

# Integrating Cooperative Extension into the Life of the University

Cooperative Extension as a separate entity from the rest of the university may no longer be appropriate or fiscally feasible. A panel of extension administrators and one professor described new models for the organization of extension within the university structure and within the career of the university professor. The discussion focused on 1) engaging faculty where they live, 2) shared leadership, and 3) the role of extension professionals in the field.

Faculty teaching and scholarship can be more fully integrated with outreach and extension, engaging faculty in working with communities throughout the state. Gail Imig noted that “We have outstanding opportunities for students to get involved in hands-on learning experiences in a variety of settings around the state. We haven’t really begun to look at the ways we can engage faculty in terms of service learning on the part of their students.” Case studies from real communities can be effectively used in the classroom.

## Reorganization at Clemson

Bud Webb, a member of the Clemson faculty for forty-one years, now serves as interim vice president for university research and agriculture and natural resources. He explained how Clemson realigned extension two and a half years ago, eliminating the county director positions and creating fifteen multicounty directors who are full-time administrators with no direct program delivery responsibilities. Clemson also eliminated district directors, cutting one entire level of middle management. It merged the 4-H, Youth and Family departments into one department of Family, Youth and Development.

Webb noted two things that he has observed since then. First, county directors have found that being the director of three or four counties is “one hell of a job.” Their relationship with local government has focused much more on programs and program quality. Second, good agents got better and bad agents got worse. “People who need to have their hands held and need constant supervision just fell through the cracks.” He expects that the same pattern will recur on the university level “with those sacred specialists” as a whole middle level of administration is eliminated.

The most fundamental change to Clemson’s Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and College of Agriculture came on July 1, 1995, when administrative department heads became department chairpersons with nine-month appointments. Their new duties were only twenty-five percent administrative, with the remaining seventy-five percent devoted to program development and improvement. By July 1, 1996, the twenty-five percent administrative portion of their salaries will be funded totally by the provost’s office, and the administrative function of the chairs will be entirely devoted to management of the academic programs.

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## Presenters:

**University of Minnesota**  
Roger Clemence,  
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**Michigan State**  
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**William Donohue,**  
**Professor,**  
**Communication**

**Clemson University**  
**Bud Webb, Director,**  
**Cooperative Extension**  
**Service**

**Montana State**  
**University**  
**Oak Winters, Dean of**  
**Outreach**

Departments are now grouped into four schools which are themselves administered by directors with twelve-month appointments. All of the budget and program management for CES and the Agricultural Experiment Station will come at the school director level.

Two years ago Clemson moved to centralize responsibility for CES, developing a university unit for outreach. In the past the academic dean of each college was responsible for outreach programs. Some colleges did better than others. Webb is now responsible for coordinating the outreach and public service activities across college lines.

The excitement of the faculty outside the CES increased when they saw their programs could make a difference outside the university. A program aimed at at-risk children, prenatal to twelfth grade, has shown that Clemson's outreach can work. Teachers told the university they were frustrated because, by the time they saw a child at five years of age, much of that child's behavior had been shaped. The outreach program Clemson developed in response helps to identify the parents and children at-risk and to teach them parenting, financial management, nutrition, or other related skills.

### **CES at Montana State University**

Over the past two years, Montana State University moved the CES from the university's College of Agriculture and expanded it campuswide. This caused much ill will within the college, according to Oak Winters, dean of outreach. Most at the university had always viewed CES as a separate service agency. In turn, extension agents and many specialists saw themselves as serving the agency rather than the university as a whole.

"One of the major challenges we have [is] to begin to help people see that whether they are county-based or reservation-based faculty or specialists, the drummer to which they march is in fact the university." CES is one "piece of the multiple responsibility of the university, not a separate agency." There has been this kind of "victim mentality" because CES had its funds cut and felt under siege as agriculture has become a less important aspect of the national agenda.

A large part of Winters' role was to bring the CES and university back together. One way to do this is to redesign the local extension office as a gateway to the university and remake the role of extension into that of a broker of resources. We must broaden the base of the local extension office beyond just service to an individual producer, and see our work as that of revitalizing the entire agricultural community. It is a very different approach when you are working for a whole community, bringing expertise to bear on systemic problems rather than addressing individual and isolated problems.

Montana State strives to have CES seen as a venue through which applied research or scholarship can take place. “In some cases we’ve had to do it with small seed grants, or buying a person’s time during the summer. In other cases we’ve found there are opportunities to blend the self-interest of these other groups. Our museum, for example, is increasingly using the extension service network to make community contacts with its programs.”

### **Faculty Outreach at Michigan State**

Because William Donahue, faculty member in the Department of Communication at Michigan State University, has mediation as his research interest, he feels a scholarly interest in getting out into the community and finding out how people communicate. From his involvement in divorce mediation, he began interacting with a group of professional mediators. When he asked them what the most important thing in mediation was, “They came up with a dozen communication issues. For example, they came up with the timing issue — when do you jump between these warring parties? I thought that [timing] was an interesting communication issue.” In this way Donohue blends his scholarship with his work in the community.

From this beginning, Donahue began to explore the timing issue along with a variety of other communication questions. Using transcripts of mediation sessions, he sought to understand the process better. Then he took his analyses back to the mediators themselves and gave them his insights about what was going on in mediation. “For years I’ve had this interaction with the mediation community to have them teach me. I conduct research and I give it back to them, and they tell me what’s going on. We have this continuous interaction.”

As part of one of his undergraduate classes on conflict, students set up mediation programs in elementary schools in the Lansing area, teaching elementary students how to conduct mediation programs and gain conflict management skills. “For me, there is no separation between scholarship and outreach. It’s just the way I do my research.”

Donahue sees encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit among faculty as important. More faculty would involve themselves in outreach if they could see the relationship between their research and the problems and issues in their community and if they could find the dollars to pay for their efforts.

## Outreach as Inreach at Minnesota

“Reach is both in and out,” according to Roger Clemence, associate dean of the college of Architecture and Landscape at the University of Minnesota. “You go to the community as co-learners, help people ask questions, and explore in a variety of ways.” He used the analogy of an hourglass to describe outreach: “You pour the sand in from the university side to feed the community” until the bottom fills. “The only way it really works is when you flip it over” and the sand flows from the community back into the university. Too often the focus is on administrative organization. While that is important, “fundamentally, outreach is about people.”

Clemence would focus on outreach as problem solving. Extension centers should be redesigned accordingly. “If someone would say, ‘Here’s some money, start a business to solve the problems in this county,’ what would the business look like? We need to integrate the sense of what customers are telling us and continue that systematic information flow between communities and the university.” Another approach in looking at communities is the wellness model: the process of community and consensus building offers great potential. Focus is needed on the community as a whole, not just on the growers or on one special interest. Partnering with other special interest groups in communities can create new resources with whom to work, but it can be an uneasy alliance.

Another challenge is to match what faculty are interested in with what the community wants. A dilemma is that one group of people sees what extension needs to do and the other group focuses on their special interests. Overall, cooperative extension services and universities themselves need to do a better job of listening to constituents. In the end, it all comes down to communication.