

AEC 977

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS SPRING SEMESTER, 2003 3 CREDITS

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AEC 977 gives you practice in being an applied economist. The objectives are to improve the students' skills of professional practice as agricultural economists and to expand their understanding of the organization and performance of food and natural resource systems. The course emphasizes developing professional skills involved in identifying the appropriate analytic tools to address different problems, carrying out analysis under tight deadlines, making oral presentations to diverse audiences, defending the analysis and giving and receiving professional evaluations of the work of peers. The class is organized around a series of case studies and events where the students participate as analysts responding to problems similar to those confronting professional agricultural economists (e.g., analyzing new investment opportunities, testifying on proposed legislation to regulate agricultural production, and evaluating a peer's professional analysis of a methodological issue). Some assignments are individual, while others are carried out in groups. The course involves role playing in presenting positions and in acting as discussants and critics. A major assignment is to organize and present a symposium, following procedures similar to those of the AAEA annual meetings.

John Staatz coordinates the course, but many members of the faculty in Agricultural Economics participate. The instructors do not teach any new analytical techniques. Rather, the case studies require students to pull together the analytical tools they have learned in other classes and apply them to specific problems, usually under time pressure. Thus, the major components of the course are:

- Sharpening your skills to match problems with appropriate analytic models and methods to address them.
- Effectively communicating the results of your analysis to diverse audiences.
- Working effectively as a member of a professional team.
- Giving and receiving useful peer reviews.

Schedule:

The class will meet Tuesdays, 12:45-3:30 in room 104 Giltner Hall.

Evaluation:

Evaluation is based on the quality of weekly presentations, effective teamwork, in-class discussion and written and oral presentations during the end-of-term symposium. "Quality" of a presentation includes (a) the substance of the analysis presented (How well have you identified the nature of the problem and

brought the appropriate analytic tools to bear?), (b) the effectiveness with which you communicate (both oral presentation and written summary); and (c) the speaker's ability to respond persuasively to questions. All assignments will carry equal weight except for the symposium, which will carry double weight (one grade for the paper and one for the oral presentation).

Students will also prepare peer evaluations of their colleagues' presentations and contributions to team projects, which will be shared throughout the term. Although these will not be a formal part of determining your peers' grade, they will be part of the evaluation of your own performance.

Readings:

There are two background texts for the course, which focus on making logical and clearly understandable arguments:

M. Neil Browne, Stuart M. Keeley, *Asking The Right Questions : A Guide To Critical Thinking*, outlines the basic tools of logic for analyzing and presenting convincing arguments.

William Strunk and E.B. White, *Elements of Style*, is a classic, short book on improving your writing. Many of its points about using clear language apply to oral presentations as well.

You should read these two books during the first two weeks of the course. For the case studies, there is no assigned text. The faculty members coordinating specific class sessions may provide some background material for the case studies, which will be handed out on a week-to-week basis. But part of the case assignments typically involves identifying relevant background information to include in your analysis.