

## Joint Appointments—Pros and Cons

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*There appears to be a trend in Extension today for joint appointments of professional staff. Many variations exist in the nature of these joint appointments. The authors present findings of a study of attitudes towards joint appointments in agronomy departments throughout the United States. What's your reaction to the advantages and disadvantages cited? Do you believe this to be the direction in which Extension should go in the future?*

### The Joint Appointment

As Extension clientele becomes more sophisticated, ways must be provided for the specialist to maintain his expertise and continue to grow in his academic discipline. The joint appointment seems to fulfill this need. And, the number of joint appointments seems to be increasing. Why has this practice become common? What are the advantages and disadvantages of joint appointments? Should this concept be considered for specialists in other adult education disciplines? To examine these and other related questions, it's necessary to understand the rationale that preceded the concept.

In this article, joint appointments refer to College of Agriculture and Home Economics employment conditions at land-grant universities. An individual may be appointed with

joint responsibilities in Extension and research, Extension and teaching, or a combination of all three. This is a common practice at the University of Nebraska and other land-grant institutions.

The colleges in the land-grant system, which were predominately agriculture and mechanics oriented, were established by the Morrill Act of 1862 to help solve some of the pressing problems of agriculture. The idea of research as a basis for the courses of instruction in these colleges became prevalent. As a result, the Hatch Act of 1887 provided for an agricultural experiment station at one of the colleges established in each state under the Morrill Act of 1862.<sup>1</sup> The need for disseminating research information was soon evident, and the Extension Service was established by the Smith-Lever Act in 1914.

Thus, the components of land-grant colleges in this country were experiment stations, which sponsored scientific research in agriculture and home economics; the Extension Service, which disseminated research information to state clientele; and resident instruction, which provided class instruction at land-grant college campuses. Therefore, joint appointments can be made in the three areas with a portion of a staff member's responsibility devoted to each area. However, most of the appointments that affect Extension personnel are made jointly between the experiment station and the Extension Service.

Another recent innovation is the appointment in an academic department whereby the specialist is responsible to the department for subject-matter information and to the Extension director for the Extension program. Or, the chairman of the academic department may also have a joint appointment with Extension. Thus, the specialist is responsible to the chairman of the department for both research and Extension efforts.

Frolik indicated that in 1967 the University of Nebraska College of Agriculture and Home Economics had 59 staff members holding joint appointments compared to 6 such appointments 10 years earlier.<sup>2</sup> The College of Agriculture and Home Economics staff at the University of Nebraska totaled about 440 in 1957 and remained about the same size during the next 10-year period.

Reasons cited by Frolik for joint appointments include: (1) less and less direct application of experiment

station research to the day-to-day problems of agriculture and home economics and (2) conduct of research being essential not only to good teaching but also to maximum professional advancement.

Sanders<sup>3</sup> indicates that great changes in professional Extension personnel have occurred. He cites a greater emphasis on graduate study, which results in more specialists becoming interested in being closely identified with the subject-matter department where their training occurred and more closely associated with research work. The trend toward closer departmental ties has led to more frequent use of a system of joint appointments for various subject-matter specialists.

Etzioni indicates several reasons why multipurpose organizations, which simultaneously and legitimately serve two or more goals, tend to be more effective than single-purpose or one-goal organizations. Advantages for joint appointments include:

1. Serving one goal often improves, within limits, the service rendered to another goal.
2. Multipurpose organizations have greater recruitment appeal than single-purpose ones.
3. Joint appointments allow personnel to gratify a wider variety of personality needs.<sup>4</sup>

Etzioni also points out weaknesses of being multipurpose:

1. A loss of effectiveness seems to occur when all organizations of a special category are made multipurpose.

2. There may be conflicts over the amount of means, time, and energy to be allocated to each goal.
3. Serving a plurality of goals may create strains for personnel.
4. One goal may completely subordinate the other.<sup>5</sup>

### **Nebraska Study**

A study of attitudes toward joint appointments in agronomy departments was conducted in March, 1970, at the University of Nebraska. Questionnaires were mailed to 350 Extension agronomists across the United States. Completed questionnaires were returned by 81 percent of the recipients.

The data reveal that 38.5 percent had joint appointments. Of those who responded, 64.7 percent were in favor of this arrangement. However, 50 percent of these persons indicated that they'd like to change their appointment in some way. Fifty-four percent of these would make their appointment more diversified. Eighty-five percent of those on joint appointment were favorable to joint appointment, but only about 50 percent of those not on joint appointment favored them.

Two findings indicate a relationship between age and years on the present job and attitude toward joint appointments. Of those responding to the questionnaire who were under 40 years of age, 58 percent were favorable toward joint appointments, while only 43 percent of those over 40 were in favor of joint appointments. Likewise, 56 percent of those

with less than 10 years experience were favorable toward joint appointments compared to 37 percent with 10 to 25 years experience. Both of these findings are significant at the .01 level of confidence using a chi-square analysis.

In general, the respondents agreed that the educational background of the Extension specialist and the researcher isn't essentially different. They disagree with statements that research agronomists generally do sufficient research on problems that are also facing Extension, and that joint appointments have decreased the need for demonstration plots.

Those unfavorable to joint appointments generally agree with two statements. These are that: (1) percentages of time responsibilities are difficult to resolve and (2) performance ratings for a man working in a single area full time will be higher than for someone with part-time appointment in the area.

Those unfavorable to joint appointments had a mixed reaction to the statement that joint appointments result in surface research and questionable conclusions. All other respondents generally disagreed with this statement.

There were two statements that those unfavorable to joint appointments generally disagreed with and those favorable to joint appointments agreed with. They were that: (1) joint appointments harmonize the departmental staff and (2) joint appointments broaden a staff member's ability to relate to different clientele.

## Conclusions

As the educational level and technical sophistication of Extension clientele increases, the need for more specialization and expertise on the part of the specialist also becomes more important. With improved transportation, the farmer no longer necessarily obtains his information from his nearest neighbor. It's not unusual for him to go directly to the agricultural scientist at his state university, or he may go to another state to learn more about a new practice.

The joint appointment is one way for the specialist to maintain his expertise and grow in his subject-matter area. However, specialists themselves don't all agree that this is the best way to promote a closer relationship between research, Extension, and teaching. The younger specialists are more sympathetic to joint appointments than are older specialists.

Some of the advantages of a joint appointment are:

1. *It provides the specialist with an "academic home."* This is important because it's necessary for a specialist to keep up on current trends in his field. Also, with similar academic training as research and teaching personnel, the specialist's stature as an academician is maintained.
2. *The specialist has time to conduct research and is encouraged to do so.* He's better able to document what he's teaching

and has a practical use for his research. As a specialist, he's more likely to devote his research efforts to research that may have a practical application to his Extension teaching.

3. *It adds variety to his work.* Many people aren't content to conduct research as a full-time endeavor. However, if their work with people can be combined with their intellectual curiosity, both needs are met and the specialist becomes a more productive worker.
4. *It enables the specialist to relate other research findings and the thinking of his colleagues to his Extension teaching.* To keep his teaching current, the specialist can't operate in a vacuum. He must be able to counsel with others in his academic discipline and share his ideas with them. Thus, the close relationships in an academic department should help develop the specialist as an Extension teacher.

Some of the disadvantages of a joint appointment are:

1. *Surface research with questionable findings may result.* When a person's efforts are "diluted," it's difficult to spend the necessary time to conduct a research effort properly. This may result in findings that aren't as reliable as those obtained from a more carefully controlled study
2. *It's difficult to serve two masters.* This principle of supervision certainly applies in the

case of someone with a joint appointment. Unless there's a clear understanding of the specialist's responsibility to the various segments of his employment, it's conceivable that the demands on his time will be greater than he can cope with successfully.

3. *A joint appointment in teaching and Extension is difficult to work out.* Specialists may want to do classroom teaching, but with the amount of travel that's required for the Extension role, meeting classes at the scheduled time becomes a hardship. However, with higher academic qualifications, Extension specialists may teach graduate classes, where schedules aren't as rigid. Or the specialist may serve as an advisor or on department committees.
4. *Performance ratings may be affected.* If one or both of the employers aren't satisfied, the specialist's rating may suffer. Either one or both may feel that they're not receiving the portion of the time to which they're entitled. Thus, it becomes a Herculean task to satisfy these demands.
5. *Staff harmony may be more difficult to achieve.* Staff relationships may be affected if the specialist doesn't seem to be functioning in the customary role of teacher or researcher. Staff members must understand what's involved in the Extension specialist's job, and they in

turn must give him their cooperation and support.

While there are both advantages and disadvantages to joint appointments, we believe this practice will continue at land-grant universities and might possibly expand. If this is true, it would seem university administrators have concluded that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. The success or failure of this approach to employment seems directly related to the individual institution's personnel and staffing policies.

The response to joint appointments is good. Extension administrators in disciplines other than agriculture and home economics might consider joint appointments as the trend for merging Cooperative Extension and General Extension continues.

#### Footnotes

1. H. C. Sanders, *The Cooperative Extension Service* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 15.
2. E. E. Frolik, "What Does the Agricultural Experiment Station Expect from Cooperative Extension?" (speech presented at the Land-Grant College Meeting, Columbus, Ohio, November 14, 1967).
3. Sanders, *Cooperative Extension Service*, p. 45.
4. Amitai Etzioni, *Modern Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 15.
5. *Ibid.*