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LAND-GRANT ORGANIZATION TO MEET THE FUTURE

James E. Martin

I am pleased for this opportunity to renew friendships with many of my former colleagues in the field of agricultural economics here today. My topic probably has as much personal interest as professional interest for those of you who are at land-grant institutions—I assume that would cover most of the audience. At any given time, an academic institution is probably either changing its organization or contemplating a change. As members of land-grant institutions, we are personally affected by the changes made, and our professional interests are frequently provoked by the effects of these changes on the traditional land-grant constituencies.

The land-grant concept is just as valid today as in 1862, when the Morrill Act made higher education available to a broad spectrum of society—but neither society nor the land-grant institutions are the same today as they were in the 19th century. Land-grant institutions have changed the nature of higher education in this country, and they remain important in today's information society. After 1862, higher education was no longer limited to the few and the privileged. It became available, in the words of the Morrill Act, to the "industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life." Land-grant colleges were established with the mandate to educate the general public instead of a few. Over the years, as the needs of society changed, the methods used to meet those needs have also changed.

Land-grant colleges and universities today are trying to overcome two obstacles that point to the need for constant review and periodic reorganization. First, they must avoid the danger of becoming locked into a bureaucratic administrative structure that is not relevant to education in a rapidly changing society. The second danger is that their academic structure could become too internalized, ignoring the needs of society. Such

shortcomings were common to higher education when the land-grant colleges were established, and universities are not immune to them today. Thus, administrators and faculty have to be especially wary to avoid irrelevance and parochialism of their institutions.

Land-grant institutions require an effective administrative and academic structure to accomplish their three-fold mission of instruction, research, and extension. Society cannot afford for these institutions to produce graduates who are ill-prepared to be productive citizens. Therefore, the quality and content of academic offerings should be subjected to frequent review.

These institutions are also the source of many of the nation's most valuable research efforts; thus, research programs designed to generate new information applicable to business, industry, agriculture, and individual citizens need attention.

The extension role also deserves emphasis to remove the walls that academic professionals tend to build around college campuses. Extension is often the initial contact between academic institutions and the general public; it is both unique and critical to the success of the land-grant mission.

There will never be an ideal administrative structure for academic institutions, so university administrators look for the best system for their institutions at a given time. People are always the first consideration for an administration structure. Good people can overcome a flawed organization, but a perfect plan on paper cannot overcome the weaknesses of poor administrators. A strong administrator needs to be in charge of any reorganization attempt, and that administrator should be as high within the existing organizational structure as possible. Preferably, that individual should report directly to the president, and he or she should be someone of the president's choosing.

Properly managed, an institution can be

James E. Martin is President, Auburn University.

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made stronger by combining the best elements of a collegial organization and a hierarchical one. Timing and the conduct of changes, however, can be critical to success. As broad an input from the faculty as possible needs to be secured, but the process cannot be allowed to drag out unduly, or it can disrupt the mission of the university.

I will cite Auburn's experience with reorganization, but bear in mind that other institutions have also reorganized through the years. What makes Auburn's situation unique is the long time, approximately 20 years, between the last major reorganization and the current one. The delay led to more sweeping changes than might otherwise have been the case, but it enabled us to organize better for the future than we could have done on a piecemeal basis.

Auburn's administrative structure met the needs of the institution during the past two decades, but concerns were being expressed about what academic structure was needed for the future. Many of those concerns had been raised during the regular ten-year accreditation review for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in 1982, so I wanted to act quickly to address the problem when I took office in early 1984.

The executive vice president, Dr. George Emert, who came with me from the University of Arkansas System, was named chairman of an ad hoc committee of faculty and administrators from a variety of disciplines. A comprehensive network of committees was established to study all components of the university structure with the objective of developing an organizational structure to serve the future needs of our students and the state of Alabama. The faculty senate studied the proposals, which were also distributed in detail through the faculty-staff newspaper.

By early 1985, the report was essentially complete, and it was approved by the Board of Trustees on March 6 of that year. Implementation proceeded in stages beginning on July 1, 1985, with the last major changes occurring on October 1, 1986, involving the creation of several new colleges, schools, and departments. However, some changes and refinements have occurred since then and will continue to do so as the need arises. Academic and administrative structures must remain flexible if they are to meet the changing needs of university constituencies.

Auburn's reorganization, generally, is in keeping with current trends of land-grant

institutions nationally as these institutions seek to ensure a meaningful education for their students and render maximum service to their states.

Some of the changes were as simple as changing the names of some schools to colleges (i.e., agriculture, business, education, engineering, and veterinary medicine). Some departments were named schools to reflect their size and importance (i.e., forestry). Other changes were made to allow emerging disciplines to better meet the needs of society and to refocus some disciplines that were in danger of becoming too big and diverse for maximum effectiveness (i.e., the division of the School of Arts and Sciences into a College of Liberal Arts and a College of Sciences and Mathematics).

Some of the most sweeping changes affected agricultural programs. We wanted to bring our Extension programs more into the mainstream of the academic community while expanding the services available to the farm and agribusiness community. A move toward accomplishing that goal involved abolishing the vacant position of Vice President for Agriculture, Home Economics, and Veterinary Medicine, rather than refilling the position. The committee recommended the action, in part, because of difficulties in coordination of those three academic areas with other academic schools and colleges on campus. It was also felt that the Agricultural Experiment Station was critical to the research mission of the entire university and should report directly to the Vice President for Research, as it had already been doing on a temporary basis since mid-1984.

Research previously reported as part of the Agricultural Experiment Station is now reported under the college or school of which the researcher is a member. At Auburn University, researchers were already members of the academic departments, and this strengthens bonds which already existed. Research contracts and grants to agriculture, home economics, and veterinary medicine have risen nearly 10 percent in two years, so the change was not as disruptive as some had feared.

A major move designed to reach beyond the university to outside constituencies involved the establishment of a vice presidency for Extension. The position had existed previously at Auburn but had not included the Cooperative Extension Service. The position also had been reduced to a lesser office several years before. The committee recommended that the

Office of Vice President for Extension be reestablished at equal status with the vice presidencies for Research and Academic Affairs and that the office include the Cooperative Extension Service. This move will allow us to deal more effectively with the interrelated problems of agriculture and the rest of society.

Extension specialists have been brought into their academic departments to encourage the exchange of information and ideas among professionals in the same disciplines. The exchange not only helps make for more relevant teaching and research, it also keeps the specialists up to date in their disciplines.

Extension specialists now on the faculty are being given the option of joining the tenure and promotion system or remaining outside that system; future specialists will automatically go on the tenure and promotion system. The standards for evaluation and promotion will be based on how effectively the specialists meet the needs of their constituents.

In the new organization, teaching, research, and Extension personnel assigned to academic departments will report to the department head who in turn reports to the college or school dean. Each academic dean will report to: (1) the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs for teaching programs, (2) the Office of the Vice President for Research for research programs, and (3) the Office of the Vice President for Extension for Extension programs.

But there is more to outreach programs than Extension specialists. County agents in the field have to be kept up to date in rapidly changing rural and urban environments, and effective ways must be found to get business, technological, and other information to audiences which need that information.

A major land-grant institution needs to be able to bring large and small groups of people to campus for conferences, short courses, and meetings. Land-grant institutions are increasingly building hotel-conference centers or entering into agreements with private enterprise for their construction. Auburn has taken the latter approach in meeting this need. Today, continuing education centers are considered as much a part of land-grant institutions as are classrooms and laboratories.

A major goal of administrative restructuring is to ensure that on-campus academic programs are adequately defined to prepare students for the future. Nowhere is the need for this more evident than in agriculture. As

programs grew and new programs evolved over the years, Auburn's agricultural, forestry, and biological sciences had been grouped together in a school that was becoming unwieldy and slowly losing its identity as well as its students. One way that institutions are dealing with the problem is to transfer programs out of colleges of agriculture if the programs can stand alone, as we did with forestry. We also placed our basic biological sciences, except those that were directly production related, in a new College of Sciences and Mathematics. At Auburn, such moves allowed the College of Agriculture to reestablish its identity as the academic unit for the agricultural sciences with its teaching, research, and Extension programs all reporting through the dean's office.

The approach seems to have stemmed a slow decline in agricultural enrollment. In fact, agricultural enrollment has increased since the reorganization. The reorganization also enables the faculty to concentrate on the needs of agriculture. In the process, the duties of the Dean of Agriculture were redefined to allow for clearer lines of responsibility. Previously, the Dean of Agriculture had control over the faculty of his college only so long as teaching was concerned. Under the reorganization, that duty was assigned to an associate dean, with the overall dean having control over all the functions of his college, just as in the other colleges.

Quality of instruction should be the guiding force behind any structural changes a university makes. Land-grant institutions, even more than others, should offer instructional programs that are relevant to the needs of a complex, increasingly technological society, whether rural or urban. At the same time, every university should require that students gain certain skills and cultural understanding basic to Western society. The problem is to balance these requirements so that the typical student can acquire a college education in approximately four or five years.

The traditional four-year standard may remain the norm for the near future, but it is caught in a squeeze between conflicting demands. It has already been abandoned in some professional programs such as architecture and is losing ground in engineering and education. As the technical knowledge in many disciplines increases, we may see more pressure exerted to add to the number of five-year programs. Yet the pendulum has swung back from the 1960s, when core curricula were

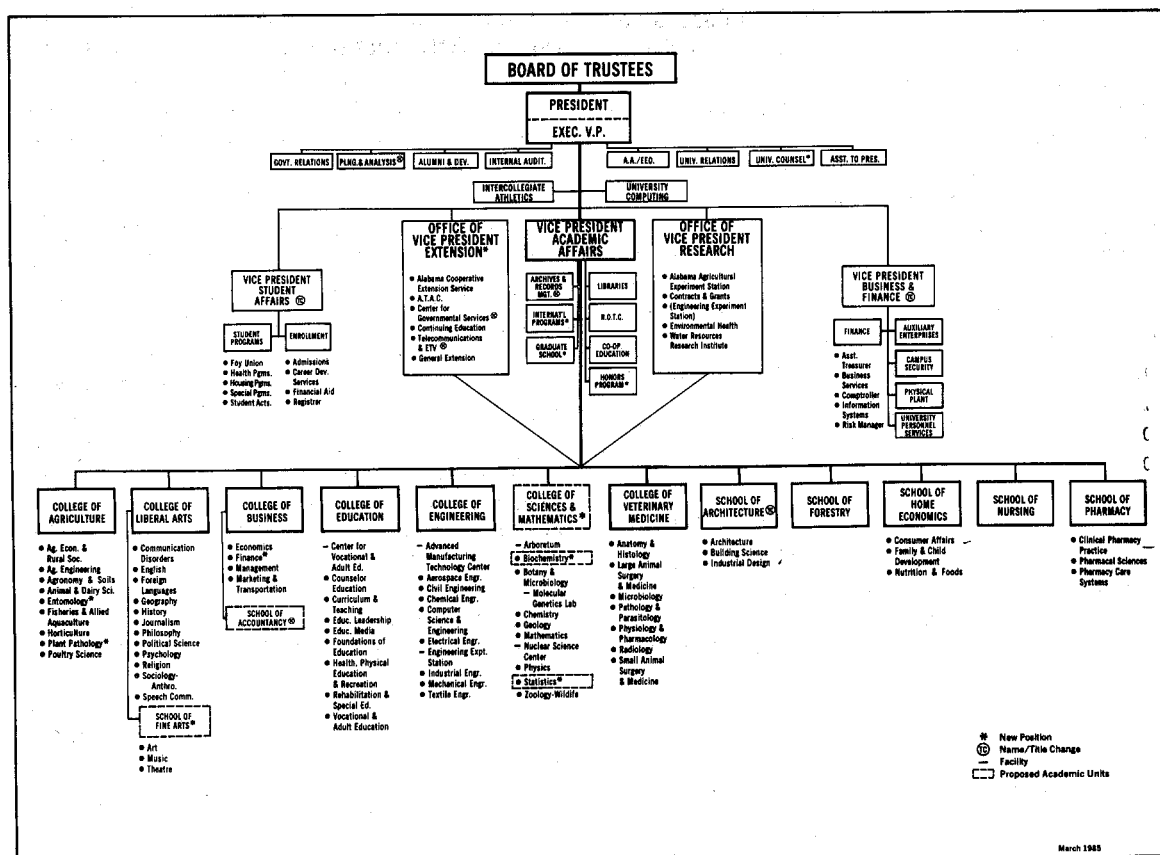
being dropped or cut back at many universities in the name of relevance. Institutions which dropped their core curricula are reimplementing them, and universities which relaxed their requirements are strengthening them.

Although Auburn never abandoned its core curriculum, we are looking for ways to strengthen the curriculum so that all graduates possess certain characteristics that are supposed to distinguish a college graduate. A committee which has drafted some far-reaching recommendations for change is headed by the Dean of Veterinary Medicine and is composed of members from the sciences, liberal arts, and professional programs. The fact that people from these diverse disciplines were able to agree on a document shows a growing emphasis on the total preparation of students, instead of on the continual addition of courses in the student's

major at the expense of a common curriculum.

As the pendulum swings back on college campuses toward more emphasis on the basics, look for attempts to organize academic requirements along common lines for all freshmen and sophomores. That leaves deans and department heads with fewer available hours for course requirements as knowledge in many fields continues to expand. Some professions are meeting that challenge by requiring postgraduate refresher courses at periodic intervals. As the practice spreads in technical fields, land-grant institutions will play a larger role than ever in meeting the continuing needs of those they serve. The future of land-grant institutions could depend on how well they fulfill that role. To meet these future challenges, the current organizational structure for Auburn University (Figure 1) will certainly require continued review, evaluation, and, when necessary, modification.

Figure 1. AUBURN UNIVERSITY ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



* New Position
 (C) Name/Title Change
 [] Facility
 [] Proposed Academic Units

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