

Graduates of Agricultural Programs Attitudes Regarding Basic Employability Skills

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Introduction I

- Students enter college with the expectation that they will acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities to enter the workforce.
- Employers have an expectation college graduates possess the employability skills required to perform their jobs.
- Faculty consider they are providing students with critical knowledge and capabilities for their careers.

Introduction II

- However, there is increasing concern in industry, government and academe that:
 - graduates lack basic ‘employability’ skills.
 - there is a misalignment between academic preparation, the perceptions of students and the needs of employers
- This results in costly remedial training
 - leading some to question the real value of a degree and the higher education system
- This concern is also evident in Agriculture.

Purpose

- To develop a triangular study, investigating the alignment of academic preparation, employers needs, and graduate capabilities in the agricultural field.
- By examining the attitudes of recent graduates, the faculty who taught them, and human resource managers who recruit them.
- The project obtained support from the California Agricultural Research Institute.

Objective of this study

- This study describes the attitudes of Cal Poly Pomona College of Agriculture graduates regarding
 - the basic employability skills received in college,
 - the importance of these skills in their first job upon graduation, and
 - their competency in these skills in their first job.

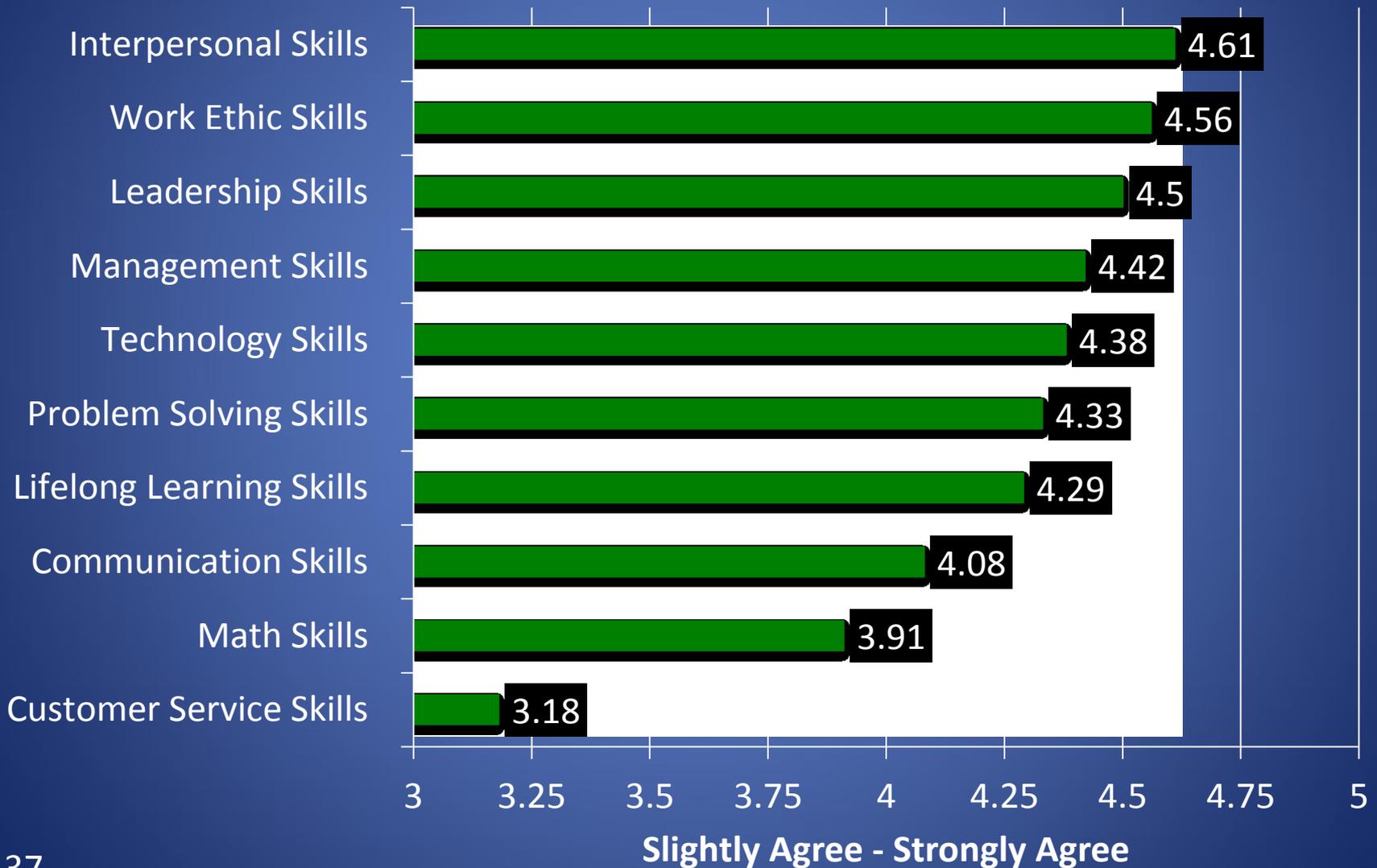
Design/Methodology/Approach

- A two part survey was designed using 5-point Likert scales.
- Part I included the 10 dimensions of basic employability skills - comprising 60 items.
- Part II included nine demographic items.
- 1,100 invitations were deployed via email.
- 137 surveys were fully completed using [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com).
- = 12.5% response rate

Critical Employability Skills /Measurement Items

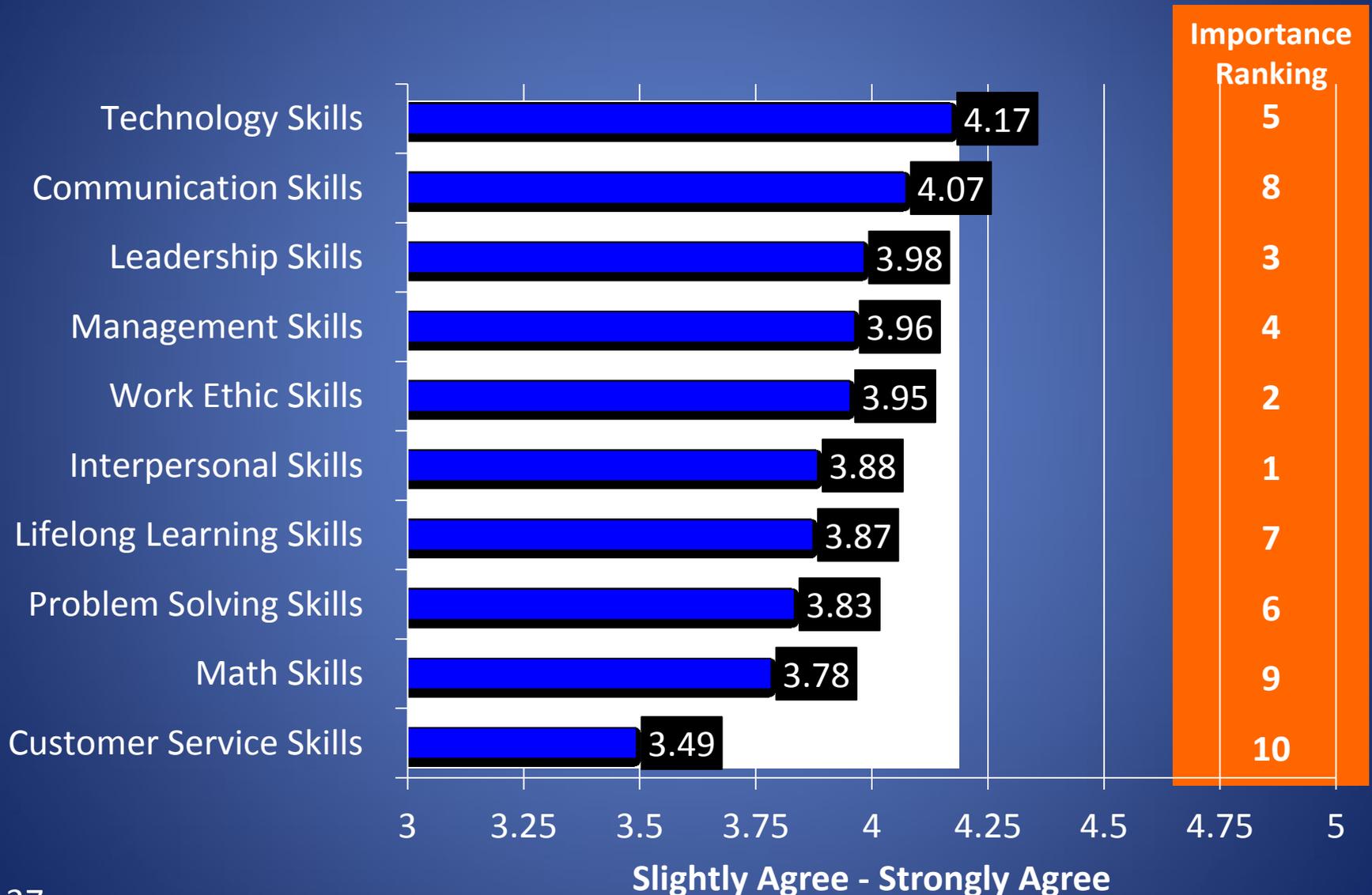
1. **Communication skills** – the ability to read, write, speak, and listen; and to interpret, assemble and articulate information
2. **Math skills** – ability to perform basic mathematical procedures to solve practical problems
3. **Problem solving skills** - ability to think creatively, make decisions, and solve problems
4. **Management skills** - the activities of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling to meet organizational goals
5. **Interpersonal skills** - ability to work in teams, help others to learn, negotiate, and work in a multicultural organization
6. **Customer service skills** - ability to anticipate and meet the needs of both internal and external customers
7. **Leadership skills** - ability to motivate others to achieve organizational goals
8. **Life-long learning skills** - willingness to assess and recognize one's own strengths and weaknesses and to pursue self-development
9. **Technology skills** - the ability to select procedures, equipment, and tools to acquire and evaluate data
10. **Work ethic** - includes attendance, punctuality, motivation, the ability to meet deadlines, and realistic expectations

Importance of Skills in First Job



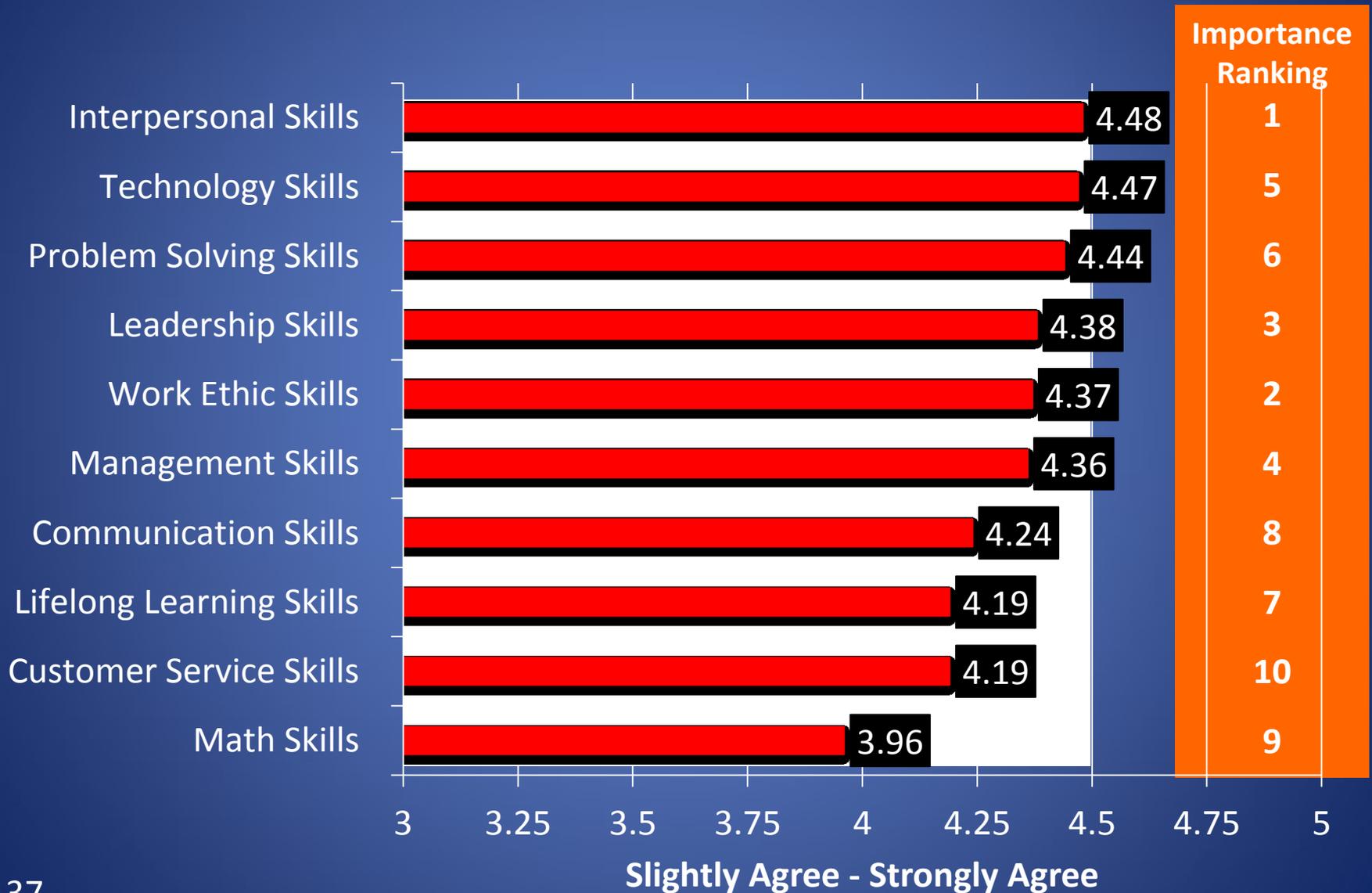
N=137

Reception of Skills in College



N=137

Competency in their First Job



Preliminary Conclusions

- Overall, findings diverge from expectations.
 - Importance of math, communication and problem solving skills emphasized in the literature
 - and is heavily reinforced throughout college programs.
 - However, they suggest support for the literature in terms of misalignment and the need for remedial training.

Limitations/ Next Steps

- A small sample
 - graduates in one College.
- Need for a bigger study
 - Multiple colleges
- Implementation of a triangular study
 - A structural model has been developed to examine hypotheses of alignment between employers needs, graduate skills, and program outcomes regarding employability skills.
 - Survey of employer perceptions (in process)
 - Survey of faculty perceptions (in process)
- We hope to report on that next year.

- We would like to find partners to collaborate on a broader national survey.
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- THANK YOU