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Timberline Manifesto: Seven Concepts Linking Extension and Engagement

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Timberline Manifesto: Seven Concepts Linking Extension and Engagement

Abstract

Though positioned within universities, Cooperative Extension Services don't have a history of linking effectively to other institutional missions. Extension's emergent role in engaging the entire university provides an opportunity to demonstrate leadership by growing a culture of engaged scholarship and involving matriculated students in Extension work. Other innovative connections can create or strengthen robust relationships between sources and applications of knowledge. This commentary reflects the views of 45 participants at an event designed to look forward toward Extension's second century.

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Introduction

Extension periodically explores its future. In our 30-plus-year careers, we have experienced numerous calls for adapting to changes. The 1999 report by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities articulated characteristics of engaged institutions that stopped short of addressing the explicit role of Extension in working across the university. Bull, Cote, Warner, and McKinnie (2004) suggested that Extension should assist the entire university in improving quality of life for citizens and communities, leading to a more complete learning experience for core faculty and their students.

King and Boehlje (2013) argued that engagement should be the overarching goal of the land-grant system, and that eXtension needed to transform to effectively meet needs of new and expanded audiences. In today's Extension context, issues often demand a more expansive approach to identifying partners, increasing learner access, and documenting the scholarship associated with what are regarded as "disruptive" innovations (Franz & Cox, 2012).

Public universities' commitment to the concept of engagement is part of a broader social movement in higher education. What is our role in this new era? Connecting communities with their public universities is Extension's legacy and strength. But what is our future?

In September 2014, the Western Extension Directors Association convened to celebrate Extension's 100-year history at the historic Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood, Oregon. At the event, called Centennial on the Summit—Looking Forward, we had in-depth conversations to explore dimensions of a contemporary Extension Service that embrace responsibility for engaging the whole university. Seven concepts emerged and are described briefly below. Participants elected to add their personal endorsement by signing the document, dubbed the *Timberline Manifesto*.

We believe the following principles are crucial to the next century of Extension work and commit to providing needed leadership at our respective institutions toward a future defined by them.

Engaged Scholarship

Land-grant universities are focused on education with a historic commitment to engagement and outreach. Extension's role in the scholarship of engagement is assumed but often not articulated, understood, or acknowledged by the majority of the academy. Extension educators must lead the development and documentation of engaged scholarship and the associated outcomes of value to a civil society.

University Integration

Extension will benefit from moving closer to the entire academy while intensifying its engagement and connection with society. Extension's outreach mission advances the social and personal goals of learners. Extension's engagement mission is not independent of the university's primary educational mission—it is an integral expression of this mission. Reaching internally and connecting with campus faculty enriches the learning environment for students and community learners.

Learning Technologies

Technologies that advance the goals of learners also enhance the effectiveness and relevance of outreach and engagement. The pace of technology development requires constant adaptation in approaches to teaching and learning. Land-grant universities and their Extension units should incorporate innovations provided by emerging learning management systems, open-source access, and noncredit curricula while staying consistent with their heritage of engaging learners. The information ecosystem supports strategic and networked partnerships with public and private sectors.

Demand-Driven Agenda

Historic outreach programs tend to be supply-driven by the availability of research-based knowledge. Engaged universities institutionalize careful listening and collaboration with populations in their service sphere. Extension must invigorate its commitment to listening to a broader community, especially audiences with diverse and changing demographics. Creating partnerships with communities and framing the Extension educational agenda based on identified local and regional issues are pivotal in

developing and maintaining demand-driven programs.

Open Source

Easy access to sharing and building on knowledge broadens possibilities for learners through self-actualization, entrepreneurship, and informed citizenship. Open and action-oriented relationships with communities have been a century-long hallmark of Extension. Land-grant universities, by expanding the sphere of engagement of their Extension services, enhance opportunities for successfully creating and incorporating market disruptions and expanding their customer base.

Culture

Extension and university engagement are tools and platforms of democracy, increasing the capacity for informed thought and social and economic change. The accelerating velocity of social and economic transformations and the technologies shaping these changes provide opportunities. Extension is a nexus for locally relevant knowledge in a global setting.

Identity and Staffing

The success of 21st century Extension professionals depends on the relevance and impact of their work. Separate from their role as content experts, Extension workers convene inclusive communities of interest and carefully weave partnerships to identify, create, and apply knowledge. Communication and marketing skills, supported by unbiased credibility, underlie Extension's future.

Conclusion

The relevance of these seven concepts no doubt varies by institution, and Extension's relationship to the academy is different at each land-grant university. This manifesto was produced by individuals from the western United States and provides a basis for conversations in other regions.

Acknowledgements

We thank those who helped make the summit event possible. Glen Whipple, University of Wyoming, led our planning committee, which also included Jon Boren, New Mexico State University; Brian Higginbotham, Utah State University; Doreen Hauser-Lindstrom, Washington State University; and Jackie Russell, Oregon State University.

Timberline Manifesto Signatories

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<http://joe.org/joe/2015august/comm1.php#discussion>

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