

Future Institute Research Center Awards Jean Parrella \$1,000 Scholarship

Jean Parrella, a Texas A&M University doctoral student working with Holli Leggette, Ph.D. in her science communications lab, received a scholarship from the Future Institute Research Center, becoming a FIRC Associate Research Fellow.

“A lot of research we do in the science communications lab aims to identify and develop innovative and effective ways to improve the science communications skills of students and other professionals across agricultural disciplines,” Parrella said.

It is important to understand that in agricultural careers, students with degrees in agriculture need to have professional and high-level vocational skills, Parrella said. Professional skills include communication, leadership, teamwork and self-management skills.

“Research has shown that disparities exist between what students and employers consider to be the most important skills for career success,” Parrella said.

The United States Department of Agriculture reports that agriculture related jobs increased by more than 5% between 2015 and 2020, Parrella said. It is expected that this number will continue to gradually increase. With this increase in interest in careers in the food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences, the need for exceptional science communication skills becomes even more important.

“As a leading institution in teaching, research, and agriculture, we need to ensure that students graduating with a degree in agriculture from Texas A&M University are being prepared to effectively fill these positions.”

Parrella’s research will be guided by the employability skills framework developed by the United States Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education in 2017 and Crawford et al.’s (2011) seven skill clusters, she said.

“I proposed to conduct a qualitative phenomenological study to understand how students across the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences perceive their personal workforce readiness and the importance of professional skills in order to identify where skill deficiencies exist,” Parrella said.

Parrella said she will conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with students for her project. With the results, it will be easier to identify teaching strategies that agricultural educators can use to ensure students are workforce ready. Parrella began the study Jan. 1, and it will take a full year to complete.

The phenomenological study will be the second phase of a study she conducted in Fall 2020, Parrella said. The scholarship is allowing me to conduct research that will be able to help students and educators across the agricultural field.

“Last fall we surveyed students in the college,” Parrella said. “We identified which professional skills agriculture students’ perceived as having the highest priority for career success and the

extent to which they perceived to have developed these professional skills as part of their degree programs.”

Parrella will present her project at the World Future Forum in April 2021.

For more information about Parrella’s project, email her at jparrella@tamu.edu.