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JOE's Niche in the Extension Scholarship Movement

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Abstract: *Extension's sustainability is tied to relationships with academia. Now more than ever, Extension faculty and staff need to integrate their work into the aims of their university to gain credibility, relevance, and support. This requires Extension workers to more deeply and widely document and share the scholarship of their work with academics and stakeholders. Extension workers should look more often to the Journal of Extension as the premier Extension journal in North America to help address this need. The journal provides a number of factors and services that contribute to developing and sustaining a culture of Extension scholarship.*

We believe Extension's sustainability is tied not only to our funding but also to our relationship with academia. Now more than ever, Extension faculty and staff need to integrate their work with the aims of their university to gain credibility, relevance, and support. This requires Extension workers to more deeply and widely document and share the scholarship of their work with academics and stakeholders (Adams, Harrell, Maddy, & Weigel, 2005; Alter, 2003; Franz, 2009; Culp, 2009).

The Outreach Scholarship Movement

So where does this focus on Extension scholarship come from? Based on Ernest Boyer's work (1991), scholarship has been defined as "teaching, discovery, integration, application and engagement that has clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique that is rigorous and peer-reviewed" (Kellogg Commission, 2005, p.12). Over the past two decades, a renewed focus on Extension and outreach scholarship and community-engaged scholarship has developed in tandem with the outreach and engagement movement in higher education (Adams et al., 2005; Alter, 2003; Bushaw, 1996). Oregon State University, Penn State, and the University of Wisconsin-Extension were early leaders in defining Extension and outreach scholarship for daily practice and tenure and promotion (Gurgevich, Hyman, & Alter, 1998; Aldrich-Markham, Olsen, Olsen, P., & Reichenback, 1998; University of Wisconsin-Extension, 1997; Weiser, 1994).

The University of Wisconsin-Extension criteria for faculty appointment and promotion specifically states, "Scholarship in UW-Extension is creative, intellectual work; reviewed by the scholar's peers who affirm its value; added to our intellectual history through its communication; and valued by those for whom it was intended "(1997, p. 1). More recently, eXtension provided this view of Extension scholarship, "When theory and practice come together, engagement becomes scholarly. This involves a more focused, ongoing, collaborative working relationship with clientele that results in producing both public goods (results) and scholarly products (peer reviewed and publicly disseminated publications)" (2012, p. 2).

Research on Extension Scholarship

In spite of the work done to define and model Extension and outreach scholarship, and the fact that Extension workers state they are expected to demonstrate scholarship as part of their work, they also believe service is more important than scholarship and that their institution has not adequately defined scholarship (Vlosky & Dunn, 2009). Another study of Extension workers revealed they felt they should enhance their scholarship. The employees in this study indicated they spent almost a third of their time dedicated to Extension scholarship but thought it should be slightly higher. However, they did not want to engage more deeply with scholarship efforts if it compromised program management, delivery, or development (Olson, Skuza, & Blinn, 2007).

Some Extension workers struggle with scholarly work because they can't envision what it looks like or how to integrate it into their own work. To navigate this uncertainty they often look to others' scholarship as a model (Olson et al., 2007). This may include reviewing dossiers and related best practices used by peers with Extension and outreach appointments as part of the tenure and promotion process (Franz, 2011). Another venue for learning about, locating, and disseminating Extension scholarship is the *Journal of Extension*.

The Why and What of Extension Scholarship

Extension educators feel conflicted about why scholarship is important in their work. They state they do not prioritize scholarship as highly as their administrators and they aren't sure how it fits into their programming (Olson et al., 2007). However, there are many reasons to engage in Extension scholarship that focus on the individual Extension worker. These include the obligation to contribute to one's field/discipline, keeping on top of one's field/discipline to be current and relevant, generating program revenue, improving program delivery and program quality, enhancing the reporting of program impact, and personal professional development (McCann, 2008).

The products of Extension scholarship can be organized into three categories: 1) peer products, 2) applied products, and 3) community products. Peer academically focused products usually include articles, conferences, posters, presentations, abstracts, proceedings, grants, and competitive contracts. Applied products include curricula, materials, guides, technical assistance, and policies. Community products include forums, workshops, newsletters, websites, presentations, reports, designs, and displays that address community needs (Calleson, Jordan, & Seifer, 2005; Franz, 2011a; Franz, 2011b).

***Journal of Extension* Fosters a Culture of Scholarship**

As *Journal of Extension* board members we are convinced the journal provides a key driver and venue for fostering a culture of Extension scholarship. The journal's website states,

The *Journal of Extension* (*JOE*) is the official refereed journal of the U.S. Cooperative Extension System. *JOE* expands and updates the research and knowledge base for Extension professionals and other adult educators to improve their effectiveness. In addition, *JOE* serves as a forum for emerging and contemporary issues affecting Extension

education. *JOE* is written, reviewed, and edited by Extension professionals, sharing with their colleagues successful educational applications, original and applied research findings, scholarly opinions, educational resources, and challenges on issues of critical importance to Extension educators (*JOE*, 2012).

In particular, the journal's board representing all aspects of the Extension enterprise intentionally creates a culture that enhances Extension scholarship by ensuring that the journal:

- Serves as the premiere Extension journal in North America
- Is an open source journal sponsored by U.S. Cooperative Extension institutions
- Has a manuscript acceptance rate of 28% based on a double-blind peer review process for the majority of manuscripts
- Promotes a scholarship network through journal Commentary articles, related online discussions connected to those articles, and features to share articles through social media
- Has a professional editor rather than student editorial support
- Provides academic writing development support for new writers through the editor and land-grant university *JOE* institutional representatives
- Serves as a prime empirical research-base for Extension work and critical source for research to development grant proposals related to Extension and Outreach
- Supports opportunities for scholarship development and dissemination cross discipline and cross institutional work and scholarship across Extension
- Highlights the top 50 most viewed *JOE* articles each year that provides scholarship recognition for *JOE* authors

The Journal of Extension builds on these cultural factors by reaching over a million visitors each year and a subscriber list of 4,500 individuals.

***Journal of Extension* Plans to Further Enhance Extension Scholarship**

In the past decade in association with the rise in the Extension and Outreach scholarship movement, the *JOE* Board has taken a number of steps to enhance Extension scholarship. The *Journal of Extension* has become an electronic publication. Although the number of issues has remained constant for several years, the number of articles in each issue has increased from 14 in 2000 to 36 in 2012, reflecting the growth of the Extension scholarship movement. The number of manuscript reviewers has increased to 90 to ensure quality. Finally, a National Job Bank has been added to help job seekers and Extension systems connect with each other.

The *Journal of Extension* board will continue fostering a culture of Extension scholarship by:

- More fully developing an institutional liaison system of advocates for *JOE*
- Reviewing processes and outputs compared with peer journals
- Maintaining the management system of reviewers for review quality and timeliness
- Continuing to recruit qualified reviewers to ensure rigor

The *JOE* Board meets quarterly to report and document progress on these aspects of enhancing Extension scholarship.

Conclusion

Extension workers are being pressured more than ever before to create, document, and disseminate Extension scholarship to share best practices and become more integrated into the aims of their university with the growth in the outreach scholarship movement. Extension workers can help meet this need by engaging with the *Journal of Extension* as the premier Extension journal in North America by serving as a *JOE* board member, a *JOE* institutional contact, a manuscript reviewer, an author, or simply a reader. In addition, Extension workers can enhance Extension scholarship by promoting the use of *JOE* and the National Job Bank, nominating reviewers, citing *JOE* in other publications, and embedding it in the academic discussions across the country to bring attention to and elevate the scholarly nature of our work.

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