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# Student Evaluation of a Training Program in International Agricultural Development

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## Introduction:

This poster relates to a training program that was implemented in 2009. There have been a number of training programs for the military, implemented throughout the United States, related to international agricultural development (Monroe, 2012). In the program that will be featured in this poster, participants were members of the Nevada National Guard's Agribusiness Development Team (ADT). The program consisted of four days of training to develop an overall understanding of U.S. and global agriculture. The classroom training encompassed topics related to agriculture and the modern world and global resources for food. The first three days were group sessions, specifically, classroom lectures, guest presentations, activities, and case studies. The fourth day involved the group breaking out into specialist teams, guided by faculty members in bio-physical science disciplines. The training was attended by 11 army personnel and was held on the campus of Cal Poly Pomona university. Trainees had at least some background in agriculture, animals, or the green industry, but the amount of knowledge and experience varied a great deal.

## Problem:

The ADT's goal is to promote the development of agriculture in Afghanistan. This is to support a broader goal of the U.S. military to win the hearts and minds of the local populace in Afghanistan, in order to promote the geopolitical interests of the U.S. The training is intended to familiarize the members of the ADT with the challenges and opportunities facing Afghan agriculture. This will enable them to make a positive contribution to agriculture and rural livelihoods in Afghanistan. The training is also intended to provide specific skills, knowledge, and abilities to the members of the ADT. It will, thus, allow the members of the ADT to conceive of and implement tactics that will assure the success of its overall mission. The problem for the people responsible for designing the curriculum and delivering the training is to create the most useful and valuable educational experience for the ADT members, given the limited length of time allotted to the training.

A number of different factors make the task of the people responsible for the training more difficult. One factor is the level of knowledge among the members of the ADT. None of the members had made a tour of duty in Afghanistan prior to the training. There was also limited knowledge among the ADT members with regard to international agricultural development, or agriculture in general. Another such factor was the lack of clarity of the mission of the ADT. One reason for this lack of clarity is the need for security.



To enhance security, a certain level of confidentiality regarding certain aspects of missions (e.g., where, when, and how many) is generally necessary. This was also the case with the specific mission of the ADT. Another reason for the lack of clarity was that the mission was not fully elaborated by commanding officers prior to the implementation of the training. For instance, university representatives had been notified that the ADT was going to Helmand Province, but at the time of the training members of the ADT indicated that they were going to Wardak Province. The source of this confusion was unclear, but it created difficulty for one of the guest speakers, who had tailored his presentation to Helmand Province. There was also some disconnect between what the commanding officers had indicated the training should address and what the members of the ADT thought the training should address.

The Bilateral Security Agreement plans for the presence of thousands of U.S. troops in Afghanistan from 2015 until 2024 and further. Our ongoing goal of nation-building in Afghanistan will most certainly require extensive efforts to promote the development of the Afghan agricultural economy. It is in the best interest of the U.S. military and the individuals who will be developing curricula and implementing training programs for the agricultural development of Afghanistan to continually assess the effectiveness of such training. Assessment data can be used to adjust future training programs with a goal of continuous improvement in relevance and effectiveness.

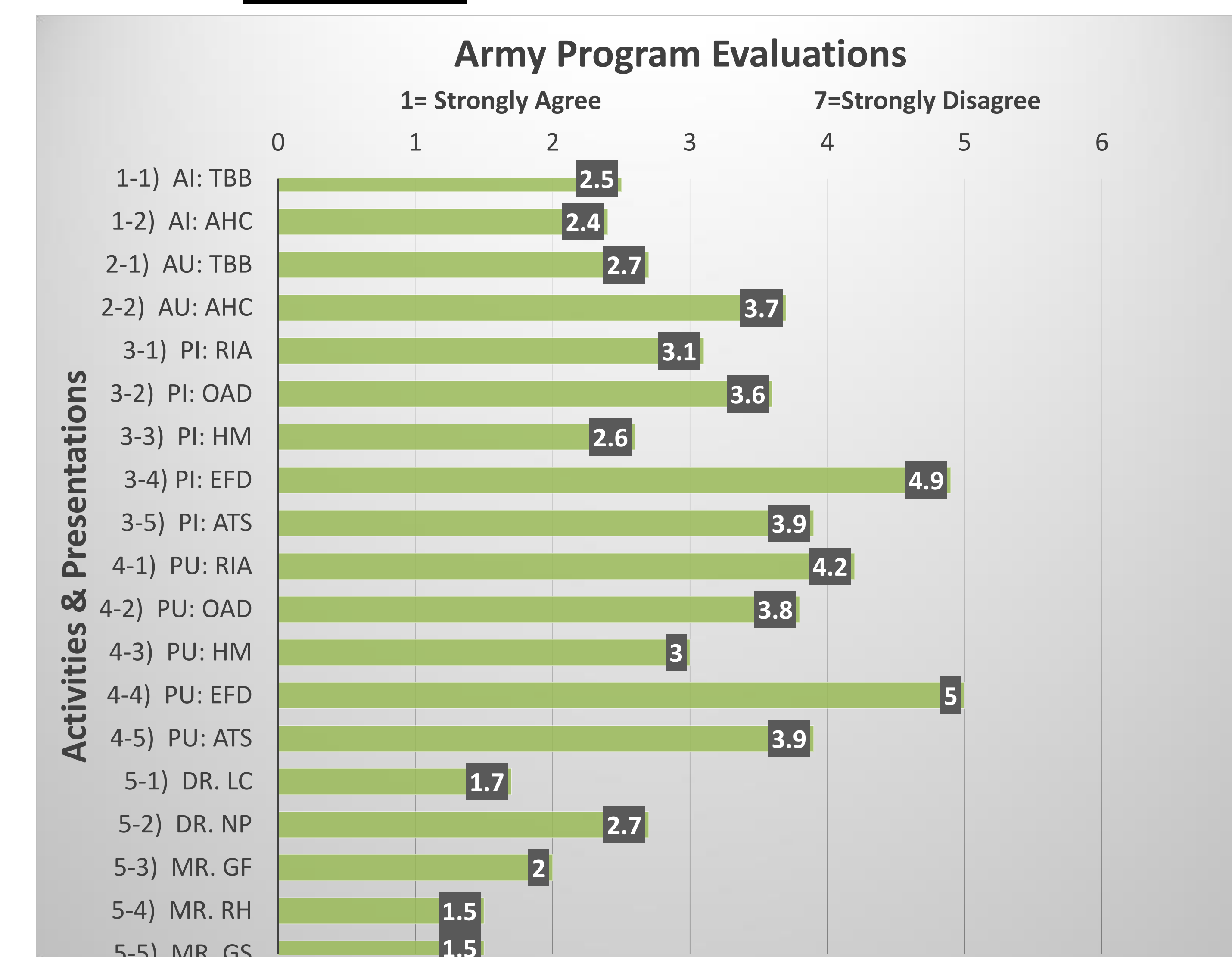


Exhibit 1: Political Map of Afghanistan. Note that Wardak Province is directly west of the capital, Kabul, and Helmand Province is in the southwest of the country.

## Research Methodology:

The lead author and instructor for the training developed a survey instrument to obtain evaluation data regarding the training. The survey asked members of the ADT to rate each presentation, in-class activity/assignment, and field experience (PIAFE) on a seven point Likert scale. On the survey, 1 represented 'strongly agree,' and 7 represented 'strongly disagree.' Each PIAFE was rated by each student on two scales, namely, how interesting it was and how useful it was. The reason for this is that there are different implications if a PIAFE is rated not as being interesting vs. not being useful. If a PIAFE did not interest the students, perhaps the method of presentation can be altered to make it more interesting. If a PIAFE was not considered useful, it brings up the question of whether or not it should be eliminated from the curriculum. The elements of the curriculum (i.e., the PIAFEs), as well as their ratings in terms of being interesting and being useful is shown in the following chart. We recognize the limitations of this method. It brings up all of the issues regarding whether students (especially students with limited background in the material presented) are able to provide meaningful evaluation data. Furthermore, because none of the students had been deployed to Afghanistan before, they may not have known what they were actually going to need to know to complete their mission.

## Results:



This chart shows the average response to each survey question. For instance, the first question states, "This activity was interesting: (1-1) Team Building Bridges, (1-2) Tour of Arabian Horse Center," and the average response of the ADT members were 2.5 and 2.4, respectively. The rest of the survey questions were as follows,

- ◆ *This activity was useful:*  
(2-1) Team Building Bridges,  
(2-2) Tour of Arabian Horse Center
- ◆ *This presentation was interesting (useful):*  
(3-1 and 4-1) Resource Inventory for Agriculture,  
(3-2 and 4-2) Overview of Agricultural Development,  
(3-3 and 4-3) Hunger and Malnutrition,  
(3-4 and 4-4) Economics of Food Demand,  
(3-5 and 4-5) Agriculture in Traditional Societies.
- ◆ *This presenter was useful:*  
(5-1) Dr. L. Corley  
"Reflections on Military Service in Afghanistan,"  
(5-2) Dr. N. Peterson "Agricultural Extension: Goals, Methods, & Management,"  
(5-3) Mr. G. Flanagan  
"Requirements for Food Processing," "Hunger & Malnutrition,"  
(5-4) Mr. R. Hartman "Sustainable Agriculture & Composting,"  
(5-5) Mr. G. Sherman "General Beekeeping Field Experience."

## Conclusions:

Since there has been an ongoing demand for training related to agricultural development strategies and tactics for Afghanistan, more agricultural economists and technical specialists are needed to provide training and meet this demand. The survey results show that the training in the form of activities and field exercises were rated as more interesting and useful in comparison to training in the form of a presentation or lecture. However, some ADT members could have had limited background in the material presented and were not able to provide meaningful assessment data. Including more field activities could aid in achieving "learning by doing" for the students. Finally, efforts should be undertaken to make the presentations more interesting and relevant to the participants.

## References:

Monroe, Cassandra (2012). Indiana Guardsmen learn farming basics for their mentoring role in Afghanistan. *Indiana Guardsmen*. Oct. 5.