Agricultural Economics Training at the University of Queensland

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Agricultural Economics training is well developed at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels at the University of Queensland. The undergraduate subjects in this discipline are formally listed in the schedules for both the B.Agr.Sc. and the B.Econ. degrees. However, students enrolled for many other degrees (*e.g.* B.A., B.Com., B.E., B.Sc.) also take agricultural economics subjects as electives. Postgraduate students may enrol for a one year Diploma or two year Masters of Agricultural Studies. These awards are mainly coursework with a short dissertation. The research Masters and Ph.D. degrees have also attracted a significant number of successful candidates.

Undergraduate Program Outline

The present curriculum for the B.Agr.Sc. course at the University of Queensland has changed little since its introduction with semesterisation in 1974. All students have a common first year which includes some agricultural economics. Although some people elect to specialise in Agricultural Economics in their second year, most students (including the majority of those who ultimately specialise in Agricultural Economics) also take a common second year which includes a major agricultural economics subject.

At the end of second year, students must choose to specialise in one of the 7 available streams of which Agricultural Economics is one. During the third and fourth year of their degree, all students must combine certain core subjects with the compulsory subjects set down for their own chosen stream. Agricultural and Resource Economics subjects are included in these core units which all students enrolled for the B.Agr.Sc. must take in their third and fourth year. Every student, therefore, irrespective of their specialisation, is exposed to economic principles in all four years of their B.Agr.Sc. program.

Agricultural Economics Specialisation

Students may enter the Agricultural Economics stream after their first year or at the end of second year. In either case, around 58 per cent of the total course load for the B.Agr.Sc. degree is basic science or agricultural science. These essentially biologically-oriented subjects are combined with an increasing proportion of agricultural economics and "pure" economics subjects as the student matures and moves towards graduation (see Table 1).

The mixture of biology, agricultural economics and economics produces a well rounded graduate who not only has a strong professional background in economics and agricultural economics, but also has a well balanced knowledge of soil, plant and animal sciences.

The responsibility for the disciplinary training in economics, quantitative methods, agricultural and resource economics is shared between staff in the Departments of Agriculture and Economics. In fact, Agricultural Economics specialists in the B.Agr.Sc. degree complete virtually all the core subjects required for the B.Econ. degree in addition to all available Agricultural Economics subjects. Some B.Econ. students also choose to major in Agricultural Economics. The free flow of students between departments is a feature of the University of Queensland.

Professional Skills Development

Beginning with the first year field-trip, there is considerable emphasis given to report and assignment writing throughout the four year program. Usually

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Table1: Outline of the Agricultural Economics program with the B.Agr.Sc. degree at the University of Queensland.

Year of course	Distribution of workload (as measured by credit point			
	General degree "core"		Agricultural Economics "stream"	
	Biology subjects	Agricultural Economics subjects	Agricultural Economics subjects	"Pure" Economics subjects
Year 1	102	4	-	-
Year 2	88	10	-	-
Year 3	56	5	20	40
Year 4	-	15	55	30
TOTALS	246 (58%)	109 (26%)		70 (16%)

assignments are built around a problem solving situation. This is especially true for those who specialise in Agricultural Economics.

Many of the agricultural and resource economics subjects include field trips or decision simulation exercises. In most cases, the students are grouped into small task forces to tackle these problem situations as a team. They are encouraged to integrate across subjects and disciplines in seeking solutions. In many cases, verbal presentations are required as well as the usual written report.

Practical Experience

All students enrolled for the B.Agr.Sc. degree, including those specialising in Agricultural Economics, must complete a series of practical experience assignments and submit written reports answering specific questions.

In first, third and fourth year, there are major field trips which are structured around formal lecture courses. At the end of first year, all students spend two weeks at the Queensland Agricultural College undergoing a thorough introduction to a wide range of agricultural technologies, livestock breeds, plant species, *etc.* All students must undertake eight weeks of practical experience on two commercial farms. Finally, prior to or during their final year, every student must obtain at least one week or pre-professional experience.

These carefully structured practical experience requirements, together with the mixture of biologically and economically oriented coursework make students majoring in Agricultural Economics at the University of Queensland immediately useful to most employers seeking a blend of economic literacy and an understanding of agriculture.

Postgraduate Training

There is an increasing demand both from within Australia and from overseas for mid-career retraining. These people do not wish to undertake in-depth research degrees. Rather they seek a multidisciplinary postgraduate coursework program.

The Rural Development, Administration and Management program at the University of Queensland offers this kind of training at both the Diploma and Masters level. Students may select postgraduate subjects offered by a wide range of departments such as Agriculture, Management, Commerce, Economics, Anthropology and Sociology, Government and Computer Science. The aim is to provide people with an understanding of the human side of agriculture and to update their economic and quantitative skills.

Postgraduate coursework programs specifically in Agricultural Economics and in Natural Resources Management are also available.

Research degrees are undertaken on both a full-time and part-time basis with the majority of students electing the latter approach. Many professional agricultural economists working in Queensland have undertaken external/part-time research degrees to upgrade their qualifications.

Agricultural Education at RMIHE: some personal views

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The School of Agriculture at Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education (RMIHE) developed from the former Wagga Wagga Agricultural College. Its history of agricultural education and experiment can be traced back to 1892. The initial role was to teach and demonstrate modern farming practices to the farming community and students were sons of farmers who aimed to return to work on farms.

Today there is still a strong emphasis on providing students with a "practical" education through various courses at the Associate Diploma level. But over the years the type of students has changed reflecting changes in Australian society and the declining importance of farming as a source of employment. At the degree level (Bachelor of Applied Science (Agriculture)), students receive a broad education which enables them to enter professions which service agriculture. Furthermore, course developments such as the introduction of a Postgraduate Diploma and a proposed Masters Degree (by 1990) extend the trend away from the practice of farming towards the science of agriculture. In this respect RMIHE now competes with universities and indeed aspires to become a university.

The developments at RMIHE are not mirrored in all Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs). But with the current policy proposals at the Federal level of abandoning the binary system of universities and CAEs, the options open to CAEs appear to merge with (or become) a university or to adopt a course profile and role similar to the current Colleges of

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