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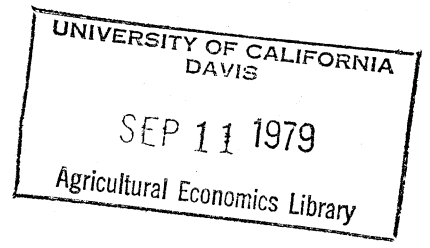
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1979



INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE IN THE MIDWEST FOR  
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS STUDENTS

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Introduction

I was especially pleased when Carl O'Connor and Raymond Folwell asked me to participate in this Undergraduate Symposium on Curriculum-- Meeting the Needs of Our Changing Clientele. It provided me an opportunity to take a new look at the internship and summer trainee program for students at my University. The information I will present is a very brief summary of responses from 12 Universities.

The following Universities in the Southwest and Midwest responded to my request for information on their internship and summer trainee programs: Colorado State University, University of Illinois, Kansas State University, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, University of Nebraska, New Mexico State University, Ohio State University, Purdue University, South Dakota State University, and the University of Wyoming. Information is also included on our program at Oklahoma State University.

I am pleased with what I found out from these responses. Agricultural Economics programs are growing in terms of undergraduate majors.

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Equally important, the opportunities for our students to obtain valuable job experience during their University careers also are expanding. Employers, students, and faculty appear to be pleased with these job-related experiences.

### The Need for Intern and Summer Training Programs

In a recent speech, titled "Gearing Up for the Eighties", Dr. Malcolm Knowles pointed out that the mission of education is to produce a competent person--one who can apply knowledge and skill to a wide variety of situations. The process of gaining competency is to gain knowledge and skill while applying it. He stated that knowledge needs to be acquired in the context of its application. The decade of the 1980's will see an increasing emphasis on "competency - based education" (1).

A recognized authority on cognitive development, Jean Piaget is convinced that cognition is greatly affected by experience. He and a co-researcher stated: "The adolescent becomes an adult when he undertakes a real job. It is then that he is transformed from an idealistic reformer into an achiever. In other words, the job leads thinking away from the danger of formalism back into reality" (2).

Lee Gray, Assistant Chairman of the Economics Department at Colorado State University succinctly stated:

"I think the response to the internship program is very much on the positive side for the faculty and for the students who have participated. Our program is expanding rapidly, at least from the point of view of the students; and at present, the student demand is much greater than the cooperator demand. The program tends to give students a brush with the real world that might otherwise be unavailable. I think it has also given the faculty a handle on the type of potential employee that firms in various sectors of the economy are looking for." (3)

### Types of Student Training Opportunities

Based on my own Department's experience, and the experiences of the 11 Universities who responded to my request, we can group student work training experiences into four general categories: (1) agricultural finance firms, including the Federal Land Bank, Production Credit Association, Farmers Home Administration, commercial banks and various types of insurance companies; (2) agricultural marketing firms, including both private businesses and cooperatives; (3) agricultural production farms, including farms, ranches, cattle and hog feeding operations, seed companies, and chemical firms (fertilizer and pesticides); and (4) government agencies, including the Forest Service (FS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Corps of Engineers (C/E), Crop and Livestock Reporting Service (CLRS), Soil Conservation Service (SCS), the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), Agricultural Experiment Stations (AES), Cooperative Extension Service (CES), and others.

Another classification of types of student work programs includes: (1) cooperative education program, where the student works for a firm in alternate semesters, or in a similar combination of classroom study on campus and off-campus work in a formalized program; (2) summer interns and/or summer trainee programs with either a private or public firm, where the student is supervised, and gains varied learning experiences; and, (3) departmental work experiences, where the student works for a faculty member as a teaching assistant, summer interviewer, computer programmer, or in other jobs related to the teaching, research, and extension program of a land-grant University.

The latter type of work experience, departmental jobs under the supervision of a faculty member, won't be discussed in detail here.

However, based on our experiences, it provides excellent training opportunities for students. The type of experiences gained by interviewing farmers, cooperative firms and other types of firms and by working as computer programmers, etc., in the department, provides the extra competitive edge needed in many cases to obtain the type of job the graduating senior is most interested in.

As indicated in Table 1, the types of intern or trainee experiences are varied, as are the types of programs at the various Universities. Colorado State University, Kansas State University, the University of Minnesota, Purdue University, and New Mexico State University have cooperative education programs which provide a highly formal intern experience for the participating students.

The number of students participating in summer intern or trainee programs this year varies from 3 to 29; the high number includes students who have worked during one or more quarters since last Fall, and in some cases, have worked without financial remuneration. The number of weeks worked is generally standardized at each University, depending on the length of the quarter or semester, and the summer break period. The length of the intern period ranges from 8 to 16 weeks.

Seventy-five percent of the Universities responding had policies which allowed the student to earn academic credit for the intern experience, although not every student intern at those Universities received such credit.

Generally, the student has to write a formal report to earn some or all of the credits. In a few cases, a series of weekly reports are required. The report(s) can be a valuable reinforcement to the job learning experience. However, the faculty member must take the time to review carefully these reports, and critique the student while the work experience is still going on, or at least is fresh on the mind of the student.

There is no need to describe the types of employing firms. A good representation of these is indicated in Table 1. It does appear that many of us have relied heavily on agricultural financial firms to provide the majority of the training experiences. In the 1980's, perhaps we need to devote more effort to line up other business firms in production and/or marketing services, so we can broaden the types of intern or summer trainee experiences available for our majors.

Another promising trend is the "demand" for Agricultural Economics majors in legislative intern positions. This may occur during a regular semester while the state legislature is in session, such as the program Elanco sponsors in various states, or the U.S. Congressional level internship position during the summer. We have been fortunate at Oklahoma State to have several students involved in these types of legislative internships.

The student intern appears to develop closer ties to his "home" department faculty via phone calls and correspondence. They obtain first-hand knowledge of how agricultural related bills and policies are formulated. Some obtain experience in applying economic principles in drafting bills and position statements. Consequently the Departmental faculty gain a greater visible image with the States Congressional delegation. Several of our Agricultural Economics majors are now working full-time for our Congressional legislators.

Most of the students working in the intern or trainee program participate between their Junior and Senior year in the University. However, there appears to be some trend towards more participation by students at the end of their Sophomore year. A major concern of many Agricultural Economics faculty members is that the student should have

TABLE 1: INTERN/TRAINEE PROGRAMS FOR AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS MAJORS  
IN MID-WESTERN UNIVERSITIES, AS OF SUMMER, 1979

University	Category of Work				Type of Program		Number of Students/yr <sup>b)</sup>	Course Credit	Salary	No. of Weeks
	Ag Finance	Ag Marketing	Ag Production	Gov't Agencies	Coop Education	Intern or Trainee				
Colo. St. Univ.	PCA, FLB Banks	Ralston-Purina <sup>a)</sup> Cooperatives	Farms, Ranches Chem. Co.	CLRS FmHA, CES	Yes	Yes	12	?	\$800/mo.	12-Sum 15-Int.
Univ. of Ill.	PCA, FLB Banks, AgriStor	?	?	FCA FmHA	?	Yes	11	0-3 <sup>c)</sup>	\$200/wk	10
Kansas St. Univ.	PCA, FLB Banks	Packers & Stock- yards Coop. Educ.	Chem Co.	CLRS	Yes	Yes	11	0-3	\$600-800/mo	12-Sum 20 Int.
Michigan St. Univ.	Banks	Milk Mkt. Coop.	?	All 3 Levels	?	Yes	29	<sup>d)</sup> 4	none for most \$3.50-5.00/hr	10
Univ. of Minn.	Banks, PCA	Ralston-Purina	Chem Co. Seed Co.	FmHA, C/E	Yes <sup>e)</sup>	Yes	2-11	1-6 <sup>c)</sup>	?	10-12
N.M. St. Univ.	?	?	Farm or Ranch	BLM, FS	Yes	Yes	5-6	?	?	12
Univ. of Neb.	Banks PCA, FLB	Ralston-Purina	Farmland	FmHA	?	Yes	11	3	\$200/wk	12
Ohio St. Univ.	Banks PCA, FLB	Ralston-Purina	Green Giant Chemical Co.	ASLS, CLRS FmHA	?	Yes	22	0	?	10-12
OK St. Univ.	Banks PCA, FLB	Ralston-Purina Cooperatives	Farmland	FmHA, SCS Legislative	Yes <sup>f)</sup>	Yes	5-10	0-3	\$500-700/mo	10-12
Purdue Univ.	Banks PCA, FLB	Ralston-Purina	Chemical Co.	FmHA SCS	Yes	Yes	12	?	Min. Wage up to \$900/mo	10-12
S. D. St. Univ.	Banks PCA, FLB	?	Ag Service Firms	FmHA	?	Yes	6-10	Yes <sup>c)</sup>	Min. Wage up	13-15 Sum 15-16 Int.
Univ. of Wyoming	Banks PCA, FLB	?	Del Monte	CLRS FmHA	?	Yes	3	2 <sup>c)</sup>	Competitive	8-10

<sup>a)</sup> Generally, this is the SAM Program

<sup>b)</sup> Excludes students working in the Ag Econ. or Econ. Department

<sup>c)</sup> Students prepare a research type paper or submit weekly analytical reports on experience and progress

<sup>d)</sup> This is an average; students receive 1 academic credit for each 4 hours worked per week up to maximum of 9 credits

<sup>e)</sup> Professional Experience Program (PEP), operated through College of Agriculture

<sup>f)</sup> The University has a formalized cooperative education program; however, our department is not participating in this.

a basic core of agricultural production, marketing, finance, and economic theory courses before he or she goes out as a representative of the Department in an intern program.

#### Advantages to Students from the Intern Programs

An abbreviated list of some of the advantages students gain by participating in the intern or summer training program are:

1. Develop increased motivation and direction (more interest in learning).
2. Participate more in class.
3. More careful in selection of electives.
4. More involved in student activities.
5. Foot in-the door for future employment, more competitive in job market.
6. Exposure to real world of work.
7. Opportunity to apply classroom material to real job.
8. Provide students from urban areas with an agricultural related experience.
9. Overall educational experience.
10. Earn credit while earning needed summer income.

#### Advantages to the Department

The Department generally gains additional publicity and becomes better known in the non-academic area. This helps in student recruitment. The intern program also helps expand opportunities for employment of our majors after graduation.



### Major Constraints

A major constraint appears to be the willingness of faculty to take charge and to coordinate an intern program for the students in their area of expertise. There is a definite conflict with research, teaching, and extension commitments of the faculty. It takes quite a bit of faculty time to adequately plan an intern program and to properly supervise the students work experience. Many departments just do not have the resources to devote to such intern programs.

There is some reluctance on the part of potential cooperators to instigate a program. However, I feel sure the level of cooperator participation is closely related to the amount of contact and merchandising effort on the part of the faculty. I'm sorry to say that most of the programs which have been sustainingly successful at Oklahoma State University have received a major continual impetus from the cooperators, e.g., Farmland, Elanco, Ralston Purina. Many of the other internships have been where students have hustled their own without any prior formal structure on the faculty's part.

### Some Concluding Comments

John Riley, Economics Department coordinator for the Intern Program at Kansas State University, summarized what a lot of other Departmental coordinators, including myself, believe. John stated:

"There is a growing interest in intern-type programs by both students and employers. Employers view such programs as a way of fairly efficiently and cheaply screening potential employees and a means of having the University help in enticing the better student into the firm for an intern program and fulltime employment following graduation. Students view intern programs as a means of obtaining work experience as well as diversification of experience, both of which are assets in the job market upon graduation." (4)

Vern Eidman, at the University of Minnesota, summarized the consensus of the faculty point of view: "while faculty are generally supportive of the program, it does require a great deal of faculty time" (5).

#### REFERENCES CITED

- (1). Knowles, Dr. Malcolm, "Gearing Up for the Eighties", Address to the Oklahoma Conference on Human Resource Development, Tulsa, Oklahoma. April 7, 1979.
- (2). Inhelder, B. and Jean Piaget, The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence; translated by Anne Parsons and Stanley Pilgram; New York, Basic Books, 1958, p. 346.
- (3). Personal correspondence from Lee Gray, dated July 10, 1979.
- (4). Personal correspondence from John Riley, dated June 29, 1979.
- (5). Personal correspondence from Vernon Eidman, dated July 5, 1979.