

Certifying the Quality of Agricultural and Applied Economics



Presidential Address 8/5/13

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It's All About Quality

- Our main concern is the quality of our work
- Standing for election as President of AAEA in spring 2012:
 - I focused on changing work environments
- All too prescient?

Our Conversation About Quality

- Connect forces and changes we are experiencing as agricultural and applied economists
 - To the concepts of quality attributes and quality metrics
- Identify major issues our profession and AAEA face in certifying the quality of our work
- Ask: How are we doing as a profession and as the AAEA in certifying the quality of our work?

Conversation Threads

- Definition and recognition of quality across all our functional areas
 - Focus on academic settings
- Which quality attributes and metrics are central now and for the future?
- Places where quality and quality certification come together
- The role of AAEA in today's quality certification landscape

Positioning of Agricultural and Applied Economics Depts & Faculty

- Conversation milestones
 - 1992, Dan Bromley, *Vested Interests, Organizational Inertia, and Market Shares: A Commentary on Academic Obsolescence*
 - 2013, Rich Sexton, *The Renaissance of Agricultural Economics*
 - Going forward
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Our Conversation About Quality— 1st Conversation Thread

- Definition and recognition of quality across functional areas
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Quality Certification

- Hierarchy
 - Standard setting
 - Certification to standards
 - Quality signaling and labeling

Quality Attributes and Metrics for Individuals

- Define profile or performance expectations
- Research quality and quantity
 - Articles
 - Grants
- Teaching
 - Peer review, portfolios
 - Student evaluations
- Extension/outreach
 - Program development and impact

Quality Attributes and Metrics for Organizations

- Aggregate individual metrics
 - Reputations:
 - National
 - International
 - Local (e.g., state)
 - Within college
 - Within university
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Our Conversation About Quality— 2nd Conversation Thread

- Central attributes and metrics
 - It's all about
 - Quality attributes
 - Quality metrics
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Central Attributes and Metrics for Agricultural and Applied Economics

- Research/Ph.D. program quality
 - Teaching quality
 - Extension/outreach quality
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Attribute 1: Research/Ph.D. Program Quality

- The university reputation game
 - Two metrics
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Metric 1:

National Research Council (2011)

- *A Data-Based Assessment of Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States*
- Includes variables on faculty research productivity

Questions Raised

- Maintenance of a sufficiently large # of Ph.D. programs identifying as ag & resource economics
 - And assuring recognition of diverse programs

Type of Department	# in NRC Study
Agricultural & Resource Economics	28 (+3)
Economics	118

Questions Raised

- How do departments without a Ph.D. program get on the research radar?

Metric 2: Citation-Based Metrics

- Impact factors
- Multiple other metrics

Questions Raised

- Suitability for discipline and for cross-discipline comparisons
 - Gaming
 - Nascent movement to return evaluation to the content of the science
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Attribute 2: Teaching Quality

- Clear trend to activity-based budgeting systems
 - Ag and applied economics in excellent position to grow in quality and quantity
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Major Challenge

- “You don’t teach much”
 - Response: teach more
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Attribute 3: Extension/Outreach Quality

- Example:
 - ECOP *Strategic Opportunities and Measuring Excellence Program*
 - Research and teaching metrics also apply
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Our Conversation About Quality— 3rd Conversation Thread

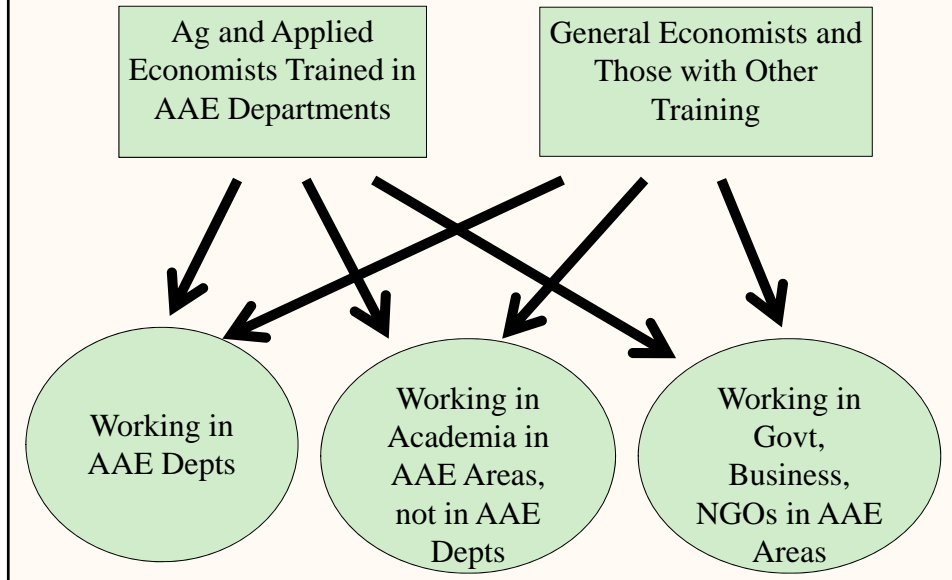
- Key places where the quality story comes together
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Place 1:

Hiring & Early Career Development

- Changing job market
 - ASSA job market becoming primary (or strong secondary?) for many departments and students
 - Results for early career cohorts
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Groups of Early Career AAE Professionals



What About Diversity in Hiring, Retention, and Advancement in Rank?

- Data collection and assessment through 2007
- No tracking since then
- Working hypothesis: If experience is similar to economics, expect relatively weak progress
- We need to collect data and analyze information to know

Place 2:

Positioning of Departments & Faculties

- I'm a veteran!
- It's about quality attributes ***and*** quality metrics
 - When reorganization is underway
 - Always in access to hiring and resources

College Placement of Ag and Applied Economics Depts

College Placement	# of Departments	% of Departments
Agriculture or Agricultural Sciences is First Name in College Title	58	83%
Agriculture or Agricultural Sciences is Second Name in College Title	4	
Business	5	6 %
Other	8	11%

Our Conversation About Quality— 4th Conversation Thread

- AAEA's role
- Quality attributes and metrics must address:
 - Important societal issues and performance criteria
 - Support disciplinary quality
 - Allow us to compete in our academic environments
- Generally facing these needs department-by-department and institution-by-institution
- Put our heads together to think more & better

AAEA in Today's Quality Certification Landscape

- Adapting and innovating over time
- AAEA Board is currently doing strategic planning
 - Input from member survey this spring
- Some thoughts at this early stage

Focus 1:

Providing Context & Best Practices

- Quality attributes and quality metrics in agricultural and applied economics field
 - Assessing quality for individuals
 - Assessing quality for organizations
 - Across agricultural and applied economics
 - Across disciplines (e.g., cross-college and cross-university comparisons)
 - Venue for discussion and communication
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Focus 2: Offering Mutual Mentoring throughout the Career Process

- AAEA has strong history in mentoring
 - Mentoring is a major area where AAEA can make investments with high dividends
 - Quality of our work
 - Vibrancy and relevancy of AAEA
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Focus 3: Providing Large and Intimate Scale Meeting Places for Interaction that Supports Quality

- Our D.C. meeting is setting a 20-year attendance record!
 - Annual meetings support & build overall community
 - Work to build even more ways to support quality feedback and networking into meeting format
- Stand-alone AAEA Symposia
 - Smaller, specialized meetings

Quality Certification Checklist for Agricultural and Applied Economics

- Attributes and metrics for
 - Individuals
 - Organizations
- Critical control points
 - Hiring and Early Career Development
 - Positioning of departments and faculties in universities and colleges
- AAEA
 - Clearinghouse for standards discussion
 - Support for quality development

Our Conversation About Quality

- Launching place for our conversation—how we’re doing as a profession and as AAEA
 - “It’s all about quality” isn’t precise enough
 - It’s all about quality attributes and quality metrics
 - It’s really about impact
 - Invite you to join, continue, and extend this conversation
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