

## SERVICE OR RATINGS?

In a previous editorial it was indicated that if a department is to receive public support, its goal should be to serve society and not merely to seek higher ratings. It was pointed out that the department whose faculty was aware of professional needs and attempted to fulfill them should gain in prestige, and that this increased prestige may be reflected in the ratings. But it was also pointed out that the department that zealously sought high ratings by trying to emulate what it felt were the attitudes and policies of the high-rated departments, may fail to attain its self-serving goal.

Perhaps critics will say that it does not make any difference what goals are sought—that no one will notice the difference between a self-serving department whose faculty seeks high ratings and a society-serving department that tries to fulfill human needs. For that reason the following table has been prepared indicating how the two differing philosophies might effect the decision-making process of a department.\*

**If the department goal is service, it should:**

1. Develop a program that is balanced between theory and practice, basic and more applied research, teaching and research, math modeling and experiment.
2. Prepare students for a successful career both in industry and in grad school.
3. Critically examine today's situation to see what professional needs can be met in an innovative way.
4. Examine its curriculum in the light of society's current and future needs, and make changes of an innovative nature.

**If the department goal is to seek high ratings, it might:**

1. Follow a specialized path that emphasizes whatever it feels has led to high ratings in the past.
2. Prepare students primarily for grad school by teaching at a high graduate level with few applications.
3. Try to emulate the innovative departments that have high ratings by adopting their programs even though it may be too late to make much impact.
4. Adopt a curriculum that seems currently popular with accrediting bodies and/or with high-rated departments.

\*The entries in the above columns are not intended to represent the policies or practices of any actual department. The table is intended to portray cases where conflict may exist between the two goals. The editor feels that his own department has generally followed a goal of service (column 1). He personally favors the goal of service as both a departmental and an individual goal.

5. Recognize and support independent innovative research on the part of its faculty members even though it is not presently fundable.
6. Support faculty in professional activities such as professional service as officers of professional organizations, service on national committees, etc.
7. Permit and reward diversity of faculty abilities and interests with some emphasizing research, others teaching or service; some doing basic research, others more applied research.
8. Give appointments, promotion, or tenure and salary increases on the basis of *all* contributions of its faculty and not just on research.
5. Encourage only research that already is supportable by outside agencies.
6. Give support only to faculty doing research, discouraging or not promoting membership or service in ASEE.
7. Expect all faculty to conform to the model that only research counts; that teaching and service are poor uses of one's time. Discourage individuality or departure from model.
8. At decision times, insist on high research paper production for all faculty, ignoring teaching or service activities.

As seen above, the ratings race not only effects the policies of the department, but also has an important impact on individual faculty members. If the department is striving for a high rating it will tend to reward activities that it believes will improve its ratings (such as the publication of research papers) over activities that are hard to measure on a universal scale (such as teaching and service). As a result, a philosophy that "research is all that counts" is followed. The idealistic young professor, whose personal goal is also service, will follow his conscience and do what he believes is important and what is right. But his more pragmatic colleagues may do what they think will get them ahead (publish papers) and may survive while he may not. Thus a department seeking high ratings can foster conformity on the part of its faculty since all will be selected, not as persons with diversified strengths, but as prolific producers of papers. Therefore teaching and service might be minimized as the competition to publish more papers intensifies.

In a department whose goal is service, all activities in which faculty serve society as chemical engineers are acknowledged. Like the organs of the human body—the heart, the lungs, the brain etc.—each has its own function. Instead of destructive competition with each other the organs cooperate and the whole body benefits. So also if a department is to thrive, each faculty member must appreciate the unique contributions of his colleagues so that as a department, they may serve society, not only through quality research but also through inspirational teaching and important professional activities.

Ray Fahien