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Grantsmanship and Consulting Policy: Discussion

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Effective grantsmanship and consulting can be stimulating roles for faculty, but they can also be high-risk if they are not consistent with the mission of the university. The public interest in our land grant mission must be guarded to insure that consulting and grant-seeking does not hamper the best of our professional objectives.

The survey information on consulting and grants presented in this paper is informative. Grantsmanship requires considerable reassessment as formula funds decline. Dr. Knutson provides some interesting and controversial proposals on these issues.

We find ourselves in strong agreement on the need to stress faculty productivity as a basis for salary adjustments. Nevertheless, I disagree most strongly with his analysis and proposals on consulting. Furthermore, he does not give adequate consideration to the mission of land grant universities and what that entails for the management of grants and consulting.

What I am most disturbed about in Dr. Knutson's paper is not just his willingness to oversimplify a very complex problem of how to secure funding for the mission of the university -- but he fails to take into account that his approach demeans many different kinds of contributions faculty make at different periods in their careers and at different stages in the life of a department or college. He fails to take into account the consequences of his suggestions for furthering the mission of the university.

A brief overview of my concerns are:

1. He does not begin with a definition of the mission so that we can all decide whether, in fact, pursuing consulting and grantsmanship to the degree he is suggesting will advance or threaten that mission.
2. There is the presumption that consulting and grants are the best way to secure funds to support faculty as they carry out the mission.
3. He translates that funding strategy into a measure of faculty productivity without proper justification.
4. This strategy by-passes the responsibility of faculty and administrators to inform the public of how their activities merit sufficient support so that faculty can devote full-time with adequate pay to those activities for which the public assumes they are paying.
5. He fails to allow for periods over the course of an academic career when not being involved in consulting or a grant project might increase the productivity of

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the faculty member and his/her contribution to the department and university.

Consulting and grantsmanship are among the myriad of complex relationships between land grant universities and the public we serve, private industry, and the culture of intellectual inquiry. An important consideration is the implicit social contract between university faculty and the broader public. We need a dispassionate analysis of alternative perspectives, implications for future funding of universities, promotion and tenure, unionization, and faculty governance as these relate to consulting and grantsmanship. We need some of Just and Huffman's considerations injected into this discussion.

Dr. Knutson attempts to escape these responsibilities by labeling his paper as "an advocacy piece that contains several value judgments, leaving to the discussant to point out the downside from an administrative perspective." Neither you nor I should allow him to get away so easily!

Moreover, my comments will go well beyond the job he assigned me. I want to provide a context for continuing dialogue on these issues, because they strike at the very heart of the land grant mission and, if mismanaged, will certainly threaten our future. My intent is to:

1. Question the basis for concluding that faculty salaries are low -- one of the major justifications for consulting given by Dr. Knutson - particularly when the incidence of consulting is incorporated into workload assessments.
2. Identify some institutional considerations for consulting and grantsmanship that are compatible with the land grant social contract with society.

Low Faculty Salaries and Consulting

The argument advanced by Knutson for consulting to be rewarded in higher salaries is weak and circular. We could easily conclude that faculty

salaries are low because the public has concluded that faculty who consult diminish the quality of their service to the university and the public interest. I don't know whether that is the case, but the potential for abuse by faculty and misperception by the public is high. Potential conflicts of interest are not even mentioned.

Let us consider the workload issue for a moment. Knutson's survey revealed that most (77 percent) universities in the South allow faculty to take one day per week of paid consulting leave. In other words, faculty on twelve month appointments taking full advantage of this would really only work for the university nine months per year. Two months generate extra consulting pay and one month is vacation.

Those on nine month appointments see their workload drop to about seven months. Of course, the taxpayers cover benefits for the entire twelve (or nine) months, an issue which raises the question of whether the university should require reimbursement of overhead and benefits for every day of consulting leave.

State governments and higher education commissions are already very concerned about how we spend our time. The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) is now seeking to restructure the debate on faculty productivity in fear of state mandates that fail to recognize the extensive preparation, public service, and other activities that make up the typical academic work week (Jacobson, p. A-17). The idea is to expand public perception beyond the six to nine hours per week of classroom instruction.

The report of SHEEO could raise a critical public eyebrow if the full implications of these consulting policies become known. That would be most unfortunate because most faculty do not consult to the full extent of time permitted. For those who do, their colleagues pick up the burden of their absence and should be rewarded for doing so. Herein lies the danger of Knutson's advocacy piece. It doesn't provide a balanced assessment of the matter.

The case has not been made that university salaries are out-of-line with the market, especially if the risk and relocation factors, work hour flexibility,

and professional renewal opportunities are considered. In fact, nothing except these differentials keep top university faculty from departing for "greener pastures" elsewhere. Why not, indeed, let the market work, rather than erecting new barriers in the form of undue consulting flexibility.

Dr. Knutson seems to want it all. Let's look at this model. Dr. Knutson wants the public to provide a secure university salary and workplace so that faculty can increase their salaries in the private sector or with other universities, agencies and foundations. After taking time from their paid tasks to make more money, faculty then turn around and ask for more pay for less work. I don't believe the public will buy that.

Consulting would work only if the quality and quantity of faculty contribution back to the public were sufficiently enhanced to merit additional pay by that public. In most cases, I fear that the "division of effort and loyalty diminishes the quality and implicit value of the service given the university" (Breimyer, 1993). University administration recognizes the potential positive gain, as evidenced by the liberal consulting policies identified by Dr. Knutson. How often is the potential recognized? How far from the ideal do we fall?

The bias in Knutson's survey of faculty consultants at 12 Southern universities is unfortunate. He fails to capture the deep concern of dedicated faculty who pick up the workload, i.e., student advising, committee membership, faculty governance, mentoring of younger faculty, and fulfillment of the Dean's and Department Chair's requests that inevitably shift to those who are less involved in consulting. Those who consult could trade-off their duties with others who consult in order to insure that the burden doesn't shift unfairly, but I doubt that happens. Again, such markets emerge only when knowledge is perfect, prices are known, and factors are mobile. A heavy teaching load, extension or research program works against such flexibility.

What does a faculty member owe the public? An eight-to-five workday? Are nights and weekends strictly our own? Then undergraduate

club work, travel, night meetings, and long hours on the weekends need to be commensurately rewarded on the basis of the resulting product.

Faculty evaluations have generally given inadequate weight to strong teachers, extension workers, and service-oriented faculty while favoring research colleagues. When considering market-matches for salary adjustments, we generally find that there is a national/international market for researchers that cannot be matched by teaching and extension faculty. Yet, all these functions are essential to the university and require equal commitments of quality, professional time.

Faculty are hired by public institutions to educate taxpayers' children, to conduct research in the public interest, and extend that knowledge for the public good. We may price some of our extension knowledge through workshop fees and payments for publications, *in order to help finance* our production. But that knowledge is a public, non-proprietary good.

Whenever acquisition by one group diminishes access by others on the basis of ability-to-pay, then we are unfairly discriminating. We have a commitment to broad, public access among taxpayers. User fees for extension products are financing mechanisms and, hopefully, cover marginal costs. Because of this "public good" nature of land grant university knowledge, such fees do not serve to guide resource efficiency any more than some other random criterion.

Dr. Knutson and I *are* in agreement on several points, particularly the need for relevance and rewarding productive faculty! His concern about the journals becoming irrelevant to the real world is shared by many. Real world experience gained through consulting can enrich, stimulate, and guide conceptual and disciplinary inquiry that serves society. The theoretical frontier is the basis from which we must operate in our profession, but being on the frontier in and of itself may have little redeeming value.

We need to heed business and government signals that rewards are based on "productivity measured by usefulness of research and teaching in decision-making." But there is also a role for

scholarship to address important issues for which there may not be an immediate demand. Market demands are too short-term, erratic and influenced by special interests to guide all land grant programs.

This poses some problems for the idea of giving formula funds only to younger faculty. I tend to favor that direction, but I also expect some senior talent to address critical, "non-market" issues. Knutson fails to point out that what the public, through government, considers useful and meaningful is not usually immediately judged to be so by the private market. Here is where the rub comes in. Universities must have a longer view, more comprehensive and integrating in a way that furthers society's interests.

Administrators must recognize the extra effort, risk, and accountability that accompanies a grant-based program activity. But it is the results that must count the most. How has the university been served by the activity? The quality and quantity of journal articles, publications, extension program impacts, and improved public and private decisions remain the essential elements of evaluation, whether they are grant-based or not.

I would generally expect a positive and significant correlation between success in securing grants and rate of salary increase. On the other hand, some faculty who are excellent in seeking grants are not the most effective in developing products from those grants. Another example of how teamwork is vital to achieve our mission.

One of the greatest dangers of grants and contracts is that they may direct the university's resources away from its principal mission. Many grants bring no new dollars into the university in a way that furthers the mission of even the faculty members directly involved. They find themselves managing a set of relationships among state agencies, federal government and perhaps other interested parties. Meanwhile, their time and effort has been taken from the teaching, research, and Extension goals of the university. Again, their colleagues are left to fill in behind them.

I feel that we have effectively guarded the university's interest in my own Unit at Missouri and significantly enhanced our basic mission by

carefully utilizing grant opportunities -- but for the reasons I will cite, I am ever on guard for potential misdirection. This means saying "no" at times to faculty at what may, at first glance, appear to be lucrative funding opportunities.

At the same time, I see no justification in most grants covering less than full overhead costs of the university. The exceptions would be priority needs of community groups with limited funds. The fiscal deterioration of many universities is fed by this draining of public dollars to serve the few who pay only at the margin. Grants can severely distort resources at the department level disadvantaging other faculty and students whose work may be even more critical for the university.

I like the idea of grants providing all or a portion of a faculty member's salary. Funds can be effectively managed in this way to enrich the goals of the university and the faculty member who generates a lot of money. The salary reward must reflect overall productivity.

Strong administration and faculty commitment to the land grant mission must guide our research for grant funds. The university's discovery-of-knowledge role cannot be compromised by the "merchandising interests and successes of individual faculty members" (Breimyer, 1993). Grants run the danger of diverting our attention to short-term issues while more important, longer-run problems are sidetracked or ignored.

I don't expect our profession of agricultural economics to decline unless we ignore our historical mission. Indeed our plate is full if not overflowing. In translating that historical mission into faculty efforts that address the needs of our time and the future -- to utilize scientific breakthroughs in agriculture to ever more effectively and efficiently feed the world, and to find ways of communicating that knowledge to all those involved in food production and distribution, *especially in those areas of the world and among those people who have least access to knowledge* -- and to accomplish all of this in ways that preserve the environment -- we are challenged at every turn to make certain that consulting and grants are always used to advance our mission and never undermine it.

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