

Integration of the Land Grant mission areas at Tennessee State University

Issue:

Prior to 2008, the agricultural academic, research and Extension programs at Tennessee State University were operated independently of each other with separate administration, missions and visions. As such there was limited mission integration and no chance to leverage strengths among programs to enhance the stature of agriculture at the university. This circumstance led to a declining enrollment in agriculture, an academic program teetering on irrelevance, and stagnant research and Extension programs.

What has been done:

Major changes in the administrative, academic, and business structure were employed. A new Strategic Plan was developed. The separate administrative entities of academics, research and Extension were combined under a single administrative umbrella, utilizing a centralized reporting structure and one business/personnel office. All Extension and research professionals were transferred as faculty members into either the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences or the Department of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, and thus had a department chairperson as their direct supervisor. This action eliminated the 'silo effect' of separate teaching, research and Extension programs and greatly enhanced the integration of the programs. To further integrate the three entities, all faculty in each department were assigned to at least a two-way appointment in teaching/research, teaching/Extension or research/Extension. New initiatives in recruiting, retention, curriculum, infrastructure, staffing, Extension programming and research priorities were implemented.

Impacts/New Partnerships:

Through my mission integration efforts, many significant changes in the output and impact of the agriculture programs at Tennessee State University have occurred. Academics were improved by the formation of discipline-specific focus groups to update and change the curricula in the academic departments to reflect high-demand employment areas. New curricula (majors, concentrations) are in the university approval process. The expertise of the newly assigned faculty have been utilized to provide instruction. A Dean's Scholars program was created to enhance scholarship opportunities and to recruit high-performing students into the agricultural sciences. A major effort was made to jump-start the graduate research programs by providing funding for a large number of assistantships as a recruiting tool.

Extension and research impacts were enhanced by placing renewed importance on USDA priority areas. Individual faculty budgets were established to provide faculty with more oversight and responsibility for their research/Extension programs. To enhance the quality of research and Extension projects, and the level of success for external funding efforts, an internal review process for grant proposals (for internal and external funds) was initiated and a full time grant professional was hired. A universal annual faculty evaluation process was established to promote enhanced scholarly activity. Graduate faculty status was obtained for qualified faculty to provide improved opportunities for graduate student research. Improvement in staffing and infrastructure at the three Agricultural Research and Extension Center farms have provided additional opportunities for student and faculty-led research and Extension programs. New construction has included new open-roof greenhouse range, a state of the art landscape studio and have recently broken ground on a 30,000 ft² agricultural biotechnology building.

Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life)

Enhancement of academic efforts through integrating research and Extension into the academic programs has almost doubled the overall enrollment in Agricultural and Family/Consumer Sciences between 2008 and 2011. New curricula to meet the needs of our students and society have been developed. A Professional Science Masters Program (PSM) in Geospatial Sciences and a new Masters Degree Program in Agribusiness Management and Marketing have been approved by the University's governing body (Tennessee Board of Regents). In addition, we are awaiting final university approval for a new Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Sciences, new program concentrations in bioinformatics and biotechnology, and a new PSM in Food and Animal Science. The enhancements made to the graduate program in the Department of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences have led to growth from 11 students in 2008 to more than 90 students in 2012. As a consequence of the new internal review process for grant proposals and faculty access to a full time grant professional, external funds secured by faculty have increased from \$2 million to \$12 million, this past year. About 20 new Ph.D. level scientists have been added since my arrival, resulting in a 30% increase in faculty size. Counties staffed by TSU Extension agents have increased from 12 to 32. Legislative efforts resulted in a historical full match from the state of Tennessee to the 1890 land grant funds in the current year. Further, the recent reorganization at the University have led to the former School of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences being upgraded to the College of Agriculture, Human and Natural Sciences and now includes two new departments: Biological Sciences and Chemistry. College enrollment now stands at over 1100 students with 200 employees. In summary, the mission integration actions have produced the highest-performing agricultural teaching, research and Extension enterprise Tennessee State University has ever experienced.

How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience?

FSLI helped to examine objectively my personal strengths and weaknesses. The program has given me confidence in the processes I am utilizing in achieving the set goals for my Deanship. Particularly, the program helped me understand the importance and the need for effective communication to avoid potential derailments. The mentoring part of the program was extremely useful; the two presidents, Drs. Joe DiPietro (A FSLI Fellow and President of University of Tennessee) and Portia Shields (President of Tennessee State University) gave me insight into their positions and gave me precious personal advice on a variety of issues I have come across during this period.

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