

A Teaching Experience and How It Came to Pass

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A Teaching Experience and How It Came to Pass

Abstract

A trend seems abroad in the land: for more AAACE members to take up formal teaching - teaching academic credit courses in their respective land grant universities.

Meade R. Arland, "Teaching Experience and How It Came to Pass" conducted to determine how videodisc technology can be applied to storage of personnel file information, technical reference information, and video disc automated hard-copy transfer that can be updated periodically.

The question I leave with you is how videodisc technology may be used to respond to the charge of Secretary Cutler when he opened your AAACE meetings with the suggestion that the new technology be utilized with the traditional technology to improve the effectiveness of your efforts to reach the urban and rural populations, the low income and aging populations, with new technical information on nutrition and on the improvement of life and our environments. The potential is great, but there will be those who see the improvement of the traditional methods as a first priority and hold tightly to the status quo. Your response as editors and information specialists will be limited, as suggested earlier, only by your creativity and application of videodisc technology to become another effective tool in your arsenal of information services and techniques.

Notes

- ¹ Lenndert, Drukker, "TV: The Little Box Is About To Grow Up," *Popular Photography*, June, 1976, pp. 109-110.
- ² Briefed from Chuck Anderson, *Video Power: Grass Roots Television* (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1975) pp. 179-192.
- ³ Jefferson Grigsby, "RCA: Off The Roller Coaster Onto The Escalator?" *Forbes*, February 15, 1977, p. 28.
- ⁴ "The New Television," *Forbes*, June 1, 1976, pp. 24-29.
- ⁵ R. Kent Wood and Kent G. Stephens, "An Educator's Guide To Videodisc Technology," *Phi Delta Kappan*, February, 1977, pp. 466-467, summarizing Ken Winslow's "A Videodisc In Your Future," *Educational and Instructional Television*, May, 1975, pp. 21-22.
- ⁶ Rodney R. Daynes, *Videodisc Technology Use Through 1986: A Delphi Study* (San Diego: Navy Personnel Research and Development Center, December, 1976) pp. iii, vii-ix. National Technical Information Service Document Number AD-A034 857.

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Arland R. Meade

A trend seems abroad in the land: for more AAACE members to take up formal teaching—teaching academic credit courses in their respective land grant universities.

There is, in fact, discussion of a possible technical section within AAACE to delve into such teaching, and to exchange information or acquire new information in programs at regional or national AAACE conferences.

More than one track is no doubt possible. May I relate one from little Connecticut. After being thwarted about a decade ago in an attempt to establish two modest (2-credit-hour) courses in communications in our College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, a path opened in the fall of 1974. A brief narrative of the events may suggest leads to other paths, especially in the smaller land grant universities where there has been or is no teaching of academic courses by AAACE "production types." I realize, of course, that several of the large schools, perhaps notably in the Midwest, have agricultural, home economics, and community resource communicators who hold PhD's and have teaching positions. Connecticut and I are in a different league.

Here the editorial and mass media communications in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources are in a small "service department," which I've headed for 13 years. It receives all the university memos that academic departments do, but has not been permitted to do any teaching. Also, no PhD degrees are required to work in it, although I—almost by a fluke of history—hold rank of associate professor.

But a decade ago I promoted the two courses and got the endorsement of a friendly curriculum and courses committee. By labeling the courses for juniors and seniors only—"upper division" so called—total University curriculum action is not required, provided the respective professional school or college faculty votes for the course. Ours did, and the courses got as far as listing in the University catalog.

Success? No! The provost said the college had trespassed the purview of the journalism department; that tiny department, although no degree nor even a major in journalism existed in this University and still does not, concurred. So the courses were rejected on jurisdictional grounds.

Passed several years. A course labeled "Extension Organization and Policy," an upper level course in our college was about to expire. This had been conducted for many years by administrative personnel in Extension, on a permission-required, time-by-arrangement basis. We were running out of administrators willing to teach it. The Dean and Director, seemingly on impulse, said to me "Would you like to teach. I believe you could take over that course if you wish."

I did wish, and I did "take over" the course.

But the historical dozen enrolled became 26 that fall. Schedule was "by arrangement." No way could we arrange a mutually wanted time for 26 juniors and seniors, so I conducted this in two sections. One section was two hours beginning at 6:30 p.m. And at least half the students opted for this. This evening timing became a significant precedent. For the second fall (always this has been offered only in the fall semester) we removed the "by arrangement" and "permission required." Enrollment jumped to 44. And this time, we met ONLY in the evening, from 6 to 8 p.m., once a week, on Wednesday, for a two-credit course.

For the third time, a Teaching Experience and How It Came to Pass preregistered for fall of 1977.

The times and situation affect the boost in enrollment. Juniors and seniors are more conscious of the need to explore a wider range of job options. More than half the students are women. About 15 percent of enrollees come from the School of Home Economics and Family Studies, and occasionally someone wanders in from the School of Education or elsewhere.

Now, what does all this have to do with communications?

Well, it's a doorway in part to the second chapter of this story. Furthermore, any course ABOUT extension could not fail to involve various communications aspects—interpersonal, mass media and more.

The lecturing “burden” was lightened by a willing Extension staff who readily have accepted my invitations to be guest lecturers. These come to the campus from various parts of the state, a few from campus, and they include female agents and urban agents who are of minority groups. Believe me, not *only* the students benefitted: I also took notes eagerly and review them to further my own knowledge of Cooperative Extension as it operates in Connecticut. And I'm of the opinion that my communicative relationship with these agents and specialists has improved through these favors they have done for me as well as for the students.

About one-third of all classes are taught by these most helpful guests speakers. In four years not one has declined my invitation even though a few have traveled a hundred miles to their homes after 8 p.m. No compensation except personal satisfaction.

Extension people really are great people.

I queried information people in selected states across the nation, and learned that there are various types of Extension education courses—perhaps none of the 2-credit, quick orientation to Extension organization and policy as I've structured ours at Connecticut.

Source material? The guest speakers, whatever booklets and syllabi I could compile from anywhere in the country (others were generous) and an old but very useful report *A People and a Spirit*. This was published in 1968 as a report of the joint USDA-National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, and printed in Colorado under the guidance of former agricultural editor Lowell H. Watts, now Director of Extension and Community Services, Colorado State University.

This year we're adding the new *Heritage Horizons, Extension Commitment to People*, published by the *Journal of Extension*. I'm requiring this as a textbook, the first required textbook for this course.

Now we come to a “real” communications course, first promoted by me to a vote of approval by the faculty of my college. We kept out of the jurisdictional problem by the nature of the label. We catalog this 3-credit course as “Cooperative Extension Communications.” This didn't ruffle a

feather in the journalism department and, of course, print journalism was but a tiny part of my course.

With little fanfare, without being required by any student for any major or any degree, and meeting three times a week at 8 a.m. this offering attracted 22 juniors and seniors and 21 finished. The other, who worked in a printshop and commuted 40 miles, decided she could do OK without the course at this time and I agreed with her.

Now I'm aware that some of our universities have agricultural communications majors, masters degrees, even doctorates in agricultural communications defined broadly. Connecticut's story and "success" is minuscule—except to *us* at Connecticut and potentially to some other small outfits without any academic program in agricultural and home economics communication and seemingly no department of machinery to establish one.

This university accepts a "catchall" department named "Agriculture and Natural Resources," with the associate dean as department head. Listed as department members are several administrators, including the associate director of Extension and the associate director of the Experiment Station. Mostly they are listed as teaching special project courses, usually undergraduate level. There is not much activity there, but I am included in the department and my two courses are listed there. I'm also listed as available for special project courses, and often do have students enrolled. This special project category can, by the way, be a foot in the door for a trial course that might become a regular one.

To expedite matters, I urge you to acquire a dean and director who gives more than lip service to the idea that students need more communications know-how and outlook than they usually get in college. University rules of course vary, as well as do the interpretations by top administrators. It is not always true that "where there's a will there's a way." For years I thought there was no way here.

Now that we're on our way, the agriculture and natural resources faculty are pleased to have the courses, some seem enthusiastic, and several advisers are steering their students to them, especially the new one on Cooperative Extension Communications; the organization and policy course has more enrollees than it ought to have, from the teaching viewpoint.

It would be presumptuous of me to suggest what AAACE members elsewhere might need to do to establish or teach courses in Extension organization, policy, or in communications. Diversity among our land grant universities is too great.

Even I might not be so optimistic a few years from now. But now I suggest that a few more of us might create a teaching slot that will get Extension closer to the students—and force us, a bit painfully, to burn more some midnight oil to keep ahead. I recommend the experience.