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The Challenge of Extension Scholarship

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PREVIOUS
ARTICLE



ISSUE
CONTENTS



NEXT
ARTICLE

The Challenge of Extension Scholarship

Abstract

Board members of the *Journal of Extension (JOE)* are rethinking and reconsidering the journal's criteria, standards, and level of rigor, taking advantage of recent efforts to redefine scholarship for Extension. We believe this is necessary if *JOE* is to continue to meet the needs of Extension professionals and to demonstrate our relevance to both higher education and the public.

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The *Journal of Extension (JOE)* became electronic in June 1994, so this year we will be celebrating our seventh year on the Web. During this time, we have seen submissions to the journal grow tremendously, to more than 180 in 2000. Based on the number of submissions, it's clear that Extension professionals across the country want to share their programming ideas through a peer-reviewed publication.

Rethinking Our Standards

I do believe that every Extension professional has ideas to share that will be of great benefit to their coworkers nationally. However, as I review some of the submissions and compare them to other journal articles that I read regularly, I see a need for *JOE* to rethink and reconsider its criteria, standards, and level of rigor for the articles it publishes.

To do this, the *JOE* board, over the next six months, must give serious thought to what constitutes scholarship for the journal. I think this is particularly important at this time, as land grant universities across the country continue to engage, rethink, and evaluate what constitutes scholarship in higher education.

Defining Scholarship

While it might appear a simple task to define scholarship, it is not. Generally, scholarship is poorly understood at most land grant universities. Often it is defined solely by the number of articles published and the research completed. Little or no consideration may be given to the faculty member's job assignment. Furthermore, in many cases, little or no recognition to team efforts is granted by faculty peers.

As we begin to think about what scholarship includes, we must first define scholarship. In *Scholarship Reconsidered--Priorities of the Professorate*, Ernest L. Boyer defines the work of faculty members by classifying it into four separate but overlapping functions. These are the scholarships of "discovery," "integration," "application," and "teaching."

A group of faculty members in the College of Agriculture at Oregon State University further define scholarship this way: "Scholarship is creative work that is validated by peers and communicated" (Weiser, 1996). The Oregon State faculty describe five forms of scholarship similar to the four described by Boyer, expanding "teaching" to "learning and teaching" and adding "creative artistry" as the fifth type of scholarship.

A small group of faculty members at Penn State University, building on the "Boyer report," have

developed a comprehensive, multidimensional model of scholarship, UniSCOPE, in which outreach scholarship plays a key role. They characterize the UniSCOPE model as a "challenge to the Penn State community of scholars" (Hyman et al., 2000).

There is much in all three of these efforts that challenges the broader U.S. Extension community of scholars, as well. The members of the *JOE* board are accepting this challenge. We believe we all must rise to meet it.

Meeting the Needs of Higher Education & the Public

JOE must and will continue to strive to meet the needs of all Extension professionals at every level of the U.S. Extension system, from the non-tenure track professional to those who hold professorial rank. *JOE* should be the medium of choice through which to share innovative ideas based on Extension research.

However, higher education is undergoing tremendous change. If *JOE* is to remain a viable, contributing member of the Extension system, we must continually work to maintain our programming connection to both teaching and research.

At the same time, we must be mindful of the public's growing distrust and dissatisfaction with universities. Universities are viewed by some as being inappropriately focused on research and funding, and often not responsive and/or relevant to societal needs today.

As a medium to showcase the creative scholarship of Extension professionals, we will demonstrate our relevance to both higher education and the public.

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