

job you can do. Support them. Speak well of them. Be loyal to them. Yes, be a professional and work diligently to become a better professional.

Professional standards do three things:

- (1) Attract public confidence.
- (2) They discourage behavior inconsistent with the image of our profession.
- (3) They help show members of the profession how to get along with their clientele, each other and other individuals and organizations and agencies who also serve the public.

7. And last, but certainly not least, let us be grateful — Let us be thankful.

I suppose the incident in my life that made me fully realize how important our agricultural production, processing and distribution system is occurred back in 1970 when I was asked by my Uncle Sam to take an all-expense paid vacation to the vacation land of Southeast Asia, a place called the Republic of South Vietnam. There I was put in a situation where:

1. You see people who have little to eat (constantly feeling a gnawing hunger).
2. As an American you do not eat the food of the local economy for fear of getting dysentery.
3. You do not drink the water unless there is a sign that says "Potable" for fear of getting Malaria.
4. And there is no milk to be had.

All these good things were taken away and I realized that we take many things for granted in this country.

I love milk and cookies. While in Vietnam, I got this ravenous appetite for milk and cookies. But I could not have any. I went through withdrawal symptoms for six months. That may sound like a little thing to you, but it was not a little thing to me at that time.

One of the first things I did when I came back home was to have my wife drive me to the supermarket. I'll never forget that feeling I had when I walked into a supermarket for the first time after getting back from Vietnam. There was a whole aisle of cookies. I counted them. There were more than 50 different kinds; for a moment, I felt like becoming the cookie monster. And there was a cooler full of fresh, clean, cold milk. There all around me was food safe to be eaten. And I had not experienced that for nearly a year. I thought to myself how fortunate we are to live in a country where we have all these good things.

Our potential or power to produce food and fiber may be one of the most vital but under-rated possessions of America. It is one of the measures of our nation's strength, and it should be an equal source of our nation's pride.

We in America have a tremendous potential to produce food and fiber. And one thing that has helped make America strong has been our Agricultural System. Our strong agriculture has helped America

develop into a strong industrialized nation. Because, before a nation can develop industrially, its agriculture must be developed to the point where people can leave the farm, go to the city and provide the labor force. They are no longer needed on the farm to produce food.

We have never been plagued in this country with a scarcity of food, but we have had the problem of surpluses. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is a much more desirable problem to have. And I sincerely believe that the young people of this country should be made aware of these facts, so that we as a nation will never, never lose our appreciation for one of the most basic necessities of our society and that is its agriculture.

And I commend each and everyone one of you here today because I believe you are committed to teaching that to our young people.

Assessment of Professionalism

Gary R. Pike

Webster's New College Dictionary (1980) defines assessment as "the act or instance of assessing: appraisal" and defines professionalism as "the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person". To me, these two definitions create an image of assay offices in the old west, where miners took their samples of gold nuggets to have them weighed and appraised. When I hear the term assessment of professionalism, I immediately think of weighing students to see if they have the necessary qualities for a profession. The more I think about this image, the more unhappy I become. As teachers we all are professionals, and assessment gives us an opportunity to weigh our own professionalism, as well as the professionalism of our students. It is these twin themes of assessment, weighing our students and weighing ourselves, that I want to carry through this presentation.

If you take a moment to examine the four national reports on the quality of higher education that have fueled the assessment movement during the last few years, you can see these twin themes of evaluating students and evaluating programs. The 1984 report *Involvement in Learning* by the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education helped begin the current assessment movement, and its main focus is on the assessment of students. The Study Group recommended that institutions establish high academic standards, involve students in the learning process, and then evaluate student learning against a stringent set of standards.

Pike is an associate director, of the Center for Assessment Research and Development, University of Tennessee. This was an invited paper delivered during the 35th Annual NACTA Conference at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, June 11-14, 1989.

In 1985, the report by the Association of American Colleges seconded the recommendations of *Involvement in Learning* and went even further, stressing the importance of assessment in accountability. Titled *Integrity in the College Curriculum*, the AAC report stressed the importance of "developing evaluations that the public can respect" (p. 33).

The following year, the theme of accountability was taken a step further by the report of the National Governors' Association, *A Time for Results*. As the name of the report implies, the National Governors' Association was interested in establishing methods that would document improvements in the quality of post-secondary education.

The most recent report by the Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching (Boyer, 1987) comes full circle and again focuses on students and improving the quality of their educational experiences. Among its many recommendations on assessment, the Carnegie Commission stresses the importance of developing alternatives to traditional multiple-choice tests that will challenge students to analyze and evaluate information, rather than simply recall it.

The recommendations of these four commissions have had a tremendous impact. State legislatures and higher education coordinating boards in at least half the states have taken actions to encourage assessment efforts, and accrediting associations are requiring the use of assessment data in self-study documents (National Governors' Association, 1988; Ewell and Lisensky, 1988). As a result, the 1988 *Campus Trends* survey conducted by the American Council on Education last year found that assessment activities are underway in approximately two-thirds of the public institutions and 40 percent of the private colleges and universities in the United States (El-Khawas, 1988).

If assessment is as important as everyone seems to think, what should be the goals of an assessment program? What should we assess? When the focus of assessment is on evaluating students, it seems to me that there are three standards we should use. The first standard is knowledge of the content of a profession. Whether a student majors in agriculture or any other field, that field has a body of knowledge that is specific to it, and the public has a right to expect that students who graduate with a degree in a particular field know the content of that field. I for one do not want the advice of an attorney who does not know the law!

Obviously, no one can remember all of the information specific to his field, and in all fairness some of that information is not worth remembering. However, students do need to have the skills to inform themselves, and that is the second standard we should apply to students. In agriculture, it probably is not necessary for students to know the scientific term for the ankle bone of a pig. They do need to know how to go to the library and find out what that term is if the need ever arises.

The third standard for judging students encompasses a wide variety of noncognitive outcomes, such as understanding and committing to the ethics of a profession. It also includes a commitment to self-evaluation and life-long learning. While assessment can provide students with the information they need for self-evaluation, it can not instill in students the commitment to act on that information. Yet it is that commitment which must be present if assessment is to make a lasting contribution to the quality of American higher education.

The assessment of academic programs also has three components. The first component or step in evaluating the quality or effectiveness of an academic program is defining the goals of the program. Obviously, these goals include the standards for evaluating students that are outlined above. Program evaluation also includes satisfaction with education. I firmly believe that education should be an enjoyable experience, and the research I am familiar with clearly indicates that satisfaction with a program enhances student learning.

Once goals have been identified, institutions must decide how they will measure the attainment of those goals, and that frequently requires developing measures that go beyond traditional paper and pencil tests. One of the problems with much of the assessment in K-12 today is that assessment activities revolve around standardized tests which are not clearly related to the goals of the schools. As a result, the furor over test scores in grades K-12 for the last ten years has done little to significantly improve the quality of primary and secondary education in this country.

The final component of assessment as program evaluation is using the results to actually improve programs. In effect, assessment of academic programs is a test of how we as professional educators respond to constructive criticism. Like our students, we must commit ourselves to self-examination and strive for continuous improvement.

My own belief is that we need to establish formal mechanisms to ensure that assessment data are used to improve programs. Even though we may be sincerely committed to improving ourselves and our programs, it is all too easy to ignore negative information and delay needed changes.

All of this sounds good in theory, but how does it work in practice? As far as I am concerned, something that does not work is not a good theory, so I want to give you some practical suggestions for making assessment work in your classrooms and on your campuses.

A key ingredient in developing workable assessment programs is to abandon the distinction between assessing students and assessing academic programs. Good assessment practices will provide information that can be used to weigh both students and programs.

One way to join student evaluation and program evaluation is to embed assessment in courses. For example, two or three questions on every test that students take could be designated as assessment items. These items would still be used to grade the student, but they also could be pulled together to form an overall test of the program. In evaluating a program, the scores of a particular student would not be important, but the scores of all students would provide valuable information about the strengths and weaknesses of a program. Embedding assessment in courses is the best way I know of to ensure that assessment measures actually reflect what is taught, and it also provides a method of motivating students to do their best, which is a frequent problem in assessment.

My second recommendation is really a criticism of current testing practice. There is no excuse for assessment measures not to be psychometrically sound. Indeed, little of worth can be accomplished if tests of program and student quality do not provide reliable and valid indicators. At best, invalid assessment measures will result in little of value being accomplished. At worst, invalid instruments will result in counterproductive efforts. The preceding is intended to point out that we should not assume that because we are teachers we know how to test. I have to admit that working in assessment has taught me a great deal about how much I did not know about testing when I was a teacher. We need to make greater use of that side benefit of the assessment movement.

The third practical suggestion that I would make about establishing an assessment program is that we all need to keep in mind that measuring what students have learned involves much more than simply testing them. Assessment should include testing, but test scores only provide part of the picture. Assessment must include surveys, performance appraisals, and available campus data so that we will be able to understand why students respond in the ways they do.

As a final suggestion I want to emphasize the importance of not punishing negative results. Nobody likes to be below average, but negative results may be less important than what is done to correct them. In some instances it may become necessary to actually reward negative results (i.e., to provide additional resources for below-average students and below-average programs).

This final suggestion points out what I believe to be the real danger to assessment. In a way it represents *reifying* assessment: of mistaking the method for the solution and assuming that if a program is assessed, it will improve. Assessment is only the first step, and probably the easiest step in the long and difficult process of improving the quality of American higher education.

Literature Cited

Association of American Colleges. (1985). *Integrity in the college curriculum: A report to the academic community*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

Boyer, e. L. (1987). *College: The undergraduate experience in America*. New York: Harper and Row.

El-Khawas, E. (1988). *Campus trends 1988*. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education.

Ewell, P.T., and Lisensky, R. (1988). *Assessing institutional effectiveness: Redirecting the self-study process*. Boulder, CO: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

National Governors' Association. (1986). *Time for results: The Governors' 1991 report on education*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

National Governors' Association. (1988). *Results in education: State-level college assessment initiatives - 1987-1988*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education. (1984). *Involvement in learning: Realizing the potential of American higher education*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

WRAP-UP

The Making of Agricultural Professionals

Robert L. Beck, panelist
University of Kentucky

The conference theme: "The Making of Agricultural Professionals" implies that teachers of agriculture do have input in training students to assume a professional role in society. The charge given to this panel was to summarize the conference in terms of its contribution and to discuss how we as college teachers of agriculture can improve our own contribution to "the making of agricultural professionals."

It seems to me that the making of agricultural professionals really is a two-fold process: 1) providing the training and education necessary for a person to function as a manager, for example, after graduation and 2) preparing our students to behave in a professional manner. As I reflect back to the presentations of the past couple of days, it seems to me that most of the emphasis has been on our role in helping students alter their behavioral pattern so that they can act and behave as a professional. Thus, my comments will focus on some suggestions as to how can we, as teachers, instill a sense of professionalism in the student, i.e. how can we (in a practical, on a day-to-day basis) help our students behave/act in a professional manner? I submit to you the following suggestions.

- 1 **Act as a professional!** Students will respect you for that type of behavior. Make sure our behavior is proper for a professional educator. We can lose the respect of students if we become too "flip-pant" in our behavior. Provide a role model for them.
- 2 **Serve as adviser to student organizations.** Teach student leaders to conduct meetings in a professional manner. Industry recruiters expect our graduates to act professionally.

Summary of panel comments presented at the closing session of the 35th Annual NACTA Conference, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, June 11-14, 1989.