

Letters

Personnel Selection in Academic Institutions

The process of selecting and appointing individuals for important professional positions in the United States is difficult to describe and even more difficult to defend. The usual mechanism is the designation by a dean and his advisers of a "search" committee, which arrives at a slate of names on the basis of discussions among its members and contacts with their friends or with persons who presumably know the personnel market in the field. Into this pot are often thrown names of individuals who are backed by influential administrative or faculty members and who are known to be interested through informal conversations or perhaps by simple osmosis.

Only seldom does the availability of a post become generally known. It may become an open secret when some candidates, having been offered the post after the ceremony of obtaining permission from their employers (in order to avoid the criticism of personnel raiding), have turned it down. But rarely do all qualified individuals have the information and the opportunity to make known that they would be interested in being considered. Open announcement of vacancies is thought to be beneath the dignity of the institution, and to limit in some way its independence and freedom of choice. Direct application by candidates appears to be a mark of unseemly aggressiveness, not worthy of a person of high, self-evident merit.

Some professional organizations have established placing services, often referred to as "slave marts." The prospective employer examines records of the prospective employees, and contact is made by means of mail-drops. Outstanding names are seldom to be found on the lists because of the *sub rosa* implications and the lack of any real confidentiality. Commercial placement services have even a lower status.

It is obvious that the present mechanisms are inefficient and undemocratic,

from the standpoint of both the employer and the employee. The system operates with limited information and invites favoritism. Would it not be more effective for educational and research institutions to announce their vacancies openly and freely, and to invite applications on the basis of stated qualifications? What traditional freedom of choice or confidentiality would be threatened by dignified announcements of vacancies in the appropriate professional journals, such as the *Journal of the American Medical Association* or *Science*? This is a common practice in Great Britain and several other European countries, and is used by many American industrial and business concerns of undoubted integrity.

With the acceptance of a more direct, open approach to personnel selection in the biomedical and clinical sciences, a fuller picture of availability would be achieved, the search committees would encounter some promising and unsuspected prospects, and the process of selection might even be made more objective. I would like to recommend the examination of our professional employment practices to the Association of American Colleges, to the American Association of University Professors, and to other organizations which have an important stake in the problem.

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Statistics Section

I have followed the discussion by Neyman [*Science* **138**, 1801 (1962)], Hoffmann [*ibid.* **141**, 1132 (1963)], and Bancroft [*ibid.* **142**, 1424 (1963)] regarding the proper role of Section U (Statistics). In Bancroft's words: "[Neyman] calls for joint attacks on scientific problems in various substantive fields by statisticians and the substantive scientists . . . [Hoffmann] is calling for

the same thing in his suggestion that Section U should perform a statistical-service function for the AAAS . . . if the statistical-service function suggested by Hoffmann were to include sessions by Section U on *creative* contributions by the statistician as well as the substantive scientist in a joint attack on some substantive problem, these should be of great interest to all."

I hope it will constitute a constructive contribution to this discussion to call attention to the Design Conferences in Army Research Development and Testing conceived by S. S. Wilks of Princeton, and guided by F. G. Dressel of Duke University. Next year the conferences will have completed a decade of "service." They seek to perform, admittedly in a restricted environment, precisely the function sought by Hoffmann. The results of the conferences are published and available through the Office of Technical Services [see Maloney, *Am. Statistician* **16**, 13 (1962)].

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I would like to propose two functions for Section U which are of basic importance and which have a good chance of being successfully performed.

1) Standards for technical communication: Section U should appoint a committee to write a set of standards for statistical results which appear in *Science* articles. For example, to what extent should the nature of experimental designs be reported? To what extent should raw data be reported? Should some estimate of the reliability of each parameter estimate be reported? Should "eyeball" curve-fits be reported as such? Should distributional assumptions (or lack of them) be reported? What information should accompany an estimate of an LD₅₀? Section U should perhaps actually participate in reviewing those papers which contain large or controversial sections relating to statistical inference. There are certainly articles which might have benefited from review by a professional statistician as part of the editorial process.

2) Statistics curricula of graduate science students: Section U should pursue a joint program with the American Statistical Association to explore the quality of the education in statistical methodology received by graduate students in the physical and social sci-