

# University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service Academic Plan 2009

## **Introduction**

The University of Wyoming (UW), as a land-grant institution and the only state university, has a responsibility to serve each individual, organization, and community in the state. When the Smith Lever Act of 1914 created the Cooperative Extension Service (CES), it formed a partnership between UW and federal and county governments. Because of this legislation, UW CES has maintained a close community connection with each of the state's 23 counties and the Wind River Indian Reservation. Though it is rooted in agriculture, the educational mission of UW CES encompasses many of the contemporary challenges facing Wyoming's people and its rural communities.

Six years ago, the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) implemented a strategic plan that changed the approach to educational program leadership as well as the organizational structure. The reorganization and refocusing of CES educational outreach programs, implemented in the 2002 Strategic Plan, has enhanced program efficacy and impact. The CES Academic Planning process for 2009 represents an update and fine tuning of the actions implemented in the 2002 Strategic Plan.

## *The Planning Process*

To prepare for the creation of the UW CES Academic Plan, a United States Department of Agriculture Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) review was implemented in April 2007. The CSREES review team included extension administrators, educators, and specialists from Washington D.C., Alaska, Montana, Wisconsin, and North Dakota. An additional review team member was Dennis Sun, a Wyoming citizen and extension stakeholder. The review team examined the outputs, impacts and structure of UW Cooperative Extension and developed a set of recommendations for change and improvement of UW CES. The review recommendations formed a starting point for development of the academic planning issues agenda. The issues agenda was developed with organizational input through the fall and winter of 2007-08. A 21-member academic planning team was selected in January 2008. The group was asked to consider the issues agenda and develop a draft academic plan for UW CES that would strategically position the organization for greater impact and success. The UW CES planning team met for a facilitated multiday retreat April 7 – 10, 2008. A draft academic plan was completed by the end of the retreat. Multiple level reviews and revisions have resulted in this academic plan for UW CES.

## *Cooperative Extension Vision*

The University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service will be recognized and respected for providing lifelong learning opportunities for the people of Wyoming. With the land-grant university as our foundation, UW CES will be the leader in outreach education throughout the state. UW CES will actively involve Wyoming people, institutions, and communities as we provide learning for better living. We will be responsive to the needs, concerns, and aspirations of diverse audiences.

## *Cooperative Extension Mission*

The University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service provides lifelong learning opportunities for the people of Wyoming and empowers them to make choices that enhance their quality of life.

**Action Items:** Two types of actions are proposed for UW CES: Those that redirect the work of the organization and affect the way extension interacts with its clients and stakeholders, and those that fine tune the workings of the organization for greater efficacy and impact. Actions 1 through 10 are categorized as the former and actions 11 through 23 as the latter.

### **Client input and needs assessment**

**Situation:** As a public land-grant institution, UW has a historic commitment to provide access to higher education. UW CES, with offices in each of the state's 23 counties and the Wind River Indian Reservation, provides a presence for the university across the state. UW CES actively engages stakeholders in assessing needs and identifying issues of importance to the state through a variety of methods. It is critical that educators and specialists identify, assess, prioritize, and address important Wyoming issues. The current process for collecting stakeholder input has not been effective in some cases. The process has been modified in response to concerns but still may not provide the best possible needs assessment and stakeholder input. As multi-county areas grow in size, the current area advisory model becomes more impractical.

**Action 1:** A UW CES working group will be formed to evaluate methods for collecting stakeholder input and assess need, and develop an improved approach to receiving input and assessing need. A more effective stakeholder input and needs assessment process will be in place by May 2010.

### **Programming initiatives**

**Situation:** Wyoming, its people and communities, is experiencing rapid change. Growth in the energy and mining sectors has impacted large areas of the state. Energy development is having an impact on the resource management in Wyoming. Division of rangelands into small parcels for home site and small acreage development is reshaping the landscape and the management of land resources in the state. Within this context both tourism and agriculture continue to be important sectors of the state's economy and important factors in the management of natural resources. Many communities of the state are struggling to keep up with the pace of change. Building infrastructure, providing services and rebuilding community culture in the face of rapid growth is a challenge for many Wyoming communities.

Additional challenges for Wyoming's people, both rural and urban, are the environmentally related issues of global climate change, carbon release into the atmosphere and rapidly rising energy costs. Clearly there is a need to take advantage of renewable energy sources even in a fossil fuel state like Wyoming. In addition, reducing carbon emissions and effective producer and consumer adjustments to rising energy prices are important to the economic health of the state. In response to these forces the following actions are proposed.

**Action 2:** UW CES will review and evaluate initiative program goals annually and will orient programs to the highest needs within the mission of the College of Agriculture. Ongoing.

**Action 3:** UW CES will develop the capacity to provide extension programming in renewable energy specifically related to the development of wind and solar energy resources in Wyoming. The use of wind and solar energy in rural and community settings appears to be a useful niche for extension's work. The College of Agriculture will work with the UW School of Energy, UW administration, and other potential partners to acquire additional human and other resources needed to build capacity for renewable energy work. Ongoing.

**Action 4:** UW CES will explore opportunities to collaborate with the School of Energy Resources and other potential partners to develop the capacity to provide education in energy conservation and efficiency for businesses and consumers. Complete by December 2010.

**Action 5:** UW CES will collaborate with the UW Reclamation Center and other interested partners to develop applied research and extension education programs which will provide training for reclamation practitioners reclaiming the lands disturbed by energy and other development in the state. Complete by December 2010.

**Action 6:** UW CES will build capacity to provide community development assistance to communities that are experiencing rapid change. The College of Agriculture will work with the UW administration to provide additional human and other resources needed to build capacity for growth impacted communities work. Ongoing.

**Action 7:** UW CES will build its capacity to assist Wyoming counties and municipalities in planning and responding to growth and development. The College of Agriculture will work with the UW administration and other partners to provide additional human and other resources needed to build effect and impact in community planning. Ongoing.

**Action 8:** UW CES will build capacity to provide education and information in small acreage management and horticulture. The College of Agriculture will work with UW administration and other local partners to provide human and other resources needed to enhance effect and impact in small acreage management and horticulture programming. Ongoing.

### **Community learning centers**

**Situation:** Extension's last academic plan discussed creating UW Learning Centers where the community could go to utilize shared classrooms and other developed space for both for-credit and non-credit education. Many communities of the state are in need of space where members of the community can come together to learn.

**Action 9:** UW CES will collaborate with the Outreach School and other governmental and community entities to develop community learning centers. Ongoing.

### **Name recognition and program marketing**

**Situation:** The name recognition and the effectiveness of the UW CES brands are important to the impacts and outcomes of our educational programming efforts. Formal surveys and more anecdotal information indicate that name recognition for the UW CES could be better and that sub-branding by groups within extension may be confusing stakeholders. It has been suggested that the UW CES name/brand identity could be improved with a shortened and simplified name.

**Action 10:** Investigate optimal marketing, branding and name recognition strategies for UW CES and develop a plan to enhance the marketing and name recognition of UW CES. This would include an exploration of a change in the name of the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service to University of Wyoming Extension and the development of a logo that is compliant with University Media Relations' policy and creates an identifiable brand for UW CES. Complete by June 2011.

## Geographic structure of field operations

**Situation:** Since its implementation, the nine area multi-county extension model has been limiting. Area educators have often been called on to travel beyond their extension areas where their specific expertise was needed to address a challenge in another multicounty extension area. Larger areas facilitate more specialization and improve UW CES's ability to provide needed expertise. In addition, the two-county area configuration has limited the availability of initiative programming because current staffing levels do not allow all extension initiatives to be addressed in two-county areas. Two-county areas currently have staffing of three area educators to cover four initiatives. As a result of these limitations, educators on the western side of Wyoming have reorganized to combine four extension areas into two, five-county areas. Discussions among educators on the eastern side of Wyoming have favored a similar reorganization plan; one that would organize the 13 counties on the eastern side of Wyoming into three extension areas. However, other organizational patterns are possible.

**Action 11:** UW CES will organize the 23 counties of Wyoming into five or fewer extension areas. Input from partners and stakeholders will be invited to determine the best area configuration. Complete by December 2009.

The following five area configuration is proposed as the most effective.

### **Eastern Region:**

Central: Sheridan, Johnson, and Natrona

Northeast: Campbell, Crook, Converse, Weston, and Niobrara

Southeast: Laramie, Goshen, Platte, Albany, and Carbon

### **Western Region:**

West: Uinta, Sweetwater, Lincoln, Sublette, Teton

Northwest: Fremont, Hot Springs, Park, Washakie, Big Horn

## Leadership and administration of the state 4-H program

**Situation:** The organizational leadership model currently in place for UW CES has two associate directors who provide supervision for most CES field educators (Cent\$ible Nutrition educators are an exception). 4-H youth educators have unique positions which require a significant amount of time committed to program management. Many issues which arise in the 4-H program are policy related. The state 4-H office has a 4-H program coordinator who provides overall leadership for state programs and policy. The lack of a supervisory connection between state 4-H program leadership and the employees managing county 4-H programs has been identified as a factor limiting the effectiveness of the 4-H Youth Development Initiative and the development of the state 4-H program.

**Action 12:** Formalize communication between the state 4-H program coordinator and associate directors regarding youth program issues, state 4-H program goals, state 4-H program policies and activities, individual employee goals, teamwork and effectiveness, and 4-H Youth Development Initiative Team activities and goals. Encourage increased dialogue between 4-H youth development educators and supervisors regarding 4-H youth development program goals and efforts. Complete by December 2009.

## Goal statements and employee coaching

**Situation:** Individual goal statements were added as a part of the UW CES evaluation system in 2006. Their use and effectiveness as a tool in employee coaching and evaluation have been somewhat variable. Most agree that goal statements could and should be used more effectively and consistently in the coaching and evaluation by both educators and their supervisors.

**Action 13:** Provide training for all extension educators regarding goal preparation during annual extension training opportunities (e.g. EPIC, new employee training, area meetings) to begin immediately. Complete by June 2010.

**Action 14:** Supervisors will have regular semi-annual (every six months) dialog with educators regarding goal statements and achievements beginning fiscal year 2009. Complete by June 2010.

**Action 15:** Administrative liaisons will encourage area and initiative teams to establish team goals that could be helpful to team members as they set personal annual goals. Complete by December 2009.

## County coordinator responsibilities

**Situation:** County coordinators have a key leadership role in field extension programs and are stewards of extension's fundamental relationship with county government. The county coordinator has liaison responsibilities with the county government, manages the county extension budget, and in some cases, serves as a county department head. The effectiveness of this coordinating role is key to the success of county extension programs. Two issues were identified to strengthen the coordinators role; coordination and oversight of initiative programs in the county, both area organized initiatives and 4-H youth development, and the review of county coordinators.

**Action 16:** The county coordinator position description will be restructured to give the county coordinator the responsibility to encourage effective programming for all initiatives in his/her county. Engaging, assisting, and supporting will be the key words describing this county coordinator responsibility. Complete by December 2009.

**Action 17:** County coordinators will be evaluated annually by their supervisor for effectiveness in their county coordinator duties. Incumbent county coordinators will be formally reviewed every five years to evaluate their effectiveness and possible reappointment to the county coordinator assignment. A CES working group will be organized to structure the format for the formal county coordinator review. Complete by June 2010.

## Initiative team effectiveness

**Situation:** Effective initiative teams involve substantial collaboration between state specialists and field educators. Currently the field/campus connection within initiative teams has been solid in some initiatives and less so in others. Effective team work within state initiative teams between field educators and specialists is a critical aspect of initiative team success. Improvement in initiative team success will depend on progress in educator and specialist involvement in team activities.

**Action 18:** Each extension specialist will be assigned to membership and participation on at least one initiative team. The extension Web site will be updated to include a description of specialist's area(s) of expertise. To help orient new specialists, the extension director will meet with new specialists on a regular basis and assist the department head in coaching specialists. Complete December 2009.

### **Improving team leadership**

**Situation:** Program leadership in Cooperative Extension is team led and team directed. The leadership of most teams is elected by the team members. The success of UW CES depends on effective leadership from each member of the extension organization. Team leadership, meeting management, decision making, and process facilitation are key skills for extension educators.

**Action 19:** Training will be offered at annual conferences and other venues to increase the team leadership skills of all extension employees. Ongoing.

### **4-H management and policy**

**Situation:** An ambiguous policy-setting process for the state 4-H program has challenged the 4-H Youth Development Initiative Team and the state 4-H program coordinator to understand roles and adjust 4-H policy to serve the youth in the program. In addition, creating more uniformity among county 4-H programs has also been suggested as a way to provide a better working environment for educators.

**Action 20:** Creation and implementation of policy for the state 4-H program is the purview of the state 4-H youth development program coordinator. To enhance the uniformity across county programs, the state program coordinator will lead the development of a revised policy manual for the Wyoming 4-H program. An outcome of implementation of the new policy manual will be greater uniformity for policy across county 4-H programs. Complete December 2009.

**Action 21:** The role of the state 4-H Youth Development Initiative Team is to determine new program/project directions for the Wyoming 4-H program and stimulate the creation of new programming for UW CES youth programs. The initiative team will retain its focus on program creation. Each educator with a majority youth assignment will participate in the 4-H Youth Development Initiative Team. Complete December 2009.

### **Training and mentoring**

**Situation:** Employee training and mentoring are important aspects of employee effectiveness and retention. Some observe that employee mentoring and training could be organized more effectively.

**Action 22:** UW CES will develop and implement a plan to more effectively organize initial training for new employees. Complete by May 2010.

**Action 23:** UW CES will appoint a working group to evaluate its mentoring program and propose changes that will improve the mentoring of new employees. Complete by May 2011.