Meeting Notes, July 27, 2025, Denver

Attending:  Dave Abler, Penn State; Amy Ando, Ohio State; Tim Beatty, UC Davis; Eric Belasco, Montana State, Chris Boyer, Tennessee; Kate Brooks, Nebraska; Carlos Carpio, New Mexico State; Sean Cash, Tufts; Hayley Chouinard, Colorado State; Greg Colson, Georgia; Cheryl DeVuyst, Oklahoma State; Sean Fox, Mississippi State; Lisa House, Florida; Terry Hurley, Minnesota; Harvey James, Missouri; Lynn Kennedy, LSU; Brian Lohmar, Cal Poly; Sarah Low, Illinois; Chris McIntosh, Idaho; Paul Mitchell, Wisconsin; Kenrett Jefferson-Moore, North Carolina A&T; Lanier Nalley, Arkansas; Bill Nganje, North Dakota State; James Oehmke, Rutgers; Peter Orazem, Iowa State; Krishna Paudel, Texas Tech; Jeff Reimer, Oregon State; Troy Schmitz, Arizona State; Aslihan Spaulding, Kentucky; Spiro Stefanou, USDA; Mykel Taylor, Auburn; Nicole Olynk Widmar, Purdue; Junjie Wu, NC State.

Leadership Pre-Conference (Sarah): Co-sponsored with the Senior Section and with sponsorship from AAEA Trust it had 54 attendees, 10 of whom (from 38 applicants) received travel grants.  Target audience was mid-career professionals – e.g., associate profs, ~7-year post PhD.  Last held 3 years ago, some ideas for the next iteration included incorporating more in-depth coverage of some aspects of leadership – e.g., personality assessment.  Some discussion ensued about pros/cons of developing an AAEA Leadership Development program – including the degree to which it might duplicate existing programs such as Lead21, Food Systems Leadership Institute (FSLI), or institutional programs.  It was suggested that the section create a shared document with information about existing programs for leadership development.  Discussion touched on: i) the possibility of piggybacking on USDA leadership/mentoring programs but that was not considered feasible, ii) creating an AAEA event and/or award for graduate/undergraduate coordinators and demonstrating the value of such roles in enhancing one’s administrative CV.

Access Task Force Survey (Sarah):

Key takeaways

* top priority is networking and mentoring
* biggest barrier to participation is cost
* industry connections highly valued

What can CHAIRS do viz-a-viz these findings?  A few suggestions ..

* Sarah – discusses AAEA with new graduate students at their orientation – what it is, why they should join
* “ask-a-chair” Zoom meetings re job market issues – could address apparent demand for ways to engage during the year
* Many PhD grads are interested in working in industry but faculty, in general, are not all that well prepared to help them
* SAEA has an Industry section that holds workshops – e.g., on software used in industry
* Lanier – has a former student currently head of HR for WalMart
* Association of Business Economists holds webinars, workshops
* Maybe a track session next year in conjunction with Grad Student section.

In closing, a number of those present (Bill Nganje, Paul Mitchell, Brian Lohmar, others ?) volunteered to help with exploring these ideas further.

Undergraduate recruiting: Some departments (North Dakota State, ..) are experiencing declining enrolment while business schools at the same institution continue to grow. Other departments are seeing growth – Illinois up to 950 with ¼ of those in Financial Planning, ¼ in Consumer Economics and Finance – a good number of whom had applied to but were rejected by the business school.  Brief discussion ensued with members sharing some recruiting practices ..

* Connections with High-School Ag teachers and guidance counselors (Lisa uses a podcast)
* Connections with Future Farmers of America (FFA)
* Articulation agreements with Junior colleges

Public perception of academia:  Can AAEA do more to make the case for academia, to promote the value of our teaching, research, Extension?  Comments included

* importance of demonstrating impact, but also noted that misuse of IMPLAN modeling can make us all look bad,
* the idea that commodity groups, for whom land grants do a lot of R&D, are in a position to offer support,
* the idea that because it’s mostly elite institutions that are under attack, land grants are better positioned to lead the reconnection with the public.
  + however, not everyone, including some state legislators, knows what a land grant is.
  + do we tell our students that they are at a land-grant institution?
  + the value of bringing students to state capitals to meet with legislators
* how to convey the value of a BS degree – what you are when you earn a BS versus when you complete a 12-week bootcamp
* need champions for public R&D

Graduate enrollment: Will be lower this coming fall at some institutions – Wisconsin, Minnesota, Purdue. Others have made their typical number of offers and have not rescinded any.  Some international students are experiencing delays getting visas and won’t arrive in time – Arizona State is creating shadow online course to accommodate.

There was discussion about whether we are training more PhD students than the job market can reasonably absorb. “Rightsizing” can be challenging.  Some departments thinking about every other year admission – which comes with logistical challenges – teaching loads, etc.  Could departments coordinate?

A growing concern is students accepting multiple offers and then withdrawing from one or more programs after April 15. Could departments collaborate or share information (e.g., lists of April 15 acceptances) to mitigate the uncertainty and improve planning?

Other topics:

* Departmental culture: At some institutions, faculty not regularly coming to the office is seen as a concern and leading to a loss of a sense of community.  It was suggested, however, that coming to the office and having a sense of community may not necessarily be correlated.
* Extension/teaching faculty: Do they see AAEA as a place to connect?
* Job openings: A number of departments are hiring – Kentucky, Oklahoma State, North Dakota State, Iowa State, ..
* Ag Law Positions: The nature of these positions varies across departments where the topic is taught – some have tenure track positions, others use instructors.