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Preparing Extension Professionals: The Ohio State University's Model of Extension Education

Abstract
Extension systems throughout the United States require individuals to have college degrees to work as Extension professionals. This article shares The Ohio State University's approach to Extension Education in the Department of Human and Community Resource Development. A model is presented for preparing Extension professionals in an academic setting. Based on the research literature, competencies for success in Extension are matched with courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels of instruction. By sharing our approach, we hope to encourage dialogue and discussion that will help us and other academic programs to offer the best possible curriculum for preparing Extension educators.

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Introduction

Extension systems throughout the United States require individuals to have college degrees to work as Extension professionals. At the county Extension educator or agent level, some states currently require a bachelor's degree (e.g., Kentucky and Michigan), while others call for a master's degree (e.g., Ohio and Nevada). State-level Extension specialists and administrative positions typically call for a doctoral degree. Successful Extension educators take many different avenues to attain their positions. Sometimes, a particular content area such as crop science, human development, family science, or natural resources is the focus. In other cases, degrees are attained with a specific focus on Extension Education.

Students have unique educational needs, and thus there are different routes to help them become most qualified for an Extension position. Factors that affect the types of degrees future Extension educators receive include program area of interest (e.g., 4-H Youth Development, Agricultural and Natural Resources), previous work experience (e.g., Extension-related, content area), and long-term career goals (e.g., administrative positions, specialist roles). This article shares our approach to educating Extension professionals as a way to promote discussion and research for developing and improving academic programs in Extension Education throughout the United States and beyond.

Extension Education in the Department of Human and Community Resource Development

Extension Education in the Department of Human and Community Resource Development (HCRD) is best described as a professional program with foundations in various disciplines (e.g., youth development, adult education, psychology, agricultural sciences, sociology, leadership development, and family studies). Currently, HCRD at The Ohio State University (OSU) not only includes Extension Education, but also the fields of Agricultural Education (which was the previous name of department), Agricultural Communication, and Rural Sociology.

The Extension Education program is grounded in the following strengths: (1) the diverse scope and focus of Extension Education faculty members' teaching and research experience; (2) the flexibility of the graduate program in Extension Education (for students focused in Extension, general non-profit administration, and youth development); and (3) direct and ongoing relationships with OSU Extension through joint and no-salary appointments.

The OSU Extension Education faculty work to create an environment conducive for learning that is research based and relevant beyond the academic setting, as evident in our scholarship of application. In tandem, we work with students to help them develop and assume successful roles as leaders, Extension educators, and scholars who promote positive changes for individuals, families, and communities.

The undergraduate program in HCRD was revised to include a specific track in Extension Education. The other tracks are Teacher Education and general studies in Agricultural Education. The focus of the undergraduate Extension Education track is to provide a foundation for future Extension professionals in general areas of program development, teaching methods, communications, and program management. In addition students are required to complete an early field experience and an Extension internship. Undergraduate students are awarded Bachelor of Science degrees in Agricultural Education, which will change in the near future to Agricultural and Extension Education to clearly indicate that Extension Education content area.

Master of Science (thesis required), Master of Education (applied, non-thesis option), and Doctor of Philosophy degrees with an emphasis on Extension Education are offered in HCRD. The graduate program offers both breadth and depth.

The Ph.D. applicant must document a minimum of 3 years of work in Extension or Extension-oriented careers. The experience may involve domestic or international Extension positions in a variety of program areas. Each application is examined individually so as to determine what constitutes Extension or Extension-related work experience. The experience requirement helps doctoral students have a real-world foundation for their advanced studies. Graduate students earn degrees in Human and Community Resource Development, which will also change to Agricultural and Extension Education to better reflect the content of the academic area to improve the visibility for both the undergraduate and graduate degrees.

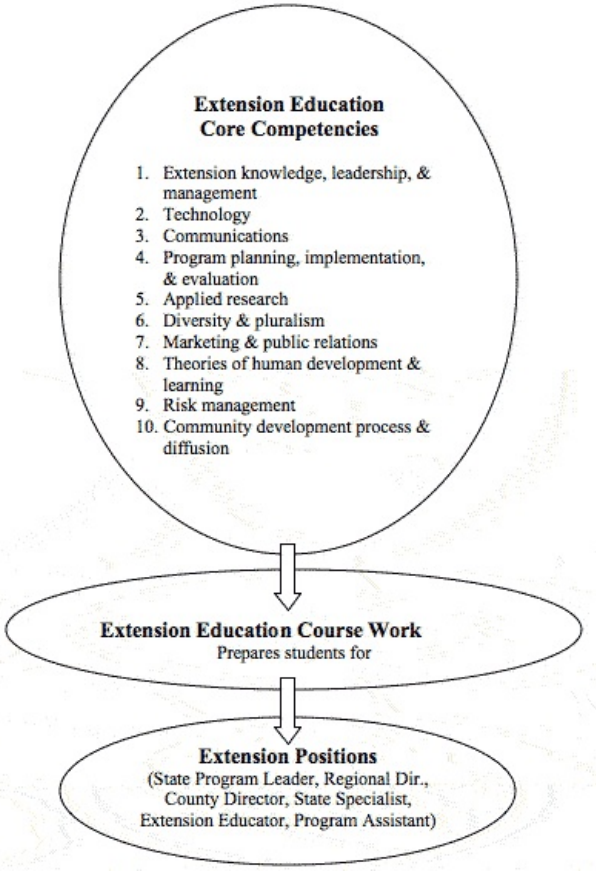
Purpose and Theoretical Foundations

We believe our primary purpose, in regards to students with a focus in Extension Education, is to provide them with the overall background and knowledge necessary for a successful future in Extension or Extension-related careers. Our Extension Education core competencies are based on the research literature (Cooper & Graham, 2001; Levine, 2004) and the essential skills required for employment by state Extension organizations. The competency areas are as follows:

1. Extension knowledge, leadership, and management
2. Technology
3. Communications
4. Program planning, implementation, and evaluation
5. Applied research
6. Diversity and pluralism
7. Marketing and public relations
8. Theories of human development and learning
9. Risk management
10. Community development process and diffusion.

Figure 1 depicts the core competency areas in a conceptual model.

Figure 1.
Extension Education Program Model



The core competency areas listed in Figure 1 are grounded in specific theoretical foundations of our Extension Education program. The theoretical foundations are given below, with a partial list of supporting references:

- Program Development and Evaluation (e.g., Bennett, 1975; Boone, Safrit, & Jones, 2002; Boyle, 1981; Caffarella, 2002; Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997)
- Human Development and Developmental Systems Theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Gardner, 1983; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004; Scheer, 1997; Sternberg, 1985)
- Adult Learning (e.g., Brookfield, 1988; Knowles, 1990; Knowles, Holton, III, & Swanson, 1998)
- Program Management (e.g., Bryson, 1995; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Herman et al., 1993; Kreitner, 1995)
- Leadership (e.g., Burns, 1978; Hersey & Blanchard, 1993; Tichy & Devanna, 1986; Yukl, 1994)
- Volunteer Management (e.g., Buford, Bededian, & Lindner, 1994; Vineyard, 1993)
- Communication (e.g., Bovee & Thill, 1998; Burnett & Tucker, 2001; Polnac, Grant, & Cameron, 1999)
- Community Development (e.g., Lackey & Pratuckchai, 1991; Rogers, 1995).

In turn, these competency areas, guided by the theoretical foundations and practical needs of the Extension profession, are infused into the coursework.

Coursework in Extension Education

Coursework in the Department of Human and Community Resource Development (HCRD) has been designed and continually modified to provide learning environments necessary for success as an Extension professional. We also incorporate classes from other departments throughout the university to reach this desired goal. Table 1 illustrates how undergraduate and graduate courses are matched with the core competencies. Although some courses are more closely connected with the core competencies (e.g., Program Development in Extension), other competencies (e.g., human development and learning) are distributed over several courses.

Table 1.
Extension Education Core Competencies Matched with Courses in HCRD

Extension Education Core Competencies	**UndergraduateExtension Education Courses** (Courses in HCRD,unless otherwise noted)	**GraduateExtension Education Courses** (Courses in HCRD,unless otherwise noted)
1. Extension knowledge, leadership, and management	230 - Introduction to Agricultural and Extension Education (History and Philosophy) 280 - Early Field Experience in Agricultural and Extension Education (80 hours) 342 - Fundamentals of Leadership 560 - Field Experience in Extension (400 hours) 630 - Senior Seminar in Agricultural and Extension Education	642 - Youth Organizations (4-H) 643 - Youth Program Management in Non-School Settings 795.03 - Leadership Development 800 - History and Philosophy of Agricultural and Extension 842 - Leadership and Administration in Agricultural and Extension Education
2. Technology	532 - Instructional Media and Technology	
3. Communications	*AG COMM 367 - Agricultural Issues in Contemporary American Society *AG COMM 390 - Oral Expression in Agriculture	840 - Agricultural Communication Theory and Practice
4. Program planning, implementation, & evaluation	420 - Program Development in Extension 530.01 - Methods of Teaching in Non-formal Learning Environments 560 - Field Experience in Extension (400 hours)	655 - Internship in Agricultural and Extension Education 723 - Strategic Planning in Agricultural and Extension Education 770 - Evaluation 823 - Program Planning in Agricultural and Extension Education
5. Applied research	387 - Data Analysis in Applied Sciences	885 - Research Methods 886 - Research Design 887 - Analysis and Interpretation of Data 888 - Instrumentation and Procedures for Data Collection 995 - Seminar in Research (Regression) 995 - Seminar in Research (Factor Analysis)

		6 credits in qualitative research (offered in other departments)
6. Diversity & pluralism	230 - Introduction to Agricultural and Extension Education (History and Philosophy) 280 - Early Field Experience in Agricultural and Extension Education (80 hours) 560 - Field Experience in Extension (400 hours) 630 - Senior Seminar in Agricultural and Extension Education	655 - Internship in Agricultural and Extension Education 795.02 - Seminar: Problems and Issues in Extension
7. Marketing & public relations	230 - Introduction to Agricultural and Extension Education (History and Philosophy) 280 - Early Field Experience in Agricultural and Extension Education (80 hours) 560 - Field Experience in Extension (400 hours)	642 - Youth Organizations (4-H) 643 - Youth Program Management in Non-School Settings 655 - Internship in Agricultural and Extension Education 723 - Strategic Planning in Agricultural and Extension Education
8. Theories of human development & learning	530.01 - Methods of Teaching in Non-formal Learning Environments 622 - Continuing Education in Agricultural and Extension Education *PSYC 100 - General Psychology *HDFS 364 - Life Span Human Development	642 - Youth Organizations (4-H) 643 - Youth Program Management in Non-School Settings 723 - Strategic Planning in Agricultural and Extension Education 795.04 - Seminar: Program Development 831 - Teaching and Learning in Agricultural and Extension Education
9. Risk management	560 - Field Experience in Extension (400 hours)	643 - Youth Program Management in Non-School Settings 655 - Internship in Agricultural and Extension Education 795.02 Seminar: Problems and Issues - Volunteerism

10. Community development process & diffusion	*RS 662 - Diffusion of Innovations	*RS 693.06 - Community Development *RS 788 - Sociological Theory Applied to Domestic Development *RS 888 - Social Action in Community Development
Notes. * Abbreviations for departments or programs that offer courses: RS — Rural Sociology, PSYCH — Psychology, HDFS — Human Development & Family Science, AG COMM — Agricultural Communications Course levels 500 and lower are undergraduate courses, 600 and 700 levels are courses that can be taken at both the undergraduate or graduate levels, and 800 and higher levels are graduate course work only		

When we initially developed this table, it allowed us to identify several gaps. This led us to consider whether we needed to add required courses to ensure that all competency areas were addressed. For example, Rural Sociology (RS) 622 Diffusion of Innovations was added because none of the other courses included this content. Furthermore, we have been able to make more subtle changes in the content and methods of existing courses.

Whenever possible, core competencies have both a theoretical and an applied component. For example, in the program development in Extension course (420), the focus is on the theory and process of program development in Extension; the opportunity to put the theory and process into practice is provided in the internship (560). With competencies such as research and evaluation, a series of courses is provided at the graduate level to encompass the desired depth. Thus, multiple quantitative and qualitative research courses are required for the Ph.D. degree in HCRD.

The HCRD teaching methods course (530) has one section (530.01 • Methods of Teaching in Non-Formal Learning Environments) that is directed for students in the Extension Education track. The Extension Education track focuses on preparing students in non-formal education settings while using actual Extension teaching scenarios. Extension Education students develop a program plan as compared to a lesson plan (as in the Teacher Education track) as they learn various teaching methods and strategies. Students have indicated this arrangement works extremely well for them because the class focuses specifically on Extension teaching.

Another example is the two youth program courses: Youth Organizations - 4-H (642) and Youth Program Management in Non-School Settings (643). The instructor plans field trips, guest speakers, and projects to connect the theoretical and the practical aspects of Extension Education. Students read about and discuss principles of positive youth development; then they observe these principles in action during a field trip to an urban youth education center.

Most recently, students participated in service-learning projects that allowed them to meet real community needs and to apply principles of program management in the process. The instructor also holds an appointment as an Extension Specialist in youth development, and thus these experiences are grounded in the current and day-to-day issues experienced by Extension professionals.

Field Experiences in Extension Education

As mentioned earlier, the undergraduate program requires both an early field experience (EFE) and a quarter-long internship (quarters are 10 weeks in length vs. 15 weeks for semester). The objectives of the EFE are: (1) to identify the role of professional educator and the scope of programs in a county Extension office; (2) to clarify a career choice through observations and experiences in Extension Education; and (3) to collect information, interview professional educators, make observations, practice skills, and reflect on experiences in Extension Education.

The EFE helps students further explore careers and gain experience in Extension. It is an 80-hour field experience with a professional Extension educator (typically at the county level) designed to help the student look at careers in Extension from the role of a professional. This experience may be the first opportunity for students to see life from the other side of the desk, therefore enabling them to take the first steps as a beginner in Extension Education.

We believe that actual observation and practical experience with a professional educator builds confidence and creates focus for students who choose to pursue a career in developing people and

communities. It also allows those who may be uncertain of Extension as a career path to gain a real-world view of what is involved in Extension work and make an informed decision.

The quarter-long internship is taken by students during their senior year. Students, under the supervision and leadership of a county Extension educator and in cooperation with the faculty instructor, plan learning experiences based on their program area of focus (e.g., Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, etc.). The course is designed to parallel the professional responsibilities of a county Extension educator. Thus, they have real-life experiences in planning, implementing, and evaluating Extension educational programs.

The internship is a 10-week commitment (400 hours) involving regular, full workdays. Some of the assignments include: developing and implementing a major educational program that is incorporated and integrated into an existing county program; participating in and contributing to actual professional experiences in OSU Extension; conducting Extension programs requiring them to use skills in planning, implementing, and evaluating Extension educational programs; teaching Extension clientele and volunteers; and gaining experience working with volunteers and advisory committees. Both the faculty member and the supervising educator provide input into the design and the evaluation of this experience.

A graduate-level internship in the Extension Education program (655 - Internship in Agricultural and Extension Education) is available for students to take up to 15 credits designed for them to broaden their educational experience and expertise. The internship is a carefully planned experience in teaching, research, Extension, administration, supervision, or other related areas. Specifics of the experience and assignments are determined not only by the faculty member and placement supervisor, but the student as well.

Implications and Conclusions

To better serve and prepare future Extension educators, developing and revising academic programs must be an ongoing process. It is imperative that the curriculum presented is competency based and grounded in theory as well as in practice. Students must have an opportunity to experience the work of Extension educators in real-world settings (e.g., through field experiences, internships, and service-learning projects). We believe these competencies, along with the practical application of theory, provide future Extension educators with the proper skills and capacity sets to succeed in the profession.

Academic departments that prepare future Extension professionals can meet changing needs by consistently reviewing the literature and evaluating the evolving needs of Extension professionals. While it may not be practical to create an Extension Education major in many universities, other reasonable options may include Extension Education certification programs or Extension Education specializations within established degree programs. In addition, the core competencies identified in Figure 1 may inform orientation and professional development plans for new Extension educators. By sharing our academic model for a research-based Extension Education program, we hope to encourage dialogue and dissemination of information that will help us and other academic programs to offer the best possible education for future Extension Education professionals.

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