Opportunities in College Teaching in the Field of Agronomy

Louis M. Thompson

There are approximately 200 staff members who are primarily engaged in teaching agronomy in the land grant colleges and universities in this country. There are many more than this number who do some teaching in addition to research. In the past, it has been possible to recruit teachers in agronomy from among graduate students to take care of replacement needs, yet considerable correspondence takes place between department heads each year before teaching positions are finally filled by competent men who are interested in teaching. For the next 7 years, and perhaps longer, the problem of securing personnel for both replacements and expansion will persist. By 1960 the agronomy teaching load will be increased by about 40 percent.

There are approximately 800 graduate students (not counting full-time staff members taking graduate work) in this country. Less than 10% of these students have indicated an interest in a position that is primarily teaching. This number of men interested in teaching will just about take care of replacement needs as these students complete their graduate work. Interest in teaching must be increased if colleges are to expand their teaching program and fill teaching positions with the most capable men.

The lack of interest in teaching on the part of the graduate students is due largely to greater recognition of research men on a national level. Research men have the opportunity to become known through publishing research papers and by personal appearance in Society meetings. This advantage to a research man is voiced so frequently among graduate students that many potential teachers turn to research for fear of a dead-end road in teaching. There is a general feeling among graduate students that the opportunities in research greatly exceed those in teaching, particularly from the standpoint of income. A survey made during the present fiscal year, 1954, however, shows that teachers are doing better than is generally realized.

Top Salaries Paid to Research Men and Teachers

There is a difference in top salaries paid to research men and teachers, but not so great as frequently expressed. There are 35 departments which have men devoting more than half time to teaching on a 12-month basis. In three of these departments the top salary is paid to a teacher. In six departments, the top salaries are the same for research men and teachers. Twenty-six of the departments are paying higher salaries to their top research men than to their top teachers. The average of the top salaries paid to research men in these 35 departments is $7,602. The average of the top salaries paid to teachers in these same departments is $7,045.

In 15 departments there is no one who devotes more than half-time to teaching. The average of the top salaries paid to research men is $7,045. In 14 of these departments the top salaries are paid to research men. The range of the top salaries paid to research men is $4,000 to $8,500. The average of the top salaries paid to research men is $7,829.

Only 5 departments have their top teachers devoting full-time to teaching on a 12-month basis. The average of the salaries paid to teachers in these departments is $5,836 with a range of $3,500 to $7,500. The average of the top salaries paid to research men (12-month basis, however) in these 5 departments is $8,208.

Table 1 shows the distribution of top salaries paid to research men and teachers. There were 55 departments but only 35 with men teaching more than half time to teaching on a 12-month basis.

Three department heads explained that the top salaries paid to their top teachers than to their top research men are due to difference in age, tenure and academic rank. The value of research men is greatly influenced by their ability to teach. Most research men do some classroom teaching, and all are called on to speak to groups at one time or another. The most valuable men, and consequently the highest paid men, are those who are good research and good in teaching.

Opportunities for Instructorships

For those who are interested in teaching as a primary duty, the instructorship offers excellent opportunities. The starting salary of the instructor compares favorably with that of other college graduates. The instructorship pays the Ph.D. while on the job. He is credited with experience while doing graduate work, and he has the advantage of establishing a reputation by the time he receives the Ph.D. degree. During the past 5 years, the majority of men graduating with the Ph.D. from Iowa State College have been to young men who served as instructors while earning the degree.

The average of the starting salaries of the instructors in 23 departments is $3,850. The average of the top salaries paid to instructors in these 23 departments is $4,000. The range of the top salaries paid to instructors is $3,200 to $4,900. The average of the top salaries paid to instructors in 35 departments is $7,042.