

forum

This begins a new feature in the Journal of Extension . . . the Forum. The Forum will replace Points of View and serve the readers in two ways: first, as a place for the reader to express himself on any topic important to Extension and, second, as a vehicle to have selected individuals comment on Journal articles printed in the same issue. Because this is the first issue, we've asked some people to review Harold Swanson's article on professionalism. Here are their responses.

Nettie Ruth Brown
*President, National
Association Extension
Home Economists
St. Augustine,
Florida*

“Are Extension Workers Professionals?” re-emphasizes the need for close self-examination of one's own ideas and ideals in relation to their being a professional in Extension. To me one hallmark of a professional Extension worker is a successful and dedicated educator. Extension workers who are truly dedicated to their job and to what Extension stands for will manifest a sense of professionalism that's contagious to the new or younger Extension worker. Having observed, for a number of years, many new workers as they come to the Extension Service, it's those who have a commitment to help their clientele and a real desire to be recognized as professionals who soon acquire a sense of self-actualization and achievement. It's the true professional who gives the most of his/her expertise and in return receives the greatest amount of self-satisfaction as an Extension worker.

Norman J. Goodwin
*President, National
Association County
Agricultural Agents
DeWitt, Iowa*

The article by Harold B. Swanson, “Are Extension Workers Professionals?” certainly caused me to think about myself as an Extension worker. Do I meet the criteria of a professional? What can I do to improve myself as a professional worker? And what can I do to improve the profession?

It was a thought-provoking article to help us to be more professional.

Robert F. Frary
*Associate Director
Agricultural Extension
Service, University
of Wyoming
Laramie, Wyoming*

What was the question? Of course Extension workers are professionals working in a highly respected profession. Harold Swanson's purpose as stated was, “. . . to establish a concept of professionalism and list attributes that may be a guide to Extension workers as educators.” I find one theme overtly discussed—criteria for being professional and attributes of the professional. Parenthetically, a covert theme is suggested,

“Is Extension a profession?” We received a provocative article in, “Are Extension Workers Professionals?” but the theme and thesis was a cop-out in Swanson’s conclusion, “Oh yes, I didn’t answer my original question, ‘Are Extension Workers Professionals?’ Frankly, I’m not sure.”

I contend Extension is a profession and Extension workers are professionals. But I find one of the most difficult challenges is to explain to the academic community, university administration and governing boards, legislative bodies, and the general public what Extension is and what an Extension worker does. Needless to say, all groups know and have heard about Extension. It appears, in spite of numerous studies, reports, and public relations activities, not too many people can explain the philosophy, spirit, and phenomenon of Extension and Extension work as a profession. The implications are more serious. Outside the Extension family not enough people recognize the Extension worker as a professional. In terms of rank, tenure, promotion, representation in the academic senates, and related issues, Extension in most institutions hasn’t established itself as a profession. As a method of education perhaps it has. Harold Swanson, you’re close to hooking into a big issue, but there needs to be more fishing before the issue is landed.

Nancy H. Ascue
President
National Association
Extension 4-H Agents
Lebanon, Virginia

Few professions could say all their workers are professionals. I believe, however, that Extension work is a profession, and the majority of the workers are professional. Why? Because Extension workers are self-directing practitioners doing an accepted service of disseminating information based on a body of specialized knowledge from the land-grant university they represent.

The structure of the Cooperative Extension Service provides staff freedom for creativity on the job and in professional development. What other profession allows any more freedom for its workers to adopt to the local situation? The opportunity for continual professional development through in-service training, graduate study, and professional improvement associations allows the Extension professional to remain skillful and proficient in his/her work. The motivation and dedication of the Extension worker is obvious as shown by the number of hours worked and the number of people involved in Extension programs. However, no worker should rest on his/her laurels because this is a rapidly changing world and the need for continual learning is imperative.

William S. Griffith
Associate Professor
University of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

Professor Swanson has done an admirable job of identifying and describing 12 criteria that he believes should characterize the professional Extension worker. Probably few readers will question the validity of these criteria for they’re eminently reasonable. Yet, two questions came to mind as I

reflected on the criteria: (1) Is the level of competence expected of the Extension educator both in his specialty area of competence and in the behavioral sciences that underlie Extension as an educational process likely to be achieved by earning a conventional B.S. followed by an M.S. or an M.A.? Perhaps greater emphasis should be placed on the idea that an Extension worker isn't necessarily a professional at the time he is first hired by the Cooperative Extension Service; instead it's only through a systematic process of personal study and growth that he develops the range and depth of knowledge prerequisite to being regarded as a "professional." (2) Would any Extension worker who met all 12 criteria be an ideal representative of a land-grant college? All 12 criteria could have been satisfied by an individual who had pursued an exclusively job-oriented educational program. To merit the respect of professionals in other occupations and of the non-professionals who are residents and citizens in his community, he must demonstrate an interest in, a concern for, and an informed knowledge of civic, social, political, economic, and cultural problems and developments in his community, his state, his nation, and his world.

I believe, however, that the most provocative statement one can make about Extension and professionalism is this: the best evidence that Extension workers have earned the classification "professional" will be the absence of speeches, articles, dissertations, and conferences on the professional status of Extension workers.

Randall Barnett
*Assistant Director
Cooperative Extension
Service
Lexington, Kentucky*

Criteria such as those listed in Dr. Swanson's article can be the basis for self-examination by every Extension worker. Dr. Ray R. Ranta, one of the references noted by the author, has said, "to the extent that an individual can score positively on each criterion, to that extent he is professional. Similarly, one Extension worker could score a colleague, thus the basis for seeing others as professionals. The sum total of all individuals can suggest the professional posture of an Extension staff. We can also project the question, is an organization professional? Can the policies established, the communication channels developed, the trust exhibited, the personnel procedures followed, etc., be related to the criteria that are associated with professionalism?"

I consider Extension work a professional field and likewise the Extension organization a professional organization, but must recognize that Extension workers possess varying degrees of professionalism. Use of this article as a tool for self-appraisal would help each of us develop a higher degree of professionalism.