

## **Extension: the Unique Characteristic of Land-Grant Universities**

**By  
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Good afternoon, Extension colleagues. Of all the places to be, it doesn't get better than being among a group of Extension professionals, and this group certainly verifies that observation. What an honor it is to be recognized as the 2005 Ruby Distinguished Service Award Recipient. I recognize that the award is not really based on individual accomplishment, but rather on the contributions of the larger group of immediate colleagues that make the award recipient look good. I have enjoyed, and really appreciate, the many cards and notes that I received after it was announced that I would receive this honor. I want to give special recognition and thanks to the outstanding colleagues I worked with in Maryland, Florida, Kansas and at the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

I am proud to accept this Ruby Distinguished Service Award on behalf of all of us who have dedicated ourselves to careers of public service in Cooperative Extension. A lot of people contributed to the nomination process, but I want to recognize and thank Madeline Greene of the Maryland Chapter for her role. I also want to thank Linda Cook, the Executive Director of Epsilon Sigma Phi for her assistance and support over the past few months.

I want to introduce you to my family members who are here today. Karen, my wife had a short 13 year, but distinguished, career as a 4-H Youth Development agent and specialist. Our two daughters, Heather and Deborah, who are both Land-Grant graduates (Kansas State to be specific), and Heather's husband, Gaylon Corley, are present. We all know that jobs in Extension are demanding and the immediate family pays a price for the long hours, over-nights, and weekend hours that are part of the job, but take away from important time with family.

I've had several different jobs within the Cooperative Extension System - county educator, county director, specialist, district director, and associate director. All of these jobs have challenges and rewards of their own, but the job of county educator is the one that provides regular and immediate feedback that gives a sense of accomplishment - community based education that makes a difference in people's lives. Theodore Roosevelt defined success this way, "Far and away the best prize that life can offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." The role of county educator certainly meets this test.

My last position and capstone of my career was at NASULGC, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, where I served as Director of Extension

as well as Executive Director of ECOP - the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy. ECOP is essentially the Board of Directors of the National Cooperative Extension System. This position gave me the opportunity to work closely with all of the 1862, 1890, and 1994 Directors and Administrators of Extension and especially those who serve on ECOP - 15 elected regional representatives, the chair of the Budget and Legislative Committee, the elected Extension delegate to the NASULGC Board on Agriculture's Policy Board of Directors, the Administrator of the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, and the Executive Director of ECOP. To give you just a glimpse of the outstanding folks I worked with during this time at NASULGC, three are former Ruby award recipients - Lyla Hougum, Keith Smith and Chester Fehlis. During this time at NASULGC, the way ECOP conducts business was changed significantly, communications were opened to a broad cross-section of Extension professionals, and the 'eXtension' initiative was launched.

What I would like to do today is first, make a few comments about Extension and how it is a very distinct feature of Land-Grant Universities. Then I will highlight ten challenges that are ahead. If you were at this meeting last year, I think you will find that some of these challenges build on the remarks made by Chester Fehlis in his talk last year.

Have you noticed how different classes of vehicles all seem to look alike? It's hard to tell one SUV from another, or minivans, or sedans. If you see one that attracts your attention, you need to look for a logo or name on the vehicle to know, for sure, its brand.

Well, universities seem to be caught up in this same kind of look-alike chase. It's getting hard to differentiate public from private universities, and Land-Grants from other publics. All talk about their goal of attracting the best and brightest undergraduate students, students in the top ten percent of their high school graduating class, or students with ACT scores of over 27. Likewise, all universities strive to position themselves to be competitive within the large research pools of funding available from the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health and many highlight research awards in the area of a half billion dollars annually.

Land-Grants were meant to be different. We have a mandate to bring our resources to where people live and work, to make lives better through the access and opportunity that can come from these resources, and to serve all of the people—not just some of the people. eXtension will help us meet this aspect of our mission.

We have a story to tell; one that builds upon this tradition of solving problems and bringing the intellectual capacity of the university to people where they live and work. But we don't tell our story in as compelling a way as we need to. As a Cooperative Extension System, our documentation is marginal. We tend to rely on tradition, hard work and our close association with a relatively small group of stakeholders to maintain our support and funding. We don't take nearly seriously enough that we conduct our business with someone else's money and that we need to be very accountable for its good use and make compelling presentations for on-going support. One format is likely to be insufficient to get this job done. In Washington, the President's Office of

Management and Budget is looking for capacity to help implement the agenda and priorities of the President's administration. Our Governors and Boards of County Commissioners are looking for this same alignment with their priorities. Are we directly supporting the issues, goals, and priorities that put these leaders in office? Do we even know what these priorities are? When it comes to setting priorities and seeking funds, one of the partners that works for the firm that does advocacy work for the Land-Grant budget, including our interests, challenges us to look at the Requests for Application from all Federal Departments and agencies and if they have funds available for 'X', and we have a need for funds for 'Z', we go to work to make our 'Z' look like an 'X'! That's alignment.

Decision makers want and expect results. They want solutions to societal issues as well as individual issues. We need to give them well-documented examples of both. Then we need to use our successes as a springboard for future support to solve new problems—especially those that they have identified and have made commitments to fix. Good documentation is part of the job. The challenge isn't how little can we get by with, but rather how much is needed to demonstrate that our educational intervention has indeed worked.

About ten years ago, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation funded a series of studies on higher education, one of which was on the topic of engagement - Returning to our Roots, the Engaged Institution. Since that time there has been considerable discussion and work on the development of a uniform understanding of what engagement is. This last summer, there was an invitational conference on this topic held at Michigan State University; feedback that we received at NASULGC was that the definition of engagement still varies by institution - with some saying that it is everything that occurs off of the main campus. University administrators are using the term engagement almost as frequently and loosely as Extension professionals use 'program'.

There are three terms that are frequently used interchangeably - service, outreach and engagement. I think that there are subtle distinctions between these terms, but that is not the point I want to make. Regardless of the nuances, Extension as we know it, can be part of any of these terms, but Extension goes beyond all of them in that Cooperative Extension has a statewide presence with offices in over 3000 counties staffed by professional educators, has a stable revenue stream from multiple sources, and has a tradition of over 90 years of working with people and communities to solve their problems, as they see them, with the intellectual capacity of a network of major universities as its energy source. No other university has this impressive infrastructure and history.

As university administrators talk about engagement, outreach and service, the gift that Cooperative Extension has to offer is not money or personnel, but the gateway to communities and the experience that we have gained in 91 years. I think that all of us would agree that our work is about much more than the subject matter expertise we bring to the job; I would go so far as to say that the subject-matter knowledge is secondary. Preempting the degrees and courses we have taken may be knowledge of

the community, how it works, who makes decisions; our own interpersonal skills, and then the so called process skills that help us design, implement, evaluate and document the educational interventions that solve problems. Faculty across the campus who have important content that can contribute to solving problems and/or contribute toward economic growth are likely to have a lot to learn about community based delivery because it's not part of their culture.

Rather than seeing ourselves as a doorway to the university, I would prefer to see our system defined as a gateway to people and communities. As universities decide that they must be more engaged to maintain the support of their legislators, as service and outreach are seen as important faculty roles, it isn't up to Extension to carry the burden. But, we can be an integral part of this expanded mission and our existing structure and experience provides a valuable in-kind contribution to this effort. Do I think that it is appropriate for universities to have a broader outreach mission? Absolutely! Do I think that Extension can help? Absolutely! I also think that universities will need to put new money and rewards on the table as incentives for broader faculty participation in order to make a strong statement about their engagement. We have an important role to play as part of an increased commitment to engagement and we need to be eager to support and be part of the expanded mission. We are the gateway and we have the community presence and experience to solve problems through successful educational intervention. We can provide as much help as others within the university community want to learn from our experiences, but we can't dilute our current success and capacity by taking on a significantly broader mission without new resources.

I have ten points that either support the statements I have made or are important for our future. I have learned these partly from my experience as part of three universities, and mostly from the three years I spent in Washington.

1. Extension's most powerful asset is its statewide presence. No university other than a land-grant has this advantage. This presence in and of itself isn't as important as the connectedness to people and communities. This presence and connectedness is our contribution to university service, outreach, and engagement. Let's be sure to always differentiate our uniqueness by calling our part of this mission Cooperative Extension.
2. Let's offer this asset of presence and connectedness as a gateway for others to use as long as they pay total cost for access to the system that we have built over 91 years. Sometimes we are much too eager to provide this asset for much less than its value to other county, state or federal agencies as well as university units and colleges. Frequently we don't know what this value is; Iowa State University has done some excellent pioneering work in models to calculate this.
3. County-based delivery has served us well for 91 years. Certainly it is tied to funding and it provides the connection to local communities that I have emphasized. There is a movement toward regionalization and a reduced role for county infrastructure in areas such as economic development. We need to think of ways to maintain the local connection, but address problems on a regional basis - like watersheds, multiple counties that share certain resources and

opportunities for economic expansion, and we need to know what the current or potential regional economic engine is.

4. We need to think about our product of educational intervention in terms of outcomes and solutions, not programs. We know that Extension at its best includes agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer science, youth development (our brand is 4-H), and community/economic development. Sometimes we nearly self-destruct by trying to prioritize the importance of one over another of the broad subject areas. We can put all that we do and a lot more under these headings. At the local government level, economic development is especially important. As we communicate with local and state decision makers, we should strive to show the economic benefits of our work. Texas A&M, Ohio State and the University of Nebraska have recently put effort into building this capacity and change the discussion from money, money, money to benefit, benefit, benefit.
5. On our campuses, when it comes to rewards such as tenure and promotion, what single output outweighs all other contributions? Research, of course. Historically, successful or even outstanding Extension/service/outreach/engagement has not been held in the same regard as good research. Perhaps we could say the same about teaching. Last year, Dr. Fehlis talked about the need for standards/metrics for us to more uniformly measure and document the benefits of our work as a step in gaining parity. I think we can take a model such as LOGIC and present it as a research model that brings about solutions through sequential educational intervention. It can't hurt to use the term research on campus and economic development in communities when we know that these are the two things held up as super important. Ohio voters just approved a new eight billion dollar investment in economic development this week.
6. While we have a strong tradition of reliable funding from counties, states and the federal government, this funding base has not expanded to meet the increased costs of doing business or the increased costs of working with a growing and more diverse population. When this reality becomes apparent, a very common first reaction is that more marketing of Extension is needed. The other reality that emerges is that if there is to be more funding, it will come from fees, contracts and grants. What I want to emphasize here is that we need to better define the gray line between public and private good so that we will know what should have a fee and what should be free; Iowa State Extension has done some pioneering work in this area. Dr. Rodney Brown, former Deputy Undersecretary for Research, Education and Economics at USDA had this to say about new money, "What we have now is much larger than any increase that we could receive from any source. We need leadership to channel it wisely and not merely manage it."
7. I talked earlier about the importance of the connectedness to the local community. This point builds on that. The Associate Director for Extension at NASULGC, Linda Kay Benning, frequently says that you can only work with those you know. We need to always be looking for opportunities to network with organizations and agencies and otherwise get to know decision makers and their priorities. This includes commissioners, state legislators as well as the Members

of Congress and their congressional staffs in Washington and at their district offices.

8. The crafting and timing of messages is essential. I just said that knowing priorities of decision makers is important. We also need to be able to make our priorities look like and align with their priorities. We need to connect with and get on the funding trains that are leaving the station, such as obesity and homeland security. We need to consider how our priorities align with where the money is and make the adjustment so that an alignment is made (make 'Z's look like 'X's). Timing is also of utmost importance. In Washington, the attention span of many staffers and decision makers is very short; some would say about as long as a strobe light. You must make your points exactly when the timing is right because once a decision is made, a bill is written, funding allocated, there is no going back for at least a year. Things move just as fast at the state and county levels.
9. When it comes to funding and support, there is no past tense. One writer said that standing still is the fastest way of moving backwards in a rapidly changing world. Wayne Gretsky attributes his success as a player this way; "I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it's been." We need to convey that based on our past successes and our current capacity, we can successfully bring about solutions to the problems that people and communities are concerned about today. We are the resource of choice in dealing with an issue or problem and in the spirit of Gretsky, boldly get out in front of emerging issues. We have the capacity in public policy education to take leading roles in helping communities and partners organize to solve issues important to them, even on issues that Extension doesn't have the total capacity and expertise to solve.
10. This point relates to marketing, which is sometimes held up as the solution to funding and other problems that confront us. When we discussed this issue with a legislative strategist who is a former three-term Member of Congress and others in Washington, their response was that marketing was important and that at least 80% of the effort needs to be made on campus. They went on to say that university presidents, provosts, and vice presidents rarely advocate for Extension funding and generally are not conversant about Extension priorities. These administrators and others across campuses see Extension as synonymous with agriculture, and certainly don't see the gateway concept that I discussed earlier.

I hope you will continue to reflect on the important role that Cooperative Extension has played in the development of our country. We are unique and provide a level of engagement unequalled among all universities and colleges. Our future is up to us. The logo of a large airline that has since merged with others was "We earn our wings every day." Like that airline, our future is dependent on our relevance today; our ability to provide solutions to issues that are important today and to document our successes in ways that demonstrate our capacity to solve other emerging problems. Let's not let Cooperative Extension get caught up in the look-alike chase when it comes to engagement, but rather, hold up our distinctive contribution and be a strong supporter and contributor to this part of the Land-Grant mission.

Just two years ago and during the time Chester Fehlis served as ECOP Chair, ECOP developed a paper on relevance. In order to end on a real positive note, I want to read the final paragraph of that one page document.

"The Cooperative Extension System is a living, evolving, market-driven organization that responds to society's changing needs. Our nation must continue to expand lifelong learning to all of society and to utilize existing and new knowledge to solve complex problems. As a unique achievement in American education, the Cooperative Extension System continues its longstanding tradition of fulfilling that need by extending the university to the people to improve the quality of life for individuals, families, business and non-profit organizations, and communities."

Let me close by thanking you again for recognizing me as the 2005 Ruby Distinguished Award recipient. I wish you well in the years ahead, and will certainly do all I can to support you and the wonderful organization that has provided me with a most meaningful career.