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Progress Report--Globalizing U.S. Extension Systems

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Progress Report--Globalizing U.S. Extension Systems

Abstract

This article highlights the results of a 2000 study of U.S. Extension directors who described their Extension systems related to efforts to globalize over a 20-year period. Directors recognize that globalization of Extension is underway and will become more integrated into future Extension programming. Positive changes were seen between 1990 and 2000, with 35 systems moving towards globalizing. For purposes of the study, globalization was defined as the incorporation of global content into Extension efforts so that clientele develop an understanding of global interdependencies as they relate to the issue areas within the Extension mission.

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Introduction

Extension programs across the globe are being challenged to consider their impact, relevance, and effectiveness in a rapidly changing society. U.S. Land-Grant Universities, European Advisory Services, and Extension Centers globally are looking beyond traditional roles to provide leadership for maintaining sustainable communities. Social, economic, environmental, and production issues are inter-related and tie to the goals of economic well-being and quality of life. Globalizing Agricultural Science and Educational Programs for America (GASEPA, 1998) established a vision for colleges of agriculture and described globally competent stakeholders, faculty, and students who live, compete, and work well in a dynamic and interdependent world community.

Studies of Extension Directors conducted in 1990 indicated there had been little emphasis on internationalizing by Extension systems across the country (Poston & O'Rourke, 1991; Rosson & Sanders, 1991). Poston & O'Rourke (1991) reported 80% of Extension directors believed that their state had achieved either a low level or had not achieved any level of globalization. The study described here sought to determine the current state of globalization and identify directors' viewpoints about changes that had occurred and their projections for the future. Extension Directors were once again selected because of their broad understanding of Extension in their state, both current and past, and their ability to envision the future of their individual system.

Ludwig (1999) established a definition for globalizing U. S. Extension systems that provided the basis for the study. Globalizing was defined as: the incorporation of global content into Extension efforts so that clientele develop a fundamental understanding of global interdependence and international economic forces. Globalizing was characterized as integral to Extension's mission. A globalized Extension system would exhibit the following five characteristics (Ludwig & Barrick, 1997).

- Clientele understand global and national interdependencies.
- Programs stress the impact of international economic forces on agricultural markets.
- Extension professionals incorporate global concepts into ongoing Extension activities.
- The relationship between basic international issues and the Extension mission is recognized.
- Personnel evaluation systems recognize international efforts.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to ascertain state Extension system characteristics which relate to globalizing, describe changes in state Extension Systems from 1990 to 2000 and project changes by 2010 as identified by state Extension directors.

Methodology

Instrumentation

A survey instrument was developed following a review of literature to clarify the concepts being studied. A five-point Likert-type scale was used on seven items related to characteristics of globalization. Respondents were invited to add position statements describing their responses. Respondents identified major barriers to globalizing and completed open-ended items requesting short descriptions of state system's efforts to globalize in 1990, 2000 and projections for 2010.

Face and content validity of the instrument were assured through the use of a panel of experts. The reviewers, six faculty from universities in the U.S., were knowledgeable about U.S. Extension systems, research methodology, and international programs. Each was advised of the purpose and objectives of the study and asked to review and refine the alternatives stated. Comments and suggestions related to clarity and content were solicited. The instrument was pilot and field tested with university faculty from 10 universities to help control measurement error. Cronbach's alpha for the instrument was .85. This met criteria established for internal consistency (Nunnally, 1967).

Data Collection and Analysis

Instruments were distributed to all Extension directors during February 2000. The study, although not an exact replication of the 1990 Poston & O'Rourke study, targeted the same audience and sought the same types of information from leaders of Extension in the U.S. Follow up contacts in March and May 2000 encouraged response. Individuals responding to the May mailing of the questionnaire were considered late respondents.

Descriptive statistics were calculated. Responses were coded for computer analysis using SPSS. A .05 level of significance was established *a priori*. Early and late respondents were compared, using late respondents as a surrogate for non-respondents (Miller & Smith, 1983). Using a t-test at the .05 alpha level, no significant differences were found between early and late respondents.

Results

The results of the study represent the collective opinion of the directors participating in the study at a single point in time and cannot be construed to be representative of any other population or situation. Directors from fifty of the 51 U.S. systems (50 states and District of Columbia) responded, a 98% response rate. Comments made by the directors provided additional information to describe the ratings and clarify issues. Forty-nine usable instruments were received.

Characteristics of State Extension Systems

Directors were asked to indicate agreement or disagreement with a series of statements as descriptors of their own Extension system. Seven characteristics were examined based on the GASEPA report (1999) and a study of internationalizing U.S. Extension systems (Ludwig, 1999). Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics. One hundred and forty-seven comments were received explaining ratings on the seven characteristics.

Table 1.
Characteristics of State Extension Systems
N=49

Item Descriptor	Rating Scale - Percentages					Valid Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
	1	2	3	4	5			
Programs offered to clientele incorporate global perspectives	2	17	40	33	8	100	3.3	.92
Extension professionals are interested in incorporating a global perspective	2	16	29	41	12	100	3.5	.97
Professional development opportunities exist for Extension professionals wishing to engage	4	31	31	18	16	100	3.1	1.1

in global collaborative efforts								
Resources are available (i.e., funding) to support Extension professionals wishing to engage in global collaborative efforts	8	45	18	21	8	100	2.8	1.1
Agricultural programs focus on the impact of international economic forces on agricultural markets	2	12	29	35	22	100	3.6	1.1
Personnel evaluation systems recognize international efforts	6	29	37	22	6	100	3.0	1.0
Extension professionals are involved in programs which promote economic and social well-being in other nations	6	34	23	29	8	100	3.0	1.1

Scale: 1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - Neutral (Neither disagree or agree); 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly Agree

The characteristics considered and trends for 2000 appearing in comments from directors are reported below.

Programs offered to clientele incorporate global perspectives.

- Directors indicate the majority of programs focus on local perspectives. More emphasis on global perspectives is sought. Agricultural programs are more likely to incorporate.

Extension professionals are interested in incorporating a global perspective.

- Educators with some international experience have a strong commitment to globalizing Extension programs. Many have limited knowledge. Local focus takes precedence.

Professional development opportunities exist for Extension professionals to develop global competencies.

- Very few opportunities currently exist. Local people resist their county educators' involvement in international work because of the gap it creates in local programs. A few states are offering leave opportunities, but most professionals find their own funding source.

Resources are available (e.g., funding) to support Extension professionals wishing to engage in global collaborative efforts.

- Budgets are tight. Motivated people are successful in finding adequate support for good programs. University and colleges are supportive of international experiences, grants, and sabbaticals often used to support.

Agricultural programs focus on the impact of international economic forces on agricultural markets.

- International marketing in various commodities has the greatest priority. Clients have growing awareness and interest in trade issues. More growth seen in this program area.

Personnel evaluation systems recognize international efforts.

- There is limited recognition, more for faculty. Generally evaluations relate to impact of programs on the people of the state.

Extension professionals are involved in programs that promote economic and social well-being in other nations.

- A number are involved or have been in short-term humanitarian and development projects. Most have not.

State Efforts to Globalize

Directors were asked to describe their state Extension system's efforts to globalize in 1990 and 2000, and project efforts for the year 2010. For purpose of analysis, the comments were coded into three categories based on the descriptors provided by directors:

1. None or minimal globalizing;

2. Moving in a direction of globalizing; and
3. Globalization integrated into Extension programming.

Positive changes towards globalizing were shown from 1990 to 2000, with increasing globalization efforts projected in 2010. In 1990, 40 states identified no or minimal efforts to globalize and nine were globalizing. By 2000, 13 states reported minimal efforts, and 35 state directors recognized their systems as moving toward internationalization. One was globalized. Thirteen directors projected globalization will be integrated into their Extension programming by 2010, while 30 forecast continued progress in globalizing and 5 projected minimal efforts to globalize as the decade ends.

Sixty-five percent of the directors indicated that limited financial resources were the greatest barrier. Directors identified a lack of time (25%), concern about clientele support (19%), and not a programming priority (17%) as other barriers.

An overview of the descriptors would indicate that in 1990 there was recognition of a need to globalize in some states, but many were hampered by budget cuts. A few formed international committees, and highly interested individuals were involved in USAID projects.

By 2000, more efforts were seen, including conferences and training programs. Support of a small number of faculty and agents to obtain global experience was noted. The global economy was the main focus of programming for clientele.

By 2010, directors hope expanded efforts for all program areas will have occurred. This will include out-of-country experiences for clientele and staff and global perspectives integrated into programming. Global collaborative efforts will be evident and more fiscal support available.

Implications

In reviewing the results of the study, Martin (2001) expressed concern that while some progress has been made, U.S. Extension systems could be characterized as globally challenged. The lack of a plan for globalization or adding an international perspective to Extension programming is evident in responses from most states.

The events of the past months raise our awareness of our connection to our neighbors across the oceans. By mid-century, it is predicted that the average U.S. citizen will trace his or her ancestry not to Europe, but to Asia, Africa, the Hispanic world, or the Pacific Islands. Global is becoming a part of local, and education and support for clientele will have to be delivered within a culturally sensitive framework. Cross-cultural competency will make Extension professionals more effective locally and also open to them the possibility of personal professional growth through involvement in a project or study tour to another part of the world.

The barriers identified by directors should be given careful consideration and could be used as a starting point in determining proactive approaches. Ludwig (1999) and Knight and Elliot (2000) in studies involving all Extension personnel in two different states found similar perceptions among individuals in the systems studied. Lack of time, financial support, and not a program priority were viewed as primary barriers by Extension personnel. Concern about clientele support appeared to be a greater perceived barrier for directors than for Extension educators who deal directly with local clientele. Extension personnel appeared to have more concern about whether the organization saw globalizing as a priority.

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