

Proposal for a Rock Ethics Institute Co-Hire Faculty Position

March 7, 2014

Proposed position

Title: Professor of Rural Sociology

Rank: Assistant/Associate

Departments: Agricultural Economics, Sociology & Education (tenure home); Food Science
(collaborating department)

College: Agricultural Sciences

Description and justification for a Food Ethics co-hire position

This co-hire faculty position at the advanced assistant or associate professor level will provide interdisciplinary expertise in research and teaching in the areas of food and agricultural ethics and policy, focusing on issues surrounding the production and consumption of food. Recent and ongoing changes at the global, national and local levels indicate the need for more focused academic attention to the multiple and sometimes competing goals for food and agricultural systems, the crucial role of stakeholder values and interests in decisions about food and agriculture, and the distribution of benefits and risks within and across societies. Pressing public concerns now include a growing population, climate change, declining agro-biodiversity, changes in the sources and influence of funding for food and agricultural research, continuing food insecurity, and public health challenges such as obesity and diabetes. These and other issues heighten the importance of ethical and policy questions regarding current and future patterns of innovation, development and management of food and agricultural systems. This position will advance research and scholarship on ethical issues and implications of technological, environmental, social, economic and policy changes now shaping food and agricultural systems at multiple scales.

The holder of this position will develop a research program that integrates social science and ethical perspectives to examine current and emerging issues and developments relevant across the broad domain of the agricultural sciences, with particular emphasis on concerns relevant to food science. The faculty member's research program will advance cutting edge disciplinary social science to examine the social impacts and ethical implications of new and/or proposed technologies, practices or policies that influence the distribution of risks and benefits across global and local food and agricultural systems. Because food and agricultural systems are complex, involving social, economic, technical and biological dimensions, and now undergoing rapid and sometimes unexpected changes, this faculty position necessitates interest in and commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration and scholarship. The faculty member must recognize and support the strengths of traditional discipline-based scientific inquiry, while also contributing to the development and implementation of innovative models of interdisciplinary research that will increase ethically informed understanding of the challenges now facing food and agricultural systems and the implications of various proposed solutions. The position holder will be expected to exercise leadership within interdisciplinary research collaborations between social and natural scientists to investigate and integrate social, technical and ethical dimensions of current and proposed innovations and changes in food and agricultural systems.

This position will also provide a leadership role in integrating ethics-focused perspectives into the curriculum in the College of Agricultural Sciences. Although the College of Agricultural Sciences has previously offered an entry level agricultural ethics course (Ag 160), there is at present no one undergraduate or graduate course dedicated to the intended focus of this position.

This position will help to rectify this situation through one or more possible contributions to undergraduate education in the College, such as the following:

1. Developing an intermediate level undergraduate course that uses a case study approach to examine (and compare) a set of relevant food and agricultural issues through an applied ethics lens. This activity could be part of the 25 percent commitment to ethics-related initiatives in the Department or College and could be structured to fill a Gen Ed requirement. Depending on design, such a course could be offered through one or more undergraduate programs in the AESE Dept. (e.g., Agribusiness Management [AG BM], Community, Environment and Development [CED] or Agricultural Sciences [AG SC]). It could be cross-listed through the Food Science Dept. and would have potential for cross-listing with other interested undergraduate programs in the College of Agricultural Sciences. Given current public and popular interest in food and agricultural issues, such a course would also be attractive to students from outside the College of Agricultural Sciences.
2. Developing ethics-related modules to include in Ag 150, the required Freshman Seminar in the College of Agricultural Sciences, so that students entering the College are exposed early on to the importance of ethical inquiry and discussion about the purposes, interconnections and broader intended and unintended impacts of technologies and practices in contemporary food and agricultural systems.
3. Co-teaching an upper-level undergraduate course in Food Science in order to infuse considerations of ethical leadership and decision-making into food science and technology professional training. Such a course would address the practice of food science professionals, including ethical concerns about launching a new product, initiating a recall, initiating company-sponsored research, reporting a supervisor for an unsafe product, negotiating with farmers, and marketing.

At the graduate level, the faculty member would teach in the Rural Sociology graduate program, contributing new, ethically focused expertise to the Program's food and agriculture signature area. He or she would teach one or more graduate courses related to their social science interest and expertise on food and agricultural systems, with particular attention to ethical issues, implications and/or applications. The position would help to meet current Rural Sociology graduate student demand for more "advanced topics" social science coursework related to food and agricultural systems. This graduate level instruction would be designed to align with the College's growing dual title graduate program in International Agriculture and Development, and would likely also contribute to the new University-level dual title graduate program in Bioethics.

This position aligns particularly well with the Rock Ethics Institute's current wider bioethics initiative, and within that, the Institute's more recent interest and activities related to food ethics. Because climate change shapes patterns of agricultural production, food supply and for some populations, issues of diet and health, a co-hire position addressing food and agricultural ethics could also intersect with and enhance the Rock Ethics Institute's climate change initiative.

COAS departments partnering on this co-hire position

Although this position would be centered in the AESE Department and based foremost within the department's Rural Sociology "cluster," it is intended to strengthen wider social and natural science scholarship in the College by delivering a highly integrative ethics focus in both research and teaching. The AESE Department Head and AESE faculty members are strongly supportive of the proposed position, as noted in Dr. Ann Tickamyer's supporting letter. The Food Science Department Head and Food Science faculty have expressed strong interest in collaborating on this position, as indicated in Dr. Bob Roberts' supporting letter. On a more informal level, individual faculty in the Plant Sciences Department have also expressed interest in bringing such a faculty position within the College. We anticipate numerous opportunities for this position to link with and complement broad ethics-related initiatives of other COAS departments and units elsewhere in the University.

The position's fit with proposing departments' and the College's strategic initiatives

Depending on the specific research expertise and interests of the individual hired, the position should align very well with at least one of the three new AESE Department strategic initiatives addressing food and agricultural systems. We anticipate that the position is most likely to support Initiative One, which centers on advancing social science scholarship that explores the interconnections between food, behavior and health and/or Initiative Three, which coordinates and leads social science scholarship on issues of food security and food system sustainability. It may also enhance activities related to Initiative Two, which focuses on developing knowledge to enhance entrepreneurship and innovation addressing food, agriculture and bio-renewables.

This position also complements the current Food Science strategic plan, especially its “directions for change” focused on 1) Food Safety, Security and Sustainability; 2) Internationalization; and 3) Food Choice. These are areas that have clear ethical dimensions that cannot be adequately considered with current Food Science faculty expertise. For example, how different groups of people consider the risks of a food additive or of raw milk, how international trade in food ingredients affects the lives of people across the world, how food choices are edited by marketers or by NGOs are all questions that necessitate an ethical lens that would be the distinctive contribution of this position.

With respect to the College of Agricultural Sciences, this position supports two of the College's three broad strategic initiatives. Goal A of the College seeks to “Enhance Student Success and Optimize Enrollment.” Through highlighting ethical challenges and developing student competencies for informed ethical analysis and ethical leadership, this position advances the College plan for increasing student leadership, promoting high standards of ethical behavior and values, and working more effectively and responsibly in a global society. Goal B of the College seeks to “Empower the engines of discovery and application.” This position strongly complements the College Plan's emphasis on research that approaches agricultural and environmental challenges as complex integrated systems. Incorporating considerations of ethics into research questions, cultures and practices will strengthen our systems-oriented inquiries and increase the value and impact of solutions generated by research in the College.

List of potential collaborating faculty in the College of Agricultural Sciences

- Dept. of Agricultural Economics, Sociology & Education: *[potential collaborating faculty names]*
- Dept. of Food Science: *[potential collaborating faculty names]*
- Dept. of Plant Sciences: *[potential collaborating faculty names]*

Job Advertisement

- POSITION: Assistant/Associate Professor of Rural Sociology
- STARTING DATE: August 15, 2015
- DESCRIPTION AND RESPONSIBILITIES: The Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology & Education, College of Agricultural Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University, seeks applicants to fill a tenure track appointment at the rank of Assistant or Associate Professor to teach and conduct social science research addressing food and agricultural ethics and policy. This is part of a transformative series of co-funded hires in ethics designed to ensure that Penn State becomes a leader in ethics-informed interdisciplinary research and the integration of ethical literacy throughout the Penn State curriculum. It is one of twelve tenure-track appointments funded by the University to augment the Penn State mission in this important area. Co-funded faculty will be hosted as affiliate faculty in the Penn State Rock Ethics Institute (rockethics.psu.edu). We are seeking candidates who will build on the Rock Ethics Institute's tradition of excellence in collaborative, interdisciplinary ethics research and ethically informed decision support for significant societal issues, as well as their success in integrating ethics into the curriculum. We are interested in scholars who will advance cutting edge social science examining the social impacts and ethical implications of new and/or proposed technologies, practices and/or policies that influence the distribution of risks and benefits across global and local food and agricultural systems. Candidates should also demonstrate a record of and/or potential for conducting and leading innovative, collaborative interdisciplinary research that embeds ethical analysis into research projects, including decision support research, and who have experience and interest in integrating ethics in undergraduate and graduate curriculum. The position will involve 50 percent time on research, teaching, and service in the Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology and Education; 25 percent time working on ethics teaching and research initiatives in the Dept. of Food Science and across the College of Agricultural Sciences more generally; and 25 percent time working on university-level ethics research and teaching initiatives centered in Penn State University's Rock Ethics Institute. The Rock Ethics Institute co-funds this position, which is a nine-month, full-time appointment. Teaching responsibilities will include the equivalent of four courses per year. The candidate will contribute to undergraduate teaching within the Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology & Education, with the potential for cross-listing of courses with other departments in the College of Agricultural Sciences, such as Food Science. The candidate will also contribute to the Department's graduate program in Rural Sociology, which also participates in Penn State dual-title degree graduate programs in International Agriculture and Development, Demography, Human Dimensions of Natural Resources and Environment, and Women's Studies. The candidate will also will be Affiliate Faculty in the Rock Ethics Institute and receive a one-course release for the first five years designed to enhance collaboration with faculty and students on existing ethics research and curricular initiatives as well as building new initiatives and programs in conjunction with the Institute's mission.
- QUALIFICATIONS: Ph.D. in rural sociology, sociology or a related social science discipline, or philosophy. Demonstrable expertise in applied ethics and/or philosophy desirable.
- SALARY: Competitive, commensurate with qualifications and experience.
- APPLICATION: Applications should be submitted electronically and should include a letter of application, a CV, three recommendation letters, and a statement of how the candidate's work is relevant to the University and Rock Ethics Institute's vision and how such a position is likely to augment his or her own work.
- [Address to send completed materials]*
- CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS: Review of applications will begin November 30, 2014, and will continue until a qualified candidate is identified.

Penn State University is committed to affirmative action, equal opportunity and diversity in its workplace. We encourage applications from individuals from diverse backgrounds.