The History and Philosophy of Extension

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Historical Context for Extension

For 100 years, University of Missouri Extension’s mission has been the dissemination of information and knowledge derived from research, study and practical experience to help people lead more productive and satisfying lives. Extension is a part of an educational system that is committed to enhancing human potential in a changing social and economic environment.

1862 Morrill Act

The Cooperative Extension Service was established in 1914 with the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, but a number of laws passed prior to that contributed to extension’s present form. The first of those was the Morrill Act of 1862, which created the land-grant university system. When the Morrill Act was passed, few people could have guessed its impact on the nation. The system it created effectively brought the opportunity for university education and vocational skills to all citizens. A uniquely American system, land-grant universities serve as catalysts for growth and change in the states they serve.

1890 Morrill Act

Twenty-eight years later, a second Morrill Act added institutions that primarily served minority students and increased funds available to the original universities. Today, each state and territories of the United States have a land-grant university, and 17 states have an 1890 institution.

From the early focus on vocational education, particularly in business, agriculture and the trades, the land-grant institutions have expanded their mission to include three primary functions: resident teaching at the undergraduate and graduate level; research, both basic and applied, in response to the specific needs of the state; and extension of knowledge to all people of the state.

The Hatch Act

The third major piece of legislation that has shaped Extension is the Hatch Act, introduced by William H. Hatch of Missouri. Passed in 1887, the Hatch Act authorized establishment of agricultural experiment stations to expand research capabilities of the land-grant universities. The experiment stations engage in a variety of research projects and communicate their results to farmers around the state.

Smith-Lever Act

In 1914, in response to successes of the experiment stations, awareness of the need for new methods of information dissemination and the growing influence of the Progressive Movement in areas of social concern, the Smith-Lever Act was passed. It established the Cooperative Extension Service as a partnership among federal, state and local governments. Congress directed the land-grant colleges and the U.S.
Department of Agriculture to work together to establish a new program to provide for both the "practical and liberal higher education of all Americans."

Over the years, the original act has been amended a number of times, but the intent has not. "As Extension's social context has changed, congressional legislation and the people's involvement in Extension have modified and expanded the clientele and curriculum. What has not changed is Extension's essential nature as a non-formal educational resource for the development of individuals, families and communities in a democratic society." ("Working With Our Publics," 1988).

The Philosophical Basis of University of Missouri Extension

What is Extension?

Extension is an integral part of the national land-grant system. In Missouri, University of Missouri Extension is an equal partner with other divisions of the University of Missouri System and Lincoln University.

The mission of University of Missouri Extension is to serve Missouri by extending the research-based knowledge and problem-solving resources of the University of Missouri and Lincoln University to focus on high priority needs of people throughout the state.

Operational Principles of Extension

Any organization that has endured and prospered for more than three-quarters of a century, as University Extension has, must be established on a well-developed set of operating principles. While there is no definitive statement of the guiding precepts of Extension, the following, derived from a variety of sources, includes the most generally agreed upon aspects of Extension's underlying principles.

- Extension helps people with self-development by helping them apply educational resources to their own needs and desires.
- Extension helps people manage change in the social, economic and political arenas.
- Extension develops programs and activities that address people's needs and the priorities agreed upon by the federal, state and local partners.
- Extension works with groups for cost-effectiveness, greater creativity and the encouragement and strengthening of democratic processes.
- Extension helps people become educators by encouraging them to participate in development of the learning activities.
- Extension is flexible and innovative in program approaches.
- Extension uses a team approach to program development, priority setting and problem solving.

Some Thoughts on Education and Democracy

"It cannot be doubted that in the United States the instruction of the people powerfully contributes to the support of the democratic republic; and such must always be the case ... The American learns to know the laws by participating in the act of legislation; and he takes a lesson in the forms of government from governing. The great work of society is ever going on before his eyes and, as it were, under his hands."

— Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America.
"Men [and women] live in a community by virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations and knowledge—a common understanding."

— John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*.

"Upon the subject of education...I can only say that I view it as the most important subject in which we as a people may be engaged."

— Abraham Lincoln, first public address, Sangamon County, March 9, 1832.

"There is little talk today about the connection between public education and freedom ... Yet this is a time when what we think of as civilization is being ripped apart across the planet by terror, torture and totalitarian controls. It is a moment when we are instructed daily in the fragility of human rights, in the tenuousness of both freedom and democracy. To speak of freedom is to hold in mind the human capacity to orient the self to the possible, to posit alternatives, to look at things as if they could be otherwise."

— Maxine Greene, professor of education, Columbia University.