

Extension and Higher Education Service-Learning: Toward a Community Development Service-Learning Model

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Abstract

This article explores how on-the-ground Extension educators interface with higher education service-learning. Most service-learning in Extension has focused on precollege youth and 4-H. When we look at higher education service-learning and Extension in Wisconsin, we see that there is not as much connection as might be expected. County-based Extension educators in Wisconsin are not well connected to higher education service-learning and, when they are connected, they are not getting the benefit of best practices in the field. The article considers four models for better integrating service-learning with Extension: the direct service support model, the Extension as client model, the Extension as broker model, and the community development service-learning model.

Introduction

The higher education community engagement/engaged scholarship/service-learning wave grows ever stronger, refusing to crest. The number of journals, books, and conferences devoted to the collection of crafts clustering under the rubric of service-learning and its related practices seems to expand exponentially. And yet, as civic engagement becomes the increasingly sought-after *raison d'être* for higher education, its historical predecessor, university Cooperative Extension, seems relegated to a neglected wayside. This article explores the disconnect between service-learning and Cooperative Extension in one state, and advances possible strategies for overcoming that disconnect.

Cooperative Extension in particular has always been about educational outreach. Established on the foundation of the Morrill Act of 1862 that created land-grant universities and colleges, and the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, Cooperative Extension was formed through cooperation of federal, state, and county government to become an educational system by which university research was to be made applicable and available to community people. The early focus of Extension was on farming. Today, Cooperative Extension has become the equivalent of a trade name and is distinct from generic higher education “extension” and outreach activities. Its

federal funding is managed by the United States Department of Agriculture, but its activities go far beyond agriculture to also focus on youth, families, community development, natural resources, nutrition, and a wide variety of other areas. This article will refer to Cooperative Extension by the commonly used shorthand “Extension.”

Today, Extension educators who live in and serve a single county or a multicounty region, and usually have advanced degrees, provide both community education and direct service activities. These educators work closely with local government, businesses, farmers, nonprofits, and residents on a wide variety of projects. They may perform needs or assets assessments, strategic planning, community visioning, parenting training, youth education and recreation, consulting on farming practices, and many other community education activities. In the ideal historical model of Extension, the local Extension educator also served as a bridge between knowledge generated by researchers at land-grant universities and knowledge needs of communities, providing early examples of the now-popular translational research model. Today, in many states, Extension has become its own educational institution separate from the state’s land-grant university, causing some to worry that Extension has weakened in its ability to provide this translational role.

Such concerns exist in Wisconsin, the focus of this article, where the University of Wisconsin–Extension is formally separate from the state’s land-grant institution, the University of Wisconsin–Madison. In contrast to many states that now have regional structures, where Extension educators may serve a multicounty section of a state, UW-Extension is structured around a county-based system. Every county in the state has their own Extension office, and up to half of the funding for a county Extension office comes from the county, creating pressure on the Extension educators to keep their relationships and attention focused in the county. UW-Extension supports four “divisions” of practice: 4-H and youth development; agriculture; community, natural resource, and economic development (CNRED); and family living, along with the areas of horticulture and nutrition. Many counties have educators representing all these areas. The county educators are served by state specialists who are in theory available to help provide translational research services. Most of the research-oriented specialists, however, are formally employed by the state’s traditional higher education institutions, especially UW-Madison.

Extension administrators and practitioners in Wisconsin regularly consider ways to bring together the knowledge resources from traditional higher educational institutions and Extension. One possibility, which is just beginning to be explored seriously, is service-learning. Such a model might, on its face, seem logical. Because Extension educators in Wisconsin are so local, service-learning placements with them can be conceptually similar to placements with nonprofit organizations, in contrast to such placements in states where the Extension educators often have a regional focus. In addition, in contrast to nonprofits, which may not have a strong educational mission and thus find themselves trying to shoehorn students into their programming, Extension educators should theoretically easily know how to get the most benefit from service-learners.

Given this history of Extension and its connections to institutions of higher learning, it seems natural that on-the-ground Extension educators would be part of today's higher education service-learning system. Examples of such practice do exist, but Extension is nearly invisible in the higher education service-learning literature. A search extending back to 2000 of the widely cited Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning yielded only one article with one brief historical reference to Extension (*Daynes & Longo, 2004*).

Extension has at times been prompted to get on the higher education service-learning and community engagement bandwagon. In 1998, Greg Simpson urged us to "begin to recognize the potential that service learning may hold for Extension and how Extension can better extend itself toward strengthening service learning initiatives." In 2003, the University of Wisconsin's Chancellor Reilly also called on Extension to act as the connector by which higher education resources could be brought into greater use in community settings.

Within Extension there is also a lack of literature that explicitly connects the craft of Extension to higher education service-learning. Overwhelmingly, the Extension literature on service-learning concentrates not on higher education partnerships, but on precollege youth and 4-H, and on the impact of service-learning on the youth learner (*Barker & Warner, 2008; Boyd, 2001; Bruce, Webster, & Hoover, 2006; Hairston, 2004; Olson & Croymans, 2008; Safrit & Auck, 2003; Stafford, Boyd, & Lindner, 2003; Webster, 2006*), though some analysts attempt to briefly explore community impacts (*Barker & Warner, 2008; Condo & Martin, 2002; Israel & Ilvento, 1995; Matthews & Bradley, 2011*). Within Extension, then, service-learning is carried

out as part of its historical youth education mission, not as part of a partnership with higher education institutions. And in many of the cases of Extension-university-community collaborations, the focus is on partnerships involving Extension and regular university faculty, without students (Booth, Vaidya, Farrell, & Bokemeier, 2003; Cadwallader & Lersch, 2006; Conway, 2006; Williams, Dougherty, & Powers, 2006). Aronson and Webster (2007) seem to provide the main exception in describing the Pennsylvania State University outreach model, which attempts to fully integrate Extension faculty, university faculty, and students.

Why is this? Research to craft an explanation is lacking. The question of why higher education service-learning and Extension are so disconnected appears to not really even be on the radar. No literature has gone beyond case study reports to research Extension educators' range of involvement with service-learners, or their feelings about working with service-learners. In addition, very little research reflects how the more visible hosts of higher education service-learners—nonprofit organizations—feel about the arrangement. Such research on community perceptions of service-learning have only recently begun appearing (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). There is nonetheless a considerable amount of general literature on service-learning that involves a nonprofit host.

Without good research to understand how on-the-ground Extension educators are interacting with service-learners, and want to interact with them, it will be very difficult to advance the practice of higher education service-learning with Extension. For that matter, it may also be difficult to advance the practice of Cooperative Extension.

The research reported in this article was initially focused on studying the scope and depth of higher education service-learning in Extension, as an effort to begin filling the gap in the literature on the relationship between Extension and higher education service-learning. The paradoxical results, which showed the lack of relationship, then led to a second question regarding what models Extension might draw upon to more effectively engage higher education service-learners and gain more benefit from them.

Research Methods

As a UW-Madison faculty member with an affiliated Extension appointment as a statewide specialist in community development, and who also focuses on student community engagement,

I was intrigued at having heard relatively few stories about students working with county Extension educators. After a number of discussions with county Extension educators about their lack of contact with higher education service-learners, and in one case their frustrations with the contact, in the summer of 2010 a study was designed to find out more about Wisconsin county-based Extension educators' experiences with higher education service-learning. A survey is the most efficient and effective method for gathering countable data to describe the characteristics of a population, in contrast to research attempting to gather in-depth causal data better obtained by case study frameworks and methods such as in-depth interviews (Sayer, 2010). The survey was structured around two basic research questions. First, to what extent do county-based UW-Extension educators engage higher education service-learners in Extension work? Second, how are the relationships between Extension educators and service learners structured? The UW-Madison IRB approved the survey protocol as exempt research that was minimal risk with anonymous responses.

The survey defined higher education service-learning as a practice that “involves college or university students receiving course or independent study credit for community service, including community-based research or volunteer work with community or government agencies. This includes interns, who are service-learners providing many more hours than the average (usually 50 or more hours in a semester).” This definition may seem unusually inclusive, but past research has shown that nonprofit staff often do not make distinctions between different kinds of students who show up on their doorstep to contribute time, even to the point of not knowing who is strictly a volunteer and who is getting credit (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). The survey was designed to be answerable in 10 minutes to maximize the response rate.

An initial draft of the web-based survey was pre-tested with two county-based educators, revised, and announced across the statewide Cooperative Extension e-mail list, with two follow-up reminders. All Cooperative Extension educators are subscribed to this e-mail list, and county-based educators are only a subset of the list members. The survey announcement specifically recruited county-based educators but, in order to make sure that only county-based educators were included in the survey, survey questions called for the geographic area the respondent served and the division of Extension the respondent worked in, thus excluding all but county-based educators. Because they were all subscribed to the e-mail list, this form of distribution provided access to the

entire population of county-based Extension educators, making this a population survey.

There were 151 responses. Two respondents were excluded because they did not check yes to the informed consent question and consequently had no data, and seven others because they did not list a region (Wisconsin Cooperative Extension is divided into regions, and this question served as a proxy for the educator's location, since asking for the educator's county and division would have made their responses identifiable) or self-identified as statewide specialists. This left a total of 142 valid responses, a roughly 50 % response rate, as the exact number of county-based Extension educators at any one time is not known. The frequencies were compiled by the open-source Lime Survey software used in the research.

Results

Who Has Experience With Higher Education Service-Learners?

The survey gathered some basic data on both the geographic district and functional division of the responding educators, and asked if they had any experience with higher education service-learners. There was a representative spread of responses across geographic districts and the functional divisions of Cooperative Extension: 4-H; agriculture and natural resources; community, natural resource, and economic development (CNRED); and family living; along with the areas of horticulture and nutrition. Notably, two-thirds of respondents had no experience with higher education service-learning, but were still willing to answer the survey (see Table 1). This suggests that some degree of interest in the practice exists among county-based educators. Perhaps the most interesting finding is the strong representation of 4-H educators in the survey (where the concept of service-learning is most popularized), but the low proportion of those educators who had experience with higher education service-learners.

Table 1. Division of County Educators Responding to Survey

	No experience with service-learners	Experience with service-learners	Totals
4H	28	9	37
Agriculture	7	7	14
CNRED	17	13	30
Family Living	13	12	25
Horticulture	4	0	4

Nutrition	18	3	21
Other	9	2	11

Note. $N = 142$

Why So Little Experience With Higher Education Service-Learning?

Further evidence that Extension educators are interested in higher education service-learning appears in Table 2. An overwhelming number of responses indicate that county educators were not working with higher education service-learners because no one had asked them to. Some were justifiably wary of the value students might bring, but their numbers pale in comparison to those who have never been approached. The lack of service-learning offers from higher education may be partly due to the lack of relationships between university faculty/students and Extension educators. However, previous research has also shown that higher education service-learning has a strong urban bias, with urban nonprofits being far more likely than rural nonprofits to host service-learners (Stoecker & Schmidt, 2008).

Table 2. Why County Educators Have No Experience With Higher Education Service-Learners

Why No Experience	Number Reporting
No one asked respondent to host a student	83
Don't know what would have them do	18
Doesn't sound worth it	2
No time to supervise	13
Other	2

Note. $N=96$

Which Service-Learners Do County Educators Supervise?

We turn next to those county educators who have had experience with higher education service-learning. The survey asked the educators to list the number of service-learners they supervised in both 2009–2010 and 2008–2009, across various categories. There is some reason to distinguish service-learners by length of their commitment. The form of service-learning least valued by community groups is the short-term variety, often defined as 20 hours or less of total commitment over a semester. The form of service-learning most highly valued by community groups is the internship, which often involves 50 hours or more of commitment. Less is known

about the middle range of commitment (more than 20 but less than 50 hours per semester). Community groups generally prefer graduate students to undergraduate students (*Stoecker & Tryon, 2009*), so the survey also made that distinction.

Table 3 reports three kinds of data. First, it shows how many educators had experience with the different types of service-learners. Next, it lists the average number of students each educator supervised in each category. Third, those averages were adjusted by removing “outliers” from the data. In most cases, there was one educator who supervised a large number (more than 20) of service-learners in a category, when nearly everyone else was supervising only one or a few students. Removing a single outlier produces more representative averages.

Table 3. Kinds of Service-Learners Experienced by County Educators

	How many educators reported in each category		Average number of students per educator		Average number of students per educator without outliers	
	2009-10	2008-09	2009-10	2008-09	2009-10	2008-09
Undergraduates for less than 20 hours	12	11	11	9	7	6
Undergraduates for 21-49 hours	6	7	11	5	7	1
Undergraduates for 50 hours or more	18	9	3	1	2	1
Graduate students for less than 20 hours	2	1	2	1	2	1
Graduate students for 21-49 hours	2	1	2	1	2	1
Graduate students for 50 hours or more	6	3	12	8	2	1

Note. $N = 46$

Unsurprisingly, Extension educators supervised more service-learners with shorter-term placements. In some cases, these were likely groups from single classes, but they could also be individual students. It is also interesting to observe that there were consistent small increases in all categories from 2008–2009 to 2009–2010. This could be due to faulty recollection of a previous year, but it could also signal a growing interest in service-learning among county educators.

Do County Educators Get the Benefit of Best Practices?

There have been many attempts to establish principles of good practice for service-learning, from the lofty and abstract (*Honnet & Poulsen, 1989*) to the practical and concrete (*Tryon & Stoecker, 2007*). That has been similarly true for the broader field of community-campus partnerships (*Hanover, 2012, Holland, Gelmon, Green, Greene-Moton, & Stanton, 2003*). But there seem to be some emerging core best practices that higher education institutions should engage in to make service-learning as beneficial to the community as possible. Tables 4 and 5 explore the extent to which county educators are recipients of such practices. The numbers are very small, but these results are consistent with other research (*Stoecker & Tryon, 2009*). One best practice is for the professor to build a service-learning course by involving the host organization and establishing the parameters of a service-learning placement with the host prior to the beginning of class. Table 4 shows that the best practices are not as widespread as we might hope. Because some Extension educators hosted students in multiple categories, it is useful to look at how they accessed each type of student. This data shows that, consistent with research on other community organizations, the best practice of prior contact is not yet widespread. In only roughly half of the cases did a student or professor contact the Extension educator prior to the start of the course when the service-learning involved an undergraduate for less than 50 hours. In the rest of the cases, the educator was apparently approached after the course began and may have had little influence over the actual substance of the placement.

Table 4. How Service-Learning Placements Are Arranged

	Student before class begins	Professor before class begins	Student after class begins	Professor after class begins	Educator contacts professor	Other/ No answer
Undergraduates for less than 20 hours	1	6	5	1	1	0
Undergraduates for 21-49 hours	2	1	3	1	0	2
Undergraduates for 50 hours or more	6	2	5	1	3	1
Graduate stu- dents for 21-49 hours	1	1	0	0	0	0

Graduate students for 50 hours or more	1	2	1	1	2	0
Totals	12	12	15	4	6	4

Note. $N=46$

Table 5 shows a similar problematic picture. Most service-learning proponents agree that best practices include having a written agreement, a work plan for the student, a list of learning goals from the professor, and criteria with which to evaluate the service-learner. Here again, in half the cases or fewer were such best practices in place. Furthermore, six county educators reported having none of these practices in place for their service-learners. Only four reported having all practices in place, six had three practices in place, 12 had two practices in place, and 18 had one practice in place.

Table 5. Educators Reporting Service-Learning Best Practices

Which practices were in place?	Number reporting
A written agreement covering all parties' responsibilities	23
A work plan for the student	23
A list of learning goals from the professor	19
Written criteria to use in evaluating the student	12
How many practices were in place?	
None in place	6
One in place	18
Two in place	12
Three in place	6
All in place	4

Note. $N = 46$

Is Higher Education Service-Learning Worth It for the County Educator?

Finally, the most important question is whether higher education service-learning is worth the time that the county educator must spend training and supervising the student. Similar to other recent research, the answer is just barely. The final survey question asked county educators to judge how service-learners impacted their productivity, with a score of 1 indicating that their productivity increased "very much" and 5 indicating that it decreased "very much." A score of 3 would mean that, roughly, the educator broke even in time invested and productivity gained.

Table 6. How Service-Learners Impact Educators' Productivity

	Average Rating
Undergraduates for less than 20 hours	2.73
Undergraduates for 21-49 hours	2.56
Undergraduates for 50 hours or more	1.89
Graduate students for less than 20 hours	2.55
Graduate students for 21-49 hours	2.33
Graduate students for 50 hours or more	1.8

Note. $N = 46$

Table 6 shows that short-term service-learning, as we would expect, was just above the break-even point, and only the internship categories of 50 hours or more averaged out above the moderate increase score. The idea of the Extension intern has been promoted, but not really evaluated in terms of its impact on Extension productivity (Cadavieco, & Walker, 2008, Rogers, Mason, & Cornelius, 2001; Wilken, Williams,), and these findings lend some data supporting the value generally placed on interns. On the other hand, although graduate students are generally valued highly for their skills (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; McClure & Fuhrman, 2011), use of graduate students shows no more than slight suggestions of increased productivity. Why that might be is an important question that this data cannot definitively answer. Given that service-learning best practices were not widely in place, some number of graduate students may have approached Extension educators with the student's research needs, and the Extension educators did their best to accommodate them. In any event, the data show that there is not yet an effective model for graduate student engagement with Extension.

Analysis

As noted earlier, the history and mission of Extension might lead one to expect that Extension is the perfect fit for higher education service-learning. However, the findings from this survey instead confirm what we are beginning to learn about nonprofit experiences with service-learning: namely, that higher education service-learners are not widely used, and when they are used, the results tend to be suboptimal. For Extension, as for nonprofits, much of the service-learning is short term, and best practices are not frequently followed. So, on the one hand, it is not surprising that Extension experiences the same problems with service-learning that nonprofits do. On the other hand, there is room to question

why higher education service-learning experiences the same disconnect with Extension as with nonprofit service-learning hosts.

There is no shortage of explanations. One is the bias of service-learners to stay close to campus (*Stoecker & Schmidt, 2008*). The Extension educator's work is not proximal to most campuses even when the Extension office might be. Another explanation is service-learning's historical bias toward student learning rather than community impact. Since Extension educators are not charged with serving credit-earning students, they probably have even less motivation to do so than do nonprofits, who at least view service-learners as potential recruits to their cause (*Stoecker & Tryon, 2009*). The third possibility that fits the data is the "best kept secret" explanation (*Horrisberger & Crawford, 2007; McDowell, 2004; also see Aronson & Webster, 2007*). Extension educators regularly refer to themselves this way, and it is entirely possible that they are a secret not just to the grassroots populace but also to their higher education colleagues. That so many educators in the survey responded that they had never been asked to host a service-learner makes this last explanation sadly plausible. And it shouldn't be that way. It is, after all, "university" Extension, so the finding that Extension educators' relationships with service-learning are so similar to nonprofits' relationships is disturbing.

A survey of Extension educators in a single state cannot be easily generalized to Extension educators across the country. In fact, some evidence indicates that the situation in Wisconsin may not be universal (*Aronson & Webster, 2007*). Between the lack of research that might contradict these findings and their consistency with what we are discovering about nonprofits and service-learning, there is nonetheless cause for concern. Research is still needed on the extent of two problems: Extension educators' lack of access to higher education service-learning, and Extension educators experiencing the same problematic practices seen with service-learning in nonprofits. However, we have enough evidence to suggest that we also need to look for better ways to connect Extension and service-learning. Does the Extension context offer service-learning opportunities that are not as readily available in the nonprofit context? And does it offer ways to make service-learning more productive?

Models for Extension and Service-Learning

Distance, lack of relevance, poor practice, and lack of visibility are a lot to overcome if we are to make service-learning actually

contribute to the capacity of Extension educators. The institutional inertia behind these conditions is too large an obstacle to tackle in a single effort. Instead, it may be worth exploring examples that can form the basis for institutional models to support an Extension service-learning practice. The existing literature suggests four different models of higher education engagement with Extension educators: the direct service support model, the Extension as client model, the Extension as broker model, and the community development service-learning model.

Direct Service Support Model

The first model, the direct service support model, mirrors the most common relationship that service-learners have with non-profit organizations. Extension youth programming in which college students assist with program delivery exemplifies this model. Smith, Dasher, and Klingborg (2005), for example, describe a project involving collaboration between college students and 4-H to improve grade school youth science literacy. Kotval (2003) describes how urban planning students support Extension-organized community projects. Dart, Frable, and Bradley (2008) present an obesity-prevention program that partnered with students, faculty, and Extension. In all of these cases, the Extension educator is engaged in direct service activities and brings in service-learners to support that direct service. Implementing this model is probably the same in Extension as in any nonprofit organization. Either university or Extension faculty must adequately prepare students to work with community members who may differ significantly from them in racial/ethnic and class background (Dunlap & Webster, 2009), as well as implement the other best practices cited above.

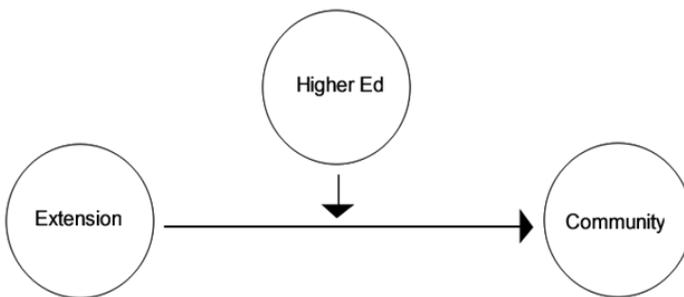


Figure 1. The Direct Service Support Model

Extension as Client Model

The second model, the Extension as client model, engages the higher education institution in activities that support Extension directly as a client rather than contributing to Extension's work with community constituencies. Morris, Pomery, and Murray (2002) promote this idea, based on their experiences with a service-learning class. They argue that service-learning can benefit Extension by providing access to higher education knowledge and enhancing Extension's visibility with community members and higher education faculty and students. This is similar to some project-based service-learning with nonprofits (Chamberlain, 2003; Coyle, Jamieson, & Oakes, 2005; Draper 2004). It also is consistent with the motivations expressed by nonprofit organizations in hosting service-learners to help enhance their community visibility (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). In one example of this, Condo and Martin (2002) describe a project involving health care students in short-term service-learning that allowed Extension professionals to expand their services in rural communities. They noted, in particular, how students could help make Extension more visible in those communities. Another service-learning project explicitly engaged students in marketing county Extension services to the community. In this case, a class of students produced a variety of promotional materials for the county office (Horrisberger & Crawford, 2007), much the same way they would have for a typical nonprofit organization that was engaged in direct service or educational activities.

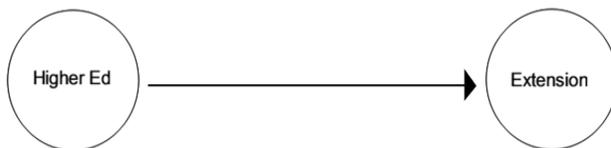


Figure 2. The Extension as Client Model

Extension as Broker Model

In the third model, the Extension as broker model, Extension brokers relationships between higher education institutions and community groups. Henness & Jeanetta (2010) report on a case involving Extension and university students in a rural community planning process. In this instance the university had a formal agreement with Extension to help connect with various communities. Kriesky & Cote (2003), in one of the few articles that discusses Extension and service-learner relationships, explore how Extension educators acted as connectors to projects, in addition to the more typical pattern of engaging service-learners to perform support research for their educational programming.

Notably, this third model approaches the science shop model developed in Europe. A science shop serves as an intake office for community groups with knowledge questions, and then searches out knowledge resources to answer those questions. Those knowledge resources are often students who perform research to answer the community group's questions (*Living Knowledge*, 2012). Can such a model provide any efficiencies—perhaps helping access more resources than would be otherwise available—thus multiplying the questions that Extension can address?

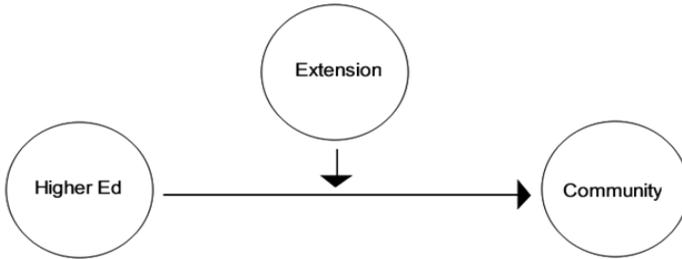


Figure 3. The Extension as Broker Model

Community Development Service-Learning Model

The final model, the community development service-learning model, is the most interesting, and it also requires the greatest changes in how we think about service-learning. Such a model applies particularly well to Extension at its best, though Extension itself may need to change to fully utilize it. Freire's (1973) important "Extension or Communication" essay exposed the less than fully empowering impulses of Extension's one-way knowledge transfer approach, in contrast to a collaborative community-based research approach, in an international context. Conway (2006) later distinguished cooperation and collaboration as two models of Extension-community relationships, with cooperation being roughly similar to a one-way knowledge transfer approach and collaboration being much more of a knowledge integration approach that involves multiple players sharing multiple forms of knowledge. This mirrors the dichotomous approaches within service-learning, in which the charity approach is a one-way transfer of service from helper to helped, and the social change approach involves much more collaboration between community members and outsiders (*Kahne & Westheimer, 2001; Marullo & Edwards, 2000*).

A community development approach to service-learning has so far been only tentatively outlined (*Stoecker & Beckman, forthcoming*).

The overall goals of a community development approach, whether conducted via Extension, service-learning, or some combination of the two, are to solve local problems and to build capacity to solve local problems. Consequently, community development service-learning must be built on a broader engagement foundation, and more informed by theory than the average one-shot short-term student volunteer hours model. Since a meaningful community development project often takes years, it requires long-term coordination that can bring in outside resources, whether in the form of academic expertise or student labor on short-term bases. Such a project would typically involve multiple courses and multiple different forms of community expertise requiring community, not higher education or leadership.

The Extension office, in this model, is already in the community for the long term and, because of that, can be an anchor for the other shorter-term relationships. That does not mean that the higher education institution can eschew any obligation for a long-term commitment to the community, only that it need not be the central coordinator or even the central player. In fact, if the community development is to be truly empowering, the higher education institution should not be a central player. Instead, the higher education institution makes a commitment to provide resources as needed to the community development project that is developed, designed, and led from the community itself.

Perhaps the best example of such a model comes from Salant and Laumatia (2011), who describe a collaboration involving the University of Idaho, University of Idaho Extension, and Coeur d'Alene reservation communities. They focused explicitly on building community leadership capacity to reduce poverty. Through a multiyear process, community leadership would identify issues and connect with university resources that could help them address those issues, such as accessing planning students to assist with housing development. In addition to acting as a primary link-maker in the process, Extension also directly engaged with both university faculty and community leaders.

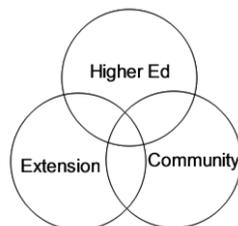


Figure 4. The Community Development Service-Learning Model

Conclusion

This research shows that the relationship between higher education service-learning and county-based Cooperative Extension in Wisconsin is in its infancy and faces the same challenges that are characteristic of service-learning generally. It addresses the gap in the literature about how Extension accesses, or does not access, higher education service-learning. To say that “no one asks” Extension to host service-learners has a double meaning in this regard. First, county Extension is frequently left out of the higher education service-learning loop altogether. Second, when higher education students or faculty invite county Extension educators to host higher education service-learners, Extension is no more likely than any other community-based service-learning host to receive best practices.

Before we ask more county Extension educators to host service-learners, then, we need to think about why we would ask county educators to do so. This article also addresses the gap in our knowledge of ways that Extension educators can better access higher education service-learning. As this article shows, we have an opportunity to not just think about how to offer service-learning’s best practices to Extension educators, but to rethink service-learning in light of what Extension educators can bring to the service-learning table. Doing so will maximize the benefits of service-learning not only for county Extension, but for everyone.

What steps can higher education and Extension take to expand service-learning collaborations and maximize their benefits? On the higher education side, the first step is for faculty to develop relationships with Extension educators the same way they should with nonprofit organization staff. This might be more challenging in some rural areas where distance is an issue, but the same challenge applies in developing relationships with rural nonprofits. It may even be easier to find the local Extension office than a small, off-the-radar nonprofit. Subsequently, simply following the standard best practices of service-learning will go a long way toward ensuring the effectiveness of the collaboration. This means faculty need to contact Extension educators before the course begins, negotiate an actual project, make sure students are prepared, engage the Extension educator in regular evaluation of progress during the semester, and take responsibility for completing the project even if the student does poor quality or incomplete work.

Extension educators should justifiably approach service-learning with some skepticism and a realistic sense of their own

capacity to manage service-learners. They should not feel obligated to add college student training to their own already overly full agendas. Rather, they can consider what capacity gaps service-learners might fill. For example, what projects might make use of one or more students who contribute only about 20 hours each in a semester? There may be community events needing volunteers, community surveys needing door-knockers, county fairs needing people to stand at booths, or any number of shorter term projects in which students can devote only small amounts of time. Extension educators can also use such small, short-term efforts to gauge the reliability of the supervising faculty member and decide whether a larger and more meaningful project is worth the risk. When it is worth the risk, the Extension educator and higher education faculty member can move on to a multiplayer community development project—the fourth model depicted above.

It is very important, as we do this, to take the time to document what happens. A crucial step in building bridges between local Extension educators and higher education service-learning programs is to discover how such programs can be shaped to expand the capacity and visibility of on-the-ground Extension and better build the power and capacity of communities. That process can begin with building a better collection of stories that provide a critical analysis of how collaborations start, sustain themselves, and produce meaningful outcomes in communities. We can then build more consciously on the lessons being learned through existing collaborations, shaping both service-learning and on-the-ground Extension for greater community impact.

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Appendix

UW-Extension County Educator Service-Learning Survey

About This Survey

This survey is designed to better understand Extension educators' experiences with higher education service-learners. Service-learning involves college or university students receiving course or independent study credit for community service, including community-based research or volunteer work with community or government agencies. This includes interns, who are service learners providing many more hours than the average (usually 50 or more hours in a semester).

Ideally, service-learning should be one option that Extension educators can use to increase their own productivity. But service-learning is still an imperfect practice, and may not have the productivity impacts we would hope. To improve service-learning, we need to know more about your experiences with the practice.

Informed Consent Statement

This survey is anonymous. It should take less than 10 minutes to complete. Any quotes used in reports will remove identifying information (such as location or name). There are no direct benefits or risks to you from completing the survey. The availability of summary results will be announced on the Cooperative Extension e-mail list and will be used in an attempt to shape the practice of service learning in relation to Extension educators' needs.

If you have questions about the research now or after you complete the survey please contact Randy Stoecker, Professor, Dept. of Community and Environmental Sociology, University of Wisconsin, 608-890-0764 or rstoecker@wisc.edu. If you are not satisfied with response of researcher, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Social & Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

Thank you,

Randy Stoecker

Professor

Department of Community and Environmental Sociology and
UWEX Center for Community and Economic Development

Consent Agreement

**I have read and understand the above informed consent statement (clicking “yes” is required in order to submit your survey).

- Yes
- No

About You:

Have you had experience with higher education service learners? If you have no experience with higher education service learners, please check why below and then answer questions 1 and 2 only. You may add comments if you wish. If you have had any experience with higher education service learners, please skip this question and answer questions 1-8. Check any that apply:

- No one has asked you to host service learners.
- You don't know what you would have service learners do.
- From what you have heard, it doesn't sound worth it.
- You do not have time to supervise service learners.
- You had a bad experience with service learning some time back.
- Other:

1. Which Extension district are you in? Choose one of the following answers:

- northern
- eastern
- quad counties
- southern
- western
- central
- No answer

2. Which Extension division or program do you primarily work for? Choose one of the following answers:

- CNRED/CRD
- 4-H/youth

- Family Living
- Agriculture
- Nutrition Education
- Horticulture
- Other:
- No answer

About Your Experience with Service Learning:

3. How many university or college service learners have you supervised as part of your UW-Extension work, in each of the following categories, during this past academic year 2009-10? Only numbers may be entered in these fields:

- undergrads who each contributed a total of 20 hours or fewer
- undergrads who each contributed a total of 21-49 hours
- undergraduate interns who each contributed a total of 50 hours or more
- graduate students who each contributed a total of 20 hours or fewer
- graduate students who each contributed a total of 21-49 hours
- graduate student interns who each contributed a total of 50 hours or more

4. How many university or college service learners did you supervise as part of your UW-Extension work, in each of the following categories, during the academic year 2008-9? Only numbers may be entered in these fields:

- undergrads who each contributed a total of 20 hours or fewer
- undergrads who each contributed a total of 21-49 hours
- undergraduate interns who each contributed a total of 50 hours or more

- graduate students who each contributed a total of 20 hours or fewer
 - graduate students who each contributed a total of 21-49 hours
 - graduate student interns who each contributed a total of 50 hours or more
5. What is the most common way you gain access to higher education service learners? Choose one of the following answers:
- The professor contacts you before the class begins to arrange the placement
 - The student contacts you before the class begins to arrange the placement
 - The professor contacts you after the class begins to arrange the placement
 - The student contacts you after the class begins to arrange the placement
 - You contact a professor or service learning office to seek service learners
 - Other:
 - No answer
6. In your experience, which of the following aspects of a service learning placement are usually in place before the student begins their placement? Check any that apply:
- A written agreement covering all parties' responsibilities
 - A work plan for the student
 - A list of learning goals from the professor
 - Written criteria to use in evaluating the student
 - Other:
7. Please use the scale of 1-5 to rate each type of service learning in terms of how it has affected your productivity. Please think of this as a kind of ratio of the time and effort you put into the service learner compared to what they produced. (please answer for only those with which you have experience).

1=this type of service learning has increased your productivity very much

2=this type of service learning has increased your productivity somewhat

3=this type of service learning has neither increased nor decreased your productivity

4=this type of service learning has decreased your productivity somewhat

5=this type of service learning has decreased your productivity very much

Only numbers may be entered in these fields:

- undergrads who each contributed a total of 20 hours or fewer
 - undergrads who each contributed a total of 21-49 hours
 - undergraduate interns who each contributed a total of 50 hours or more
 - graduate students who each contributed a total of 20 hours or fewer
 - graduate students who each contributed a total of 21-49 hours
 - graduate student interns who each contributed a total of 50 hours or more
8. What should higher education institutions, faculty, and students do to improve the outcomes of service learning for you, UW-Extension, and the communities you work with?

About the Author

Randy Stoecker is a professor in the Department of Community and Economic Development at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and holds a specialist appointment with the University of Wisconsin-Extension Center for Community and Economic Development. He teaches, publishes, and trains in the areas of community organizing and development, community-university partnerships, and community informatics.