

Report of the Florida Extension Reconsidered Initiative¹

9 February 2015

Background

In 2014, there was a national celebration of the 100 year anniversary of the Smith-Lever Act that created the Cooperative Extension. As part of this celebration, the University of Florida IFAS Extension volunteered to be one of 13 states that were part of a special national initiative that brought individuals together to reconsider the role and functions of Cooperative Extension for the next 100 years.

The Extension Reconsidered Initiative (<http://imaginingamerica.org/research/extension-reconsidered-initiative/>) began as an idea of Dr. Scott Peters, Associate Professor of Developmental Sociology at Cornell University and Co-Director of the national Imaging America organization, who saw the centennial as an opportunity for critical reflection on the history and future of Cooperative Extension. A major part of this initiative is engaging people and methodologies from the arts, humanities, and design fields to support extension professionals in strengthening the civic life of communities. By developing new creative and innovative ways to enhance our democratic culture, extension can help communities to address the social, technological and economic conditions of the 21st century.

In this Initiative, state teams from Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, Oregon, and Wisconsin reached out to citizens to discuss key questions about Extension's future and roles in civic life. This national initiative was supported by Imaging America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life (<http://imaginingamerica.org/>), the Charles F. Kettering Foundation (<http://kettering.org/>), the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (<http://engagementscholarship.org/>), the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (<https://ccph.memberclicks.net/>) and the Art of the Rural (<http://artoftherural.org/>).

The Extension Reconsidered Initiative Process

Extension Reconsidered was created as an action research initiative that would engage a diverse range of participants in constructive and critical deliberation about the future of the land-grant system's extension and public engagement work. Each of the 13 states agreed that they would do the following, as part of the initiative.

- To organize a planning team at the state level that included people from diverse fields and positions within their land-grant institution—particularly the arts, humanities, and design—as well as community partners who are not employed by the institution.

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- To engage the planning team in developing an arc of work over the next year (or longer) that fosters critical reflection and inquiry in order to create a trajectory for Extension work in the 21st century.
- To engage the planning team in designing and organizing a deliberative institute, forum, or other event on the future of extension, to be attended by a diverse range of people within and beyond the land-grant institution.
- To creatively document the team's work through one or more kinds of media, and to write and submit a report of the work and findings.

The Florida Experience

Dr. Mike Spranger, Professor and Community Development Specialist within the University of Florida's Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences was the lead for the Extension in this effort. He established a partnership with Dr. Sophia K. Acord, Associate Director with the University of Florida's Center for Humanities and the Public Sphere, who agreed to be the co-lead in this effort and create connections with the local Imaging America community. In the planning for this initiative, the co-leads decided that we would hold two sets of meetings. One would be internal (University of Florida faculty) and one would be external (practitioners of the arts, humanities and urban design fields). We agreed we would hold a facilitated meeting on the University of Florida campus and two facilitated community meetings in Florida communities.

A first step was to form an advisory committee that would plan for the internal meeting. The committee would be composed of individuals from the arts, humanities and urban design fields. The following faculty members volunteered to serve on this committee.

- Mike Spranger, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences (Co-Lead)
- Sophia K. Acord, Center for Humanities and Public Sphere (Co-Lead)
- Donna Cohen, School of Architecture
- Katerie Gladdys, School of Art and Art History
- Keven Marshall, School of Theatre and Dance
- Anna Prizzia, Horticulture Department
- Whitney Sanford, Department of Religion
- Ruth Steiner, Department of Urban and Regional Planning
- Matt Williams, UF Office of Sustainability

Several planning meetings were held in the spring of 2014. Due to end of semester and summer schedules, the decision was made that we would conduct our campus meeting in the fall, 2014.

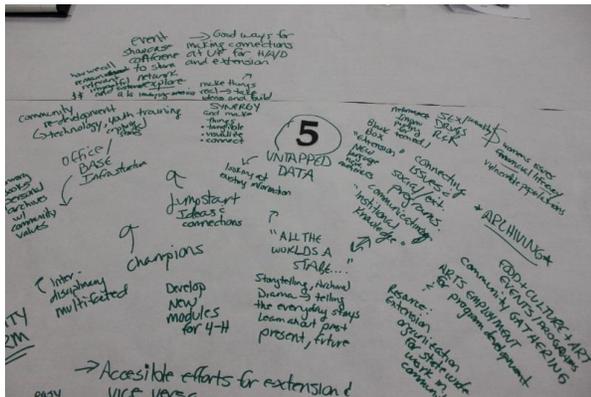
For the University of Florida meeting, we set as our initial challenge the exploration of the following question: What potential is there for the faculty within the arts, humanities, and design disciplines, and IFAS Extension to collaborate with local individuals and organizations to support our institution's civic mission and strengthen our communities?

The University of Florida Campus Meeting

On September 4th, 2014, a facilitated discussion was held at the Straughn IFAS Extension Professional Development Center from 4:30-7:00 pm. Participants included 27 faculty from the following areas: religion, English, languages and literatures, oral history, women's studies, art, theatre, music, arts in medicine, landscape architecture, urban and regional planning, and African-American studies. In addition, 12 faculty represented state and county IFAS Extension faculty, including the fields of family, youth and community sciences, horticulture, and forestry. Although there are several individual collaborations between these faculty and IFAS Extension, this was the first meeting that brought the goals and aims of IFAS Extension into direct discussion with UF's membership in the Imagining American consortium. In preparation for the workshop, we created a University of Florida public blog to profile the range of community-engaged work involving the arts, humanities, and design (<http://ufhumanities.tumblr.com/>).

Regarding format, the program began with introductions where individuals provided background on their program areas and their reasons for participating in the meeting through a creative Object Tap exercise. The planning committee decided that pencils and crayons should be available along with an interactive ice-breaker utilized to bring out the creative side in participants, as well as emphasize the importance of opening the format to arts/design-based methodologies for deliberative discussion.

Selection of the shared discussion sheets created by workshop participants



These introductions were followed by a short overview and history of the Cooperative Extension Program and the role that the cultural and artistic approaches have played in past extension work. Several examples of collaborative efforts between arts/humanities/design and extension faculty were also shared, ranging from ecological art installations to community oral history programs to alternative transport design sessions.

The participants then broke into small groups where they addressed the following key questions:

- What is the role of arts, humanities and design fields in supporting vibrant communities?
- What are opportunities for the University of Florida and its Cooperative Extension to become more involved through these areas?
- Recommendations and next steps.

Facilitated Discussions



Students from the University of Florida's Theatre were invited to the event to observe and summarize the meeting with an improvisation of what they heard at the session.

Student Improvisation of Meeting



To continue discussions, the planning committee organized a social potluck sponsored by the Center for the Humanities and Public Sphere and University of Florida IFAS Extension. Participants engaged in lively discussion and interaction following the formal meeting.

Extension Reconsidered Potluck



The Community Meetings

Two community meetings were also conducted to gather perspectives and receive input from community-based practitioners in the art, humanities and design fields. These meetings were held in Pensacola, Florida on September 17th and in Live Oak, Florida on September 26th. These meetings were co-hosted by the local county extension office. The locations of these meetings were selected so we would receive perspectives from a mid-sized city and small rural community. The local office sent out invitations to members in the community that they had been involved with in extension projects, or who were leaders in the art, humanity and design fields in their local area. More than twenty individuals attended these two meetings. The participants included artists, architects, planners, theater directors, youth chorus directors, photographers and art patrons as well as representatives from the local county extension offices.

The format was similar to that of the University of Florida campus meeting. The program began with introductions where individuals provided background on their program areas and their reasons for participating in the meeting. This was followed by a short overview and history of the Cooperative

Extension Program. The participants then broke into small groups where they addressed the following key questions:

- What is role of Arts, Humanities and Design fields in a vibrant community?
- What are opportunities for Extension to become more involved in these areas?
- Recommendations and next steps.

These meetings also concluded with a social where informal discussion continued.

What We Heard at These Meetings:

University of Florida Campus Meeting

- Many faculty did not know that IFAS Extension was already involved in projects that engaged topics, approaches, and individuals from the arts, humanities and design fields.
- IFAS Extension could be a resource and partner to provide arts, humanities, and design faculty with opportunities to work in and with communities, as well as to help document outcomes and successful impacts.
- Extension and local communities need to work together to explore new approaches and funding mechanisms that encourage local programs in the arts, humanities, and design areas.
- Disciplines in the arts, humanities provide important approaches to understanding human values, social relationships, and ways of acting in the world. These forms of knowing could be usefully connected to ways of doing pragmatic work with communities.
- There is a need to bring urban arts and culture into the IFAS extension palate.
- There needs to be a better reward system at University of Florida for faculty to work across disciplines and departments (“break the silos”). Both the promotion and tenure system and current funding arrangement (RCM) are major deterrents to collaborative efforts.
- IFAS Extension needs to look at a new organizational and programmatic structure to include cultural expertise in the arts, humanities, and design in their activities. For example, IFAS Extension faculty members could be appointed to different departments (such as theatre, or religion) or faculty from the arts/humanities/design could have the opportunity to serve as Visiting Extension faculty at campus and county-based offices.

Community Meetings (Pensacola and Live Oak)

- Most participants did not know that IFAS Extension was involved or could be involved in projects that engaged the arts, humanities, and design fields.
- Art is important; it is what makes us humans and our communities strong and vibrant.

- IFAS Extension needs to change their image so people are aware that they have programs in these cultural arts, humanities, and design areas. For many, the image of Extension is that it is only rural and only focused on agricultural issues.
- There are a number of professional associations involved in arts, humanities, and design fields (e.g., Art, Architecture, Planning). These groups want to give back to their community. IFAS Extension needs to reach out to these groups to partner on community projects.
- There is a critical need to provide more opportunities for youth to be more involved in cultural arts, humanities, and design in hands-on learning or community service projects.
- For IFAS Extension to change, there needs to be a concerted effort to have arts, humanities, and design representatives on local Extension Advisory Councils.
- Extension faculty appear to be swamped with programs and projects. Cultural arts, humanities and design projects need to be part of overall extension programs. A percent of time should be devoted to these projects, or have new positions focused on this topic, like the University of Missouri is currently doing.

Participants Suggestions and Recommendations for Future Extension Work

University of Florida Campus Meeting

- Establish a place or process for informal gatherings for arts, humanities, design, and extension faculty to enhance collaborations and cross-fertilization (The Cultural and Extension Café)
- Create an annual event to showcase arts, humanities, design, and IFAS Extension collaborations (perhaps through Imagining America).
- IFAS Extension should create a Community Arts Extension Specialist Position, similar to what other state extension programs are now doing (e.g., University of Missouri).
- University of Florida should find ways that would provide part-time FTE Extension appointments to University of Florida arts, humanities, and design campus-based faculty.
- IFAS Extension should create several Regional Specialized Agent positions that focus on the arts, humanities, and design programs.
- IFAS Extension should consider establishing an Extension Summer Community Artist in Residence Program that University of Florida campus-based faculty with 9 month appointments could apply for.
- Develop a master list of grant awards (and opportunities) for cultural arts, humanities, and design and Extension faculty.
- Consider creating a University of Florida Center for Public Life that connects various campus-based community engagement centers to improve program communications and quality.

Community Meetings (Pensacola and Live Oak)

- IFAS Extension should create a Community Arts Extension Specialist Position and/or several Regional Specialized Agent positions that focus on the cultural arts, humanities, and design.
- Have an “Artist Summer in Residence” program where individual could take a circuit rider approach to work with local communities on cultural arts, humanities, and design projects.
- Create a “Master Artisan Program” similar to Master Gardeners.
- Develop a new WPA type program (similar to one that was designed and implemented during the Depression era) to rebuild our rural and urban communities with art projects. Extension could be a lead in these type of activities in local communities.
- Provide training opportunities to the arts, humanities, and design community.
- Develop mobile cultural arts, humanities, and design programs that agents can take to underserved neighborhoods.
- Find ways for collaborative projects/funding in local communities. Many communities have various taxes and user fees that are dedicated to the cultural arts, humanities and tourism. Explore if these funds could be used for funding extension projects and/or positions.

Analysis of the Meetings

Several common themes were identified from both sets of meetings. First, most participants were not aware that IFAS Extension is involved in several human and community-oriented activities that draw on approaches from and collaborations with the arts, humanities, and design. They also had a perception that Extension programs are focused on rural and agricultural issues, and conducted very little programs that addressed urban issues. Second, all groups felt that the arts are vital parts of community life and strengthen communities. Third, all groups felt that a collaborative approach among the arts, humanities, design, and extension faculty was a desired approach for the future. Fourth, all groups felt that more staffing is needed to support arts, humanities, and design programs in local communities. Interestingly, both the campus-based and community-based workshops asked for almost identical forms of Extension structure. These included such things as:

- creating and incentivizing more Extension partnerships with local organizations and academic faculty outside of IFAS,
- creating new extension agent with specialty expertise in the arts and appointments in the arts, humanities, and design disciplines (e.g. University of Missouri Extension model),
- providing funds to faculty in the cultural arts, humanities, design fields to conduct formal extension work, and
- establishing summer “artists-in residence” programs where artists and art faculty would work with extension agents on community projects.

Sample of Activities associated with the Florida Extension Reconsidered Initiative conducted in 2014:

- Three deliberative forums and socials were conducted in Florida. These forums were held on September 4 in Gainesville, FL; September 17 in Pensacola, FL; and September 26 in Live Oak, FL.
- Sophia K. Acord attended the Imagining America annual conference in Atlanta, GA on October 11, 2014 where there was a discussion on the Extension Reconsidered Initiative.
- Mike Spranger was invited by the Dean of Extension to present an overview of Extension Reconsidered and Florida-related activities for the statewide “Extension Connection” monthly meeting for extension faculty on November 24, 2014.
- Mike Spranger authored the article “Disasters, Extension, and the Cultural Arts: Unlikely Partners?” in the Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life blog series. <http://imaginingamerica.org/blog/2014/11/>

Conclusion and Upcoming Project Activities

The 2014 Florida Extension Reconsidered activities succeeded in opening discussion and establishing a networked community of practice in civically-engaged work across the arts, humanities, and design at the University of Florida. We discussed some of the narrow focuses that have evolved in contemporary Extension practice, and learned and shared ideas of how to create a model of University of Florida engagement that connected rural and urban life, different racial and ethnic groups, and historical achievements to sustainable futures. In 2015, we plan to formalize this network by creating a listserv for individuals to share information and seek collaborators, and to maintain the University of Florida Imagining America blog site (<http://ufhumanities.tumblr.com/>) to document ongoing work in this vein.

Building on this accomplishment, new opportunities for sharing work and ideas among participants in our Extension Reconsidered activities are evolving. We expect more opportunities for Extension Reconsidered network members to collaborate to emerge over the next year.

Below is a sample list of on-going and new activities that demonstrate collaborative efforts that we currently are aware of that involve those who were involved in the Florida Extension Reconsidered Initiative workshops.

- Sophia K. Acord, Center for Humanities and Public Sphere and Mike Spranger, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences are exploring opportunities for several informal “show-and-tell” gatherings throughout 2015, built on the recommended Extension Café model. In this approach, Extension Reconsidered participants would volunteer to host an informal session at a convenient time and location. At the café, faculty in Arts, Humanities, Design, and Extension will gather to discuss their projects and explore opportunities for future collaboration.

- The Center for Humanities and Public Sphere has received funds to hire a 12-month postdoc in the public humanities in the 2015-2016 year. We hope to have this individual provide assistance in formalizing resources as we work further on collaborative efforts.
- Ferdinand Lewis, Department of Urban and Regional Planning and Center for Building Better Communities, coordinated development of *Creative By Nature: A Ten-Year Cultural Plan for the Communities of Alachua County, Florida*, which was presented to the City of Gainesville and Alachua County on December 10, 2014. As a result of this effort and next step, Dr. Lewis is exploring development of a Leadership Academy for Alachua County in 2015 that would bring together members from non-profit agencies, funding organizations and students to learn basic organizational, facilitation and grant skills.
- Jill Sonke, Center for the Arts in Medicine Program, is leading a planning team that is coordinating a Round-Table on “Creating Change: Arts for Rural Health” that will be held in the spring, 2015 in Tallahassee. The meeting has been endorsed and supported by the Florida Secretary of State Office and Division of Cultural Affairs. Several members who attended the Extension Reconsidered Meeting are involved in the planning of this event.
- Victor Harris, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences will conduct a three-day, in-service training for Extension faculty on “best practices in effective teaching and intercultural competencies” from March 30 - April 1, 2015 in Gainesville, Florida. Several members who attended the Extension Reconsidered Meeting have been asked to participate in this training.
- An emerging project for 2015 is an experimental National Issues Forum issue guide that is engaging the Extension Reconsidered network to facilitate community-level deliberative forums in rural places using cultural organizing strategies and tools. An initial meeting was held February 18-19, 2014 at the Kettering Foundation. Mike Spranger was invited to attend this meeting and will be involved in the project.
- IFAS Extension will be unveiling a new staffing plan in the spring, 2015. This plan may include new type of extension positions that may have regional or statewide responsibilities. We hope the recommendations made by the Extension Reconsidered Initiative to more community development/cultural arts programs considered as these new positions are created.

It is crucial that we continue to build partnerships and discussions across the University of Florida in this area to draw on cutting edge research and expertise in the areas of arts and culture as it serves its land-grant mission to empower Florida communities. And it is equally crucial that we invest the Extension expertise and service ethic across the University of Florida to connect research, teaching, and practice in support of the #GatorGood.² The work of art, design, and culture plays a vital role in celebrating Florida community life, connecting individuals to their communities for enhanced civic activity, and resolving historical conflicts to support a dynamic Florida in the 21st century.

² GatorGood seeks new ways of collaboration to make the world a better place. <http://gatorgood.ufl.edu/>