PERCEPTIONS OF ENTRY-LEVEL HIRES IN NATURAL RESOURCES: A SURVEY OF EMPLOYERS AND EDUCATORS

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• What skills do natural resource professionals value in recent graduates?
• What attributes do professionals believe will most ensure entry-level success?
• Do professionals believe there is a difference between the proficiency of past and current hires?
• How may we reconstruct the undergraduate curriculum in light of the results?

RESULTS

Perceived Proficiency of Past and Current Hires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Past Hires</th>
<th>Current Hires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field skills</td>
<td><img src="chart1.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart2.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td><img src="chart3.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart4.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
<td><img src="chart5.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart6.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Written Comm.</td>
<td><img src="chart7.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart8.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral Comm.</td>
<td><img src="chart9.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart10.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ac. Knowledge</td>
<td><img src="chart11.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart12.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Natural Resource Skill Importance

- Critical thinking (4.59)
- Problem-solving (4.56)
- Teamwork (4.55)
- Stakeholder communication (4.29)
- Oral communication (4.21)
- Animal ID (4.02)
- Written communication (3.64)
- Habitat measurements (3.58)
- GIS & mapping (3.45)
- Navigation (3.39)
- Basic statistics (3.29)
- Knowledge of policy (3.21)
- Animal capture & handling (3.19)
- Knowledge of laws & regs (3.12)
- Light equipment use (3.09)
- Plant ID (2.99)
- Equipment maintenance (2.89)
- Indirect measurements (2.89)
- Physical conditioning (2.78)
- Advanced statistics (2.77)
- Lab skills (2.43)
- Certifications (2.43)
- Firearms & trapping (2.19)
- Heavy equipment use (2.04)

Desired Attributes for Entry-Level Hires

- Crit. thinking & Prob.-solving (5.0)
- Field research experience (4.9)
- Ecological knowledge (4.8)
- Local experience (4.5)
- Experience elsewhere (4.3)
- Charisma (4.0)
- Published papers (3.9)
- High GPA (2.9)
- Lab research experience (2.0)

DISCUSSION

Respondents appear to value practical skills (like field experience and critical thinking) over more academic skills (like a high GPA). This may communicate to students that it is vital to attain field experience while progressing through the undergraduate curriculum.

The differing perceptions of proficiency between past and current hires may be multiply interpreted. It may be true that today’s hires, who are generally less familiar with working outdoors, may lack field skills and critical thinking. It may also be true that respondents tend to overestimate the abilities of past hires. Either way, respondents may want field skills to be emphasized more heavily in the curriculum.

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