

evaluating your total extension program

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The need for a broader definition and application of program evaluation has previously been stressed in the *Journal*.¹ Increased availability and application of technology, changing social forms, and more recently the financial crunch faced by institutions of higher education all have intensified the need for, and interest in, evaluation of Extension programs.

During the early 1970s, the University of Missouri launched a thorough reappraisal of academic programs of the 4-campus institution, including Extension programs. A self-evaluation of Extension programs, coupled with reviews by teams of educators from across the nation, helped establish a basis for judgments about future Extension programs and program development procedures. The evaluation effort involved a major commitment of Extension personnel.

Organizational Changes

Here's a brief description of four significant organizational changes in Missouri Extension to help you better understand later references in this article.

1. In 1960, Cooperative Extension and all other Extension programs of the university's campuses at Columbia and Rolla were combined into one unified Extension program so all University of Missouri resources would be available to people of the state in a coordinated manner.
2. In 1963, campuses were added in Kansas City and St. Louis, the major metropolitan centers of the state. Each campus Extension division is under the leadership of a dean for Extension, with institutional leadership vested in a vice president for Extension.

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3. In January, 1970, Extension field staff were specialized by subject matter.
4. The specialized personnel were assigned to multicounty areas composed of from 3 to 10 counties, with an area director in charge. Area personnel are headquartered in the Extension centers maintained in each county and most work across county lines.

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to describe the procedure followed in evaluating Extension at the University of Missouri, to report on the usefulness of the steps followed, and to present some of the outcomes from this Extension evaluation at the institutional level.

Procedures

As noted earlier, the evaluation of Extension was part of a complete institutional reappraisal at the university. All reappraisal efforts were guided by a central steering committee which approved the procedures for evaluation of Extension that were developed with help from two evaluation consultants.²

Information Collection

Information was assembled to provide an inventory of: (1) program objectives and implementation, (2) impact of Extension programs, and (3) allocation of financial resources. This served as a readily available source of evidence for reference during the evaluation.

Every Extension employee contributed to the inventory by reporting their major program activities, how programs were developed, and which campus departments made significant contributions to their program. In addition to information from university sources, a sample of program participants also were asked to provide their impressions of Extension programs.

Evaluation Teams

Specialized help in evaluation can help decision makers by: providing alternative recommendations based on evaluation findings, suggesting techniques by which administrators themselves can be more effective evaluators, discussing evaluation information with personnel in the institution, and suggesting guidelines for future evaluations.³

Specialized external observations were secured from *program category* evaluation teams composed of three or four out-of-state individuals who spent one week in Missouri reviewing Extension programs categorized as:

1. Business, Industry, & Labor.
2. Community Development & Public Sector.
3. Continuing Education for Professionals.
4. Food & Fiber.
5. Quality of Living (Family & Youth).

Each category team submitted a report outlining their recommendations for changes in the program or resources assigned for its implementation.

A five-member *comprehensive* evaluation team was asked to review the Extension efforts of the university as a totality. The merits of an educational program may be judged either by comparison with absolute standards—standards of excellence—or, a program may be judged in comparison with other similar type programs.⁴ The intent here was to gain insights of the former type—to evaluate performance of the Extension function at the University of Missouri compared to the objectives the institution had established for itself.

Findings

Observations from the evaluation teams about program weaknesses and possible remedies were of a general nature. A review of the team reports revealed four items that were of recurring concern.

Develop Programming Procedures

Programming procedures should be developed to encourage greater involvement of all campuses in Extension. Participation in Extension efforts is still heavily centered in departments and campuses that traditionally participated in Cooperative Extension. Involvement from other departments that might logically be expected to contribute to Extension programs is often minimal. If Extension is to engender involvement from most departments and generate multidisciplinary efforts, program development procedures must be more clearly defined and more thoroughly communicated.

Define Relationships and Responsibilities

The relationships and responsibilities of campus and universitywide Extension personnel should be more clearly defined. The need for clarification is most acute in the immediate vicinity of the campuses. Evaluation teams were concerned that campus and universitywide area Extension personnel were each conducting similar programs of which the other was unaware. Area specialists and campus faculty need to be mutually informed if they're to be most effective in programming. The flow of communications between campuses should also be accelerated. Certain departments

exist on more than one campus, which might lead to inadvertent duplication. Also, many opportunities for interdepartmental programming may be overlooked.

Specialized area Extension personnel with upgraded competence leads to ambiguity about their role versus that of campus Extension faculty.

Amend Reward System *The reward system of the university should be amended to provide recognition for performance of Extension responsibilities equal to that for performance of teaching and research.* Four of the five program evaluation teams (all but Food & Fiber) were concerned that many Extension personnel felt the reward system of the university is inequitable in considering Extension competence and performance. Traditional criteria for promotion are research, publication in refereed journals, and teaching credit courses on campus—none of which is an appropriate standard for evaluation of Extension personnel.

Review Resource Allocation *The current allocation of resources should be reviewed, with particular attention to the share allocated for urban campuses and areas.* The urban campuses have experienced rapid growth since their establishment in 1963. The potential for programs, as a result of the concentration of population and the broad mission of Extension, has contributed to strong feelings that urban areas of the state were severely limited in the current allocation of funds.

Resolution of the first three concerns should lead to proper allocation of resources. Decisions about resource allocation properly follow, not precede, decisions about program priority and direction.

Results and Actions

Evaluation team reports were disseminated to, and discussed with, Extension personnel in all parts of the university. Task forces composed of Extension and non-Extension personnel of the university were assigned one of the four major concerns identified by evaluation teams and asked to suggest specific remedies. Following the task force deliberations and submission of their recommendations, these actions have taken place or are being implemented:

1. An Extension Planning Council composed of the four deans of Extension and members of the vice president's staff has been established. Monthly meetings of the council help improve communication and coordination between campuses and university-wide units.

2. Program development groups have been established that include a universitywide program director and area and campus personnel. This broadened involvement of campus faculty and area specialists during the early stages of program discussions accelerates the exchange of information about program needs and university resources.

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3. Roles and responsibilities of campus and area Extension personnel aren't mutually exclusive. However, the primary functions of each have been broadly defined.

Campus Extension personnel will:

- a. Help with the assessment of program needs and priorities.
- b. Analyze research findings and prepare information and materials for use with off-campus Extension personnel or with clientele.
- c. Communicate to resident teaching and research counterparts their perception of changing needs and conditions.
- d. Help assess and maintain the competence of off-campus Extension personnel.

Off-campus Extension personnel will:

- a. Develop and/or coordinate programs in their assigned area and in concert with appropriate academic departments.
 - b. Disseminate (teach) research findings and encourage their application.
 - c. Help with and/or conduct applied research.
 - d. Help people identify problems and educational needs and communicate them to campus Extension personnel.
 - e. Supervise the "internship" of regularly enrolled students.
4. The reward system for Extension personnel is being reviewed and possible ways of establishing a "career ladder" for area specialists are being studied. Also, promotion and tenure committees on each campus are being encouraged to recognize Extension efforts more appropriately.

Summary

While some of the procedures and findings presented in this article have unique application for University of Missouri Extension, they may provide useful ideas for guidance to other states contemplating a major review of their Extension programs. Briefly, here's what was done:

1. Statements from the Board of Curators, the president, and vice president for Extension of the university, as well as legislation related to Extension work, were collected. From these materials, the commitment and mission of University of Missouri Extension were described and used as criteria for guiding the collection of information and the structuring of questions that outlined judgments to be made.
2. A complete inventory of program information was prepared. The inventory included statements of objectives, lists of activities, and types and numbers of program participants. Personal interviews with a sample of 250 program participants representing every program category provided useful information. A non-Extension survey unit did the sampling and interviewing. This relieved Extension personnel of a time-consuming task and enhanced the confidence placed in the responses.
3. Each program category and Extension programs as a totality were reviewed by an evaluation team composed of distinguished out-of-state educators. Administrators can't avoid the responsibility of making difficult choices about programs and resource allocation, but objective insights provided by outside evaluation teams are very helpful.
4. A planned schedule of follow-up activities helped gain the attention and involvement of personnel and avoid the trap of continuing with old patterns regardless of evaluation findings.

In retrospect, the evaluation process could have been strengthened by adding some steps and altering others. A broader sampling of program participants would help in the search for defensible and understandable measures of program impact.

An opinion poll from a sample of citizens about their perception of needs and priorities for programs would have provided additional evidence on which judgments could be based.

Evaluation at the institutional level led to recommendations of a general nature and the impact of adjustments tried as a result are difficult to assess immediately. However, the recent completion of an Extension academic plan that projects program emphasis five years in advance, the use of more paraprofessionals in more programs, and broadened campus interest in Extension programming are all examples of developments that are traceable to the evaluation and follow-up activities. Despite acknowledged weaknesses and/or oversights, Extension evaluation at the University of Missouri has been very helpful. Not only has it helped strengthen judgments that have been made, but a precedent has been established on which additional evaluation efforts will be based in the future.

Footnotes

1. Sara M. Steele, "Program Evaluation—A Broader Definition," *Journal of Extension*, VII (Summer, 1970), 5-17.
2. Robert E. Stake, Center for Curriculum Development, University of Illinois, Urbana, and Jack A. Culbertson, executive director, University Council for Educational Administration, Ohio State University, Columbus, were engaged to help develop a proposed evaluation plan.
3. Thomas E. Owens, "Suggested Tasks and Roles of Evaluation Specialists in Education," *Educational Technology*, VIII (November 30, 1968), 4-9.
4. Robert E. Stake, "The Countenance of Educational Evaluation," *Teachers College Record*, LXVII (April, 1967), 523-40.