An Exploration of the Transformational Factors Affecting the Performance of Intercollegiate Extension Programs

Olivia Caillouet[1], Amy Harder, Grady Roberts, J. C. Bunch, and Heidi Radunovich
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL

Abstract

University engagement in community settings is increasingly valued and expected. Extension efforts vary slightly from community engagement conducted at private institutions but the ultimate goal has been focused on a stronger level of societal relevance that improves both society and the overarching goals of higher education. The Organizational Change model helped frame the discussion of external or internal forces that would create opportunities or barriers for intercollegiate Extension programs. The research question was developed to explore how transformational factors influence the success or failure of intercollegiate Extension programs. A qualitative, phenomenological approach was used, and eight interview transcripts were analyzed. Participants were required to be Extension employees who had experience with an intercollegiate Extension program. Data were analyzed using the template analysis and the constant comparative method. Findings reported that transformational factors were: (a) Financial Needs of Intercollegiate Programs Exceed What Is Commonly Available Through Internal Funding, (b) Promoting Access to Higher Education and Serving the Public, (c) Leaders Recognizing the Potential of Intercollegiate Extension Programs to Help Improve the Reputation and Visibility of the University as a Whole, and (d) Changing Culture to Integrate Intercollegiate Extension Programs. Nevertheless, more research is needed to better understand these non-traditional programs.

Keywords: collaboration, interdisciplinary, university-wide, mission, funding

Engagement of universities in community settings is increasingly valued and expected (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). In the 2020 cycle, 44 institutions received the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification award for the first time which totaled 359 campuses in the United States (U.S.) and its territories who have this important recognition (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, 2020). Land-grant universities (LGUs) have traditionally conducted their community engagement through the Cooperative Extension service, simply known as Extension (Rasmussen, 2002). Extension efforts vary slightly from community engagement conducted at private institutions but the ultimate goal has been focused on outreach that improves society as well as higher education (Fitzgerald et al., 2012). LGUs are unique in the sense they have a formal Extension mandate which has been operating for over 100 years. The LGU Extension mandate connects university knowledge to public needs through the use of nearly 3,000 county offices across the U.S. states and territories (National Institute of Food and Agriculture, n.d.).

Some universities have tried intercollegiate engagement, which is consistent with calls for Extension to more fully engage with the entire university (Caillouet & Harder, 2021; King, 2018). The Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC) has awarded grants to faculty members involved in interdisciplinary projects that were mutually beneficial for university scholars and communities (ESC, n.d.a). The Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) (2015) described several priority issues for Extension's future, including: (a) the need to become more responsive to rapidly changing societies, (b) the need to partner with others who share similar interests, and (c) rewards for team efforts. Previous research also indicated

the need for Extension to partner with a variety of LGU departments to address community needs (Harder et al., 2019; Warner et al., 2017). Conveniently, Extension was positioned within LGUs, which have been described as organizations which "comprise the universe of knowledge" (Stevens et al., 2018, p. 8), with a broad range of scholars including chemists, linguists, health professionals, and many more. Intercollegiate Extension programs can be operationally defined as long-term programs collaborating with colleges beyond colleges of agriculture. However, a gap in the literature exists between the need for collaborative, interdisciplinary Extension efforts and documented best practices for these more multi-stakeholder partnerships. Extension has begun to embrace a systems approach which acknowledges that everything is interrelated when solving complex community problems (Gaolach et al., 2017; Groulx et al., 2020). However, more information is needed regarding the successes and challenges of these types of programs and document opportunities for program improvement aimed at meeting all partners' goals (ESC, n.d.a).

Theoretical Framework

This research was grounded in the Social Constructivism theory, which was developed by Vygotsky (1978) to explain that learning is a collaborative process where individuals interact with society. Social Constructivism theory postulates that personal experience relates to knowledge and all knowledge is socially constructed (Fox, 2001). Social Constructivism was important for this research because LGUs are public institutions of higher education and learning at these universities has been influenced by the social context in which they are situated.

In addition, the Organizational Change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) was used in the discussion of the research findings. The Organizational Change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) can be explained in terms of transformational and transactional factors. Transformational factors are factors affected by the External Environment (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Transformational factors have been defined as the primary catalyst for organizational change and requires new behavior from organizational members (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The Organizational Change model has classified five transformational factors: (a) External Environment, (b) Mission and Strategy, (c) Leadership, (d) Culture, and (e) Individual and Organizational Performance. Conversely, transactional factors have typically been short-term exchanges among people (Burke & Litwin, 1992). This research has focused on the transformational factors affecting intercollegiate Extension programs because Burke and Litwin (1992) explained transformational factors have more influence on overall organizational change.

The Organizational Change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) is useful for guiding a deductive approach to data collection and analysis. Also, the Organizational Change model is a practical guide for interpreting the findings of our research because LGUs have a variety of organizational structures and ways of connecting Extension with the entire university. Previous researchers have used the Organizational Change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) to investigate factors affecting organizational effectiveness (Martins & Coetzee, 2009), overcome significant external environmental changes (Spangenberg & Theron, 2013), and understand organizational capacities to address community challenges (Ali et al., 2019). Conceptualizing data within the Organizational Change model can provide a theory-driven strategy for exploring intercollegiate Extension efforts.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of our study was to explore intercollegiate Extension models through the lived experiences of Extension professionals at universities who adopted an intercollegiate Extension model or who are in the process of doing so. The overarching research question for our study was: how do transformational factors influence intercollegiate Extension programs?

Materials and Methods

Research Design and Worldview

A qualitative descriptive phenomenological research design was used which is a holistic approach which seeks to connect personal experiences with the real-world context in which they occurred (Thompson et al., 1989). Creswell and Poth (2018) described a defining feature of phenomenology research as exploring a heterogenous group of individuals (three to 15 people) who all experienced the same phenomenon. Ultimately, the aim of phenomenological research is about capturing the essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of the lived experience which explains what and how individuals experienced the phenomenon. The phenomena under investigation were the lived experiences of faculty working with intercollegiate Extension programs at LGUs and more specifically the successes and failures of these innovative programs.

Intercollegiate Extension programs vary across LGUs and have served a wide range of societal problems. This research was grounded in a pragmatist worldview which values a pluralistic approach to understanding and a real-world approach to problem-solving (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, the pragmatist worldview was described as exploring what truly works rather than finding an absolute truth that is applicable to all situations (Frey, 2018).

Lead Researcher's Reflexivity Statement

The researcher serves as the primary instrument in qualitative research; therefore, transparency and openness is necessary regarding the primary researcher's background (Wolcott, 2008). The lead researcher was a graduate assistant at a LGU in the southern U.S. and has a background in horticulture and community development with internship and assistantship experience in Extension. The lead researcher was born and raised in an urban center in the southern U.S. and also attended a LGU for their bachelor's and master's degrees.

Participants

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for one-on-one semi-structured interviews. More specifically, criterion sampling determined participants' eligibility (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). A literature review using the ESC (n.d.b) followed by related Google searches were conducted to determine if Extension faculty fit the criteria for working with intercollegiate Extension programs or if they were in the process of doing so. A second criteria required participants to work for a university-based Extension system. A total of 10 individuals were identified and contacted via email to request one-on-one interviews. All 10 individuals agreed to participate, but two were excluded from the final analysis because further investigation revealed they did not meet the criteria of working for Extension. Of the eight participants, seven participated in their one-on-one interviews via Zoom and one met via phone. All eight participants were employees at different 1862 LGUs with R1 research status (Carnegie Classification of Institutions, 2018). Finally, these intercollegiate programs covered topics related to a wide range of community-driven challenges (a) public policy, (b) technology for community development, (c) business development and rural revitalization, (d) sustainable tourism, (e) urban engagement, and (f) healthcare access.

Data Collection

The Organizational Change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) was used to guide the interview protocol creation which was approved by the University of Florida's institutional review board. The interview instrument was comprised of 15 main questions along with six probing questions. The instrument was reviewed by a content expert prior to data collection. This content expert was well-informed about the functioning of LGUs across the U.S. due to 20 years of employment at three LGUs and has had collaborative research experiences domestically and abroad, which helped ensure the interview questions were understandable across various LGU organizational structures. Then, interviews were conducted by the lead researcher from July 20, 2021 to August 18, 2021. Interviews ranged from 51 minutes to 63 minutes in length and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim using Zoom or Otter. The interview protocol documented information such as: (a) pseudonyms; (b) meeting date, time, and length; (c) meeting type (e.g., phone or Zoom); and (d) specific questions asked. Individual expertise and applicability of questions were taken into consideration when selecting which questions to prioritize within the agreed-upon one-hour interview. For example, one of the least commonly asked questions was about intercollegiate Extension program impacts on Extension's organizational structure; however, these programs often had no effect on Extension's organizational structure. So, due to time constraints, it made sense to skip it.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data were analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis technique (Brooks et al., 2015) which was combined with the constant comparative method (Saldaña, 2016). Template analysis is a type of thematic analysis which provides structure as well as flexibility in the coding process of textual data (Brooks et al., 2015). A new template was saved after every significant change to the themes and sub-themes and personal notes were taken which recorded why significant coding changes occurred (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research was grounded in the Burke and Litwin (1992) Organizational Change model, which served as the basis for the template analysis (Brooks et al., 2015). Themes and sub-themes required verbal support from at least three interview participants to be substantiated and included in the findings, which also helped increase the credibility of the research results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Participants' own words were used as frequently as possible to illustrate the themes and sub-themes to promote transparency and reduce researchers' biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transcriptions were conducted using an initial transcript provided from the Zoom or Otter recording. The lead researcher listened to the interview audio recordings, made appropriate transcript corrections, and transcript validation was completed by the lead researcher who reviewed all transcripts to ensure there was no missing information.

Member-checking was performed after transcriptions were complete (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). During the member checking process, participants were asked to provide their own pseudonyms to ensure they had the right to represent their individual identity characteristics (e.g., cultural, gender, racial, etc.) (Allen & Wiles, 2015). In addition, two peer debriefings were performed with an Extension faculty member who was knowledgeable in the subject area but not a member of the research team (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the debriefings, thematically coded statements were read out loud and the peer debriefer agreed or disagreed with the assigned theme or subtheme. When the peer debriefer disagreed, the lead researcher considered recoding the statement, especially, if the theme/subtheme was not distinct in comparison to all other themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Reflections after the peer debriefings helped the lead researcher question her personal biases and reconsider codes based on an outsider's perspective.

Results

Participants in this study identified four transformational themes relevant to the success or failure of intercollegiate Extension programs: (a) Financial Needs of Intercollegiate Programs Exceed What Is Commonly Available Through Internal Funding, (b) Promoting Access to Higher Education and Serving the Public, (c) Leaders Recognizing the Potential of Intercollegiate Extension Programs to Help Improve the Reputation and Visibility of the University as a Whole, and (d) Changing Culture to Integrate Intercollegiate Extension Programs.

Financial Needs of Intercollegiate Extension Programs Exceed What is Commonly Available Through Internal Funding

The participants in our study indicated that the Financial Needs of Intercollegiate Extension Programs Exceed What is Commonly Available Through Internal Funding, thus making the delivery of intercollegiate programs erratic. The need for increased extramural funding has created opportunities for intercollegiate Extension programs to capitalize on collaborations. Similarly, previous research has shown that collaborative research teams have increased chances of writing successful proposals (Sohn, 2020). Participants explained that soft funding was oftentimes the catalyst for getting these programs started, but the ideal funding source is having intercollegiate Extension programs as a line item in a budget. Previous literature supported the use of multiple revenue streams which vary as Extension programs mature (Donaldson, 2020). Nevertheless, participants explained that individuals who manage intercollegiate Extension programs must be well versed in grant writing and forming collaborations.

Historically, universities have funded Extension through a cooperative agreement between federal, state, and county governments but over the recent decades the level of financial support has either stagnated or decreased (Elliott-Engel et al., 2020; Harder et al., 2009). Richard explained, "the Smith-Lever [federal] funds have declined as a percentage of the budget." Participants communicated a high demand for resources but a lack of availability. When Leah was asked if she could change anything about her intercollegiate Extension programs, she replied, "increased funding and in large part because it would be nice to be able to have the opportunity to market ourselves a little bit more." Leah elaborated about how many intercollegiate Extension programs focus on the program outcomes rather than communicating those outcomes with stakeholders, resulting in a lack of recognition and awareness of her team's engagement efforts.

Regarding his intercollegiate Extension efforts, Levi also explained, "that there's interest but there's just not the resources to support it." Levi stated how this financial need has placed a large amount of responsibility on the program coordinators to secure funding which has made their work more challenging. Richard also explained how the history of Extension providing services without charge has been difficult to transition away from. Richard reflected, "it's a personal philosophy for me ... I remember the home economist coming into my parents' house and helping my mother learn how to make curtains for her house …" Richard added, "everything the Extension agent provided was free, you know, that was just a service you had in your county. So, … I have problems charging for an Extension program but I've recognized that I can't hold on to that philosophy." Extension along with other university services have been shifting to partial or full cost recovery programs which have been supported by grants, contracts, or program fees.

However, participants explained how many intercollegiate programs are reliant on grants, which oftentimes are at the mercy of fluctuating economies (Boroush, 2020). Also, the majority of research funding has been provided by the business sector while federal support has declined (Boroush, 2020). Intercollegiate Extension programs have created opportunities for LGUs to take advantage of sources of extramural funding and offers increased chances of success by utilizing collaborations. Nonetheless, challenges remain for intercollegiate Extension programs such as fluctuating grant budgets, high overhead rates at LGUs (Kreighbaum, 2017), and the need for best practices when maturing programs transition from soft funding to reoccurring support.

Promoting Access to Higher Education and Serving the Public: The LGU Mission

Two sub-themes of Promoting Access to Higher Education and Serving the Public emerged which included: (a) Experiential Learning for Students and (b) A Mission to Serve the Public. Participants explained that successful intercollegiate Extension programs must support LGUs' higher education mission through experiential learning and programs must serve public needs.

Experiential Learning for Students

Participants felt a key to the success of their intercollegiate programs was incorporating student learning into the programs which helped connect Extension with the teaching mission of the university. These interviews with professionals involved with intercollegiate Extension programs emphasized the importance for students to gain experiential learning opportunities. For example, Jessica emphasized, "Student engagement with Extension is a strategic initiative" at her LGU which has created opportunities for intercollegiate Extension programs. Anna explained that "students work harder and achieve more academically when they have a real-world project to work on" and that her intercollegiate Extension program provides "a sweet spot where real world community development needs overlap with things our students are needing to learn..."

Richard explained how one of his LGU intercollegiate Extension programs developed due to "a big push to help students have some experiential learning opportunities and we saw that … Hey, we could maybe partner with communications and let those students get some experience learning how their communication abilities could actually help somebody." Levi reflected on the value of engaging students with intercollegiate Extension programs and he said that an outcome of doing that has "been really instrumental in, kind of, growing our work and extending our work throughout the university and being able to conduct that engagement."

In addition, Leah explained more in-depth about the relationship between the intercollegiate Extension programs at her LGU and student engagement. Leah, who leads a research and Extension outreach unit, described how that relationship has provided opportunities for faculty "to be able to engage their students in research that we do, which gets them great experience." Leah also added, "It's pretty

rare that we get a project where there is not a component where we can provide the opportunity for students to engage." Participants highlighted the connections between intercollegiate Extension programs and opportunities to engage students with real-world projects related to their courses. The ability for intercollegiate Extension programs to offer experiential learning opportunities for students connects back to LGUs' original mission to provide access to higher education (Rasmussen, 2002).

Mission to Serve the Public

Participants conveyed how intercollegiate programs embody the LGU Mission to Serve the Public across the state. Anna said intercollegiate programs at her LGU have "really spread a lot of goodwill for the university across the state and that's an unexplored potential" and that "there's even more potential for maximizing our [Extension's] visibility of programs like this and people love it and they remember it and it breathes the love for the university." Several other participants supported the importance of intercollegiate Extension programs embracing the original LGU Mission to Serve the Public. For example, Jessica stated her work must "be very innovative. We have to look at things from a customer's point of view." Clint explained, "one of the key pillars for Extension is, you know, meeting the people of the state where they are at."

Charlie passionately described how seriously his LGU takes the mission to serve and that "it's not just a line item – it's not just a department – it's a lived philosophy of the land-grant that there is a true mission of extending the creation of knowledge and transferring that out to the people of the State." This lived philosophy at Charlie's LGU has created opportunities for intercollegiate Extension programs to gain credibility within academia. Similarly, Leah commented that Extension personnel "see themselves as the front door university because they're out in communities all over the state and people might not get to campus to interact with people on a campus but they do interact with people out in communities."

Participants continued to describe how successful intercollegiate programs embodied the LGU mission to serve the public. Charlie added that his LGU has been "mission driven and we [Extension] go to where that need might be, and then that's where we'll develop the relationship with the college." Charlie indicated the mission to serve state clientele drives relationships between Extension and other colleges within the LGU. Clint also explained some other benefits that could arise "when we [Extension] partner with other colleges on grant projects like this. I think that translates directly into learned knowledge that we can then share." The Burke and Litwin (1992) Organizational Change model described the Mission and Strategy transformational factor as central to the organizational purpose. Interviewees reflected on the importance of intercollegiate Extension programs remaining grounded in the LGU's Mission to Serve the Public.

Leaders Recognizing the Potential of Intercollegiate Extension Programs to Help Improve the Reputation and Visibility of the University as a Whole

This theme was about Leaders Recognizing the Potential of Intercollegiate Extension Programs To Help Improve the Reputation and Visibility of the University as a Whole. This theme explored the ability of intercollegiate Extension programs to enhance the visibility of the university but questioned whether Extension was the right partner or if LGU administrators should consider another engagement office be created with the purpose for university-wide engagement. Clint had a positive experience with his LGU's support of intercollegiate Extension programs and explained, "… our recent President really wants to make sure that the university is connecting with the state, you know, where people are at around the state." Similarly, when Charlie explained how the intercollegiate Extension programs came to be at his LGU:

> at some point in the past Extension was probably within the college of Ag. And then was brought out by some visionary that was sitting within the President's Office or Chancellor's Office and saw that Extension was a way to enhance the visibility and the trust of the university as a whole and not just within a college…

Clint explained how "Extension leadership works very closely with the overall university leadership, you know, at the top levels to show the impact of Extension in our programs but also to be open to partnerships, you know, within the university itself." Jackie acknowledged the importance of partnerships and stated, "really, really strong commitment and partnership between the colleges and very, very strong relationships by upper administration with both colleges" can only help Extension. Jackie also supported this theme and said that they are "working very hard to ensure that Cooperative Extension administration is a connected and an active partner." Leaders' support of intercollegiate programs was detailed as an important factor related to the success or failure of these programs.

Levi brought up one of the most important decisions facing the expansion of intercollegiate programs which will likely need to be made by leaders at LGUs. Levi commented that "there's a conversation going on about … Extension as the arm of outreach for the university but how does that look university-wide? How do we navigate and coordinate community development in general and engagement throughout the university?" Moreover, Levi poised a couple of intriguing questions, "Should Extension be leading that? Or should that be its own office for community outreach and engagement at the Provost-level coordinating that? I don't know. That's, you know, that's a much higher-level decision that has to be made."

Participants explained that intercollegiate Extension programs at their LGUs have been successful because leaders recognized the potential for these programs to improve the reputation and visibility of the university as a whole. Additionally, participants raised some important questions regarding whether Extension should be

spearheading this cross-campus outreach and engagement. One option participants offered was that a separate office be created to navigate general engagement across the university but that this decision should be made by LGU leaders.

Changing Culture to Integrate Intercollegiate Extension Programs

Two sub-themes provided insight into the organizational Culture surrounding intercollegiate Extension programs emerged: (a) Main Campus and County-Based Extension Divide and (b) Extension Stakeholders' Lack of Familiarity with Program Topics.

Main Campus and County-Based Extension Divide

LGUs are unique institutions of higher education in the sense they have an Extension mandate which requires state-wide outreach. Several participants expressed concern regarding a cultural divide among main campus employees versus county-based Extension employees. Participants expressed that intercollegiate Extension programs were less likely to succeed if main campus faculty were unaware of Extension best practices regarding interactions with the public.

Tower (2011) explained important distinctions exist between the work done by Extension faculty and traditional university faculty in departments across universities. More specifically, Levi provided an example of how some main campus faculty have not performed well in the county-based Extension context. Levi said, "I mean, others probably just need to be on campus teaching students in a traditional manner and don't necessarily have the skillset or the ability that translates into being effective in a community-based type of environment. And we'll hear that from communities, too." Levi added that faculty involved with intercollegiate Extension programs made the mistake of viewing the opportunity as "more of just what can I get for my students and, kind of, using them [the community] as a laboratory with very little end benefit to the community. So, there's some skepticism, right, that that comes from that…" This is important for intercollegiate Extension programs because participants expressed how main campus faculty often lacked the ability to properly interact with the public, which can cause more harm than good by lessening trust between the university and public. This decrease in trust has been problematic because trust is essential for sustaining long-term relationships (Ali & Warner, 2017).

Jessica also mentioned the dynamic between the location of the LGU and the need to relate to people statewide. Jessica served on a university-wide group to promote urban initiatives. Jessica, along with 15 other experts representing 15 colleges within her LGU, created think-tanks to brainstorm challenges facing cross campus collaborations related to urbanization. Jessica explained that the outreach of her LGU extends beyond the "main campus the mothership" and "how Extension looks in City A or City B, City C, and City D is a little bit different because of their local partners, and because the LGU is not

the main player." Jessica's urban initiative group realized the challenge Extension may face engaging main campus faculty who might be out of touch with what is happening in communities around the state.

An important aspect of successful intercollegiate Extension programs has been the ability to serve the public. However, the cultural divide between main campus faculty and Extension makes those collaborations more challenging because of the misunderstanding regarding the work being done. Leah, Levi, and Jessica shared similar thoughts on this topic. Leah explained that "some of them [non-Extension faculty] are familiar with us, you know, have gotten familiar with us over time and space. They may get what we do, they still don't really get Extension necessarily." Participants explained that if main campus faculty are unaware of Extension the ability to engage those faculty in intercollegiate programs can be seriously impeded.

Extension Stakeholders' Lack of Familiarity with Program Topics

Another prominent component of Extension has been the traditional programming areas. The foundational Extension programs vary slightly from state-to-state but have primarily included areas such as agriculture and 4-H youth development (Conglose, 2000). Participants provided several examples of how intercollegiate Extension programs have faced challenges with Extension Stakeholders' Lack of Familiarity With Program Topics.

Clint had an experience where his intercollegiate Extension program was not well received by 4-H volunteers. Clint described challenges he faced while implementing a sustainability-focused intercollegiate Extension program and he finally concluded:

> the 4-H model works very well when volunteer leaders are teaching something that they are already familiar with and passionate about. ... And I think, to introduce a program like sustainability … if it doesn't already fit into something that they are currently tuned into, I think we had a very difficult time recruiting volunteers in the traditional sense of 4-H.

Although interview participants communicated the benefits of intercollegiate Extension programs, challenges did arise when implementing these non-traditional programs. In the end, Clint used the public school system to implement the sustainability program rather than collaborating with the 4-H Extension program. Furthermore, Levi explained, "the role of agriculture, you know, is not the same in society as it was 100 years ago and now, other issues like tourism are growing in importance and growing in need for us to provide support and service." However, Levi noted, traditional programming still takes priority and community development programming receives the least amount of support despite increasing societal need.

Charlie expressed the need to clearly communicate the value of intercollegiate Extension programs because they may not be as well received by traditionally-minded Extension employees and stakeholders. For example,

Charlie said that intercollegiate Extension programs at his LGU have provided:

> an opportunity for us to socialize to the state why we're doing certain things, because I think when you get up a little bit further away from the university campus things become a little bit more traditional-minded. And so, this [intercollegiate program] is not a traditional Extension model. … We have to tell our story a little bit differently to get buy-in from across the state and once we tell the story then it's a no brainer.

Jessica also explained how clientele may feel uncomfortable about a shift from more traditional style programming to including more intercollegiate Extension programs. Jessica also expressed some concern regarding urban-focused Extension employees who expressed feelings of being unwelcomed within the organization. Jessica said:

> it's still a shift where I know my local urban teams feel like the other [not viewed as a valued member of the organization]. The norm is this … rural and suburban. You'll see it in our imaging, you see it in our stories, you see it in the way that we support where we invest. And so, it takes getting a lot of people to buy-in to help make this shift … I really want everybody to feel like they belong in every conversation, and they don't feel like the other, and sometimes our urban teams still do.

Jessica passionately questioned the traditional Extension approach and encouraged the organization to be "really looking at some of those harder conversations to say, 'Hey, this has been a model we've used forever, and it doesn't always lead to equity'." Due to the nature of intercollegiate programs, many Extension stakeholders (e.g., Extension employees, program participants, and volunteers) have been unfamiliar with the topics covered, which has created some challenges when implementing the programs.

Summary

Discussion

The External Environment was identified as the greatest driving force for change and affects the Mission and Strategy, Leadership, and Culture of an organization (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Four themes emerged related to the transformational factors and are presented with the research theme first and the related Organizational Change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) factor in parentheses: (a) Financial Needs of Intercollegiate Programs Exceed What Is Commonly Available Through Internal Funding (External Environment), (b) Promoting Access to Higher Education and Serving the Public (Mission and Strategy), (c) Leaders Recognizing the Potential of Intercollegiate Extension Programs to Help Improve the Reputation and Visibility of the University as a Whole (Leadership), and (d) Changing Culture to Integrate Intercollegiate Extension Programs (Culture). One Burke and Litwin (1992) transformational factor, Individual and Organizational Performance, was not an intercollegiate Extension program concern raised by participants.

Findings from this research supported previous literature that highlighted the importance of Extension finding new ways to combat unpredictable budgets with extramural funding (Caillouet & Harder, 2021; King, 2018). However, a surprising finding was that many intercollegiate Extension programs were initially funded through soft funding (e.g., grants) but later that funding structure became a hindrance because of the unpredictable availability of funding from extramural agencies. Participants explained how grants have been beneficial for intercollegiate programs just starting out but as programs matured the extramural funding became a source of stress.

Our findings indicated that achieving LGUs' missions of providing access to higher education and serving the public were important sub-themes related to the successful mission of intercollegiate Extension programs. The closer intercollegiate Extension programs aligned with the LGU Mission, the more successful these programs were. The importance of the organizational Mission was supported by the Organization Change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) which displayed it as being embedded throughout most every factor related to organizational change. Furthermore, these findings aligned with research by Bull et al. (2004) that encouraged Extension to utilize university-wide partners to address societal problems. Our research documented successful examples of how intercollegiate Extension programs utilized university-wide expertise to improve student education in addition to fulfilling the LGU mission to serve public needs.

Also, the ECOP (2015) championed the need for increased partnerships to tackle complex problems but if that idea is not supported by LGU leaders, intercollegiate Extension programs could fail to thrive. Participants explained that successful intercollegiate Extension programs improved the reputation and visibility of the university by promoting economic development in communities and demonstrating unity across the LGU where it has been siloed. In addition, the sub-theme regarding a divide between the main campus and county-based Extension offices was found to be particularly important. Bull et al. (2004) called for the entire university-system to adopt an expanded portfolio to address complex problems, but participants reported main campus employees' misconceptions about what Extension does. Main campus faculty members' lack of respect for communities could jeopardize the trust between community members and Extension. This finding is especially important because Ali and Warner (2017) explained how trust is an essential component of relationships over longer periods of time and if this trust is jeopardized it could dramatically affect the ability of LGUs to promote behavior change aimed at improving society and the environment.

Furthermore, the perception of intercollegiate Extension programs being difficult to understand by Extension stakeholders created some challenges. Extension has a strong history of working in specific programmatic areas such as 4-H and horticulture. So, the expansion to include more non-traditional programming and the desire to reach new audiences (King, 2018) has led to some Extension

clientele feeling abandoned or confused. It is evident that outside pressures (e.g., Extension volunteers) have slowed innovation for some intercollegiate programs.

Recommendations

Burke and Litwin (1992) explained that certain External Environmental factors may be minimized by activities such as lobbying or forming coalitions. More research should be conducted to determine measurable outcomes related to learning and community engagement which can be used to justify investment in these programs. Next, the potential gains (e.g., grants, contracts, and/or program fees) from LGUs adopting more intercollegiate programs should be explored to understand the benefit to cost ratio of developing these types of programs. Also, as intercollegiate Extension programs mature, more research is needed to determine best practices for transitioning these programs from soft funding to LGU supported recurring funds. Plus, future research could benefit from exploring client perspectives towards cost recovery fees associated with intercollegiate Extension programming and any possible conflicts regarding the transition away from Extension's historical approach which offered services free of charge (Revenue Enhancement Steering Committee, 2015).

Specifically, future research should determine how Extension and university-wide expertise should be leveraged to increase experiential learning for students and identify ways to tap into faculty's motivation to serve the public. LGUs should encourage research which identifies commonalities between community needs and concepts students need to learn. Also, Leadership plays a key role in the success or failure of intercollegiate Extension programs. Leaders are typically supportive of these intercollegiate programs when they enhance the LGU reputation and promote the university as a whole. Intercollegiate Extension programs should design a marketing campaign for LGU administration which clearly communicates how these programs will improve the LGU's reputation and visibility.

Furthermore, results from this study expressed the need for training main campus employees who are involved with intercollegiate Extension programs or plan to do so. We recommend that safeguards be developed which prevent main campus faculty involved with intercollegiate Extension programs from damaging relationships between LGUs and the public (e.g., faculty training, faculty community engagement evaluations/observations, etc.). Also, it is recommended that Extension stakeholders become familiar with intercollegiate Extension program topics and have a base-level knowledge of why the program topics are important.

Because many factors influence the success or failure of these programs and no two programs are exactly alike it is impossible to provide a formula for intercollegiate program best practices. However, based on these findings, those interested in creating or improving intercollegiate Extension programs should consider all four themes which emerged from this research. Extension was initially created to disseminate science-based information aimed at improving people's lives (Rasmussen, 2002). The 21st century has presented unique challenges which were unheard of in 1914 when Extension was established and LGUs must adapt if the organization aims to remain relevant (Caillouet & Harder, 2021). If implemented properly, intercollegiate Extension programs have the potential to find solutions to complex societal problems, provide students with experiential learning, secure funding, and improve the university's reputation across the state.

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