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# BALANCING SPLIT APPOINTMENTS: A VIEW FROM THE TRENCHES

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# General Session

Editor's Note: Four papers were presented in the general session, and two were submitted for publication in the proceedings.

The following titles were presented in the session but not submitted for publication:

Jim Knight, Montana State University—Addressing Controversy as a Wildlife Specialist: Building Bridges  
Robert Ruff, University of Wisconsin—Balancing Split Appointments: A View from the Headshed

## BALANCING SPLIT APPOINTMENTS: A VIEW FROM THE TRENCHES

MARGARET BRITTINGHAM, School of Forest Resources, Forest Resources Lab, Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802

The following comments primarily address the extension/research split but many of them are also applicable to the extension/teaching split.

### CHALLENGES

There are many challenges associated with having your extension appointment split with research.

#### Time Demands of Extension

One of the largest challenges is the challenge of time management. No matter what your extension appointment is, extension can take 110% of your time. There are always requests for programs, phone calls to answer, individuals to assist, and administrative reports to fill out.

#### Tenure and Promotion Based Heavily on Research

Although this is beginning to change in some universities, in most the reward system on which promotion and tenure are based recognizes research above either extension or teaching. This does not mean that you don't need to have an excellent extension program, but it means that no matter what your research split is, you need to have an active research program to attain tenure and promotion. Extension faculty are often put in a particularly difficult situation because many non-extension faculty do not understand extension and therefore, do not understand how to evaluate extension. This becomes particularly problematic when you are being evaluated at a university-wide scale by individuals outside of colleges that have extension appointments.

As a consequence of these two factors: high time demands of extension and reward system based primarily on research, extension faculty with split appointments are

faced with a difficult challenge—the challenge of having an extension program while also being involved in and publishing research.

### BENEFITS

Extension is research based and there are many benefits associated with being involved in the research process from obtaining grants to publishing results.

#### Keep Current

Conducting research helps you to keep current within the field. Although it is not necessary to conduct research to keep current, it makes it much easier because you become involved in reading the primary literature, determining what is known, and designing research to answer questions that are not known.

#### Target Research Programs to Address Extension Needs

Through extension we get a much clearer picture of what the needs of individuals or agencies are and can design research to answer these questions. We are not totally dependent on others to conduct the research.

#### Better Able to Evaluate Other Research

Conducting research helps you develop a critical eye and it helps you evaluate other research. This is extremely important because our job as extension specialists is to evaluate research and translate research into a form that can be used by the public.

#### Enhances Your Credibility with Colleagues

As I said under challenges, one of the challenges is getting recognition from other academic peers. By conducting research, you are able to gain this recognition.

In addition, although the public often doesn't care whether or not you conducted the research, I think this can raise your credibility particularly when you are conducting educational programs for other natural resource professionals.

Having a split appointment with teaching can also be beneficial. I have found the greatest benefit to be the continual contact with students that allows you to see a change over a semester. One of the frustrations of extension is we often have one-shot programs where people come in, we teach them, and we don't see them again.

## **SURVIVING THE SPLIT APPOINTMENT**

### **Manage Your Time Wisely**

This is an obvious statement but can be very difficult to do particularly in extension. Managing your time involves a number of factors:

- setting aside blocks of time to conduct research or to work on developing new extension programs;
- setting priorities of what you want to accomplish and what you need to do to get there;
- saying no. Just because a day is open doesn't mean you have to say yes to give a particular program. You also need to have time to think and write.
- controlling the phone. For many extension specialists, the phone can be one of the greatest obstacles to having blocks of time. If possible, have graduate assistants or other knowledgeable individuals handle routine phone requests. Answer phone calls a couple of times a day instead of throughout the day.

### **Link Your Research and Extension Program Together**

If you have a research appointment, you will need to conduct research and write publications. The most efficient way to do this is to link your research and extension program together. To do this you can develop a research program that will answer specific extension questions and develop an extension program based on that research. It is almost impossible to have completely separate research and extension programs.

### **Develop Partnerships but Maintain Identity**

A good way to multiply your efforts is to form partnerships in both research and extension. However, you still need to maintain your identity and have programs that you are the lead on.

### **Evaluate Your Extension Program and Present Programs That Are Being Reviewed in an Organized Way**

In terms of surviving the system and also in terms of improving your extension programs, you should evaluate your extension programs in a systematic fashion on a regular basis. This will make it much easier for others to understand what you did and why.

### **Find a Mentor Within and Outside of Extension**

It is helpful to have a mentor both within the extension system and also outside the system. These mentors can provide advice and help keep you on track in terms of what you need to do. An individual outside of extension is useful because they can provide insights into how your programs will be perceived by non-extension faculty.

### **Know What Is Expected**

Finally, you need to know what is expected. This will vary greatly from university to university, so it is important that you find out what is expected in your particular situation.