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History of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication¹

College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Reprinted from “College of Agriculture of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, The First Century” by Elvin F. Frolik and Ralston J. Graham. Published by the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, 1987, with subsequent updates.

Names of the Department

Department of Agricultural Education 1918-1920

Department of Agricultural and Home Economics Education 1920-1922

Department of Vocational Education 1922-1962

Department of Agricultural Education (2) 1963-1992

Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication 1992-present

Administrators		
Name	Title	Period served
Harry E. Bradford	Head	1918-1919
Harry E. Bradford	Chairman	1919-1949
Claud E. Rhoad	Chairman	1949-1951
Howard W. Deems	Chairman	1951-1965
James T. Horner	Chairman	1965
John H. Coster	Acting Chairman	1965-1966
James T. Horner	Chairman	1966-1975
Roy D. Dillon	Interim Chairman	1975-1976
Osmund S. Gilbertson	Chairman	1976-1977
Osmund S. Gilbertson	Head	1977-1987
Allen G. Blezek	Acting Head	1987-1988
Allen G. Blezek	Interim Head	1988-1989
Allen G. Blezek	Head	1989-1995
Earl B. Russell	Head	1995-2000
Susan M. Fritz	Head	2000-2005
Daniel Wheeler	Head	2005-present

Location of Headquarters

Headquarters for the Department has always been in Agricultural Hall.

¹ James T. Horner provided continuing assistance in the preparation of this chapter.

The Formative Years

First Course – Agricultural Pedagogy

A.E. Davisson was the first professor of agricultural education. In 1907 he taught a course in agricultural pedagogy. Davisson was followed by Fred Hunter, and in 1912, Harry E. Bradford, principal of the School of Agriculture, was assigned to teach the college courses in agricultural education (1, pp 27-28)

A boost in the demand for teachers of agriculture came in 1913 when the Nebraska Legislature passed the Shumway Act. In 1915 the demand was again increased by passage of the Mallery Act, according to a Department of Vocational Education report written by Leroy D. Clements in 1963. These acts both offered state aid for schools teaching agriculture but made no provision for training teachers. The big incentive, however, came in 1917 with passage by the United States Congress of the Smith-Hughes Act. This law provided aid to states for ‘teacher training’ as well as funds for establishing departments of vocational agriculture in local high schools.

The College of Agriculture already had the teacher training machinery in operation. Upon designation by the State Board ² as Nebraska’s “official training center”, it was ready to assume the responsibilities. Bradford was selected as head of the Department of Agricultural Education to organize and conduct the new program (1 pp 27-28).

Practice Teaching Centers

Through the years 1907-1919 the courses in agricultural education were general and historical in nature with no attempt to attack the program of teaching methods. When the Department was enlarged in 1919, methods and organization courses were introduced and practice teaching centers were established in neighboring town high schools having vocational agriculture. The first practice centers were at Waverly, Eagle, Seward and Crete (3, pp 34-35 and 1, p 29).

According to Clements, “Among the earlier ‘critic’ teachers in local schools who helped with the practice teaching program should be mentioned the names of George A. Spidel, Byron McMahan, Richard M. Kildee, and Ralph W. Canada” (1, p 29).

The 1918 Agricultural College catalog listed two courses in Agricultural College catalog listed two courses in agricultural education. One was called history of vocational education and the other merely vocational education. The next year, 1919, there were four courses: 1) vocational education, 2) organization and administration of agricultural education, 3) methods of agricultural teaching, and 4) supervised teaching.

²State Board of Vocational Education. The Smith-Hughes Act was accepted by the Nebraska Legislature and approved by the Governor on April 25, 1917. To be eligible for Smith-Hughes benefits a state was required to set up a State Board for Vocational Education and make formal application (1, p 15).

The 1920 the program was known as Agricultural and Home Economics Education. Instruction in teaching home economics had been added with special women professors under Bradford's overall direction. By 1922 the offerings in this department had grown to 11 courses. It was then that the name of the Department was changed from Agricultural Education to the Department of Vocational Education (1, p. 29).

A reorganization in 1963 moved instruction in vocational home economics to the newly created School of Home Economics, and the name of the Department was changed back to Agricultural Education. Students majoring in home economics extension enrolled in the School of Home Economics, and those majoring in agricultural extension in the Department of Agricultural Education.

Courses in extension education had been taught first by Elton Lux and Ethel Saxton, and later by Duane Loewenstein and William D. Lutes. The extension major was administered by Cooperative Education (5).

Cooperation with Teachers College

"The University of Nebraska Teachers College on the downtown campus was...established in 1908", Clements wrote (1, p 28). "One branch of its work was given to (the) Department of Agricultural Education at the College of Agriculture. This cooperative arrangement was continued when the new Smith-Hughes plan was put into operation. The teacher education curriculum for agriculture was primarily at the College of Agriculture. Departmental staff members were also members of the ...Teachers College staff. However, they spent most of their time at the College of Agriculture.

"The students in agricultural education were offered all the advantages of a small college coupled with those of a big university. They had intimate associations with fellow students and faculty on the College of Agriculture campus. At the same time they could take part in all University affairs and be a part of the larger group. As a result, a better student spirit developed along with broadening social experiences."

Present Administration Organization

Nationwide, about half of the agricultural teacher education units are administered in colleges of education. In 1969, the Nebraska agricultural education staff conducted a self-study with a view toward transferring to Teachers College. The study acknowledged that some problems arise for social scientists in a predominately biological and physical science environment, in terms of curriculum requirements for students as well as publication, promotion and research of staff members (6).

However, the study conceded that the benefits outweigh the costs in terms of close association with other departments in the College of Agriculture. These are the departments that provide research, instruction and support materials in the subject matter that agriculture teachers are preparing to teach.

At the University of Nebraska, some staff members in agricultural education have joint appointments in Teachers College and selected courses are cross listed. Within IANR, the agricultural education staff hold joint teaching-extension and/or research appointments.

Recently, staff members have had special appointments within IANR such as director of LEAD and as teachers of computer literacy, career education and honors seminars in the College of Agriculture.

Teaching

A Unique Role

The Agricultural Education Department was designated (and it remains) the sole official training center for vocational agriculture instructors for the State of Nebraska. The Department places student teachers in secondary schools for full time practice teaching for durations of eight weeks. The staff provides frequent on-site supervision (6).

This close contact with high school teachers and students puts the agricultural education faculty in a unique role. Studies have shown that more than half of the College of Agriculture students had been enrolled in high school vocational agriculture. The faculty has maintained an in-service education program, providing “a new teacher course” plus workshops and courses for secondary, post-secondary and College of Agriculture instructors.

Although the primary mission of the Department has been to prepare high school vocational agriculture and adult teachers, and more recently post-secondary teachers of agriculture, studies in both the mid 60’s and mid 70’s showed a wide range of employment by graduates.

About half initially entered teaching, and 30 percent remained in that field for five years. Generally, 15 to 30 percent pursued one of the following, depending on the agricultural economy: 1) production agriculture, 2) management and sales in agribusiness, and/or 3) college positions, including work as cooperative extension agents. Others enter a variety of vocations including government, military and foreign service (6).

The Graduate Program

The first master’s degree in vocational education was granted to Clyde Walker in 1930. In 1962, Walker’s occupation was shown as “Agr. Eng., General Electric Co.” (1).

The next degree granted was to Vilas J. Morford in 1933. Morford’s occupation in 1962 was “Vo. Ag. Teacher Training – Iowa State University” (1).

³Sixty-two master’s degrees granted between 1930 and 1962 (1) and 171 from 1963 through 1984 (7).

Through 1984, a total of 233³ master's degrees in vocational or agricultural education had been granted.

Ph.D and EdD degrees are not granted in agricultural education, but doctorates are granted in teacher education through the Teachers College Administration is by the Graduate College.

Vocational Agriculture Contests

The Department has organized and coordinated high school vocational agriculture contests since they were inaugurated in 1918.

The first Nebraska public high school vocational agriculture judging contest was held in 1918 on the College of Agriculture campus when Howard J. Gramlich, chairman of Animal Husbandry, extended an invitation to departments of vocational agriculture located near Lincoln. The first contest consisted only of livestock judging. About 50 high school students competed. Since then the contests have been an annual event on the campus.

C.C. Minter directed the contests from their inception in 1918 until 1950 when H.W. Deems assumed this responsibility. M.G. McCreight was coordinator from 1951 through 1973 (4, p 20).

Following McCreight as coordinators were, successively, Richard Douglass, Roger Gerdes, Leon Wissman, Lloyd Bell and Clifford McClain, who is presently coordinator — 1987 (5).

Shortly after the beginning of the livestock judging contests at the state level, other departments on the campus became interested. In 1987, 14 contests were conducted by the Departments of Animal Science, Agronomy, Horticulture, Entomology, Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Engineering (4, p 20).

Student Club

Alpha Tau Alpha, a national honorary agricultural education fraternity, plays a vital role in preparing students who plan to teach vocational agriculture. The fraternity was founded in 1921 by A.W. Nolan and a group of his students at the University of Illinois. There are now 43 chapters in training institutions throughout the nation.

Beta Chapter at the University of Nebraska was organized April 11, 1925. Loyal Rulla was the first chapter president; Franklin Allen the first secretary; and Bradford was advisor for the first group. Other early officers included L.N. Cyr, Orlando S. Bare, and George West.

On February 10, 1956, 46 members of the Vocational Agriculture Association of the University of Nebraska became charter members of the reorganized Beta Chapter.

Lewis Zamanek was president; Alan Hoeting, secretary; and H.W. Deems, advisor of this reorganized group. Since 1956, 431 persons have been initiated into the fraternity, making a total of 487 national members of Beta Chapter (4, pp 48-49).

Research

Research and creative activities have focused primarily on the practical, such as development of curriculum materials, improved teaching methods and student teaching, career opportunities and decision-making, advisory councils, computer literacy, and leadership development.

When U.S. Office of Education (USOE) research monies became available in 1964, the agricultural education staff was awarded the first grant — over \$100,000 annually — for a four-year experimental project involving 24 Nebraska high schools. The purpose was to “assess approaches to preparing high school students for off-farm agricultural occupations.”

The Nebraska Research Coordinating Unit for all vocational education — funded at over \$100,000 per year from the USOE — was developed and directed from 1965 to 1972 by agricultural education staff members. John K. Coster and James T. Horner directed the USOE projects.

Related Organizations

Future Farmers of America. The National FFA Organization held its first convention in November 1928 in Kansas City, Missouri. Nebraska was one of the 18 states represented at this first convention. Alvin Reimer of Dewitt, Nebraska, and from the Beatrice Vocational Agriculture Department, was named central regional vice president.

The first two chapters in Nebraska were chartered in November 1928 at Beatrice and Eagle under the advisorship of L.D. Clements and Clyde Walker, respectively. The State FFA Association issued 223 local charters from 1928 to 1984. In 1984 there were 135 active FFA chapters in Nebraska (4, p 33).

Nebraska Vocational Agricultural Foundation was incorporated January 24, 1968 to receive and administer funds for leadership development in Nebraska, especially the Future Farmers of America.

To accomplish these objectives the Foundation accepted, as its primary emphasis, the 27-acre Nebraska Youth Leadership Development Center near Aurora (often referred to in the early days as State FFA Camp). Before the Foundation was established, the camp (originally purchased for \$30,000) was operated by a “camp committee” appointed by the Nebraska Vocational Agricultural Association.

According to M.G. McCreight, “Irving Wedeking of Aurora is to be credited with the major share of the leadership provided during the establishment and early years of the Foundation.” Others to join Wedeking on the original Foundation board of directors were Dean Jochem, Ainsworth, vice president; Ted D. Ward, Verdigre, secretary-treasurer; and Donavan Benson, Syracuse; Reuben Epp, Henderson; Myron Schoch, Lyons; Harold Johns, Bassett; Duane Dunning, St. Paul; Jim Boyle, Aurora; Stanley Elsen, Grant; Raymond Snyder, Lyman; B.E. Gingery of the state staff; and James T. Horner of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The Nebraska Young Farmers and Ranchers Educational Association was organized November 24, 1962, at a meeting chaired by Marvin Schultis, a young farmer at Fairbury, Nebraska.

The first officers were Marvin Schultis, Fairbury, president; Marlin Frenzen, Fullerton, vice president; Kermit Bohling, Hooper, secretary; William Perrin, Schuyler, treasurer; Jack Underwood, Exeter, reporter; Burneil Gingery, Lincoln, executive secretary; and Glen Strain, Lincoln, advisor.

Among several goals are the development of competent, aggressive rural agricultural leadership and strengthening the confidence of young men in themselves and in their work.

An awards program was initiated in 1965 in four areas: livestock proficiency, crop proficiency, farm improvement, and outstanding chapter. The program has been underwritten by Ak-Sar-Ben and Farmland Industries.

Fifty-seven chapters have been chartered in Nebraska with a total membership of about 1,200. In 1980 Nebraska hosted the National Institute Conclave.

The Nebraska association is affiliated with a national association (4, pp 47-48).

Staff Recognition

Recipients of UNL Distinguished Teaching Award

Urban E. Wendorff – 1971 (also listed in Agricultural Engineering)

Allen G. Blezek – 1981

Laverne A. Barrett – 1986

Richard M. Foster – 1987

National Professional Society President

James T. Horner – president of the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture – 1975.

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