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## Turning an Extension Aide into an Extension Agent

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# Turning an Extension Aide into an Extension Agent

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**Abstract:** For any organization to remain sustainable, a renewable source of faculty and staff needs to be available. The Extension Internship Program for Juniors and Seniors in High School is a new tool for recruiting and developing new Extension agents. Students get "hands on" experience working in an Extension office and earn college credit while in high school.

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## Introduction

In order for any organization to survive, it will need to recruit and develop many new personnel. The Cooperative Extension Service is no exception. New agents are needed to replace those who will leave the profession. To provide the staff necessary to support continuing and future endeavors, Cooperative Extension leaders are challenged to think of new recruitment and development strategies. Internships have long been a way to recruit a potential workforce. But to date, most internships have been centered on college-age students. (Wilken, Williams, Cadavieco, & Walker, 2008; Rogers, Mason, & Connelius, 2001; Seevers, Treat, Cummings, & Wright, 1996). According to Borkowski (2009), internships during high school provide a full range of benefits to both the organizations and the student, like work experience, career orientation, resume building, and a potential future workforce.

For New Mexico, we conceptualized the Extension Internship Program for Juniors and Seniors in High School as one new tool for recruiting and developing new agents. Our idea is for Extension agents to identify talented youth who have the interest and potential to become quality Extension agents as their aides. Duties are structured and supervised/mentored by their Extension agent to give the interns a comprehensive look at and successful experiences with the role of an extension agent. Interns get real experiences in the different Extension program areas as well as the delivery strategies for successful community education.

## Grading Rubric for College Credit

Upon entering college, the student receives college credit for their internship by submitting a portfolio. Our instructions and grading rubric for interns compiling, and university faculty assessing internship portfolios for college credit are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.**  
Grading Rubric

**Department of Agricultural and Extension Education  
New Mexico State University**

**Internship Program For Juniors Or Seniors In High School**

**Description:**

Juniors or Senior in high school who have expressed interest in Extension education as a career can receive credit for AXED 100 (Introduction to Agricultural and Extension Education - 3 credits) and AXED 230 (Early Field-Based Experience - 1 credit) for interning with their county extension agent(s) while still in high school. To receive credit, they must be fully admitted to New Mexico State University and register for AXED 100 and AXED 230 the fall of their first semester at NMSU. During the year of high school they are interning, students will develop a portfolio, containing the following tabbed sections: Students will turn in the completed portfolio to the Agricultural and Extension Education Department (AXED) the first Fall semester they attend NMSU and register for AXED 100 and AXED 230. The portfolio can be submitted any time during that first Fall semester up to the Monday of finals week. A grade will be assigned based on the points received in the portfolio assignment.

1. **PROFESSIONAL GROWTH:** Students will keep a daily journal of their 4-H, Extension, and other internship experiences. In this journal, students will write about what they have learned about planning and delivering effective Extension programs. They will reflect on agents/extension educators they have observed and identify what makes an Extension professional successful. They will reflect on what makes the Cooperative Extension Service a unique community education program. (10 points)
2. **4-H/PROGRAM PLANNING:** Students will be the key person in helping to plan two 4-H activities. They will provide all planning tools developed (e.g. calendars, agendas, etc.) and utilized for the activities. Examples of activities include fairs, contests, judging activities, or camps. Details of travel, food, lodging, members participating, chaperones involved, as well as any other pertinent information should be included. (20 points)
3. **OTHER EXTENSION PROGRAMS:** Students will assist the county agent with at least 2 programs offered in other Extension programs areas (e.g. Agriculture, Natural Resources, Home Economics, Health, Community Development). Documentation of the experience should be provided through agendas, handouts, and other class materials. (10 points)
4. **PROGRAM DELIVERY:** Under the supervision of the county agent(s), students will plan and teach at least two 50 minute lessons in any Extension program area/topic, and will include the lesson plans and evaluation tools used for the lessons. (20 points)
5. **INFORMATION DELIVERY AND PROGRAM PROMOTION:** (1) Students will be involved in assisting clientele to obtain information sought. Questions from clientele may come from walk-ins, telephone calls, email messages or farm/ranch/home visits. Verification of information from accurate and reliable sources is essential. (2) Students will be involved in at least two activities that promote Cooperative Extension programs and activities. Possible activities could include: newsletter articles, news releases for newspapers, radio programs, flyer/brochures, etc. (20 points)
6. **NETWORKING/COLLABORATION:** Students will document interaction with outside stakeholders/partners such as advisory committees, and community groups such as Farm Bureau or Fair Boards by providing agendas, sign up sheets, or any other documentation of a meeting or event. Students will discuss the role of partners and the importance of networking and collaboration in a short, half page essay. (10 points)
7. **SCRAPBOOK:** Students will keep a scrapbook of programs, brochures, photographs, and other records of their participation in the internship program. (10 points)
8. **SUPERVISING AGENT EVALUATION:** The supervising agent will use the attached rubric (at <http://www.nmsu.edu/academics/axed/high-school-internship.html>) to evaluate the student on their professionalism during the internship. (20 points)

## Benefits of the Program

This program has multiple winning aspects with no apparent downside. Some of these aspects are the following.

1. Agents get involved in building their future workforce.
2. Rich and meaningful experiences are provided to high school students with the interest and potential to become quality Extension agents.
3. Agents get the satisfaction and experience of mentoring their own youth toward a career in Extension.
4. Agents get more assistance with their program.
5. Youth get four credits towards their college education.
6. Partnership links between Extension, agents, youth, and university agricultural educators are established when the youth are still in high school.
7. The most motivated youth start early on a pathway to become an Extension agent.
8. Students could apply internship experiences towards scholarships, record book, and leadership awards.
9. Students enroll in a full load of courses their first semester in college, but in reality only attend four classes because they have already completed the work for four credits.
10. The program is simple to understand and requires little additional paperwork for the Extension agent.
11. Additional costs for the internship should be minimal to non-existent.

## Final Notes

While we don't anticipate that the program will completely solve the shortage and demand for additional agents, it could make a sizable contribution. Just think if each current Extension agent identified and worked with one student over the next 3 years in such an internship. We'd have the potential to add hundreds of new

agents to the workforce with this simple tool, alone!

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