

# INDUSTRY'S PERCEPTION OF UNIVERSITY HORTICULTURE CURRICULA

*Tim Smalley*

*Chair, Industry Liaison Committee, ASHS Education Division*

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The ASHS Board of Directors established the Industry Liaison Committee in 1990 to improve the relationship between university horticulture departments and industry. Industry Liaison Committee members represented the commodity groups: floriculture (V. Lohr, Washington State University), fruits (D. Ferree, Ohio State University), landscape (T. Smalley, University of Georgia), vegetables (N. Mansour, Oregon State University) and turf (N. Christians, Iowa State University). Unfavorable publicity in trade journals concerning the training of horticulturists prompted the committee to conduct a survey of the industry to determine if opinions expressed in the trade journal articles were shared by a significant portion of the industry. The objectives of the survey were to: 1) determine industry's perception of university training of recent graduates and 2) determine industry's perception of education needs for future graduates.

A delphi survey, consisting of two rounds of questions used to obtain consensus from a group of experts, was conducted. About 30 national experts in each commodity area, who had been selected by committee members or extension specialists, indicated their level of agreement with questions fashioned by the committee from comments in trade journal articles. The survey participants rated the importance of several areas of study for horticulture students and indicated their satisfaction with the training of recent graduates in these areas. Last, the respondents ranked the areas of study according to relative importance of being included in a university curricula.

The lack of hands-on experience was a major problem in recent horticultural graduates; however, 94% of the survey respondents agreed that internships should provide practical experience, and the horticulture department should concentrate on the science of horticulture. Contrary to many comments in trade journals, a majority of industry experts (62%) were satisfied with the horticultural technology training

of recent graduates. In fact, horticultural technology was the only area of study with which the industry experts were satisfied.

The respondents agreed that business expertise will be more important than production expertise in the future. However, they would not be more likely to hire a business major than a horticulturist for a management position. Marketing was not deemed an important area of study, but 85% of the experts thought that the teaching of marketing skill should be incorporated into the curricula. This apparent contradiction could be the result of wholesale horticulturists, who did not consider the retail aspects of marketing important.

The ranking of areas of study for relative importance to be included in the university curriculum (from the most important to least) was: communication skills, business management, horticultural technology, personnel management, plant nutrition/soil fertility, pest control, plant physiology, plant pathology, environmental awareness, marketing, accounting and equipment use/maintenance. The high relative importance of communication, horticultural technology and business and personnel management skill indicated that horticultural departments should evaluate their curricula to assess adequacy in these areas.

The only areas of study not rated significantly important by the respondents were accounting, equipment use/maintenance and marketing. If time in the curricula is needed for more important areas of study, then these three areas should be considered for removal first. The industry experts were not dissatisfied with the competency level of recent graduates in any of the queried areas of study, but the highest level of dissatisfaction was expressed for competency in personnel management.

In answers to questions and comments, the industry experts indicated that they would like horticultural curricula to present a balance of tech-

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nical and scientific training. Many university horticulture departments have already made changes in the curricula to improve this balance; if not, the results of this study should be considered when revising curricula.

A complete report of this study will be submitted to *HortTechnology* for publication.

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## SOMETHING NEW

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