Five Myths About eXtension

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Recommended Citation

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Abstract

eXtension has finally launched, and more and more Cooperative Extension faculty and staff are becoming involved. However, there are still a few rumors and myths that need to be dispelled. We hope that we can clear up the confusion and open the door to your participation as we transform Cooperative Extension for the future.

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Myth 1: eXtension is exclusive.

eXtension is for everyone! By March 15, 2008, about 7,500 of an estimated 15,000 Cooperative Extension faculty and staff had an eXtension ID. Our goal is to get everyone in the Cooperative Extension system to sign on and get an ID. Getting that ID opens the door to full participation—joining a community of practice and building content, submitting or editing Frequently Asked Questions, participating in weekly professional development offerings, and collaborating with colleagues, whether they are in the next county or across the country. Go to http://about.extension.org to learn more and to get your own eXtension ID.

Myth 2: eXtension will replace Extension offices across the country.

If anything, eXtension will make local Extension offices more visible to new users who discover the Cooperative Extension system via eXtension. When someone visits eXtension and tells us where he or she lives, eXtension automatically becomes personalized. That person can find his or her local Cooperative Extension office and make contact for more information. Eventually, content will be localized so that visitors will be able to find local events, news, and even content that is particularly relevant to local conditions or regulations.

eXtension is building crucial resources that can fill the gaps where resources are scarce. As the world shrinks, it only makes sense for Cooperative Extension employees across the United States to band together. Some of our individual publications have already become cooperative efforts involving several states. We are stronger united than we are as individual institutions.

People are finding the eXtension site as they seek information. Our user analytics show us that Californians lead the country in eXtension use, followed closely by residents from Texas, New York, North Carolina, Illinois, Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, and Georgia.

Myth 3: eXtension won't publish our state's news.

We will and we do, as long as your news is easily accessible. It's easiest to get to your news releases if they are available via feed (either RSS or, preferably, ATOM). It's also much easier for us to pick up your news if Extension news is kept separate from general university news.

From October 2007 through February 2008, more than 1,300 news releases have been posted in the eXtension Virtual News Room from 40 state Extension services. The top contributors of releases were Iowa State, Kansas State, Louisiana State, Mississippi State, North Dakota State, Ohio State, Oklahoma State, Texas Cooperative Extension, and the University of Illinois.

Myth 4: There's nothing in eXtension for me.

Being part of the transformation of Cooperative Extension may not seem like something rank and file Cooperative Extension folks can share in, but it is. As Extension nears its centennial anniversary, we can all change the way we work together and take our collaboration and creativity to new levels. eXtension really does offer something for everyone.

Nearly 35,000 frequently asked questions and their answers are available to eXtension ID holders. They're a great resource for the public's questions and also for weekly columns and news articles.

The professional development opportunities alone are worth the price of your time. Every week, eXtension offers 30-minute online sessions on consumer technology and social networking topics. Those topics will become more and more diverse as time goes on. Sessions are archived, so you can watch them at your convenience. There have been sessions on Web design, collaborative work, social networking sites (such as Facebook and MySpace), and the interactive virtual world Second Life.

While online collaboration isn't new to most of us who work in communications and information technology, it is to some of our colleagues. They're finding that, although the eXtension collaborative workspace has a bit of a learning curve, it fosters creativity and communication, resulting in better educational products. Collaboration isn't just for building educational modules or public content. eXtension's Collaborate Wiki, located at http://collaborate.extension.org, is a workspace that anyone interested in virtual collaboration can use.

Myth 5: eXtension is just a flash in the pan.

By now, it should be obvious that eXtension is here for the long haul. In February 2007, Extension directors and administrators agreed to continue

their support of eXtension through their annual assessment of a percentage of Smith-Lever funds through 2011. Congressional support through the New Technologies for Agricultural Extension grant program continues to show promise for growth. As more and more Cooperative Extension educators and specialists begin to transform their own working environments to include eXtension, it will become even more sustainable. Right now, more than 500 Cooperative Extension professionals are building content in 21 communities of practice. eXtension formally designated five more communities in March 2008. More and more Extension professionals developing educational resources are recognizing that eXtension offers valuable collaborative tools, professional development, and access to new audiences.

There is a place in eXtension for you. Bring your contributions and expertise as a communicator or information technologist and help move Cooperative Extension and eXtension forward into the future.

About the Authors

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