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*Assuring Quality in University Extension Programs:
A Call for Research.* The debate regarding the quality and effectiveness of off-campus university-based Extension

programs continues to exist among many faculty members and administrators in institutions of higher education. Many advocates of off-campus education contend that the unique learning needs of the adult student who participates in such activities are better met by courses held at times and in places convenient for them.

On the other hand, partisans of on-campus education insist that the type of learning experience offered on campus is the only one worthy of consideration when awarding college or university credit.

Regardless of which position one may support, little empirical research has been done to conclusively substantiate either opinion. This lack of data documenting the quality of one of the fastest growing segments of today's higher education programming activities suggests, and perhaps mandates, that intensive study must be immediately initiated by adult and Extension education practitioners.

The literature related to comparative program evaluation indicates that we know little about the standards of quality present in programs of off-campus education. One study suggests that the evidence is clear; students and faculty view off-campus education as superior to similar programs offered on campus. While this is a position that all practitioners would like to support, further reading suggests that the contrary may be true. Reviewing yet a third study suggests that a somewhat middle position is correct.

In light of such rather inconclusive evidence, it would seem that adult and Extension practitioners have no choice but to begin to develop a conclusive data base on which our business can be built. Every opportunity must be provided for the research component to be effectively integrated into the structure of each university administrative unit responsible for the Extension function. Likewise, professional organizations that are directly or tangentially related to furthering the practice of Extension education must be encouraged to

support studies related to assessing the quality of university-based Extension programs.

Most Extension practitioners believe, albeit based on a personal dedication and/or commitment to our business, that Extension education presents a viable and valuable means of delivering learning activities to an off-campus adult clientele. However, a greater amount of empirically derived data must be compiled which either supports or refutes this opinion. Unfortunately, in these days of cost effectiveness and programmatic accountability analysis, neither personal belief nor dedication to the profession can provide an adequate rationale to assure and justify our existence. Rather we must provide concrete evidence, via deliberate and purposeful initiation of documentative/research activities, that supports the quality and importance of off-campus learning experiences.

It's only through initiating such investigative activities that we can begin to effectively achieve a true level of professional maturity concomitant with that of our peers in other aspects of the continuing education business.