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**PROMOTION, TENURE AND THE EXTENSION/  
RESEARCH INTERFACE**

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## PROMOTION, TENURE AND THE EXTENSION/RESEARCH INTERFACE\*

Marc A. Johnson\*\*

An after dinner address on promotion and tenure is a prescription guaranteed to cause indigestion. Promotion and tenure elicit more fear and anxiety than salary procedures. Salary increments are handled privately and in relatively continuous fashion, offering hope for the future. Promotion and tenure are discrete events approached with critical appraisal of the subject's performance by faculty colleagues, with public announcement of the result, and with an outcome that signifies professional success or failure, professional employment or unemployment. Promotion and tenure affect one's ego and job security, both of which are usually more important than a few extra dollars.

Once an individual starts the tenure clock, the ticking is always audible, and the sound grows louder and louder as the day of judgment approaches. Anxiety is heightened by the fact that the men and women in black robes are different each year, in different moods, with different experiences of each unique subject, and not particularly accountable for their judgments.

### Why Promotion and Tenure

What purpose do promotion and tenure serve? Why is this anxiety and potentially adversarial experience among colleagues justified? Promotion and tenure are quality control devices in the construction of academic faculties. Tenure is provided to reduce the short-term pressure for job security, to

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provide freedom to look to the long run, and to provide protection to address subjects repugnant to rent-seeking special interests. Promotion and tenure signify that one's colleagues respect the initiate's intellect and energy and desire to count him or her among their collegial lot, to be partners in an academic enterprise. The uncertainty in the process can result in a degree of misdirection, but the generation of creative anxiety is important to stimulate creativity and productivity.

Operating promotion and tenure procedures through academic units is an essential grant of responsibility to the professionals in each discipline to set their own standards and to police themselves. This is a privilege to be protected, because it permits specialists to preserve disciplinary and scholarly integrity. This privilege allows faculties to be built on mutual respect, rather than by garnering individual favor with administrators or politicians.

Promotion and tenure are parts of the reward structure that direct activity and output. This reward structure is blamed for inhibiting interdisciplinary work, extension work by researchers, research by extension specialists, and other creative mixes of university activity. Sometimes the excuses are justified, but the reward structure is given more blame than is warranted. Any selection process will suffer occasional type I and type II errors, but individuals with high output in a creative variety of university work will nearly always clear the hurdles, as long as scholarly potential is demonstrated.

#### The Extension Agricultural Economics Profession

These remarks will continue with suggested criteria for promotion and tenure for Ph.D. agricultural economics extension professionals. Before

developing the criteria, two questions will be addressed: (a) What is the agricultural economics extension profession? and (b) What are the responsibilities of Ph.D. agricultural economists?

What is the agricultural economics extension profession? If there are benefits to specialization, in which dimension should specialization be directed, in extension or in agricultural economics? If the profession specializes in the extension dimension, specialists will read the Journal of Extension and train in adult education theory and delivery techniques. This approach will lead to Kohl, Shabman, and Stoevener's description of the deliverers of management information, who require master's degrees in the subject matter discipline, who are separated from the researchers, and who eventually, as a unit, move outside the university to perform their services.

If the profession specializes in the subject matter dimension, specialists will read agricultural economics journals and keep their skills honed for creating, interpreting, and applying economic principles to agricultural issues. Research-extension interaction is more likely to occur with research and extension personnel in the same department, and subject to similar criteria for professional justification than with physical and professional distinction. Specializing in the subject matter dimension also provides the best chance of addressing Eidman's extension dilemma of "staffing to present quality educational programs on increasingly complex subject matter areas to an increasingly sophisticated clientele" (p. 1311). Clearly, extension specialists are not going to be unidimensional, building economic knowledge and neglecting the search for creative delivery techniques. But the discipline of their analytical thought processes is the economic way of thinking, which needs continuous practice.

Farrell et al. have finally brought into open discussion what most agricultural economists have perceived for some time, by describing the relationship between extension and research as "cultural separatism." "Cultural separatism" means being isolated from one another because of the customs and beliefs that diverge as distinct groups pursue distinct missions. Professors can share offices and be culturally separate. Kohl et al. are very straightforward when describing the "tensions between the service needs of extension and the requirements for individual professional advancement in research and in the classroom" (p. 12). If not recognized and handled appropriately, these conditions breed contempt for one another and drive a wedge into collegiality. Are these comments familiar? "The journals are worthless; they are filled with mathematical erotica, which has no application." "Researchers don't produce anything I can take to the field," implying uselessness. "Extension economists just blow in, blow off, and blow out." "I don't see why it takes a Ph.D. to do extension work."

Cultural separatism is, in part, a result of the failure of universities to create the incentives for all faculty to maintain their disciplinary human capital at equivalent levels, thereby creating academic barriers to research-extension interaction. Not until all faculty are promoted on similar criteria of demonstrated ability to contribute to their discipline in the creation, interpretation, and application of disciplinary knowledge, will the culture of separatism be eliminated. Each individual will have a unique mix of professional products. The criteria relate to "similar ability" rather than "similar products." Promotion based on "job responsibilities" separates faculty along dimensions other than disciplinary expertise, resulting in

different criteria for extension specialists and research-teachers. This results in professional isolation and spawns mutual contempt.

Promotion and tenure criteria should promote cohesion in an environment of cultural diversity. A well-balanced agricultural economics program produces a range of outputs, including journal research, bulletin research, publications for laymen, classroom teaching, and off-campus teaching and service.

Individual faculty tend to specialize in a subset of these media for the distribution of economic knowledge. Mutual respect among individuals serving the various missions of the university is desirable. However, mutual respect in a university department is much more realistic when all faculty members are hired, promoted, and maintained with similar professional standards.

Expectation of similar academic prowess in all program areas, that is, the ability to use economic knowledge, will break the "cultural" boundaries and foster mutual respect and joint work among research and extension specialists.

The second question is: What should be the responsibilities of Ph.D. agricultural economists? Ph.D.'s generate, interpret, and apply economic knowledge and teach economic concepts. Ph.D. extension specialists are suited to interpreting others' research; disseminating research-based information in publications, workshops, and classes; and developing applied research in both disciplinary and multidisciplinary, issue-oriented settings. All university faculty are promoted and given other rewards for maintaining their disciplinary potential by keeping up with the current literature, practicing disciplinary inquiry, and publishing results. If extension is to continue to educate ever more sophisticated audiences, specialists must be called upon to maintain their human capital (Libby, Knutson). If extension specialists are to be recognized as peers by research faculty, they must maintain their human capital (Eidman,



Beattie, and Watts). Of course, research and teaching faculty must maintain their human capital to earn the respect of extension specialists, as well.

#### Promotion and Tenure Criteria

Promotion and tenure are not rewards for past performance. These are privileges granted in recognition of the future potential of an individual as a productive colleague. Past performance provides evidence about the intellect, creativity, and energy of individuals, which characterize momentum in their professional careers. Constructing a merit badge card, listing requirements for promotion and tenure, should be resisted. Bestowing an award for requirements fulfilled represents completion and termination of effort. The award is backward-looking in recognition of past accomplishment. Promotion and tenure are forward-looking career decisions, recognizing future potential. In practice, the difference is subtle, but significant.

Extension specialists with Ph.D.s should be judged on their future likelihood of performance in four categories: (a) client development, (b) program performance, (c) unit service, and (d) professional advancement. Client development relates to an effectively planned and implemented effort to become familiar with the client base to be taught, to assess the educational demands of clients (demand is a price and quantity relationship for information of a given quality), and to achieve credibility among clients. Within a five year tenure cycle, a specialist should know his client group characteristics, be familiar with individuals in the group, identify areas of educational deficiency, understand which communication methods are effective, and be well thought of as an expert in his or her field by members of the client group. In 10 to 12 years, a specialist should be recognized nationally among extension

specialists for expertise in a subject matter area, to qualify for the rank of full professor.

The client development phase in extension is similar to the problem definition phase in research. Research of a quality leading to promotion and tenure requires that topics of inquiry are studied to determine the highest value subjects to address, appropriate hypotheses to test, and efficient and effective methods with which to test. Interaction with extension personnel and citizens provides valuable input into the research problem definition phase.

The second criterion for future potential as an effective extension specialist is evidence of successful program performance relying on sound economic content, efficient delivery, leadership, and popularity. Program content should include application of economic principles with sufficient depth to complement information available through other media. It also should be original and provide dynamic responses to changing conditions.

A specialist should indicate a continual search for ways to magnify the impact of a program through video taping, fact sheet publication, news article composition, and agent training, where appropriate, to reach additional audiences with each program. This zeal to add output until cost becomes excessive represents economic efficiency in program delivery.

Extension programs should evidence leadership of client groups. This implies offering new concepts and challenging conventional wisdom, that is generating a bit of creative anxiety for the client in safe dosages.

Program experience also should show popularity. Popularity means that the preceding elements of client assessment and program performance have been done effectively. Popularity signifies that the specialist has the ability to assess the educational demands of clients, and to select appropriate means of

communication and that a degree of credibility has been established. Most specialists have had busts. But a continuous sequence of busts means a specialist is on a wrong track. Inability to find a right track is an accountable flaw.

The third criterion for career specialists is a positive, teamplayer attitude. Extension requires flexibility and a willingness to respond. This flexibility is demonstrated in many ways from turning in paperwork, to serving on committees, reviewing papers and programs, guest lecturing in classes, cooperating on grant projects, hosting visitors, etc. An agricultural economics unit cannot function without accomplishing these tasks, and willingness to contribute builds the spirit of cooperation and enhances faculty interaction in professional work.

Finally, the specialist should have shown that investment in human capital is a natural and habitual act. This includes evidence of keeping up on journal and bulletin literature in the chosen subfield and interaction with extension, research, and teaching colleagues in seminars, discussions, joint projects, and professional meetings. Human capital building also entails adoption of an explicit component of economic inquiry in the annual work plan. Probably the most debilitating flaw of effective extension specialists is the inability to manage time to include human capital building activities. Farmers who pay no attention to repair and augmentation of equipment and facilities soon find themselves with major replacement expenses or obsolescence. If the university is not to become obsolete, new faculty who fail to adopt capital building habits must be expelled.

All university professors should have a scholarly component to their work, to maintain and develop their ability to use economic tools and interpret their

results. It is difficult to imagine an extension specialist being deeply involved in the field for five years without running into issues that need in-depth investigation. Teaming with researchers of agricultural economics or other disciplines is a way to get such projects started.

Departmental and college managers have a responsibility to see that new specialists are guided in a direction toward developing work habits that will meet these criteria. Administrators also have a responsibility to protect the time of specialists to permit development of well-balanced careers with long-term integrity.

#### Summary

Promotion and tenure procedures represent healthy mechanisms for maintaining the vitality of a profession. When managed appropriately, promotion and tenure procedures establish guidelines within which young professionals develop good work habits and generate creative anxiety to stimulate high performance. Promotion and tenure procedures will enhance research and extension interaction only if criteria include interest and potential for intellectual growth in the subject matter discipline and the propensity to deliver original, research-based information to clients. These criteria apply to researchers and teachers as well. The unity of promotion and tenure criteria for all university agricultural economists builds mutual respect among colleagues, which enhances the probability of interaction.

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