

DISCUSSION: THE SOUTHERN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION AND RESIDENT INSTRUCTION

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Historically, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that resident instruction in agricultural economics is an important part of the discipline. However, despite its relevance, it has failed to receive the support and acclaim compared to other aspects of the discipline. Today, excellence in education is being critically evaluated by many groups and agencies, particularly at the elementary and secondary education levels. Perhaps it is necessary for a timely examination of resident instruction's role in agricultural economics to enhance the production and delivery of agricultural economics education.

This paper will expound upon the issues and concerns raised by Dr. Josef Broder's paper on resident instruction in the Southern Agricultural Economics Association.

The specific objectives of this paper include: 1) discussion of major issues and concerns surrounding resident instruction in agricultural economics, 2) suggesting possible changes needed in the teaching process and teacher education, and 3) creation of specific recommendations and activities that the Southern Agricultural Economics Association leadership should consider for more effective resident instruction.

Dr. Broder's paper does an excellent job of documenting the importance of resident instruction in our discipline at all academic levels. The discussion contrasting research and teaching excellence suggest that an age old philosophy of "publish or perish" still dominates the agricultural economics profession. His concerns about teacher education and declining enrollments in agricultural programs are major topics the agricultural economics discipline must address. These are two points which are addressed in this paper.

TRAINING OUR TEACHERS

I agree with Dr. Broder's comments that the agricultural economics profession in general does an inadequate job of exposing Ph.D. candidates to teaching philosophies, concepts, and techniques. I can concur with his comments that aspiring and even experienced teachers are well versed in content but poorly trained in delivery. One only has to observe faculty candidates out of graduate school to note these deficiencies. Methods of delivery are in vogue as society in general has taken a fascination with communication. Today's society and students are a product of the television generation which necessitates new strategies in teaching techniques for effectiveness.

Teaching training begins with basics such as use of the overhead, audio visuals, course design, and examinations. Information presentations and lecturing usually are advanced aspects of teacher education. I strongly suggest that Ph.D. candidates in our profession be encouraged to have at least one semester in the classroom with major responsibility being given for the course. Through my experiences, I have found that a series of teaching assistantships on the masters and Ph.D. levels was extremely valuable in developing teaching skills. The first assistantship was very basic and responsibilities included development of examinations and grading and student consultation. Later assignments included responsibility for a section and eventually a whole course. At the same time, my graduate committee encouraged me to take courses in college teaching and communications which were valuable in perfecting delivery. Communication courses included taping and critique of lectures which were extremely useful. The College of Agriculture at Cornell

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also had teacher training seminars designed for the graduate student. In these seminars, we were exposed to teaching techniques used by the outstanding teachers on campus. With the importance of education excellence and communication, agricultural economics leadership must rethink priorities and responsibilities in teacher training.

DECLINE IN ENROLLMENT

Enrollment trends could be one of the biggest challenges facing the agricultural economics discipline. Enrollments in the College of Agriculture are declining at most land-grant universities. This trend places increased importance on resident instruction programs. In the future, the discipline will not only have to contend with teaching excellence in the classroom but sound programs in recruitment and placement activities. More dialogue in agricultural economics is needed concerning recruitment and placement activities. For example, exchange of ideas concerning recruiting techniques such as targeting potential students and program promotion could enhance overall resident instruction efforts. On the other hand, placement activities concerning employment opportunities, salaries, and career paths are just a few of the variables that need attention by our Association. Programs on the regional and national levels along with written dialogue are needed to fill the void in these areas of resident instruction.

RECOMMENDATION

In light of the concerns and issues of resident instruction in the agricultural economics discipline, this author recommends the following suggestions for consideration by the Association's leadership. It is proposed that more attention be given at the Association's annual meetings concerning teaching techniques and teaching excellence. A means of successfully completing this task would be to utilize the talent of award winning teachers. A session at the annual meetings involving video tapes of classroom instruction featuring outstanding instructors recognized by the Association would be a means of encouraging ideas concerning teaching techniques. The video tape could be modified to include several situations and circumstances faced by instructors. For instance, one tape may present instruction in a large class at the introductory level while further tapes might focus on teaching conceptual and the-

oretical courses at the advanced graduate level. These tapes could be catalogued by the Association, and would represent a library of information that agricultural economics professionals who are interested in resident instruction could utilize. This library of tapes would be more beneficial than a session in that the tapes could be used as a reference for years at a relatively low cost.

A second recommendation centers on involvement of the Association with more emphasis given concerning techniques, concerns, and issues. Colleagues who have major teaching responsibilities frequently inquire about articles and books that can be obtained concerning teaching techniques. The Association may consider devoting an article on teaching tips in its regional journal or create a new magazine that is primarily devoted to the dissemination of resident instruction information. Timely articles featuring innovative teaching techniques, advising, recruitment, and administrative challenges of the agricultural economist would be valuable for the exchange of ideas. At Virginia Tech, the Academy of Teaching Excellence, is in the process of publishing a book of essays with a central theme of teaching excellence. Past award winning professors are asked to contribute an essay on what they consider makes an effective teacher. These essays present a broad range of perspectives over diverse disciplines, situations and circumstances. The agricultural economics association may want to consider such a vehicle to disseminate teaching excellence through its award winning instructors.

Strong encouragement should be given by the Association's leadership for recognition of superior teaching. A regional teaching award would by no means compete with the AAEA teaching award and would be a possible stepping stone in receiving the national award. A certificate based upon instruction, advising, and other related teaching activities would definitely enhance the visibility of resident instruction with small marginal cost.

The role of resident instruction, whether on the regional or national level, has received little support. A challenge must be placed on the Association's leadership to take a more active role in increasing the visibility and promotion of resident instruction activities. The leadership can provide the impetus for the enhancement of resident instruction in the production and delivery of agricultural economics education.