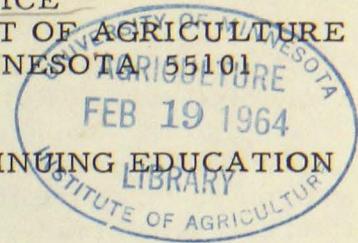


mac (3)  
 (1) AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE (2)  
 UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA -- U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
 INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA 55101

THE ROLE OF GENERAL EXTENSION IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

Willard L. Thompson, Dean  
 General Extension and Summer Session  
 University of Minnesota



At some point in his life, Mark Twain is reported to have said "it usually takes more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech."

I had planned to take at least that long in preparing what you are about to hear - perhaps longer. But as usual, the immediate took precedence over the merely important and I found myself laboring at this particular effort almost on the eve of its delivery. And the labor pains were considerable. But such is the life of a dean - and such is the fate of those who must listen to him.

By way of stating my qualifications, I am not unfamiliar with the things you do, the ways in which you do them, and the substantial services you provide to the people of Minnesota.

As a younger man, I had the pleasure of working on a newspaper in a small Illinois community. The publisher of that particular paper was a very wise man. He knew that a substantial part of his welfare rested with the agricultural community. He knew that the newspaper in the nearby large city provided a full share of international, national and state news. He recognized the wisdom of focusing his efforts on a coverage of the farm folk in the area and those in the small farm communities. As a photographer, reporter and managing editor of that paper - sometimes even as society editor - I had the privilege of working with the local county agent, the agricultural leaders and the many farm families. It was one of the most pleasant times in my life. Shortly after that I was involved with a radio station in a small southern Illinois town. Again we focused our attention on the agricultural community - for that was the principal form of activity in that area. It was there that I met Clinton Cutwright - the county agent in that community. I remember him particularly because of the store of stories that was his. One in particular, he liked. He said that one day he attended a meeting at which the speaker was the congressman from that district. After the meeting, as the crowd was filing out, he overheard an exchange between two farmers. The one - obviously of the same political faith as the speaker - commented, "That was a right good speech, wasn't it?" To which his friend replied, "I suppose so. But a half hour's rain would o' done us a heap more good."

"I'm not sure how that relates to what is to follow. I'm certain that with the recent snowfall, we don't need a half hour's rain. But there may be other things that would do you a heap more good than what you are about to hear. So be it.

Presented to the 1963 Annual Conference of the Minnesota Agricultural Extension Service, Institute of Agriculture, University of Minnesota, December 10, 1963.

My particular assignment today - as the program notes - is to tell you something of the "Role of General Extension in Continuing Education."

When I received the invitation to speak, I was greatly pleased. For I am convinced of the importance of greater understanding between Cooperative Extension and General Extension. If, in some small measure, I can contribute to that greater understanding, then this effort will have been immensely rewarding.

I imagine that the best way to approach the topic is to go back to the beginning. As you know so well, the concept of general extension is not new. It had its beginnings with the extension of university instruction in popular form by lecturers from the great university centers of Oxford and Cambridge who visited the great town and manufacturing districts in England. In this country, the lyceum and the chautauqua provided training ground for adult educators. By 1890, more than 200 organizations were providing lecture series, correspondence instruction and evening classes in nearly every state of the union. In 1892, when the University of Chicago first opened classes, University Extension was among the five major divisions of the institution, with equal status with the University Proper. Its president, William Rainey Harper, a former chautauqua lecturer, saw as the mission of the University - "service not merely to the students within its walls, but also to the public, to mankind."

But the true beginnings of the modern form of university extension were conceived at the University of Wisconsin in about 1906. At the outset it was a "Tax-supported, job-training program," support for which came from the Milwaukee Merchants and Manufacturers Association. The charge ran as follows: "Together with manual skills, conservative ideologies were to be imparted."

It soon became much more than this, of course, as officials of the university were determined to "make the boundaries of the campus coterminous with the boundaries of the state." Success of the Wisconsin plan is celebrated in extension circles.

At the University of Minnesota, the earliest efforts to provide what might be termed extension classes came in 1881 when Professor William A. Pike offered evening classes in engineering. In the 1890's, Professor Harry Pratt Judson offered courses in history to which the word "extension" was applied, and in 1909 there was created an Extension Division of the Department of Home Economics and Political Science - although this did not represent a formal university recognition of an extension division.

Cyrus Northrop, second president of the University, was little impressed with the possibilities inherent in these earliest efforts. The year before his retirement he wrote . . . "It is scarcely possible that regular university courses . . . ever will be demanded by large enough groups to make them self-sustaining."

His successor, George Edgar Vincent, was of an entirely different mind. According to James Gray, official historian of the University, Vincent recognized that the chief difficulty faced by anyone who wished to create an extension program was the "implacable, snobbish hostility of the Brahmins of education within the institution itself" who felt that "to encourage extension work was to open the citadel of culture to an invasion of barbarians."

President Vincent was determined that there should be an extension program, despite these resistances, and in 1913, Richard Price, director of extension at Kansas State University, was appointed director of the General Extension Division at Minnesota. I particularly enjoyed the words that James Gray used in describing Price. He was, Gray wrote, "a tall, thin man with the kind of driving energy that leads to the high places of achievement (with an occasional detour through the hospital for observation of stomach ulcers.)"

Price had charge of night classes in all departments, correspondence work, lectures and entertainment, and the work of the Municipal Reference Bureau. And here again I can't resist the words of Gray, reporting on the early program of correspondence study. Telling of the prisoners in state institutions who were encouraged to take correspondence study, Gray reported on "one inmate with a very great deal of time to himself (in a moment of heedless enthusiasm, attributable to his youth, he had obligingly bashed in the head of a woman whose husband found her a nuisance) took course after course, receiving all A's but one, and that was a B."

One of the major battles of that early period centered about the question of credit courses, and the number to be accepted toward a degree. In this, Price was eloquent. Speaking to the University Senate, which was threatening to accept only work done in regular daytime classes, Price asked, "Is education, then, a matter of astronomy? Does it derive its authority from the movements of the sun? According to the principle just set before you, if a class meets in a particular University building, under a particular instructor at four o'clock, that is education. If a class meets in the same building, under the same instructor, at seven o'clock, it is not education, but something inferior upon which the University dare not put the stamp of its official sanction."

Price's eloquence carried the day. The Senate accepted the principle that all extension classes in Minneapolis, St. Paul and Duluth were to be considered classes in residence. That principle holds today.

With the years, the programs begun by Richard Price and furthered by his successor Dean Julius M. Nolte have prospered, until today the General Extension Division, through its many programs and services, touches hundreds of thousands of persons in all reaches of the state and beyond.

When we were preparing the exhibit for the Editors and Legislators Day last fall, I was somewhat embarrassed when I first read the claims being made for the division - that in one way or another the division reaches one out of three persons in the state. And I suggested that we be a bit more restrained. But in the end I was persuaded that this actually is true. And as a newcomer to the division, I was impressed.

It is true. Through its several departments the division does reach enormous numbers of persons. Through its evening classes . . . its department of correspondence study . . . the audio-visual extension service . . . the municipal reference bureau . . . the state organization service and the World Affairs Center . . . through the center for continuation study . . . and the programs of the department of radio and television broadcasting . . . through the program service and the drama advisory service.

It's impossible, of course, to number each person. Thousands are served through the member organizations of the State Organization Service . . . through the programs broadcast by radio and television . . . indirectly through the municipal reference bureau and the League of Minnesota Municipalities.

Almost 85,000 visual programs, films and tapes are furnished annually to some 3,000 organizations by the Audio-Visual Extension Service. Representatives from that department visit an average of 125 high schools and colleges during the year, offering assistance in solving problems related to audio-visual programs.

There are few Minnesota communities that are not reached at one time or another by the University of Minnesota Program Service whose program offerings have a yearly audience of more than 200,000 students in schools throughout the upper midwest and in Canada.

The Municipal Reference Bureau provides a continuing study of city and village operations and research services available to the communities of the state through the League of Minnesota Municipalities.

The Drama Advisory Service provides counsel for the more than 1,000 directors in high schools, colleges and community theaters of the state.

These are widespread services . . . services that carry the influence of the University over an ever-widening area.

More important are the formal instruction programs, credit and non-credit. These enrolled in excess of 41,000 persons in 1962-63, and the totals in this year promise to be considerably greater.

More than 14,000 students are enrolled in evening and special classes in this present semester. These are in classes held in the St. Paul Center . . . in Duluth and Morris . . . in Robbinsdale and Rochester . . . and of course, on the Minneapolis campus. More than 1,000 classes are offered each year . . . permitting those who can't attend classes full-time to continue work toward a degree or toward special certificate programs.

Through the Center for Continuation Study, those who have already received technical or professional instruction have opportunities to further their education through short courses and institutes. More than 150 are held each year, with registrations ranging from 15 to 750. Seventy-two percent of the course registrants hold college degrees - this is advanced study.

Through correspondence study, some 10,000 persons received instruction each year. And here the division goes international - enrolling students in some 25 nations.

These, of course, are statistics. And as such they threaten to be dry as dust. Perhaps we could use that half hour of rain. Behind the statistics there lies a world of excitement, and challenge, and constant change. A world in which the University seeks to share its intellectual concerns and interests with all who are able and willing to give the necessary time and attention.

And in this, the University finds the ultimate fulfillment of the land grant concept . . . that all men and women, regardless of station in life, shall have available to them opportunities for study and self-improvement. That the resources of a state university are to be shared with those from whom it draws its being. That men and women of wisdom are essential to a free way of life. That the wisest investment to be made in a free society is the investment in trained minds.

And what of the future?

Indications are that we face a sellers market. This may not be the term you would choose, but it does describe what lies ahead.

The recent study by the National Opinion Research Center forecasts an explosion in the area of adult education within the next decade.

The typical person enrolled in adult education is the young, urban, educated person. His is precisely the type person who will be around in greatly increased numbers in the next few years.

But it is not these alone that provide our market. There are the increasing numbers of women, 35 years of age and older, who seek to resume educations interrupted by marriage and family obligations.

There are, of course, others - many others. In a world that grows increasingly complex there is the need for ways in which men of science and industry may keep abreast of technology's rapid change. In a world in which leisure time is increasingly available, opportunities for self-development and individual satisfaction are more urgently needed. In a world in which the store of knowledge grows with almost geometric proportions, there is great need for increased means by which that knowledge may be made available to agencies at all levels. In a world in which distances between nations are daily lessened, there is a need for wisdom and understanding, not on the part of the few, but the many. In a nation in which maintenance of a free society is dependent upon a wise and enlightened electorate, the need for increased efforts is imperative.

Something of the magnitude of the problem was dramatized in a column in the Minneapolis Star shortly after the tragic events surrounding the death of President Kennedy. The column reported on complaints received by television stations of the Twin Cities; complaints from irate viewers. Let me read a few:

"Your station should get wise to what the public wants. You are just repeating yourself and people are turning off their sets" . . . "Couldn't your station or one of the others carry this stuff and the rest regular programs? The way it looks, no one at your station has any kids, or else you lock them in a closet" . . . "Isn't this a free country? Well, why can't we have our choice as to what we would like to watch?" . . . "We are really getting this junk down our throats. I'm turning my set off and am going to a show" . . . "The stuff you had on the air before this stuff was bad enough, but now! How can your station even expect to stay on? I'm selling my set"

. . .

There is more.

As the great wave of students seeking admission to regular classrooms mounts dramatically in the next five to ten years, more and more students will be turning to extension. As one person phrased it: "As admission and retention standards edge slowly upward, General Extension's unique responsibility within the University should be to keep the door open, not to the uneducable, but to the student whose education was deferred or interrupted, to the 'late bloomer,' to the groping, the doubting, the wondering." For the important thing is that talent not be wasted.

How will we achieve all of this? By careful planning. By a more efficient use of the resources available to us. Through heroic efforts on the part of those who must staff the classrooms both on and off campus. Through innovation - seeking always new and more effective ways of meeting the needs with which we are faced. In his inaugural address President Wilson called for such innovation. "Not to experiment now," he said, "would be irresponsible."

In the General Extension Division such experimentation is going forward - slowly and cautiously at the moment but with increasing pace and imagination. Increased attention is being given to television as the vital instrument available in reaching increased numbers both on campus and beyond the campus. During the winter term a closed circuit television channel will carry courses at both graduate and undergraduate levels to Rochester, Minnesota. Thought is being given to ways in which television and programmed learning may supplement correspondence study.

There is, then, a final way in which we will achieve our goals and fulfill the demands made of us. This is through the fullest cooperation between all who serve the University, and through the University, the people of the state. As you know, I am new to this business of being a dean, and new to this business of extension. One of the first talks I heard, upon accepting this assignment, was offered by dean of extension of the University of Missouri, who explained the way in which general extension and cooperative extension had been joined on that campus. Later I visited the University of Wisconsin where I learned of studies that are going forward to find ways in which general extension and cooperative extension might best supplement each other or be joined.

At the recent Land Grant meeting in Chicago - my first as dean of general extension - I found that the major topic of conversation was the same; the problems of finding accommodation between general extension and cooperative extension. The thing that struck me most was the attitude of defense that prevailed. Concern was with the threat of "being taken over." I commented on this to one of your people following that session and he replied, "That's exactly what happened in the meeting on cooperative extension this morning. Folks were fretting with the prospects of being 'taken over'."

This is, at best, an unfortunate condition. At worst, it's downright foolish. It is not a matter of one group "taking over" another; of persons being "gobbled up." It's really a matter of finding an accommodation between men of good faith in which we seek ways to maximize the effectiveness of available resources.

It is not a matter of taking over or being taken; not a matter of breeching historic prerogatives. It is simply a matter of cooperation in solving problems of mutual concern. There is, of course, precedent for such cooperation. For years the department of radio and television of the General Extension Division has worked with the information section of Cooperative Extension. Conversations are presently going forward in which the General Extension Division and Cooperative Extension will join forces in providing an Arts Coordinator to the people of the state. Not many months back there was a most effective series of seminars throughout the state in which Luther Pickrel of Cooperative Extension and William C. Rogers of General Extension worked hand in hand, with remarkable success.

As you have been told earlier, President O. Meredith Wilson is naming an all-University committee to study the role of extension. Some may regard such a study as a threat to well-established sinecures. It isn't. It is, rather, an opportunity to look anew at problems that haven't been faced since the roles of General Extension and Cooperative Extension were first set out, decades ago; roles that had their definition in another time when the world was quite a different place. It offers an opportunity to look anew at the needs to be met. An opportunity to spell out the organizational forms that can best meet those needs.

In this there should be no alarm. The tasks facing us are immense. It will require the best that is in all of us, working together to meet the challenge we face.