Improving Instruction in Agricultural Colleges

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Within recent years the importance of good teaching has become recognized more than previously in the Land-Grant Colleges of the United States \(1, 2, 3, 4\). In the past, perhaps, there was a tendency for an unbalanced swing of the pendulum toward the research side of the clock.

The First Southern Regional Work Conference on Agricultural Instruction was held June 23-25, 1955, at Knoxville and Gatlinburg, Tennessee, with the University of Tennessee as host. Participants included the deans of instruction and/or one or two teachers from the Land Grant Colleges of the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Approximately 18 teachers and 10 deans of instruction attended from these agricultural colleges in the southern region.

One phase of the Conference consisted of a period of study and discussion relating to the improvement of instruction on the college level. Some of the results are reported here.

Teachers' Group

Chairman John D. Pendleton placed three questions before the teachers' group for consideration. They are presented in order, with the suggestions and recommendations made in answer to them.

I. "What Will Help Teachers Do the Best Job of Teaching and How May They Be Stimulated to Improve?"

1. Place teaching at the proper level of importance in the college or university. Teaching, too often, is pushed into the background for emphasis on research. Teaching should be recognized and treated as an important job.

2. Make the work load light enough to enable proper preparation, yet broad enough for professional improvement. Suitable changes should be made in teaching load to compensate for committee work, counseling, public relations, and other faculty activities.

Inadequate time for class preparation is a major problem of many teachers. Expediting better procedure in the functioning of committee work may be of aid. Then, too, public relations may be consuming a large amount of time for some faculty members.

Perhaps deans and directors should take positive steps toward a more careful evaluation of service reports. Establishment of a standard may be desired, against which records of individuals may be evaluated, with a view toward preventing the exploitation of some individuals with relatively unfair work loads.

3. Have a dean of instruction.

5. Recommend that the deans of instruction and/or departmental heads give more consideration to the qualifications of the individual before making or approving specific assignments.

6. Emphasize importance of teaching and research to instructor.

7. Have the director and departmental head make a special effort to obtain adequate facilities and equipment for good teaching.

8. Devise a teaching seminar, workshop, or some other method for improving and stimulating the professional personnel may be obtained to assist with this work. The Oklahoma A. and M., University of Georgia, and Washington State (1) seminars are examples.

9. Consider means of bringing teachers from other institutions to exchange ideas and promote better teaching.

10. Make committee appointments with the approval of the departmental head.

11. Encourage the "mission" viewpoint in teaching.

12. Establish an effective system of sabbatical leave, and the words of one member, "The teacher cannot afford a professional opportunity to stop and brush the rust off his education."

(a) Give equal recognition regarding sabbatical leave to teachers and research personnel.

(b) Invest in a program of sabbatical leave. It is believed that such a program, even in time of rising costs, will be a good investment for the college.

(c) Encourage and assist the teacher to take some courses on his own campus.

(d) Consider an exchange of teachers, personnel, or sabbatical leaves for a short period.

13. Encourage visits of teaching personnel to national, regional, and state meetings and to other colleges for professional improvement and motivation.

14. Encourage professional morale of teachers.

15. Give considerable attention during the first weeks of the freshman year toward teaching study, how to organize their notes and time, and fulfill assignments. Include this type of instruction in the orientation course.

16. Recommend that deans and departmental heads receive a copy of the preceding suggestions.

II. "What Is Good Teaching?"

Encouraging interest among the highest order...