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INSTITUTIONAL RESTRUCTURING IN RESPONSE
TO THE CHANGING MISSION OF LAND GRANT COLLEGES

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The advertisement of one of our automobile manufacturers 10 to 15 years ago ended with the slogan, "Ask the man who owns one." Probably my presence on this program on institutional restructuring can be explained best by paraphrasing this ad to read "Ask the man who's been through one." Although I shall describe Vermont's experience with reorganization, in the process I want to discuss a few ideas on the changing role of the university and the land grant college in the last half of the 20th century. I readily confess that many of the ideas expressed in this paper are not original; I have drawn heavily upon recent writings of James Bonnen (1), Emery Castle (2, 3), and Earl Heady (4), and I recommend the original articles to you.

Agricultural economists over the years have engaged in a continuing dialogue of critical self-analysis and soul searching, and the American Journal of Agricultural Economics is replete with articles of this kind. Many of these discussions are self-serving, but as Heady points out, the agricultural economist's quest for relevance and identity is not unrelated to issues facing colleges of agriculture, since there will be departments of agricultural economics only as long as there are colleges of agriculture (4). Given the biologically instinctive drive toward preservation of the species, it is not unnatural that we should be concerned with these problems.

Higher education enjoyed a period of unprecedented prosperity and growth in the two preceding decades, and on most campuses there was little concern for operational efficiency or program duplication (Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6). This expansionary period affected both the public and private sectors of higher education, although the public sector experienced the greatest growth. Table 5, showing the distribution of enrollments between the public and private sectors in the Northeast in 1970, is particularly interesting, since it shows that the private sector is significantly more important in most of the Northeastern States than in the U.S. as a whole.

In an article in the American Journal of Agricultural Economics entitled "The University in Contemporary Society," Castle draws a distinction between the autonomous and popular functions of the university^{1/} and the conflicts arising as a result of these two missions (2). He notes that the land grant universities were created in the popular tradition, although in several of our northeastern institutions, notably Cornell and the University of Vermont, the autonomous tradition preceded the acceptance of the popular mission. The University of Vermont was founded in 1791 as a Liberal Arts College. In 1864, the State Legislature created the Agricultural College and merged it with the private University. However, it was not until 1955 that the Legislature recognized the University of Vermont as an "instrumentality of the State" and started appropriating money for the support of the entire institution. At the University of Vermont, the autonomous function is assumed by many of the faculty and by some administrators to have higher priority than the popular mission, and even the state has been reluctant or unable to fund adequately the popular function. The philosophical question as to whether the mission of the University of Vermont is to serve as a "north-country Williams or Amherst" or whether it is to accept its role as a true land grant institution, dedicated to the popular functions of mass education and service is never far below the surface and the University of Vermont serves as a good illustration of the paradox Castle discusses in his article.

Whatever the mission to be performed, as Bonnen points out, there is little doubt that society no longer looks upon the university's output as a consumption good, but rather insists that the activities in teaching, research, and service are a production good that must be available to the whole society (1). Colleges of agriculture have always viewed education as a producer's good, and the land grant college should be able to serve as a model for the rest of the university as it expands its activities from the classroom

^{1/} Castle defines the autonomous function to include conservation and transmission of high culture, pure scholarship and basic scientific research, and selection, formation, and certification of elite groups. The popular functions fall into two categories; mass education for all who qualify, and provision of useful knowledge and service to every group and institution that wants it.

and laboratory to the outside world. As Bonnen emphasizes, if there is any part of the university that has experience in facing the problems of societal involvement, it is the college of agriculture and "we have the scar tissue to prove it." It is Bonnen's thesis that, with rare exceptions, there is little evidence of any organizational contribution from agriculture in facing this university problem. He accuses us of viewing the world as a zero-sum game in which anyone's gain must be someone else's loss. In a highly cynical statement, Bonnen says that the one unique social organization invented by Americans—the land grant college—"is today praised extravagantly by its few apologists, damned quite vociferously by its more numerous critics, and increasingly is ignored by most. The final indignity of life is not to be criticized, hated, or feared, but to be ignored." This is harsh criticism, but probably warranted in many instances.

If the colleges of agriculture are not to spend their remaining years living on past organizational capital, they must develop programs of social and scientific relevance. In discussing alternative missions for colleges of agriculture, Bonnen identifies six possible role models: Agricultural Development, Natural Resource Development, Rural Area Development, Regional Development, International Agricultural Development, and Basic Biological Science. He infers that any final solution will represent a mix of the various roles, with the original role of serving commercial agriculture playing an important part in most states.

Heady says that "it is not a crime for agricultural colleges to service . . . large commercial farmers and energetic marketing firms," since agricultural colleges were created for exactly that purpose. His criticism is that as a result of these activities we have failed to recognize "complex externalities which depress the income, employment opportunities, and institutions of other families and population strata in the same communities and then doing little about the latter." In a very descriptive passage, he states: "It is still true that there are more programs for animals and things in our colleges of agriculture than for the people of rural communities. A sow has better available information from our institutions in guiding her to the best lot of opportunities in Chicago, Kansas City, or Omaha, than does an underemployed housewife in farm areas. A bull calf will find more guidance information, indicating whether he should migrate to a feed lot in Arizona or to a breeding pen in Wyoming, than will the boy of a country town" (4).

With a decline in relative importance of commercial agriculture in much of the Northeast, the colleges of agriculture

have been casting about for alternative missions--and in the process they have frequently changed their names to better reflect new missions (Table 7). It is interesting to note that nationally just over half still call themselves "College of Agriculture," but in the Northeast only Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and now Vermont bear this designation. Table 8 indicates names of the economics departments within the land grant colleges.

Whether the changes in name realistically reflect changing missions or are primarily cosmetic in order to more attractively package and sell the same old product cannot be determined without in-depth study.

Reorganization at the University of Vermont

The organizational structure of complex social institutions like universities is a function of many variables; among them historical accident, unplanned growth, and expansion--empire building if you will; legislative decree, availability of outside financial support in specific areas, and pressure from constituencies. Seldom is it the result of logical rationalization; certainly it was not at the University of Vermont. In recent years the University has been composed of six colleges: Arts and Sciences which included the traditional Social Sciences and Humanities Departments, and Physics; Agriculture and Home Economics; Education; Technology which included the Engineering Departments, Chemistry, and Mathematics; a Division of Health Sciences which included the College of Medicine and various programs or schools of Allied Health Sciences; and a Graduate College.

The College of Agriculture and Home Economics, faced with declining enrollments in traditional programs, had developed several innovative and popular programs. The curriculum was liberalized, with many fewer required courses. The Agricultural Economics Department changed its name to Resource Economics, and developed resource economics and planning programs to complement the Agricultural Economics program. A multidisciplinary Environmental Studies Program was developed. A Biological Studies Program was attracting large numbers of highly qualified students. A new interdisciplinary program in Recreation Resource Management was growing in popularity. Forestry developed an accredited 4-year degree program. Home Economics developed programs in Social Welfare, Early Childhood Education, and Human Relations and Family Development. Enrollment in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics increased by nearly 100 percent between 1969-1972.

Without going into detail, some frictions developed among departments in the various colleges and a certain amount of duplication of effort had crept in. The University was going through a period of financial exigency; and the new central administration decided that a study of reorganization was essential.

Accordingly, in mid-September 1972, the President appointed a Task Force on Collegiate Reorganization with seven members. In his charge to the Task Force, the President directed them to "study alignment of both Colleges and Departments and to submit to me by December 1st, recommendations for improving our academic structure, so that we might effectively carry out our missions of education, research, and service."^{2/} Furthermore, he directed them to consult widely both within and without the University community, to work as visibly as possible, and to be receptive to ideas and opinions of concerned groups.

It is generally recognized now that the Task Force was given an impossible job; two and one-half months was insufficient time to do this job adequately. This forced them to limit their "visibility" and consultations.

Time does not permit going into detail on the Task Force report, other than to mention selected highlights. Its first specific recommendation and the one that raised the wrath of the gods was "that the College of Technology and the College of Agriculture and Home Economics be dissolved."^{3/} It proposed a new College of Applied Sciences, including a Department of Engineering containing the three existing engineering departments; a Department of Agriculture, which combined the existing departments of Animal Pathology, Animal Sciences, Plant and Soil Science, and the program in Agricultural Engineering; a Department of Forestry; a Department of Home Economics; a Department of Business Administration with a faculty of Resource Economics; and new Departments of Computer Sciences and Statistics. The Biological Science Program and the Botany Department of the College of Agriculture would be transferred to the College of Arts and Sciences. The Extension Service and the Experiment Station would also be in this new college.

^{2/} Presidential letter to faculty, September 22, 1972.

^{3/} The Task Force Report, Special Supplement to This Week, a house organ of the University of Vermont, November 27, 1972.

Someday, someone at the University of Vermont will develop a catalog of "good words" and "bad words" to use in official statements. Heading the list of the bad words will be "dissolve."

The ensuing reorganization battle consumed a major share of the time of department chairmen, deans, and directors from December to May. I'm sure it is no surprise to any of you that the most vocal groups outside of the University were our agricultural constituency and the Vermont Legislature's House and Senate agricultural committees.

It soon became evident that the proposals of the Task Force were politically unacceptable and were ill-conceived in several aspects. Counter-proposals surfaced from many of the affected and unaffected individuals, departments, and colleges. Gradually, a revised reorganization proposal evolved which was eventually accepted by the Board of Trustees on June 2, 1973. Although there is still a certain degree of unhappiness with the reorganization, both within and without the University, the new plan will be implemented on July 1, 1973.

The major units in the new organizational structure are as follows:

- (a) A College of Agriculture with the traditional agricultural departments including Resource Economics. The College also maintains the Biological Sciences Program, but loses its Environmental Studies Program to a University-wide program in Environmental Studies. The Extension Service will remain within the College but will gradually take on the functions of an all-University extension program. The Experiment Station also remains within the College. However, there are plans to set up a peer review committee for research proposals which may be submitted by researchers in any college in the institution.
- (b) A College of Engineering, Mathematics, and Business Administration, with distinct Engineering, Mathematics, and Business Administration Departments, and programs in Statistics and Computer Sciences.
- (c) A School of Home Economics, which includes all of the programs of the former department except for Social Welfare.

- (d) A School of Natural Resources, which includes the Forestry Department and programs in Resource Economics, Recreation Resource Management, Civil Engineering, Water Resources, and Planning.
- (e) Minor changes in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences and Education.

The President is on record as committed to maintaining a strong College of Agriculture, and rightly or wrongly, he firmly believes that the proposed structure will accomplish this goal. A major justification for removing Home Economics and the natural resource programs from the College of Agriculture is his belief that the best way to preserve a strong program in agriculture is, to use his words, "to keep the College pure"—that the quickest way to destroy a program is to dilute it and obscure its mission.

Many of us in agriculture are skeptical. We have seen falling enrollments used as an excuse to deemphasize educational programs. We are mindful of Jim Bonnen's admonition: "It should be clear that institutions constructed on an exclusively agricultural or local rural community base to serve agricultural or rural life are no longer viable. Specialized rural or agricultural programs and particular rural institutions which operate separately and under special rules or behavior (because "agriculture is different" or "rural life is superior") have lost their ability to relate to the rest of society—where most of the power of decision making, public and private, lies" (1).

To one who has lived through the painful process of institutional reorganization, it seems as if several major errors were committed:

1. The Task Force, in response to administrative direction, confined its restructuring largely to areas where administrative frictions had developed or where specific programs were considered too expensive or duplicative. No real attempt was made to consider reorganization as a University-wide problem. Furthermore, reorganization was conceived in the absence of any long-range educational plan for the University.
2. The Task Force was not given sufficient time to develop its proposals, consequently all of the implications of the original recommendations were not carefully considered.

3. The Task Force was politically naive.
4. The public relations surrounding the reorganization, both on and off campus, were inept, and as a result the credibility of the Administration was unnecessarily questioned.
5. As a result of the first four errors the eventual reorganizational structure was in part a function of exterior pressures upon the University Administration and Trustees.

In Retrospect

I believe it was Ernest Nesius who once remarked that one of our difficulties is that farmers have problems, but colleges have departments. In their infancy, colleges of agriculture were unstructured collections of faculty, with no organizational boundaries separating them. They evolved into highly specialized and differentiated groups and at the same time they became professionalized. In order to provide an administrative machinery, departments were created in which professionals were grouped by discipline. According to Bonnen, "It has diluted, if not subverted, the loyalty of the faculty to the college and university" (1). It has affected also our ability to provide the research and service input so necessary to our complex society; certain disciplines lay exclusive claim to societal problems and attempt to subvert the efforts of other disciplines. It also has made restructuring of colleges and universities that much more difficult.

Labels tend to be misunderstood by administrators who attach specific and restrictive meanings to words. Thus, an agricultural economist is one who can work only on the problems of commercial agriculture, whereas a resource economist's expertise is dealing with natural resource problems. In the effort to categorize according to the descriptive adjective, we disregard the noun; we seem unable to convey the fact that we are all economists.

Castle discusses priorities for agricultural economists in the decade ahead (3). He says that we should be concerned with the economic problems of commercial agriculture; natural resources and environmental economics; and rural area development, community development, and human resource development. He argues, correctly in my view, that the important problems facing society demand an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach to research and education, and that unless

Departments of Agricultural (Resource) Economics become multidisciplinary, overlapping or duplicative units will be created.

Castle states with considerable foresight that the 1970's will be a time of considerable experimentation in organizational form. He argues that a variety of organizational forms can work if the participants understand what it is they are trying to do—and I might add, if the participants can convince administrators of their mission.

In spite of our instincts toward self-preservation, our primary goal should not be merely the survival of agricultural economics as a specific profession. And, even if it were, our survival would not be assured by retreating further into departmental bastions and digging disciplinary moats around ourselves. We have demonstrated our ability to work on problems outside of agriculture as it is narrowly defined, and in all likelihood we will continue to work productively on such problems under whatever organizational structure exists at any point in time.

Table 1
Number of Institutions of Higher Education, U.S.

Item	1950	1970	Percent increase
Public	641	1,089	70
Private	1,210	1,467	21
Total	1,851	2,556	38

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of
of the United States: 1972. (93d edition.)
Washington, D.C., 1972.

Table 2
Enrollment in Higher Education, U.S.

Item	1950	1970	Percent increase
Thousands			
Public	1,355	5,112	277
Private	1,304	2,024	55
Total	2,659	7,136	168

Source: See Table 1.

Table 3
Expenditures for Higher Education, U.S.

Item	1950	1970	Percent increase
Million dollars			
Operating			
Public	898	12,900	1,336
Private	808	7,700	853
Total operating	1,706	20,600	1,108
Capital			
Public	276	3,200	1,059
Private	141	1,100	680
Total capital	417	4,300	931

Source: See Table 1.

Table 4
Degrees Granted, U.S.

Degree	1950	1970	Percent increase
Bachelor's	432,058	833,322	93
Master's	58,183	209,387	260
Ph.D's	6,633	29,872	350

Source: See Table 1.

Table 5
Percentage Distribution of Enrollments in Northeast
in Public and Private Institutions, 1970

State	Public	Private
Maine	72	28
New Hampshire	54	46
Vermont	57	43
Massachusetts	38	62
Rhode Island	56	44
Connecticut	58	42
New York	56	44
New Jersey	67	33
Pennsylvania	57	43
Maryland	79	21
Delaware	83	17
West Virginia	82	18
United States	75	25

Source: See Table 1.

Table 6
Degrees Granted in Selected Disciplines, U.S.

Discipline	1959	1970	Percent increase
Agriculture			
Bachelor's	5,421	9,192	70
Master's	1,014	1,480	46
Ph.D's	343	726	112
Forestry			
Bachelor's	1,346	2,177	62
Master's	169	327	94
Ph.D's	33	97	194
Economics (Excluding Agricultural Economics)			
Bachelor's	7,723	17,258	124
Master's	664	1,990	200
Ph.D's	221	794	259

Source: See Table 1.

Table 7
Name of Colleges of Agriculture in U.S., 1970

Name	Number	States in Northeast Region using this name
College of Agriculture	26	(Md., Mass., Pa., Vt. ^{a/})
Division of Agriculture	1	
School of Agriculture	3	
College of Agricultural Sciences	2	(Del.)
Division of Agricultural Sciences	1	
College of Agriculture and Home Economics	2	
College of Agriculture and Forestry	1	(W. Va.)
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources	2	(Conn.)
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences	2	(N.Y.)
College of Life Sciences and Agriculture	2	(Me., N.H.)
School of Agriculture and Life Sciences	1	
College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences	1	
College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences	1	(N.J.)
College of Resource Development and Home Economics	1	(R.I.)
Miscellaneous	4	

^{a/} As of July 1, 1973.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Professional Workers in State Agricultural Experiment Stations and Other Cooperating State Institutions, 1971-72, Cooperative State Research Service, Agriculture Handbook No. 305, 1971.

Table 8
Names of Economics Departments
in Colleges of Agriculture in U.S., 1970

Name	Number	States in Northeast Region using this name
Department of Agricultural Economics	27	(N.Y., Conn., Del.)
Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology	7	(Pa.)
Department of Agricultural Economics and Marketing	1	(N.J.)
Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics	1	
Department of Agricultural and Food Economics	1	(Mass.)
Department of Agricultural and Business Economics	1	
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics	3	(Me., Md.)
Department of Economics	3	
Department of Economics and Agribusiness	1	
Department of Resource Economics	2	(R.I., Vt.)
Division of Resource Management	1	(W. Va.)
Institute of Natural and Environmental Resources	1	(N.H.)

Source: See Table 7.

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