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The Proper Preeminent Role of Parent Disciplines and Learned Societies in Setting the Agenda at Land Grant Universities

Bruce R. Beattie and Myles J. Watts

Contrary to recent commentary, reliance on individual faculty initiative and learned societies in setting the academic agenda has greater promise for contributing to the land grant mission than more administratively driven and dominated systems. Learned societies have the advantage in evaluating disciplinary content and are thereby the appropriate evaluators of quality. A distinguishing characteristic of all university professors should be a continuing commitment to active participation in research in support of their principal function, teaching, be their students on-campus undergraduates or graduates, off-campus clientele, or professional peers. The popular notion that all, or even most, recognized peer-reviewed journals are oriented mainly to disciplinary (versus problem-focused) research is challenged.

Key words: academic agenda, land grant university mission, peer-reviewed journals, research/teaching/extension integrality.

In preparing this paper we were torn between two titles: the one chosen or "Revitalizing Land Grant Universities: A Second Opinion," taking off on Ed Schuh's important and widely read paper published in *Choices*. This particular title was chosen because it is descriptive and expresses our biases rather clearly. We do not share the view of a number of eminent agricultural economists that our land grant universities have "lost their way"; we believe it is appropriate that academic administrators (including those at land grant universities) have by and large deferred to the parent disciplines and professional academic associations in calling the tune on the "appropriate search for

academic excellence," criteria for promotion and tenure, and thus indirectly the academic agenda.

While it is not our intention to provide a critique of Schuh's paper, it is nevertheless important to review the main themes put forth by Schuh to place our thoughts in proper context. In so doing we also draw significantly from James Bonnen's 1986 AAEA Fellows Address. Following this brief review of the "revitalization appeal and proposals" of Schuh and Bonnen, we narrow the focus more specifically to the idea that, rather than being a problem, the evolving basic disciplinary and peer-driven orientation of contemporary land grant universities, and agricultural economics in particular, is positive and more likely to be in society's and our own self-interest than a more administratively/clientele/social-problem driven system.

Review of Revitalization Proposal

Perhaps the most efficient way to summarize the main points of the revitalization proposals

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Montana State University administrators, Michael Malone, dean of graduate studies, and James Welsh, dean of agriculture, as well as an anonymous *Journal* referee, provided helpful insights and comments. Given the subject matter of the paper, the usual caveat is particularly appropriate, that the authors are solely responsible for the contents of this paper.

An earlier version of this paper was presented in the invited paper session, "The Proper Preeminent Role of Parent Disciplines and Learned Societies in Setting the Agenda at Land Grant Universities," at the annual meeting of the Western Agricultural Economics Association in Manhattan, Kansas, July 12-14, 1987.

of Schuh, and to a lesser extent Bonnen, is to pull excerpts directly from their papers. Direct quotation is intended to minimize biases and misinterpretation on our part, but it clearly has the disadvantage of taking ideas out of context.

Schuh (1986) begins emphatically:

The land grant universities have lost their way. Faculties have become introverted in their disciplines. . . . A strong bent to a disciplinary orientation seems to be eroding allegiance to the land grant concept. For large parts of the university the land grant concept is completely alien. (page 6)

Schuh (1986) continues:

Several symptoms tell me that there is a serious malaise. Most prominent is the pervasive attitude in our land grant universities that applied work is not important; publishing for professional peers and consulting for the highest paying firm or government agency are the priority tasks. . . . [Historically] staff members were rewarded as they contributed to the solution of society's problems. In contrast, today the criteria for promotion is publishing in scholarly journals. In turn people are self- and peer-oriented. They do not feel a responsibility to contribute to the institutional mission of solving society's problems. (page 6)

Serious stuff; accusations that are perhaps worthy of rebuttal or empirical test, although we shall not.

Challenges are offered by Schuh (1986):

The basic challenge of today's land grant university is to bridge the gap between society's current problems and the frontiers of knowledge. . . . While we must be involved in the frontier of knowledge, we must not abandon today's problems. To meet this challenge presidents, deans, and faculty must reestablish a mission orientation into our land grant universities. They must revitalize the tripartite mission of teaching, research, and extension. This needs to be done across the university in both teaching and research. Everyone needs to recover a sense of institutional mission, to mobilize their considerable on-board resources to devise solutions for the pressing problems of our society. (page 7)

Finally, Schuh (1986) suggests six corrective prescriptions (tasks), one of which is particularly germane to our topic today. He encourages us in the land grant universities to "give university administrators more authority" presumably to direct the university agenda. As will become clear later, we feel uncomfortable with the substance of this recommendation, while, in the main, we agree with a number of Schuh's other suggested tasks.

In his recent AAEA fellows address, James

Bonnen lends support to a number of Schuh's themes. Again quoting out of context, Bonnen states:

Other colleges of agriculture, many land grant universities, and some agricultural professional associations have absorbed as their ideal the academic science establishment's focus on disciplinary research. Their 'search for academic excellence' is denaturing the land grant tradition of problem solving and service to all people, irrespective of wealth or position. A near-exclusive focus on basic discipline depreciates applied, multidisciplinary research, denies admission of problem solvers and prescriptive analysis to the academic pantheon, and turns good land grant universities into second-rate, private academies. Such an environment destroys the basis for effective extension education and problem solving and lowers the potential productivity of any agricultural science investment. (page 1076)

Turning to agricultural economics in particular, Bonnen suggests:

Since World War II agricultural economics has been drifting toward an antiempirical and a disciplinary outlook, away from the great empirical tradition around which the profession was built and upon which its reputation still rests. Today we celebrate theory and statistical methods while ignoring the data collection and problem solving necessary to validate our theory and models. . . . The search for 'academic excellence' in agricultural economics . . . places excessive or sole emphasis on rewarding the development of disciplinary knowledge almost to the exclusion of the development of subject-matter and problem-solving knowledge, both of which are essential outputs of an effective agricultural economics department.

Thus, a badly flawed notion of what agricultural economics is about is leading to incentive structures for tenure and promotion, penalizing those who do empirical work or who would spend large parts of their lives in applied, problem-solving and subject-matter research, without significant disciplinary contribution. (page 1078)

And finally, Bonnen comments that, ". . . as Schuh has pointed out, the value structures and behavior pursued today in many land grant universities and their colleges of agriculture suggest that the land grant idea is being abandoned" (p. 1066).

So there we have it; many of our land grant universities, including their colleges of agriculture and agricultural economics departments, have "blown it." We have sold out to the expediency of letting the basic academic disciplines and learned societies call the tune, we have become peer- and self-oriented, and we have succumbed to celebration of the false

god of theory and statistical method. In short, we have lost our way and are of considerably less social value than we might be, and surely once were.

While we have admittedly and purposively overdrawn and dramatized the positions of Schuh (1986) and Bonnen as we interpret them, we nevertheless believe (and fear) that this position enjoys considerable sympathy among many agricultural economists, college of agriculture faculty generally, and agricultural teaching, research, and extension administrators. In juxtaposition to the Schuh-Bonnen view, we assert that the drift toward greater emphasis on basic disciplinary training and research and greater reliance on peer review and learned societies in setting standards of excellence and the academic agenda has been healthy for colleges of agriculture and for agricultural economics in particular. And this disciplinary focus is crucial for a continuing, if not greater, role for colleges of agriculture and land grant universities in serving the needs of society in teaching, applied research, and extension. The decentralized agenda setting of the parent disciplines and learned societies has greater long-term potential to serve social needs and contribute to the solution of problems, thus fulfilling the land grant mission, than do politically/administratively determined and directed processes. We turn now to the development of this alternative view.

What Is a University Professor?

An appropriate place to begin is with some thoughts about what it means to be a university professor. First, we offer the perhaps startling proposition that there are not three functions of a land grant university as popularly believed and touted. Rather there is but one function—teaching. Whether one's position is funded principally from university or instructional dollars, from extension or from experiment station funds, all university faculty, i.e., professors, are first and foremost teachers. Perhaps this needs a bit of explanation. None of us presumably have difficulty casting those professors with resident teaching responsibilities as teachers; hopefully not many have difficulty with the idea that extension faculty are also teachers, in this case their students being off campus.

But why is it that we argue that those faculty

with principally experiment station appointments should be thought of as fulfilling a teaching function? In our view the purpose of research conducted by a university faculty member, be he or she on college, station, or extension appointment, is to convey the knowledge, ideas, and principles gained thereby to others—resident students, off-campus students (sometimes called clientele), and/or peers. Yes, our peers are also our students, and we their's.¹

Thinking of all land grant university faculty, be they funded from instructional, station, or extension budgets, as university professor-teachers would be a useful first step in placing all college of agriculture faculty on equal footing, affording all full-fledged membership on the faculty and in their respective professions. As a final point here, we do not accept the oft-stated role for extension as being disseminators of solutions to problems or of experiment station scientists as being discoverers of solutions to clientele or social problems. Such a view is not in keeping with our idea of what it means to be a university professor or educator.² Our argument, that we are not discoverers and disseminators of solutions per se, seems even more compelling for a social scientist, given the fundamentally non-Pareto social choices that economists are so often called upon to provide insight.

Viewing all university faculty as professor-teachers has implications for our special role in society and obligation to those who pay the bill. In particular, we in the colleges of agriculture must abandon the atypical and nonsense view that research, scholarly, and creative activity is expected and deemed socially responsible behavior only for those with a formal research, i.e., experiment station, appoint-

¹ We owe this thought to the late Professor Albert Halter. A *Journal* referee commented that our subsuming the traditional tripartite mission definition under a single title, university-professor-teacher, is not helpful. We disagree. While it is from time to time convenient to think in terms of the separate functions of teaching, research, and extension, we firmly believe that more damage is done to effective program (output/service) delivery in most colleges of agriculture than is gained by maintaining the "separate" function mindset. The concept of wholeness of the ideal university professor role is what we wish to emphasize. In our view it is crucial to the future of our colleges of agriculture, and in particular their extension components, that the matter of scholarly and scientific inquiry become implicit in the thinking and assumed job description of each and every faculty member (including administrators).

² In this connection we wholeheartedly endorse Schuh's (1987) call for more teaching on the part of extension and less "one-on-one technical assistance" in a pure service role.

ment. Nothing could be more foreign to the concept of a university professor. If college of agriculture "teaching and extension" faculty are to be afforded full rights, privileges, and recognition within our academic institutions, then we and our administrators (perhaps especially our administrators) must come to understand and appreciate the fact that scholarly/creative activity (research, if you will) is a necessary and built-in part of our job descriptions even if we are budgeted 100% college or 100% extension. Not having a formal experiment station appointment is not an excuse for a physicist, an historian, or a general economist to avoid scholarly research and publication, and neither is it an excuse for an agricultural economist or plant scientist. The rest of the university expects it, will demand it, and for good reason. One cannot be a university professor and avoid scholarly activity (research). The latter is necessary for the former. Furthermore, we assert that the integrality of research to a university professor's role is understood even outside of academia (among the taxpaying public) and is even reflected in commonly accepted definitions of a university.

If for no other reason, scholarly research is essential for human capital preservation and growth. Nothing is of less social value than teaching, applied research, or extension on so-called relevant and crucial social problems, but taught, researched, or extended by those whose human capital has long since been depleted or never was what it should have been in the first place.

In his discussion of Knutson's 1986 AAEA address on "Restructuring Agricultural Economics Extension to Meet Changing Needs," Libby suggested that,

Extenders must invest in the search for useful knowledge, just as most land grant researchers should spend their time on topics that make a difference to somebody Extension is an integral part of the intellectual capital of departments of agricultural economics, not just as deliverers of research results *but as contributors to the stock of knowledge* [emphasis added]. (page 1313)

Johnson (1987), in a presentation to the Western Agricultural Economics Council, echoes Libby's concern by calling for "deeper disciplinary training for extension specialists and more applied research as part of extension program and material development" (p. 1). Johnson (1985) comments elsewhere that, "all university faculty are promoted and given other

rewards for maintaining their disciplinary potential by keeping up with journal publications, practicing disciplinary inquiry and publishing results" (p. 6). If all of this is true for university professors with extension appointments, then it surely is true for so-called teaching/research types as well. Research results that are not committed to paper, or otherwise conveyed to our students (again, broadly defined), is research undone; and society has assuredly been "ripped off" if such happens often.

Peer-Reviewed Journals and Applied Research

Having argued that research is integral to every university professor's job description, we next attempt to debunk what we consider to be a particularly debilitating notion that publishing in peer-reviewed journals is antithetical to what Bonnen calls subject-matter and problem-solving research. In so doing we will focus exclusively on agricultural economics.

Frankly, we find it somewhat amazing that some eminent agricultural economists would seem to suggest that publication in the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, the *Western Journal of Agricultural Economics*, the *North Central Journal of Agricultural Economics*, the *Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics*, *Land Economics*, *Water Resources Research*, the *Journal of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers*, *Agribusiness*, *Agricultural Finance Review*, the *Journal of Production Agriculture*, and so on, is not to be involved in applied, subject-matter, or problem-focused research or activity. How can one read these journals and conclude that their orientation and content is exclusively, or even mainly, original, basic, disciplinary research? The editorial policy statements in every one of these journals suggest otherwise; virtually every editor's pronouncement we can recall suggests otherwise; and, more important, a perusal of the contents of these journals surely suggests otherwise.³

The bottom line is that the vast majority of

³ We also contend that much of the research of scientists in our parent disciplines is applied or concerned with "real world" problems. For example, the most recent issue of the *American Economic Review* contains twelve articles plus Professor Buchanan's Nobel Prize lecture. Of those twelve articles, at least half have an applied focus and make little or no contribution to the main body of economic theory or quantitative methods.

those of us who call ourselves agricultural economists are engaged in applied rather than basic research; most of us are unlikely ever to produce what could legitimately be called a truly scholarly piece or a paper that would have profound or lasting impact on the evolution of economic thought or method. To be sure, it has become advantageous for our department heads (we know, we've been there) to convey a particular impression when arguing the case for promotion and tenure of agricultural economists at upper levels of the university review process. Such buzzwords as "scholarly," "seminal," "basic," and "excellence" are invaluable in effectively playing the academic game. But we should not let this administrative/bureaucratic expediency confuse us as to what we are in fact doing, what our comparative advantage is, or the social value of our work.

Surely, in the main, good work in teaching, research, and extension tends to be rewarded whether it is basic or applied or problem-focused or discipline-focused. We submit that a review of the salary structure at most land grant universities would support this claim. Certain professors with strong track records of a discipline-focused nature are among the highest paid—as they should be and as the academic market dictates (Beattie). However, the number of relatively high paid and highly regarded professors with problem-focused track records and modest or negligible disciplinary contributions is also significant, and not all of them are senior citizens that were recognized for their problem-focused contributions in a bygone era.

We hypothesize that this is not only true within our land grant universities, but it is also true of our professional associations and learned societies. One needs only to review the list of fellows and past presidents of the AAEA to see that problem-focused and applied activities count, and count a lot. One needs only to review the past recipients and titles of the outstanding published research awards of the AAEA and WAEA to see that an applied and problem-focused orientation has its rewards. Finally, we reemphasize that one has only to read the broad array of peer-reviewed journals accessible to agricultural economists to conclude that a problem orientation and applied work is rewarded. We have no doubt whatsoever that this is true not only in agricultural economics but throughout all college of agriculture professions and the academe generally.

Do we seriously believe that all recently anointed full professors of physics, history, or economics in our land grant and other U.S. universities have distinguished records in disciplinary research with little or no recognition of applied-problem-focused activity? Let us not kid ourselves! Those of you who have served on university-level promotion and tenure review committees know better.

The Importance of Disciplinary Competence

The importance of disciplinary competence seems to us to be self-evident. Surely we would all agree that contemporary disciplinary competence is essential to the conduct of good applied research and teaching, focused on relevant problems facing society. No doubt, where disagreement arises is in defining the minimally acceptable level of disciplinary competence for a university professor and the appropriate level of taxpayer dollars to invest in sustaining or enhancing the human capital of professors already in place. To put the issue in more specific terms, in an applied discipline like agricultural economics, do all or most of its professional participants need to be continuously at or near the "cutting edge" in terms of their capability? To us, at least, the answer is obvious: Those participants calling themselves university professors should strive to be on the frontier of knowledge of at least an appropriate disciplinary subfield. We do not naively believe that such a lofty goal is attainable, but that it should be the university's goal is without question in our minds. Furthermore, contrary to popular perception, we expect that such is a goal for which one would find considerable support among the taxpaying public.

"Span[ning] the ever-widening gap between the frontier of knowledge and the problems of society" (p. 9), as called for by Schuh (1986), is not inconsistent with disciplinary competence or with being on the "cutting edge." In fact, it is difficult to believe this gap could be spanned by someone who is not intimately familiar with the frontier of knowledge. In our view the best, perhaps only, way to "know the gap" is to be actively engaged in research, at least some of which must have a strong disciplinary component.

It may be that our land grant universities, and our colleges of agriculture in particular,

are devoting too many resources to disciplinary knowledge production *vis-à-vis* what we might call problem-solving activity. However, as argued earlier, the facts of the matter, in our view, do not support that allegation; rather, the problem with our colleges of agriculture, including the agricultural experiment stations and the extension services, is that we have been laggard in embracing a rigorous "cutting edge" ethos in the conduct of teaching, applied research, and extension activities. Only very recently have our colleges or agriculture generally been forced into the mainstream of university/professorial life through "upgraded" promotion and tenure criteria, scientific expectations, and such matters. In our estimation this bodes well, rather than dismally, for the future of our colleges of agriculture; we would be surprised if the overall competency and productivity of our agricultural faculty has not been enhanced in the process. If this is true, then surely it has positive implications for our prospects for doing truly relevant applied work.

Let us face it—our agricultural colleges historically have not been exactly bastions of intellectual leadership or academic and scientific productivity⁴ and, in our view, a rather relaxed promotion and tenure system and attitude in our colleges of agriculture contributed to the lack of productivity on the part of a good many college of agriculture faculty. The probability of less competent or less motivated faculty surviving today's tenure and promotion process seems more remote than was the case in our not distant past. The disciplinary prowess of new entrants into our tenured ranks—and, more important, their commitment to sustained scientific inquiry—has assuredly improved. How can such a situation be interpreted as inappropriate for our land grant universities and the states they serve?

Administrative Versus Decentralized Agenda Setting

We come now to the point where we take rather direct exception to one of Schuh's suggested remedies for revitalization of our land grant

universities. Schuh (1986) suggests that administrators be given more authority *vis-à-vis* individual scientists and disciplinary peer associations in setting the academic agenda and regaining a sense of institutional mission. In separate letters to the editor (of *Choices*), both Bromley and Smith express their skepticism—a skepticism we share. In our view, academic agenda setting emphasizing peer-review and learned-society involvement better serves society's interests (broadly defined) than do administrative/political processes.

We, like Johnson (1985), hold to "the Hayekian notion that the totality of individuals holds more knowledge than a single central authority. . . . [And that] program decisions are best decentralized so the full talents, interests and knowledge of the faculty can be revealed" (p. 5). To be sure, Schuh's call was for only some degree of greater administrative authority at the margin. Nevertheless, we are not excited about even that kind of a prospect. There is a fundamental institutional/incentive problem, we fear, with significant administrative control of the academic agenda, especially for the artistic endeavor of research. The problem is that land grant university administrators, especially directors of experiment stations, directors of extension services, deans of agriculture, and presidents, by the nature of their positions, spend far more time moving in clientele, legislative, and other fundamentally political circles than they do academic/scientific circles. There is opportunity, and we fear tendency, for these administrators to get too close to the pragmatic short-run interests of clientele groups and to drift away from the longer-run view and attitudes of the academic community.

The result, we suggest, is that the behavior and thought processes of these individuals often become more bureaucratic/political than academic/scientific. The outcome of bureaucratic positioning and budget-maximization behavior, including the usual requirements of political compromise, coalition building, etc., are not always consistent with the pursuit of scientific/academic progress, free inquiry, or for that matter, the social interest. It is indeed the exceptional agricultural college administrator (and surely there are some) that can successfully resist the political agenda setting that is brought to bear during the necessary conduct of their budget garnering and public relations functions.

⁴ This comment certainly should not be interpreted as suggesting that our colleges of agriculture have been (or presently are) devoid of strong academicians-scientists and university leaders. To be sure, a goodly number of outstanding individuals, including agricultural economists, have graced the halls of our land grant universities over the years.

In no way should this be viewed as a condemnation of the personalities, character, or motivations of our key university administrators. It is rather just an unfortunate fact of political/bureaucratic life and process. Accordingly, to turn very much of the academic enterprise over to administrators and away from individual faculty/scientists would be a grave mistake in our view. At the several universities with which we have been affiliated, the research and extension agenda likely would have been in near-constant turmoil if administrators had in fact had the ability to call the tune. Would it really be a wise allocation of society's resources, for example, to have significant agricultural economics faculty talent devoted to the research of intrastate agricultural value-added (product enhancement) options? Does this have a familiar ring to most of you? We suggest that this would be a likely prospect for many agricultural economics departments in the United States today and for the next couple of years if Schuh's recommendation were taken seriously, just as "solving the farm financial crisis" would have been the activity the preceding couple of years. When the nonsense and futility of such effort on the part of social scientists is ultimately revealed through the hard reality of the marketplace and ultimately the political process, what would be the next agenda item of a clientele/political/administrative articulated mission? Our land grant universities have far too much to offer to risk such outcomes.

To be sure, self- and peer-driven agenda setting is not a perfect mechanism. It is the nature of any institutional arrangement that we be working continuously in a world of second-best. Individual scientists, peers, and learned societies occasionally take off on one particular kick or another, e.g., linear programming, dynamic programming, ARIMA processes, duality, welfare economics, natural resource economics, community development, international development, or maybe even macroeconomics. The list could go on and on. One person's or group's sense of a priority, relevant social contribution is another individual's or group's irrelevant disciplinary kick or worse yet, mere self and peer adulation.

The beauty of decentralized market-like processes is that if one group turns out to be wrong, then we can expect fairly rapid and orderly adjustment to market (peer and learned society) signals due to self-interest and self-

preservation instincts. It is not clear that university administrators with their shorter-run bureaucratic tendencies would be as likely to take "appropriate" corrective action consistent with the broader social interest. As we know all too well from the public choice literature, reliance on the vision, motivations, and good intentions of well-educated bureaucrats does not often lead to optimal social outcomes.

Finally, who is to say what is important and what in the way of academic activity is going to yield the greatest social value—peer scientists and learned societies, clientele, legislators, or administrators? No doubt all are going to have something to say about it. The question is, have we drifted too far in letting the parent disciplines and learned societies set the agenda? We think not. We believe the present balance is preferable to a process involving greater administrative control and direction. We also are confident that the peer and learned society component of the academic agenda-setting process will in fact take corrective action if individual members, groups, or even an entire profession gets too far adrift.

Conclusion

In summary, we have attempted in this paper to make four main points:

(a) A distinguishing characteristic of all university professors ought to be a commitment to, and a requirement for, active participation in research in support of their principal function, teaching, be their students on-campus undergraduates or graduates, off-campus clientele, or professional peers.

(b) Contrary to popular opinion, rewards and recognition of university faculty, both on-campus and through their professional associations, clearly are not exclusively correlated with disciplinary prowess and contribution. Historically, including recent history, applied-problem-focused teaching, research, and extension has been rewarded, especially in colleges of agriculture and including agricultural economics.

(c) The notion that all or even most recognized peer-reviewed journals are exclusively or mainly oriented to disciplinary research is malarkey.

(d) Reliance on individual faculty initiative and learned societies in academic agenda set-

ting has greater promise for yielding timely, high-quality, problem-focused output, and thus contribute to the land grant mission, than more administratively driven and dominated systems.

To be sure, recent reminders that all may not be well in our land grant universities provide serious food for thought. We do not wish to be interpreted as suggesting that everything is "hunky-dory" in contrast to the warnings of Schuh (1986) and Bonnen. However, it is our view that the prescriptive advice that we become less self- and peer-oriented, less disciplinary in our focus, and more administratively directed is bad medicine. While there may be a malaise, surely these are precisely the wrong medicines at the wrong time. The land grant universities may need to become more problem oriented, but the appropriate way to go about it is not through a deemphasis of parent disciplinary attention and greater administrative authority. Greater administrative leadership, characterized by a facilitative, encouraging attitude to enhance faculty human capital and productivity, may be called for; but that is decidedly different than the vesting of greater mission, programmatic, and directive authority in our university administrators.

The creative/artistic activity of teaching, including the discovery as well as dissemination dimensions, must remain as undirected, uncoordinated, intrapersonal, spontaneous, and free as possible. Effective university administration involves expertise in coaching, cheerleading, and cleaning the path of debris. Greater administrative authority in setting the academic agenda, identifying the mission, and providing programmatic direction are likely to be counterproductive to enhancing the long-run efficacy of the land grant universities and their ability to contribute to the solution of relevant social problems.⁵

⁵ Two reviewers questioned whether the role we advocate for university administrators is a bit too limited. Again, we think not; but perhaps some amplification is in order. First, our views regarding administrative leadership in terms of coaching, cheerleading, and cleaning the path of debris is discussed in some detail in an earlier paper (Beattie). The discerning reader will no doubt agree that doing these three jobs well represents near full and worthwhile employment in and of itself.

In a broader context, we believe that administrators have an extremely important role to play in determining the long-term quality of the university through their decisions and considerable power and influence in staffing, i.e., through the hiring, firing, and tenure and promotion process. One of the most important administrative functions is to improve the quality of weaker units. Administrators should lean heavily on learned society member

In discussing the proper role for our land grant universities, many people seem fond of the idea of "going back" to some earlier time when we purportedly had a better sense of mission and when our work was allegedly of greater social value. We have always been somewhat uncomfortable with the historical approach in suggesting appropriate current thrust and orientation. Nevertheless, we did a little historical investigation of our own. Actually, that is not quite true; what we did was read *The Legacy: A Centennial History of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations, 1887-1987*, by Norwood Kerr. It is an interesting book; we recommend it highly. A couple of selected quotations from Kerr's historical account provide a fitting conclusion for this paper.

Kerr notes that,

By 1887 . . . fourteen states scattered over the nation had established agricultural experiment stations. In perhaps an equal number of other states, the land grant colleges were engaged in the same types of activities on a less formal basis . . . Although their work was almost entirely practical, the station leaders aspired to more. As the nation's first agricultural experiment station director, Wilbur O. Atwater, stated in the Connecticut station's first annual report, 'It has been felt from the first that *more abstract scientific investigations would afford not only the proper, but also the most widely and permanently useful work of an Agricultural Experiment Station*' [emphasis added]. (page 16)

And subsequently, as first director of the Office of Experiment Stations, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Atwater addressed the 1889 convention of the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations. Kerr suggests that,

Because Atwater was convinced that the support of farmers ultimately could be won only by discovering principles of agriculture that were long-term solutions to their problems, he cautioned against straining resources in an effort to find a cure for every new problem the farmers encountered. In an era when the tendency

input in evaluating the strength of a unit. Strong units should be allowed to "run their own show" with little interference, even in the important hiring and tenuring decisions. Administrators should attempt to increase the quality of weaker units by active involvement in the hiring and tenure process, particularly of the department head or chair. Administrators then need actively to support the head or chair in recruiting, hiring, and retention of quality faculty. The administration should only intervene directly in the departmental and individual scientist's research and teaching agenda in extremely unusual situations and, instead, should concentrate on strengthening weak units via intervention in matters of staffing rather than program.

was to do anything to garner farmer loyalty, Director Atwater's advice . . . was a valuable reminder *that the demands of the scientific discipline should be the guide and the advancement of knowledge should be the standard of success for the stations* [emphasis added]. (page 39)

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