

# STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX TO SET YOURSELF APART

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**A**griculture Future of America, National Block & Bridle, Students of Agronomy, Soil and Environmental Sciences, International Collegiate Agricultural Leadership, Alpha Zeta, Post-secondary Agricultural Student Organization, Horticulture Club, Alpha Gamma Rho, Sigma Alpha, The American Red Cross, Teach America, and the list could go on and on! There are a plethora of clubs, organizations, extracurricular opportunities and even elective classes that allow you to be involved while you're in school that could enhance your career success.

Next to having internships, taking part in extracurricular activities is a great way to build your employability skills. Traits like communication, decision making, professionalism, and self-management are skills you can develop through serving on committees, planning and executing fundraisers and traveling. All of these are the types of activities that take place in extracurricular settings.

## EMPLOYERS NOTICE

"When I look at resumes of entry level candidates, one of the first things I look for is involvement on campus. When I see the candidate has gotten him/herself involved in applicable clubs and groups this shows me that the candidate has likely learned good skills including teamwork, networking, leadership, time management and industry knowledge. These are all very important when looking for that first full-time job," says **Molly Toot**, Area Talent Manager, **Land O'Lakes** Business Development Services.

You cannot write about the importance of going above and beyond your normal collegiate experience without mentioning the most useful outcome of your

involvement ... networking! When I was in college, I was a member of a co-ed agricultural honors fraternity, Alpha Zeta. The camaraderie in this organization, for not only active members but alumni as well, was extremely close and we often joked that no matter where we were in the state, if we had a flat tire, you would always have an Alpha Zeta brother nearby to call for help. Seven years later, I've not had a flat tire and needed help from a fellow brother, but I can't even count the number of professional connections I've made as a result of being involved. I've found mentors, colleagues, clients and other opportunities as a result of knowing people I met via Alpha Zeta connections.

## BE CAREFUL

However, while it is important to have an extracurricular section of your resume, you should proceed with caution. It can be easy to over extend yourself and be involved in too many activities and not focus enough of your time and efforts to genuinely being involved. A listing of fifteen different extracurricular memberships/activities will quickly scream to an employer "I will over commit to projects and will turn in half-finished assignments." Or "I've joined everything on campus to try and beef up my resume but I've not held any leadership roles, sat on any committees, or even attended half of the meetings."

Being a part of clubs and organizations or getting involved

in events on campus is about demonstrating leadership or your ability to follow, learning to work with others, accomplishing goals with likeminded individuals, and above all else, having fun and making memories.

## UNIQUE COURSES

There are also unique courses you can enroll in that will probably fall



outside of your normal plan of study but can be helpful in your career. Conversational Spanish, Business Writing, Personal Finance, Negotiation Analysis, and Human Motivation are all courses offered at schools throughout the U.S. that would be good examples. These courses would not necessarily be part of the outlined plan of study for an agronomy major, but they could certainly be beneficial to your resume. These courses offer skill development for real life situations, skills that will often set you apart during a job interview.

To help you understand the importance of getting involved on campus, we asked a few agricultural professionals to share their experiences of how they stepped outside the box and continue to reap the benefits in their careers.

# HEAR WHAT YOUNG PROFESSIONALS HAVE TO SAY

“Club involvement was without a doubt the most rewarding part of my college experience. During my four years I committed myself to one campus organization and served in various leadership positions, planning and participating in activities and fundraisers.

“Community service events and fundraisers taught club members the importance of giving back to the community and furthermore showed each of us the need to teach others about where food really comes from and how animals are cared for.

“My involvement allowed me to sharpen my skills and industry related knowledge in order to gain a competitive edge in the workplace.

“Lastly, my participation has given me numerous networking opportunities that have allowed me to make vital connections throughout the various livestock industries.”

— *Kyle Richards, Account Manager, Prima Tech USA*

“Involvement in extracurricular activities in college played a significant role in my being hired for both of the positions I’ve held since graduating.

“During interviews for my first job, I used experiences gained from those activities to show that I could fill the requirements of the position. I used my advisor for the NAMA Club at NC State as a reference during the recruitment process for my current position.

“In both situations, the experience gained from those activities along with the networking opportunities they provided were my ‘foot in the door’ that led to my employment with two reputable companies in a field that I love.”

— *Jamie O. Thomas, Recruiting & Training Manager, Hog Slat Inc.*

“When I first enrolled in courses such as Women and Gender Studies and Group Communication in college, I remember having that common thought ‘How will I ever use this in a career?’

“At the end of the semester, my attitude was dramatically different. First and foremost, sometimes it is refreshing and a nice change of pace to take classes that do not pertain to your major directly.

“Reflecting now, as I find myself in the workforce, these types of classes easily rank among my favorite courses ever taken in college.

“In Women’s Studies I learned a number of things about women’s roles in the corporate world, the balance of work and family challenges, as well as gender roles and how they play into our society today.

“In Group Communications we worked in a team for the entire semester. No matter what job you choose to pursue someday, you will always have the opportunity to work in groups and teams.”

— *Macy Eaves, Central Midwest Sales, Dow AgroSciences*

“The key is to be engaged. Engaging in student organizations and clubs allowed me the opportunity to practice running meetings, work with teams, and develop effective communication abilities. All of these skills are essential in a fast paced work environment like Union Pacific.”

— *Emily Chappie, Business Manager Food and Refrigerated Products, Union Pacific Railroad*

“My involvement in extracurricular activities in college has proven invaluable to me in my professional career. As a college student I attended an international industry event, to represent my university. At that event I was able to network with industry representatives from the **Department of Agriculture** within my home state.

“Today, 10 years later, I remain in contact with those individuals and assist them annually at our state fair to market our state’s agricultural products.

“The network of contacts I made within the Department of Agriculture has proven instrumental in my current position and it all goes back to my involvement with an on-campus club.”

— *Summer Lanier, Public Relations Director, Prestage Farms, Inc.*

“My involvement in clubs and organizations during and after my college career has been instrumental in my personal and professional development. Not only have they allowed me to expand networks and friendships, but I have been able to hone multi-tasking abilities and positively give back to the community.”

— *Dr. Jeff Broadaway, DVM, Large Animal Veterinarian*

“My degree is in horticulture, but I took a resume writing course as an English elective in college in which we covered various ways to develop resumes. I’ve found myself referring to my notes on many occasions as I’ve helped friends with their resumes and feel confident that if I were to make a career change that I would have a very competitive resume.”

— *Adam Larsen, Owner, Larsen’s Greenhouses*

“While in college, I chose to be a part of many different groups and organizations, mainly because I enjoyed meeting new people and learning about the places they are from.

“This network of friends and acquaintances that was created during my college years has continued to be a significant part of my career success.

“Those same folks are the leading young professionals involved in the agricultural industry today and I know that as I progress in my career, the relationships I have created will benefit me for many years to come.”

— *Andy VonCanon, Agricultural Teacher*