



**AgEcon** SEARCH

RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

*The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library*

**This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.**

**Help ensure our sustainability.**

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

[aesearch@umn.edu](mailto:aesearch@umn.edu)

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

*No endorsement of AgEcon Search or its fundraising activities by the author(s) of the following work or their employer(s) is intended or implied.*

PROCEEDINGS  
of the  
WESTERN FARM ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION

v. 37

THIRTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING

JULY 15, 16, 17, 1964

CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC COLLEGE  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA

## THE GOALS AND CONTENT OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS CURRICULA

Kenneth B. Boggs  
Oklahoma State University

This paper claims no panacea for the "ills" either chronic or acute, of agricultural economics curricula. Moreover, I want to divest myself of any inference that I am an expert. I am only one who has acquired a point of view from the routine of curriculum operation. The comments I shall make are directed toward the undergraduate program and curriculum.

It is a delusion of present day America that the only objective of Education and Science in a society of free men is to expand the quantitative stock of knowledge and that more published research, measured in pounds of printed material of numbers of articles in the leading national journals, signifies progress. The real substance of progress in our society is not in the acquisition or stock piling of new knowledge, although this may be a necessary condition for effective performance, but in the action which free men take in the context of new knowledge.

Let us not suffer from hallucinations. Knowledge in and of itself, like science, is sterile. Neither knowledge nor science are Gods, nor are they Devils. They are the inert materials of human institutions which are given life only through the human will to act. Economics and Agricultural Economics are but particular organizational forms--the means and not the ends.

What are the goals implicit in our academic curricula? In the pasture of intellectual freedom we say that we absolve ourselves of all responsibility in the selection of goals and leave to society the product of our achievements. We say that it is up to society to test our product in the dynamic conditions of social behavior and either accept or reject it. Is this, in fact, what we do? In the climate of our academic communities we have a tendency to accept the products of our efforts as the absolute truth, and as contributors, we commit ourselves to solving the acute or chronic "ills" of the social organism. In our confusion over what is true and what men believe to be true, we have built ivory towers of subject matter disciplines of "truths" each separated by huge moats of technical jargon which, at times, becomes the major pre-occupation of our disciplines. This may or may not be consistent with the attainment of the more fundamental goals of our society.

For some period of time in the history of this country, the University--even the Land Grant University--enjoyed the luxury of a secluded cove in the sea of human affairs. The heat generated by increasing technological rates of change and concomitant social frictions has removed the clouds of seclusion and laid bare the university, with its discipline oriented moats and towers for free men to observe. In today's world, the university is society's laboratory and the image of the university as a sanctuary is fast disappearing from the American dream. This is particularly true of

Land Grant institutions and will become more true of all universities as these institutions increase the duration and frequency of suckling from the public udder.

It is here that I am confronted with mixed feelings. Do we know enough about what constitutes a healthy society to try to prepare a remedy for each and every "ill", imaginary or real, for which society requests relief? What criteria do we use to measure what "ills" are and what they are not? If we could define these "ills" and ultimately cure them, what task would we assign ourselves to then?

In my opinion we have given material quantitative assistance to quantitative requests of society. But we have given little more than lip service to the implicit and qualitative goals of society. The explicit task of education in the university is to build curricula, to develop courses for specific curricula, and execute performance in these courses. But it is the implicit task to effect qualitative progress in the human mind; to provide that kind of climate that each individual may attain his academic potential. It is here, both inside and outside of the classrooms that the real process of education takes place. The professor must take what is presented to him, the raw materials of the human agent and develop this potential to the fullest extent of its capacity and abilities. He creates nothing! What abilities and capacity has been created is already there--he did not create it--! He can only develop the individual's awareness of his own abilities and capacities and thus help him to attain what he is capable of becoming. The process is analogous to certain aspects of modern marketing firms. These firms cannot create in a product something that, either in quantity or quality, the product does not already possess. An awareness of the potential qualities and utility of the product can be developed. But only in the human agent can the product act on and for itself. In this sense society does not expect the university to create something--they ask only that we develop the human resource to the fullest of its capabilities.

In this context I want to quote from a paper by Dr. John F. A. Taylor of the Michigan State University:

"Am I my brothers' keeper? Yes, as I would keep society at all, I must keep my brother and to be kept by him. With respect to that matter there is never any question. The question is, who is my brother? And that is a question for which no technique will ready a solution. 1/

There are far too many universities and professors who have taken only the "cream" from the top of the can of human resources. For long

---

1/ John F. A. Taylor, "Responsibilities of a University in Meeting the Needs of Society--A Philosopher's View" (The University and the Moral Frontier) A Workshop on the improvement of undergraduate instruction of Agricultural Economics--sponsored by the American Farm Economics Association, Bemidji State College, Bemidji, Minnesota, August 20-24, 1963.

periods of time they have suffered from intellectual obesity when the real nutritive value of the total product was in the solids-not-fat. In my opinion the challenge of the university is the development of the whole product with a minimum of by-product waste. Because we have had the cream to teach, it rises to the top of its own accord, the task has been so easy that we have been hyper-critical of the compulsory educational system for its failure to present us with an increasing proportion of top quality students.

We must view the human resource for what it is, not what we would like it to be. We must now begin to mine and process the ore from less accessible sources. This will require our professors to become teachers--not researchers--and our curricula at both undergraduate and graduate levels will need to reflect our willingness and our ability to adjust to this change. Can we in all intellectual honesty ask of others that which we ourselves cannot or will not do?

Human talents are scarce in the history of civilization because they are unique; and unique perhaps because of the limited environment in which they found themselves. Who is to say which talents are to be developed? I, for one cannot say, but an over-view of the history of science and the ecology of human existence would suggest we develop all talents, academic as well as nonacademic, within the limits of economic feasibility. What then should be the content of a curriculum?

Our curricula tends to reflect the curricula of our own training--the past! We tend to build into our courses the images of ourselves and our own special interests--rather than reaching beyond ourselves to the fundamental goals of the university and of society. If you would have your son be like you--and both you and he will try--you would have him limited by the goals of the past. I tell my own children, "do as I say--not as I do" and "be what you are capable of becoming." This requires that they give 80 to 90 percent of their capacity to whatever task they do. In school, grades are but relative measures of success. The knowledge of having given their best will establish a pattern upon which human institutions may continue to develop.

The form of a curriculum depends on the training and cultural environment of the staff, the academic climate of the university, and the cultural origin and environment of students. But this does not specify the substance and content of the curriculum, nor does it specify what the curriculum is capable of producing. For the whole of the thing may be larger than what we conceive as the sum of the parts. The subject matter should be relevant, organized and structured to the nature of the sea of human affairs wherein students must ultimately set sail. For them, the sea of the university is calm and the storms that do occur are academic. The broad sea of human affairs is not so and if our students flounder and drown, they will have done so because we in the university have failed to challenge them to demonstrate their own capacity to go beyond what limited knowledge and experience we as professors have been able to demonstrate to them.

We cannot in the normal course of academic pursuit expose our students to every detailed contingency on the sea of life or on the larger sea of human affairs. We are not endowed with that absolute knowledge and wisdom. But we must prepare ourselves, our curriculum and our students for these incertitudes. This requires that we maintain a certain viability in our courses as well as in the structure of the curriculum. It requires that we accept the notion that we are our brothers' keeper--and we will also be kept by him if we would keep society at all. In this sense it requires that we have mutual respect and faith--intellectual and personal faith in our fellow man and in his discipline as much as we have in our own ego-centric selves and our own discipline.

In most disciplines, the subject matter--the quantitative stock of knowledge--tends to be what members of the discipline regard as of paramount importance. Knowledge of the specific subject matter is construed to mean wisdom. This cannot be, because wisdom implies some degree of human judgment and the will to act. If the subject matter is important in human affairs, we need to keep in mind the response and performance of the human agent.

In agricultural economics we need to put a bit of philosophy back into our Doctor of Philosophy degree, or we may skid as a discipline into the oblivion of shade-tree mechanics. Moreover, if the participants in our degree programs are to become future teachers in undergraduate curricula, exposure to advanced courses in logic, philosophy, history and government, law, and the integrative role of education would be helpful. Our undergraduate students cannot know--nor can the professors who teach them know--what constitutes the real task of education if they are forever pre-occupied with technological detail. This is a grave danger and can stimulate a high rate of occupational obsolescence, not only for students but for professors as well.

In the evolution of scientific achievement, the discovery of new dimensions to individual subject matter disciplines broadened the scope of their inquiry. The separation of parts from the main stream of subject matter disciplines occurred in response to specific needs, but was conditioned by the intellectual climate in which the separation took place. Agricultural Economics came into being in a similar manner. It came primarily from those scientific areas dealing with the physical and biological problems of agricultural production. Production scientists were joined by a few general economists in attempting to revolve problems which resulted from the development and growth of an industrial economy and the attendant problems of a changing, market-oriented commercial agriculture. The sphere of influence and the subject matter of this discipline has also grown. The main stream of problems is still intimately tied with the physical-biological sciences, but the analysis requires choices in the perspective of social goals.

It is my opinion that the curriculum in Agricultural Economics should emphasize the integrative nature of our discipline with respect to the subject matter of agriculture as it relates to the goals of society. In

no other discipline in colleges of agriculture is this opportunity so obvious, and in no other discipline is the subject matter so well equipped to do this task.

There was a day in our history when students enrolled in colleges of agriculture were nearly all farm boys oriented to the basic physiological and biological nature of growth processes. I would "guesstimate" roughly 45 percent of our current crop of sophomore students at Oklahoma State University originate from income and activity backgrounds unrelated to agriculture. I will further hazard a guess that five years from now this percentage will rise to 60 percent--if we can offer challenging subject matter and opportunities for intellectual and remunerative satisfaction.

There are two general types of students whose reaction to the learning process affect our teaching methods as well as our curricula: the parrot type and the creative type. I do not depreciate either of these--but their characteristics reflect a condition of the human specie which we must recognize and use to our advantage. In our narrow concept of academic achievement we fail to fully appraise ourselves of the Darwinian notion that while we tend to be alike we are, in fact, uniquely different. In the design of course content and curricula, those who parrot back the things we conceive to be the truth tend to be rated as "good students", and we offer very little for those who are not willing to "parrot back." But we do not erase the matter of their continuing to live in our environment. Moreover these renegades frequently give the stereotyped system the creative shock necessary to keep it from sinking into oblivion.

Do not ignore these kinds of students when you design your curriculum. Leave room for the creative mind--typically it will not be in the upper ten percent of your grading system.

Many people do not like the term "service courses." However, we could classify all courses in a university as service courses. In Agricultural Economics I believe we can serve any and all students, but we can serve best those students interested, through background or for other reasons, in agriculture and the activities related to it.

These students may be grouped as follows:

1. Those students whose major fields of academic pursuit and interest are not in Agricultural Economics, but for whom the integrative nature of our discipline can provide a perspective of the goals of society and the choices that must be made by society that will influence their own careers and perhaps the direction of their own discipline.

2. Those students for whom the application of knowledge to specific problems in the world of service and entrepreneurship has become their vocational objective. For these students--both "majors" and "nonmajors" a more specific ability in the use of economic concepts and methods of analysis will be quite helpful, particularly as they must function in the mainstream of human affairs.

3. Those students for whom the subject matter of Agricultural Economics interests them to the extent of considering this field for an academic or research career.

Peculiarly, students tend to sort themselves into these groups, and I believe this is as it should be. We can only lead them to water; we cannot make them drink.

At Oklahoma State University the undergraduate curriculum in Agricultural Economics, and by curriculum I mean the course subject matter areas and the sequence of those courses, has remained essentially unchanged for almost 30 years. I believe we have experimented on a year-to-year basis with a total of only a half dozen or so courses. Some, we have added--to be dropped in a year or two. Some we have dropped as the subject matter has become less relevant to our discipline. But the core of the courses retained have been kept because we have not succumbed to the temptation to bandwagon every new fad. This is a tribute to the vision, training, and kind of staff we have been able to attract over the years. Moreover, until about 10 years ago, the history of this Department has been one of major emphasis on undergraduate rather than graduate programs.

Course content has been continually updated, supplemented and revised, but the subject matter areas included as the proper domain for specific courses have not altered significantly. The substance of these courses has been a rigorous adherence to basic concepts and principles--with diligent efforts to application in the world of student experience--to facilitate through every known technique--the transfer and retention of principles and concepts as relevant tools of analysis. To keep such a curriculum viable has meant that the staff members responsible for these subject matter areas have made significant sacrifices in professional status and in economic remuneration. They have chosen to spend time they could have devoted to research-- on the detailed perfection of their courses. This they have done in order that they would be able to challenge students and stir their dormant capacities. Perhaps some of you have forgotten the alternative uses of time and the marginal rates of satisfaction of these alternatives for an 18, 19, or 20 year old boy! Many of these kids drive better cars and have more money to go to school on than they are likely to have when they are graduated from the University. On the other hand, many must sacrifice academic excellence just to remain in school. It was not hard to challenge the few students we had in the years of lesser economic opulence. We had more time per student partly because research funds were not so plentiful, and the pressure for publications not so great.

Today the few students who are hungry are usually easy to challenge--but the sheer number of students attending the university makes it difficult to determine individual patterns in their academic talents. In all instances there are more activities today, more choices and alternative uses of their time. This makes the task of the teacher more difficult and considerably more frustrating. In the final analysis the teacher must



have the "intuitive feel" of his class in order to motivate them to actively rise above themselves as they are, individually and as a class. I sometimes wonder if administrators recognize the full significance of the time and effort involved. The question is, what price is society willing to pay for teaching in terms of research foregone? Is this an administrative or social decision?

In 1958 we began to offer three options as separate alternatives within the curriculum of Agricultural Economics. In essence these tend to be different areas of interest and emphasis through the selection and alternative arrangement of courses, primarily at the Junior and Senior level. These areas are Farm and Ranch Management, Marketing and Business and General Agricultural Economics (Table 1).

This is our program. If all our students were of homogeneous academic talent regardless of the level, we could do this with much less organizational difficulty. We believe--but we do not know with certainty--that we challenge even those of the lowest academic talent.

Table 1. Undergraduate Agricultural Economics Curriculum, Oklahoma State University.\*

<u>Required of All Students</u>			
<u>Agricultural &amp; Science Courses:</u>	<u>Hours</u>	<u>Specific Agr. Econ. &amp; Econ. Courses:</u>	<u>Hours</u>
Agricultural Orientation	1	Agr. Econ. Principles	3
Chemistry	8	Economic Principles	3
Soils	4	Farm Management	3
Botany	4	Agricultural Marketing	3
Plant Science	3	Agricultural Prices	3
Animal Science	3	Money and Banking	3
Biological Science	3	Agricultural Policy	3
Agricultural Engineering	2	Senior Seminar	2
	<u>28</u>		<u>23</u>
<u>General Courses:</u>			
Military Science	8	Total Required	80
English	7		
Speech	2		
History and Government	6		
Math ( college level)	3		
Social Science	3		
	<u>29</u>		

\*These are all minimum semester course hour requirements.

Table 1. (Con't.) Undergraduate Agricultural Economics Curriculum, Oklahoma State University \*

Curriculum Options			
Farm and Ranch	Hours	Marketing and Business	Hours
		General	Hours
Accounting	3	Accounting	3
Statistics	3	Statistics	6
Employment Theory)	3	Employment Theory	3
or Price Theory)	3	Price Theory	3
Agr. Finance	3	Agr. Finance	3
Farm Appraisal or)		Coop Mktg. or)	
Land Economics or)		Adv. Agr. Mktg.)	
Resource Develop.)	3	or Ag. Bus. Mgmt.)	3
Adv. Farm Mgmt.	3	Land Economics or)	
		Land Appraisal or)	
		Adv. Farm Mgmt. or)	
		Resource Develop.)	3
	<u>18</u>		<u>24</u>
Appl. Agr. Electives 9			
(Jr. and Sr. Courses			
only)	<u>27</u>		
Basic Requirements	<u>80</u>	Basic Requirements	<u>80</u>
	107		104
Electives (free)	<u>23</u>	Electives (free)	<u>26</u>
	130		130

\*These are all minimum semester course hour requirements.