

The Relevance of ISU Extension

Good morning. I am very happy to be with you this morning at my **first** annual ISU Extension conference. I hope that this is the first of many annual conferences we can share together. It's been a little over eight months since I took the helm of the Good Ship Extension here at ISU. I can tell you without reservation that my appreciation for the quality and quantity of our programs and for all of you, your talents, your dedication, and your hard work, grows greater each day. ISU and ISU Extension are first class organizations and I'm very proud to have you as colleagues.

Some of you I haven't met personally yet, but those of you who have ever heard me talk about Extension, won't be surprised to know that I'll be talking about **relevance** today. That's because Extension is all about relevance and would become a relic without it. It is relevance that creates our programs and provides each of us with our marching orders. It is relevance that will make or break us as an organization. But relevance is tricky. Why? Because it is always in the eye of the beholder.

The dictionary actually gives two definitions for relevance: the one that resonates with the modern world is, "Pertinent to the matter at hand" or **useful**. The other definition is much older and *means to provide relief or be helpful*.

To be relevant, Extension must be both *useful and helpful*.

Today, I would like to broaden the definition of **Extension relevancy** to encompass both definitions.

Although it wouldn't be considered a scientific study, I sometimes take lunch in the resident dining facilities so that I can visit with students. So many times after introducing myself to several unsuspecting students as someone who works for **Extension**, in most cases there is a pause, and then their faces go blank while they madly search their internal hard drives for a file on "Extension."

When they draw a blank, I will usually give them a clue like, "You know those Extension offices in your county?" or "Were you ever in 4-H?" After a lot of hemming and hawing, I am sad to report that too many of these conversations have ended in my explaining what Extension is and does.

I also have tried asking students to explain what a Land Grant university is with the same dismal results. I haven't approached a question about the genesis of Morrill Hall's namesake, but I would bet the ranch — if I still had a ranch — that a very slim minority would have a clue.

During my listening tour last spring I realized that Extension's RQ — Relevance Quotient — among our clients' ranges from nonexistent to lifelong. Many who attended the sessions have had a connection with Extension and had wonderful things to say about our work. Some folks were confused about our role and thought that we did research. There were others, who were leaning about of our programs for the first time, or didn't realize the scope of our programs. Almost everyone told us that we needed to do a better job in getting the word out.

The take home message from the listening tours bears out a **woeful lack of awareness of Extension and its mission**. And Ladies and gentlemen, if we are to remain **relevant** in today's world, we must do a much better job of marketing who we are and what we do or fade away with the other great programs and brands of bygone days: WPA, 20 Mule Team Borax, and the New Deal.

One thing is clear: we must stop singing to the choir and mine for new audiences. As part of our refreshed strategic plan, I am asking our marketing group and all of you to make it a priority to make Extension a household word — like iPod or Homeland Security. I also am going to be asking for better marketing intelligence. We have never really looked at or analyzed our competition. **Yes, Extension has competition and it's growing**. We will be studying some mature organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce that has managed to stay on the radar screens despite technological advances and globalization. We will be delineating and examining our market segments, determining what our market share is within those segments, and looking at where the greatest opportunities lie. The end product will be a marketing and communications plan that will provide templates, budgets, and marketing guidelines for each of our program areas.

Is today's Extension relevant? Absolutely! We are extremely relevant and we are damn good at what we do. We are the best!

One way we remain relevant is through the **relationships** we build with organizations, agencies, businesses, communities, and everyday Iowans of all ages. Let's look at a few of those relationships.

We're helping new immigrants find the resources and confidence to become active, involved citizens. Extension has received federal grant funding since 2000 to connect Hispanic community members in Perry, nearly 30 percent of the population, with long-time residents. The Perry L.I.N.K. project has resulted in a leadership group (Hispanics United for Perry), an enhanced Hispanic festival, Extension programming in Spanish including a 4-H club, and critical communication and outreach between new residents and community organizations.

Throughout Iowa, community development is an important component in economic development. In Osage, for example, ISU Extension led a main street revitalization project that has attracted new businesses. In Dubuque the Washington Neighborhood Project, now in its second year, has taken a declining neighborhood with abandoned properties that is 70 percent landlord owned and is working to revitalize properties and help low to moderate income families purchase houses in the area. ISU Extension, the City of Dubuque, and a local lending institution are partnering to make the project happen.

One thing that I have learned about partnerships is that some of the most successful ones are often formed with strange bedfellows. We don't have the time or money to re-invent the wheel. We see large corporations taking over or "merging" with family farms every day. It's high time that Extension starts utilizing the time-honored business practice of mergers and acquisitions, rounds-up its competitors, and forges partnerships whereby core competencies are combined to bring out the best qualities and redundancies are eliminated.

Extension can be relevant (i.e., useful and helpful) through **recruitment**, whether it's

- the kids who join 4-H or participate in our in-school or after-school programs,
- the high school students — or their parents — who stop by the county extension office in person or online, or
- the working adults who want to continue their education and get that degree or certificate.

I noticed that one of the local papers ran an article last week with the headline that read, "Universities must steal students to keep enrollments up."

The gist of the article was that we are becoming more reliant on out-of-state students to make our numbers. While out-of-state students are a very important factor in our budgets and increasing diversity, there are plenty of students right here in Iowa, who are touched in some way by ISU and Extension but they are not getting a personalized invitation to the dance. That's right, **an invitation from one of you to come to ISU is worth a lot more than an ad or a billboard.**

I am sure that many of you in this room have, or know someone with, children in high school. Are they contemplating attending ISU? Why? Why not?

We have to get their attention, show them what Iowa State has to offer, and direct them to the opportunities that exist right here in Iowa. Recruitment is everyone's job. Our clients need to know that whenever and wherever they connect with Extension they are connecting with Iowa State University. A county Extension office is Iowa State University. A campus Extension center (be it the Beef Center, Pork Center, Value-added Agriculture, or the Community Vitality Center, among others) is Iowa State University Extension. A 4-H club meeting is Iowa State University Extension. *We* have to make the connection so that *our clients* can make the connection and the Legislature makes that connection.

Some of you may be asking why Extension professionals need to become university recruiters. Well, first there is the obvious. Simply put, without a strong university we cannot be a strong Extension service. We must stop the decline in student enrollment and stabilize the student population at Iowa State. Then there is the more practical side. The Legislature did not provide enough funding for salary increases this year. The president requested a tuition increase, which was granted by the Regents. That is from where our raises came. Now Extension doesn't generate tuition and the argument has been made if Extension should receive these funds for salary increases. The new university budget model is "tuition-driven." I worry in the absence of adequate funding from the Legislature, how are we going to fund our salary increases in the future. The argument to use tuition dollars is much easier made when there are abundant tuition dollars to use, which translates into more students.

I am aware that through our Extension programs, especially 4-H, we are recruiting students to Iowa State. However, we have never developed metrics to demonstrate that. In order to determine what we are doing and to increase our ability to bring students to ISU, I have appointed a Recruitment Task Force, chaired by Chuck Morris and in cooperation with Mark Hardin and his staff in University Admissions. You soon will be hearing more about what that Task Force is planning.

Extension is useful and helpful through **renewal**. Consider Iowa's grape and wine industry. It's growing rapidly, producing 133,700 gallons of wine with an estimated market value of \$6.7 million — creating a significant economic effect in the state's rural communities. Since 2000, the industry has expanded from five wine-grape vineyards to approximately 400 commercial vineyards and 65 wineries. ISU Extension provides education and leadership to help these entrepreneurs grow their industry profitably.

Extension is partnering with the Wallace Foundation for Rural Research and Development, the Grow Iowa Foundation, and the Southwest Iowa Coalition on a three-year project to create a Rural Development Resource Center based in Red Oak. The center will address the programming and technical assistance needs of small businesses, cooperatives, and micro-enterprises in a 22-county targeted service area of southwest Iowa. Part of the project is an e-commerce Web site that Extension will design for these micro/small service providers, retailers, manufacturers, artisans, processors, and agricultural producers.

Extension's Families Program also has received a significant grant from the Northwest Foundation to deliver the Horizons Community Leadership Program to Reduce Poverty. It's available to Iowa communities of 500 to 5,000 residents with a poverty rate of 10 percent or greater. The information meetings are under way this fall, and the communities that choose to participate will gain training and resources about leadership, poverty reduction, community development, visioning, and strategic planning. Iowa's rural communities have great potential to take on economic challenges when they continue to build the leadership skills of their citizens.

There has never been a greater need and there has never been better time to revitalize and renew our communities. The bioeconomy and biofuels are generating an opportunity that could create a rural renaissance. But we must act swiftly and piggy-back on many of the partnerships and programs that we already have in place.

Extension also is useful and helpful through the **resources** we bring to the table — the research from Iowa State, our ISU Extension staff, and our connections throughout the state.

For example, look at bird flu — avian influenza. This is not an issue of *if* it comes, but *when* it comes. It's an animal health issue, as well as a human health issue, a food safety issue, and an economic issue. What will it mean for poultry producers, for consumers, for lake tourism, for 4-H youth and their poultry projects? Iowa State has formed a university-wide team involving Extension, the colleges of Agriculture, Veterinary Medicine, and Human

Sciences, and University Relations, and representatives from the poultry industry — so we can keep our clients and the media well informed.

Once more, the bioeconomy is a good case in point. We're positioning Iowa companies to take advantage of the bioeconomy. The Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS) is working with Boone's Vibroacoustics Solutions Inc., a producer of agriculture-based lubricants, and Sho-Me Container, a corn-based plastic containers producer located in Grinnell. CIRAS partners with the USDA Office of Energy Policy and New Uses in this effort.

We've also received a \$156,000 grant from the Iowa Finance Authority to build capacity and provide technical assistance to Local Housing Trust Funds (LHTF). We're partnering with the Iowa Coalition on Housing and Homeless to help increase the amount of affordable housing in Iowa's communities, including transitional housing for new residents, starter homes for young families, senior housing, and improved housing for low- to moderate-income households.

At the same time, I don't have to tell you that our resources are shrinking, do I? Every day we are doing more with less. Too bad that your talent, commitment, and hard work aren't line items on the budget because we would be rolling in the dough! That's why we all need to look at alternative delivery systems very closely to identify areas where we can reach more people by applying technology. It's either that or start cloning extension agents. But we won't go there — yet. As part of our refreshed strategic plan, I will be asking our IT folks to stretch their resources and their talents to find new ways to broaden our market reach. I am very proud of the fact that our Core Services Unites of IT, Communications, and Distribution are providing national leadership in the extension program of the national Extension system.

Relationships, recruitment, renewal, and resources — **I see these as the key ingredients to being useful and helpful and that will define Extension's relevance.** At the same time, we must strengthen our commitment to and alignment with the university's overarching goals and objectives.

Shortly after I arrived at Iowa State, President Geoffroy gave me (us) a special assignment — something he calls Extension's **Mission Critical Objectives**. There are four:

First, we're looking at **budgets and finances**. We're giving Extension a complete check-up in terms of financial health. The revenues and costs have to line up — and the financial commitments I inherited from the previous Extension administration have to be met.

Second, Eldon K. Uhlenhopp, our new interim director for **Continuing and Distance Education**, will help us grow and improve that program to better serve Iowans and others interested in education from Iowa State. We have the potential to reach learners of all ages wherever they are, and whatever their learning objectives might be.

For this reason, ISU Continuing and Distance Education (CDE) will be rethinking its business model—its roles in the institution, its core capabilities (and how to develop a few new ones), and its positions in a local marketplace that is increasingly global. There is an unprecedented opportunity for CDE to take some significantly new approaches to developing and delivering programs.

For ISU the questions are clear: What are the opportunities for reaching massive numbers of people with the curricula that ISU develops? What are the skills and abilities needed by staff to develop and deliver CDE to a broad range of audiences? Can high quality curricula be developed as overload teaching with faculty already stretched? How can partnerships that will provide high quality, cost containment, increased access to education, and high-value be developed internally and externally? How can technology be developed and shared to mitigate educational delivery costs? Clearly, instructional delivery must be rethought so that it relates to the learning needs of a dynamic and wide-ranging continuum of students, including the traditional clientele of Cooperative Extension.

ISU CDE is modeling its goals and outreach efforts in the spirit of the Morrill Act and from the market need to provide better access and value to higher education to place-and time-bound students. Additionally, the new model will be designed to cut across traditional higher education boundaries and to create functional continuing education partnerships among Iowa State University, Iowa communities and businesses.

Because many of CDE's problems have been financial in nature, I appointed a Financial Task Force, chaired by Extension's Budget Director Laurie Gustafson, to assess the status of CDE and make recommendations. Their summaries and suggestions have been incorporated into the plans. In addition, the Financial Task Force has been charged with oversight and reporting the progress of the finances of CDE as the plan rolls out.

I have requested President Geoffroy appoint a President's Commission on Instructional Delivery (PCID) comprised of representatives from ISU faculty and administrators who will study the issues and opportunities and prepare a report with recommendations addressing the future of instructional delivery at ISU. Examples of the tough issues and questions the Commission members will address include:

- Can a distributed learning "business" operate effectively within the confines of the traditional college or university given the current faculty governance model?
- Conversely, can our current faculty governance model work in the new market environment?

The third mission critical objective deals with **decentralized faculty and staff appointments**. We'll be developing a plan to bring greater central control over faculty and staff Extension appointments that currently are distributed within the university's academic units. This could involve collecting salary monies from dispersed extension appointments that become vacant to create a reallocation pool — because we must make sure that future appointments are well-aligned with the university's overall priorities for Extension.

And the fourth objective, which I already have discussed, is to support the **university priorities of increasing enrollment and building taxpayer support**. Every ISU Extension

employee must be an effective ambassador for the university and all of its programs. We're on the front line throughout the state. We have to connect Extension with Iowa State University.

You'll be hearing more about these four mission critical objectives as they shape, focus, and perhaps change what we do in Extension.

Finally, I would like to address remaining relevant while managing the changes ahead, as I firmly believe that relevance and change operate cheek and jowl.

I'll paraphrase that "great philosopher" Red Green: 'I work for Extension, and I can change, if I have to, I guess.' ... At least I know the folks from northeast Iowa will appreciate that comment. It's a little inside joke from the Northeast Iowa Listening Tour. If you don't believe me, ask Dan Burkhart.

Earlier this summer I shared with you the final report from the Cooperative Extension System's "Joint Task Force on Managing a Changing Portfolio." Iowa State University Extension was one of the funding models included in this national report. User fees have become an integral part of our revenue generation strategy. They've changed over time, but now we depend on them as a significant budget item. In fact, since 2003, grants, contracts, and user fees have represented a larger portion of Extension's budget than do federal and state funds. Our funding approach is highlighted as a "best practice" in the task force's report.

The task force made a number of recommendations that they believe eventually will result in a more consistent approach to several critical issues facing the Cooperative Extension System as funding models continue to change.

Ladies and gentlemen, our objectives are clear: we will maintain a superb standard of performance in our core competencies; we will renew and refresh our tradition with contemporary programs of value and relevance, we will reach out to all segments of our heterogeneous society as useful and helpful ambassadors of the true face of the Land Grant institution.

I'm sure that there are more topics that we could cover here today, more examples of Extension's relevance that could be highlighted, but in the interest of my being relevant, I will stop here and take your suggestions and comments. But first I'll share this a quote I found. I hope that you find it use and helpful:

***"Never question the relevance of truth, but always question the truth of relevance."* -Craig Bruce**

I want to thank all of you not only for your time this morning, but also for the great welcome you have provided me throughout campus and the state of Iowa. I consider it a great privilege to serve in this position and to work with such a wonderful, dedicated, hard working, and enthusiastic group of Extension colleagues. I promise to represent you well. Go Cyclones! Go Extension! I look forward to working with you and visiting with you around the great state of Iowa.