

**Remix to Improve Local Career Exploration and Institutional Collaboration**

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### **Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea**

Since 1975, the California Women for Agriculture (CWA) has promoted and developed the interests of women affiliated with or interested in agriculture (CWA, 2016). The San Luis Obispo (SLO) County chapter started in 2011. Although a relatively new chapter, the SLO CWA chapter has taken an active role in the community by working to raise funds and provide scholarship activities to local youth in agriculture, fostering relationships with local legislators, and providing an opportunity for industry members to collaborate (CWA SLO County, 2020). However, there has been little collaboration with students of agriculture in the local university. As CWA has a stake in education and is composed of members representing a cross section of agricultural careers (CWA SLO County, 2020), the lack of university collaboration is troublesome.

Considering career development has always been an important post-secondary component (Hitch & Gore, 2005), it is also problematic there is a general lack of knowledge surrounding agriculture careers available to college students (Gilmore et al., 2006). Research suggested integrating more activities where post-secondary students are able to interact with leaders in careers (Esters, 2008; Esters & McCulloh, 2008; Jones & Larke, 2003). Providing a space where the local agriculture industry could showcase careers to post-secondary agriculture students would allow for a targeted career exploration and opportunity for the SLO CWA chapter to enhance its relationship with the local industry. From this idea, the “remix” event was born.

### **How It Works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps**

This project was a collaborative effort between the SLO CWA chapter and the Cal Poly State University (CPSLO) Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow (ACT) chapter. Two months before the event, a representative from ACT met with the SLO CWA executive committee to develop a plan for the event. Key tasks for successful event implementation were identified as securing a room on the campus, outlining an event budget, developing an agenda, identifying industry representatives to participate on the panel, and promoting the event to both CPSLO students and to the CWA membership.

The ACT representative was responsible for securing a room and parking on campus, as well as promoting the event to students. The room was booked through the university room reservation process. ACT social media and paper fliers were used to promote the event on campus. The target population for this event was initially ACT members and was then open to all students in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) at CPSLO. The CWA chapter president promoted the event to the CWA membership via the monthly email notices and the chapter social media account. Both the ACT representative and the SLO CWA president worked together to create the event agenda (to be shared with the final poster) and invited 12 members to be a part of the panel. Potential panel members were invited via email.

On the night of the event, the ACT chapter officers set up the room by moving chairs into groups; eight chairs per group. Additionally, an ACT representative picked up refreshments and set them up in the meeting room. A copy of the event agenda was displayed on the projector

screen. When the session started, students had the chance to visit four groups for seven minutes each. During each session, the panelists provided brief descriptions of what their job entailed and invited questions from the participants. Students self-selected themselves into their initial group and a bell was used to announce the beginning of the panel round. At six minutes, a one-minute warning bell rang. At the conclusion of the seven minutes, the bell rang again signaling it was time for the students to exit that panel group and move to the next group of their choosing. This was repeated four times. This portion required one person, the ACT representative, to act as timekeeper and bell ringer while giving prompts to the participants to move.

At the conclusion of the event, all panelists came to the front of the room and provided final concluding thoughts on job-hunting in general in the agriculture industry. This also included a question and answer forum for more general questions regarding career preparation from the audience. Once the panel portion was over, the CWA chapter held their monthly business meeting and the students in attendance were allowed to be a part of the business meeting. The entire event, including setting up, the panel, the CWA business meeting, and clean up took approximately two and a half hours. After the event, the ACT representative sent handwritten thank you notes to all guest panelists.

### **Results to Date/Implications**

The first event was held on November 20, 2019. Twelve panelists participated from industry sectors representing agricultural law offices, enology laboratories, farm creditors, wine and viticulture managers, marketing firms, agricultural tourism entities, specialty farming operations, produce sales distributors, cattle production operations, and public service offices. As a first-time event, 15 students participated in representing majors across the CAFES at CPSLO. Additionally, 10 CWA members were in attendance as observers and for the general meeting after the panel. Three faculty members from the Agricultural Education & Communication (AEC) Department also attended.

### **Future Plans/Advice to Others**

In the future, for planning purposes, it is important to coordinate the date with other groups on campus for less event overlap. The event was the week before finals on the same night as other campus club meetings; these two items limited student ability to participate. Next year, ACT will look for greater student outreach and event scheduling and timing needs to be a priority. At first, the invitation was limited to ACT members but after some consideration, the officer team thought the event should be extended to the entire CAFES, which also limited attendance. Future events will focus on a broader student audience initially.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

Minimal costs were associated with this event as it was held on the CPSLO campus and hosted by a club. The meeting room, when booked on campus through a university-sponsored club, was free and included tables, chairs, and all audiovisual equipment. CWA contributed \$200 for refreshments. ACT purchased parking passes for guest panelists, which totaled \$75. The department housing the ACT club provided thank you cards. The total cost for the mixer was \$275.

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