

# University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service

## Academic Plan 2009 - DRAFT

### **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.

UW CES has faced a number of challenges over the past 20 years, as have many other Wyoming institutions and offices. For example, the demand for information has broadened, and in some cases, deepened. County based CES educators have been challenged to address a wide range of issues and needs raised by local residents.

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 long term success for any organization requires a periodic examination of its programs and organizational structure in light of changing needs and the cultural environment. This academic plan reflects a reexamination of the client needs and the effectiveness of UW CES. 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 directions 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 twenty-one 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 multiday retreat April 7 – 10, 2008. A draft academic plan was completed by the end of the retreat which was facilitated by Mary Randolph, Director of the Wyoming Rural Development Council. This draft academic plan provides an opportunity for you to review and comment. This draft will undergo at least two reviews by CES personnel and external stakeholders before it is submitted for College and University review in September 2008.

The organizing principles of this document mirror those outlined in the *UW Creation of the Future 2*, developed by the UW Office of Academic Affairs.

The strategic plan implemented in 2002 sought to place UW CES in a position to assist Wyoming residents in dealing with the challenges they face and optimize its contributions to the university. The plan identified the following vision and mission statements.

#### *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.

#### *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 (Actions 1 through 10), and those that fine tune the workings of the organization for greater efficacy and impact (Actions 11 through 24).

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

**Situation:** As a public land-grant institution, UW has an 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 these 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.

### **New programming initiatives**

**Situation:** Wyoming, its people and communities, is experiencing rapid change. The growth in the energy and mining sectors has impacted large areas of the state. Energy development is having an impact on 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.

An additional challenge for Wyoming's people, both rural and cities, 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 adjustment 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 build 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 provide additional human and other resources needed to build capacity for renewable energy work. Ongoing.

**Action 3:** UW CES will explore the opportunity to partner with others to provide education in energy conservation and efficiency for businesses and consumers. Complete by December 2010.

**Action 4:** 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 5:** 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 community work. Ongoing.

**Action 6:** 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 7:** 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 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 come 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 8:** 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 UW CES name/brand identity could be improved with a shortened and simplified name.

**Action 9:** Change the name of the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service to University of Wyoming Extension and develop a logo that is compliant with University Communications policy and creates an identifiable brand for UW CES. Complete by June 2010.

**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. 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 would facilitate a little more specialization and improve UW CES's ability to provide needed expertise. In addition, two-county area configuration has limited the availability of some initiative programming in some counties 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 thirteen counties on the eastern side of Wyoming into three Extension areas. However, other organizational patterns are possible.

**Action 11:** Organize the twenty-three counties of Wyoming into five Extension areas following two possible configurations.

*Suggested new area configuration:*

**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

*Alternate new area configuration:*

**Eastern Region:**

Central: Sheridan, Johnson, Natrona and Campbell,

Northeast: 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 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 discussion of team related goal statements among area and initiative team members. 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 partnership 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 county coordinator the responsibility to coordinate and enhance the program offerings for all initiatives in their county. Coordinating, encouraging, assisting, facilitating and supporting will be the key words describing this county coordinator responsibility. Complete by December 2009.

**Action 17:** County coordinators will continue to be evaluated annually by their supervisor. Incumbent county coordinators will be reviewed every five years by their supervisor to evaluate their effectiveness and reconsider the assignment of the county coordinator responsibilities. A CES working group will be organized to structure the format for the five-year 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 extensive and effective in some areas 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 June 2009.

**Action 19:** Issue teams will more aggressively seek out specialists and other professionals to participate in Extension program development.

### **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 20:** Training will be offered at annual conferences and other venues to increase the team leadership skills of all Extension employees. Complete by June 2010.

### **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 21:** 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 4-H program coordinator will lead the development of a revived 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 September 2009.

**Action 22:** 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 June 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 23:** UW CES will develop and implement a plan to more effectively organize initial training for new employees. Complete by May 2010.

**Action 24:** 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.