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Graduate Courses in Agribusiness Management

National Food and Agribusiness Management Education Commission

Working Paper #3

Michael Boland and Jay Akridge, co-chairs*
National Food and Agribusiness Management Education Commission

*Michael Boland is an associate professor of agricultural economics at Kansas State University. Jay T. Akridge is professor of agricultural economics at Purdue University and Director of the Purdue Center for Food and Agricultural Business. The authors wish to acknowledge Lori Thielen for her help with the NFAMEC in collecting the data used in these working papers. For questions about this document, please contact Michael Boland at mboland@agecon.ksu.edu or 785-532-4449.

Other NFAMEC Working Papers include

Working Paper #1: A Summary of Undergraduate Curriculum in Agribusiness Management Degrees

Working Paper #2: A Summary of Doctoral Research in Agribusiness Management, Food Business, and Industrial Organization, 1951 to 2002

Working Paper #4: Introductory and Advanced Agribusiness Management Courses and Food Business Courses in Undergraduate Agribusiness Degrees

Working Paper #5: A Summary of Extension Programs in Agribusiness Management and Food Business

Working Paper #6: A Summary of Masters Degree Research in Agribusiness Management

Graduate Courses in Agribusiness Management

Abstract

We found 19 masters and doctoral courses in agribusiness management being taught within the 66 agricultural economics programs that have graduate programs. Four of the courses have not been taught since 2001, three are cross-listed with an undergraduate course by the same name, and 10 of the courses are taught annually. The most common textbook used was Besanko et al.'s *Economics of Strategy*, which was used in eight courses. There was a variety of subjects taught in the courses but industry analysis, firm analysis, and financial concepts appeared to be the most common. The emphasis on written and oral communication skills is greater in these courses than most other courses taught at the graduate level. University of Missouri and Purdue University have separate courses for masters and doctoral students. Michigan State University offers a graduate certificate in agribusiness management for graduate students in other disciplines while University of Missouri has a unique curriculum built around organizational economics.

Graduate Courses in Agribusiness Management

The 1989 National Agribusiness Education Commission (NAEC) conducted a comprehensive look at the role of agribusiness in agricultural economics programs in the United States.¹ One recommendation was the introduction of PhD programs in agribusiness management. Wolverton and Downey summarized a survey of NAEC participants in 1999 regarding implementation of the NAEC recommendations.² The recommendation for the creation of PhD programs in agribusiness received the lowest score at 2.7 on a 10-point scale (1 = least satisfied, . . . , 10 = most satisfied).

Some, but not all, graduate programs have distinct masters and doctoral courses. These are courses that are only open to masters students or only open to doctoral students. However, most programs have graduate courses that can be taken by masters and doctoral students. In recent years, agribusiness management has become more popular and some departments have developed graduate level agribusiness courses.

The 2003 National Food and Agribusiness Management Education Commission was charged with undertaking a similar task as the NAEC. In a series of working papers we examine various aspects of agribusiness management. In this paper, we compare the topics taught in graduate agribusiness management courses in graduate programs in the United States.

¹ Downey, W.D., ed. 1989. *Agribusiness Education in Transition: Strategies for Change*. Report of the National Agribusiness Education Commission, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Cambridge, MA.

² Wolverton, M.W. and W.D. Downey. 1999. "A Look at Agribusiness Education Since the National Agribusiness Education Commission's 1989 Report: The Lincoln Report Revisited." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*. 81:1050-1055.

Description of the Data

We went through graduate catalogs for 66 programs that offered masters or doctoral programs in agribusiness management. We found 19 masters and doctoral courses in agribusiness management being taught within agricultural economics programs. There were other courses that had the word “agribusiness” in them but they were primarily marketing, price analysis, or quantitative methods courses that were applied to agribusinesses. We chose to focus on individual courses offered to on-campus students rather than curriculum in MBA/MAB type programs that are taught executive style (i.e., Kansas State University, Purdue University). The rationale was that these types of programs were part of an overall formal curriculum with a terminal degree (Kansas State Masters in Agribusiness and Purdue’s Executive MBA in Food and Agricultural Business). More about these two unique programs can be found in Boland et al.³

Our purpose was to focus on broad agribusiness management courses rather than standard graduate courses that have been part of graduate programs. These courses were taught at Arizona State University, Clemson University, University of Florida, University of Georgia, Kansas State University, Michigan State University (two courses), University of Missouri (one three credit course and a number of one credit courses), University of Nebraska, North Dakota State University (two courses), The Ohio State University, Purdue University (two courses), University of Tennessee, Texas A&M University (two courses), and Texas Tech University. All of the courses appear to be electives for masters and doctoral students.

³ Boland, M. A., A. Featherstone, and S. J. Chapman. “Characteristics of Master’s Programs in Agribusiness Management.” *International Food and Agribusiness Management Review* 2, 1(1999): 63-82.

Courses in Agribusiness Management

Table 1 shows the names of each course. Management and strategy are the most common words included in the titles. Fourteen of the courses were created within the past six years. At least four of the courses have not been taught since 2001 or before due to lack of suitable instructors or low or no enrollment. In addition, several others appear to be taught every other year due to low student enrollment which is not uncommon in many graduate courses that are electives. Three others are cross listed with an identical undergraduate course. Students taking that course for graduate credit are required to complete a project. Michigan State University, North Dakota State University, The Ohio State University, and Texas A&M University team teach the course.

The most common textbook was Besanko et al.'s *Economics of Strategy*, which was used in eight of the courses.⁴ Table 2 contains a list of the textbooks being used in these courses. It was interesting to note that no other textbook was used in more than one course. There were little or no prerequisites for the courses.

Four courses graded participation. The average contribution towards the final grade was 15 percent. Every course required individual examinations with an average of 2.1 exams per courses and a 36 percent contribution towards the final grade. A team project was part of every class with an average contribution towards the final grade of 30 percent. Written and oral assignments constituted another 26 percent and were required in every course. Case studies were used in 11 courses. Three courses required 10 or more case studies while the remaining eight courses required an average of 3.3 cases.

⁴ Besanko, D., D. Dranove, M. Shanley, and D. Schaefer. 2004. *Economics if Strategy*, 3rd edition, John Wiley and Sons.

Almost every course required a team assignment that included an oral presentation. In addition, 12 of the courses required a final team project that was called a business plan, case study, or marketing plan. Seven of the courses had oral presentations by teams of students on case studies. Nine of the instructors also taught a similar class at the undergraduate level.

There were some but not many similarities across the courses. Thirteen courses taught industry and firm analysis concepts. Six other courses taught some financial concepts. The majority had a variety of topics and appeared to provide a survey of agribusiness management concepts and literature. The House and Sterns survey found that more than 70 percent of the 30 PhD students who classified themselves as agribusiness had been exposed to strategic management. Organizational theory and supply chain management were the most frequently taught management topics found in agribusiness courses that were taught in agricultural economics departments.⁵

Michigan State University, University of Florida, University of Missouri, North Dakota State University, Purdue University, and Texas A&M University have some unique features. Each of these programs have more than one agribusiness management course and each course (except North Dakota State University) is taught annually, which suggests that a critical mass of graduate students are in these programs. Michigan State University, North Dakota State University, and Texas A&M have a management course that is team taught with three modules in finance, quantitative methods, and management concepts. University of Florida offers courses in advanced marketing management and

⁵ Financial theory and portfolio theory were also listed but because these are considered part of risk, production economics, and similar subjects, we do not include them as management topics.

retail food and wholesaling. Michigan State University also offers a certificate in agribusiness management.

University of Missouri and Purdue University were the only programs that had separate courses for masters students and doctoral students. Both programs have been highly successful in recent years in receiving USDA Higher Education Programs PhD National Needs Fellowships.⁶ University of Missouri has courses in Economics of Agribusiness Organizations and Coordination of Agribusiness Networks, which are open to masters and doctoral students. It also teaches one-credit courses for doctoral students on The Logic of Collective Action, Innovations in Agribusiness Coordination, Economics of Agrobiotechnology, Agribusiness Investment and Finance, Cooperatives in the Global Food System, Management of Technical Innovation, and Economics of Agricultural Contracting. The University of Missouri's program was the most unique of all the graduate programs with its emphasis on organizational economics. Purdue University offers two courses (one at masters level; one at the doctoral level) as well as an international agribusiness marketing course.

Summary

We found 19 graduate courses in agribusiness management. These courses were available to masters and doctoral students. Ten of the courses are taught annually. There was a variety of subjects taught in the courses but industry analysis, firm analysis, and financial concepts appeared to be the most common. The emphasis on written and oral

⁶ Boland, M.A. and L. Thielen. "Industry Note: The USDA CSREES HEP: Doctoral Fellowships in the National Need of Management and Marketing." *International Food and Agribusiness Management Review*, 7,1(2004): 67-69.

communication skills is greater in these courses than most other courses taught at the graduate level.

Table 1. Universities and Course Titles for One Semester Graduate Courses in Agribusiness Management

University	Course Title
Michigan State University	Strategic Management of Agribusiness
Michigan State University	Agribusiness Firm Management
Texas A&M University	Strategic Agribusiness Management
Texas A&M University	Fundamentals of Agribusiness and Managerial Econ.
North Dakota State	Part I: AgProduct Marketing and AgBusiness Strategy
North Dakota State	Part II: AgProduct Marketing and AgBusiness Strategy
University of Florida	Management Strategies for Agribusiness Firms
Texas Tech University	Agribusiness Analysis
Kansas State University	Advanced Food and Agribusiness Management
University of Missouri ^a	Economics in Agribusiness Strategy
The Ohio State University	Agribusiness Firm Management
University of Nebraska	Strategic Issues in Food and Agribusiness Management
University of Georgia	Advanced Agribusiness Management
Arizona State University	Strategic Management seminar
Mississippi State University	Agribusiness Firm Management
Clemson University	Professional Problems in Agribusiness Mgmt
University of Tennessee	Agribusiness Management
Purdue University	Strategic Agribusiness Management
Purdue University	Economics of Agribusiness Strategy and Marketing

^aSee page 7 for a list of University of Missouri's one credit courses

Table 2. Textbooks being Used in the Courses Described in Table 1.

Author(s)	Textbook Title
Besanko, D; D. Dranove; and M. Shanley	Economics of Strategy
Brown, S.L. and K.M. Eisenhardt	Competing on the Edge: Strategy as Structured Chaos
Hunger, D. and T.L. Wheelen	Essentials of Strategic Management
Barney, J.	Gaining and Sustaining Competitive Advantage
Hoskisson, R.E., M.A. Hitt, and R.D. Ireland	Competing for Advantage