

Thriving by Design II
Rural Design Conference
University of Minnesota Crookston
July 30-31, 2014
Extension Reconsidered

I. Intro/lead-In:

Good late morning and thank you for this opportunity to share...

I am honored, and indeed humbled, to be doing a wee bit of envisioning about the promise of Extension over the next 100 years...

This "Extension Reconsidered" effort is, for me, the beginning of the beginning of a great, long-term "thought and action experiment." And if it turns out to be the end of the beginning of that experiment, then I must be honest, what we will have experienced is a PR campaign. We need continually to take the pulse of the People and that includes the University and other institutions. How we end up doing this on a continuing basis is both the promise and the challenge we face over the next 100 years. We are not here now to worry or wonder about form and function. WE ARE HERE TO DREAM!!! TO IMAGINE ANEW!!!

II. Paul Brutlag Challenge/Arthur Himmelman Research on Public/Private Initiatives

In his 1992 book, Sacred Eyes, L. Robert Keck points out that the bottom-line on sustaining relationships consists of three questions: "Is what you are bringing to the relationship empowering? Is the relationship empowering you? If the answer to either question is 'no,' then the follow-up question is: Do you have the courage to change it?"

As this millennium was upon us, Paul Brutlag (one of the grandfathers of the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships) once stated to me that the most critical issue for Minnesota moving into the 21st century will be how the U of M fulfills its land-grant mission ---

FOUNDED IN THE FAITH THAT MEN ARE ENNOBLED BY UNDERSTANDING

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING AND THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

DEVOTED TO THE INSTRUCTION OF YOUTH AND THE WELFARE OF THE STATE

This encapsulation of the land-grant mission was carved in June 1936 on the facade of Northrup Auditorium. And let's make no mistake about the meaning of these words: our manifest destiny as Minnesotans will be greatly guided and determined by the nature and quality of the relationship between The People and their University...

In the 1980s Arthur Himmelman did research at the Humphrey Institute on public-private initiatives. A major finding of this research was that folks who organize to accomplish XYZ end up failing, or not being as effective and therefore fading away, by not spending intentional time upfront and on a continuing basis, discussing their philosophy and what they value about their endeavor - an essential grounding that we don't seem to do a lot of. Because of this truth, I call for us, for Extension, for the University, to revisit its land-grant roots. To dig more deeply into what its values & philosophy are with being in relationship, in partnership, in public & civic engagement on a more consistent basis with smaller, more diverse concentrations of wealth for long-term interest --- the People & the communities of Minnesota --- rather than with larger, more narrow-minded concentrations of wealth for short-term gain. We must work to restore a more equitable balance to the imperative of serving "the welfare of the State."

III. An August 23, 2001 Star Tribune Editorial stated:

A university that seems fixated on money making research and workforce development connects with a fraction of Minnesotans. One dedicated to helping average citizens solve public problems and govern themselves wisely has broader appeal --- and, overtime, may do more to secure the good life in Minnesota.

This to me is the great promise which Extension can help cultivate and nurture both within the University and within the citizenry of Minnesota; and it is a promise that will yield fruit of unimaginable beauty throughout the countryside. It is also a promise which begs us to answer some questions about what we value and profess:

Why are you here in this room today?

Why are we here together exploring a "Reconsideration of Extension?"

What do you value and what is valuable about the work you do?

How does being part of a land-grant university inform and mold Extension's practices?

How is Extension meeting the needs of the small towns, small businesses, and small farms of Minnesota? And how are we all taking care of and being with Mother Earth?

What is and what has been Extension's public value and impact? (Scott Peters)

And how and why does it matter? (Scott Peters)

In its May 2012, "Ten-Point Plan for Advancing and Institutionalizing Public Engagement at the University of Minnesota, the Office of Public Engagement stated:

At a time of diminished public support and novel intellectual and practical challenges, the Engaged University, holds the promise for a constructive new era in higher education in which civic responsibilities and public contributions become central institutional priorities affecting research & scholarship, teaching & learning, outreach & partnership...

How will Extension help all of us realize this "promise for a constructive new era in higher education?" And how will Extension help establish and make stronger these "institutional priorities" of "civic responsibility and public contribution" so that the common good becomes rooted deeper, much deeper into the heart and soul of the body politic?

Do we, as advocates for an Engaged University, truly understand that engagement is "something that goes well beyond Cooperative Extension and conventional outreach...and even beyond most conceptions of public service?" Can we make a promise to work hard to replace "our inherited ideas (of engagement which) emphasize a one-way process of transferring knowledge and technology from the university - as the source of expertise - to its key constituents," with an engagement ideal that has "...embedded (within) it a commitment to sharing and reciprocity (and envisions) partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect among the partners for what each brings to the table?" {These quotations are from the 3rd report - February 1999 - of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, "Returning to Our Roots."} By doing so, won't the research & scholarship, the teaching & learning, and the outreach & partnerships arising out of such a process be more beneficial for the long-term welfare of the state, and as a consequence, build greater capacity and competence for everyone involved?

IV. Somewhat more specific "crystal-balling":

1) I see Extension becoming a phalanx within the culture of the University advocating for change in the way the University goes about doing its business of research, scholarship, teaching, learning, outreach, and service to the commonwealth. In the beginning of this advocacy I see Extension as being viewed as an apostate to the status quo, but when the dust finally settles and the final analysis is made, Extension will be known and cherished as the "loyal heretic." For it will be clearly understood and embraced that the change Extension brought up for discussion, deliberation, and action was the very change that was needed during this time and place of our experiment in democracy and of our unending search for truth. And it will be

seen as a change that made Minnesotans more vital and more resilient in our capacities to work through the challenges and opportunities of all of our future presents.

2) I see Extension as that vanguard within the Culture of the Academy advocating and continuing to show by example how to employ and value the principles, methodologies, and practices of public scholarship - especially of the interdisciplinary variety, that not only can cross-fertilize with other departments, centers, institutes, colleges and university campuses, but can also more strongly undergird the applied research efforts needed for the health and viability of the many, many communities of interest within Minnesota. The need for the methodologically rigorous generalists is profound. Our information, economic, industrial, agricultural, and natural resource sciences' technologies & techniques, and the advances in highly specialized fields of knowledge (not to mention our production/consumer crazed mentality and money driven infatuation with control & power) are far outdistancing not only our ability to make sense of who we are in relation to each other, but also to make sense of the actual long-term good we are doing together.

3) Ralph Nader once said,

Until unstructured citizen power is given the tools for impact, structured power, no matter how democratic in form, will tend toward abuse, indifference, or sloth...Building a new way of life around citizenship action must be the program of the immediate future (built upon) a commitment to citizenship as an obligation, a continual receivership of our time, energy, and skill.

I, therefore, see Extension as playing a major role in not only revitalizing the democratic ideal within the Academy but also reinvigorating democratic practice throughout Minnesota. I see Extension more forthrightly supporting the essential need for active citizenship, which calls on us to think first and foremost as citizens with a commitment to working through challenges and exploring opportunities in citizen-driven, community/university partnerships. I see Extension building exquisite relationships by solidly constructing the two-way roads of **inreach** and **outreach**. And this construction will be done with voices from all walks of life asking the right, down-to-earth questions important to them. Such questions and two-way roads will enable us to more accurately identify, analyze, develop solutions for, and work through local, regional, and statewide environmental, social, and economic issues and problems. And we will be unswervingly committed to the ethic:

If you disagree with me, you have something to give me; if you are sincere and seek the truth as best you may, honestly with modest care, your thought is growth to mine, you deepen my vision. --- Dom Helder Camara

4) An observation from the 1951/1952 book, The Sabbath, by Abraham Joshua Heschel:

Technical civilization stems primarily from the desire of man to subdue and manage the forces of nature...Technical civilization is the product of labor, of man's exertion of power for the sake of gain, for the sake of producing goods...Technical civilization is man's conquest of space...yet to have more does not mean to be more. The power we attain in the world of space terminates abruptly at the borderline of time. But time is the heart of existence.

To gain control of the world of space is certainly one of our tasks. The danger begins when in gaining power in the realm of space we forfeit all aspirations in the realm of time. There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord. Life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern.

I see Extension cultivating a new way of doing business for the University and beyond, a way that better balances our actions in time and in space. By helping us to put into clearer perspective the notion of the **marketplace university**, Extension will help to enable us to build a more viable land-grant mission and civic engagement force within our State. We are woefully off kilter with our expectations of, belief in, and the value we place upon **the marketplace**. We delude ourselves in thinking that **IT** and **IT** above all else, will deliver us to the promised land of prosperity, justice, and equity, as well as to an equal and fair distribution of goods and services.

So, in conclusion, I see Extension Reconsidered as the "the beginning of the beginning," as a never-ending process of renewal, of what Pete Seeger called "the folk process." And in this spirit, I'd like to close with "A Farm Boy Remembers" --- a poem by the Minnesotan, Leo Dangel:

Saturday was for cleaning barns,

forking out tons of manure.

There are more significant ways

to spend a Saturday, when the snow

is melting, but this was ours.

Throw out the shit

and put down clean straw.

Renewal has never since been so simple.

Thank you...