

The Challenged Professoriate

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Abstract

Recent changes in higher education have impacted faculty vitality. This case study examined the teaching, research, and service of College of Agriculture faculty under these conditions. Results indicated that there is a need to improve the job satisfaction of faculty. Most faculty rated their morale low and stated that other faculty had similar feelings. Although most faculty felt that the university did not value agriculture, they remained loyal to their discipline. Most faculty have not participated in formal programs for enhancing their professional growth, but informal programs do appear to be in place. Greater financial support and increased recognition for teaching and advising, service, and research were listed as factors useful in improving faculty vitality.

Introduction

Faculty in American higher education are challenged. The changes brought about in serving the needs of a greater heterogeneous student population, coupled with declining departmental resources, increased academic work loads, and greater institutional pressures have impacted faculty vitality (Bowen & Shuster, 1986).

This condition appears to be exacerbated in colleges of agriculture. Agriculture as an industry and profession has undergone an erosion of confidence among the American public. The unidimensional public image of agriculture as production-only, combined with competition from other academic disciplines, has contributed to declining enrollments in the agricultural sciences (Litzenberg, Whatley, & Scamardo, 1992). With smaller student populations, faculty in agricultural disciplines have experienced acute reductions in the traditional institutional support that is linked to student numbers. Such changes ultimately affect the quality of academic lives.

Nevertheless, there continues to be a need for agricultural faculty to be ever-more productive in the areas of teaching, research, and service. As the efficacy of traditional agricultural practices declines, new technologies will replace outdated ones thereby expanding career possibilities. Students will continue to seek out academic programs leading to a myriad of agricultural careers, and there will

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continue to be substantial opportunities available to those students who do persist.

The College of Agriculture at a mid-size western university has experienced declining student enrollments for most of the previous 15 years. With the decline in student numbers, it has become apparent that the College must initiate changes to revitalize academic programs and personnel. Pals (1988) asserted that an assessment of faculty attitudes is necessary in order to facilitate improvements in colleges of agriculture. Hence, the need for this study was to examine the faculty's perceptions related to their profession and to suggest techniques for enhancing their vitality. Although the findings of this study are only generalizable to this local faculty, this study should be useful to others in suggesting techniques for improving the professional lives of faculty. Both process and product of this investigation may guide others in addressing and resolving this problem.

Objectives of the Study

Specific objectives of the study were:

1. To identify faculty attitudes on teaching, advising, research, and service.
2. To assess levels of faculty morale.
3. To ascertain the extent of the faculty's participation in professional growth opportunities.
4. To recommend techniques/opportunities for enhancing professional vitality.

Procedures

The accessible population of this study consisted of all full-time and part-time faculty in the College of Agriculture (N=64). Faculty were identified from the Spring Quarter, 1990, faculty/staff roster provided by the College of Agriculture Dean's Office.

The data were collected by a mailed questionnaire adapted from two previous studies (Pals, 1988; Whaley & Wickler, 1992). Additional elements were adapted from *The Condition of the Professoriate: Attitudes and Trends* (Boyer, 1989). A panel of agricultural graduate students and faculty (n=12) were used in refining items and establishing content and face validity. A post-hoc reliability indicated that the questionnaire had internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .7 to .87 for each of the scales.

An initial mailing and two follow-up mailings were utilized to gather data. All faculty were assured of complete confidentiality with their responses. Ten-day time intervals

occurred between all mailings. Usable data collection instruments were returned from 57 (84%) respondents. Non-response error was controlled by comparing early and late respondents, with late respondents serving as a surrogate for non-respondents. No significant differences were found between the three groups of respondents ($p > .05$). Therefore, results were generalizable to the target population.

The data from the questionnaires were described using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations. T-test and chi-square analyses were used to identify relationships between respondent groups.

Findings

Data collected in the study revealed that the faculty was mature and experienced. Only 16% of the respondents were less than 45 years old. Mean university teaching experience was 17.7 years ($\sigma = 8.7$), while mean teaching experience in the College of Agriculture was 15.3 years ($\sigma = 7.8$). Eighty percent of the faculty respondents were tenured and 86% were full-time employees of the university. Seventy-five percent of the respondents were full professors. Only two percent were assistant professors.

Sixty-three percent of the respondents had an earned doctorate. Five percent of the respondents indicated that their highest degree was only a bachelor's degree. Most of the faculty (65%) were on academic-year appointments (9 month) while the remainder were on 12 month appointments (26%) or employed quarter by quarter (9%). Faculty indicated that, on the average, they spend 38 hours per week at the university. Twenty-two (58%) of these hours were devoted to teaching or teaching-related duties (i.e. course preparation and advising).

Faculty attitudes on teaching, research, and service

Approximately 95% of the respondents indicated that the quality of their *teaching* is very important to them while 77% responded that the quality of their *advising* is very important. Surprisingly, 22.8% indicated that the *service* component of their appointment is unimportant, while 37% reflected that it is unimportant to engage in *scholarly work* leading to publications or exhibits.

Overall, respondents replied that their students rated the quality of their teaching as highly effective (68%) or effective (23%), while few respondents indicated that students perceived the quality of their teaching to be ineffective (3.5%) or extremely ineffective (2%). Faculty generally rated their own teaching somewhat lower in quality than did their students. Eighty percent rated their teaching as highly effective or effective (compared to a student rating of 91%). Seven faculty (12%) responded that the quality of their teaching is ineffective.

Faculty were asked to rate the extent of their agreement/disagreement with a series of statements pertaining to their attitudes on teaching, research, and service. Findings are summarized in Table 1.

The data reflected that faculty enjoy interacting with students. Only one respondent disagreed with this sentiment. This sentiment was further supported in that most faculty disagreed ($\bar{x} = 1.8$) that students should seek out fac-

Table 1. Faculty Attitudes on Teaching, Advising, Research, and Service.

Factors	*Mean	S.D.
1. I enjoy interacting informally with students outside of the classroom.	3.5	.54
2. A close faculty and industry collaboration is necessary to ensure a current and relevant curriculum.	3.3	.54
3. In my department, faculty are generally competent in their subject matter.	3.2	.61
4. In my department, faculty have high standards of good scholarship.	2.8	.74
5. There is little incentive in the College of Agriculture to improve/update my subject matter competence.	2.7	.85
6. Overall, College of Agriculture faculty have high standards of good scholarship.	2.7	.74
7. There is little incentive in the College of Agriculture to improve my teaching.	2.6	.78
8. Although faculty should attempt to fulfill their office hour obligation, it is acceptable to miss office hours when conflicts exist.	2.6	.63
9. Student should only seek out faculty during posted office hours and by special appointments.	1.8	.67
10. Fewer faculty members today provide positive role models to our students than in the past.	0.8	.68

* Scale: 4= strongly agree; 3= agree; 2= disagree; 1= strongly disagree.

ulty only during specified times (i.e. posted office hours and special appointments).

Although most respondents agreed that colleagues are competent in subject matter ($\bar{x} = 3.2$) and scholarship ($\bar{x} = 2.8$), surprisingly some questioned this issue. Nine faculty (16%) felt that, within their departments, faculty are not subject matter competent. More than one-fourth of the faculty (28%) responded that their departmental colleagues do not have high standards of good scholarship.

Faculty Morale

Data were collected to ascertain the faculty's professional morale. Respondents described the extent of their agreement or disagreement with attitudinal statements on

Table 2. Faculty Morale.

Factors	*Mean	S.D.
1. My academic discipline/subject is very important to me.	3.6	.54
2. The general public does not appreciate the importance of agriculture.	3.5	.51
3. My academic department is very important to me.	3.2	.61
4. Those employed in agriculture have a high level of job satisfaction.	3.1	.13
5. I am more enthusiastic about my work now than when I began my academic career.	2.7	.84
6. My morale is presently very high.	2.5	.95
7. I often feel trapped in a profession with limited opportunities for advancement.	2.0	.94
8. Overall, the morale of other faculty in the College of Agriculture is presently high.	1.8	.64
9. The university community at Cal Poly Pomona perceives agriculture as an important field of study.	1.7	.75
10. If I had it to do over again, I would not become a college teacher.	1.5	.64

* Scale: 4= strongly agree; 3= agree; 2= disagree; 1= strongly disagree.

the faculty's working conditions, institutional and industry loyalty, and professional enthusiasm. These data are reported in Table 2.

The professional morale of most faculty is low. Only 36% of the faculty agreed that their morale is presently high. As well, only 30% of the faculty agreed that the morale of other faculty in the College is high. Finally, most faculty (60%) agreed that they have lost enthusiasm for their work since they began their academic careers.

Even given this low morale, faculty are satisfied with the selection of their profession. Most (92%) *agreed* that if they had it to do over again, they would become college teachers. Faculty also *disagreed* that they feel trapped in a profession with limited opportunities for advancement. Most faculty *agreed* that their subject matter discipline (96%) is very important to them, however, most felt that the university community does not perceive agriculture as an important field of study.

Additional analysis revealed that there were significant differences by departments to the faculty responses, $X^2(4, N=50)=11.51, p<.05$. Members of the Agricultural Engineering, Animal Science, and Foods and Nutrition Departments generally disagreed that those employed in agriculture have a high standard of living, while members of the Ag Business Management and Horticulture/Plant Science Departments responded more favorably. Further, members of the Animal Science Department felt that agriculture students are more concerned about higher monetary rewards than students who do not study agriculture. This sentiment contrasted significantly with the perceptions of members from other academic departments $X^2(4, N=49)=9.44, p<.05$.

T-test analysis revealed significant differences between male and female perceptions on the industry of agriculture, $t(49)=3.06, p<.05$. Male faculty were generally more favorable about agriculture in their responses than were female. There were no other significant differences on the basis of gender with regard to attitudes on teaching, research, and service; and morale.

Participation in professional growth opportunities

Table 3 summarizes data collected to determine the extent to which faculty have participated in professional growth opportunities. Most faculty have sought advice/assistance from colleagues (94.1%), utilized the advice/assistance of their department head (84%), and sought advice from an off-campus source (61.2%). Additionally, most faculty (62%) have participated in the planning or delivery of subject matter in an area different from their primary teaching area.

A minority of faculty have prepared or taught courses for non-agriculture majors (42.1%), taken a sabbatical leave to pursue professional development (40.8%), served in an international assignment (34.5%), or participated in professional development activities with the Faculty Development Office (21.4%). Only 8 faculty (16%) have enrolled in courses through the university's Fee Waiver Program.

Enhancing professional vitality

Faculty members were asked to rate the importance of

Table 3. Faculty Participation in Professional Growth Opportunities

Factors	Have participated (percent)	N
1. Sought advice/assistance from a fellow faculty member.	94.1	51
2. Utilized advice/assistance of department head.	84.0	49
3. Prepared/taught course in subject matter different from primary teaching area.	62.0	50
4. Sought advice from an off-campus source	61.2	48
5. Prepared/taught course in subject matter area primarily for non-agriculture majors.	42.1	50
6. Taken sabbatical leave or other type of leave to pursue professional development.	40.8	57
7. Served in an international assignment which utilized the expertise of the professional.	34.5	57
8. Participated in activities of newly formed Faculty Development Office.	21.4	56
9. Enrolled in courses through the Fee Waiver Program	16.0	57
10. Participated as an IGE (Interdisciplinary General Education) faculty member.	0.0	32

selected activities which might contribute to the enhancement of their professional vitality. (See Table 4.)

Most of the recommended techniques/opportunities involved recognition and additional funding. Respondents agreed that their professional vitality would be enhanced if they received greater financial support to attend conferences or pursue research or other scholarly activities ($\bar{x}=3.6$). Higher salaries ($\bar{x}=3.2$) and mini-grant awards ($\bar{x}=2.9$) were also desired.

More recognition by administration for teaching ($\bar{x}=3.4$), advising ($\bar{x}=3.2$), and for research and other scholarly activities ($\bar{x}=2.9$) was encouraged. Participation in international assignments ($\bar{x}=2.7$) and faculty exchanges with other institutions of higher learning ($\bar{x}=2.7$) were not as supported strongly.

Table 4. Techniques/Opportunities for Enhancing Professional Vitality.

Factors	*Mean	S.D.
1. Greater financial support to attend professional conferences or to pursue research or other scholarly activities.	3.6	.59
2. More recognition by administration for achievement in teaching.	3.4	.76
3. More recognition by administration for achievement in advising.	3.2	.61
4. Higher salaries.	3.2	.62
5. Participation in more interdisciplinary activities that involve faculty of all disciplines in the college.	3.1	.81
6. Reduction in teaching/advising load.	3.0	.81
7. Mini-grants to fund preliminary research.	2.9	.83
8. More recognition by administration for research/scholarly activities.	2.9	.83
9. Participation in international assignments which apply professional expertise.	2.7	.91
10. Faculty exchanges which would allow teaching and/or research at another institution.	2.7	.91

* Scale: 4= strongly agree; 3= agree; 2= disagree; 1= strongly disagree.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The agriculture faculty at this mid-size western university is a mature faculty. Most are tenured, full-professors who have taught at the university level for an average of approximately 18 years. The faculty members value teaching as indicated by the respondents' self-rating, but overall feel less enthusiastic about the service and scholarly components of their assignments. Generally, this faculty feels that they are effective teachers, but surprisingly, fully 12% responded that the quality of their teaching is ineffective.

This study revealed that the morale and vitality of agricultural faculty is low. Only 36% of the faculty rated their morale level as high. This was corroborated when only 11% of the respondents rated the morale of other agricultural faculty as high. Further, faculty expressed that, over time, they have lost enthusiasm for their work.

Faculty were somewhat critical of their colleagues' competence. They *disagreed* that within their own departments, and overall throughout their college, faculty have high standards of scholarship. Although departmentally, faculty felt that their colleagues were competent in their subject matter, they tended to view others outside their departments more harshly.

Nonetheless, most faculty expressed that they still remain satisfied with their selection of this profession. Almost all faculty indicated that if they had it to do over again, they would still choose to become college teachers and few would elect early retirement if it was made available.

Although the agriculture faculty concurred that the university community did not perceive agriculture as an important field of study, they remained loyal to their discipline, department, and college.

Generally, faculty have not participated in a *formal* program for enhancing professional growth and for improving their vitality. An *informal* program does, however, appear to be in place as evidenced by the proportion of faculty who have consulted with their department heads or with the faculty colleagues. Fewer faculty have employed formal techniques such as taking sabbatical leaves, participating in international assignments, soliciting assistance from the Faculty Development Center, or enrolling through the University's Fee Waiver Program.

When asked to recommend techniques for enhancing their enthusiasm and commitment, faculty indicated that greater financial support and increased recognition for teaching and advising, service, and research were important. Interestingly, although some faculty (37%) expressed a disinterest in conducting research or other scholarly activities, most agreed that mini-grants to fund preliminary research projects and financial support to attend professional conferences or to pursue other scholarly activities were important. Additionally, faculty also agreed that a reduction in the teaching/advising load would be beneficial. These findings infer possible directions for professional development activities.

Although the findings of this research are only immediately generalizable to the target faculty at this mid-size university, this investigation addressed a pertinent topic

relevant to faculty in other colleges of agriculture, and indeed, to faculty outside the agricultural disciplines. Recent literature in higher education speaks of the need to enhance faculty vitality. Ultimately the productivity of faculty changes as their vitality changes. Therefore, this present study may be useful to other institutions of higher education as a model for initiating similar investigations aimed at improving the professional lives of faculty or for providing additional input for efforts that may already be underway.

The vitality of the agriculture faculty is clearly challenged. Changes in higher education have impacted the vitality of academic professionals. A well-constructed, well-directed program to enhance these attributes may provide beneficial results and useful incentives for college faculty.

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A Bit of Historical Trivia

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VICE-PRESIDENT OR PRESIDENT-ELECT

Every person who has been elected President of NACTA since 1961 had previously served in the office of Vice-President. So, in practice, the office of Vice-President has actually been President-Elect for each of the past 32 years. However, this was not the case during NACTA's first six years. Only one of the first six Presidents had served previously as Vice-President. The following table lists the first six Presidents and their Vice-Presidents.

Year	President	Vice-President
1955	E.B. Knight	Conrad White
1956	M. Wayne Folk	Glenn E. Karls
1957	Burton W. DeVea	T.R. Buie
1958	T.R. Buie	J. Wendell Stucki
1959	Ralph A. Benton	Ed. D. Moore
1960	G. Carl Schowengerdt	John T. Carter

Note that among the first six Presidents, only T. R. Buie had served as Vice-President. Professors Folk, DeVea, and Schowengerdt had been Regional Directors. Ralph Benton was the first Secretary-Treasurer and had served four years in that position. John Carter, Vice-President under Carl Schowengerdt, was elected President in 1961. Four former Vice-Presidents did not ultimately serve as President.