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learnt about in the market place of life.) One cannot help wondering how these people convinced their examiners to grant them degrees. Having listened to academic colleagues discussing this problem, I believe that the awarding of degrees under these circumstances reflects either misguided kindness or, alternatively, the application of some private code of justice. About the latter I have nothing to say. However, as to misguided kindness, I would like to stress that from the standpoint of what happens to the unskilled graduate the kindness is truly misguided. No matter how powerful a union, or protective of its workers an employer is, a person who cannot work to his or her qualifications is always eventually moved into simpler work. This process can take up to 12 months during which time the employer has lost time and money and the employee has earned a reputation for poor performance. Such employees have been poorly served by their educators and would have been better off being failed early in their studies and thereafter pursued other interests.

Agricultural Economics at the University of New England

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The Department of Agricultural Economics and Business Management at the University of New England has been teaching for some 28 years. There are four qualifications in which students can specialise in the broad disciplinary areas of agricultural economics and business management (student numbers as at 31 March, 1988 appear in parentheses): Bachelor of Agricultural Economics (190), Diploma of Agricultural Economics (76), Master of Economics (37) and Doctor of Philosophy (23). Units taught by the Department also are taken, either compulsorily or as optional units, by students enrolled in certain other qualifications.

Within the teaching program of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Business Management the courses offered by the Department can be classified into five main themes: mainstream agricultural economics, agribusiness management, agricultural development, farm management and natural resource economics. In addition, two courses relate to research methods. Support is provided by other Departments for courses in econometrics, economic theory, financial management and accounting (all within the Faculty of Economic Studies), agronomy and animal science (Faculty of Rural Science), resource engineering and ecosystem management (Faculty of Resource Management).

Students studying for the B.Ag.Ec. (a four-year degree) are required to complete 29 semester units of courses, 20 of which are compulsory. The compulsory units are in the areas of microeconomic theory (two), macroeconomic theory (three),

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quantitative methods (five), agriculture (two), agricultural economics (five), farm management (one) and research methods including a dissertation (two) reporting the application of research techniques to a specific problem. In addition, they are required to complete 16 weeks of approved practical work (at least eight weeks on farms).

The Dip.Ag.Ec. (two semesters) can be satisfied by completing six, seven or eight semester units depending on the levels of the courses chosen, but a minimum of five units (four in the case of the six-unit Diploma) must be chosen from units offered by the Department. A two-unit dissertation is one of the options. While there are no compulsory units, students are advised to choose courses so as to fill any voids that might exist in their prior basic training in general agricultural economics, economic theory and quantitative methods, especially if they intend to go onto Master's-level study.

The M.Ec. (three-semester) is available by coursework-only, coursework and dissertation, or thesis-only. Under each option students are required to complete a study program of at least 39 weighted units. (Weighted units are defined as course level multiplied by course units/100; e.g. Ag Econ 402-1 Agricultural Marketing would be $400 \times 1/100 = 4$ weighted units and Ag Econ 599-8 Masters thesis would be $500 \times 8/100 = 40$ weighted units.) Few students pursue the coursework-only option but those that do are required to complete Ag Econ 502-1 Research Methods and Ag Econ 505-1 Master's Project. Even fewer students complete the thesis-only option since the Department regards this option as being suitable only for those students who have completed a B.Ag.Ec. with at least Second-Class, Division I Honours. Most students pursue the M.Ec. by taking at least 24 weighted units of coursework and completing a dissertation worth 15 weighted units. These students may be required to take Ag Econ 502-1 Research Methods and they may take two units from Departments outside of the Faculty of Economic Studies. Master's students are restricted to a maximum of two 300-level units. All units taken at 300- and 400-

level must be satisfied at least at the credit level or above.

The Ph.D. (3 years) is a research degree earned by completion of a satisfactory thesis. However, the Department frequently requires Ph.D. students to complete courses in order to fill gaps in previous training.

All qualifications except the B.Ag.Ec. can be completed in an external mode although for the M.Ec. and Ph.D. there are minimum residency requirements.

The most important prior training for entry to the B.Ag.Ec. is mathematics at 2-unit level or above and sound English. The equivalent of an Australian three-year degree is required for entry into the Diploma and a four-year degree in the case of the M.Ec. Intending M.Ec. students are often placed in a Diploma program initially. Entry to the Ph.D. degree requires the equivalent of an upper-second class honours degree from an Australian university. There is some flexibility in entry requirements for the graduate program in that relevant work experience and/or publications might substitute for formal qualifications not matching those mentioned.

The Department's offerings cover those areas of the discipline which one would find at large land-grant universities in the United States. Additionally, the Department is somewhat unique, at least in Australia, in having available several units which provide training in concepts, problems and strategies relating to business management, including finance and risk management. The Department's expectation is that graduates of any of the qualifications offered should have, at a minimum, basic skills in applying economic theory and quantitative methods to the problems of agriculture.

An important aspect of the Department's graduate-level training is the weekly, one-hour Graduate Student Workshop, a forum in which graduate students expose their research ideas and results to staff and colleagues. This forum is also used for seminars by staff and visitors. Dissertation students present at least one seminar and thesis students at least two seminars.

A problem that has existed is the lack of graduate-student-only courses available in the Department (this also applies to other Australian Agricultural Economics schools). Apart from a course in Research Methods, the Department has not been able to offer taught courses purely for graduate students only because of resource constraints. In an age of rapid technological change and many advances in the theory and methods of applied economics, the lack of such courses impedes the development of research skills and skills in policy analysis. In the Australian context this is seen as a deficiency in urgent need of remedy. Fortunately, with the granting in 1988 of Federal funds to establish a Key Centre for Advanced Training in Agricultural Economics, the Department is now able to offer four new courses for graduate students only. These will cover analytical methods in agricultural economics, agricultural price and policy analysis, resource economics, and agribusiness and financial management. Visiting academics will assist in the teaching of these units.

With these additional courses and the availability of advanced courses in economic theory and econometrics available in other Departments, it is now more feasible to think about the possibility of a combined coursework dissertation Ph.D. The authors view this as a desirable *option* for those Ph.D. students wishing to obtain a broad portfolio of skills in agricultural economics analysis and are not convinced of the argument that, because the Ph.D. provides training for high-level research, it should be earned by research only. Coursework can provide a broad skills base to enhance the efficiency with which research is undertaken.

A recent development in the Department is the establishment, on a trial basis, of a committee system to monitor the research progress of graduate students. Previously, members of the Department took a corporate responsibility for the broad approach of students while the supervisor dealt with the more detailed tasks of supervision.

If the profession of agricultural economics in Australia is to continue to advance, the efficiency and effectiveness of

the teaching process must rise continuously. It is clear that a much greater emphasis is needed on the teaching of postgraduate students in the basic skills of the profession. In a professional area with relatively small numbers of students, this objective might be pursued by much closer cooperation between educational institutions in the teaching and supervision of such students.