

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE PROFESSOR IN AGRICULTURE*

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Statement of the Problem

Teaching inefficiency at the university level is often blamed on the "publish or perish" policies that have gained reputation in the past decade. The argument is that professors are somehow forced to conduct and report research in order to keep up with their colleagues to the detriment of classroom instruction. Along with his research, however, the professor has many other duties to attend to that are not strictly teaching. The combination of all these activities may well be the reason for poor quality teaching. Two types of bad situations may exist. In the first place, a professor who is deeply research-oriented may be assigned teaching duties which he really does not want, while a professor who genuinely enjoys teaching may be assigned research and a host of other jobs which rob him of time he would devote to teaching preparation in order to do a creditable job.

In a larger study, "The Professor in Agriculture: A Profile,"¹ a random sampling of professors from land grant colleges and universities in the United States in 1969 were asked to indicate their preferences of fourteen selected professional activities. Preferences were measured by a five point interval scale - dislike - 1; prefer not to do - 2; don't mind - 3; enjoy - 4; and enjoy much - 5. It was assumed that each of these descriptors represents an equally spaced scale of preference with a low in "dislike" and a high in "enjoy much."

Analyses of this report were guided by the following questions:

1. What is the difference in preference of professional activities among professors by academic rank? Is there a pattern of activity preference unique to each rank?

2. What is the difference in preferences of professional activities among professors by their self-rating in teaching? Would professors who rated themselves high in teaching tend to prefer activities closely related to teaching?

3. What is the difference in preferences of professional activities among professors when grouped according to their satisfaction in present professorial role? What types of activities are preferred by those who are more satisfied compared with those who are less satisfied?

Methodology

Data on activity preferences were subjected to analysis of variance by factors of 1) academic rank, 2) self-rating in teaching, and 3) satisfaction in present and professional role. Significance of differences among means was determined by F ratios. To facilitate discussion, the means were ranked and plotted on a preference profile. Acceptable level of significance was set at .05.

In the preference profile, variations may be observed among preferences but the F ratio may be low or vice versa because the actual means were not used in the plotting - only the rankings. Specifically, between any two factors on any activity, the ranking may vary but the F ratio may not be found significant. In any case, probability levels for F values for each activity are indicated in the profile.

Findings

1. Activity Preference by Academic Rank - A total of 378 professors were included in the analysis. Of these, there were 191 full professors, 131 associate professors, and 56 assistant professors. One research professor and 98 other professors who did not indicate their preference on one or more of the listed activities were excluded from the analysis.

In general, four activities stood out as ones which professors by academic rank would enjoy or enjoy much. Leading was research, following in order by teaching graduates, directing graduate student research and teaching undergraduates (Fig. 1).

Down the list of activities that professors would either prefer not to

do or don't mind doing were faculty committees, administration, conducting workshops and attending official social functions.

Of interest was the fact that even if the means did not differ much, the professors had a relatively higher preference for doing committee work at the departmental level over the college or university levels. Writing scientific papers occupied 7th position in the preference profile. While professors in agriculture liked to conduct research, preparing manuscripts was not always considered a pleasant job.

The three groups of professors by academic rank were, in general unanimous on their four top preferred activities, although among the associate professors, teaching graduate students occupied a number 2 position and directing graduate student research was in 3rd place. The reverse was true for the full and assistant professors.

While professors, by academic rank, varied in their ranking of preferences for activities, the differences among means of preference for most of these activities were not significantly large enough to reject the null hypothesis. It was only in faculty committees at the university level and writing scientific papers that professors did vary significantly. Even though serving on faculty committees at the university level was among the least preferred activity, there was a slightly higher preference among associate and full professors than among assistant professors.

High agreement of preference was observed for teaching undergraduates and for teaching graduates. These two activities were among the four top preferred. Conducting of workshops was the one activity where the probability of "no difference" was observed to be the highest.

2. Self-Rating in Teaching and Activity Preference - Respondents were asked to rate themselves on their teaching function by means of a fifty point scale. Twenty-two professors did not indicate self-ratings and 91 did not respond to the question on activity preference. Respondents were grouped according to their self-ratings as poor - 00-19, fair - 20-29, average - 30-39, superior - 40-49, and excellent - 50. According to this grouping, professors tended to rate themselves on the average. Half of the respondents rated themselves average and 36 percent rated themselves superior.

Professors by self-rating in teaching were also unanimous for research as the preferred activity (Fig. 2). Other top preferred activities were teaching undergraduates, teaching graduates and directing graduate student research. The professors were consistent in their preference for attending departmental committees over university committees. Of interest also was the fact that consulting (for business, government and industry) occupied 6th position in the profile, even higher than extension work or conducting workshops. Apparently, professors prefer not to do administrative jobs or attend official social functions. The latter was the least preferred in the entire rankings.

When professors were compared in their preference for activities, according to their self-rating in teaching, significant differences were observed. Those who rated themselves average and superior put attending official social functions as the least preferred activity while those in the excellent and poor groups placed the same activity second to the last in preference. Those who were in the fair group placed this activity in the 8th position in the profile and chose conducting workshops as the least preferred activity.

The higher the scale in self-rating in teaching, the higher the placement of preference for undergraduate and graduate teaching. The professors in the self-rated poor group placed undergraduate teaching in the 8th position, while the excellent and superior groups placed it in the 3rd and 4th preferences respectively. For teaching graduates, the same trend was observed. There was a large difference in preferences among professors in these two activities (p less than .001).

Respondents placed research as the most preferred activity with the exception of those in the excellent group who placed it in the same high rank of preference as teaching graduates. Although directing graduate student research was one of the top preferred activities, professors who rated themselves high in teaching placed this activity one step lower in preference than with those who rated themselves low. However, even if differences were observed, they were not large enough to be significant. Significant differences among professors were observed in their preference of counseling, departmental and college faculty committees, but no meaningful pattern could be observed.

Professors who rated themselves as poor, placed consulting for business, government and industry in the 3rd position of preference, even a step higher than teaching undergraduates.

3. Satisfaction in Professorial Role and Activity Preference - Professors were asked to indicate how satisfied they were in their professorial role by means of a fifty point scale. Five professors did not indicate their satisfaction, while ninety-five did not indicate preference in one or more of the fourteen selected professional activities. Out of the 477 respondents 378 were included in the analysis. Satisfaction

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index was arbitrarily set at 00-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, and 50. There were 22 in the first category, 41 in the second, 163 in the third, and 139 in the fourth. Thirteen indicated "complete satisfaction."

The highly preferred activities were the same as those preferred by professors according to academic rank and self-rating in teaching groupings, i.e., teaching graduates, teaching undergraduates, research, and directing graduate student research (Fig. 3). Those who indicated lowest satisfaction differed markedly from those who were more satisfied, particularly in attending official social functions, faculty committees at the departmental level and in extension work. However, it was only in the last two activities that professors differed significantly in preference at the .05 level. For those who were least satisfied, extension work was the least preferred activity compared to those who were completely satisfied. Even if the differences were not significant, it was interesting to note that while other groups of professors according to their satisfaction index ranked research as the number one preferred activity, those who were less satisfied ranked this activity second only to teaching graduates.

Discussion

In general, the professor in agriculture is research-oriented. Preference of the research activity was evident in all the three factor groupings with a high degree of agreement among categories of groupings. In a description of the profile of the same respondents, Cardozier¹ reported responses on an open ended question on satisfaction that the largest single satisfaction was research. When research-oriented responses were combined, the total was almost 21 percent of all the listed satisfactions. In the present analysis of activity preferences by satisfaction index, there was a tendency for the more satisfied professors to prefer research than did those who were less satisfied, although the preferences were not significantly different. Apparently, the professor in agriculture preferred research among other professional activities because it is also a source of satisfaction in his job.

How is teaching performance related to research preference? There was no definite pattern as to the categories of self-rating in teaching insofar as preference of research was concerned. However, research was found to be significantly and positively correlated with teaching graduates ($r = .352, n = 362$) while it was significantly, but negatively, correlated with teaching undergraduates ($r = -.207, n = 362$). This would seem to indicate that research is compatible with teaching at the graduate level but at the same time incompatible with teaching at the undergraduate level. While this result seems disturbing, perhaps its occurrence is explainable. For instance, Heiss,³ in a review of research concluded that teaching time of the graduate faculty member is almost half that of the college professor, thus allowing him more time to conduct other scholarly activities, mainly research. In another study by Stallings and Singbel,⁵ conducted at the University of Illinois, it was reported that students' perception of the courses was significantly correlated with a measure of productivity, thus lending support to the assertion that a productive researcher tends to be a good teacher and vice versa. While this assertion may not be shared by less productive professors, this would seem to be generally accepted by those who are research-oriented.

The faculty is increasingly involved in decision-making. Eckert contends that the faculty has the major share of responsibility for the internal functioning of a college or university. She adds that because this power has been delegated to the academic community, the faculty has a large stake in seeing that its tasks of policy-making and policy appraisal are effectively discharged.² While this study was not concerned with decision-making, faculty participation in committee work at the various levels points indirectly to faculty involvement. Participation in committees was the least preferred among the fourteen activities! However, the professors were unanimous in their preference of departmental to either the college or university committees. Perhaps, this is simply a phenomenon generally occurring among faculty in the applied and technical subjects. For instance, in an analysis of decision-making in community colleges in Oregon, Malik⁴ concluded that the field of specialization seems to have the most effect in this area, academic instructors generally wanting

a higher degree of participation than the teachers of vocational or technical subjects.

An analysis of the question of faculty participation in governance was made by Cardozier.¹ When professors were asked about their participation in policy-making, only 23 percent indicated they had little or no opportunity for participation at the departmental level. At the college or university levels, participation increased with increase in rank. The same trend was true in the case of committee preferences. While there was a general agreement among professors for preference of departmental committees, the differences in preference becomes increasingly wider at the college and university levels with the full professors indicating a higher preference.

There was a tendency for the professors who rated themselves high in teaching to have higher preferences of teaching undergraduates and graduates than those who rated themselves low. Those who rated themselves poor in teaching had higher preference for consulting for business, government and industry than those who rated themselves fair to excellent. The results of the study were revealing. Those in the poor group would rather consult for business, government and industry than teach, either in the undergraduate or graduate levels.

In terms of satisfaction in present professorial role, there were four activities that exhibited patterns of differences with lower preferences exhibited by those who were less satisfied: faculty committees at the departmental and collegiate level, extension work and conducting workshops. When professors were asked about their dissatisfactions, leading the list were: low salary, administration, excessive committee work and excessive workload.¹ With the exception of excessive workload and low salary, these factors mentioned were also observed to be preferred least among the professional activities.

Summary

The activity preferences of the professor in agriculture were analyzed according to three factor groupings: academic rank, self-rating in teaching, and satisfaction in present professorial role. Preference was based on an interval scale from 'dislike the activity', rated one point, to 'enjoy much the activity', rated 5 points. Data were subjected to analysis of variance by each of the factor groupings. To facilitate discussion, the means were ranked and plotted in a profile.

The main problem was to determine the activity preference of professors in agriculture. Specifically, the study sought to determine activity preference associated with each of the factor groupings.

Findings of the study were:

1. There were no significant differences among professors by academic rank in their preferences of professional activities except in faculty committees at the university level and writing scientific papers. Full and associate professors had higher preference for faculty committees at the university level while they had lower preference for writing scientific papers than the assistant professors.

2. Professors who rated themselves excellent in teaching tended to prefer such activities as teaching undergraduates and teaching graduates, than did those who rated themselves poor. Those who rated themselves poor in teaching indicated a higher preference for consulting in business, government and industry and extension work than did those who rated themselves high.

3. Significant differences in preferences of professional activities were observed between the two groups of professors who were less satisfied and those who were more satisfied in the matters of faculty committees in the departmental and at the collegiate levels, in extension work and in conducting workshops, the significance being in favor of the latter group.

4. In general, the four most preferred activities were teaching undergraduates, teaching graduates, research, and directing graduate student research (Fig. 4). Research activities

always occupied the top position in all factor groups. The four least preferred activities were administration, attending official social functions, faculty committees at the university level, and conducting workshops.

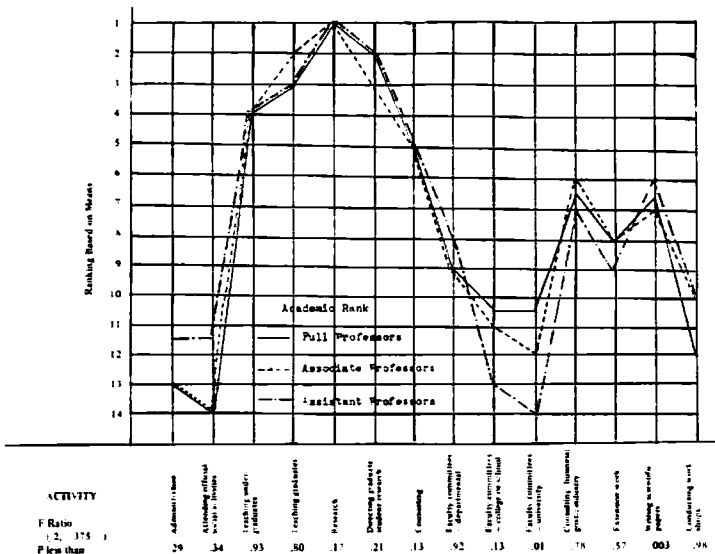


FIGURE 1

Profile of Activity Preference Based on Ranking of Means, Professors by Academic Rank

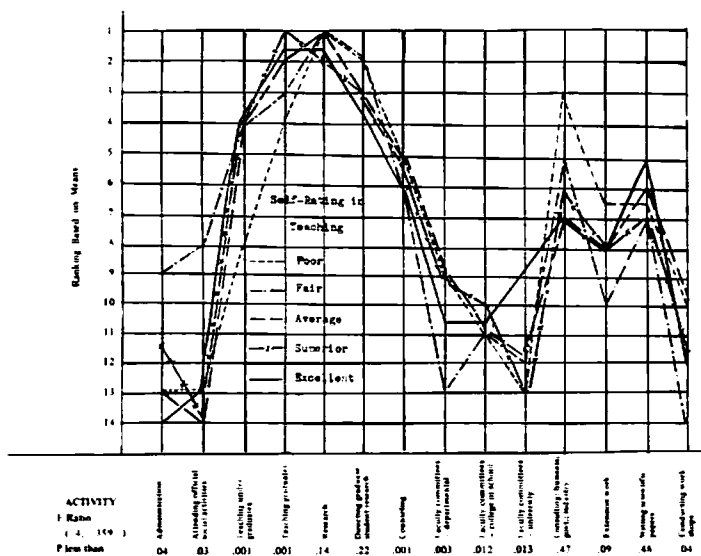


FIGURE 2

Profile of Activity Preference Based on Ranking of Means, Professors by Self-Rating in Teaching

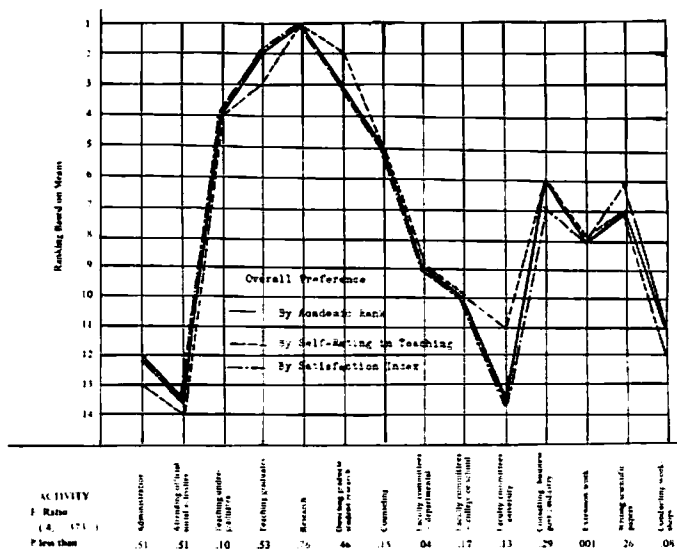


FIGURE 3

Profile of Activity Preference Based on Ranking of Means, Professors by Satisfaction Index

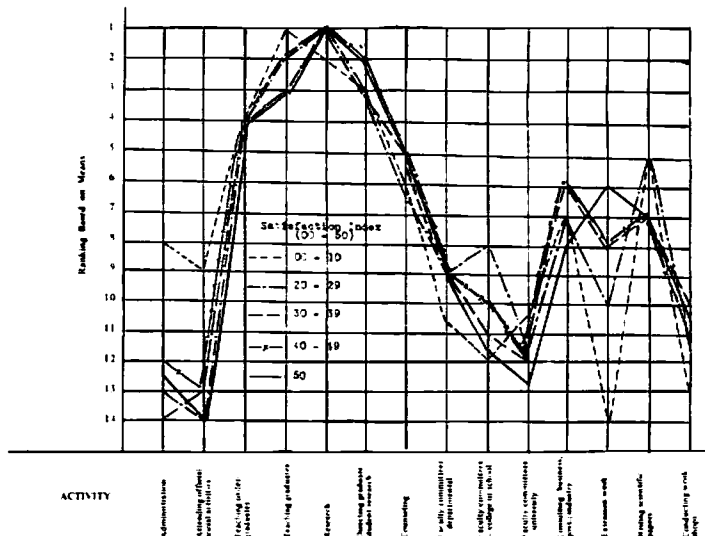


FIGURE 4

Profile of Overall Preference Based on Ranking of Means

CITATIONS

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4. Malik, Joseph, Decision-making in community colleges, Abstract reported in Research in Education, June, 1969, p. 56.
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TRAINING

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Teachers of the basic subjects which are preparatory to training in any chosen field know that they would do much better if their practical colleagues and others supported them instead of constantly subjecting them to pressures for applications, in modern parlance "relevance." On the other hand, teachers of Agriculture, the oldest practical subject on the campus other than the ancient triad of theology, law, and medicine, continually stub their toes on schedules, rules, curricula, committees, debates, and the like which originate

with teachers of basic subjects, the idealists, academicians, theorists, inmates of the ivory tower.

Common sense says that basic education and ivory towers are important. Wallace Sterling, ex-president of Stanford, asked: "What's wrong with being an egghead?" It is equally evident that training to do needful things and produce, earning a living thereby, is essential.

Why not bring order out of this confusion, eliminating the bickering and waste motion? Why not with everyone's blessing