

Administrative Problems of General Concern to Teachers of Horticulture

Eliot C. Roberts
University of Florida

Dr. Roberts is Professor and Chairman of the Department of Ornamental Horticulture, University of Florida. This was presented as an invitational report at Department Heads Breakfast, August 28, 1967, ASHS Meetings, Texas A&M University.

The various types of administrative problems noted by horticulture department chairmen are not different from those cited by heads of other departments. In many instances only the degree to which these problems have been left unsolved accounts for differences in effects on departmental policy and operations. For this reason, it is imperative that once we are satisfied with the descriptive aspects of our administrative responsibilities, we set about to strengthen those areas of deficiency from which problems arise. I would suggest that this is fundamentally a matter of public relations with emphasis placed in 3 areas; i.e. with the horticultural industry, with students and prospective students at both undergraduate and graduate level, and with our colleagues within the University family.

Name the problems ranging from inadequate research budgets to insufficient numbers of students and the solution to the problem will be found, at least in part, in one of these 3 categories:

Pay Attention to the Horticultural Industry

We often do an excellent job of creating problems for ourselves by taking an ostrich "head in the sand" attitude in regards to relationships with horticultural industries. If we have a job to do, it is as "partners in progress" with grower and industry representatives and with citizens interested in group action on matters of concern to horticulturists. Where there's no job to be done, we'll soon be replaced by space scientists and others who are public relations conscious.

It is clearly our responsibility to communicate effectively regarding the adequacy of research facilities in relation to project needs in our areas of specialization. We can exhaust ourselves trying to determine what is a desirable balance between "basic" and "applied" and "developmental" research, but until these concepts are understood and appreciated by our public, we are a long way from making good use of our time and effort. Further, since it is unlikely that we will ever be adequately financed to function in all those areas where project justification exists, it is imperative that orders of priority be worked out and agreed upon. Understanding our limitations is a certain first step in developing a strong program. As greater coordination of effort develops between experiment stations in neighboring states, the better chance all of us will have to meet the needs of local groups for information. To be sure there will be some question on interpretation of results, but when recommendations are made on the basis of our best understanding of the factors involved and so presented in an atmosphere of good public relations, results will be favorable.

Development of extension programs that are clearly defined and understood by our horticultural industries and public will significantly increase the effectiveness of our effort. To a considerable extent we have assigned our public relations image to extension leaders; we are indebted to them for the important achievements they have made and recognize their need for our continued support.

Often, curriculum development and setting up of specialized training options are accomplished within the "ivy covered walls" with little industry contact. Ultimately, our graduates become part of the overall horticultural industry. We

are in grave need of better communication between horticultural employers and horticultural educators. Needs for on-the-job training programs to replace, in part, worn out and ineffective laboratory exercises must be considered soon if we intend to realistically prepare students for careers in horticulture. Course content adjustments should reflect the thinking of industry leaders as well as our scientists and educators. If we follow present trends, it seems likely we will abdicate our position of leadership to general education and liberal arts. The fact that this movement is already under way indicates the hour is late to effectively stress improved public relations as a prerequisite to working more closely with industry leaders in making necessary adjustments.

Communicate with Students

Students are our most important resource, scholars are our most important product. Lecturing to students in class is not enough; we must communicate with them concerning horticulture and its place of importance in local, national and world affairs. Improved public relations of this type are needed from elementary school, through high school, college and post graduate studies.

Horticulture will never accomplish more than our graduates have capacity and motivation to achieve. In working with students we often fail to present horticultural science as part of every day living. Horticulture is a plant science, but in addition, it is whatever horticulturists as people make it. It can be cold and unrewarding or it can be alive with the personality of horticultural leaders who are living this dynamic profession. Our students are looking for a professional goal that is somewhere before them. They expect to be treated as adults and want to face the future in their chosen field in a realistic way. They deserve to know the industry and understand the underlying technology that contributes to its economic growth.

Students will likely be as enthusiastic about horticulture as we are. Spend some time working with them; make them a part of our departmental effort rather than being subject to our effort and they, in turn, will promote and support horticulture wherever it counts most.

Promote Horticulture within the University Family

It is amazing how much misinformation concerning agriculture and agricultural staff circulates even on our land grant college campuses. It's little wonder that horticulturists and agronomists are often looked upon as being a cut below others of the academic community. A course in Botany may be considered highly desirable and worthwhile, one in horticulture suitable only for the student who can't find something better to do. Year in and year out we tend to sit back and accept situations of this sort with the self-righteous attitude that it's the hard luck of those on the faculty who don't appreciate what we have to offer. In the meantime, we are missing an opportunity to offer plant science level subject matter relative to horticultural crops to thousands of students who, in future years, will come floundering to our home grounds, county agents or to consultants in ornamental horticulture wondering why they had never before been told of the importance of horticultural science.

We must not be satisfied to teach courses in horticulture to horticulture majors alone. *Although this is important we must also recognize a responsibility to help develop a better horticulturally informed citizenry.* What better place is there to start than with our college students of today? Your public

relations effort with your University colleagues yesterday will determine how effective this start will be.

Summary

In the months and years ahead horticulturists should have an increasingly strong voice in the affairs of agriculture. The population shift from rural to urban, if nothing else, will place even more responsibility on horticulturists. Agronomic crops may keep the world free from starvation, but horticultural

crops will make the difference between subsistence and achieving the "good life" universally sought after by all free men. Opportunities open to us make it clear that our goals should not be set lower than this. Now is the time to solve problems (not talk about them) by emphasizing improved public relations in all phases of horticultural programs. Procedures which are working successfully for others will work for us.

Teacher Responsibility in Placement

Harlon D. Traylor
Louisiana State University

Mr. Traylor is Professor and Chairman of the Employment Opportunities Committee, Department of Agriculture Economics and Agribusiness at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803.

Is the marketing of a student's product — his scholastic achievement, ability, experience, interests, drive, personality and the like — any less important than that of industry? Can he do it effectively by himself? What responsibility does the college have in this matter? The department administering his curriculum? The teacher?

Certainly no one can guarantee jobs to students upon graduation. Aside from the training given him, however, colleges and their faculties are further concerned with placing students in suitable careers. This further concern leads some colleges to devote as much as .6 percent of their budgets to a conscious effort in this regard.

If grades alone were a good indicator of later performance in a career, students would be classified into fairly homogeneous groups which purchasing agents could buy at the market price. Likewise if starting salaries alone were a good indicator of later performance of the company toward its employees, choosing employment would be much simpler for students. There would be little need for the personnel office so important to many large organizations today. The imperfection of a direct relationship between career or company performance and some single criterion such as grades or starting salaries also creates problems and opportunities for college placement officers and teachers.

There is no good measure of the amount colleges really expend on this matter. Some colleges maintain a central placement office. Others more or less leave it to the various departments. In placement circles the issue of centralized versus decentralized placement is always a timely subject. Some of both systems exist in any college. The important thing is to recognize this function and devote conscious effort to it.

As a minimum in centralized placement there is some office or offices at the college level to which initial inquiries about students for prospective employment is addressed. If there is not a placement officer, it may go to a dean, the public

relations office or even the chancellor's office unless it is addressed specifically to a department or some faculty member or student. Whoever receives it will attempt to get it to the right department or perhaps to the right students. When it comes to a department head, he or someone designated by him then probably attempts to communicate the inquiry to qualified students through posting on bulletin boards, correspondence or some other means. He then arranges interviews if indicated, and will probably maintain a file on such inquiries for future reference. Some may attempt to gather statistics on the number of jobs interviewed for, starting salaries, and the like and to coach students on interviewing.

Meanwhile students are attempting to determine through their advisors, the department head and others what they hope to do after graduation. If the student has a military obligation, or if an alumnus is not satisfied with his job, communication between prospective employers and employees is all the more difficult. Thus the department may develop a system of data sheets on all students to help more efficiently communicate between the two as the occasion arises.

A strong centralized placement office may relieve a department of some of these functions. It may also belong to an association through which it obtains useful ideas about placement. It may maintain elaborate files, for example, on companies and their personnel programs as well as on students. It is generally in a position to recognize and implement many refinements in placement that individual departments and faculty members could not afford.

Even where the central placement office is strong, however, individual teachers still have certain responsibilities. Through classes, advising and other contacts with students, through employment opportunities that come to their attention because of specialization in their field, through conscious effort to teach subject matter relevant to available employment, and through other avenues, they can make significant contributions in this matter.

Though teachers need not be overly concerned, the job cannot be done effectively by turning it over to the placement office altogether. Particularly adept teachers can be encouraged to carry a large share of the burden by recognizing it as part of their job.

Teaching Agriculture in the Community College

James D. Claridge
Mesa Community College

Mr. Claridge is Chairman of Agriculture at the Mesa Community College, Mesa, Arizona.

The Community College has provided a means for interested persons to further their education by adopting the Open-Door-Policy. This policy, combined with a minimum fee, has attracted many persons interested in post-high school

education, allowing them to develop new competencies or add to the ones they already possess, to prepare them for a new occupation or to rise in their present one.

Approximately 70% of those entering the Community College do not go on to four-year colleges or universities. This group has created a need for training programs to prepare