



June 2011
Volume 49 Number 3
Article Number 3TOT2

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Developing a Roadmap for Excellence in Extension

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Abstract: Trying to figure out the promotion and tenure system is one of the major stressors for new Extension faculty. To help new county-based Extension faculty, their supervisors, committee chairs, and other mentors evaluate progress in the probationary years, a Roadmap with specific guideposts delineating expectations for pre-tenure years was developed. This article describes the evaluation parameters standardized in the role statement and the expectations for new faculty outlined in the Roadmap.

New Expectations for Extension Faculty

When a new provost came to Utah State University (USU) in 2006 with a different vision and rigor for faculty success in the promotion and tenure system, stress and anxiety among university faculty increased exponentially. With the prospect of altering a time-honored process, you can only imagine how the specter of change affected on-campus and off-campus Extension faculty. Bloir and King (2010) recently presented a compelling argument in the article 'Change, Who . . . Me?' that as change agents Extension staff are very successful in facilitating change among the populations with whom we work yet are very resistant to change within our own system. Because county Extension faculty are tenure track at USU, it rapidly became apparent that more and improved 'tools' to help county-based faculty catch the vision for change and define what constitutes 'excellence' for county based Extension faculty was needed.

Navigating the System

The path that successfully guides early career Extension faculty through the university tenure track system while meeting the educational needs of the county or counties they serve is elusive. Clearly, mentoring is an important key to success and has been discussed in the literature for many years. (Foote & Solem, 2009; Solem & Foote, 2004; Ukaga, Reichenbach, Blinn, Zak, Hutchison, & Hegland, 2002; Kutilek & Earnest, 2001; Nestor & Leary, 2000; Mincemoyer & Thomson, 1998; Sorcinelli, 1994; Sorcinelli & Austin, 1992). However, Barge and Shockley-Zalabak (2008) have concluded that when it comes to organizational knowledge, we don't practice what we teach or know.

Safrit and Owen (2010) suggest that new faculty need to know specific expectations and have the tools to be successful and the talent to do what they do best. Many institutions have developed mentoring tools to provide guidance to the mentor and mentee. (Kinsey, Carleo, O'Neil & Polanin, 2010). However, it is easy for new Extension faculty to become overwhelmed with learning the intricacies of the job. There are university expectations to be learned while trying to identify county issues and develop a strategy to work with those issues. In working with new faculty, it seems that most benefit from working with a mentor who knows and understands the system while providing help and support to new county-based faculty. It then follows that those who know and understand the system best and would be ideal mentors are senior faculty. However, the literature states (Olsen & Sorcinelli, 1992) that senior faculty are the most reluctant to mentor junior and early career faculty.

In Utah, new county-based faculty sign a role statement when an offer is accepted that articulates how they will be evaluated while establishing excellence in Extension. Next, they are assigned a tenure and promotion advisory committee whose responsibility is to meet with the new agent (USU Faculty Policy 405) in the fall to evaluate progress, inform the candidate about the P&T process, and recommend strategies for success. The committee chair usually acts as a mentor. To help orient new Extension faculty, agent-to-agent shadowing is planned to be carried out within the first 3 months, and the region director is expected to establish regular contact with the new faculty. However, because of the great distances between counties in Utah and downsizing of Extension faculty, there are some new faculty who find themselves as the lone agent responsible for an entire county. For those faculty members, mentoring many times is neither easy nor timely.

The Roadmap

A written document called "Roadmap for Excellence" was developed to provide guidance to new Extension faculty learning about developing an Extension program that successfully meets their county's expectations while successfully navigating the road to promotion and tenure. Developed as a companion to the role statement, the roadmap gives specific recommendations and expectations for agents in their first year, years 2-3, years 3-6, and finally those seeking promotion to full Extension professor. The caveat being that successfully fulfilling the Roadmap for Excellence does not guarantee success. The following categories for performance evaluation are outlined: 1. Program development; 2. Program delivery; 3. Program participation; and number of participants; 4. Support materials; 5. Scholarship; and 6. Program funding.

Specifics

Under each of the evaluation headlines a narrative describing expectations for excellence is defined, followed by a chart listing specific expectations. Below are some selected examples in each category.

Performance Category 1—Program Development

Year 1: a) Focus on needs assessment. b) Take advantage of agent-to-agent shadowing. c) Begin program development.

Years 2-3: a) Focus on two to three areas for program emphasis with one program identifiable as "your" program. b) Include evaluation methods in program planning. c) Establish benchmarks.

Years 4-6: a) Build on established programs. b) Take advantage of professional development activities. c) Modify program objectives to meet changing needs of target population.

Performance Category 2—Program Delivery

Years 1-3: a) Form collaborative relationships with specialists, other agents, and community resources. b) Begin to identify curriculum materials for activities. c) Deliver presentations, demonstrations, classes, workshops, or other educational activities. d) Conduct a minimum of two events per months by second year.

Years 4-6: a) Develop or modify curriculum to fit individual style and address program needs. b) Develop support materials. c) Average three to four events per month across major program areas. c) Apply for extramural funding.

Performance Category 3—Program Participation

Years 1-3: a) Identify target audience. b) Demonstrate need through steady growth in participation numbers.

Years 4-6: Decline in participation numbers may indicate a maturing of program and could be justification for non-continuance of program.

Performance Category 4—Support Materials

Years 1-3: a) Develop three class handouts. b) Develop three to six fact sheets or other printed material.

Years 4-6: a) Demonstrate originality and/or imagination in materials that support classes, presentations, and programs. b) Develop handouts, factsheets, Power point presentations, etc. A good target for materials developed is 12-20 developed during the pre-tenure years.

Performance Category 5—Scholarship

Years 1-3: a) Write at least one peer-reviewed abstract each year, including those from professional events in Utah. b) Offer at least two peer-reviewed presentations and proceedings including those professional events in Utah. c) Participate in writing and data gathering to prepare for scholarly writing directed toward scholarly activities.

Years 4-6: a) Write two to three peer-reviewed journal articles. b) Write at least two peer-reviewed abstracts and/or proceedings per year. c) Offer at least two scholarly presentations per year at national, regional, and/or state meetings. d) Use media to disseminate educational material, such as newsletters, radio, TV, and newspaper. e) Apply for and receive awards.

Performance Category 6—Program Funding

Years 1-3: a) Apply for USU Extension New Agent Grant.

Years 4-6: a) Apply for USU Extension Applied Research Grant. b) Apply for competitive funding.

The above lists included with the performance categories are selected guideposts and are only meant to provide an example of the specifics included in the Roadmap. The complete Roadmap can be found at: http://extension.usu.edu/employee/htm/faculty_development. (Under the heading "Other Resources," click on roadmap for agents.)

Summary

The Roadmap for Excellence is a relatively new tool in the mentoring arsenal to help guide new Extension faculty as they begin their Extension careers in Utah. The Roadmap is not meant to take the place of the guidance in the faculty code (USU Faculty Policy 405) or override the recommendations of the candidate's promotion and tenure advisory committee. The Roadmap is a tool by which new faculty, committees, and supervisors can follow the guideposts that gauge progress and determine that the trajectory established in the early years provides the momentum necessary to carry new Extension faculty successfully through the pre-tenure years.

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