The Meaning of Service in Higher Education

In higher education, service should be practical, relevant, and beneficial to its recipients including community members, community groups, and professional and academic colleagues, organizations, and partnerships. Service within higher education is the application of knowledge required to find out what works and then set out to improve the quality of life of citizens in order to make significant impacts to communities.

Service is one of three main responsibilities of academics in higher education; the other two are teaching and research. In the past, service has been under-emphasized or devalued in comparison to the other two areas. In recent years, however, achieving a greater balance among service, teaching and research is a topic of interest in the literature of higher education. The abundance of growing social, economic, technological, and environmental problems and the demand to solve such problems, has made the case of the importance and meaning of service in higher education. The Kellogg Commission has challenged higher education to "go beyond traditional notions of Extension, outreach and service in order to become truly engaged institutions" (Journal Of Extension, April 2002, Volume 40, Number 2).

Service is only meaningful if the implementers first determine and assess the relevant needs of the targeted audience. For service to be effective, implementers must be of high quality and be skilled in their area of service. "To be considered scholarship, service activities must be tied directly to one’s special field of knowledge and relate to, and flow directly out of this professional activity." (Glassick, et. al., 1997, p. 12).

Extension’s Role in the Service Mission of Higher Education

The basis for including service as one of the responsibilities of institutions of higher education can be traced back to several 19th and 20th century United States Congressional Acts. These same Acts also mark the beginning of Cooperative Extension.

Morrill Act of 1862 - “a land grant from the federal government to the states to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes.”

Morrill Act 1890 - “dollars to be applied only to instruction in agriculture, and mechanical arts, the English language, and the various branches of mathematical, physical, natural, and economic science, with special reference for their application in the industries of life.”

Hatch Act of 1887 Section 1 - “to conduct original and other researches, investigations, and experiments bearing directly on and contributing to the establishment and maintenance of a permanent and effective agricultural industry of the United States, including research basic to the problems of agriculture in its broadest aspects, and such investigations as have for their purpose the development and improvement of the rural home and rural life.”

Smith-Lever Act 1914 Section 1 - “In order to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information...” and “to encourage the application of same.”

Smith-Lever Act 1914 Section 2 - “Cooperative agricultural extension work shall consist of the development of practical application of research knowledge and giving of instruction and practical demonstration of existing or improved practices or technologies...”

(Description of the Acts of Congress were taken from Journal of Extension, April 2006, Volume 44 Number 2 Article Number 2FEA8.)

Service is a core mission of West Virginia University Extension Service. Faculty members of the Extension Service are responsible for quality educational programs that produce positive results. One of the major goals is to use the knowledge emerging from the research conducted at the land-grant university and translate it into a form that is helpful for the citizens of the state.

Extension agents play an important role in assisting communities to identify solutions to critical local issues. While institutions of higher education have academic units, society has problems...
that are complex and multi-disciplinary spanning over various academic disciplines. Extension is often better suited than other academic units to solve these problems. Extension’s service programs integrate teaching and research in a manner that makes it relevant to communities.

**Service as Scholarship in Extension**

For service to meet the standard of scholarship, it must be based on clearly identified needs, include a measurable evaluation component that demonstrates impact, and be communicated to peers and local stakeholders beyond those individuals that were directly involved in the Extension program itself.

The scholarship of service, in the words of Charles Glassick, is to “move beyond the campus to engage others and bring our scholarship directly to the public….where the scholarship of teaching is powerfully affirmed, where the scholarship of research is adequately supported, where the scholarships of integration and application come alive to take on a special vitality and new purpose.”

The following paragraphs are from the WVU Extension Faculty Promotion and Tenure Document. They describe how WVU and the Extension view service as it relates to promotion and tenure and defines it in terms of scholarship.

“Service activities involve the application of the benefits and products of teaching and research to address the needs of society and the profession. These activities include service to individuals, groups and organizations at the community, county, university, State, regional, national and international levels. For extension personnel, service to the university includes contributions to the efficiency and effectiveness of the unit to which the faculty member is assigned, key collaborating agencies and to WVUES in general.

The evaluation of service should include assessments of the degree to which the service yields important benefits to the university, society, or the profession. Especially relevant is the extent to which the service meets the needs of clients, induces positive change, improves performance, or has significant impact on the societal problems or issues.

A significant contribution in service includes the successful development and implementation of programs that serve the society. Such programs will normally integrate teaching and research to meet the needs of clients, induce positive change, improve performance, or have a significant impact on societal problems or issues.”

**Sources**


Programs and activities offered by the West Virginia University Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, and marital or family status.
### Possible Ways to Measure Success

There are a number of ways to gather information to document the success of your service activities. Some of these include:

- Examine minutes, logs and other recorded documentation
- Count number of products, funds, activities
- Request reviews of program products from experts
- Observe participants working together or using program products
- Interview participants including collaborators, team members, or users of products
- Conduct focus groups with collaborators, team members, or users of products
- Conduct program/activity outcome evaluations (i.e. pre- post tests)
- Conduct satisfaction studies
- Video tape participants participating in an activity
- Conduct role play activities
- Use photos and other media to stimulate conversations about activities and participation.

### Service Situations

The situations below are ways Extension educators in West Virginia often conduct service.

- County administrative position i.e. County Program Coordinator
- Advisor to groups
- Member of a group, committee, or team
- Program administrator or coordinator
- Professional leadership position at the state or national level

### Service Activities

The activities listed below may involve a service component. Note that some of them may also contain research and teaching components.

- Administration
- Assessment or evaluation
- Mediation
- Teaching
- Researching or gathering information
- Synthesizing of information
- Leading
- Writing grants
- Fund raising
- Planning and implementing programs/projects

### Action Words for Indicators of Success

When developing indicators you might want to use one of the following words to begin the sentence. Example: “Increase the number of participants in the program.”

- Improved
- Completed
- Established
- Changed
- Redirected
- Balanced
- Disseminated
- Strengthened
- Reconstituted
Sample Logic Model for Measuring the Impact of Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Situation</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Indicator of Impact</th>
<th>Ways to Measure Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Extension Educator has an administrative position in the county</td>
<td>Coordinate county public relations program</td>
<td>Increase participation of citizens in county programs. Increase awareness of the Extension programs in the county.</td>
<td>Compare county indicator report of numbers of participants from previous years to this year. Include media documentation of newspaper articles, radio/TV programs, or websites that show the quality or benefit of participation. Analyze the following questions: Did the right message get out? How many people attended? Which groups got the message? Interview a sample of the public about their knowledge of Extension programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension Educator is an advisor to a group</td>
<td>Advise the CEOS club</td>
<td>Increase in the number of new members. Reduce the number of members dropping out of CEOS. Increase the number of members who are actively participating in CEOS</td>
<td>Compare the number of members and with previous years and determine of members and new or returning. Investigate the reasons for members dropping out and/or why new members have joined. Develop criteria for active membership and then determine if members are “mailbox members” or active members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension Educator is a member of a group, committee, or team</td>
<td>Member of statewide 4-H curriculum team</td>
<td>Prepare agents to train 4-H volunteer leaders to teach the curriculum to youth in 4-H.</td>
<td>Post then pre knowledge test to show knowledge gained for each group separately. Observe agents teaching volunteer coordinators. Observe volunteer leaders teaching the curriculum to youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension Educator is an administrator or coordinator of a program</td>
<td>Dining with Diabetes state coordinator</td>
<td>Improved A1c levels or other clinical tests Increased number of DwD sites</td>
<td>Pre-post test or self reported improved A1c levels Counting of number of new sites in WV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension Educator has a leadership position at the state or national level</td>
<td>Developing resources, i.e. money and materials Balance an unbalanced budget</td>
<td>Increased funding Establish a balanced budget</td>
<td>Number of grants obtained Number of new resources utilized Conduct an audit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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