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## The Effect of Tenure and Promotion Policy on Evaluation and Research in Extension

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## The Effect of Tenure and Promotion Policy on Evaluation and Research in Extension

### Abstract

This article discusses results from a study to understand how a promotion and tenure policy at West Virginia University Extension allowing faculty to select service over research as their significant area of contribution would affect research and evaluation productivity. The results show that research expectations are related to job status and length of service, but evaluation expectations remain consistent across groups. The author suggests that administrators enhance evaluation skills and promote evaluation studies as a way to document service scholarship in the tenure process. The result would be a better understanding of how to document the scholarship of engagement.

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## Introduction

In 1985, West Virginia University (WVU) Extension educators, both state and field-based, were granted faculty status in Extension. At WVU, very few Extension faculty members carry an appointment in an academic college or department, so this was an important change in promotion and tenure policy. At that time, most faculty members were assigned research and teaching as their areas of significant contribution and were expected to participate in evaluation and research activities.

The move was welcomed by the faculty because it meant an elevation in status as well as an increase in salary. Most, however, did not fully realize how much time and effort they would be expected to spend on evaluation and research activities. The guidelines for promotion and tenure have been adjusted two times since 1985, in 1989 and 1996 (WVU Extension Guidelines for Promotion and Tenure, 1985, 1989, & 1996).

In 1991, the WVU Extension Research Planning Committee conducted a needs assessment to determine how to strengthen the capacity of Extension faculty to do evaluation and research. On that survey, 73% of field-based faculty or agents reported that they were having difficulty complying with research requirements as compared to 42% of state-based faculty or specialists who were having difficulty.

The faculty members said that they needed technical assistance to design research and analyze data and that they wanted policies and procedures that would systematically incorporate research activities into their plan of work (Marshall, et al., 1991). Over the next 10 years, a series of workshops were offered to faculty, a specialist was given the responsibility of coordinating research throughout WVU Extension, a research committee was established, and a fulltime evaluation specialist was hired.

Today, 18 years later, the effects of WVU Extension's promotion and tenure policy are being evaluated, and changes are being implemented to allow faculty members to change their areas of significant contribution from research and teaching to service and teaching. This is partially in response to the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (1999), which says that universities should organize their resources to better engage and serve their

clientele.

In 2003, several entry-level tenure-track faculty members were selected to change their area of significant contribution from research to service and to develop a portfolio that will document their service as scholarship and serve as an example to others who might want to make the change. Based on these faculty members' experience, Extension administrators will be able to make decisions as to whether to allow new faculty members to choose service over research and to allow tenured faculty to change their areas of significant contribution. In addition, the information will help faculty in academic departments defend their outreach activities as scholarship.

As an Extension evaluation specialist, I was interest in whether this new policy would have an effect on evaluation and research productivity at West Virginia University. The results of this exploratory study might also help other Extension units as they deal with promotion and tenure issues (Schauber, et al., 1998; Weiser, 1994, Ukaga, et al., 2002).

The following research questions were explored:

1. Does "faculty status" have an effect on a WVU Extension faculty member's perception of evaluation expectations and research expectations?
2. Does "job status" have an effect on a WVU Extension faculty member's perception of evaluation and research expectations?
3. Does "length of service" have an effect on a WVU Extension faculty member's perception of evaluation and research expectations?
4. If WVU Extension faculty members change their area of significant contribution from research to service, will it affect evaluation and/or research productivity?

## **Methodology**

In the fall of 2002, all faculty members in WVU Extension were invited, via e-mail, to attend a workshop on survey writing. Forty-seven Extension professionals attended and completed a survey. There were 36 faculty members in this group, which represents about one-fourth of all faculty members in WVU Extension.

The study group is not a representative sample of Extension faculty members at West Virginia University because the majority (32) were from the Center for 4-H and Youth, Family and Adult Development, one of three WVU Extension centers, and all respondents "self-selected" for the study by signing up for a workshop on survey writing. In addition, this group may have a greater interest in evaluation and research methodology than other faculty members may. Therefore, this study must be considered exploratory.

The questions on the survey included demographic information about the respondents' professional or faculty status; their position at WVU Extension; how long they had worked for WVU Extension; whether they had worked for WVU Extension before 1985, when faculty status was granted; whether they had worked for any other Cooperative Extension unit before coming to WVU; and whether state and field-based Extension educators had faculty status at that institution. They were also asked if they could explain the difference between research and evaluation, a distinction that has caused both confusion and unrealistic expectations during promotion and tenure reviews.

Using a three-point Likert scale (1=too high, 2=about right, 3=too low) respondents were asked to rate the evaluation and research expectation placed upon them by administration. Using a four-point Likert scale (1=not important, 2=tends to be not important, 3=tends to be important, 4=important), they were also asked to indicate how important or unimportant program evaluations and/or research activities are in order to achieve high performance ratings on annual reviews. Using a three-point Likert scale (1=fewer, 2=about the same, 3=more) they were asked to indicate whether or not they would do more or fewer evaluation and research projects if they did not have faculty status. Finally, using a four-point Likert scale (1=yes, 2=no, 3=unsure, 4=does not apply to me), they were asked if given the opportunity, they would choose to change their areas of significance to service and teaching rather than research and teaching.

## **Subjects**

Almost two-thirds of the faculty respondents were tenured (23) and another third (13) had faculty status, but were either not tenured yet or were clinical faculty who are not on tenure track. The latter group can be promoted and participate in the same promotion process as those on tenure track. Twenty-five, or 66%, of the respondents were field-based faculty; eight, or 22%, were state specialists; and one was an administrator. Thirteen, or 36.1%, had worked for WVU Extension for more than 20 years; 13, or 36.1%, had worked for Extension for 6 to 20 years; and 10, or 27.8%, had worked for WVU Extension for 5 years or less.

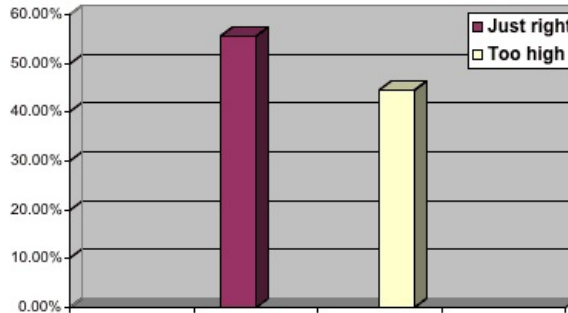
## **Experience with Evaluation and Research**

Seventeen, or almost one-half (47.2%) of the faculty respondents, had been working for WVU Extension in 1985, when faculty status was granted. Of those, eight, or more than half (57.1%), said that they evaluated fewer programs before they had faculty status, and 13 (92.9%) said they engaged in fewer research projects before they had faculty status.

## Evaluation Expectations

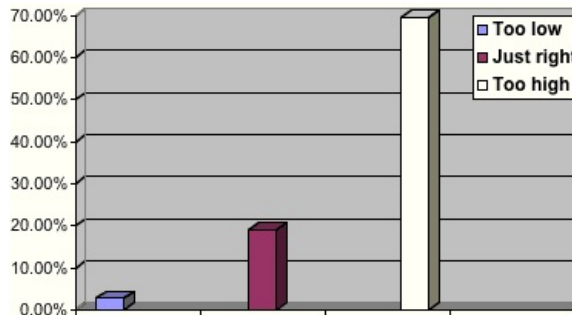
A smaller number of faculty members said they thought that the evaluation expectations were too high than thought that the research expectations were too high. The majority, 20 of the respondents (55.6%), said that they thought the expectations for evaluation are about right (Figure 1). Thirty-two of the respondents (88.9%) agreed that it is important to complete program evaluations in order to get a rating of high merit on annual evaluations.

**Figure 1.**  
Evaluation Expectations



Twenty-eight respondents (77.8%) said that they thought the research expectations were too high, seven (19.4%) thought they were about right, and one (2.8%) thought they were too low (Figure 2). Thirty-five of the respondents (97.2%) said that they believe it is important to complete research projects in order to get a rating of high merit on annual evaluations.

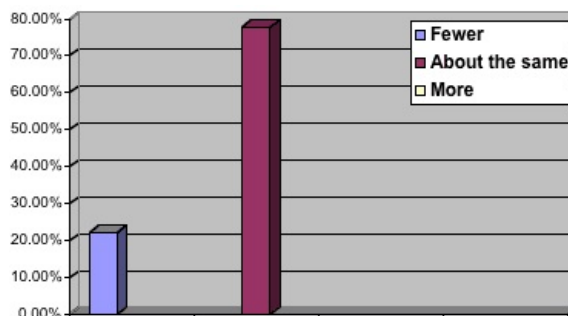
**Figure 2.**  
Research Expectations



## Effect of Faculty Status on Evaluation and Research Productivity

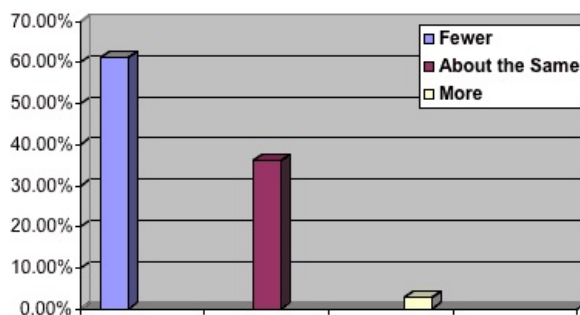
Eight, or almost one fourth (22.2%) of the respondents, said that they would do fewer evaluations if they did not have faculty status. On the other hand, 28 respondents (77.8%) said that they would do fewer research projects if they did not have faculty status (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.**  
Perceived Evaluation Productivity Without Faculty Status



Twenty-two of the respondents (61.1%) said that if they did not have faculty status, they would do fewer research projects. Thirteen (36.1%) said they would do about the same number of research projects, and one person said he or she would do more.

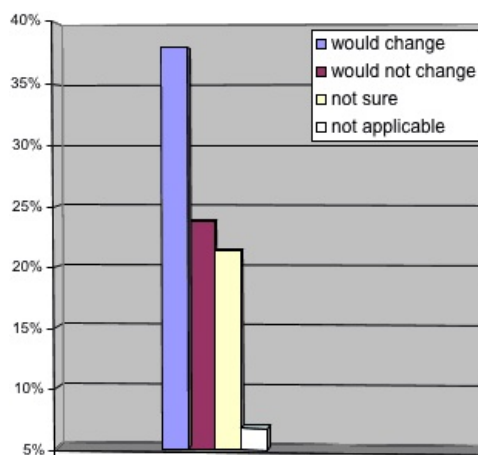
**Figure 4.**  
Perceived Research Productivity Without Faculty Status



### Change in Area of Significant Contribution

Thirteen respondents (36.1%) said that they would change their significant area of contribution from research to service if given the opportunity. Eight respondents (22.2%) said that they would not change, and nine (25%) said that they were unsure about making the change. Six of the respondents said that the proposed change did not apply to them. The reason for this may be that, at the time, specialists were told that they could not change their areas of significance.

**Figure 5.**  
Desire to Make Changes in Area of Significance



Those who said that they would not change their significant areas gave the following reasons for not changing.

- "After 10 years I feel more confident in doing research due to opportunities to work with other professionals working in research."
- "I am happy with teaching and research."
- "I am starting to figure out about research, and I don't want to not practice what I've been spending nine years learning to do."
- "I'm OK with teaching and research at this point in my career."

### Relationship of Respondent Characteristics to Attitudes About Research and Evaluation Expectations

Since the sample is small and non-representative, non-parametric tests were used to compare two independent samples of participants based on professional status, job status (agent/specialist), and length of service (10 years or less/more than 10 years). No relationship was found with professional status (clinical, non-tenured tenure track, tenured) and any of the independent variables.

#### **Job status**

Based on a Mann-Whitney Test for significance, County Extension agents rated the expectations for research higher than did specialists. It is important to note that this does not mean that the expectations are higher for field-based faculty than for state-based specialist, but only that they perceive them to be higher.

**Table 1.**  
Evaluation and Research Expectations Related to Job Status

Question	Mean - Field-Based	Mode - Field-Based	Mean - Specialist	Mode - Specialist	Z

How would you rate the expectations regarding evaluation? **	1.48	1.00	1.67	2.00	-.804
How would you rate the expectations regarding research? **	1.14	1.00	1.55	2.00	-.2.438*
How important is it to complete evaluations to get high merit? ***	3.45	4.00	3.11	3.00	-1.572
How important is it to complete research projects to get high merit? ***	3.24	4.00	3.33	3.00	-1.238
<p>* p &lt; .02  ** 1=high, 2=about right, 3=low  *** 1=not important, 2=tends not to be important, 3=tends to be important, 4=important</p>					

### Length of Service

Based on the Mann-Whitney Test for significance, those who have more than 10 years of service in Extension rated research expectations higher than those with fewer years of service. Those with fewer than 10 years of service were also less likely to think that completing research projects was important in order to get a rating of high merit.

**Table 2**  
Evaluation and Research Expectations Related to Length of Service

Question	Mean < 11 years	Mode < 11 years	Mean > 10 years	Mode > 10 years	Z
How would you rate the expectations regarding evaluation? **	1.74	2.00	1.52	2.00	-.740
How would you rate the expectations regarding research? **	1.61	1.00	1.09	1.00	-.1.982*
How important is it to complete evaluations to get high merit? ***	3.42	4.00	3.39	4.00	-.572
How important is it to complete research projects to get high merit? ***	3.26	3.00	3.35	4.00	-2.086*
<p>* p &lt; .05  ** 1=high, 2=about right, 3=low</p>					

\*\*\* 1=not important, 2=tends not to be important, 3=tends to be important,  
4=important

## Discussion of the Results

### Research Question One

Does "faculty status" have an effect on a WVU Extension faculty member's perception of evaluation and research expectations?

The answer to this question is "no." The majority of West Virginia University Extension faculty members who were surveyed said that evaluation expectations were "just right," and the majority of West Virginia University Extension faculty members who were surveyed said that research expectations were "too high." Neither evaluation nor research expectations were related to faculty status, or whether the respondent is a clinical professor, non-tenured tenure track professor, or a tenured professor. In addition, perceptions of whether or not completing evaluations or research projects are necessary in order to receive a rating of high merit on annual evaluations, is not related to faculty status.

### Research Question Two

Does "job status" have an effect on a WVU Extension faculty member's perception of evaluation and research expectations?

Whether the respondent was a specialist or a field-based faculty member had no relationship to his or her perception of evaluation expectations or of whether a faculty member needed to complete evaluations in order to receive a high merit rating.

Job status did make a difference with regard to research expectations. Field-based faculty members rated research expectations higher than specialists did. There was no significant difference, however, in the responses of specialists and field-based faculty to the question about the importance of completing research projects in order to receive a rating of high merit.

### Research Question Three

Does "length of service" have an effect on a WVU Extension faculty member's perception of evaluation and research expectations?

The length of service did not have a relationship to evaluation expectations or the perception of the need to complete evaluations in order to achieve a high merit rating.

Those who have been employed by Extension for more than 10 years rated research expectations higher than those with fewer years did of service. Those individuals were also more likely to say that completing research projects is important in order to receive high merit on annual evaluations.

### Research Question Four

If WVU Extension faculty members change their area of significant contribution from research to service, will it affect evaluation and/or research productivity?

The majority of WVU Extension faculty members who participated in the study said that they would do about the same number of evaluations if they were allowed to change their area of significant contribution from research to service. No relationship was found with faculty status, job status, or length of service.

The majority of WVU Extension faculty members who participated in the study said that they would do fewer research projects if they were given the opportunity to change their area of significant contribution from research to service. Again, no relationship was found with faculty status, job status, or length of service.

## Implications of the Results for Extension

For WVU Extension, the results of this study indicate that both field-based faculty and specialists seem relatively satisfied with evaluation expectations and expect to continue at the same level if they have the opportunity to change their area of significance from research to service. This is true no matter how long they have been with WVU Extension.

However, the two job groups view the research expectations of their jobs differently. One can reasonably speculate as to why WVU Extension educators differ more when it comes to research. For instance, specialists, most of whom have doctoral degrees, are more comfortable with research tasks and have job responsibilities that accommodate research activities. Field-level faculty members at WVU usually have a master's degree and are primarily engaged in programmatic activities. They may not have research skills and often do not have time to do research.

With regard to length of service, those with 19 or more years were hired at a time when research expectations were not as high as they are today. They never expected to be held accountable for their research activities and may still not have adequate skills. For WVU Extension, the results of this study should reinforce the need for training in research skills. In addition, Extension faculty members need to be clear about the distinctions between evaluation and research requirements.

The results of this study should also be considered by those in administrative positions in Extension who are considering changes to promotion and tenure policies. For them, the important result from this study is that field-based Extension educators are comfortable with evaluation expectations, but not with research expectations. Once the evaluation skills of field-based faculty are developed and they gain experience with implementing evaluation strategies into program activities on a regular basis, their level of comfort will most likely increase.

The importance of this finding is that evaluation, rather than research, could become the key to documenting the scholarship of engagement. The challenge is to develop and enhance evaluation skills in Extension educators, to give them opportunities to conduct applied research in connection with their evaluations, to write technical reports and professional journal articles, and to present evaluation findings.

If Extension is successful in bringing field-based faculty through the tenure and promotion process using quality evaluation studies to document the scholarship of engagement, it could become an example for the rest of academia. Indeed, Extension could be instrumental in assisting the rest of academia in understanding the process of promoting and giving tenure to those in discipline areas that do not fit into the tradition system, which rewards basic research and teaching over other forms of scholarship.

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