

College Administration — Is It For You?

L.S. Pope

One of life's big decisions may come sooner rather than later to teachers or researchers in colleges of agriculture. The question: Whether or not to accept an administrative post and the challenge it represents.

It calls for a decision that can change the entire direction of a career, often thrusting the individual into the bewildering world of personnel management, business decision-making, financial accountability and public relations. Many young scientists and teachers will find the choice difficult. If they accept, they may enter ill prepared to manage a multi-million dollar enterprise, typical of many departments and colleges today.

Further, they may find their own professional careers side-tracked by a sudden change of direction. If they are at, or near, the height of a promising career as a teacher/researcher, or deeply involved in Extension, a career change can prove unsettling to both the faculty member and the family.

Some Observations

Some observations gathered during a career spanning 21 years of administration at three major universities, from department head to dean, may prove useful.

1. Embarking on an administrative career in a modern department or college means that one must be prepared to sacrifice personal career goals for the benefit of the larger system. Success and satisfaction will come largely as the faculty within a department or college advance toward their career goals. A dedicated "team player" philosophy must be paramount, and one must enjoy seeing others advance up the ladder, perhaps far above what he/she might have hoped to achieve. One must gain a high degree of satisfaction from the professional advancement of other faculty and expect limited personal rewards.

2. The pace of change in any field of research and technology today is so rapid that in three to five years, the distance from one's professional field may prove to be a serious setback if re-entry is considered. Attempts to mix a teaching/research or Extension career with full-time administration is difficult, to say the least; often it conflicts with rigid schedules and outside activities. Then there is the problem of funding. Administrators may be accused of absorbing funds or hoarding opportunities better suited to other faculty. The demands of a full commitment to administration in a modern department or college leaves little time to keep up professionally.

Pope served as Dean and Chief Administrative Officer of the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at New Mexico State University, 1976-85.

3. The present trend toward greater faculty involvement or "participatory management" makes administration more difficult, to say the least. Certain faculty seek involvement in decision making, but shirk responsibility for actions taken. It is very probable that this trend will intensify. The office of chairman rather than department head raises further uncertainties as to tenure in the job. Faculty and deans may be non-supportive and are often skeptical of a department head's progress. Frustrations are commonplace.

4. Current trends on the evaluation of administrators by faculty at yearly, or at least frequent intervals, leaves them open to attack and constantly on guard. Such evaluations may stray from the intended constructive process, i.e., to assist the administrator and improve performance. In the case of a director or dean, it is often difficult for faculty to fairly and constructively evaluate administrative performance. Tunnel vision may prevail, and the impact of a recent decision may be the most vivid perception of performance. Some administrators may take the course of least resistance in decision making, i.e., avoiding unpleasant ones.

5. A serious attempt to involve faculty, through conferences and committees, in decisions can lead to frustration. To be sure, many faculty have excellent ideas and can draw on years of experience on the "front line;" but it is often difficult for individuals immersed in their technical fields to see the broad picture, to appreciate the constraints of tight budgets, university policies or outside political impacts. Administrators are charged with looking at the broad picture. Conversely, when a committee is employed, it must be listened to, made to feel wanted and is deserving of an explanation if advice is not followed.

6. Let's face it. Nearly all colleges of agriculture will experience very tight budgets during the next 3-5 years. The various publics we serve may be quick to criticize — and slow to support administrators. In the university system, no other dean or director faces the same array of challenges as the chief agricultural administrator. To assume an equivalence between an ag administrator with the dean or director of research in Arts and Sciences, for example, is preposterous.

Often, salary advantages are not apparent. The "pool" of available funds to reward top administrators and lack of flexibility to make significant financial rewards are restricted as compared to those of outstanding faculty. Hence, after 5-10 years, an administrator may find that his comparative salary advantage has declined relative to other competent faculty. If and when he elects to step back into a faculty role, or is requested to do so, he may find that he is at a

distinct financial disadvantage as well as not being "up-to-date" in his professional field.

Frequently the stipend or increment for administration is too low to provide ample reward for services rendered. The demands of the job, plus possible conflicts of interest, do not allow the administrator to gain much outside remuneration from consulting.

Why Choose Administration?

Having said all this, a proper question is: Why choose administration at all? It deserves a constructive answer.

It is important that some of the "brightest and best" in our nation's repertoire of faculty choose the administrative route. At times, this may come at considerable personal sacrifice. Somehow we must make administration enticing enough in terms of self satisfaction to appeal as a career goal. How else can we expect to advance in agricultural education, research or extension if dedicated leadership is lacking?

There is also a strong sense of satisfaction for many who choose the administrative role. Tenure at many levels of administration is short, yet the pure joy of watching gifted young faculty grow and mature professionally is real. It often exceeds expectations and justifies the many long hours of counseling, striving for a better budget, settling differences, etc.

Further, in agriculture, there are the prestige and rewards that go with assisting students and the satisfaction of serving state industry leaders. To see a program develop and advance often is well worth the effort.

Basically, we need a better understanding on the part of faculty for the role and efforts of administrators as department heads, deans or directors. There is nothing to be gained, and much to lose, from unjustified criticism of administrators, no matter what individual satisfaction is achieved.

Faculty can assist administrators in a multitude of ways, from solid expressions of support, to good counsel and advice. Administrators, with some exceptions, cannot be expected to be a constant source of instant answers and solutions, nor can they be expected to be an ever-ready source of ideas and unique approaches. Many new and challenging concepts surface first at the faculty level. Steady and constructive support for administration benefits the individual faculty member and provides the right environment for departmental progress. From the other side, administrators must be sympathetic, mindful of faculty needs and willing to respond.

There should be full realization of the fast-paced and dynamic nature of today's educational and research mission. Decisions made by administrators may impact long beyond the immediate crisis and will shape future generations. During a lifetime, a gifted teacher may influence 8-10,000 students; an outstanding department head, director or dean will set in motion concepts, ideas and uncover resources that will

influence many more.

It is important that faculty lend positive support to administrators as they deal with budgets and changes in institutional direction. Given the meager resources most states have to deal with, hard decisions are common. Faculty can assist in long-range planning, a very difficult task at best and especially if protectionism prevails.

Would experienced administrators, seasoned by years, do it again? Are there joys of leadership that outweigh the disagreeable aspects? One would suspect that many administrators might choose a different route, if they were honest. Certainly, the financial rewards are not all that great.

But, student service, institution building and faculty growth can be best served through good administration. I feel many administrators would respond: "Yes, I'd do it again." Emerson once said: "An institution is the lengthened shadow of a man." In the best interests of a strong agricultural future, let's hope that good young faculty will continue to choose this leadership role.

Teaching French Agricultural Vocabulary

Jacqueline Gerols

French has been the official language in the Province of Quebec, Canada, since 1977. Additionally, professional corporations demand that their members demonstrate a good level of proficiency in this language before they are admitted and allowed to practice their profession in this province. This is, of course, the case for professional agrologists.

In Quebec, university level education in agrology is provided by two universities: Laval for French speaking students and Macdonald College of McGill University for English speaking students. As an Associate professor of French at Macdonald College, I was called upon to provide instruction at the LSP level (Language for Special Purpose) to those future agrologists and food scientists. A course had to be designed to improve communication skills, both verbal and written, as well as provide a good basic agricultural vocabulary, in under 40 hours of lecture time.

The first priority was to avoid the unnecessarily tedious memorization of a long list of words for each subject matter by ensuring that key terms in animal and vegetable production, soil science, agricultural economics, etc. would be repeated often enough during the course to be retained by students.

A stimulating topic had to be found for each section, to serve as a vehicle for the study of the vocabulary of agricultural practices. Agriculture in French speaking countries was chosen as a general theme for the course. This offered enough diversity to

Gerols is an associate professor of French and Associate Dean of Student Affairs on the Faculty of Agriculture at MacDonal College, 21,111 Lakeshore Rd., Ste. Anne De Bellevue, P.Q. Canada H9X 1C0.