

# forum

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*Learning Contract Brokerage.* For some time now, I've seen the potential for benefit to both students and Extension from the development of a learning contract brokerage. A learning contract brokerage provides college credit to students for reaching learning objectives through on-the-job experience. Student learning contracts would be written, negotiated in the community, and performed under the supervision of a broker who would be on the faculty at the university. Other parties to the contract would be consultants, on the university faculty, as needed to counsel the student in the particular subject matter of the contract and clients in the community who provide the job setting and resources in exchange for needed work.

In explaining this idea, I'll use an example from the social sciences because this is the area of Extension I'm in. Extension agents will be able to think of examples pertinent to agriculture, home economics, and youth work.

With the current interest in community resource development, it's becoming evident that rural areas have less access to data on their needs and resources than urban areas. This lack of data is costly because grant proposals require information that just isn't available. Examples of needed research are needs surveys, economic input-output analysis, and the like. There simply aren't personnel in the rural areas with the expertise to do this kind of work and it's costly to hire researchers.

All the while that data aren't available to rural areas, there are students at colleges and universities who need practical experience in all the phases of research from interviewing, coding, and data analysis to writing research proposals, research reports, and grant proposals.

Extension has the organization and expertise to bring together these interdependent needs to the mutual advantage of both groups. To do this, a minor innovation in their already existing structure is needed—institution of a correspondence course that uses learning contracts. This course would be opened to any student to take and any Extension teacher to teach. The only additional personnel would be a learning

contract broker and staff as needed to supervise the contracts. The exact organization of the learning contract brokerage can be worked out if people involved can see how it would benefit them. So I'll limit myself to explaining how it would work for the county agent.

Suppose a county agent wants to do a needs survey of older citizens and a learning contract brokerage has already been established at his/her state university. The agent would advertise through the broker at the university that he/she needs a research design, interviewers, data processors, research analysts, and so on to do the job. Students interested in this project would submit learning contracts much like grant proposals pertinent to whatever phase of the research they wish to undertake.

It's important that the student writes the learning contract himself/herself to avoid this becoming a means to get free labor. It's also important that students submit *behavioral objectives* of their contract for approval before they're permitted to undertake the project. The behavioral objectives would provide assurance to the agent that needed work would be done and assurance to the student that he/she would have access to needed resources and would receive credit for what he/she did.