

BRIDGING THE CHASM BETWEEN RESEARCH AND END USERS OF RESEARCH RESULTS: AN ONLINE GRADUATE PROGRAM IN GLOBAL AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS AND EXTENSION

Despite scientific advances and the revolution in information technologies, there remains a great chasm between those who know and those who don't know much about the food and agriculture complex. The consequences of such a divide grow increasingly dire. Two separate but related fields have the goal of reaching out and engaging diverse stakeholders in joint problem solving and opportunity seeking. Agricultural communications examines the communication processes among various actors within and external to agriculture, from research and production through processing, marketing, consumption, nutrition, and health. From its original focus on agricultural production, the field now encompasses natural resources and the environment, and other dimensions of rural wellbeing and agricultural sustainability within society. Extension, on the other hand, refers to the range of information, advice, training, and knowledge related to agriculture or livestock production, processing, and marketing provided by governments, land-grant universities, and other sources that increase farmers' ability to improve their productivity and income.

There is an urgent need for communication-extension education that will produce a new breed of professionals with a deep knowledge of food, agriculture, bio-renewable energy, the environment—plus the skill set to thrive in an ever-changing media environment so as to engage diverse stakeholders in joint problem solving and opportunity seeking.

The goal of this funding initiative is to establish an online graduate degree option emphasizing communication-extension in both international and domestic settings. It will serve students from abroad as well as those in the U.S. It will be tailored to the needs of communications professionals and academics, extension administrators and educators, advisory service practitioners, agricultural scientists, environmental scientists, food scientists, NGO professionals, and others in their roles as communicators.

This graduate program addresses an expressed, growing need for degree-based professional development in communication-extension related to food, agriculture, and the environment, globally.

OPPORTUNITY:

Reaching out to diverse audiences with evidence-based communications is an area of distinct historic strength for the Agricultural Communications Program and University of Illinois Extension. This proposal embodies the mission of these two programs—preparing communicators for service across a wide spectrum of settings, from local communities to global responsibilities. It capitalizes on the improved arrangement for collaboration between the College of ACES and the College of Media in implementing the Agricultural Communications Program. It taps ACES' existing strength in Extension and agricultural education, and the proven ability of its international efforts such as AgReach to provide guidance and support for innovative agricultural extension and advisory services worldwide. In short, this initiative contributes substantially in creating a university of international distinction.

There is strong demand and a favorable market for trained communicators able to translate research findings so that they are applied meaningfully to people's lives.



University of Illinois Extension
College of Agricultural, Consumer
and Environmental Sciences



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There are wide-ranging impacts of this communication-extension graduate program. Among them are:

1. The ability of the University of Illinois to lay claim to the only online, inter-disciplinary communication-extension graduate program addressing the full ACES mission with a global focus.
2. The training of communication and extension professionals who will help address the growing challenges related to food, feed, fiber, bioenergy, rural development, and other aspects of agriculture and the environment. As observers, reporters, conduits, links, and voices, communicators and extension agents operate from platforms that reach and serve millions.
3. The cultivation of intelligent consumers who are able to make informed decisions about the issues that directly affect them including, but not limited to, the food they eat, the land they cultivate, the environment in which they live, and the community infrastructures and services they receive.

RESOURCES REQUIRED:

To put this initiative in motion, we need a senior faculty position to develop the curriculum and establish the online learning environment. Programmatic funding for faculty and student research projects, guest lecturers, and experiential opportunities is also required.

Enrollment fees and other program expenses for domestic students may be provided by a large pool of firms and organizations at the local, state, and national levels. On the national level, it is expected to attract the funding interests of commercial firms and other organizations interested in improving the strategic communication-extension skills of their employees and constituents. This initiative is expected to generate support from international development organizations, national governmental agencies, foundations, and other organizations involved in agricultural and rural development.



University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

University of Illinois – U.S. Department of Agriculture – Local Extension Councils Cooperating