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AN ANALYSIS OF THE GRADUATE PROGRAM AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

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In his paper opening this discussion Professor Henry has described the goals of a graduate program. This paper will provide an opportunity to indicate some of the ways in which a small-scale enterprise, the Agricultural Economics Department of the University of Rhode Island, can produce a product which enables the graduate student to maximize his satisfaction. We also recognize the fact that graduate assistants enable the department to achieve its goals of producing a large quantity of high quality teaching, extension and especially research with the least cost combination of resources. However, in this paper we will be mainly concerned with the goals and satisfaction of the student. We believe the evidence supports the proposition that in a small scale enterprise the unique requirements of the graduate student, both as a producer and as a consumer, are most satisfactorily met.

In discussing maximization of satisfaction from a graduate program anywhere the first problem which must be met and disposed of is income maximization. At almost any institution income received as a graduate student through scholarships or assistantships is somewhat less than for almost any other occupation including drawing unemployment insurance. Rhode Island, I fear differs not a bit from the norm in this respect and neither advantage nor disadvantage is apparent. From the economic standpoint we explain this discrepancy in terms of maximization of future satisfaction. That is, the utility to be obtained in the future will be so great as to repay with interest the sacrifices of the present. It is worth a footnote at this point to add that the alert graduate student may bring added increments to his present income by venturing into that highly risky enterprise, matrimony, and searching out suitable employment for his wife. It must be recognized, however, that this will necessitate a distribution of future money income amongst a larger number of individuals thereby decreasing the future per capita income. Another problem, which arises from the so-called acts of God, misplacing the blame to some extent, may result both in a decrease of present income and an even wider distribution of future income.

One may distinguish between the activities of the graduate student by classifying them as producing or consuming endeavors. Although as in taxonomy some overlapping of classes exists, the categories appear useful, as an assistant the graduate is a producer of research, as a student the consumer of knowledge.

The research labor of the graduate assistant at Rhode Island produces the data used by the department faculty as the basis for their learned publications. Maximization of the student satisfaction is obtained in two ways: 1. he acquires those skills in the manipulation of research tools which will contribute to the quantitative and qualitative maximizations of future output, and 2. he obtains the data out of which a thesis may be developed with the aid of the tools he acquired.

In the interest of the objective and scientific approach, which we value so highly, it must be pointed out that we are dealing with a labor-management situation which is somewhat less than perfectly competitive. Little countervailing power is possessed by the graduate student and, I fear, there does exist some oligopolistic exploitation. The wage scale has been discussed above but working conditions are also involved. If the alternative activities on a day when the temperature is 95 and the humidity is 96 are obtained time and motion studies from harvesting potatoes on South County farms or sitting at a desk between open windows and water cooler, the graduate student who is wise appears for work with a broad brimmed hat. Again, if the Department Head needs to know the income earned from poaching by the sons of immigrant Eastern European shepherds of Warwick township from 1923 to 1953 for an address he is giving to the combined Garden and Clamming Clubs of East Providence, it is the graduate student who will search for days amongst the dirty volumes buried beneath remains of past 4-H camps. However, these worldly tasks may have their own unique rewards. As an example, a very recent graduate at the University of Rhode Island, armed only with calipers, ruler and a will to succeed has attained international fame as the fastest and most accurate measurer of the damage to permanent pasture resulting from the bad manners of the loose ladies from Holstein and Guernsey. It is perhaps indiscrete but worth noting, that an unexpected addition to total utility is obtained by the field working graduate student on hot days because of the close proximity of Rhode Island farms to beaches.

As a consumer of knowledge, imparted in the classrooms by the faculty in their infinite wisdom, the graduate student at Rhode Island has three advantages which contribute to his maximization of satisfaction:

1. Small size of class--Most graduate classes are small--1 to 3 members. This small number of students allows the technological organization of production to be organized on a handicraft rather than a mass production basis. The small number of consumers makes it possible for the instructor to produce a custom-made product of instruction that emphasizes the area in which the student has the least knowledge and, therefore, have the greatest marginal utility.
2. Specialized variety--While a small department cannot formally offer an imposing schedule of subject matter courses, a system which included a number of courses whose subject matter is not fixed, provides the opportunity for presentation of wide variety of instructions, any one part of which may be highly correlated with the preference map of the student. The student concentrating in a specialized field may be enrolled in a course which is designed specifically to cultivate intensively this particular area of endeavor.
3. Close student-teacher relationship. Because each Professor must expend his labor on only one or a very few graduate students, the amount of labor which he must withhold from the research function to provide additional out-of-classroom aid to the student is not large. This means that as a problem arises in a course which the skills acquired by the student are insufficient to allow him to handle by himself, he may feel free to call on his instructor for additional help which, because of the small sacrifice entailed, he is willing to provide.

To sum up, I would say that maximization of satisfaction by the graduate student both as a producer and consumer in the Agricultural Economics Department at the University of Rhode Island is made possible by the degree to which the student may be integrated into the over-all productive process of the department. Because of the small size of the enterprise it is possible, in fact necessary, for the student to become closely involved with all individuals and all operations of the department. This allows him to acquire a diversified portfolio of investments which should insure maximum future returns.