

10-1-2003

## Strategies for Extension Specialists with Research or Classroom Instruction Assignments

Scott Loveridge

Michigan State University, [loverids@msue.msu.edu](mailto:loverids@msue.msu.edu)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

---

### Recommended Citation

Loveridge, S. (2003). Strategies for Extension Specialists with Research or Classroom Instruction Assignments. *The Journal of Extension*, 41(5), Article 14. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol41/iss5/14>

This Ideas at Work is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact [kokeefe@clemson.edu](mailto:kokeefe@clemson.edu).



October 2003 // Volume 41 // Number 5 // Ideas at Work // 5IAW1



PREVIOUS  
ARTICLE



ISSUE  
CONTENTS



NEXT  
ARTICLE

## Strategies for Extension Specialists with Research or Classroom Instruction Assignments

### Abstract

Many Extension Specialists hold appointments including classroom teaching and research functions. The article discusses using the classroom to enhance Extension work, structuring a research program synergistic with Extension, and developing a focused program consistent with a smaller percentage time appointment in Extension. Integrating research and classroom teaching with a meaningful Extension appointment may seem daunting, but it can be done. The key to success is to creatively assess opportunities for blending the activities in a synergistic way instead of simply segmenting time across the three functions.

### Scott Loveridge

State Extension Leader and Professor  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, Michigan  
Internet Address: [loverids@msue.msu.edu](mailto:loverids@msue.msu.edu)

### Introduction

This article offers ideas for State Extension Specialists holding appointments in classroom teaching and research. The proportion of specialists with blended appointments varies by state, but the movement toward this kind of appointment has been going on for some time (Gerber, 1985) and seems to be accelerating. The changes are partially driven by financial considerations as departments have downsized and combined positions (McDowell, 2001; Acker, 2001; Ahearn, 2002).

Programmatic advantages of blended appointments include:

- Bringing practical experiences to research (Jones & Finley, 1997) and classrooms (Haines, 2002)
- Offering a chance to "test run" Extension programs in classrooms
- Providing a bigger pool of applicants for open faculty positions

Programmatic disadvantages of blended appointments include:

- Difficulty in balancing effort (Brittingham, 1999)
- Paucity of mentors who achieved tenure under a split appointment

The rest of this article fills the "mentor void" by focusing on strategies that Extension Specialists might employ to balance among the three functions. The article includes strategies for the classroom, research, and Extension teaching.

### Classroom Strategies

To blend classroom teaching and Extension, find ways to connect students to groups who might benefit from the interaction. Some examples of how to do this follow.

- Use stakeholders to identify topics for student papers and provide critiques.
- Use industry/community contacts as guest lecturers in your course.
- Draw examples or exercises from your Extension work.
- Use student papers as a springboard for jointly authored Extension bulletins.
- Recruit passionate students for Extension-related internships, independent study, or thesis.

- Use spring break or summers to get students off-campus.

It is important to carefully negotiate your teaching assignment. Try to get a teaching assignment where the subject is closely aligned with your Extension work. Alignment will probably be best in upper-division undergraduate or intermediate graduate classes. Consider also the seasonality of demand for your Extension activities, and work towards concentrating your classroom teaching during the off-season. Team teaching with someone who doesn't have an Extension appointment can also help focus your classroom work in the Extension off-season.

### **Research Strategies**

Extension work can greatly enhance a faculty member's research program. Academic review includes consideration of published works and the faculty member's grant writing history. Some changes are underway among the major agencies that fund basic research across the nation. Frequently cited works by Boyer (1990), Lynton (1995), Campbell (1995), Glassick, Huber, and Maerhoff (1997), and the Kellogg Commission (1999) emphasize the need for connecting university research to various constituencies. Funding agencies now place more value on whether the research results have application in society.

For example, the prestigious National Science Foundation has recently added a new criterion for proposal review: "What are the broader impacts of the proposed activity?" An Extension appointment, with the close contact it brings with people who have practical needs, is an excellent way to develop research questions that have solid applications. What follows are some ways to connect research with Extension teaching.

- Use stakeholder groups to identify key, ongoing issues.
- Use your knowledge of the field to leverage non-Extension faculty involvement.
- Write post-docs or associates into your grants and ask them to assist in Extension program delivery.
- Involve Agents in managing, coordinating, or monitoring trials in their service regions.
- Use stakeholders to develop participatory research programs.
- Publish results of program evaluation in disciplinary journals.
- Look for mentors at all levels in the system as part of your evaluation work (Dann, 1999).

### **Extension Programming Strategies**

As a Specialist with a blended appointment, you may be filling two (or more) positions held by your predecessors. It is important to first assess and prioritize the Extension demands that your position's history may place upon you (Craven, 1999). A radical shift away from the prior programs may be needed, but it can be dangerous to make changes that alienate stakeholders before you have a better program to offer! Following are some strategies to make the most effective use of your time.

- Take time to understand Agent abilities and needs (Ukaga et al., 2002).
- Use Web sites, video, and conference calls to reduce travel time.
- Summarize new lines of research based on your dissertation.
- Avoid dozens of speeches to civic groups.
- Do programs with the potential to lead to short- or medium-term behavior change.
- Use program fees, program applications processes, or pre-program "homework" to assess the commitment of the audience.
- Proactively offer a selection of talks instead of simply reacting to requests.
- Use a "train-the-trainer" approach with Agents, and be clear about how you can help after the training.
- Seek grants for outreach or applied problem-solving activities.

Get a summary of your department's overall plan for Extension. If your department doesn't have a plan for its Extension work, then you have an opportunity to initiate discussions about what the department values in an Extension program. An excellent resource for this dialog might be Lynton's (1995, p. 56) "Questions for Departmental Discussion" (available on the Web at <http://www.compact.org/advancedtoolkit/lynton.html>).

### **Conclusions**

This article shows how Specialists with appointments blending research and classroom activities with Extension can thrive under the competing demands for their time. The strategies presented here must be evaluated in the context of your own assignment. Before using the suggestions listed above, frame them in the context of your situation, and consult with your more seasoned colleagues and your supervisor.

A good mix of research and classroom assignments can benefit an Extension program. While the appropriate mix may vary by discipline and place, it is important to keep in mind that the basic proportions in any good recipe can't change too much without ruining the flavor. Mixing research and teaching with Extension work in your appointment is a little like mixing a salad--if you put in 20 parts crouton and one part lettuce, the salad won't be very satisfying.

Similarly, a faculty appointment with only a small percentage of Extension time may not be very satisfying. It may result in a lack of focus on Extension program development, and it takes time to develop effective mechanisms for informal education. Research and classroom experiences should be viewed as seasoning for the salad--making life more interesting through combining flavors and experiences--but not the main ingredient in a Specialist's position description.

Integrating research and classroom teaching with a meaningful Extension appointment may seem daunting, but it can be done. The key to success is to creatively assess opportunities for blending the activities in a synergistic way instead of simply segmenting time across the three functions.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Vera Bitsch, Roy Black, Cheri Booth, Ted Ferris, Geoff Habron, George Morse, the MSU Extension Specialists Association, National Extension ANR Program Leaders conference participants, and three *JOE* reviewers for substantive comments on an earlier draft.

## References

- Acker, D. (2001). Budget cutbacks: Some strategies for deans, directors, and the staff they lead. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 39(2). Available at: <http://joe.org/joe/2001april/comm1.html>
- Ahearn, M. (2002). *Regional trends in Extension resources*. Paper presented at the Southern Agricultural Economics Association Meetings in Orlando, FL. Summary available at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/extension/>
- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered, Priorities of the professoriate*. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Princeton University Press: Lawrenceville, NJ.
- Brittingham, M. C. (1999). Challenges facing today's Extension specialists: Where's the stress? In R. M. Timmand S. L. Dann (Eds.) *Leading the way toward sustainability: Extension in the new millennium*. Proceedings of the 9th National Extension Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Conference. Portland Maine.
- Campbell, J. R. (1995). *Reclaiming a lost heritage: Land-grant and other higher education initiatives for the twenty-first century*. Iowa State University Press. Ames, IA.
- Craven, S. R. Survival within the university system. (1999). In R. M. Timmand S. L. Dann (Eds.) *Leading the way toward sustainability: Extension in the new millennium*. Proceedings of the 9th National Extension Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Conference. Portland Maine.
- Dann, S. L. (1999). Succeeding within the Extension system. In R. M. Timmand S. L. Dann (Eds.) *Leading the way toward sustainability: Extension in the new millennium*. Proceedings of the 9th National Extension Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Conference. Portland Maine.
- Gerber, J. M. (1985). Extension specialists: A self-analysis. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 23(4). 1985. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1985winter/a2.html>
- Glassick, C. E., Huber, M. Y., & Maerhoff, G. I. (1997). *Scholarship assessed: Evaluation of the professoriate*. Jossey-Bass Publishers. San Francisco.
- Haines, A. L. (2002). Blended teaching: Land use planning education in Wisconsin and lessons learned. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 40(5). Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2002october/iw2.shtml>
- Jones, S. B., & Finely, J. C. (1997). Integrating Extension in natural resources graduate education. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 35(6). Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1997december/a5.html>
- Kellogg Commission on the Future of Land-Grant Universities. (1999). *Returning to our roots: The engaged institution*. Washington, DC: National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges [On-line]. Available at: <http://www.nasulgc.org/publications/Kellogg/engage.pdf>
- Lynton, E. A. (1995). *Making the case for professional service*. American Association for Higher Education. Washington, D.C.
- McDowell, G. R. (2001). *Land grant universities and Extension into the 21st century: Renegotiating or abandoning a social contract*. Ames: Iowa State Press.
- Ukaga, O., Reichenbach, M. R., Blinn, C. R., Zak, D. M., Hutchinson, W. D., & Hegland, N. J. (2002). Building successful campus and field faculty teams. *Journal of Extension* [On-line]40(2). Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2002april/a3.html>

*Copyright* © by Extension Journal, Inc. ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the [Journal Editorial Office, joe-ed@joe.org](mailto:joe-ed@joe.org).

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#)

