

Agribusiness . . .

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A Proposal for Improving Extension and Collegiate Teaching*

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Recently some voices have taken issue to the proposition that the market for agricultural economists may be a declining one. One area sorted out for possible growth has been the extension and collegiate teaching function. However, there are complaints that these activities are not equal in status or monetary rewards to research activities and therefore cannot attract and hold outstanding talent. This article analyzes the nature and cause of this atmosphere of discrimination. It is argued that what is needed is a conscious effort to restore professional status to the teaching function and also to devise ways of measuring and awarding differentials in quality teaching activities. Among other suggestions, it is proposed that administrators take an active role in developing criteria for measuring the performance of extension and collegiate teaching; that the American Farm Economic Association take specific steps to break down the image of discriminatory treatment between researchers and teachers.

"RESEARCH AND EDUCATION" is the magic phrase in high public favor. Research and education, however, may not be synonymous activities. At the risk of oversimplification, research may be considered as the exploration for new truths while education may be considered as the process of transferring and making knowledge useful to the continuing parade of new decision-makers. This difference in the two activities was made quite clear in the presidential address to the American Farm Economic Association by Lowell Hardin when he sorted out the education phase—both collegiate and adult—as being the potential growth area for the agricultural economics profession.¹

But if Hardin is correct, and I think he is, we have a dilemma. He suggests that agriculturalists and agricultural economists recognize the importance of undergraduate instruction and adult extension education. Yet at the same time, almost any administrator will complain about the difficulty of hiring and retaining good personnel whose primary work would be adult or collegiate teaching. The joint appointment in research and teaching or extension is widely used to hire a good man. Once hired, however, the teaching responsibilities often lose out to the research activities.

This aversion to tending the educational fires is not a secret known only

to college administrators. Increasingly the public is beginning to note that the distinguished professor advertised in the catalogs may seldom appear before the class. The outstanding scholar that the student sees often turns out to be the graduate assistant. Even those concerned with the quality of our public schools are beginning to discern the embarrassing point that the teachers in these schools are a product of our university classrooms.

Why is it increasingly difficult to persuade men of talent to take on the jobs of teaching students and adults? The argument will be advanced that the major stumbling block is not the average level of monetary compensation which exists for the adult and collegiate teachers but rather that (1) professional teachers have second-class status in our research oriented profession, and (2) the structure for awarding excellence in our universities is better geared to recognizing excellence in the research half of "research and education." As economists, we know that if a marketing system does not recognize differences in quality, the result is often a deterioration of the product. We also recognize in many instances that motivating rewards often include more than money.

The Image of Discrimination

It has long been fashionable, especially at higher administrative levels, to deny that there were differences in the rewards, either in money or prestige, between research oriented and teaching oriented personnel. Presidents and deans, especially when talking with either legislators or parents, are careful to establish their devotion to the excellence of the educational operation. However, it is how the participants judge the situation that is of most importance. Let's listen to the words of some of our own colleagues:

Professors prize the split (research and teaching) appointment. This is largely because professional prestige from research so heavily outweighs

that from teaching that any individual or department head must beckon the call.²

While weak teaching programs are not necessarily fatal to good education, weak teachers are. Here colleges and universities have fallen short. They have relegated teaching and teachers to an inferior status. Rank, pay and prestige accrue more generously to those involved in writing, research and administration.³

There are academic strata of professional status on the top is the researcher; down quite a ways is the teacher and at the bottom are the educational translators—the extension people.⁴

Another interesting insight is found in a recent study which analyzed the satisfactions which college teachers found in their work. It was found that positions most preferred by teachers over college teaching were U.S. senator or congressman, dean, research worker in own field, college president and full-time author. Another very interesting conclusion was satisfaction with teaching as a profession increased with rank, age and experience.⁵

This complaint of discrimination often is rationalized by the proposition that the criteria of a good researcher will at the same time measure the desired characteristics of a good college teacher or an adult educator. Therefore, so this reasoning goes, the deserving educators are also deserving researchers and receive their rewards. It is the incompetent teacher and extension man (by this definition, one who has no research output) who is by-passed and feels unjustly treated.

This rationale, too, is coming under question. One observer has made the charge that research, as now carried on in our experiment stations, may actually be in conflict with excellence in the teaching function.⁶ Another phrased the issue "the fact that a staff member is an excellent and productive researcher does not preclude his being a good teacher; neither does it assure it."⁷

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A college dean in speaking on the impact of uniform research measuring sticks for his extension men said:

Some Ph.D. extension workers want to impress other Ph.D.s' and have overlooked their tremendous educational opportunity with lay people. Part of the high attrition among younger workers, no doubt, is due to the inherent result of present Ph.D. programs tending to engender personal aggrandizement in new-found research of theoretical skills. Somehow some have lost their "educational touch" and embarked on a personal program of emphasizing their newly acquired competence.⁸

Why Does the Problem Exist?

If the above even approximately describes the actual situation, then a serious problem exists. A market which does not adequately recognize product differences either in kind or grade does not effectively bring forth the desired products. Can the causes of the present performance be identified? Though highly interrelated, such causes can be sorted as coming from society, from administrators, from our own professional association and from the educators themselves.

The value of research has been successfully sold to society in general. Part of the American myth is the dogma that tomorrow will be better. The corollary proposition has also developed that no problem, however complex, can remain unanswered if enough talent and resources are applied. Business in particular has become a devotee of this position, and the research-consultant has developed into a booming business of its own. Research money has flowed from the public, from business and, of course, from the new social phenomenon of the American scene—the well-heeled foundations.

The results from these efforts have been substantial and important. The competitive world in which we live and the continuation of unanswered important questions call for more research, not less. It is likely that the demand for research skills has increased relative to either adult or collegiate teaching skills.

The administrators of our institutions of higher learning, caught in this environment, have added certain refinements of their own. How to tap this immense reservoir of funds for research has become both an art and a science. The professor with the developed talent for tapping foundations for large grants is probably rarer and more valuable than the one who has outstanding research talents. No one should blame administrators, who

faced with tightfisted legislatures have moved in on this fountain of gold.

In operating in this climate, however, administrators have fallen into two traps. One of these is "project-itis," which reaches a most virulent form in the agricultural experiment station. As every American knows, there must be a careful record of expenditures and returns made by an accountant. The research industry can be no exception to this principle. Donors of both private and public research funds often identify the problem that they want solved. They also want to know what results they obtain for their money.

This valid desire of both donors and administrators of funds to be "accountable" and get results has contributed to some rather undesirable developments in the research area itself. The proper project must concisely state its problem with a special admonition that it be restricted in such a manner that its answers are possible. These answers then must be carefully reported so that the accounting process can show results. One of the results of this procedure, as Paarlberg has implied, has been an overemphasis on research on methods rather than on significant problems.⁹ Such projects give both the researcher and the administrator a useful escape hatch. If answers to a problem cannot be found, at least a "professional contribution" which will be acclaimed by our colleagues has been produced. More importantly, however, the emphasis on accountable projects has tended to make research a special compartment of scholarship instead of synonymous with scholarship. Hardin alluded to this in his observation that we make research thrusts at frontiers of knowledge, but our scholarship in the intergration and synthesis of knowledge is lagging.¹⁰

The other administrative result has been the use of the criteria of research capacity to hire and reward all personnel. Listen to a head of a major agricultural economics department:

What do we do when we hire people? We look for someone with experience. We then examine, count and compare lists of publications. We ask whether he can be a member of the team, get along with colleagues, and stay out of trouble. Occasionally we investigate his teaching ability; but after all, if he has gone through the academic paces and learned the subject matter, then he can certainly teach.¹¹

This administrator maintains that the above is so generally used that it is a stereotype procedure. He says this

single model is used without regard to the fact that different characteristics are necessary for excellent performance of different functions. In other words, the system both hires and awards on the written research output of an individual without much regard to whether this is the individual's major function and work. Such administrative procedure cannot help but affect the young man's evaluation of a job and his behavior after he has accepted employment.

The activities of the American Farm Economic Association contribute to these administrative developments. After all, every college administrator wishes his staff to be recognized as excellent by the professional rating societies. How does our association contribute to this status? It gives numerous awards—all for research reports or written papers. It is particularly interesting to note that textbooks are especially excluded from consideration. It is also significant to speculate on whether any collegiate department, whose role it is to nominate worthy publications, would have the effrontery to suggest one of their extension publications for consideration—regardless of the excellence of its contribution. It has recently been suggested that awards for excellent educators—college teachers or extension workers—be instigated. But these suggestions have had considerable opposition because, as it is phrased, such activities are unmeasurable.

Finally, the teacher himself has contributed to his own fate. If, as Hardin suggests, this is the group best suited to intergrate, synthesize and report our present state of knowledge, then considerable failure must be acknowledged. There is a dreary lack of good writing, textbooks or otherwise, which the student, either youth or adult, can use to enhance his knowledge.

Of equal importance, while the teacher has cried that excellence performance in his role has not been rewarded, he has vehemently resisted the evaluation and measurement which would make an intelligent rewarding process possible. Extension is always evaluating its programs, but rarely the extension educator. Universities spend long hours on curriculum evaluation, but give only perfunctory attention to evaluating the teacher. The average teacher would quickly retire to the protection of "academic freedom" if administrators sought to see his course outline or to sit in on his classes. The implication is that even these teachers believe their work to be so esoteric that only they themselves can judge its worth. However, even artists must exhibit their pictures for the

evaluation of their colleagues and the marketplace if they are to become famous or eat well!

Corrective Action Can Be Taken

There are indications that society itself is becoming more interested and concerned as to how its scarce resources should be divided between the research function of searching for new knowledge and the teaching functions of transferring the accumulation of knowledge. The increasing educational needs of the coming years may again increase the relative demand for adult and collegiate teachers. Added money helps heal many wounds, but it will not solve all the problems which flow from second-rate professional status or from the poor system of recognizing excellence. To help correct these shortcomings, action can be taken on several fronts:

1. Administrators can take steps to encourage the reunion of research activities and scholarship. Nonproject scholarly activities can be encouraged. Publication of work attempting to bring knowledge together and transmit this to others can be increasingly supported. One approach might be to insist that either researchers or teachers of excellence should be able to produce periodically significant writings not directly related to or reported under any particular research project. Such efforts would enhance both our project oriented research and our educational processes. The committee on research needs in our profession has concluded that the great need is for "intergrated, systematic and exhaustive treatises that will compile, examine and appraise our present knowledge in various fields."¹² Such scholarly efforts would reduce the area of argument over what we know and aid in defining the new problems. It is true currently that not many administrators would be happy to support such efforts or many experiment stations or professional journal editors happy to print such findings. But this can be changed by directed effort and leadership.

2. Administrators can develop, publicize and put into effect different criteria for employment and reward for different types of academic jobs. The image that the only way to recognition is via the research output route needs to be shattered. This would encourage individuals with talent for the classroom or the adult public to flow into these jobs and devote their energies to perfecting their performance. This step would go a long way toward releasing the schizophrenic pressure on those individuals with talents and interest in the teaching endeavors, but who also half-hearted-

ly push project research in order to qualify for status and reward. The transferring of both administrative and staff energies from the overabundance of committees on college curricular and extension "scope" type reports to increased emphasis on effort to assure that educational talents are developed to maximum potentials is also in order. The excellence of what is done is directly related to the competence and skill of the doers. With wrong or inadequate people the best laid curricular or programs falter.

3. The American Farm Economic Association can take an active leadership in helping evolve the measurement tools and evaluation procedures for differentiating among teachers of different qualities. It should devote part of its resources to stimulate these activities. The argument that the excellence of classroom and extension teachers cannot quantitatively be measured is simply not adequate. It is true that the problem will be extremely difficult. It is also true that some of the greatest opponents of such efforts will be teachers themselves. However, as a professional group, we have gathered and quantified qualitative data on a wide variety of problems ranging from consumer preference for lean meat to the managerial ability of farmers. We have worked in areas of great opposition to our efforts. Difficulty and opposition are insufficient reasons for not bringing our professional talents to bear on an important problem.

In addition, the Association in its award program for published works should recognize the valuable role of text and reference books, extension training publications, and other materials for public use. Special effort should be taken to award broad scholarship as well as excellence in research techniques. Our Association has awarded excellence in talking to ourselves; it should make equal efforts to award excellence in communicating with the present and future decision-makers of our society.

4. Finally, the educators themselves must make active effort in their own behalf. As a group, teachers and extension workers have not been productive in contributing to literature. If the assertion that those who teach are equally capable of scholarly activities is to be accepted, results must be forthcoming. Part of the responsibility of education is to help assimilate new knowledge into the old so that the largest possible total body of useful knowledge can be transmitted effectively to the new generation in order that

they, in turn, can add to and improve its content. Project oriented research activities provide much of the material for this process, but they do not necessarily accomplish it. In this process, teachers must become full and productive partners.

And most important, teachers must insist that their activities be evaluated. They must ask that administrators sit in on their classes, attend their meetings, and question their students. Researchers must commit their efforts to paper and subject themselves to the comment and criticism of their customers and peers. The teacher-economist, if he wishes to be equally respected, can do no less.

Research and education are both vitally important ingredients. Society through the marketplace ultimately decides on the desired balance between research and teaching resources. However, improvement in professional status will help remove a barrier to entry into adult and collegiate teaching. This should permit a more effective allocation of specialized talents between the teaching and research functions. The establishment of separate criteria for judging teaching performance and of a system which makes its rewards to teaching on these criteria should provide additional motivation toward excellence for those choosing to be teachers of either youths or adults.

1. L. S. Hardin, "Potential Growth Area in Agricultural Economics," *J. Farm Econ.*, Vol. 45, December 1963, p. 939.

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3. L. K. Fischer and R. M. Finley, "Proposals for Improving College Teaching," *J. Farm Econ.*, Vol. 42, December 1960, pp. 1494-1496.

4. M. E. John, "Recruitment, Training, Administration of Staff," Symposium Proceedings of the National Study on Agribusiness Education, Purdue University, 1962, pp. 23-26.

5. "College Professors Liking for College Teaching," a report of AAUP Subcommittee on Preference for College Teaching, 1962.

6. Snodgrass, op. cit.

7. Fischer and Finley, op. cit.

8. E. R. Kiehl, "A Critical Appraisal of the State of Agricultural Economics Extension Work Today," *J. Farm Econ.* Vol. 43, December 1961, pp. 1453-1461.

9. Don Paarlberg, "Methodology For What?" *J. Farm Econ.*, Vol. 45, December 1963, p. 1386.

10. Hardin, op. cit.

11. M. E. John, op. cit. The above is slightly paraphrased and condensed.

12. H. M. Southworth, "The AFEA-SSRC Committee on New Orientations in Research," *J. Farm Econ.*, Vol. 41, December 1959, pp. 1451-1460.