

THE TEACHING OF RURAL ECONOMICS IN U.S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS: SOME IMPRESSIONS

By David W. Hughes and Bruce A. Weber

ABSTRACT

A 1993 survey of United States agricultural economics departments found twenty-five departments teaching thirty-five courses in rural economics that focused on the economic well-being or development of rural people, communities or regions in the United States. A similar survey 10 years ago found more departments (thirty-one) teaching more courses in "rural economics" (forty-four). In the intervening decade, the courses have become more focused on community economics and regional economics tools and have given less attention to broad social issues, to the long-run dynamics of development and to analytical traditions that emphasize disequilibrium and institutional change. Slow enrollment growth in colleges of agriculture and shifts in emphasis towards agribusiness are plausible explanations for the decline in course offerings. New concepts such as teaching networks offer the possibility of increasing the emphasis on broader social issues while retaining instruction in the use of analytical tools.

INTRODUCTION

A fundamental question of community development is how to address problems faced by communities. Are such problems best addressed with tools oriented approaches such as economic base studies or with broader, often multidisciplinary analysis of underlying social forces? The success of community development practitioners in dealing with social problems is in large part based on the appropriateness of their method of analysis. Academic training influences the problem orientation and general interest of future practitioners.

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Course content can play a significant role in determining how community development practitioners will address the problems they will face as professionals.

The agricultural economics profession continues to train a number of community development practitioners. Hence, the profession is an important influence on how community development practitioners analyze community problems. Further, the number of course offerings in community development by departments of agricultural economics is one among many of the determinants of the future supply of individuals who will enter the field.

Reported here is a summary of a 1993 survey of rural economics courses in United States agricultural economics departments concerning what was being taught in the broad area of the "economics of rural development." Results from the 1993 survey are compared with results from a similar survey in 1982–1983 to see how the course offerings may have changed. At that time, 31 institutions offered 44 courses relating to the development of the United States rural economy (Cordes et al., 1984). Some possible reasons for the change in composition and number of courses are discussed.

One of the main findings of this research was a shift in course content from an emphasis on broad social problems and forces to more tools oriented approaches. The shift may arm future practitioners with better tools for analyzing certain types of community problems and issues such as moving to a new economic base in the face of structural changes. However, a number of communities face deeply rooted problems such as general underdevelopment. A broader perspective by community development practitioners may be required to address these problems. Suggestions are made concerning how teachers of rural and community development economics can more fully convey understanding of both tools and underlying social forces to future community development practitioners.

1993 RURAL ECONOMICS COURSE SURVEY

Survey Response

In December of 1992, a request was sent to the heads of agricultural economics departments to obtain information concerning rural economics courses in their departments. The letter went to 76 department heads, including those in all the 1890 and 1862 Land Grant universities. Course outlines and reading lists were requested for both undergraduate and graduate courses taught in their departments that met the following criteria: first, a primary focus on the *development or well-being of rural people, communities or regions*; second, a primary focus on *domestic* (rather than international) development; explicit attention, however limited, to *rural areas*; third, *economics* (and not, for example, sociology) as the core discipline; and fourth, the course is *currently being taught* or has been taught within the last two years (1990–1991 or later).

A post card reminder was mailed to all department heads who had not responded by late January. In February, a follow-up letter was sent to the 26 members of the Community Economics Network of the American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA) listed as teaching a rural economics course but for whom we had no course outline. The directory of the network listed the teaching, research and extension interests of most of the agricultural economics faculty likely to teach a course in rural economics at a United States land grant university. Of the 76 universities in the study group, 57 responded to the survey, including all but three (University of California at Berkeley, University of Connecticut, Rutgers University) of the 51 1862 Land Grant universities.¹

Virtually the same information was requested in the current survey and the earlier 1982–83 survey. Requested information in both surveys included instructor's name, major text (if any), whether the class was undergraduate, graduate or both, course outline and course reading list. Although the survey populations were almost identical in both studies, slightly fewer departments were surveyed in the earlier study (69). However, the 1983 response rate of 85.5 percent was slightly higher than our response rate of 75 percent. Virtually the same number of departments responded in both surveys with 59 respondents in the 1982–83 survey as compared to 57 in this study.

Twenty-five of the responding universities offered courses in rural economics. Table 1 contains information about the 35 rural economics courses offered at these universities. Most of these courses were either *community economics* (emphasizing the structure of individual communities and the policy options available to localities to influence development) or *regional economics* (emphasizing the economics of rural regions and economic techniques for analyzing these regions). Some of the courses drew on *development economics* in which the long-run issues of capital accumulation, disequilibrium models and poverty/income distribution are emphasized. Three courses dealt heavily with institutionalist issues of property rights and the analysis of institutional arrangements.

Course content and method were evaluated by reading syllabi and dividing major course topics into broad categories using our subjective knowledge. We believe that the material did not lend itself to quantitative approaches and that our approach was well suited to the purpose of this paper.

Two universities—Clemson University and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VPI)—offered three courses, and six universities—Pennsylvania State University, University of Delaware, University of Maine, University of Minnesota, Oklahoma State University and University of California at Davis—offered two courses in rural economics. Shaffer's text, *Community Economics* (1989), dominated the teaching of rural economics in U.S.

¹ Follow-up phone calls confirmed that none of these three universities currently offer courses in rural economics with a concentration on domestic issues.

Table 1. Rural Economics Courses at U.S. Departments of Agricultural Economics

State	University	Course Number	Course Title	Level (U,G) ¹	Instructor	Required Text	Year of Syllabus
CA	University of California-Davis	ABS241	The Economics of Community Development and Planning Strategies	G	Refugio I. Rochin	None	Winter 1990
CA	University of California-Davis	AE148	Economic Planning For Regional U and Resource Development	U	Refugio I. Rochin	Market Centers and Retail Location: Theory and Applications. Berry & Parr. Regional Economic Analysis for Practitioners. Bendavid-Val. Cost-Benefit Analysis: A Handbook. Sassone & Schaffer.	Winter 1990
DE	University of Delaware	FREC 429	Rural Economic Development Theory and Policy	U	Steven E. Hastings	None	Fall 1991
DE	University of Delaware	FREC 826	Issues in Domestic and Foreign Rural Development	G	Steven E. Hastings	None	Fall 1992
GA	University of Georgia	AEC 471/671	Rural Economic Development and Growth	U/G	Warren Kriessel	Community Economics. Shaffer.	Winter 1993
ID	University of Idaho	AgEc 467/502	Economic or Rural and Community Development	U/G	Stephen C. Cooke	Property, Power and Public Choice. Schmid. The Retention and Expansion of Existing Business. Morse.	Fall 1992

Table 1. Continued

State	University	Course Number	Course Title	Level (U/G) ¹	Instructor	Required Text	Year of Syllabus
IL	U of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign	AE199,B	Economics of Rural Poverty and Area Development	U	Joyce F. Allen	The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination. Schuller.	Fall 1992
IL	Southern Illinois University-Carbondale	AgEc 690	Rural Economic Development	U/G	Roger Beck	Community Economics. Shaffer.	Spring 1991
IN	Purdue University	AgEc 690	Rural Economic Development	G	Kevin McNamara	None	Spring 1992
KY	University of Kentucky	AGEC 580	Economic Development Policies for Rural Areas	U/G	Stephan Goetz/David Freshwater	Community Economics. Shaffer.	Spring 1992
LA	Louisiana State University	AGEC 4503	Rural Resource and Community Development	U/G	David W. Hughes	Community Economics. Shaffer.	Fall 1992
MA	University of Massachusetts-Amherst	RES EC 482	Community Economic Development	U	David Storey	Community Economics. Shaffer.	Spring 1992
ME	University of Maine	ARE 422/528	Rural Economic Development	U/G	Steven C. Deller (now at University of Wisconsin-Madison)	Community Economics. Shaffer. Planning Local Economic Development: Theory and Practice. Blakely.	Spring 1992

Table 1. Continued

State	University	Course Number	Course Title	Level (U,G) ¹	Instructor	Required Text	Year of Syllabus
ME	University of Maine	ARE 527	Principles of Community Development	G	Dennis Watkins	Financing Economic Development-An Institutional Response. Bingham, Hill, & White. Planning Local Economic Development-Theory and Practice. Blakely. Negotiate Your Way to Success. Seltz & Modica.	Fall 1992
MI	Michigan State University	PRM 201	Introduction to Community Economics	U	A. Allan Schmid/ Lynn Harvey	The Economic Way of Thinking. Heyne. The Economics of Public Issues. North & Miller. Community Economics. Schmid, Shaffer, van Ravenswaay & Harvey. Getting to Yes. Fisher & Ury.	Spring 1993
MN	University of Minnesota	5630	Regional Development Systems	U/G	Wilbur Maki	Community Economics. Shaffer.	Winter 1993
MN	University of Minnesota	5620	Regional Economic Analysis	U/G	Wilbur Maki	Regional Economics. Hoover & Giarralanti.	Fall 1992

Table 1. Continued

State	University	Course Number	Course Title	Level (U,G) ¹	Instructor	Required Text	Year of Syllabus
NC	North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University-Greensboro	AgEc 730	Rural Development	G	Robin Henning	Agricultural Development in the Third World. Eicher & Staatz.	Spring 1993
NE	University of Nebraska-Lincoln	AGEc 376	Rural Community Economics	U	Bruce Johnson	None	Spring 1993
NH	University of New Hampshire	RECO 756/856	Rural and Regional Economic Development	U/G	John Halstead	None	Fall 1992
NV	University of Nevada	AgEc 472/672 EC 472/672	Regional Economic Analysis	U/G	Thomas Harris	Urban and Regional Economics. Blair.	N/A
OK	Oklahoma State University	AgEc 4723	Rural Economic Development	U/G	Gerald Doeksen/Mike Woods	None	Spring 1993
OK	Oklahoma State University	AgEc 5713	Rural Regional Development	G	Dean Schreiner	Input-Output Analysis: Foundations and Extensions. Miller & Blair.	N/A
OR	Oregon State University	AREc 432/532	Economics of Rural Development	U/G	Bruce Weber	None	Spring 1993

Table 1. Continued

State	University	Course Number	Course Title	Level (U,G) ¹	Instructor	Required Text	Year of Syllabus
PA	Pennsylvania State University	AgEc 533	Rural Development Theories and G Analytical Methods	G	Stephen Smith	None	Fall 1992
PA	Pennsylvania State University	AgEc 502	Economics of Natural Resources and Rural Development	G	Frank Goode	None	Spring 1992
SC	Clemson University	AREC 806	Community and Regional Economics	G	Mark Henry	Who Benefits from State and Local Development Policy. Bartik. Geography and Trade. Krugman.	Fall 1992
SC	Clemson University	AGEC 411/611	Regional Impact Analysis	U/G	Mark Henry	Forecasting Techniques for Urban and Regional Planning. Field & McGregor.	Fall 1992
SC	Clemson University	AREC 412/612	Spatial Competition and Rural Development	U/G	Buddy Dillman (Now Retired)	An Introduction to Regional Economics. Hoover.	N/A
VA	Virginia Polytechnical Institute and State University (VPI)	AgEc 3304	Rural and Regional Development Policy	U	Judy Stallman	Rural America in Transition. Drabenstott & Gibson. Rural Policies for the 1990s. Flora & Christenson. Community Economic Analysis: A How to Manual. Hustedde, Shaffer, & Pulver.	N/A

Table 1. Continued

State	University	Course Number	Course Title	Level (U,G) ¹	Instructor	Required Text	Year of Syllabus
VA	VPI	AgEc 6444	Regional Economic Methods	G	Tom Johnson	Input-Output Analysis: Foundations and Extensions. Miller & Blair. Social Accounting Matrices: A Basis for Planning. Pyatt & Round.	Spring 1992
VA	VPI	AgEc 5244	Rural Development	U/G	Tom Johnson	None	Spring 1993
WA	Washington State University	AgEc 520	Regional Economics	G	David Holland	General Equilibrium Models for Development Policy. Kernal, De Melo & Robinson. Input Output Analysis: Foundations and Extensions. Miller & Blair. Social Accounting Matrices: A Basis for Planning. Pyatt & Round.	Spring 1993
WI	University of Wisconsin-Madison	AgEc 720	Community Economic Analysis	G	Ron Shaffer	Community Economics. Shaffer.	92-93 Sem II
WV	West Virginia University	AgEc 211	Rural Economic Development	U/G	Dennis Smith	Rural Planning and Development in the United States. Lapping, Daniel & Keller.	92-93 Sem I

¹ U: Undergraduate Class; G: Graduate Class; U/G: Undergraduate and Graduate Class.

N/A Means not available.

agricultural economics departments, at least at the undergraduate level, being used in almost one-quarter of the courses. The next most popular text was Miller and Blair's *Input Output Analysis* (1985), used in four courses.

Changes in the Teaching of Rural Economics, 1983–1993

Compared to ten years ago, fewer agricultural economics departments opted to teach courses in rural and community development economics and the national total of courses offered also declined. Four departments—University of Nevada, University of Maine, University of Southern Illinois, University of Illinois—started teaching rural economics courses, while ten departments—University of Arizona, North Dakota State University, Texas Agricultural and Mechanical University (Texas A&M), Iowa State University, University of Tennessee, University of Florida, Ohio State University, Rutgers University, University of Connecticut, University of Vermont—stopped teaching rural economics courses. Overall, 35 courses were reported in the 1993 survey, a decline of nine classes or approximately 20 percent from the 44 courses offered ten years ago.

Figure 1 identifies the geographic distribution of rural economics courses in 1993 and the change in the number of these courses during the past decade. States added and dropped courses in most regions east of the Rockies. The only region of the country to show net growth in courses was the west. The north central region experienced a net decline of 7 courses.

Over the decade, the courses tended to focus more on local community issues and *economic tools* and less on broad social issues. Ten years ago, for example, a large share of courses (over one-third) emphasized poverty and income distribution. In 1993, less than one-quarter of the courses treated this subject. In 1983 and 1993, input-output analysis was taught in about two-thirds of the courses, but in 1993 a greater emphasis was placed on input-output analyses and other tools. In 1983, no courses taught computable general equilibrium models while in 1993 five courses covered the topic.

Although teaching methods were not addressed, it appeared that in 1993 more courses involved student application of tools in the analyses of local community issues. Some instructors called these applications case studies. At least one instructor assigned case studies in the sense used by NRSC where students are given background information about a policy problem and asked to identify and evaluate policy alternatives. Survey results led to the conclusion that there is more potential for use of case studies in rural economics courses than originally perceived by the authors.

The teaching of rural economics is in a constant state of flux. University of Minnesota, Ohio State University, North Dakota State University and University of Tennessee indicated an intention to offer additional courses during the coming years. University of California at Davis and University of Maine indicated an intention to offer fewer courses.

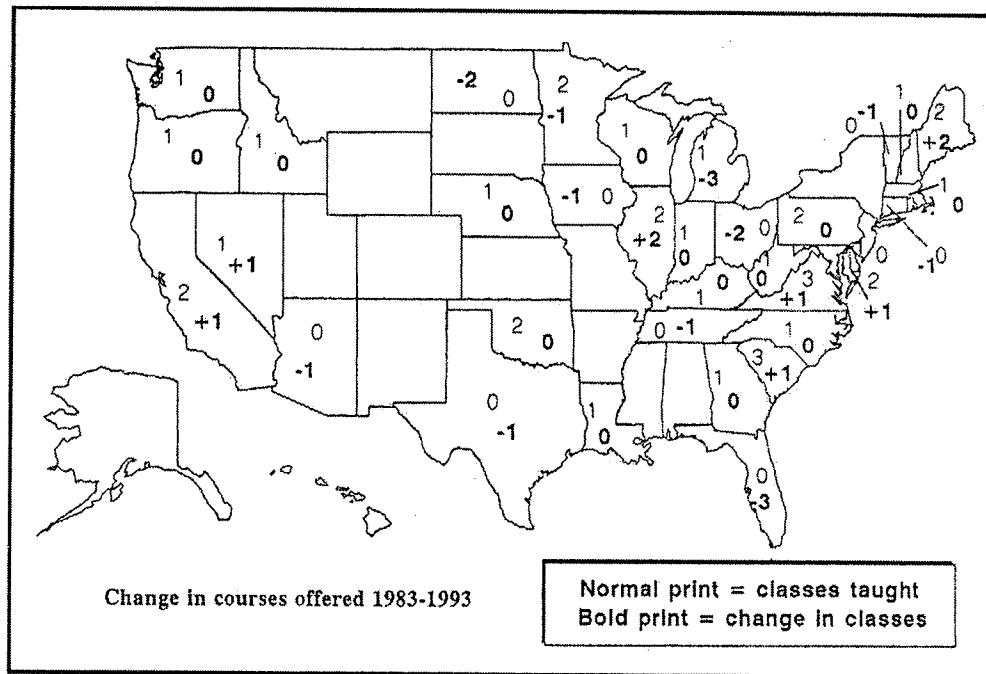


Figure 1. Location and number of rural economics courses offered at U.S. Departments of Agricultural Economics in 1993 and change, 1983-1993.

One can entertain several possible causes underlying the roughly 20 percent decline in rural and community development economics course offerings. The naturally fluid state of the distribution of course offerings makes one hesitant about reading too much into the numbers. Yet some musing about the environment in which instructors operate may provide some insight into the changing numbers, spatial distribution and content of courses.

A changing macro-environment governs education in general and in colleges of agriculture, departments of agricultural and applied economics and other departments training future community development practitioners in particular. These changes or influences are generally initiated by forces beyond the control of the various levels of academia, but carry different ramifications at each level.

A readily apparent change at the university-wide level affecting all areas of academia is a set of new technologies, especially the advent of the personal computer. Other important changes included a renewed interest in the quality of teaching and continuing budget problems. The impact of these macro forces on the content and spatial distribution of rural development economics classes is difficult to assess. Further, many of these macro forces carry similar implications for courses taught in other areas of agricultural economics and for courses in other areas relevant to community development economics. The renewed emphasis on teaching is a comparable recent phenomenon with implications for the future of all courses that are relevant to training future community development practitioners, for example.

One so-called macro force with obvious implications for course content in rural and community economics is the advent of personal computers. The dramatic growth in the use of personal computers is in all probability partially responsible for the increased emphasis on tools and the case studies approach. Computers have eased the transfer of information that students need in performing case studies. Computer programs also ease the performance of any necessary calculations. Instructors can also use simulation programs to give students hands on applications that should enhance the learning experience.

Further, increased faculty familiarity with computers has greatly enhanced our access to analytical techniques in researching relevant problems. Because teaching and research interests often intermingle, it is only natural that teaching should become more tools-oriented.

The growing emphasis on tools may also be a response to the demands of the consuming public. The business community, nonprofit organizations, and government entities look for students trained in the use of computers and quantitative techniques. In this regard, teachers may be responding to the demands for society at large.

As previously hinted, the emphasis on tools carries the potential opportunity cost of less emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches. Broad social problems and forces that do not yield themselves easily to reductionist approaches may also receive less treatment.

A different set of macro forces can be seen in the slow growth of undergraduate and graduate enrollments in colleges of agriculture across the country (Figure 2). Lack of growth in enrollment along with budgetary pressures probably explain some of the overall decline in the number of course offerings. Budgetary pressures may help explain the especially large decline in course offerings in the north central region, for example.²

Changes can also be seen within the field of agricultural and applied economics. While a growing interest exists in topics such as the economics of sustainable agriculture and international trade, the most relevant change for teaching is the recent emphasis on agribusiness. The shift towards agribusiness may be especially important for undergraduate teaching. A number of departments have either recently hired or are planning to hire faculty in this area, even in the face of budgetary problems. Like other influences, it is difficult to trace the effect of agribusiness on current course offerings in rural and community development economics.

The growth in agribusiness has mixed implications for the *future* of teaching rural and community development economics, especially at the undergraduate level. As the number of agribusiness students in our undergraduate programs

² Although it is beyond the scope of this study, an interesting research question noted by one of the reviewers was whether the decline in rural economics classes can be completely explained by a general decline in course offerings by departments of agricultural economics.

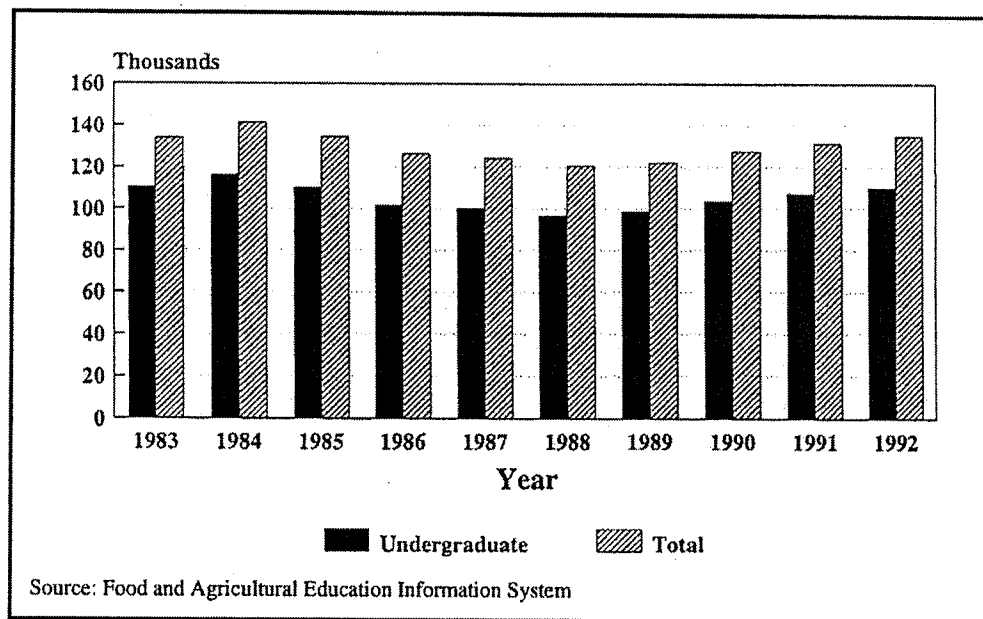


Figure 2. Enrollments in colleges of agriculture, forestry and natural resources, 1983–1992.

increases, instructors may want to consider altering the mix of classes and topics to meet the needs of such students. Location theory and spatial analysis often form a significant part of our courses and these topics are relevant to the interest of agribusiness students. Emphasizing the plant location decision and spatial markets from the viewpoint of an agribusiness firm might yield dividends, for example. Further, a business approach is pertinent to the basic activity of a number of community development practitioners who work on problems such as downtown revitalization. For individuals working in this area and for the businesses they are attempting to help, a business school approach, with an emphasis on product marketing and other related concepts, could be beneficial.

A shift towards agribusiness would in all likelihood hasten the trend towards greater use of tools and the case studies approach. As previously discussed, such a trend offers both advantages and disadvantages.

At the same time, rural and community economics are applied economics, like other components of agricultural economics. Inasmuch as the teaching mix of a department can be viewed as the outputs of a multiproduct firm (Biere, 1988), agribusiness carries a potential opportunity cost. A shift in teaching emphasis towards business principles and away from applications of economic theory may imply a shift in resources away from traditional areas of work including rural and community development economics.

On a more positive note, the macro forces operating on the different levels of academia offer an opportunity for growth in our area of study. While colleges of agriculture throughout the country undergo a process of retrenchment, they are also beginning to look beyond traditional concerns. The emphasis on new

areas of research may bode well for economists concerned with rural development issues.

The shift in emphasis is a way of avoiding or least minimizing the downsizing that will otherwise probably occur as the political power of the traditional agricultural establishment wanes. A *successful* move to a new support base of rural but not always agricultural constituency may preclude downsizing and in some cases lead to growth.

Because of renewed attention to the problems faced by rural communities, academic institutions and other public entities have shown a renewed interest in the general area of rural economic development. The push toward retrenchment and downsizing in colleges of agriculture may also give impetus to teaching and research in the broad area of rural and community development.

As pointed out in a recent *Choices* article by Debertin (1992), traditional agriculture interests groups have formed the political base for much of the commodity oriented research by economists and others in land grant institutions. As the power of such interest groups wanes, colleges of agriculture at land grant institutions and other public institutions oriented towards agriculture must tap into other areas of public support to survive. One option is to reach out to non-traditional farm groups and non-agriculture rural communities and citizens. Economists interested in problems of rural development are well positioned to help lead the shift to an increased emphasis on the more general problems of the larger rural population.³

A reorientation of resources has obvious implications for research in community development economics. Teaching will also be influenced because, especially at the graduate level, course offerings are often tied to a strong research program. The two schools which offered the largest number of classes, VPI and Clemson University, both provided examples. Both programs had at least three faculty positions that involved substantial work in the area of rural and community development economics. Both states were also well below the national average in the contribution of production agriculture to gross state product. South Carolina agriculture ranked 35th and Virginia agriculture ranked 39th among the 50 states in relative contribution of agriculture to the state economy. Neither state was among the leading states in the processing of food products (Barkema, Drabenstott & Stanley, 1990). One could argue that foresight by faculty at these two institutions has made them leaders in what we hope is a national shift towards greater emphasis on teaching rural and community development economics.

³ A related point noted by one of the reviewers was that a number of agricultural economics departments continued to offer traditional classes despite declining enrollments. Institutional inertia may be precluding the move to more relevant curricula, of which rural and community development could be an important part.

STRENGTHENING THE TEACHING OF RURAL ECONOMICS

The emphasis on tools and on a community level approach has the possible opportunity cost of less emphasis on broader social questions. Less time may also be spent examining the long run dynamics of development and in analytic traditions that emphasize disequilibrium dynamics and institutional change (Castle et al., 1990).

The emphasis on tools and the community level focus will in all likelihood remain. The challenge is, therefore, to efficiently use tools and case studies in our courses while reemphasizing broader topics such as institutional change. Those wishing to strengthen the teaching of rural economics could do several things to achieve this end.

First, the cross fertilization among the rural economists teaching rural economics could be improved. Such cross-fertilization among teachers could be obtained in a number of ways. Symposia on teaching rural economics might be held on a regular or as needs basis for example. Course outlines could be reproduced by the Community Economics Network of the AAEA or by the National Rural Studies Committee. Given sufficient demand, course outlines could be part of the 1995 edition of the Eno River Press *Development Economics Reading Lists* series. Course outlines, handouts and computer simulation programs could also be placed on an electronic bulletin board. A newly organized or existing electronic bulletin board could be used to post relevant material, including current course outlines, for access by interested parties. Journals, published symposia or books could be employed in disseminating innovative teaching methods. A set of papers concerning the teaching of regional economics at the undergraduate level published in the Fall 1992 issue of the Southern Regional Science Association's *Review of Regional Studies* is an excellent example (Blair, 1992; Bolton, 1992; Emerson, 1992; Giarratani, 1992; Kurre, 1992; & Latham, 1992). Specialized software could be developed with an emphasis on pertinent concepts and topics. Computer software similar to the SIMCITY program but adapted to problems and conditions in small rural communities would be useful for example. Perhaps one of the fiscal impact models such as the Virginia Impact Projection (Swallow & Johnson, 1987) series of models developed at VPI could be modified for such a purpose.

Second, cross fertilization with other relevant disciplines and subdisciplines such as regional economics, geography and rural sociology should also yield benefits. This type of cross fertilization could be achieved by symposia cutting across disciplines that could be held at regional science association meetings or in some other venue. Links could also be forged with other appropriate teaching groups such as the one formed by Jim Kurre of Pennsylvania State University at Erie for instructors of regional economics.

Similarly, access by those teaching rural economics courses to interdisciplinary materials that could enrich their courses could be improved. Examples of

such interdisciplinary material include *Proceedings of the National Rural Studies Committee* (NRSC). These are currently being used in rural economics courses to a limited extent. Eight papers representing various disciplines from the *Proceedings* issues were used in four of the 35 courses identified in the survey. These provided much if not all of the cross-disciplinary content of rural economics courses. An outline of *The American Countryside: Rural People and Places*, the forthcoming multidisciplinary book of readings from the NRSC edited by Emery Castle, could be made available to instructors. Likewise, information about *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*, a sociology video telecourse series and textbook by Cornelia B. Flora et. al. (1992), which includes material appropriate for rural economics courses, could be made more accessible. Other examples of pertinent interdisciplinary material include *Case Studies in Rural Development Policy*, published by the Center for Domestic and Comparative Policy Studies at Princeton University (1993) with assistance from the NRSC and the report *Persistent Poverty in Rural America* by the Rural Sociology Society Task Force on Persistent Rural Poverty (1993), which included a number of prominent agricultural economists.

Distance learning techniques could be used to fill the gap in course offerings. We see the role of distance learning through satellite courses or otherwise as primarily supplemental. Students best relate to concepts when regional applications with which they are familiar can be cited and when they have personal contact with instructors. Distance learning could be used to strengthen and provide greater diversity to what is offered on a particular campus. For schools where no offerings in community development are currently available and prospects for future availability are slight, distance learning may be able to fill the need for such courses at least on a temporary basis.⁴ Schools with strong programs in community development economics such as Clemson University could become distance learning centers. Courses could be provided over the Agricultural Satellite System (AG*SAT) or through some other means.

The cross fertilization and access to a broader set of course materials would provide instructors with fresh perspectives with which to reevaluate their course outlines. It might encourage them to frame their courses more broadly to treat issues and theoretical perspectives not currently covered. It would certainly speed up incorporation of new research into coursework in a field which is ripe with new ideas and new knowledge, and which could be a growth area in the near future.

Courses in community development should prepare students to deal with broad issues that are faced by community development practitioners. Tools of analysis such as economic base studies can be helpful in attacking the problems faced by many rural communities that are currently experiencing the dislocation

⁴ The best solution in our view would be to hire an instructor in the area of community development economics.

of structural change. Other rural communities continue to have deeply rooted structural problems such as high rates of poverty and general underdevelopment. Solutions to broader socioeconomic problems require a broader perspective by the practitioners of community development. Practitioners will possess both analytical tools and a broad perspective if teachers of community development economics can successfully incorporate both approaches into their classes.

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