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Participant
Ph.D. Curriculum – Panel of Ph.D. Graduates
Given at the 2002 WCC-72 Meetings in Las Vegas, NV

Presentation Outline

- Ex poste viewpoint of my experience in the Ph.D. program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- Tempered by my perspective:
 - Fall 2000 graduate
 - Two specialty area prelims taken - agribusiness management and agricultural finance
 - Returned in mid-30s after 10+ years in industry
 - Employed as an Academic Professional (staff) with The Center for Farm and Rural Business Finance while completing the degree
 - A positive experience:
 - Excellent faculty who taught
 - Informal experiences (examples):
 - Ph.D. seminar
 - Strategy seminar (Mintzberg text)
 - Student-driven prelim preparation seminars
 - Job market talks – faculty and department head
- An ideal Ph.D. program would:
 - **Develop analytical skills through *application***
 - Not just a topical or theoretical presentation
 - Give context, applications to current research questions and data
 - Industry hires? Some skills or abilities cannot be taught
 - Ability to communicate, lead and mentor in a team environment
 - Understand the whole
 - Are “divergers” made or born? (i.e., Ph.D. is just a “finishing school”)
 - **Recognize that management scholarship exists**
 - “Program perspective”
 - Allow students to integrate business courses *for credit* (i.e., prior to prelims at Illinois)

- “Paradigm perspective”
 - This is huge
 - Traditionally-minded ag economists may equate this to “dumbing down” the program
 - This attitude permeates program committees, graduate advising, dissertation supervision, departmental leadership, and faculty perspective toward students
 - Leads to schizophrenia – graduate students, new hires, P&T
- **Acknowledge that teaching training is important**
 - My experience was unique
 - Advisors – promote/support gaining experience
 - Department – provide/promote opportunities (like econ and B-schools)
- **“Practice what we preach” regarding the agriculture and food system**
 - Farm to table?
 - Support/mentor students whose interests lie toward the *consumer* end of this continuum.
 - Midwestern schools – acceptable research projects:
 - E.g., close to farm gate, corn or soybean processing, meat packing
 - But what about other end of the channel (*consumer* economics?)
- **Be more flexible and less rigid**
 - Dependent on formal program (e.g., classes) – inadequate preparation for academia or industry
 - Focus on our primary consumer - the student!
 - Allow students to design programs that meet individual needs and (research) interests
 - Venue? The student-advisor interface