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The Scholarship of Extension: Practical Ways for Extension Professionals to Share Impact

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Abstract: Traditionally, scholarship in Extension has been defined by the same parameters as those in academia. Primarily, research conducted, journal articles published, presentations at state and national meetings, and grant dollars funded. It is, therefore, difficult for Extension professionals, particularly field staff, to be rewarded for scholarly efforts. This article redefines the scholarship of Extension as "creative intellectual works that are validated by peers and communicated." Six types of scholarship for Extension are identified. To integrate scholarship into Extension activities, devote time during program planning to practicing scholarship and communicating results and impacts.

Introduction and Review of Literature

When competing for community resources, the need for Extension professionals to share results and impact becomes increasingly important. Extension supporters and funders demand more from us, in terms of outreach, relevance, impact, and efficiency. Delivering a successful, targeted program in a county or community can help countless local clientele. It becomes our responsibility to replicate that program nationally by sharing our programmatic success with our colleagues (Smith, 2004). Sharing results and impact, therefore, becomes an important component of the professional life of Extension professionals and has become known as "the Scholarship of Extension" (Norman, 2001).

The types of scholarship and scholarly products that will best serve the various clientele and audiences in Extension will vary based on their unique perspective and relationship to the Extension professional. One type of scholarship or scholarly product will not fit all cases; therefore, a diversified portfolio of scholarship is needed for success (Adams, Harrell, Maddy, & Weigel, 2005). Scholarship in Extension has often been interpreted too narrowly, especially when it came close to being identified only with original research (Rice, 1989). Scholarly achievement and excellence in performing assigned responsibilities are the primary categories for evaluating faculty performance. Long and Bushaw (1996) called for a more inclusive view of being a scholar, recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, synthesis, practice, and teaching.

The Kellogg Commission (1998) identified a lack of engagement of higher education with problems relevant to communities where universities are located. The report argued that "despite the resources and expertise available on campuses, higher education is not well organized to apply them to problems in an organized way. Society has problems; institutions of higher education have academic disciplines." Campus-based

faculty resist calls for a more engaged approach to research and teaching. At the same time, Extension professionals resist the reciprocal call for a more scholarly approach to engagement (McGrath, 2006).

While all research seeks to discover or establish facts or principles within a particular field of study, research has traditionally focused on activities that test and advance theory (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996). Only recently has a focus on the scholarship of engagement elevated applied research, which focuses on problem solving or opportunities to serve communities, (Andranovich & Riposa, 1993) to an elevated position within the academic community.

This vision of scholarship (recognizing diversity of talent) proves useful as faculty reflect on the purpose and direction of their professional lives. Long and Bushaw (1996) defined scholarship in Extension as "unbiased research-based information, practical education to meet local needs and solve local problems, and interdisciplinary approaches designed to address human issues." Weiser and Houghlum (1998) reported that Oregon State University's revised Promotion and Tenure guidelines describe other aspects of faculty performance that the university values. These include Collaborative Effort, International Perspective, and Service.

Defining and Classifying Scholarship in Extension

Boyer (1990) determined that "Scholarship in Extension" could be classified into four separate, overlapping functions. The four functions include Discovery, Integration, Application, and Teaching. Weiser (1996) defined scholarship as "creative work that is validated by peers and communicated." Weiser reclassified Boyer's four functions to five, including: Discovery, Integration, Application, Learning & Teaching, and Creative Artistry.

Norman (2001) identified several factors to consider when defining scholarship for Extension, specifically for 4-H professionals. He believed scholarship is often poorly understood at land-grant universities and is often defined solely by the amount of research completed and the number of articles published. Additionally, little consideration may be given to the Extension professional's job assignment, and little or no recognition may be given to team efforts, collaborations, or collegiality.

In response to the factors identified by Norman (2001), Alter (2003) postulated that:

- Scholarship is about creating, synthesizing, and applying knowledge to address issues important in our world;
- Scholarship is about respecting and learning from the knowledge and wisdom of others and essential players in the scholarly process of knowledge creation, synthesis, and application.

Recasting and Redefining "Scholarship for Extension"

Schauber, et al., (1998) recast "scholarship for Extension" as "creative intellectual works that is validated by peers and communicated." This definition includes four forms of scholarship: Discovery of New Knowledge; Development of New Technologies, Methods, Materials or Uses; Integration of Knowledge Leading to New Understanding; and Artistry that Creates New Insights and Interpretations.

To effectively integrate scholarship into the life of Extension professionals, Culp (2006) redefined earlier works (Schauber, et al., 1989; Boyer, 1990; Weiser, 1996; Norman, 2001; and Alter, 2003) by reclassifying

six types of scholarship for Extension. These include: Exploration & Discovery, Sharing Results & Findings, Teaching & Learning, Application & Reflection, Creative Artistry, and Integration. Extension professionals can integrate scholarship into their work and programming efforts by setting aside time during program planning to practice scholarship and share the results and impacts of programs and efforts. Extension professionals can apply these six types of scholarship in their daily lives.

Exploration & Discovery

The process of exploration and discovery can include: assessing and identifying community and local needs; asking critical, futuring questions during program planning, needs assessment, program review, and expansion and review meetings; conducting asset inventories, reviewing literature, and keeping current with best practices and new findings; conducting or collaborating on needs- and issue-based research; and compiling and synthesizing information and findings.

Sharing Results & Findings

Three primary ways to share results and findings of Extension efforts include publications, formal presentations, and non-formal presentations. Published articles in scholarly journals, applied publications, newsletters, and local media are all publication examples. Formal presentations include seminars, workshops, posters, and round table discussions made at international, national, regional, and state meetings. Non-formal presentations are those made at field days, workshops, local events, fairs, Council meetings, etc.

Teaching & Learning

Extension professionals should embrace life-long learning to ensure that information taught is cutting-edge, creating and sharing new teaching methodologies. Effective teaching should be research-based and evaluated by what participants learned. Two primary types of teaching, formal and non-formal, should be reported and valued.

Application & Reflection

Extension professionals should apply knowledge to help clients solve problems. Additionally, they should reflect upon how new discoveries might be applied to become solutions to problems.

Creative Artistry

Creating new insights and interpretations, developing new teaching strategies, and thoughtfully considering how current teaching methods may be expanded to appeal to multiple intelligences are all examples of how creative artistry may contribute to the scholarship of Extension.

Integration

Integration includes making connections across disciplines, collaborating and networking, engaging professionals from other programs and colleges, placing specialties in a larger context, and illuminating data in a revealing, useful way that benefits an audience at the local level.

A National Approach to the Scholarship of Extension

Organizationally, Extension should develop its own national standards and guidelines that define quality and utility. The use of effective communication, regardless of the audience, facilitates the learning and dissemination of new knowledge and establishes a baseline for evaluating professional competence (Adams, Harrell, Maddy & Weigel, 2002).

The scholarship of Extension is no longer defined only by the amount of research conducted, the number of journal articles published, and the number of presentations made at state and national conferences. As Extension professionals compete with non-profit, community, civic, and philanthropic organizations for precious financial resources, grantors will need to determine how to allocate their grant dollars. Increasingly, these allocation decisions will be made, based upon documentable evidence of the impact and benefit to the community, clientele and target audience. Collecting, sharing, communicating, and celebrating this documentable evidence is the very essence of scholarship. Extension professionals with the best scholarly track record will likely be rewarded with the biggest piece of the grantor's pie.

Extension professionals should embrace scholarship as a means of sharing successes, results, and impact. Scholarship will benefit Extension by strengthening communities and clientele, providing legislators with documentable evidence of programmatic value, and equipping funders with impact data that justifies financial support. Scholarship will justify the value of Extension programs and ensure that Extension will remain a viable part of communities and land-grant universities. With its rich history of community involvement and solution-oriented action, Extension is poised to take the lead in the scholarship of engagement (Davis, Burggraf-Torppa, Archer, & Thomas, 2007.). Documenting and communicating these efforts of community engagement embodies the very essence of the Scholarship of Extension.

In times of economic crisis, when county, state, and federal budgets shrink, and increasing pressure is placed upon elected officials and decision-makers about funding decisions, scholarship will place Extension in a more secure position to receive appropriations and continue to be an integral component of communities. Simply "doing a good job" and "having a good program" or "being a good teacher" is no longer enough to satisfy funders and decision makers. Extension professionals must be able to demonstrate, through valid, reliable, documentable evidence, that resources have been effectively utilized, and that Extension has made a difference in the community and in the lives of its residents.

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