

Making the University Accessible

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A university fully realizes its potential when it reaches all of the people who support and can benefit from its resources and when what the university has to offer makes a difference in the lives of people. Bringing the university into the mainstream of society requires experts—Extension workers. However, the Extension worker cannot accomplish this mission by being a passive extender. The university has certain characteristics that should be understood; Extension has opportunities and obligations.

THERE'S NO doubt that Land-Grant institutions were created to be servants of the public that supports them. It is so mandated in the various Morrill Acts of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Nor is there any doubt that the university effectively carried out this responsibility in a manner appropriate to the needs of society during the early years these statutes were in force. However, these same institutions, so progressive in the advancement of nineteenth century technical knowledge, have failed to change with the society that now surrounds them. The problems that confront man and his environment require a multidisciplinary focus.

The university *in toto* is relevant to contemporary concerns. As *A People and a Spirit* has pointed out, "The significant expansion of programs with new and different audiences as recommended by the joint study committee requires a new set of academic disciplines added to those traditional to Extension. The knowledge needed embraces most of the concerns of human beings and must come from all of the colleges in the university." The university and perhaps more specifically Extension must articulate the needs of society with the various expertises of the university.

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The Situation in the Universities

In spite of the strong sentiments of the traditionalist who sees danger in the "all things to all people" philosophy, the scholar must leave his laboratory and enter the real world with its real problems. A recent University of Oklahoma self-study emphatically suggests that "It is time for universities to abandon the ideal of aloof scholarship that analyzes but never commits to action, that describes but never defines moral values."

✓ The tax-paying public wants more than the preparation of sons and daughters to cope with the vagaries and responsibilities of life. They are convinced the university is too valuable a resource to serve only that brief period of an undergraduate's life between the ages of 18 and 22. They see compatibility between societal needs and university resources and they want them joined. If the university is to be a part of contemporary American society, it must be made to feel responsible for its development. Urban concerns are just one illustration of the unparalleled severity of today's problems. Society has been caught unaware and the shortage of trained leadership is substantial. The university is expected to provide that leadership.

The federal government also has an interest in the university's accessibility and relevance. The past few years there have been big cuts in funds to institutions of higher education for pure research. Meanwhile a variety of public service bills such as the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the State Technical Service Act of 1966 have been passed and grants made to institutions of higher education.

With good reason, the public and its government are turning to the university for assistance. The academic community has a ready-made capability for certain kinds of problem solving. Further, objectivity, which is cherished and carefully guarded by academic people, can be a unique asset of its public service work. Other organizations, such as churches, corporations, or governmental bodies must require conformity to traditions, values, and practices for their very existence. Such conformity attenuates effectiveness. The university, to the contrary, has a commitment to evaluate alternatives and offer recommendations independent of pressures of vested interest or political expediency.

Potential for Service

Higher education is responsible for teaching, research, and extension. All of these have a common base in service. If the university doesn't bring these functions together, external forces will, and if

higher education is unwilling to bring about balance, it may well be faced with an inappropriate and unfavorable imbalance.

The role of the university as a vital part of the problem-solving process is now taking shape. The need is more obvious than ever before: (1) more education and training services for adults and (2) more applied research and action programs in areas ranging from pollution to poverty. Evidently this need will have to be met by a responsive and innovative university community.

But the image of the great university seldom ties to accessibility. By today's standards the great university is the one with the strongest research base and the most prestigious graduate program. The danger of this universal image is not in having a handful of universities become great on this narrow basis but that all institutions will strive for greatness in this way to the neglect of their service responsibility. A truly well-rounded university can be great as much for public service as for graduate teaching and research.

This isn't meant to negate the importance of pure research and excellence in student accomplishment. No inherent conflict exists between academic quality and social relevance. Good and bad quality can be found in both applied and theoretical research. There are good and bad teachers of utilitarian and nonutilitarian subjects. All good teaching doesn't occur in the classroom; some great teachers have never given a lecture or done any conventional teaching.

Extension has too often been viewed by residence faculty either as a tool for public relations and student recruitment or by mutual agreement has been permitted to go its separate way developing its programs with its own staff. The struggle to interest residence faculty in the extension and public service activities has too often been abandoned. Extension reorganizations that are spreading throughout the United States have contributed to this separatism. Furthermore, the clean and simple lines of the one campus operation, which made integration of all three academic functions relatively easy, have given way to the complex organizational web of the modern multiversity. Marshalling specialized resources of several campuses on a statewide basis requires different organizational strategies than the one campus, one college program of a bygone era.

Needed: Responses from Extension

To counter forces that move Extension away from central core of the university requires special effort of state, area, and county staffs. For state staff, it must mean avoiding the passive role of simply being "on call" to the counties. The campus specialist must be an

active partner with this county and area colleagues in program development. He must identify problems, inform his off-campus colleagues of them, jointly work out effective responses, and actively participate in implementating programs.

On the campus side, he must make an even greater effort to work closely with his colleagues to (1) influence the direction their activities may take and (2) take full advantage of the spin-off from their work. In this effort, it isn't enough to meet people halfway. The effective Extension worker is an activist who must seek out both his resources and his clientele.

For county and area staff, greater efforts are required to keep fully informed about the resources available on the campuses and to use these resources skillfully, avoiding the dual hazards of demanding either too little or too much. Insufficient or inefficient use of campus resources is the quickest route to making the county or area agent superfluous or converting him into just another local government employee. The historical partnership concept of the Cooperative Extension Service was never more relevant and the job of making the partnership work never as difficult as it is now.

Where campus resources are lacking or inadequate, county and area staff must provide the feedback and the prodding needed to recruit new kinds or greater amounts of faculty resources. Extension administrators, even in times of tight budgets, have ways of tapping added resources if needed. They depend on county and area staff to make these needs known.

The job of the district leader must change too. He will have to delegate more housekeeping functions and devote more time being a significant communication link between campus and off-campus staff, involving campus staff in the problems of his district, and being the catalytic agent who helps bring about effective combinations of campus and off-campus talents.

Two developments compound the problem of more effective use of university resources: (1) universities are bigger and more complex today than even a decade ago and (2) today's mandate is to tap the resources of the total university—not just a single college. The reoccurring theme in *A People and a Spirit* is that Extension should strive “to achieve the role of the local point of contact between the public and the entire land-grant university.”

Considerations in Responding

Conscientious county and area staff are understandably frustrated by the magnitude of the task. Implied in this challenge is not merely

an information retrieval problem of tremendous proportions but also a need to operate knowledgeably in a multidisciplinary setting. An agent who is concerned, for example, with the community's problem of solid waste disposal must not only know the dozen disciplines that may be able to contribute but must play a significant role in integrating the various contributions to effect an adequate application within his community.

Three answers to the challenge seem most promising: (1) increased use of area specialists who are nearby, who can work closely with county staff, and who are more familiar with needs of their area; (2) more liberal use of paraprofessionals and ad hoc staff to handle selected aspects of programs and general administration; and (3) getting rid of extraneous duties that are not an integral part of Extension. In short, there's a need in both state and local operations to take a hard look at Extension functions with an eye to greatly increased efficiency and selectivity in the use of manpower resources.

Closely related to the need for a more effective relationship between extension and residence teaching and research is the need for better articulation with other educational and governmental agencies. Instead of competing with or ignoring the growing number of agencies serving local people both from central and local bases, it becomes one of the Extension worker's jobs to know what these resources are and to use them to increase his own effectiveness. The notion that such efforts at cooperation must be brought about by administrative decree is suicidal. Cooperation is first of all a local matter, and state and federal policy are most effective when they reflect local initiative.

If external threats to Extension work can be overcome, the prerequisites of the Extension worker must also be reviewed and changed. In some states the specialist in the college of agriculture does not hold a professorial appointment; in even more states the staff member working on a county or area basis is denied rank and tenure. To deny the protection of academic freedom to the faculty member on the firing line while granting it to the faculty member safely ensconced on the campus is analogous to giving combat pay to the private who is stationed in Washington and denying it to his counterpart in Vietnam.

Changes in this direction will not occur, however, merely because they are needed. To a degree, Extension workers must actively demonstrate that an improved condition is deserved. This requires increased emphasis on professional self-development both by the advanced degree and by keeping up professionally. It means that Ex-

tension workers must develop and demonstrate the validity of their own equivalents to the more traditional evidences of academic excellence. Among other things, it means recognition of the element of validity in the threat to "publish or perish."

The ability to communicate significant ideas in a lasting form is indeed a mark of academic excellence. The program of quality serving the homemakers of Pawnee County needs to be described to a larger audience and its general implications deduced. The Extension worker who does this well has given tangible evidence that he is an effective thinker as well as a doer. He has taken an important step toward establishing himself in the academic community—something which locally effective programming alone will not do.

Membership in the academic community needs to be validated in the specialist staff also. Periodic research appointments and publications of results is one way of doing this. It has the dual advantage of strengthening ties with residence colleagues and of improving ability to evaluate and interpret the research efforts of others. Nor need the research itself represent a blind alley in terms of the specialist's main commitment to Extension. No one is better prepared to identify significant problems growing out of his own experience and to have valuable insights into possible research strategies for solving these problems.

There are many other ways in which Extension workers can strengthen their ties to the total academic community: membership and participation in professional societies, attendance at meetings on scholarly topics, journal subscriptions, the library habit, classroom teaching from time to time, maintenance of an attitude of inquiry. There is a need for a more balanced emphasis in Extension on the subject matter extended rather than so much emphasis on the act of extending the subject matter.

In the case of off-campus staff, there is also a need to foster a greater sense of community with the campus. Issues of student unrest, academic freedom, and the university's budget often seem remote from the concerns of county and area agents. In this remoteness, too, there's a tendency to misunderstand and be unsympathetic to the position of the university on critical issues. The agent located in a county seat 300 miles from campus isn't prepared to explain to the chairman of his county board why the Dean of Students handled the latest demonstration the way he did. His sense of community with the campus is lessened by distance; only effort on his part and the part of the campus-based staff can offset this.

Accountability requirements often accentuate this gap between residence and Extension staff. The most common residence appoint-

ment is for an academic year and aside from meeting his classes and keeping his office hours, the typical residence faculty member is accountable only in terms of his accomplishments. The Extension worker, on a 12-month basis, is expected to keep regular hours often without benefit of academic recesses during which to catch up on his journal reading, writing, and planning. Such tight accountability is incompatible with scholarly activity. The Extension worker, at least as much as his residence colleague, needs time to refuel and incubate ideas. Yet frequently the structuring of Extension jobs precludes this, and requirements concerning activity reports and time and effort reports reward busyness at the expense of effectiveness.

Partially, this problem is the difficulty of establishing effective yardsticks for the Extension worker. Course load, class size, faculty-student ratio, and other time-hallowed yardsticks are provided for the residence faculty member. While they don't prevent some faculty members from coasting, they do create a climate in which other faculty are immensely productive, and they come at least a little closer to emphasizing results rather than a mere accounting for hours of activity.

Measures of accomplishment are hard to come by in Extension. Residence operations are measured by criteria that, if not always valid, are at least sanctioned by time and usage. Criteria of success in Extension are probably inherently more difficult to measure and, by its very diversity, Extension will probably never find a neat yardstick. On the other hand, the argument that measurement is difficult is too freely translated to mean impossible or not worth the effort. Acceptance of this notion can only lead to withdrawal from the battle and ultimately to the decline of Extension's support.

More than any other arm of the Land-Grant University, Extension needs to emphasize management by results—changes in clientele behavior, increases in productivity, educational progress. All of this not in terms of meetings held, numbers reached, or hours spent, but in terms of hard, quantitative measures of progress toward well-stated and relevant goals. If Extension is making the university more accessible, the evidence must exist and be demonstrable.

In this respect, a significant difference can be noted in the reports submitted by different kinds of Extension workers. The reports of results-oriented county staff or subject-matter specialists abound in descriptions of things that have happened; the numbers' player counts contacts and hours spent. Each one describes what he thinks really counts with his administration. The kinds of things a worker reports are both a measure of the man and the management.

Conclusion

For staff and administration alike there must be genuine acceptance of the idea that a university only fully realizes its potential when (1) it reaches all of the people who support and can benefit from its resources and (2) when what the university knows makes a difference in what people do. It requires an expert to bring the university into the mainstream of society—the Extension worker. Furthermore, the Extension worker must not be merely a passive extender. He must, in his own way, be a highly creative worker scanning widely, interpreting selectively and effectively, and making knowledge operational in the lives of people. As the interface between the university and the public, he should both increase the effectiveness of the university in achieving its fullest potential impact and be a significant influence on the course that teaching and research will take on the campus.