

An Occupational Market Analysis of Positions in
Agricultural Teacher Education

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Occupational opportunities in teacher education are a foremost concern in the minds of aspiring teacher education doctoral students as well as current university faculty. Scully (1983) attributes this concern to what Mortimer calls the three-R's of the 1980's: reallocation, reduction, and retrenchment. Mortimer estimates that of the 490,000 college teaching faculty in the United States, 43% are tenured (in Scully, 1983). However, one cannot equate being tenured with job security in the 1980's because 1200 of the 4000 faculty dismissed from higher education positions in this country in the past five years had been tenured (Mortimer in Scully, 1983). It appears that the higher education job market is being affected by tenure decisions and dwindling financial resources. On the other hand, with continuing shortages of agriculture teachers, (Craig, 1983), the effects of retrenchment may be minimal in agricultural education at the university level.

Are the national trends in higher education affecting agricultural teacher education programs? There is limited data to answer this question. There is a need to know what the job market looks like in terms of teacher education positions over the foreseeable future. The profession needs to be aware of its personnel needs. This study is an attempt to provide at least part of the data to address those concerns.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine the occupational market for agricultural teacher education over the immediate future. The specific objectives were to determine:

1. the current tenure status of members of the profession,
2. the planned job moves over the next five years,
3. the anticipated effects of Reduction In Force (RIF) on the profession over the next five years.

4. the number of doctoral graduates in agricultural education who will probably seek teacher education positions over the next three years.

Methods

Instrumentation

A somewhat similar study in home economics teacher education, (Moore, 1976) was found useful in providing several items of interest in this study. The literature provided additional concerns of members of the profession which related to the overall purpose of this study. A draft survey form was developed and submitted to a panel of teacher educators for validation. The resulting instrument was field tested on the faculty in agricultural education at Virginia Tech. The survey consisted of 23 questions beginning with a brief section on demographics. It then asked respondents for information related to their occupational plans for the next five years. A third section, for department heads only, asked for projected numbers of doctoral graduates for the next three years who could be expected to seek teacher education positions. Because it was not a summated type survey, statistical reliability estimates were not determined.

Data Collection

The population for the study was all teacher education faculty members in agricultural education programs in the United States, the population was further defined as being all of the teacher education faculty listed in the Agriculture Teachers Directory, 1983 edition, with corrections based on the personal knowledge of the Virginia Tech teacher education faculty. The final mailing list consisted of 322 subjects in 93 institutions.

The first mailing was conducted in late September of 1983 to insure that all of the institutions had started school for the year. Because of the personal and potentially delicate nature of the information being sought, the decision was made to make the questionnaire truly confidential, even for the researchers. Thus, the cover letter promised complete anonymity and indicated that the questionnaires were not coded. Thus the follow-up at the end of two weeks had to be sent to all of the persons in the initial mailing. After six weeks, there were 234 usable responses, for a return rate of 73%. Follow-up of non-respondents was not possible, because they could not be identified. All of the data reported in the remainder of this paper are limited to the 234 respondents because the feasibility of generalizing the findings to the non-respondents could not be estimated.

Results

Findings

Because the number of persons who expected to leave their current positions over the next five years was small, the decision was made to use all responses that were reasonably complete, even though a number of the responses had missing data. As a result, there are minor discrepancies in terms of n size among several of the cross-tabulations that follow.

Of the 234 teacher educators who responded to the job market survey, 31 were from the Eastern Region of AATEA, 70 were from the Southern Region, 79 were from the Central Region, and 53 were from the Western Region. One respondent failed to list a region. There were 181 respondents from Land-grant universities and colleges, 51 from state universities and colleges, one from a private college, and one respondent failed to indicate type of school. The age of the respondents ranged from 27 to 66 with a mean of 44.9 years. There were 229 males, three females, and two who did not indicate sex. In response to the question on academic rank, 10 reported that they were instructors, 61 assistant professors, 61 associate professors, 94 professors, and eight reported other classifications. A total of 209 (90%) indicated that they were in tenure track positions while 24 (10%) reported being on non-tenure tracks. Of the 209 tenure track individuals, 154 already had tenure. Of the remaining 55, when asked when they intended to apply for tenure, five indicated that they were being considered in 1983, 17 in 1984, 15 in 1985, seven in 1986, seven in 1987, two in 1988, and two in 1989.

When asked for their occupational plans for the next five years, 181 of the respondents indicated that they intended to remain in their current positions. The remaining 53 either definitely plan to move or are uncertain of their plans over the next five years. When asked for their reasons for leaving, 49 responded (see Table 1). The most frequently cited reason (n=24) was retirement, followed by moving to another institution but staying in agricultural education (n=8). One respondent indicated that his or her imminent departure was the result of a RIF.

Those indicating plans to move were asked to specify the year; however, only 34 of the respondents were able to do so. Those giving a year for their planned departure from their current positions were two in 1983, 16 in 1984, seven in 1985, three in 1986, four in 1987, and two in 1988. Most of those leaving believed that their positions would be filled (n=44).

An examination of Table 2 reveals that the Southern Region can expect the most job openings over the next five years (n=17), followed by the Central Region with 13, the Western Region with eight, and the Eastern Region with seven. Of the total openings, 37 will be in Land-grant colleges or universities and eight will be in nonLand-grant schools. Full professors make up the largest portion (18) of the planned departures. Assistant professors follow with planned

Table 1

Reasons Cited for Leaving Current Position During Next Five Years

Retirement	24
Moving to another institution, stay in Ag. Ed.	8
Moving to another institution, out of Ag. Ed.	4
Leaving higher education	2
Position discontinued, reduction in force	1
Other	9
Total	48

Table 2

Projected Departures by Type of Institution, AATEA Region, and Rank

Region	Type	Instr.	Asst. Prof.	Assoc. Prof.	Other	Total
Eastern	Land-Grant	1	0	2	4	7
	Other	0	0	0	0	0
Southern	Land-Grant	2	5	1	4	13
	Other	0	1	2	1	4
Central	Land-Grant	1	4	1	5	12
	Other	0	1	0	0	1
Western	Land-Grant	0	1	1	3	5
	Other	1	0	1	1	3
Demographics Incomplete						3
Total	Land-Grant	4	10	5	16	37
	Other	1	2	3	2	8
	Unknown					3
TOTAL		5	12	8	18	48

Table 3

Projected Doctoral Graduates Who Are Expected to Seek Teacher Education Positions

Region	1984	1985	1986	Total
Eastern	4	4	6	17
Southern	20	19	22	61
Central	19	26	24	69
Western	0	4	3	7
Total	43	56	55	154

departures at 12, then associate professors with eight, and instructors with five; see Table 2.

The final objective of the study was to project the number of doctoral graduates who could be expected to seek teacher education positions over the next three years. To avoid duplication of numbers, only head teacher educators were asked to report on expected doctoral graduates. An examination of Table 3 reveals that the projected number of such graduates for 1984 ranges from zero in the Western Region to 20 in the Southern Region. For the next year, the Central Region should produce the highest number, at 26. For the entire three year period, the Central Region head teacher educators reported an anticipated 69. They were followed by a projected 61 for the Southern Region, 17 from the Eastern Region, and seven from the Western Region.

Conclusions

The findings of this study must be interpreted in light of the difficulty in projecting the future. Individuals' plans are frequently fragile and may respond to changing circumstances. Additionally, not all members of the profession responded to the survey. However, in light of the findings of the study, a number of conclusions can be made.

1. The respondents are heavily tenured. Of the 234 respondents, 209 are in tenure track positions. Of that latter figure, 154 (74%) already have achieved tenure.

The respondents are heavily weighted toward the upper end of the rank structure. Agricultural Education has more full professors than associates, and more associate professors than assistant professors.

3. There are at least 48 members of the profession who plan to leave their present positions between 1983 and 1989.

4. Fully half of the projected position vacancies will result from retirements, triple the number resulting from any other reason.

5. The Southern Region of AATEA can expect the most position vacancies over the next five years. The Central Region is a close second, with the Western and Eastern Regions offering considerably fewer opportunities for new graduates.

6. The vast majority of openings will be in the Land-grant schools.

7. The Central Region has more doctoral programs and will produce more doctoral graduates than any other region over the next three years. The Southern Region is close behind in both areas and in fact should produce the highest number of new doctorates in 1984 only. The Eastern Region is a distant third on both counts, with the Western Region having the fewest programs and projected graduates.

8. Reduction In Force (RIF) problems are not a major national concern in agricultural education -- at least not at this time.

9. The number of doctoral graduates seeking teacher education positions can be expected to exceed the number of job openings by a factor of nearly three to one in 1984, the most favorable year between now and 1986. That ratio can be expected to worsen in 1985 and 1986.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered for the profession:

1. Prospective doctoral students should be made aware that the job market in teacher education is not and probably will not become very favorable for them, at least not in the foreseeable future.

2. Institutions planning to begin or expand doctoral programs should consider the ethics of recruiting students for programs that probably will not lead to teacher education positions for most of them.
3. Agricultural education doctoral programs should recognize the limited market for their graduates inside the profession and gear their programs toward better preparation of their students for administrative and industry positions or for positions in education but outside agricultural education.
4. A logical step would be to strengthen cognate requirements to give the graduates skills and experiences other than those strictly relating to teacher education.
5. Internships could be structured to provide experiences in the training function of agricultural industries. This would benefit the industries which later hired these well trained specialists in agricultural training. It would also benefit the agricultural education doctoral graduate whose job options would be expanded.
6. The information provided by this study can be important to one segment of the profession. Yet such data are transitory at best. This study should be replicated periodically to make available updated job market information regarding agricultural teacher education.
7. Studies should be conducted to determine the characteristics and career aspirations of agricultural education doctoral students.
8. It is the responsibility of the profession to maintain the highest standards in its new members. To that end, the excessive numbers of doctoral graduates is good, in that it provides multiple applicants for each position announcement. That allows for selection of the most qualified graduates to enter the profession. At the same time, it is the responsibility of graduate advisors to let their potential doctoral students know in advance the status of the job market in teacher education. Having been thus advised, the doctoral student must be willing to accept the potential disappointment. The final decision is the student's to make. Moreover, the profession will always have room for the best and brightest.

References

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