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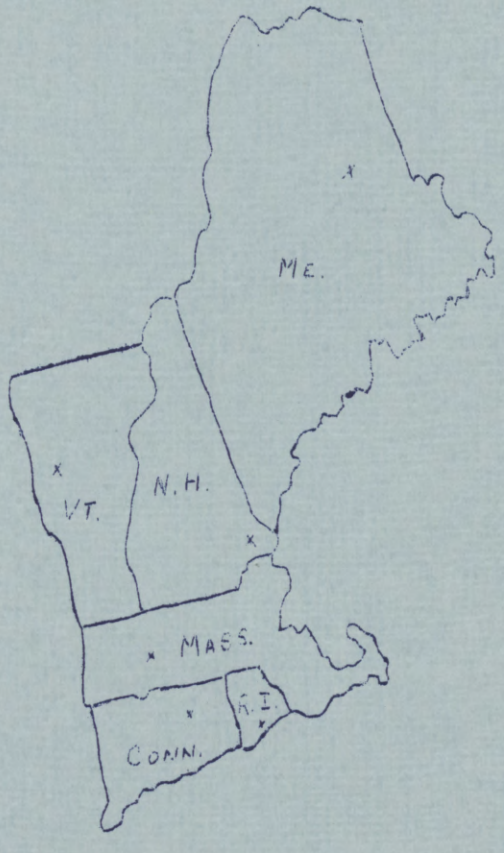

PROCEEDINGS JUNE 1957

AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

STORRS CONNECTICUT

MY GRADUATE PROGRAM AT CONNECTICUT

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The merit of a particular graduate program may be measured in various ways. One might attempt to judge the success of the program from the achievements of its graduates, or from the amount of knowledge to which the students are exposed, or merely from the number of students who are attracted by it. It is probable that no two persons evaluating the same program would agree upon the standards to be used, or upon the relative weight to be given to each standard. They would probably agree, however, that the problem would be somewhat simplified if, instead of attempting to evaluate the entire graduate program of an institution, they were asked to evaluate the benefits that a particular student would receive from a particular graduate program. The program could then be judged in terms of the objectives and the personal characteristics of the student, and the resulting evaluation, while not completely accurate because of the factors which still remain unknown, would be more useful and meaningful. An illustrative analogy may be drawn to a similar situation which exists in farm management. A particular program which yields good returns on one farm may ruin another. In the light of all the known facts, one particular program may be expected to maximize the returns from a given farm. In a similar fashion, the maximum returns from graduate study can be expected only if the student and the faculty expend the effort necessary to seriously consider each student separately, and set up the program which they jointly feel to offer the greatest possibility of fulfilling the students' objectives.

Graduate students can, to some extent, be placed into various categories for purposes of determining their programs. The first obvious distinction may be made between the Master's candidates and the Ph.D. candidates. The latter must of necessity receive both a broader and a more detailed knowledge of the subject matter of the field, as well as more rigorous training in research. A further separation of students may be made upon the basis of their expressed areas of specialization. By the time a student enters graduate work in agricultural economics, he may have a decided preference for one particular area, such as marketing, or even for a certain segment of this area. Or, as is sometimes the case, his undergraduate training may have emphasized one of the technical agricultural sciences, and he may desire to do work closely allied to this field. In formulating the programs of these students, the need is to insure that they receive the broad theoretical framework which will enable them to do effective work within their specialty. The natural tendency to treat all students in the same specialty area in the same manner should be resisted.

At the other extreme, the student who is unsure of where his detailed interests lie should receive prompt but unpressured counselling, plus exposure to research work being done in all areas, in time to make an intelligent decision upon the topic of his dissertation.

From my observations and experience here at Connecticut, I have concluded that the faculty makes a conscious effort to fit the graduate program to the individual in such a way that he will receive the maximum benefits from the resources which are available at the institution. This effort is noticeable in the selection and execution of the research project, in the selection of the

courses to be taken, and to some extent in the contents of the courses themselves. If this spirit is maintained as the resources of the institution grow, future graduate students should be able to realize their highest objectives.

In general, the program leading to a Master's degree in agricultural economics at Connecticut is as follows: The new graduate student takes a course in general agricultural economic theory and a course in research methodology in each of his first two semesters, and these four courses, plus a course in advanced statistical methods, form the basic part of his classwork. The student who has not had sufficient preparatory work in economics and statistics may have to take one or more undergraduate courses to remedy his deficiency, whereas the more advanced student may select from among the advanced courses offered in the department, which are Marketing, Econometrics, Agricultural Policy, and Production Economics, or may select a course in the Economics Department or in some other field of study. All students are also encouraged to take one or more courses in mathematical analysis.

The concentration of early coursework upon theory and methodology appears to be of assistance in the early selection and commencement of work upon the dissertation, which is required of most candidates for the Master's degree as an invaluable part of their training. The wishes of the student necessarily receive great weight in the choice of the research topic, but this choice is also limited by the fact that, since most of the students have part-time research assistantships, they must select a topic which qualifies for such financial support. Usually, the advisor will guide the student into a topic of current interest to the profession or to some segment of agriculture. Such a procedure may sometimes be undesirable, but it attains certain worthwhile objectives. The student's research project is more apt to be directed toward the solution of an actual contemporary problem. The advisor is more likely to take an active interest in the planning and execution of the project, and so the student learns to work with him and with people in the appropriate related areas. It appears to me that the experience of the student approximates very closely the situation he will face in doing research after graduation, and I regard this experience as a very valuable part of the total training.

While on the subject of receiving experience in lines of work in which the student may engage after graduation, I must note that the graduate student here does not receive any formal classroom teaching experience. Such experience would probably be most valuable to Ph.D. candidates, and if the doctoral program in agricultural economics at Connecticut is expanded, I believe that provision should be made for supplying the interested student with such experience, together with the necessary preparatory training for it.

My own graduate program has the Ph.D. degree as its immediate goal. I am afriad that I was one of those students who did not quite know what they wanted when they entered graduate work, as I came to Connecticut for my Master's degree, but a few months later decided to try for the Ph.D. degree instead. My program therefore began with the beginning graduate courses that I have mentioned. I expressed an interest in agricultural policy, and during my first semester my advisor, Dr. Halcrow, discussed with me the projects on which he was working, most of which dealt with various aspects of the farmer's tax problem. I became interested in the possible use of a state income tax to relieve the local tax burden of property-owners, and place the finances of

the state and local governments upon a sounder basis. I decided to make this area the general topic of my dissertation, the exact title being "Impact of Selected Alternative Sources of Tax Revenue on Connecticut Agriculture," and I was thus able to begin working upon my dissertation early in my graduate program.

The next step was to set up an appropriate program of courses which would provide the broad base of knowledge expected of a doctoral candidate. Needless to say, the program includes all of the graduate courses offered by the Department of Agricultural Economics, plus seven graduate courses in the Economics Department of the College of Arts and Sciences. These latter courses are history of economic thought, price and distribution analysis, national income analysis, American economic history, business cycles, taxation problems and fiscal policies, and international economic problems. In addition, the program includes one course each in political theory, comparative rural societies, and statistics. To satisfy the requirements of two languages or special skills, I have taken two years of mathematical analysis, and am now in the process of studying Spanish.

In both the Master's and Doctor's programs at Connecticut, therefore, the usual practice is to have the classwork provide a broad base of theoretical knowledge which the student will need in any future work he does in agricultural economics. The work on the research project for the dissertation then provides an area of specialization as well as essential training in the ways of research.