

## **What is an Extension Program?**

*Rick Fletcher, OSU Extension Service  
June 2006*

Many faculty who come to Oregon State University are unaware that it is a Land Grant University, or what that title means. The “Third Mission,” that of Extension, has been clouded even more in recent years with the advent of major outreach programs through distance education. Extension is unique in structure and function. With its nationwide university faculty and staff located on university campuses, and in the over 3,000 counties across the country, Extension is truly the front door to America’s land-grant universities and the prime university link to local communities. Local Extension professionals apply their expertise and connect community residents to the resources of the nation’s great teaching and research universities to help solve locally-identified problems. This integration of teaching, research, and public service enables the Cooperative Extension System to respond to critical, emerging issues with research-based information.

So what distinguishes an Extension program from other activities conducted by University faculty? Academics outside of Extension sometimes mistake service activities such as speaking to local service clubs as Extension activities. Extension faculty, however, conduct teaching and research activities like their non-Extension campus colleagues; the only apparent difference many times is the audience served and the location where the work is being done. A closer look reveals other important differences. A major difference is the involvement of the audience in the design and delivery of the programs. Where campus research is driven many times by researcher interests, developments elsewhere in science, or the desires of a funding organization, Extension research is usually based on locally identified needs. Likewise, Extension educational programs involve identifying community needs and then partnering with local organizations and individuals to address them through publications, educational meetings, tours and other educational techniques. Extension programs are usually delivered in informal settings and do not include university credit. Traditional university teaching produces curricula largely designed by faculty, with little input from the students. Many Extension programs include advisory committee input, and sometimes direct involvement of local technology/industry leaders in helping deliver the programs.

Another important feature of Extension programs is how success or impact is measured. The OSU Extension Service encourages the LOGIC model, (<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html>), assessment technique for Extension faculty to use for program planning. Using this technique, educational designers identify outputs and outcomes they expect to result from the Extension program, and specify how these will be measured. This is done before the program is conducted. Educational programs using this type of method typically

generate impact information which can be used to demonstrate the value of the program to stakeholders, and may be statistically valid information for publishing and sharing with peers. However, not all Extension programs are expected to be shared with peers.

Scholarly accomplishments can be a part of some Extension programs. New Extension faculty members often have difficulty explaining and communicating their important work to teaching and research colleagues, due to the unique nature of their work compared to teaching university students, and publishing basic research. While it seems pretty straightforward to count refereed journal articles to evaluate a faculty member's research output and progress towards tenure and promotion, it is less obvious what constitutes scholarly output for an Extension faculty member. Faced with this dilemma, and nervous about their ability to achieve tenure, many Extension faculty often take the more common pathway, of publishing research in refereed journals. This form of peer validation is easily understood by colleagues. There are alternate ways to communicate with peers and obtain validation of one's work. The current university definition of scholarship provides for some flexibility and innovation here.

Scholarship was redefined at OSU in the 1990's, thanks to the efforts of Conrad Weiser and a group of colleagues, based on original work by Ernest Boyer. OSU now defines scholarship as "creative intellectual works that is validated by peers and communicated." (<http://oregonstate.edu/facultystaff/handbook/promoten/promoten.htm>). The definition includes the four forms of scholarship:

1. Discovery of new knowledge
2. Development of new technologies, methods, materials, or uses
3. Integration of knowledge leading to new understanding
4. Artistry that creates new insights and interpretations.

This redefinition of scholarship is good news for Extension faculty who make contributions to scholarship other than just discovery of new knowledge, as verified by refereed journal articles.

Useful Further Reading:

Boyer, E. (1990), *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professorate*. Special Report. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

O'Meara, K. and Rice, E. (2005). *Faculty Priorities Reconsidered: Rewarding Multiple Forms of Scholarship*. Jossey-Bass Publishing. Available for purchase at: <http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0787979201.html>

Schauber, A. et al. (1998). *Defining Scholarship for County Extension Agents*. Journal of Extension. August 1998. <http://www.joe.org/joe/1998august/iw1.html>