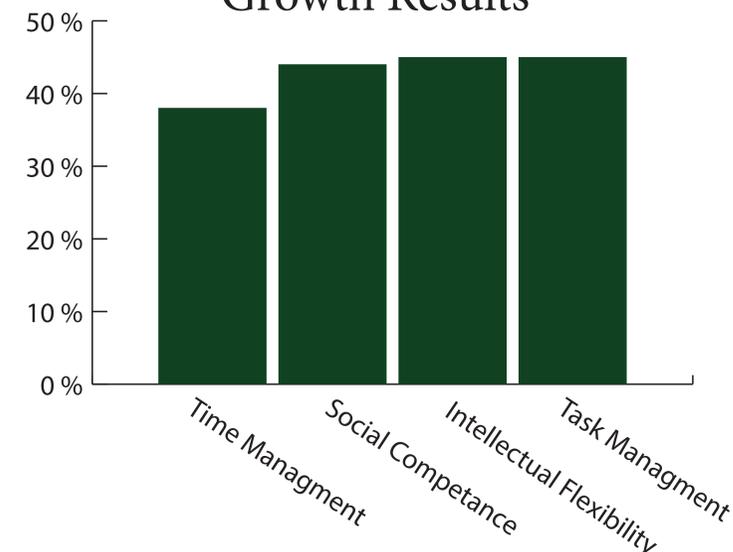
## Conference Sponsors



## Methodology

Under the guidance of the Agriculture Ambassador Advisor, Dr. Sherri Freeman, Cal Poly Ambassadors organized the second state conference in February 2017. This conference included California agriculture universities and community colleges. Representatives from these institutions were contacted to attend with students and faculty. The 2017 conference was funded by a variety of agribusinesses, which were approved through the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) Dean's Office. Cal Poly Ambassadors worked with Cal Poly ASI Club Services to reserve classrooms, provide meals, and advertise the conference throughout the state. A committee structure was used as a way to provide continual support for student leaders through the Cal Poly Ambassador organization. Annually, the timeline would reflect participation letters and donor letters being sent out in early fall, registration would open at the beginning of December, organization and planning will occur throughout the fall. The conference began on a Saturday morning featuring a keynote speaker, industry mixer, lunch, workshops by industry professionals, a dinner, and student social mixer. Sunday included breakfast in the morning, workshops led by visiting groups, lunch, and a closing session to end the event. To analyze potential soft skills gained, this project utilized the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire, the LEQ-H method. The LEQ-H assessment "focuses on measuring generic life skill competencies which are theoretically amenable to change" according to James Neill, co-developer of this method (Neill, 2008; Neill, Marsh, & Richards, 2003). It is ideally used to measure key life proficiency domains, which include personal development programs, such as measuring soft skills. A pre-event survey was administered prior to the keynote speaker, industry presentations, agricultural ambassador program workshops, and social mixers with a duplicate survey following. There were a total of 98 students in attendance for the 2018 conference from fourteen institutions with a two year or a four year program. There were 66 students to participate in both the pre and post survey for analysis. By tracking individual students before and after the event a composite score was calculated for each for each question, which determined development in measured soft skills.

## Growth Results



67 Participants

40% Average Improvement

Significant Improvement in:

- Time Management
- Social Competence
- Intellectual Flexibility
- Task Management

## Conclusion

The event doubled in size from the prior year with a significant increase in participation from returning and new schools. Agriculture Ambassador groups in attendance had an ideal opportunity to capitalize on gaining and reasoning so skills during the event. After analyzing the results, it can be concluded that the expected improvement, positive growth in so skills, was proven true due to a majority of students improving their so skills. These skills will not only help in future endeavors in career development but also significantly improve academic performance. The results after two years show encouraging impact and indicate the opportunity to improve so skills among Agriculture Ambassadors in the state through additional repetition.

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