Statement of Vision for Washington State University Extension

All of my scholarly and administrative work is embedded within my vision related to the land-grant university and the integration of the three missions, engagement, instruction, and discovery, across time. In my years as a graduate student working for an extension specialist, as a faculty member, and as an administrator, I committed to fully exploring and developing this vision as the underpinning for my personal scholarship and activities (Boyer, 1990; Culp, 2009; Kellogg Commission, 1999; Sellers, 2009). My individual vision is distinct and a critical aspect of my overall scholarship and intellectual leadership.

Traditional vision of research, teaching, and extension.

The traditional language and concepts used to describe the three missions are research, teaching and extension, and all are characterized as distinct enterprises within this paradigm. In the conventional model, the university’s overall aim (to advance, extend, and apply knowledge) positions the three missions as separate endeavors. A visual representation of this archetype demonstrates the missions as occurring on their own, with a small, overlapping space for integration. They are static across time (Figure 1).

My preferred terms to more fully represent the land-grant university’s three missions are engagement, instruction, and discovery. I define each of these below and explain how this vision shapes my overarching approach to science in a universal way.

Engagement, instruction, and discovery.

‘Engagement’ is used by The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education to describe “…collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.” I expand that definition to incorporate communities beyond the geographical, including interest, action, and practice. Engagement allows for all faculty, staff and students to access and actively participate in this mission. The concepts of Extension, outreach, and public service are therefore subsets of engagement. (Cooperative) Extension is an educational network with faculty, staff and infrastructure, and exists because of state and federal funding. Outreach occurs when faculty and staff impart knowledge to individuals in communities, but do not view them as partners within the effort. Public service is an activity that anyone may engage in, and is comprised of serving in a formal capacity within an organizational or agency structure to advance specific goals. Therefore, engagement assumes a responsibility of all institutional members to contribute in some way to this mission; it is not only “Extension” faculty and staff who are accountable.

The word ‘instruction’ provides opportunities to think broadly and creatively related to how the university shares information and with whom, such as in informal environments. It supports innovation, especially for today’s learners who find themselves in a techno-global context. “Teaching” infers a power dynamic between two people, with one person acting as the expert dispenser of knowledge and the other as a receptacle. Instruction removes the long-established interpretation that learning can only occur when a professor stands in front of a classroom. Instruction allows for the co-creation of knowledge, and similarly to engagement, provides for a framework where this institutional activity can become reciprocally constructive.

According to Narayananamurti and Odumosu (2016), discovery is “…the creation of new knowledge and facts about the world” while research is “…an unscheduled quest for new knowledge and the creation of new inventions, whose outcome cannot be predicted in advance, and in which both science and engineering are essential ingredients” (p. 11). Discovery encompasses a wide array of possibilities, and is more inclusive of various discipline-specific, intellectual contributions within the university. It also
speaks to an internal process as opposed to an external one. The ultimate outcome of discovery is for the individual to create and acquire new knowledge, whereas research is about the external “quest” and a physical product. Discovery espouses and extends the idea of learning and learners across and within all aspects of our world.

The integration of engagement, instruction, and discovery.

I have dedicated my scholarship and leadership efforts to exploring and advocating for this contemporary vision related to the fulfillment of the land-grant university missions of engagement, instruction, and discovery, not by positioning them as separate endeavors, but by creating a milieu where mission integration and unification flourishes, thrives, and is rewarded. In this environment, it may be that discovery occurs on its own; but it may also inform instruction, and instruction may inform discovery. Further, discovery may transfer to ‘community’ through engagement, and the community may inform discovery or act as a venue for instruction. Fluidity is paramount; the three missions are never stagnant, but constantly moving and intersecting at various points as needed. In this paradigm, all three missions are linked centrally by the institution, and all three can align, mesh, and integrate at various levels and across time (Figure 2).

The operationalization of engagement, instruction, and discovery within Washington State University Extension.

In reflecting upon a vision for the three missions of the land-grant university, and Washington State University Extension specifically, I believe it is paramount to remember and honor our shared legacy. However, with the milestone of the 100th birthday of the Cooperative Extension System, some have suggested that Cooperative Extension is on the way to irrelevancy and a sure demise in today’s complex, ambiguous, and ever-changing society. Extension scholarship and education does have a rich history and tradition, and we need to take pride in our past. We also need to be able to embrace an unknown and often chaotic future. It is my view that the position of local county Extension offices as a viable and attractive option for education and information and referral within American society is becoming more significant, not less, within our current contemporary context. Technology is an ubiquitous presence within everyday lives, and the ability to provide “high-touch” and individualized guidance and service is largely lacking in today’s technically-focused world. In reflecting upon the possibilities for the future, I believe Washington State University Extension is well positioned to fully execute a modern, innovative vision of engagement, instruction, and discovery. I share with you a charter that includes six principles, which constitute my vision for Washington State University Extension:

Revitalize the Land-Grant University. Representing one intersection of the engagement, instruction, and discovery missions of the land-grant university, Washington State University Extension is dedicated to the modernizing of the tenets of the Morrill Act of 1862. Washington State University Extension works every day to “…promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life” with a contemporary, progressive approach that attracts the community members of today and tomorrow.

Serve All of Today’s Families. There is no dearth of critical, societal concerns, both now and in the future, including the need for highly skilled employees, access to quality health care, and overall economic wellbeing. At the nexus of these issues is the 21st century American family. Therefore, the purpose of Washington State University Extension is to address challenges facing today’s diverse families through expanding access to educational opportunities.

Encompass a Global Perspective. Serving today’s diverse individuals, families, and communities necessitates finding and using knowledge and resources from a global perspective. No one person, faculty, or even university can appropriately serve the diverse and unique needs of individuals within our complex and changing society. Connecting people to knowledge and access to education, wherever it may...
be located, and by whomever it may be offered, is the ultimate goal of Washington State University Extension.

Focus on Issues. Washington State University Extension concentrates on the solution of problems through the delivery and application of knowledge. Comprehensive issues of importance at the local and state levels are addressed through the provision of educational programs and services. Washington State University Extension is a positive change agent within communities.

Employ Vanguard Technologies. “Information overload” is a term that attempts to describe the overwhelming amounts of data encountered during the course of a day. In a world this competitive, Washington State University Extension understands that the needs of people are ever-changing, and is dedicated to exploring the frontiers of technological capabilities that best serve the mission. Embracing innovation is an integral aspect of the vision, as is engaging in trends as warranted by the changing landscape and needs of individuals, families, and communities.

Generate Appropriate Revenue. As an entrepreneurial aspect of the land-grant university, Washington State University Extension generates appropriate revenue. An expanded definition of “student” provides opportunities to engage with business and industry and institute fee-for-service activities related to workforce development and quality improvement services, among others.

Summary.

These principles are closely aligned with the College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences Strategic Plan, 2017–2022, and the vision that focuses on “…the expansion, translation, and transmission of society’s knowledge base in agricultural, human, and natural resource sciences.” I see reflections of my personal vision, and many of the principles I outlined in my charter, mirrored within the plan. Washington State University is finding opportunities to think creatively and implement 21st century programs and initiatives. I am excited at the prospect of mutually creating a pioneering, futuristic approach to the land-grant mission, fulfilling and surpassing expectations of community members and stakeholders.

The implementation of this vision is a worthwhile vocation. It is one that I would be honored to lead, alongside a community of Extension professionals who would stand together with this shared vision, firmly grounded in a fundamental principle from the Extension Professionals’ Creed:

“I believe in people and their hopes, their aspirations, and their faith; in their right to make their own plans and arrive at their own decisions; in their ability and power to enlarge their lives and plan for the happiness of those they love.”

References


Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, ch. 130, 12 Stat. 503, 7 U.S.C. §§ 301 et seq.

