



April 1997

## UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EXTENSION

UW-Extension provides continuing education and public service programs through its Division of Continuing Education, and programs to serve children and families, farmers, urban and rural communities, business, and industry through its Division of Cooperative Extension. In fiscal year (FY) 1995-96, UW-Extension's expenditures from all funding sources were \$135.3 million, which represents the third-highest total among all UW System institutions. These expenditures supported 1,655 full-time equivalent positions.

### **UW-Extension Has Grown Significantly**

Over time, UW-Extension programs have expanded from emphasizing practical skills in agriculture, home economics, and industrial work to include all areas of human knowledge, presented through an array of seminars, workshops, televised distance education, and other means. Continuing education enrollment, which totaled 71,889 in FY 1966-67, increased to over 283,000 in FY 1995-96. In the Division of Cooperative Extension, county extension agents and other staff reported over 1.15 million program contacts in FY 1994-95, the latest year for which data were available.

UW-Extension's programs have a long tradition in Wisconsin, but the evolution and expansion of programs have contributed to a 79.4 percent increase in expenditures in the last ten years. Both the breadth and the increasing cost of current programming raise questions about whether UW-Extension should redefine its core mission, particularly since current priorities are defined so broadly that virtually any educational area can be included.

### **User Fees Could Provide Greater Support for Programming**

The single largest source of funding for the Division of Cooperative Extension is general purpose revenue (GPR); only 6.7 percent of the Division's FY 1995-96 expenditures were supported by program revenue derived, in part, from user fees. User fees for cooperative extension services have been limited largely by apparent federal prohibitions on charging for basic education services. However, at least two counties--Milwaukee and Waukesha--have become more aggressive in generating program revenue.

In contrast, program revenue supported 71.6 percent of program costs in the Division of Continuing Education. However, because UW institutions exercise considerable autonomy in setting fees for continuing education programming, there is significant variation in fees charged. For example, in FY 1995-96, a 7-hour non-credit program titled "Introduction to WordPerfect" was offered for \$159 at UW-Milwaukee and for \$45 at UW Center Marathon County. In addition, some institutions operated their FY 1995-96 continuing education programming at a deficit, while others carried forward sizable operating balances.

### **Efforts to Coordinate and Evaluate Programming Have Had Mixed Results**

Growth in programming and the evolution of programs offered have strained UW-Extension's resources. Therefore, UW-Extension's efforts to coordinate programming internally and with other public and private entities, such as the Wisconsin Technical College System, other state agencies that provide training, and private colleges and universities, are important to ensure that limited resources are allocated to areas of greatest need. However, results have been mixed. For example, UW-Extension and the Department of Commerce are providing similar general business counseling programs and technical support to small businesses, municipalities, and local economic development organizations.

UW-Extension evaluates its programs, but improvements should be made to increase the usefulness of these

evaluations. For example, reports on cooperative extension program outcomes often include vague descriptions of program success, and there is little consistency in how county agents report their contacts. For example, county agent contacts ranged from 794 per agent in Sawyer County to 9,178 per agent in Portage County. The federal government has also asked for more evaluation of cooperative extension programming.

### **The Future Funding and Direction of UW-Extension Should Be Examined**

Two recent events--the Governor's biennial budget proposal to reduce GPR support by \$2.5 million in each year of the 1997-99 biennium, and the January 1997 resignation of the UW-Extension Chancellor--suggest this may be an appropriate time for the future funding and direction of UW-Extension to be examined. To help establish priorities and a direction for the future, the Legislature, the UW System Board of Regents, UW System administration, and UW-Extension need to address whether the volume and diversity of program offerings have expanded beyond the State's capacity to fund them, whether current planning and evaluation processes can be improved, and the extent to which unnecessary duplication in programming and service delivery is occurring.

UW-Extension currently allocates 47.6 percent of its total funding to other UW System institutions. This percentage is even higher for the Division of Continuing Education, which transfers 86 percent of its funding to others. Costs savings and greater accountability could be realized if continuing education functions were conducted solely by the UW System campuses as part of their overall mission of teaching, research, and public service, and if cooperative extension district and statewide program administrative staff were merged.

The structure of UW-Extension is complicated by a number of organizational units that have been added over time. Some of these units are linked directly to other programs or services provided by UW-Extension. However, several--such as the Higher Education Location Program and the Wisconsin Survey Research Laboratory, which were attached to UW-Extension primarily because of their statewide constituencies--appear to be largely independent of other UW-Extension programs. Their addition has helped to create a confusing overlay of programs and services. Placement of these units in UW System or another UW institution could be considered in evaluating UW-Extension's future.-

\*\*\*\*

[View full summary](#)