Characteristics of Distinguished Faculty in Agricultural Education

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Introduction/Need for Research

Agricultural education has been influenced by distinguished individuals throughout the history of the profession (Camp & Crunklilton, 1985). Birkenholz and Simonsen (2009) noted that faculty were the most commonly-cited feature of distinguished agricultural education programs. Previous studies in agricultural education have produced lists of prolific authors in the profession (Birkenholz & Ewing, 2005; Edgar, Edgar, Briers, & Rutherford, 2008; Harder, Goff, & Roberts, 2008; Moore, 1982; Radhakrishna & Jackson, 1995). However, the researchers were unable to identify characteristics of distinguished faculty beyond the authorship metric. This study was conducted to identify characteristics of agricultural education faculty who were highly regarded by professional colleagues.

Conceptual Framework or Theoretical Foundation

Social expectations theory describes the process of developing and understanding group behavior. Burris posited that characteristics and routines of groups are identified and understood which leads to the shaping of group norms (as cited in DeFleur & Dennis, 1991). Norms become guidelines that groups strive to achieve and perpetuate (Hossler, 1998). Social expectations theory suggests that underlying norms in this study have been reinforced over time through professional interactions among agricultural education faculty. Reputational perceptions are also reflected through the accumulation theory of minimal effects. Exposure over time and through repeated interaction influences the perceptions upon which professional colleagues base their opinions (DeFleur & Dennis, 1991). Respondents in this study were assumed to base their perceptions on disciplinary norms developed over time as a member of the academic community. Respondent perceptions were also expected to be in alignment with normative expectations of the discipline of agricultural education.

Methods

The survey instrument was designed by the researchers. The population frame consisted of a primary contact person in each agricultural education program listed in the *2007 Directory of Teacher Educators in Agricultural Education* (American Association for Agricultural Education, 2007). Data collection instruments were mailed to 82 agricultural education programs in the United States. Respondents were asked to identify ten agricultural education faculty (currently active in the profession) that were held in "highest professional regard." Respondents were also asked to identify distinguishing characteristics for each faculty member they identified. However, respondents were instructed to not include themselves in their response. Cumulative frequency counts were used to identify 15 distinguished agricultural education faculty members. Characteristics reported for each of the distinguished faculty were summarized by the researchers. The three most frequently-cited characteristics were reported for each distinguished agricultural education faculty.

Results/Findings

A total of 56 instruments were returned, although eight did not provide useable data. Therefore, the results of this study were based on data collected from 48 respondents for an overall response rate of 59%. Non-respondent follow-up procedures were not employed. Thus,

the results of this study cannot be generalized beyond the respondents providing usable data. Agricultural education faculty that were held in the "highest professional regard" by the respondents are listed in alphabetical order in Table 1. The three most frequently-mentioned distinguishing characteristics for each of the faculty are also provided.

Table 1
Distinguished Agricultural Education Faculty and Their Distinguishing Characteristics

Distinguished Faculty	Distinguishing Characteristics
Matt T. Baker	Leadership, helpful/friendly, and scholarship
Robert J. Birkenholz	Leadership, research, and respected
Gary E. Briers	Research, leadership, and teaching
William G. Camp	Leadership, research, and teacher education
Jack F. Elliot	Curriculum development, leadership, and research
Bryan L. Garton	Teacher education, research, and leadership
Robert A. Martin	Leadership, research, and visionary
Gary E. Moore	Historical research, dedication, and leadership
Edward W. Osborne	Leadership, research, and problem based learning
Rick D. Rudd	Leadership, critical thinking, and research
Glenn C. Shinn	Leadership, agricultural mechanics, and knowledge
Rob Terry, Jr.	Teaching, research, and leadership
Greg W. Thompson	Leadership, research, and professionalism
Robert M. Torres	Research, personable, and mentorship
M. Susie Whittington	Cognition research, teacher education, and service

Conclusions

Leadership and research were the two most frequently-cited characteristics of faculty who were held in the highest professional regard in agricultural education. Several distinguished faculty were also characterized with a specific research or curricular area. Teacher education and teaching were cited as a distinguishing characteristic multiple times. Interpersonal dispositions such as helpful, friendly, visionary, professional, personable, and service were also listed as distinguishing characteristics for several faculty. Readers should avoid inferring that faculty omitted from the list are not distinguished or held in high regard by professional colleagues. Also, readers should be cautioned against concluding that characteristics missing from the list implies any professional shortcoming or deficit. Rather, this study was conducted to identify characteristics that agricultural educators consider to be distinguishing features of highly esteemed professional colleagues.

Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

Since faculty are the most frequently-cited distinguishing feature of highly regarded agricultural education programs (Birkenholz & Simonsen, 2009), targeted efforts should be directed toward recruiting, developing, and retaining talented faculty. This study reveals perceived characteristics of distinguished faculty who were held in high regard by colleagues in agricultural education. Program administrators should promote professional development efforts to enhance the distinguishing characteristics reported. Concerted efforts should be undertaken to encourage and support all faculty to continue their professional development with a special emphasis on the characteristics of distinguished agricultural education faculty.

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