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REFLECTIONS ON GRADUATE TRAINING IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS FOR ASIAN STUDENTS

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The purpose of this presentation is to familiarize interested members of the profession with a very specific and quite unique exercise in international education; the program in agricultural economics at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in which I participated from 1968 to 1975. Some meaningful insights should emerge from the experience, as the program was designed and until recently well situated to overcome some of the fundamental inconsistencies and dilemmas noted in programs based in the United States (Collins).

The argument expressed here is predicated on an acquired conviction that international training cannot successfully be conducted as an adjunct activity by U.S. national educational and research establishments. 1/ That is not to say that international educational programs cannot draw on expertise in purely national programs, but the design, management and principle subject-matter contributors must be by professionals giving their undivided attention to international education.

Many of the thoughts expressed here were generated during my last year at AUB when I was on the Faculty Senate. It was a time of severe financial and social crisis and the very survival of many University programs was in question. My current ERS assignment in the technology assessment facet of futures research has also influenced my thinking.

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1/ While not all existing U.S. programs can be fairly typed as adjunct, the trend is increasingly in that direction. The East West Center certainly, is an exception.

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While financial difficulties and social disruption have sharply curtailed all AUB programs, I nevertheless believe there is longer term potential for the reestablishment of international educational activity in Lebanon. With the working out of new relationships with local governing bodies future programs may be even more viable than past. The civil strife in Lebanon aside, the AUB's success was generating failure. It had become a prestigious and overly elite institution serving Lebanon and the Middle East, while remaining a private U.S. university and becoming increasingly dependent on U.S. public support. Given the history of U.S. Middle East policy and concurrent events in Lebanon, a great deal of credit must go to many Arab faculty, graduates and friends of Americans as well as to the University Administration for the until recently successful continuance of educational programs.

Hopes and praises for the AUB aside, the lessons learned there may have general value in the design of international educational programs.

Fundamental Inconsistencies and Dilemmas in U.S. Programs

The objective and role, and ways of improving on international training in agricultural economics were extensively examined in the 1974 AAEA-ADC workshops on international training. The review of this exercise (Johnson; Fienup; Shertz) addressed training of foreign students in the continental United States. Many of the portrayed shortcomings of international training are directly related to the divergence between the objectives and role of domestic U.S. university programs and the training needs and capabilities of students from the economically less developed countries of Asia.

The principle shortcomings of U.S. based programs lie in the necessarily domestic focus of graduate programs, in the exposure of students to high material levels of living, and in the altered social outlook that is likely to be acquired. These inhibit the effective performance of returning students and increase the number remaining abroad.

A high percentage of U.S. agricultural economics graduates return home to assume governmental administrative positions for which a narrowly focused graduate training program poorly equips them. To further aggravate the problem, Asian countries have, unfortunately, already established elite scientific enclaves which in some cases have serious barriers to entry. The result is a surplus of narrowly trained persons ill-equipped both in terms of skill and incentive to effectively address the demanding social management tasks they face.

Fortunately, and commendably, foreign students are not always sheltered from an understanding of the difficulties posed for them by study in the United States. The introduction to graduate study in the United States prepared for ADC fellows does an excellent job of pointing out these problems. The handbook delightfully illustrates the enduring nature of the problem by a quotation from Benjamin Franklin on a 1774 American Indian response to the invitation by a college of Williamsburg to send six braves for "instruction in all the learning of the white people" (Stevenson).

The Graduate Program at AUB

The Faculty of Agricultural Sciences at AUB was established in 1952 with a grant from the Ford Foundation. Although coursework in agricultural economics

has been offered to undergraduate majors in Agriculture, no undergraduate degree has been offered in the field. An M.S. degree program was initiated in the late fifties under the guidance of Dr. Gordon Ward. By the early 70's an agricultural economics faculty of three was advising ten to fifteen M.S. candidates. The program has relied on the Department of Economics for instruction in theory and in basic economics statistics and on Faculty colleagues in rural sociology and agricultural extension for instruction in social policy, program administration and social aspects of the adoption of technology.

The areas of course offerings in agricultural economics have been agricultural markets and prices, farm production and management (with emphasis on agricultural credit) and agricultural development principles and policy.

Students have been strongly encouraged, and with rare exception, have chosen to conduct research in their home community. The field research program was made possible by the decision in 1967 of the then Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, Stanley Swenson, to make budgetary provision for the agricultural economics, extension and rural sociology faculty to accompany graduate advises to their home country to supervise thesis research on local topics. USAID has supported student travel as an alternative to paying fees and tuition for the summer academic session. Students have thus been able to spend 8 to 10 weeks researching local problems and faculty member advisors have been able to familiarize themselves with agricultural development problems in the region.

This program has been attractive to students, faculty and sponsors and has created considerable interest on the part of host countries. The program emphasis has been on acquiring research skills and experience. The social re-

search output has been downplayed and the emphasis placed on education, thus avoiding the increasingly sensitive problem of obtaining research clearance by local governments.

The program at AUB has been far too small to provide the advanced graduate training available on large U.S. agricultural campuses. In other respects this smallness was beautiful; it provided a broader scope simply because the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences consisted of only 35 with a graduate student body of around 130. While the total University enrollment of 5000 students is small by today's standards, it has been served by a faculty of nearly 600. A wide spectrum of degree programs were offered. Within the many nationality groups on campus there has existed opportunity for much dialogue across disciplinary lines.

The Clientele

Most non-Lebanese graduate students in agricultural economics were financed by USAID scholarships. As the program became established, it attracted increasing numbers of Lebanese students, either self-financed or supported by research grants from Lebanese institutions. In 1973, the Agricultural Development Council commenced scholarship support. Requests by various U.N. agencies for non-degree training were simply in excess of the capacity to render such services, given the demand for graduate level training.

Growth in the number of graduates was a consequence of a broader selection of courses and a willingness to supervise research in a broad number of topics, USAID assisted efforts by West Asian governments (particularly Pakistan and Jordan) to upgrade their capability in agricultural economics, and prosperity

in the Lebanese agri-business sector. An additional important factor in expanding demand was the program of supervised thesis field research which increased awareness of the program.

The Student's Response

Beirut could by no means have been viewed as a locality which would not expose visiting students to a high material level of living. Subsequent to the influx of Arab oil dollars the level of living was quite something to behold. However, foreign students seldom remained in Lebanon, where in fact agricultural economists were in extremely short supply and in many respects agriculture was poorly developed. This was in part due to national policies on immigration and local employment preferences. In the case of some USAID students there was a language barrier to Arab country employment resulting from instruction in English. The largest number of students so affected were the Urdu speaking Pakistanis.

The emphasis was on a terminal M.S. program and relatively few participants did more advanced graduate work. Very few of the graduates failed to return to their home country, or to an agricultural underdeveloped neighboring Middle East country, or occasionally to an African country.

The Educator's View

While site location, academic program and research program are important, of even greater importance is the commitment to international educational assistance. If U.S. trained scientists involved themselves only partially in these programs, having to bear in mind the requirement of maintaining a professional anchor to lee, their effectiveness will be impaired. It is essential that funding and management of such programs be under the jurisdiction of a body wholly committed to international educational and technical assistances

and unencumbered by short term political and budgetary considerations.

While the AUB conveyed this commitment to professionals it was less than fully successful in following through. The University's image as a truly international educational institution did attract people who were professionally committed to international work. But long term financial support was lacking, and while being truly international it was almost inevitable (as a political matter) that the institution came to be viewed otherwise by many in the Arab states.

A New Perspective?

The AUB experience, current strategies for world agricultural development, and our domestic debate on technology seem to me to provide strong evidence supporting a more futuristic approach to the less advanced countries. We must rely less on disciplines and more on truly interdisciplinary efforts to anticipate and then facilitate future development. As an example, in the domestic economy we currently tend to admit that technology impacts are highly complex; that social impacts of technology must be addressed. Meanwhile, the international agricultural research center's concentration on the development of high yielding grains constitutes a defacto recognition of the complexity of agricultural problems in the less developed countries; for it is an attempt to technologically impact societies hard enough to bump them out of an old equilibrium and onto a new plateau. It is at least inconsistent, and at most perverse to so acknowledge the need to address societal complexity on one hand and ignore it on the other.

A Final Thought

An administrative officer of the University recently commented to me that he no longer had illusions about professors, alluding to their pursuit of self interest as against service to humanity. The remark, in view of the mood on campus, served to reinforce my conviction that efforts of the wealthier nations to assist economically less fortunate societies must be embarked on more wholeheartedly, not less so. Recent policies and practices have disillusioned many highly dedicated and competent people in the international field. This must be corrected. We must have programs designed for "others"; not exercises in selflessness, but programs with a very long term goal of improving the effectiveness with which our society interrelates with others. International education is clearly at the heart of the matter.

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