



Maintaining viable plant pathology programs in multidisciplinary departments

Darin Eastburn
University of Illinois
Department of Crop Sciences
eastburn@illinois.edu



US Plant Pathology Programs

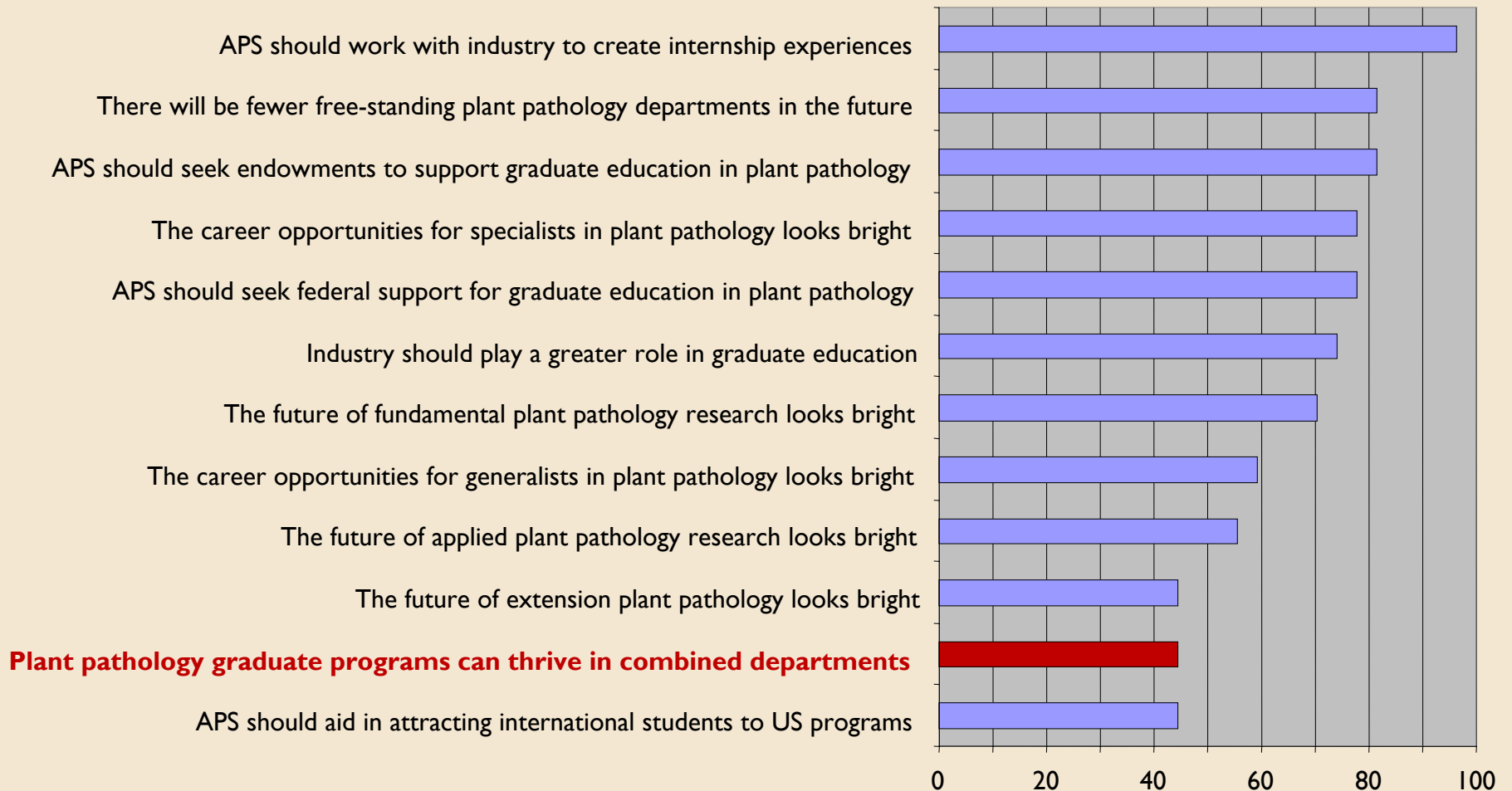
16 - Freestanding departments of plant pathology

13 - Combined with plant pathology in the name

22 - Combined without plant pathology in the name

What is the APS Role?

Question #10. What is your level of agreement/disagreement with each of these statements?



Percent of respondents who strongly agreed with each statement.

2007 APS Survey of Graduate Program Heads



A Tail of Three Departments

Michigan State University

Department of Plant Pathology

Montana State University

Department of Plant Sciences &
Plant Pathology

University of Illinois

Department of Crop Sciences



Michigan State University Department of Plant Pathology

- Prior to 2001
Department of Botany and Plant Pathology
College of Natural Sciences
- 2001
Split to form Department of Plant Pathology
Moved to College of Ag and Natural Resources



Benefits:

- Esprit de corps among pathologists
- Maintain plant pathology courses
- Still able to attract graduate students

Negatives:

- Upset some students and faculty
- Plant Pathology now more vulnerable?
- Relationships with former colleagues
- Competition for space
- Future merger?



Montana State University

Department of Plant Sciences & Plant Pathology

- Dept. of Plant Path established mid 1970s
- Merged into Dept. of Plant Sciences 1990s
- Plant Pathology added to department name



Benefits:

- All faculty supportive of name change
- Initial drop in grad students reversed
- Distinct PI Path MS and PhD programs
- Justification for PI Path courses & faculty
- Replacement of Plant Path faculty
- Plant genetics students take PI Path classes
- Collaboration among disciplines

Negatives:

- Competing for graduate students
- Competing for grant funding



University of Illinois

Department of Crop Sciences

- Dept of Plant Pathology formed in 1955
- Merged with Dept of Agronomy in 1995
 - PI Path smaller of two departments
 - Maintained PLPA course rubric
 - No distinct plant pathology graduate program



Benefits:

- Better collaboration with colleagues
 - Joint projects, grant accounts
- Access to more undergraduate students
- More non-pp students in PLPA courses

Negatives:

- Fewer plant pathology faculty
- Fewer PLPA graduate courses
- Loss of visibility to potential students
- **No common sense of purpose**



Plant Pathology Faculty at Illinois

Dept of Plant Pathology, 1988

17 State-line

5 USDA-ARS

4 Illinois Natural History Survey

Dept of Crop Sciences, 2009

8 State-line

4 USDA-ARS



Teaching Plant Pathology at Illinois

Courses 1988

- 1 undergraduate (intro plant pathology)
- 13 graduate level courses

Courses 2009

- 2 undergraduate level courses
- 7 graduate level courses
- No distinct graduate degree programs

**Graduate
Students**

Research funding
Teaching support
Teaching focus



**Faculty
(teaching)**



**Graduate
Courses**



Concerns with mergers

Reduced student recruitment

- Keep plant pathology in department name
- Keep separate plant pathology course rubric
- Keep separate degree programs
- Loss of visibility to outside students
- Fewer course offerings
- Diluted focus on plant pathology training



Concerns with mergers

Reduced departmental influence

- Out voted on issues of policy, curriculum, priorities
- Competition for faculty positions
- Pathology viewed as a service to breeders, geneticists, etc.
- Faculty asked to teach non-plpa courses



Concerns with mergers

Loss of sense of purpose

- Goal of training plant pathology students
- No sense of joint mission
- Focus narrowed to individual research
- Weaker community of plant pathology
- Loss of esprit de corps



Parting thoughts

- Programs can be maintained if plant pathology is valued
- Resource support and advocacy from administration must be present
- Attitudes/personalities can have an impact
- Focus on needs of students may help maintain community of plant pathology