

student involvement) progressed, the colleague, while identifying the concensus, also noted the entire spectrum of positive and negative remarks if they appeared potentially useful for the later debriefing session.

A previously unexpected benefit of the use of CAE was that students are treated as individuals and not simply part of a numerical array. The traditional course evaluation via formal questionnaire presents an upset or frustrated student as a number, a situation that does little to help the instructor or the student. The informal verbal discussion of the CAE did allow all students to speak out in the manner they wished. Then, the class discussion of these points helped to point out to both the students and instructor where improvements could be made by each person. This should result in a more thoughtful and analytical approach by the student to the formal course evaluation at the end of the semester.

One final, and unexpected point, was that after the use of CAE the students seemed to understand that, as instructors, we were making a deliberate attempt to improve our teaching. CAE is or should be an entirely voluntary process. In formal questionnaire evaluation the student evidently feels that the computer or calculator will do the grading work and the instructor will simply passively "read" the results. However, in the CAE process, the instructor is "leaving himself wide open", an overt voluntary commitment based on active instructor interest and concern that appeared to generate accompanying student interest and concern.

Final Thoughts

Colleague Aided Evaluation calls for a personal, active involvement by the instructor in the process of course evaluation. This commitment, as well as the immediate benefits available to the present students, generates student involvement on an educational level. The colleague, who can approach the course evaluation informally, yet professionally, can help maintain the evaluation at that level.

Finally, CAE I perceive it to be, will be best used in conjunction with a formal course evaluation in the traditional post-course sequence. The informality of CAE when used as a supplement to formal course evaluation is an appealing and productive attribute. However, without the rigor of a formal course evaluation, this informality and early timing of evaluation, might negate the total information gathering and total instruction improvement sought in all forms of course-curriculum evaluation.

¹These have commonly taken the appearance of formal, straightforward computer questionnaires; some of these are totally objective in approach and others do provide spaces and infrastructure in an attempt to generate written subjective analyses.

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EFFECTIVE WRITING: AG ALUMNI SAY IT'S ESSENTIAL!

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Introduction

Often, instructors in the College of Agriculture experience difficulties as they attempt to convince students that writing effectively is important. Too frequently students believe that once outside the college classroom, they will not need to write. They therefore take little heed of skills taught in required writing courses, resent writing assignments given in agriculture classes, and fail to enroll in technical writing courses available to them. Sensing students' disregard of writing skills, instructors increase attempts to convince them that the ability to write effectively is essential to success in many agricultural careers. But we lack specific information to support this generalization, and we therefore frequently fail to motivate students to improve writing skills.

In August of 1971 the English Counseling Service of the University of Illinois College of Agriculture surveyed graduates' use of writing skills in agricultural careers. A five page questionnaire was mailed to 660 graduates of the College of Agriculture randomly selected from a list of all graduates from 1923 to 1968. The specific purpose of the study was to ascertain kinds of writing tasks College of Agriculture graduates regularly engage in, the number of hours they devote to writing during an average work week, the value of writing experiences offered in U. of I. courses, and other information useful in motivating students to improve writing skills. Also, the information was sought for use in developing communications curricula for agricultural students.

Forty-four percent of the questionnaires mailed were completed and returned. Questionnaires not completed can be accounted for, in part, by the fact that addresses were in some cases incorrect, several of the recent graduates were overseas on military assignments, and older graduates were retired and therefore decided the questionnaire was not applicable for them. Graduates no longer working in agriculturally related careers also considered the questionnaire not applicable. Still others were deceased.

Findings

The 292 graduates responding to the questionnaire ranged in age from 25 to 72, an average age of 44. Thirty-nine percent of those responding were in professional or technical positions, 38 percent in managerial or official positions, and 17 percent in farming. The remaining 6 percent included craftsmen, housewives, and non-farm laborers. Forty percent were employed by private agencies, 34 percent by governmental agencies, and 21 percent self-employed. Most of those self-employed were farmers.

Respondents were asked, "Do you think the ability to write well is important to persons entering your profession?" Ninety-five percent of those responding to the questionnaire answered "yes." The 5 percent (N=15) who answered "no" included 9 self-employed farmers, 4 persons in managerial positions, 1 craftsman, and 1 non-farm laborer.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the amount of time they spend writing each week. Twenty-four percent indicated that they spend an average of 1 to 2 hours each week writing, and an additional 23 percent spend 3 to 5 hours each week. Another 20 percent spend 6 to 10 hours writing in an average week, 11 percent spend 11 to 15 hours, and 13 percent spend over 16 hours per week. Only 9 percent indicated they do no writing at all. A breakdown of these groups by occupation and employer indicates that 54 percent of those persons who spend 16 hours or more of each week writing are in managerial positions whereas the overwhelming majority (21 out of 26 or 81 percent) of those who do no writing in an average week are in nonmanagerial positions.

Respondents indicated that their writing tasks are varied. Business letters, documented reports, plans of work, and inter-office memoranda require the most time of the greatest portion of the respondents. Other writing tasks include monthly reports, advertisements, technical reports, budget reports, speeches, newsreleases and other journalistic writing, legal documents and miscellaneous reports. Thirty-three percent of the respondents

spend from 15 minutes to 1 hour a week writing business letters. Plans of work also occupy 29 percent of the respondents from 15 minutes to an hour each week, whereas 17 percent spend over an hour each week writing plans of work. Speeches and office memos each involve 29 percent of the respondents between fifteen minutes and one hour per week, and an additional 16 percent spend over one hour per week writing speeches and memos. Thirty-one percent of the respondents spend up to one hour in an average week writing progress reports. The mean number of hours spent by respondents in writing was 7.1 hours.

Over half of the respondents indicated that writing courses they took while at the U. of I. were useful to them. Thirty-five percent also learned useful writing skills in agriculture courses which required lab reports, research papers, and other writing assignments.

Respondents holding managerial positions were asked the following question: "In general, how would you rate the skills in written communication of those persons who apply for positions in your company?" A rating scale of "Very good," "Good," "Don't know," and "Very poor" was provided. Twenty-eight percent of the managers rated applicants' skills as "Poor" or "Very poor" and 37 percent rated them as "Good" or "Very good." The remaining 35 percent could not rate applicants' writing skills.

Many respondents added unsolicited comments to the questionnaire. One 1928 graduate wrote,

I think speech and writing are more important in any line of work than most undergraduates realize. You can make more hay by being able to stand on your feet and talk when called upon, than by being the most able person in your profession if inarticulate.

His remark sums up the attitude of most of the respondents who added personal notes. Several commented that writing skills are closely related to success in agricultural careers. A 1948 graduate noted, "Busy executives demand concise, well-organized technical reports, and justifiably so." Others expressed regret that they had not enrolled in technical writing, report writing, or research reporting courses while students. One noted that "Any skill that will improve an individual's capacity to write simply and briefly would be of great benefit." As a footnote to his comments on the value of speech and writing courses which he took at the U.

of I., a 1961 graduate wrote "These courses would have been more useful had I known their importance and studied." Another graduate stressed that students should realize that a few years after graduation they may be working in an area only remotely connected with what they studied in college. But because writing is important in any career, he recommends thorough preparation for all students.

Conclusion

Overall, the survey shows that effective writing is essential for most graduates of the College of Agriculture: the sheer number of hours that most graduates spend writing is convincing evidence of its significance. It also suggests that in particular graduates who plan to enter managerial positions and "go to the top" will find effective writing an essential.

Findings in the survey have important implications for agriculture faculty and administrators, too. Today a variety of pressures on university administrators and classroom teachers may adversely affect the writing skills of our graduates. Many colleges and universities are reducing the number of writing courses required of students regardless of their writing skills. Budgetary cutbacks which necessitate larger class enrollments limit the time an instructor can devote to evaluation of student writing. Students, particularly those who do not write well, argue that writing assignments are "irrelevant" to agricultural coursework. But the findings from this questionnaire suggest that we do our students no favor if we yield to these various pressures and reduce composition requirements for all students, whether qualified or not, or omit writing assignments from agriculture courses. Our students will be writing once they leave the university. We therefore will be most helpful to them if we provide meaningful writing experiences, familiarizing them with the variety of writing tasks they will face in agricultural careers and helping them perfect writing skills.

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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ADVISOR . . . STUDENTS ATTEMPT TO EVALUATE THEIR INSTRUCTORS

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The following article describes a particular effort at the University of Illinois. It provides a case study of student efforts to evaluate instructors and publish the results. The article gives faculty, students, and administrators at other institutions details about this effort which might be useful on their own campus. It considers the entire University, realizing that the College of Agriculture is a vital part of the total institutional system.

The death of The Advisor was proclaimed in the March 14 editorial of the University of Illinois student newspaper, The Daily Illini.¹ The Advisor, a yearly student publication which provides the only public campus-wide student evaluation of faculty, was reported as an apparent victim of the current tight budget. In figuring its priorities, the University decided that the \$4,000 plus staff and equipment it has contributed yearly to make The Advisor possible would be better spent somewhere else.

Lack of financial resources may have dealt the killing blow, but lack of student leadership and manpower became apparent during the 1971 Fall semester. Although a sound, workable delivery system for data collection, analysis, and publication had been worked out, student apathy caused serious problems in the execution of the student-directed operations. The viable student leadership that emerged on campus during the late 60's had not transferred to the current student body. In short, no one wanted

to put enough concern and work into The Advisor in order that someone else could benefit.

Another development may have strangled The Advisor in unknown dimensions. A long-range study group on University reform, known by the acronym CRUEL (The Commission for the Reform of Undergraduate Education and Living), voted last year to support mandatory student evaluation of faculty members. Last December the vice-chancellor for academic affairs acknowledged support for such an idea. In the last issue of The Advisor, the editors supported CRUEL's position and hinted the time would come for mandatory use of teacher-course evaluation questionnaires and the departments would be required to use the results of such questionnaires in the hiring and firing process.²

Subsequently, the University had second thoughts about its budget. Funds supporting The Advisor came from a budget allocated to short term support of innovative projects so ideas could be tested. University monies for The Advisor had been provided for three years to test the feasibility of the effort. With persistent needs for innovation in other areas, the University decided 1971-72 would be the year to see if The Advisor could become self-supporting, freeing the supporting funds to The Advisor for other needed efforts.

Although it is difficult to conjecture about the impact of The