The Journal of NEAFCS

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Volume 6, 2011

JOURNAL OF NATIONAL EXTENSION ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES

President's Message

I am pleased and honored to introduce you to the 2011 *Journal of National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences*. The theme for this issue is "Social Marketing and Social Networking: Moving Extension FCS into the Future." All of us know, whether we engage in social media practices or not, that technology has changed the way we do business. Learn how your colleagues used these changes in their Extension programming—we all need to learn more about capturing audiences as they speed down the highway of technology.

Take the time to read our *JNEAFCS*. New submission categories expand the possibilities for our members to have their works published. *Research, Best Practices*, and *Implications for Extension* will help tell the story of current lessons learned through practical applications, trends, and emerging issues, as well as traditional research projects. How are these similar to issues in your state?

JNEAFCS is published as a member benefit to help you stay current with programming methodology and research that is specific to our Extension professions. As you read our journal, think about your own body of work, current issues, and future trends. Do you have something to say that will be of interest to readers of the journal and add to the knowledge base? Consider submitting an article as a professional goal for yourself in 2012—the deadline for submissions is December 31, 2011.

As an online resource, the journal is easy to share with your administrators, local and state policymakers and advisory groups, and peers so they are also aware of the valuable work done by extension Family and Consumer Sciences educators from across the nation. Help share our story and let others know of our efforts and strong impacts across the country. Extension work matters! Research proves that!

I would also like to extend a huge "*Thank You*" to Lou Mueller of Utah State University Cooperative Extension, and Teresa Byington of the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, for their hard work and dedication as co-editors of the journal and co-chairs of the Journal Editorial Subcommittee. My appreciation also goes to members of the subcommittee, peer reviewers, and to our Vice President of Member Resources, Lora Lee Howard, for a quality, peer-reviewed, professional publication that helps preserve our valuable research and resources for the future.

Sincerely,

Amy B. Peterson, President (2011-2012)
National Extension Association of Family & Consumer Sciences

National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences

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Journal of National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences

From the Editor

Welcome to Volume 6 of the *Journal of National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences.* I want to thank co-editor Teresa Byington (NV) for her dedication and many contributions to the journal. We are pleased to share some of our more recent successes, including a prominent link on the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences home page (www.neafcs.org). Public access elevates the journal's profile by making it more accessible to readers and providing complete access to all editions of the journal. Also provided are newly revised Submission Guidelines and a link to an Author's Checklist. Using these tools will help assure that all requirements are met and improve outcomes for authors.

Another significant development is the extended deadline of December 31, allowing more time for authors to polish manuscripts. Themed issues have been discontinued and two new submission categories have been identified: Best Practices and Implications for Extension. These options offer publication opportunities to colleagues without research assignments and are loosely defined to be more inclusive.

- **Research** includes procedures and outcomes—basic or applied, quantitative or qualitative—which are essential to successful extension programs.
- **Best Practices** may not always incorporate a research component, but should focus on lessons learned through practical applications that extend Extension's base of knowledge.
- **Implications for Extension** feature trends and emerging issues that benefit Family and Consumer Sciences professionals.

Other resources posted on the *JNEAFCS* website include a helpful slide show titled, "Writing and Reviewing for the *Journal of NEAFCS*" (also available as a webinar at http://www.neafcs.org/content.asp?pageID=2036). We are currently soliciting reviewers for the 2012 volume; contact me if you are interested. Becoming a reviewer for *JNEAFCS* not only helps you make a valuable contribution to your association, but also strengthens your writing skill set by providing important insights into the publication process. Members of the Journal Editorial Subcommittee enjoy the same benefits so consider joining through Member Resources.

With “housekeeping” behind us, it is time to introduce your 2011 issue of the *Journal of National Extension of Family and Consumer Sciences*. This is the last themed volume so our first four articles address, “Social Marketing and Social Networking: Moving Extension FCS into the Future." Find out how your colleagues are using social media to capture new audiences.

Details of a survey conducted at one university to determine how and if Extension professionals used social media were shared, and suggestions on how to develop an effective social media strategy were offered (Kinsey, 2011). Twitter, for example, was described as a critical venue for disseminating parenting information to a broader audience (Forstadt & Stone, 2011). Insights into how an eXtension Community of Practice used Frequently Asked Questions to transfer knowledge and measure results were also addressed (O’Neill, Zumwalt, Ravenscraft, Swanson & Seiling, 2011). The importance of offering a balanced mix of traditional and electronic teaching methods was verified by Forstadt (2011). Other researchers utilized mixed methods, including a website, to promote healthy lifestyles for men (Stephenson et al., 2011).

Of general interest, researchers shared methods used to strengthen marriages through experiential date night activities (Brower, Darrington & Bradford, 2011). Another study identified leadership styles and described how these styles impacted group dynamics on Extension subject matter teams (Herringshaw, 2011). Some may remember the 50th anniversary of NEAFCS (then known as the National Association of Extension Home Economists) and a survey that was conducted among members to determine major concerns of their constituents at that time. To follow up, another study was conducted in 2009 for the 75th anniversary and a fascinating comparison of both studies was shared, reminding us that we live in changing times and must continually assess and evaluate our programs to meet current needs (Scholl, Syracuse & Kneip, 2011).

Twelve manuscripts were submitted for the 2011 volume: nine were accepted and one withdrew, resulting in a 75% publication rate. Those are pretty good odds, so we encourage you to submit your manuscripts to *JNEAFCS*. Many circumstances affect our annual publication schedule so while we cannot predict a definite publication date, we can guarantee that manuscripts accepted for publication for a given year will be published during that year.

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Defining an Effective Social Media Strategy for Family and Consumer Sciences Educators

Joanne Kinsey

A study was conducted among Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) Family & Community Health Sciences, 4-H, and Agricultural & Resource Management Agents to determine usage of technology tools. Results determined (1) their use of Web 2.0 technologies, (2) their level of interest in Web 2.0 technologies, and (3) appropriate training and resource needs to maximize the effectiveness of this technology in programming. This article outlines outcomes of the study and offers recommendations for Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) educators for designing an effective social media strategy.

Early software development produced static Web pages featuring information for users. In the later years of Web development, Web 2.0 software emerged allowing for interactivity among communities or groups of people through social networking sites, blogs, wikis, and video sharing sites. These interactive tools enabled users to collaborate and share information with their followers and clientele. Web 2.0 software can be confusing in terms of sifting through a vast array of interactive technology tools to determine which social media tools will produce the greatest impact. This article will help Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) educators (1) analyze three online tools to better understand their usefulness and (2) determine a personal social media marketing strategy. The tools suggested are available to Internet users free of cost so financial expense is not a factor in making the best decision.

The Internet can be quite useful by extending our reach electronically. Current data from the *Pew American Life Project* (2010) provides an eye-opening account of how much time Americans are using the Internet to communicate with friends, family, and colleagues. For example, Americans spend an average of 29 hours per month online (outside of work time), or about the amount of time spent on a part-time job. The Pew Project notes that 74% of American adults are online as of 2010, including 60% of low-income Americans. Today 52% to 92% of Women, Infant and Children (WIC) federal nutrition program recipients are online due to the widespread use of cell phones with Internet capacities. Recent figures show that more Black and Hispanic individuals are online than Whites, whereas in 2008 more White Americans were online than Black and Hispanic Americans (PEW American Life Project, 2010).

Statistics confirm that consumers of information, both local and global, are relying on information obtained with online tools. In addition, "infotainment" (i.e., a combination of entertainment and information) is how many individuals are learning online. More people are getting "news" from Facebook, Twitter, satellite radio, and online news outlets, while fewer people are reading hard-copy newspapers (PEW American Life Project, 2010). The response for FCS educators is clear: we must be offering programs, research-based information, lessons, newsletters, and other promotional materials in the electronic world. The challenge is to make the most of our expertise and function in the world where the community resides: online. In an effort to identify the social media needs and training, a study was conducted with Rutgers Cooperative Extension staff. The results of the study follow.

Objectives

The objectives were to (1) quantify the use of Web 2.0 technologies by Rutgers Cooperative Extension field faculty and staff, (2) determine their level of interest in Web 2.0 technologies, and (3) recommend appropriate training and resource needs to maximize the effectiveness of this technology in RCE programming.

Method

A Web 2.0 Usage Survey

Cooperative Extension program participants have historically been reached through one-on-one consultations, educational workshops, and other processes that share science-based knowledge. To quantify the potential to expand programmatic outreach via Web 2.0 technologies, a web-based survey of Rutgers Cooperative Extension faculty and staff in agricultural and resource management, family and community health sciences, and youth development was conducted (Kluchinski, et al, 2009). The survey respondents *(N=61)* were asked about barriers to using Web 2.0 technologies, their previous use of and contributions to Internet-based communication, hardware devices used, and their use of these technologies in their programmatic activities.

Findings

Survey results indicated the greatest barriers were lack of time to learn and use Web 2.0 technologies (61% of respondents), and lack of knowledge about these technologies (49%). The highest daily/weekly used technologies were e-mail listservs (84%), online purchasing (21%) and blogs (20%), while respondents reported rarely/never using social bookmarking (89%), chat rooms (86%), or professional networks (75%). The highest daily/weekly contributions to these technologies were e-mail listservs (42%), online calendars (26%), and instant messaging (22%), while most rarely/never contributed to chat rooms (92%), wikis, and professional networks (both 91%) as identified in Table 1.

Table 1. Use of Web 2.0 technologies by department in 2008.

	Department			
Technology	4-H[1] (n=15)	ARMA[2] (n=31)	FCHS[3] (n=11)	Other[4] (n=4)
Video/picture sharing (%)	26.7	25.8	36.4	33.3
Social networking (%)	26.7	16.7	9.1	0

[1]4-H (4-H Youth Development). [2]ARMA (Agricultural & Resource Management Agents). [3]FCHS (Family & Community Health Sciences). [4] Other (unidentified department).

Differences in technology use across career stages were observed. Nearly half (46%) of early-career (0-10 years) employees reported daily/weekly use of social networking sites, compared to 14% for mid-career (11-20 years) employees, and 0% for late-career (21+ years) employees (Table 2). These results suggest a need for significant training of Extension professionals, particularly older employees with longer service, to increase their awareness and knowledge of Web 2.0 technologies, and how they may increase efficiency and enhance dissemination of educational programming to a wider audience.

Table 2. Impact of career stage on use of Web 2.0 technologies in 2008.

	Career Stage		
Technology	Early[1] (n = 16)	Mid[2] (n = 21)	Late[3] (n = 24)
Video/picture sharing (%)	46.7	19	25
Social networking (%)	46.7	14.3	0

[1]Early-career (0-10 years). [2]Mid-career (11-20 years). [3]Late-career (21+ years).

Social Media Tools

Below is a list of technology tools that can assist busy FCS educators in taking a program online to gain a maximum amount of exposure and promote their community education work by enlisting Web 2.0 technologies.

YouTube. YouTube attracts an incredible number of users on a daily basis. In May 2010, approximately 2 billion videos were viewed per day, 13 hours of video were uploaded every minute, and it would take over 412 years to watch every video that was online at that time (Wikipedia, 2010). Without a doubt, engaging learners using an online video or podcast (i.e., automated presentation created from a PowerPoint, or an audio message delivered with or without photographs) is worth the time it takes to create and upload the FCS message. Creating a podcast can be as simple as designing a PowerPoint slide show, automating it, and uploading it as a movie. Voice-overs or music can also be added for additional interest.

The average consumer is adept at using online video so they can easily locate information when searching on the Internet. Visual literacy (reading and writing) is heightened for users in an interactive venue, adding to the value of posting informational messages online (Educause Learning Initiative, 2006). FCS educators may consider publishing demonstrations of food preparation and food safety techniques, nutrition analyses of commonly prepared foods, household safety tips, financial education information, family and human development topics, seminars or workshops (Xie and Gu, 2007). Video can be a powerful and educational tool that allows the user to work towards achieving curricular objectives (Duffy, 2008).

The popularity of YouTube makes it an attractive tool for Extension educators due to its viral nature (i.e., ability to be quickly transmitted from one person to the next via e-mail and social media) and the ease of use and accessibility by audiences of all ages (Kinsey, 2010). Reports can be generated and saved from YouTube's "Insight" tracking tool. These reports include a variety of graphs and charts that provide user-friendly data tracking information.

Facebook. Facebook is a rapidly growing, interactive, online social media venue, which more than doubled its number of users between 2009 and 2010—from 200 million to 500 million as reported in July 2010 (PEW American Life Project, 2010). The fastest growing demographic on Facebook is women over the age of 50 who use this venue mainly to keep in touch with children and grandchildren. The popularity of this tool is its user-friendly, interactive Web-page appeal. In essence, people of all ages flock to Facebook to keep track of happenings and news in the lives of family, friends, favorite retail shops, clothing lines, sports teams, schools, and other venues.

FCS educators are using Facebook for promoting program materials, fact sheets, announcements, upcoming events, informational pieces, links to related articles, and video. Since Facebook attracts followers who are interested in the creator's postings, it is necessary to develop a group of “friends” in order to spread the message about FCS programs. It is easy to understand that Facebook’s energy is contagious and easily promoted among friends and groups of friends in the virtual community.

Blogs. Blogs, originally referred to as Web-logs, are a tool used for sharing expertise and information via comments. Blogs are public interactive Web tools since readers can leave comments. Bloggers range from professionals to lay-people who share information and Web links to readers or followers. The Pew American Life Projects (2010) reported that 96.5 million people read blogs and 30 million authored blogs.

Blogs can encourage creativity among readers and can encourage people to engage in reading and writing skills. Essentially, blogs give people a place to share information. Consumers often use reliable blogs when searching for product reviews and commentary. Blogs provide a venue where FCS educators can contribute research-based information to the local and global consumer. Since blogs can be established by anyone on the Internet, it is crucial for Extension educators to establish a positive reputation and community following online (Kinsey, 2010).

Summary

Research at Rutgers Cooperative Extension demonstrated that staff lacked experience and/or confidence using a variety of technology tools, therefore time and training is needed to update technology skills. When effectively trained and armed with the right Web 2.0 technologies, Extension FCS educators are well positioned to generate positive attention for their outreach programs. By using free online technology tools, educators can reach broad numbers of local and global learners.

YouTube’s viral appeal and ability to reach far corners of the globe make it worthy of consideration in the personal social media strategy toolbox. A simple video placed on YouTube can provide a venue for demonstrations, step-by-step instructions, research-based information from fact sheets, PowerPoint presentations, and other materials, allowing educators to extend their teaching into a wide classroom laboratory (Gentry, 2008). FCS educators could convert their existing educational materials into a “new” promotion by posting their products and resources online.

Facebook’s popularity, flexibility, and ease of use make it a strong contender in a personal social media strategy. The availability of uploaded photographs and documents, links to articles, and links to other Facebook pages allows the tool to be easily established to fit the needs of the user. FCS educators can generate momentum for their page by starting with an interesting variety of educational resources and accumulating a list of followers starting with friends and family. Once a cadre of followers is engaged, Facebook can be kept current with frequent posts and updates.

For FCS educators, blogging on a regular basis can provide relevant information for the community. The challenge with blogs is the ability to attract followers to the site. Many bloggers find it useful to connect with communities of bloggers of similar interests. Often bloggers comment on the posts of fellow bloggers to generate conversation and debate controversial issues. Links to a blog should become a routine part of an FCS educator's signature line, on a Facebook page, and, whenever possible, on a YouTube video, in an effort to generate maximum exposure to online venues.

To get started with a personal social media tools strategy, one could research how FCS peers are using social media tools then determine a reasonable first step. The FCS educator can create simple video by using photographs or graphics with a simple message. Individual photographs can be saved in Joint Photographic Experts Group (.jpeg) format, inserted into a PowerPoint presentation, and then saved in a movie (.mov) format to automate the slide transition. A different starting point is to enhance an existing Web site to offer opportunities for viewers to pose questions, complete a simple survey, and view or embed educational videos. Once comfortable with the interactivity of Web 2.0, FCS educators may want to engage the community in a blog as a direct way to interact with consumers.

Implications for Extension

When considering a social media strategy, FCS educators should determine the ease of use of a technology tool, and the amount of time invested in the creation and maintenance of the tool. They should search for related sites, video postings, and Web blogs to gain an understanding of how others are using these tools. Decisions about social media strategies should be based on where FCS educators can produce desired results and justify the investment of their precious time and energy. Once stepping out into the world of social media tools and experimenting with one or more venues, FCS educators will find the most appropriate and advantageous fit to extend their work into the global community. The time is ripe for FCS educators to step-out into the global community with a personalized social media strategy.

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The Art of Communicating with Twitter

Leslie A. Forstadt and H. Marissa Stone

Twitter is an easy-to-use, social-networking medium that can be utilized by Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) professionals to expand outreach and communicate regularly with their audiences. Twitter projects related to electronic dissemination of two parenting newsletters are described, as are suggestions for how to get started using this technology, ideas for building followers, and tips on engaging others in these efforts.

With so many social networking possibilities available (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, You Tube), Twitter is one way to reach a vast audience with a minimal time investment. Twitter is an online, real-time, regularly-updated information network that connects the account holder (the "tweeter") to their audience (the "follower"). Twitter has become increasingly popular over the past several years, in part, because of the many ways members can post their messages. For instance, Tweeters can post via the Twitter website (http://twitter.com) using a mobile phone, via email, or through another instant messaging program. This versatility has helped move Twitter to the top of the list of microblogging sites because it creates a convenient, yet powerful, microsharing environment that is controlled by the Twitter community itself (Drapeau, 2009). Based on who you follow (i.e., communicate with) and who follows you, Twitter can be equally effective as a professional or a social networking tool (Drapeau, 2009; Thompson, 2007). Twitter stands out from other social networking tools because it can connect people with like interests (Lucky, 2009) in real-time, making the exchange of information immediate (Parry, 2008; Young, 2008).

Tweeters participate by sending status updates (i.e., short amounts of information as text messages called "tweets") to their followers electronically. Followers can then share that information with their own followers—a process called "retweeting." A tweet must be 140 characters or less, which is generally enough space to share a quick thought, answer a question, or embed media or articles. Tweeters can include embedded media or articles through the use of programs that offer shortened website links, called URLs, enabling the follower to click on a link (the URL) to a webpage where the media or article is posted. Tweets are easy to create and once you have a Twitter account (Figure 1), you can tweet and retweet messages you receive, while others retweet your messages to their followers, and so on. Welcome to a new way to connect vast audiences by way of technology (Twitter, 2010).

The Art of Communicating with Twitter

Statistics on Twitter

Twitter boasts 175 million registered users, with 100 million active users per month, averaging 250 million tweets per day (Parr, 2011). Over 50% of those active monthly users post new tweets daily. Additionally, because Twitter is easily accessible on a smartphone, (i.e., iPhone, Android, Blackberry) 55% of Twitter users log in from a mobile device to share information anytime and anywhere. The median age of a Twitter user is 31 years, with 33% being 18 to 29 year olds, and 22% being 30 to 49 years old (Fox, Zickuhr, & Smith, 2009).

Several different types of communities use Twitter and each affords a unique opportunity for followers at different communication levels (Akshay, Song, Finin & Tseng, 2007). One type of community is a group of friends who follow one another's daily activities, engage in two-way conversations, and share their locations throughout the day. They may tweet about events, conferences or other special occasions. Another type of community uses Twitter to report on news headlines, current events, and share information from multiple news sources. Still other communities form around gathering and sharing information and following experts who post daily on topics of interest. This is where Cooperative Extension fits in, and where *The Growing Years* (TGY) from the University of Maine Extension, and *Just in Time Parenting* (JITP), from eXtension.org, offer parenting and family-related information. Because TGY and JITP are extension resources with affiliation to land grant universities, both use Twitter to promote research-based information with a professional and trusted voice.

To Tweet or Not to Tweet

There are multiple services available to assist members in managing their Twitter accounts. Most include management options such as (1) pre-scheduled tweets (i.e., Twuffer, Hootsuite and Tweetdeck); (2) shortened URLs or Web addresses (i.e., TinyUrl, Bit.ly); and (3) user analytics (i.e., Hootsuite, Tweetstats, and Twoolr) to evaluate how many clicks and retweets each Twitter account receives. These services help users strengthen connections between their tweets, their blogs, or their Facebook posts, and allow more information to be conveyed in a tweet, which increases the success of their overall Twitter campaign. Despite these user-friendly options of communicating information (i.e., parenting information) to followers (i.e., potential parents and families, especially new parents), one drawback to Twitter is that the information in tweets is seen only by those who follow the tweeter, those who retweet to others who follow them, or by those who search Twitter for content. Therefore, it is critical to consistently post relevant and interesting information, and to engage in two-way conversations with followers.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to expand the reach of *The Growing Years* and *Just In Time Parenting* and newsletters using Twitter as a platform for reaching new audiences. Twitter was viewed as a way to reach out to new groups and build awareness among those who might not otherwise recognize that Extension provides diverse parenting and child development resources and information.

Method

Parenting newsletters such as *The Growing Years* (Twitter address: @TheGrowingYears) and *Just In Time Parenting* (Twitter address: @JITParenting) have used Twitter since 2009 as a method to disseminate research-based parenting and child development information and resources to new audiences. Teams contributing to both newsletters were interested in finding new ways to reach out to parents with trusted, research-based information provided by Extension. Therefore, Twitter was adopted and tweets were developed to communicate with parents and highlight current extension resources, trends in parenting, and relevant feature articles on extension websites or other trusted sources. The tweets sent by TGY and JITP enabled followers to receive detailed information on parenting topics through website links shared within each tweet.

An important aspect of building followers was to tweet on a regular basis. A good rule of thumb was to send a maximum of 10 Tweets per day, not including weekends and holidays. Though difficult to keep up with, daily updates increased the potential for more followers and higher numbers of tweets. Both *The Growing Years* and *Just In Time Parenting* newsletters posted to Twitter on a regular basis using a variety of strategies. TGY worked with faculty in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine to recruit students who were well-versed in technology (or willing to learn). Participating students received up to two independent course credits for their contributions. Through trial and error, the TGY team discovered emerging technologies to help post daily tweets to followers. One such technology, called Twuffer (http://twuffer.com), was selected because it allowed tweets to be scheduled in advance, making it easier to manage a daily Tweet schedule. Tweets from TGY were structured so that each tweet contained an external Web link to a report or publication. At least once each week, a resource from University of Maine Cooperative Extension, or another state Extension, or eXtension.org, was featured.

The Just In Time Parenting eXtension Community of Practice (eCoP) worked closely with a human development graduate student interested in emerging online educational tools for the dissemination of parenting information. The JITP team used free services from Hootsuite (http://hootsuite.com) and Tweetdeck (http://www.tweetdeck.com) to schedule tweets and manage followers. Instead of typing in a tweet update through Twitter, the team set up RSS (Rich Simple Syndication) feeds, which allowed for updates to happen concurrently. When the team posted an update to their eXtension website (http://www.extension.org/parenting) or their blog (www.jitp.wordpress.com), those updates automatically posted as tweets for followers to view. Updates and retweets also happened in the other direction, so that when an RSS feed was displayed on a primary webpage, each tweet posted to the Twitter account also showed up on the website (Table 1). JITP tweets all contained research-based parenting information including current publications, featured articles on trending topics, as well as upcoming extension parenting webinars and events. JITP tweets also included external links to age-paced, parenting e-newsletters available on the main JITP website. Both newsletters provide a service to followers by offering evidence-based information on appropriate and significant parenting topics and issues.

Findings

Newsletter Followers

Twitter followers are very important—the more followers you have, the further your messages will reach, with the potential for greater impact. Therefore, to increase followers, both *The Growing Years* and *Just In Time Parenting* immediately followed someone who followed them. This option was set automatically within Twitter resulting in easy maintenance for the Twitter account manager. Another method used by both newsletters was to look at each other's followers and follow those who identified parenting information in their profiles and follow those on various parenting-related Twitter lists (i.e., groups tied into groups of other Twitter users), and relevant followers from those sources.

By using Twitter to connect with new audiences, TGY has established 371 followers, posted 643 informative tweets, and been added to 9 Twitter lists since it began using Twitter in 2009 (TheGrowingYears, 2011). To help build their following, TGY used Twitter periodically to search for parenting or related topics and follow relevant users discovered during those searches. By identifying and following parents or family-related tweeters, those tweeters often followed back.

JITP adopted similar practices in searching out like-minded individuals to follow. JITP however, included an additional strategy, using Rich Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, which allowed JITP to experience tremendous growth since it began using Twitter in 2009. JITP currently has 1,187 followers, has posted 1429 informative tweets, and is listed 27 times (JITParenting, 2011). By setting up RSS feeds early on, and increasing the number of those feeds in February 2011, JITP had tweets being automatically posted from multiple relevant sources (i.e., website, blog, Facebook), which allowed more users to learn about the option to follow JITP on Twitter. These RSS feeds enabled content to be tweeted automatically as it was created, keeping fresh pertinent information flowing to followers daily. Figure 2 illustrates the rate of tweets for TGY and JITP over the past two years.

Other follower-building efforts both teams engaged in included: regular or frequent "live" postings; retweets of relevant, research-based information; consistent response to followers in online conversations; and for JITP, tweets from conferences or other parenting events and a technically-oriented graduate student in charge of the account. These methods increased the number of followers acquired over time.

A Tale of Two Strategies

While there is always something to be said for face-to-face programming and the importance of one-on-one conversation, Figure 2 clearly illustrates the advantage of auto-promoting your Twitter account. Regular posting of applicable information take time and in a world of increasing budget cuts, everyone is being asked to do more with less. Therefore, it is important to find creative new ways to connect with audiences by offering them the same, if not greater, level of expertise while expending fewer resources.

Through the use of RSS feeds to populate their Twitter stream, *Just In Time Parenting* appeared to the Twitterverse (i.e., people communicating via Twitter) as considerably more active than *The Growing Years*, which may have led to increased followers over time. In contrast, TGY relied on a "single-post-a-day" strategy and did not actively seek out RSS feed options that would have enabled fresh new content to be posted to followers daily. Further, automating the JITP Twitter account allowed a diverse selection of content to be delivered to followers. By identifying a number of interesting blogs, websites, and individuals, JITP was able to ascertain those who produced the most relevant, research-based content and set up RSS feeds from those accounts to the JITP account. This enabled JITP to act as an aggregator of information, which strengthened the connection between JITP and its followers.

Summary

Twitter is easy to use and allows FCS professionals to reach new audiences using relevant, research-based informational tweets. The teams from *The Growing Years* and *Just In Time Parenting* revealed how a number of strategies and technologies could be used to gain a robust Twitter following. Further, by providing reliable parenting and child development information to these followers, TGY and JITP were able to retain these new audiences through informative tweets.

Implications for Extension

According to Followerwonk (http://followerwonk.com), a specialized Twitter search application, there are 5,887 Twitter users with "parenting" in their bios. These Twitter users include physicians, psychologists, practitioners, big name corporations, and novice and veteran parents who share their experiences (Followerwonk, 2011). Professionals and lay persons such as these are on Twitter with different types of advice, sales pitches, and recommendations. Thus, there is always competition over saturated audiences, and for Extension, the verdict is not yet out; finding a niche for Extension on Twitter is still in its infancy. One challenge to effective tweeting is the element of conversation, which is one reason many people connect on Twitter (Akshay, Song, Finin & Tseng, 2007; Honey & Herring, 2009). The JITP team is currently engaging in conversation with friends on Twitter and Facebook, and has auto responders set up to connect with followers on Twitter. Rather than simply sharing information on Twitter, JITP is becoming part of the social-networking community.

Another means of connecting with the community on Twitter can be most efficiently done in weekly or bi-monthly "tweet-ups," where tweeters and followers engage in a real-time, "instant-message," or "chat-room" style conversation about a trending parenting topic for the duration of one hour. These tweet-ups may increase user participation, and have the potential to enhance and solidify community connections within this social network. Ultimately, FCS professionals seeking to use Twitter must determine the purpose, the desired audience, compile a team to carry out the tasks, and devise an evaluation plan.

Note

For additional information on how to use Twitter, go to eXtension.org and Ask an Expert. You may also preview an instructional 60 minute webinar on getting started, including how to create an account, post and read messages, find applications, define terminology, and more (Dorner, 2011).

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Table 1. Sample Tweets	
Tweets from TGY	Tweets from JITP
Understanding Cyber Bullying: New technology is being created every minute and the Internet is now widely availa... bit.ly/q7CRWw	Exploring Military Deployment Through the Eyes of Youth: Implications for Research and Practice http://ht.ly/6BTHy #Milfam
Parenting from Away: For about 100 inmates at the Wiscasset jail, a parenting education class offered by Univers... http://bit.ly/mGGNF1	Retweet @TheGrowingYears: Planning for School Conferences with Ease: As the new school years starts, you may wonder h... http://bit.ly/oMe3jv
Getting outside with the family this summer: When was the last time you took a walk, played tag outside with you... http://bit.ly/kR203V	What Can I Pack my Kids for Lunch? Every fall, as school s... http://bit.ly/nHvTrP #CESvalue #JITP

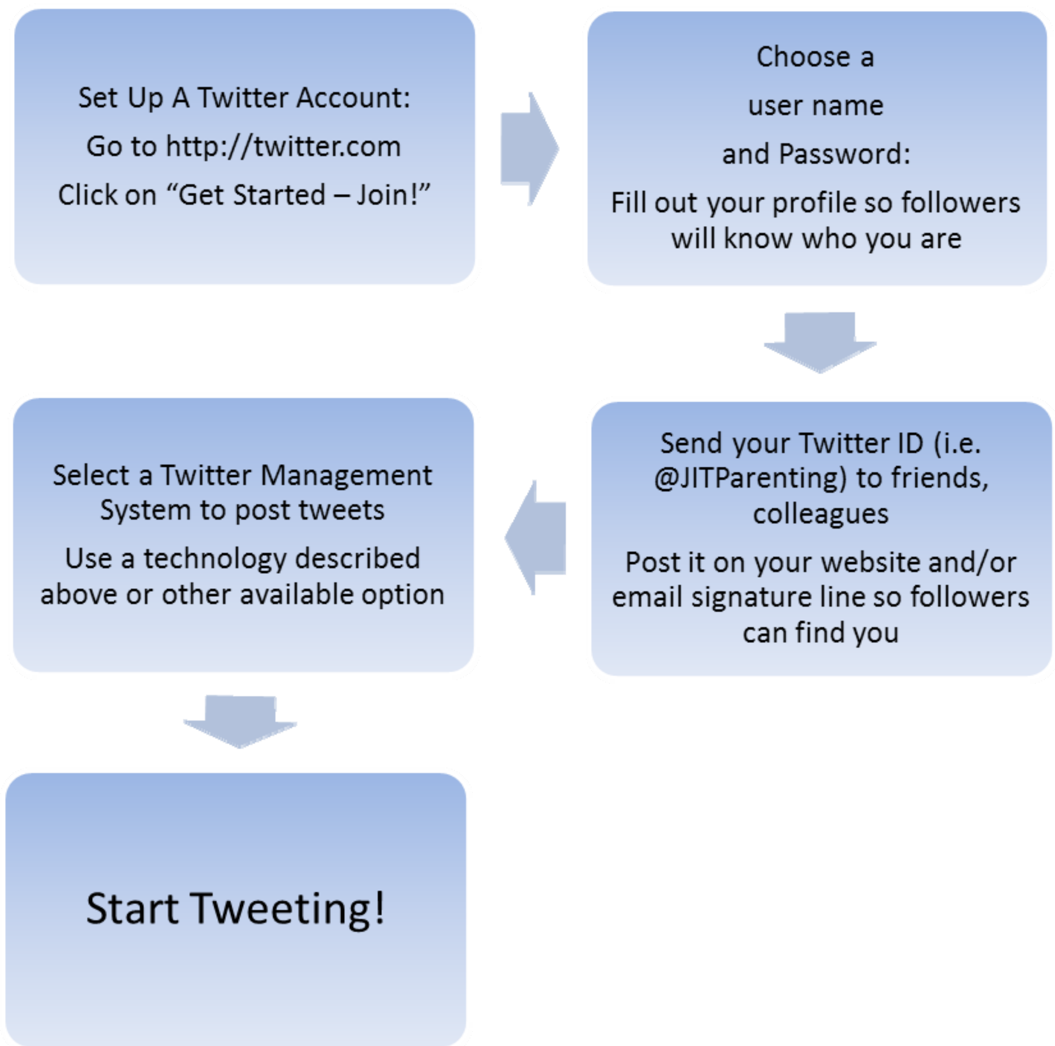

Figure 1. Getting Started with Twitter

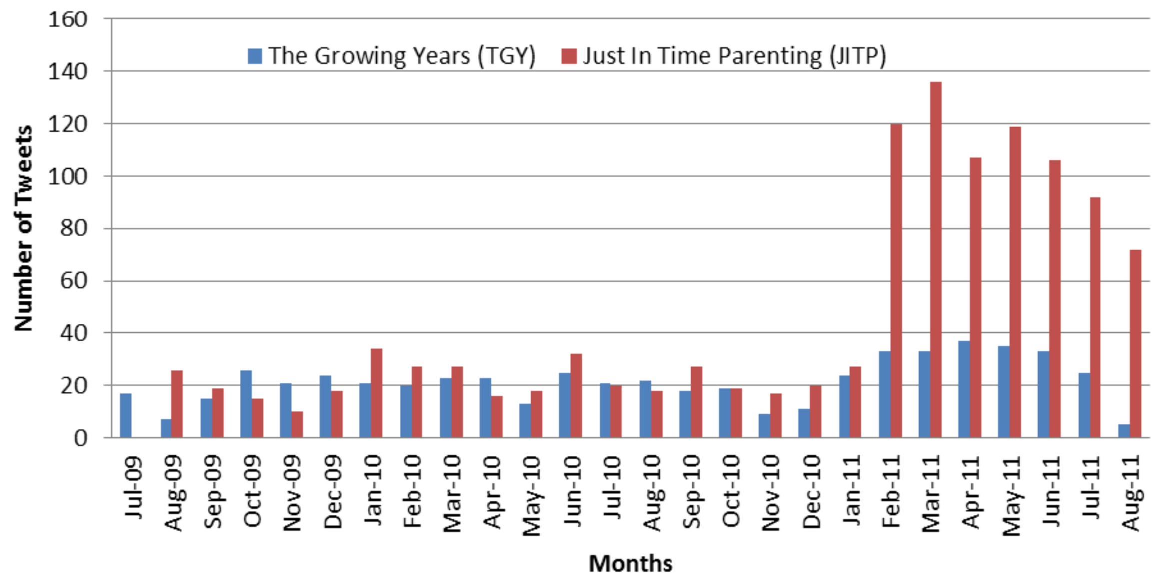

Figure 2. Number of Monthly Tweets from *TGY and JITP 2009-11*

Social Networking in Extension Education: Working Smarter and Evaluating Impact

Barbara O'Neill, Andrew Zumwalt, Michael Ravenscraft,
Patricia Swanson, Sharon B. Seiling

This article describes specific ways that members of the eXtension Financial Security for All Community of Practice (FSA CoP) have used social networking tools and developed methods to "work smarter, not harder" in the posting of online content. It also discusses types of content that can be disseminated via social networking and how to evaluate the impact of social networking outreach. The article concludes with results of one of the first studies ever conducted to track the impact of a financial education social media project.

Less than ten years ago, interactive outlets available on the Internet consisted of discussion forums, which could be hard to navigate, and some early blogs. Since then, the use of social media has exploded. For many people, popular social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn are a part of everyday life. Social media can be defined as user-generated content. For example, Web site users, themselves, are posting information for review and comment by others rather than relying on subject matter experts. The days of one-way "broadcast media" (e.g., radio, television, newspapers, Cooperative Extension) as a centralized source of information have long since passed. The Internet has increasingly been providing new democratized mechanisms through which people can make their own content available (Boyd, 2010).

To provide some perspective on the growth and influence of social media, it is helpful to review some current statistics. Americans spend nearly a quarter of their time online on social networks and blogs, up from 15.8% a year ago, a 43% increase (Social Networking Watch, 2010). Facebook is the dominant social networking site in the U.S. with more than 500 million active Facebook users. If Facebook were a country, it would be the third largest in the world behind India and China (Facebook Statistics, 2010), well above the population of the United States (about 309 million). The world's second most popular search engine (after Google) is the self-produced video Web site, YouTube.

Twitter ended 2009 with just over 75 million accounts and is now attracting 190 million visitors per month and generating 65 million tweets (short messages of 140 characters or less) per day (Schonfeld, 2010). Other popular social networking outlets include social gaming (e.g., FarmVille, Mafia Wars, Scrabble) and virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life). More than 200 million people play social games every month and the numbers grow by the thousands every day (Social Networking Watch, 2010).

Like many organizations, Cooperative Extension has begun to use social media to create and deliver educational content to new and existing clientele. Advantages of social media tools include timely dissemination of information, expanded outreach, and facilitation of interactive communication, connection, and public engagement (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). Much of the social networking outreach in Cooperative Extension is being done by eXtension communities of practice (CoPs), but not without several time-related challenges. The first challenge is finding time to learn the mechanics of how to blog, tweet, create a YouTube video, or construct a Facebook page or LinkedIn profile. The second is finding the time to do it on an ongoing basis.

Purpose

This article describes specific ways that members of the eXtension Financial Security for All (FSA) CoP have used social networking tools and developed methods to “work smarter, not harder” in the posting of online content. It also discusses types of content that can be disseminated via social networking and how to evaluate the impact of social networking outreach. The article concludes with results of one of the first studies ever conducted to evaluate the impact of a financial education social media project.

Why Use Social Media?

Quite simply, social networking provides access to large and diverse audiences. This is true today and will be increasingly so in the future as usage trends upward. The social networking outreach numbers cited above make this abundantly clear. Kinsey (2010) notes that social media tools are an increasingly popular way for people to access information outside the constraints of time and place. She also states that Extension educators need to keep abreast of new technology, including social media tools, and make time in their busy schedules for training and experimentation. Social networking tools are especially well suited for Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) educators who often reach a predominantly female clientele with their programming. Studies show that women favor social networking applications on cell phones and social gaming more than men (Social Networking Watch, 2010).

Social networking is an asynchronous teaching method, which means that information is available anytime, anywhere. Thus, it improves the availability of content compared to traditional methods of disseminating information (e.g., printed materials and face-to-face classes). Social networking also has the ability to make educational messages more effective and change learner behavior because it facilitates the presentation of information in multiple formats from multiple sources. Research has found that people need to see a message three to five times before they believe the information to be true, and they also need to see messages from both experts and peers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010).

Another reason to use social networking tools in Extension programming is their low cost. In tough economic times where operating budgets are constrained, tools like FaceBook, Twitter, and blogs provide excellent value because they are free of charge and readily available online. The biggest "cost" for Extension educators will be the time required for daily information dissemination and the "learning curve" required to use social media. When viewed from an outreach perspective, however, the time spent on social networking is well worth it. Consider an Extension Twitter user with 200 followers. If just 5% (10) of the followers re-tweeted (i.e., having your messages tweeted by others) the educator's message to another 200 followers each, an Extension educator has suddenly reached 2,200 people after, perhaps, 3 to 5 minutes of work. Ideally, information disseminated via social networking tools can also be disseminated in multiple formats (e.g., newspaper articles, Web site, radio scripts, newsletters) to provide increased accessibility to learners and to "work smarter, not harder."

The Financial Security for All Community of Practice

eXtension is structured as a set of Communities of Practice that form around a topic of interest to consumers who need information and a Web source for reliable, unbiased information that can be quickly applied to everyday life. The eXtension Financial Security for All Community of Practice provides reliable, research-based, and up-to-date financial and consumer information twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year on any Internet-ready device at www.extension.org/personal_finance. The FSA CoP is a virtual community (organization) led by fifteen Extension professionals from across the country. Membership in the CoP has grown steadily from approximately 50 members in 2005, to the current membership of almost 275 professionals from land-grant universities in 44 states and one territory.

FSA CoP members are organized into three major subject matter areas (1) Financial Security in Later Life, (2) Financial Literacy for Youth, and (3) Financial Stability. CoP members develop interactive lessons; provide peer-reviewed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and Featured Resources; and answer Ask an Expert questions from consumers, all organized around 16 key word topics such as: Children and Money, Consumer Credit, Estate Planning, Home Ownership, Saving and Investing, and Insurance.

Social Networking in Extension Education

The FSA CoP is one of a relatively small number of interactive non-commercial personal finance Web portals available to consumers. Most Web sites with FAQ and Ask an Expert features are provided by financial services firms or companies that solicit financial firms as sponsors. The FSA CoP Web site provides continuous public access to research-based, unbiased, personal finance information. After several years of developing its FAQ data base (over 1,800 published FAQs as of September 2011) and Ask an Expert response capacity, the FSA CoP launched its social networking efforts in 2009 with a pilot project to disseminate personal finance information using Twitter.

Teaching with Twitter

The social networking Web site, Twitter, is increasingly being used as a personal finance educational and marketing tool. At least 8,000 investment-related Twitter messages, called tweets, are distributed daily (Wolverson & Heimer, 2010) from sources that include well-known personalities (e.g., Suze Orman), media outlets (e.g., *USA Today*), financial services firms, and government and non-profit agencies, including Cooperative Extension. Although Twitter outreach trails several leading Web giants (e.g., Google and Facebook), it has experienced explosive growth during the past two years (Schonfeld, 2010). Twitter is a “micro-blogging” Web site because it constrains its users to short messages of 140 characters or less. Spaces and punctuation count as a “character” so Twitter messages must be extremely concise.

The beauty of Twitter as an outreach method is that users can expand well beyond the 140 character constraint with strategically-placed links to additional information contained within blogs, Web sites (e.g., online publications), YouTube videos, online surveys, other social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), and more (Johnson, 2009). In addition, long URLs can be shortened with applications such as bit.ly, TinyURL, and ow.ly, thereby conserving more characters for a Twitter user’s message. Further, a Twitter user’s messages can be re-tweeted by his or her followers, which further extend educational outreach (e.g., your 300 followers could collectively have 5,000 more followers). In fact, an increasing amount of Web traffic is coming from “passed links” via social networking rather than search engine queries (e.g., Johnson, 2009). The key to being followed and/or re-tweeted is creating content that provides value and/or creates a sense of “community” through a shared discussion of topics of interest. Items that FSA CoP members tweet include: Extension fact sheets, newsletters, and press releases; interesting media articles; Facebook pages; blogs; video links; and eXtension FAQs.

Collaborating with CoTweet

Since starting to use Twitter, the FSA CoP has used a Web-based application called CoTweet (www.cotweet.com) to post messages from the Twitter user name, moneyeXtension (http://twitter.com/moneyeXtension). Fifteen months after this URL was launched, moneyeXtension had 122 followers. CoTweet allows multiple users to post messages (i.e., tweet) from a single account. CoTweet is a Web-based social media tool built for customer service and brand management (CoTweet, 2010). A designated administrator establishes and maintains a CoTweet account and provides access to other contributors via an e-mailed invitation. CoTweet, thus, allows a group of individuals to "divide and conquer" the task of messaging for a group, and maintains a unified organizational brand instead of having individuals tweeting for eXtension from their individual accounts. As a result of this successful Twitter pilot, several FSA CoP members also decided to tweet individually, and regularly re-tweet moneyeXtension posts (and vice versa).

Finding Friends on Facebook

Facebook is a widely used social media outlet with an active user population. Facebook pages provide the FSA CoP with more tools to explain its identity and mission, and provide resources in more detail than message posts available on Twitter. This is accomplished through both the additional number of characters allowed on Facebook messages, and the ability to add applications, such as video, within Facebook pages. Additionally, users of Facebook or Twitter may be unique to one service so by using both social networking tools, the FSA CoP is interacting with an expanded population.

The moneyeXtension Facebook page was created by the FSA CoP in 2010 to complement its presence on Twitter and reach active users via status updates on the Facebook page. When a status update is posted to the moneyeXtension Facebook page, it is displayed in the news feed of all active users, where they can click through to the moneyeXtension Facebook page, or directly to eXtension.org via the link included in the status update.

In keeping with its "working smarter, not harder" mantra, the FSA CoP has automated interaction between Facebook and Twitter. It automatically tweets (on Twitter) all Facebook status updates and posts all tweets as status updates on Facebook; therefore, when either a status update or tweet is posted, it will automatically show on both media outlets. This engages all Facebook "Friends" and Twitter "Followers" with one message, increasing the efficiency of maintaining connections with all users.

Social Networking in Extension Education

Facebook "Insights" offers tools to track a page's traffic and user "Likes" and "Dislikes." The Facebook page has also been used to market FSA CoP resources such as its online personal finance course for bankruptcy filers. In addition to content postings on Facebook, one can also post advertisements. eXtension is experimenting with this approach to publicize its debtor education course. Four concise (less than 20 word) ads were developed and targeted to the Northeast and upper Midwest. Results on effectiveness of this approach are mixed; the ads have reached many potential users, but course participants are not yet reporting that they learned about the course through Facebook.

Automating Social Networking Tools

The FSA CoP has experimented with two different types of automation in order to constantly provide new content to social networking sites. The first type of automation recognizes that some tweeting topics are the same year to year. Tweets surrounding major holidays, seasonal issues, and deadlines (e.g., income tax) are roughly the same every year. Instead of creating new tweets every year, tweets can be saved and reused, similar to ways that seasonal news releases are often reused.

The second type of automation uses Google Spreadsheets and Google Apps Script to automatically tweet new FAQs published by the eXtension FSA CoP on topics related to personal finance. This creates a regular, continuous feed of tweets from published FAQs. Neither of these automation methods are meant to replace the human interaction of social networking. Instead they compliment the two-way communication of social networking by providing content that can start conversations.

Google Spreadsheet and Google Apps Script

The Internet search engine company Google provides excellent tools to help facilitate both methods. Google Docs (GDocs) is their alternative to Microsoft Office; GDocs provides substitutes for Word (Google Documents), Excel (Google Spreadsheets), and PowerPoint (Google Presentations). All of these free Web services provide real time, or near real time, collaboration with similar feature sets to their Microsoft counterparts as noted.

Google Spreadsheets provides the backbone for FSA CoP automation efforts. This collaborative space allows several people to contribute to the project without having to constantly e-mail each other revised and updated files. More importantly, Google Spreadsheets allows for the execution of Google Apps Scripts (GAS). Similar to Microsoft's Visual Basic, GAS allows users to build small programming scripts that interact with the Internet and the spreadsheet. Excel also offers this function with Visual Basic, but the benefit of using Google Docs is that Google Spreadsheets are never offline. Scripts can be event driven, set to run at certain time intervals, or set to run on a daily, weekly, or monthly schedule (Figure 1).

Evaluating Impact

The "holy grail" of Extension programming is documented positive impact on the lives of people served (e.g., increased savings and better eating habits). In an era of constrained funding, impact evaluation is more important than ever to demonstrate the value of programs to stakeholders. Below is a list of metrics to document the impact of Extension social networking efforts:

- Increasing number of followers over time and positive direct messages (feedback) from followers.
- "Prestige" (position) of followers (e.g., news reporters and legislators) and their followers.
- Hits on Web sites that are visited through links from Twitter, Facebook, and other social media posts.
- Subsequent media coverage originating from information posted on social media.
- Use of an embedded online (e.g., Zoomerang or Survey Monkey) impact evaluation survey.
- Use of Web-based evaluation tools. Examples are grades for Twitter outreach performance (e.g., number of followers, power of followers, number and recency of tweets) from Twitter Grader (http://twitter.grader.com) and reach and exposure data from TweetReach (http://tweetreach.com).

Method

FSA CoP Social Media Research Project

From January to March of 2011, the FSA CoP launched a social media financial education project to encourage savings, debt reduction, expense reduction, and enrollment in the *America Saves* program by followers/friends of 94 participating Cooperative Extension agents, *America Saves* and *Military Saves* campaign coordinators, and other partners. The project was funded with a mini-grant from the Consumer Federation of America. A total of 70 tweets and 70 Facebook messages were prepared for distribution by project participants to their social media networks. The messages were ready to be "cut and pasted" from an e-mailed Word file. The following are examples of social media content that was developed for this program.

> Twitter Message: Plug ur [sic] spending leaks & save: snacks, soda, lottery etc. $5/ day = $1,825/ yr + interest. Small amts add up: http://bit.ly/ASTips#eXasw

> Facebook Message: Today is the final day of *America Saves Week*. *America Saves* is a national campaign to persuade Americans who have little or no savings to "build wealth, not debt." Savers identify a savings goal and take action on a plan to achieve it. The America Saves program is free and motivational. Check out these monthly messages from *America Saves* e-wealth coaches: http://bit.ly/hSJnXY

These prepared messages were distributed during *America Saves Week 2011*. The following evaluation methods were used to measure impact (1) a unique Twitter hashtag (e.g., #eXasw); (2) a follow-up online consumer survey; (3) a follow-up online professional participant survey; (4) bit.ly analytics to determine the number of clicks on links embedded in the ASW messages; and (5) tracking the pre- and post-program Twitter influence metrics of project participants who distributed financial education messages. At the conclusion of the project, 1,190 tweets were recorded by use of a unique hashtag and 877 clicks from Facebook messages and 275 clicks from tweets were subsequently recorded.

Findings

A link to a brief evaluation survey was embedded in messages prepared for the final day of *America Saves Week* (ASW), for feedback from followers/friends of project participants. Almost 9 in 10 of 45 respondents found the ASW messages very helpful (32%) or helpful (57%). Additionally, 48% visited one or more of the ASW Web site links that were contained in the messages, 25% said they planned to, and only 27% said they did not. With regard to joining *America Saves*, 11% of respondents reported that they joined, 32% said that they planned to join, 18% were already America Saves savers, and 39% said they had not joined.

The 94 project participants were also surveyed and 36 (38%) completed an evaluation. The number of social media followers/friends reported by these 36 professional collaborators ranged from 8 to 2,723, and totaled 8,163 when the outreach numbers reported by all of them were combined, for an average of 226 each. Comments about the project were very positive: "V*ery good idea to get the word out;" "We hope to re-use the messages posting one each day;" "I hope to continue to use the tweets I was unable to use during ASW;" "Wish I had ready-made tweets every day;" "Very good idea, think we could try to keep this up;" "This was great. It was easy to do;"* and *"I really appreciated this project to help me get going with Twitter."* Nine of 10 (91%)

respondents said that they would participate in another social media financial education project.

Implications for Extension

Cooperative Extension personnel need many types of skills to be successful educators. In addition to basic literacy (reading and writing), numeracy (math skills), computer literacy, interpersonal skills, and expertise in one or more subject matter topics, social networking literacy (i.e., the ability to educate and interact with online users) is required. This article described how members of the eXtension Financial Security for All Community of Practice began using social media and ultimately streamlined the process of delivering financial information via social networking tools. Social networking is also a powerful daily professional development method if credible, research-based sources are followed. Both receiving and posting information via social media can take 15-20 minutes per day or less and potentially reach thousands of people. There is no time like the present to get involved with social networking in Extension education. Jump in, get started, and have fun.

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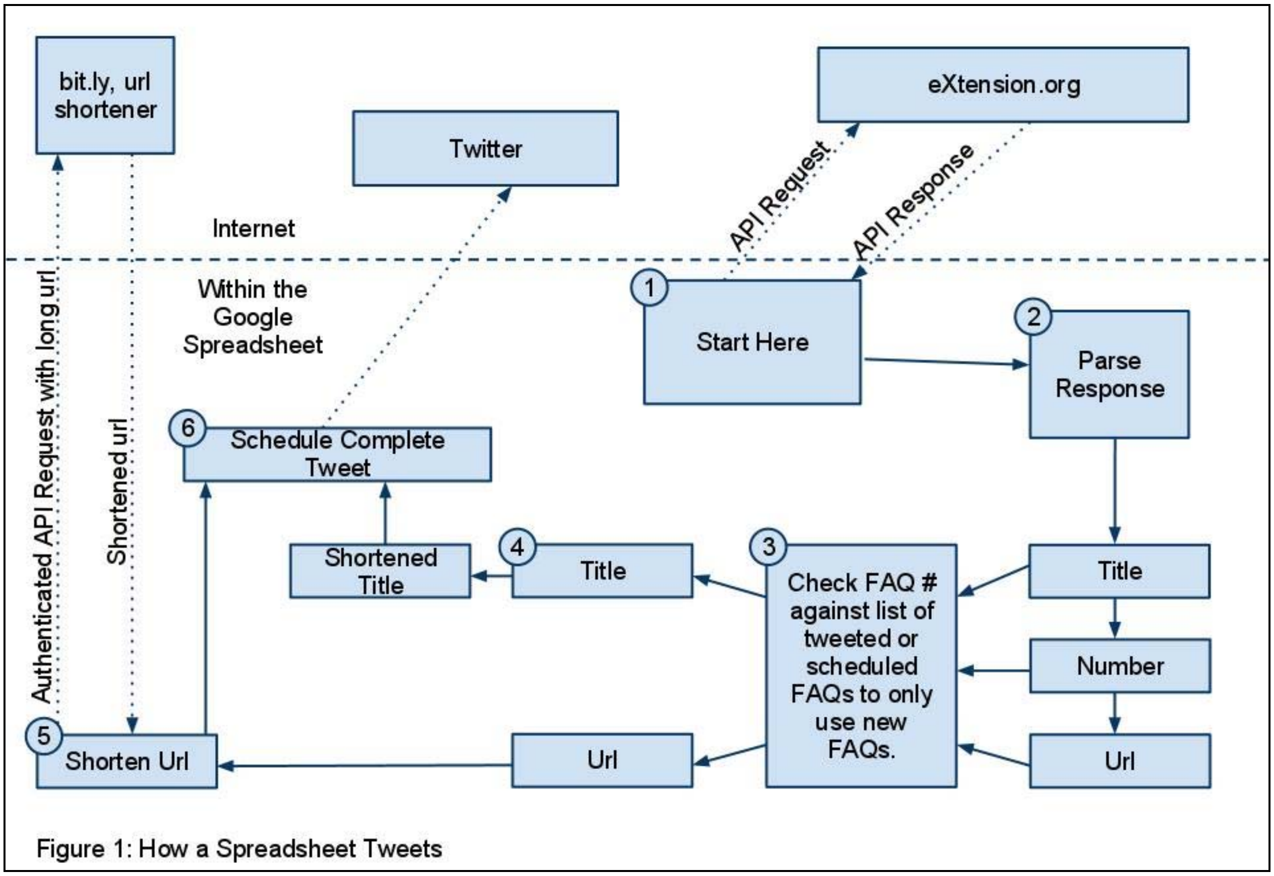

***Figure 1**:* A diagram of how a spreadsheet tweets.

1. The Google Apps Script requests the 25 most recent FAQs published related to "personal finance" from eXtension.
2. The script then parses the response from eXtension separating out the title, number, and URL of the FAQ.
3. The response from eXtension may also contain FAQs that have already been tweeted or are scheduled to be tweeted. The script checks the FAQ number of the newly parsed FAQs against the list of scheduled or previously tweeted FAQs. If the script does not find a match, then the FAQ is copied to the list of scheduled tweets.
4. Overly long titles are shortened to fit the 140 word limit of each tweet.
5. URLs are shortened to conserve space.
6. The script provides the bit.ly shortening service with the long URL and bit.ly then returns a unique shortened URL that fits well within the tweet and also allows for tracking the clicks through the link. The tweet is then assembled with its slightly modified title, shortened URL, and a tag. The script schedules the tweet for the next open day. Finally, the script checks the list of scheduled tweets and sends any that are scheduled. The script repeats this whole process every 5 minutes.

The Benefit of a Balanced Approach to Electronic Education

Leslie A. Forstadt

A survey targeting more than 800 readers of a parenting newsletter regarding their preferences for paper or electronic delivery was conducted in a northern state. Findings demonstrated compelling reasons to keep paper options available to the public, in addition to developing electronic resources. Both paper and electronic options were needed to provide a balanced approach to sharing information and meeting consumer needs.

Methods used by Cooperative Extension to deliver information have been evolving for some time. In many states, Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) professionals are responsible for sharing parenting information through newsletters, and they are exploring new avenues for this educational outreach, including electronic delivery through e-mail.

Traditionally, within Extension parenting newsletters are mailed monthly to consumers. This is true in Maine, where the developmentally-paced (i.e., age appropriate) newsletter, *The Growing Years,* is mailed monthly to over 1,800 families. Families receive issues of the newsletter based on their child's age, from pre-natal to age five.

Physically mailing newsletters through land mail costs the program about $300 each month and reaches only 5% of eligible families in the state. It is not hard to see how the cost of producing and distributing newsletters could become prohibitive, especially when audiences grow and budgets continue shrinking. Some states have developed alternative delivery methods, such as distributing newsletters through schools (Garton et al., 2003), hospitals, or parent home visiting programs (Weatherspoon, Bowman, Hernandez, & Pratt, 2006). Other Extension publications are offered through free online downloads, while some are published in hard copy and sold for the cost of printing and materials. Traditional paper newsletters and delivery methods are becoming outdated, as more electronic options are made available (e.g., through eXtension.org). With over 75% of American households now owning computers, Internet access has also increased (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

The discussion about electronic distribution versus paper delivery is not new. Over ten years ago, Ohio State researchers examined this topic with farmers in their 1998 publication, “Using Electronic Media to Convey Timely Information” (Siegrist, LaBarge, & Prochaska, 1998). They found that for farmers, electronic delivery was not only more timely, but also opened before postal mail and received very positively. However, there has been little discussion about electronic delivery of ongoing newsletters in general, and parenting information in particular, in consideration of electronic delivery of these resources.

The use of paper parenting newsletters has been shown to be very effective for general audiences (Riley, Eisenmann, & Gruenewald, 2004) and specific audiences (Brotherson & Bouwhuis, 2007), but little is known about the willingness of parents or caregivers to receive electronic parenting materials. An assessment was needed to determine if a fully electronic newsletter distribution system would meet public needs.

Objective

The purpose of this study was to determine the number of current newsletter recipients that would be interested in receiving electronic copies of *The Growing Years*. A survey was conducted with readers to understand if electronic delivery of an established and successful parenting newsletter series would be welcomed.

Method

Participants

A survey assessing reader satisfaction, impact of the newsletter, and interest in receiving the newsletter electronically, was mailed to 2,312 recipients of *The Growing Years.* On average, readers had subscribed to the newsletter for 30 months (i.e., 2 years and 6 months) and all readers were receiving the newsletter by land mail. The survey was sent to the entire mailing list, with over 95% of recipients mothers who were expecting, or parenting a child under the age of five. Respondents were from 15 of Maine’s 16 counties, with response rates ranging from 2% to 15% per county.

Procedure

To understand user satisfaction, parenting impact of reading the newsletter, and willingness to access the newsletter electronically, recipients of *The Growing Years* were asked to respond to the following questions:

- Who reads the newsletter once it arrives?
- How many times do you refer to the newsletter once it arrives?
- We are considering offering a Web-based version that could be e-mailed directly to you to be read online and/or printed. Would you like to receive *The Growing Years* in an e-mail?
- "We are considering offering a Web-based version that could be e-mailed directly to you to be read online and/or printed. Would you like to receive *The Growing Years* in an e-mail?
- Readers were also asked to provide any additional feedback about "ideas to go Web-based."

Data Analysis

Responses were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 12.0. Statistical manipulations included both descriptive and Chi-square analyses. Open-ended responses are reported here to explain the reasons why readers did or did not wish to receive electronic publications.

Findings

Eight hundred surveys were returned for a 35% response rate. This response rate was beyond expectations for a single mailing (e.g., Kiernan (2005) found a typical survey response rate to be 19% to 27%). Over 50% of readers reported having referred to the newsletter more than once, and 75% either kept issues for future reference or passed them on to others. When asked if they would like to receive the newsletter electronically, 40% responded "yes," 19% responded "maybe," and 41% responded "no." To the question, "Who reads the newsletter once it arrives?" 95% of readers reported that the newsletter was primarily read by the subscriber; 57% also shared it with a spouse, and more than 10% shared it with their child's grandparents (Figure 1).

Results of Chi-squared tests showed a significant difference among readers who desired to receive electronic resources on two questions (1) how many times they referred to the newsletter after reading [n = 749, p < .01], and (2) what they did with the newsletter after reading it [n = 735, p < .001]. Readers who indicated that they wanted e-mail delivery referred to the newsletter fewer times than those who were interested in receiving the print version. Readers who wanted e-mail delivery were also those who reported throwing away the print version after reading. Readers who desired the print version were those who referred to the newsletter two or more times and also shared it with others.

Open-ended responses

There was a range in responses when readers were asked for their open-ended opinions about *The Growing Years* becoming Web-based. Of 179 responses to the question, “Would you like to receive *The Growing Years* in an e-mail?” 16% of readers were supportive of saving paper and resources; 8% thought it would attract new readers; and 20% added comments like, “great idea!” or added specific suggestions for formatting the electronic version. Nearly 30% of respondents preferred the paper option because of ease and convenient access (i.e., they were able to refer back to it without the difficulty of reading it online). Others had no Internet access (15%), no computer (6%), or no e-mail or other daily challenges that would prevent them from accessing the newsletter online (6%).

Summary

With so many wonderful new technologies available, transition to completely electronic parenting newsletter resources may seem inevitable. This research suggests that there are compelling reasons to keep paper options available to the public, in addition to developing electronic resources in a way that responds to public need. Balanced approaches that use the availability of electronic resources while also making paper resources accessible is still important for parents served by the FCS community.

Given that more and more readers have Internet access, it was somewhat surprising that any reader responded “no” to the option of electronic delivery. Almost 40% of readers wanted to receive newsletters by e-mail, even though many towns in Maine have only dial-up and downloading a newsletter can be quite cumbersome. Readers who referred to the newsletter multiple times were less interested in having electronic delivery, which could mean that they thought electronic newsletters were to be read only online and not printed. This finding informs future changes to delivery methods of publications to ensure readers are aware of the download options. Readers should be sent links to sites for downloading documents, rather than being sent attachments that may require more time to download and cause readers to become frustrated with the process.

It can be possible to offer both types of resources by making paper copies available as a download on the state Extension website, and by providing CDs to local programs that serve families so that they may print them. For families with no access to the Internet, the newsletter can be mailed if the county or state Extension office can still devote resources for a significantly smaller mailing. Paper copies can be made available and the newsletter promoted through child care centers by offering complete sets of newsletters for parents to browse, and information on how parents can sign up to receive newsletters electronically. The electronic newsletter should be heavily promoted, and Extension can offer technical assistance if families run into difficulty trying to sign up electronically.

Implications for Extension

It is understandable that in an era of financial strain and simultaneous excitement about emerging or existing technologies, the day of Extension newsletters mailed to the home might be winding down. However, as readers of *The Growing Years* reported, readers still appreciated the mailed newsletter. Similar findings have also been established in other studies (Smith, Ostergren, & Riley, 2007), inferring that this sample is similar to Extension clients in other states; thus these findings about electronic resources may be generalized to a wider Extension audience.

The data implied to the researcher that many readers are well-versed in, and accepting of, non-print publications. Clearly, parenting newsletters can be offered electronically and the Extension FCS community should consider taking advantage of this economical method to reach greater audiences. In fact, with eXtension.org, the *Just in Time Parenting* newsletter does exactly this, with regular delivery of parenting education materials directly to a parent's e-mail box. Whether state Extension educators choose to adapt existing resources to fit new technologies, or adopt new resources that exist in these formats, the delivery of parenting and child development information from a trusted source is still valued.

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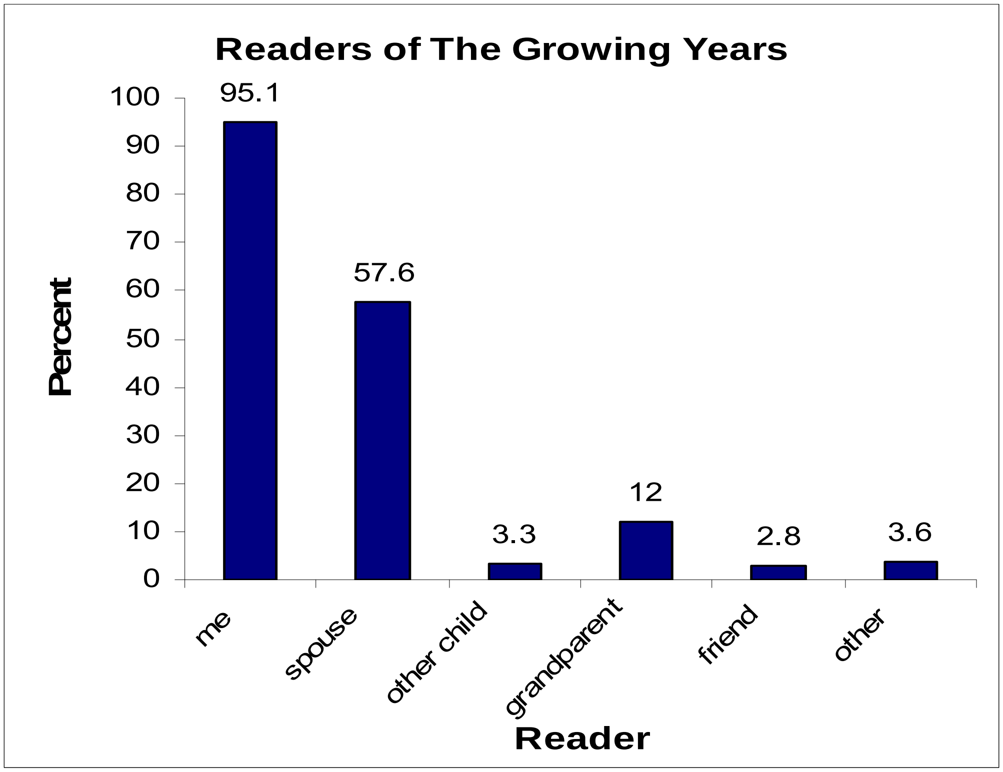
Figure 1. Readers of *The Growing Years* Newsletter



***All-Star Dads* Social Marketing Campaign: Utilizing Formative Evaluation to Increase Men's Physical Activity**

Laura Stephenson, Mark Swanson, Chuck Stamper,
Nicole Peritore, Rosie Allen, Cheryl Case, Peggy Powell

State and national data underscore high rates of obesity and progressive decline in men's physical activity throughout the lifespan. A 2008 needs assessment of Kentucky Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Extension professionals was conducted through the "Health Education through Extension Leadership" program. Findings pointed to a lack of educational resources available to improve men's health. Formative data was gathered through six focus groups of men ages 25 to 55 to create a social marketing approach to effectively target a rural male audience and encourage men to choose a physically active lifestyle while engaging in activities with their children. This paper discusses the formative evaluation process of a social marketing-based, health promotion program to encourage men's physical activity, and implications for Extension professionals.

Physical inactivity is a serious problem in the United States causing an increase in obesity, cardiovascular disease, and other health-related problems (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). The 2009 Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) indicated that 49.0% of men in the United States, and 54.3% of men in Kentucky, reported falling short of the minimum 30 minutes of moderate activity five days per week, as recommended in the Healthy People 2010 goals (Centers, 2011). Research also attests to higher rates of physical inactivity within rural areas of the southern United States (Martin et al., 2002).

If physical activity is to be more effectively promoted, it is important to recognize that individuals will vary in their level of readiness to adopt healthier lifestyle behaviors. The Transtheoretical Model, Stages of Change Theory has been utilized by researchers to better understand individual readiness to make healthy lifestyle changes. The model involves five stages of motivational readiness for change (1) precontemplation: no physical activity and no intention to start in next six months; (2) contemplation: no physical activity but intention to start in the next six months; (3) preparation: some physical activity, but less than recommended levels); (4) action: participation in regular physical activity, but for fewer than six months; and (5) maintenance: participation in regular physical activity for six months or longer (Prochaska et al., 2008). The model suggests that for an intervention to be successful, it must be marketed to the target group, taking into account their environment, level of self-efficacy, decisional balance between perceived advantages, and disadvantages, thought modification techniques, feelings, behaviors, and cultural beliefs (Lee and Kotler, 2011).

Social marketing is an increasingly popular means of affecting behavioral change among targeted populations. It has been defined as “the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of society” (Lee & Kotler, 2011, p. 7). Key features of social marketing include (a) audience orientation—learning what the target audience currently knows, believes, and does; (b) audience segmentation--targeting a specific part of the larger population so that the campaign can be tailored to them; (c) focus on behavior--working on influencing behavior, not just changing awareness or attitudes; d) competition—targeting preferred behaviors needing to be changed; and e) exchange—offering the audience something they want in return for the desired behavior change (Lee & Kotler, 2011).

Social marketing involves a systemic, sequential development process based upon using data to identify target audiences and formative evaluation to guide program decisions (Lee & Kotler, 2011). The purpose of formative evaluation is to improve a product during development through various assessments; "When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative. When the guests taste the soup, that's summative” (Scriven, 1991, p. 169). Through formative evaluation used in social marketing, target groups are integrally involved in the development of programs to design messages and approaches that resonate with them at their stage of readiness for change (Kotler & Roborto, 1989). Participation in focused discussions by target group members provides valuable context and insight before and during health promotion program development. Formative evaluation is a critical tool in choosing effective messages and designing program elements and products based upon feedback throughout program development (Andreason, 1995).

Cooperative Extension professionals have traditionally used focus groups in community needs assessment and program evaluation (Nordstrom et al., 2000). Social marketing adds another dimension to Extension program development as focus groups are used to progressively evaluate and develop targeted messages to encourage healthy behavior change. In this study the target group was men over the age of 24.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to:

1. Examine behavioral patterns that may promote and/or impede physical activity among young (25 to 40) and middle-aged (41 to 55) male focus group participants in three rural counties in Kentucky.
2. Identify facilitators and barriers to physical activity among male focus group participants.
3. Lay the foundation for development of an effective community-based intervention, led by Cooperative Extension through social marketing, to increase physical activity levels among men in rural geographic locales.

Method

A survey was conducted in 2007 of all Kentucky Extension agents to determine and prioritize health education resource needs to be funded by Health Education through Extension Leadership (HEEL) program. Men's health emerged as a high priority issue specifically focused on rising rates of obesity. This finding prompted the development of a work group of Family and Consumer Sciences agents, extension faculty, and public health researchers to design a program to address the men's obesity issue. HEEL program leaders requested the work group use a social marketing campaign model.

A cross-sectional, qualitative study design was employed that utilized six focus group sessions in three counties to collect data (two groups per study, per county) from a total of 40 participants. One group included participants ages 25 to 40, and one group included participants ages 41 to 55 (Table 1). Participants were recruited by Cooperative Extension agents and the Eastern Regional Program Coordinator in Harrison, Montgomery, and Gallatin counties in Kentucky. Participants were recruited through flyers, newspaper advertisements, and Extension newsletters in each county.

Male researchers led each of the focus group discussions using questions designed to center the discussion on physical activity barriers and motivators the men experienced (Appendix). This group guide included key questions that explored social supports for participants' physical activity and behavior patterns that affected their physically active lifestyle (Krueger, 1994). Participants received $20 each for participating in an approximately 90 minute session. Family and Consumer Sciences agents facilitated logistics of focus group meetings at local Cooperative Extension offices.

Findings

Analysis of formative data provided insight into a range of motivating factors and barriers relating to physical activity for rural adult men. The following themes emerged from the focus groups as key factors in shaping the physical activity decisions of men.

Family Responsibilities

The men identified family responsibilities as a barrier to physical activity because taking time from their children was a disincentive to being physically active. Conversely, family responsibilities also provided opportunities to be physically active because their children engaged them in activities such as playing ball, hunting, and camping. One participant stated, ". . . you've got to go to work and so you do that and then when you come home you, whatever, you've got to mow the yard, or you've got to take the children somewhere, or do something with them, or whatever. We probably don't . . . find a way to involve physical activity while we're taking care of our kids, which is a real good, that's a good technique."

Role of Wives

Discussion on the influence of wives brought mixed comments from the men. Most indicated that their wives were supportive of their physical activity, particularly if it did not interfere with their familial responsibilities. Wives were considered as a positive support when they inspired their spouse to be physically active by their own example. Wives were considered as a negative influence when they stopped or decreased their own physical activity because the men often followed suit. "I'm going to use my wife as an example," one man stated, "because she isn't here and she isn't going to hear this, but she's a great motivator sometimes and the worst motivator at others. . . . When [my wife] stops, I might as well jump off of that cliff too."

Physical Activity as Priority

A number of barriers were discussed such as time, weather, and sedentary lifestyle. However, many respondents agreed that the key issue was making physical activity a priority. One participant noted that his challenge was, "scheduling, then learning how to work it into your schedule, being willing to. It's always, I don't have time and you know obviously that's a big one, our being too busy."

Financial Issues

Men pointed to the lack of financial resources to join gyms or participate in extracurricular activities as a possible limiting factor to physical activity. In these difficult economic times, many were working multiple jobs to support family and therefore had decreased time for physical activity. One man stated "Everybody now has gone from one job and using their free time for recreation, to now they're trying to pick up that second job. They're trying to find something for supplemental income and it's taking away from the time that you have for extracurricular, you know. People aren't walking as much because they're working. People aren't playing softball as much because they're working on the weekends." Participants mentioned employer-sponsored programs such as opportunities and incentives (e.g., discounts on health insurance for those who maintain health indicators) that could provide motivation for physical activity.

Results

A salient finding that emerged from the formative data was the impact of family responsibilities on physical activity levels. While family responsibilities could discourage men from investing time in physical activity, this barrier also presented a significant opportunity for increasing physical activity with children. Research by Gustafson and Rhodes (2006) supported the concept that when a parent exercised, a child was more likely to exercise--especially when the parent was male, was in the normal weight range, supported and modeled healthy physical activities, and spent time outdoors with family. This finding became the basis to develop the men's physical activity social marketing campaign, based on promotional strategies that supported the concept of fathers being active with their children. Formative evaluation data pointed to the need to:

- Focus on men's physical activity with their children.
- Emphasize the social and familial benefit to fathers of spending time with their children being physically active.
- Identify father/child activity opportunities that already exist in project communities.
- Identify father/child activities that are low or no cost within the community.
- Develop a community marketing campaign to promote father/child interaction and involvement in physical activity.

As a result of these findings, a pilot social marketing campaign was designed to promote men's physical activity through their role as father. Extension agents and researchers actively participated in development of a campaign that incorporated the message that being an active dad was important for a child's growth and development, and that active dads were good fathers. The resulting *All-Star Dads* project used messages and activities that encouraged interaction between father and child in daily physical activity. The key slogan used was, "Be an All-Star Dad: Be active with your child." The pilot *All-Star Dads* campaign used four social marketing strategies:

D.A.D.S. Scorecards. The Daily Activity Dads Scorecard is used to record the activities father and children are doing together. Each card has twenty squares. A square is to be filled in each time at least 30 minutes of physical activity are completed together. Once all of the squares are completed the scorecard was returned to the local Cooperative Extension office to be eligible for a drawing for a $100 gift certificate. Fathers could complete multiple scorecards during the six month time frame.

***All-Star Dads* Yard Signs**. After completion and return of the scorecard dads were given a yard sign that read, "My *All-Star Dad* Lives Here."

Refrigerator Magnets. Dads were given refrigerator magnets that said, "I'm active with my child, ____." The dads could personalize the magnet and attach it to the refrigerator as a reminder to be physically active, and as a prominent placeholder for the D.A.D.S. Scorecard.

Website. A website (http://all-star-dads.org) was created with downloadable versions of the scorecards, ideas for age-appropriate physical activity for children, and links to other Web resources.

So far, the *All-Star Dads* campaign has been piloted in four rural counties. Scorecards and magnets have been distributed to families at local community events and at elementary schools. Further refinement of targeted messages, local activities, and resources to improve the *All-Star Dads* program will continue through formative evaluation techniques and input from men in project communities.

Summary

Throughout the project FCS agents were active partners in the design of the research and intervention for the *All-Star Dads* campaign. The impact of social marketing concepts on FCS agents' program perspective became apparent as the project evolved.

Males have not been a traditional audience for Extension health promotion programming. A focus on men's health, through the framework of social marketing, allowed FCS agents to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of male participants in order to guide promotion development. Initially, FCS agents struggled to recruit men to participate in focus groups. As the project progressed, however, it became apparent that a critical aspect of audience engagement was to include agents' male co-workers and male researchers to establish bonds with male participants. This connection established a rapport and researchers were then able to maximize input in the formative evaluation process.

These efforts also supported the ability of Cooperative Extension professionals to engage the target audience. In addition, it was essential to devote adequate time to develop messages that resonated and were easily understood by the target audience. This involved going back to participants multiple times to gain feedback on messages and resources throughout promotion development. The *All-Star Dads* campaign slogan, messages, and incentives were developed based upon initial focus groups and later refined based upon feedback from men in the local communities. As the *All Star Dads* project evolves, future focus groups will be convened to further refine potential products, lessons, and activities for feasibility, as well as best ways to make these resources available.

Cooperative Extension has traditionally focused on educational outreach through knowledge transfer, rather than a focus on influencing voluntary behavior change through social messages. The assumption that education by itself will lead to sustained change in physical activity behavior is questionable at best, making social marketing's focus on behavior appealing (Nebeling, Yaroch, Seymour, & Kimmons, 2007). The concept of developing a tailored message that is easily understood and resonates with a very specific audience was time consuming and required different perspectives, skills, and thought processes than traditional educational curricula. Social marketing is a research-based approach to intervention development with the emphasis on exchanging unhealthy behavior with something the participant desires. In this case the desire participants verbalized was to be a good father. Thus the campaign was designed to define physical activity with children as the mark of a good father. FCS agents and campus faculty struggled initially with focus on the message and promotion, rather than focus on a teaching strategy. At each stage of the process, the promotion design team purposely returned to focus on messages that pointed to the underlying value, "Being an active father is being a good father."

Implications for Extension

The *All-Star Dads* program has provided a learning opportunity for FCS agents and faculty to concentrate on audience diversity and voluntary behavior change. Cooperative Extension programs can benefit through a social marketing approach that tailors outreach programs and messages to augment traditional education programs.

***All-Star Dads* Social Marketing Campaign**

Focus groups and interviews with particular audiences are integral in developing customized messages for increased impact.

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Table 1. Focus Group Demographics (*n* = 40); mean age: 39.9.

Variable	Percentage	*n*
Race		
African American	2.1	1
White	97.5	39
Marital Status		
Married/Living with Partner	72.5	29
Widowed/Never Married	20.0	8
Education		
High School	35.0	14
Post HS/Business/Trade School	20.0	8
4 Years College	30.0	12
Graduate School	15.0	6
Household Income		
< 15,000	7.5	3
15,000 – 30,000	2.5	1
30,000 – 45,000	25.0	10
45,000 or More	65.0	26
Employment Status		
Employed Full-time/Part-time	87.2	34
Retired	2.6	1
Seeking work/Working from home	7.7	3
Disabled	2.6	1

Appendix

Focus Group Guide

Question 1. What is health?

Question 2. You all indicated that you were once more physically active than you are now. What types of physical activities did you once regularly engage in?

Question 3. What factors contributed to your decline in physical activity?

Question 4. What do you feel are some barriers faced by men to maintaining good levels of physical activity?

Question 5. What are some things that would encourage you to get back to higher levels of physical activity?

Question 6. Do you feel other people are critical or supportive of your physical activity?

Question 7. What forms of physical activity do you enjoy most?

Question 8. Do you prefer doing physical activities alone or with others?

Question 9. When you were physically active, did your activities change seasonally?

Question 10. Does anyone have anything that they would like to add to the conversation?

Relationship Education: Encouraging Participation through Experiential Date Nights

Naomi Brower, Jana Darrington, Kay Bradford

Experiential date nights encouraged increased participation in relationship education by providing a low-cost, nonthreatening, and fun opportunity for couples to develop and enhance their relationship skills. Date nights consisted of relationship education and activities that appealed to both men and women. Outcomes from 18 date nights (N = 293) offered in two western, urban communities indicated that date night activities significantly improved knowledge of relationship skills. Formative results demonstrated that both men and women found the activities to be highly valuable. This article provides descriptive information for other Extension professionals wishing to design and evaluate experiential relationship education.

It is estimated that divorce costs taxpayers in the United States over 33.3 billion dollars every year (Schramm, 2006). The erosion of marriage has also created many struggles for individuals, children, parents, and society (Fagan, Patterson & Rector, 2002). On the other hand, strong and healthy marriages have been associated with more positive outcomes for children (Adam & Sawhill, 2002; Amato, 2001; Institute for American Values, 2005; Marks & Lambert, 1998).

Based on this data, over the last decade many marital and relationship education programs have been developed to help couples build and maintain healthy relationships. While these programs vary in structure and content, recent meta-analyses suggest that relationship education enhances participants' communication skills, relationship quality, and marital strength (Blanchard, Hawkins, Baldwin & Fawcett, 2009; Fagan et al., 2002; Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin & Fawcett, 2008).

In addition to relationship education, research suggests that couples' relationships can be strengthened by taking time to play together. Playing together increases bonding, communication, conflict resolution, and relationship satisfaction in relationships (Aune & Wong, 2002; Baxter, 1992; Kopecky, 1996; Vanderbleek, 2005). Play can also promote spontaneity when life seems routine, and serves as a reminder of positive relationship history and intimacy (Baxter, 1992).

While research suggests that couples benefit from relationship enhancement classes and taking time for play, most relationship education programs use a more traditional delivery, emphasizing face-face, intensive, multi-session instruction in a classroom (Duncan, Steed, & Needham, 2009). This method may not be ideal for all learning styles and does not generally include opportunities for play (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001). Research also suggests that women are more likely to "attend" to relationships, and, therefore, may be more likely to initiate relationship enhancement efforts (Walker, 1999). Because women often seek out healthy relationship events, communities sometimes offer events that appeal more to women in order to encourage the couples' attendance and men may be less likely to want to attend. Couples can significantly benefit from relationship education that encourages men to participate through play and fun-filled interaction, rather than a traditional method of education which appeals mainly to women.

Relationship date nights were created to encourage attendance by couples who might not attend traditional marital relationship enhancement activities. Date nights were purposefully planned to provide hands-on experiential activities where couples could learn and apply principles of happy relationships in a fun setting, and . Efforts were also made to specifically target men with activities that they and their partners would find enjoyable.

Objective

The goal of this paper is to provide a program model by documenting methods and initial findings from relationship date nights in two communities, so that this program can be replicated by Extension agents in similar settings.

Method

The intent of relationship date nights was to provide inexpensive and fun activities designed to appeal to couples. Additionally, the experiential learning atmosphere encouraged couples who may not normally have attended relationship education to participate, and it provided opportunities to introduce them to marriage education in a nonthreatening way. Participants were recruited or self-selected to participate through advertisements placed in and around various communities.

Participants

Since its inception in Spring 2009, 18 date nights have been held with 293 individuals in attendance, including 118 total participants in one county (5 events) and 175 in another county (11 events). Participants were mostly couples (49% men, 51% women) and most were married (93%), with length of marriage ranging from 5 months to 45 years (78% were in their first marriage). There were also a few dating and engaged couples. About 40% of couples indicated they had no previous relationship education. Most participants were caucasian (95%). The mean age was 36 years, with a median of 3 children, and mean income of $53,500.

Procedures

Activities for date nights were selected based on participant and community suggestions and previous community support. While activities varied at each event, each date night consisted of a hands-on activity where couples could discover, experience, and/or apply relationship educational principles. At the beginning of the date night, the event facilitator conducted a 10 to 15 minute presentation and participant discussion about a relationship concept connected with the hands-on activity.

Some of the activities and correlating relationship education concepts included:

- Adventure Ropes Course: couples participated in rope challenges focusing on trust, reliance, team work, and communication.
- Cooking Classes: couples learned and practiced food preparation skills while re-discovering the value of spending quality time together on a regular basis.
- Couples Massage: couples learned how to increase their intimacy and reduce their stress through hands-on instruction from a local massage therapist in a comfortable environment.
- Games Night: couples participated in couple and group games intended to increase communication, problem solving, and/or financial harmony.
- Gardening: couples gained practical knowledge about basic gardening techniques while learning how to grow and nourish their relationship strengths.
- Rock Climbing: couples practiced basic rock climbing skills as a team at a local rock climbing gym. The focus of the activity was on trust, reliance, and communication.

The facilitator encouraged the application and integration of relationship concepts throughout each activity and at the end of each event, couples were provided with relationship enhancement tools such as research-based books relating to the evening's topic, to encourage further discussion and application of relationship principles. Food was another incentive for participation and refreshments ranged from light snacks, such as cheese and crackers or granola bars, to a full meal, depending upon the activity. Couples also completed an evaluation at the end of each event.

Date nights were generally scheduled on Friday evenings for approximately two hours, between 6:00 and 9:00 p.m., and were held monthly, except for busy months, such as December, when it was anticipated that there would be lower attendance. While couples generally paid for their own activity costs, partnerships with local businesses allowed for activities to be offered at reduced rates. For example, some local businesses offered "two-for-one" deals, or free/reduced fees, for the use of their facilities for date nights. Additionally, various activities would have been too expensive for some couples to participate in without the date night group rate, which provided another incentive for couples to participate in organized date nights.

Evaluation

An evaluation, approved through Utah State University's Institutional Review Board, was given at the end of each date night to identify the impact of each event. This pen-and-paper evaluation tool included demographic information, a posttest-then-retrospective-pretest questionnaire, a formative evaluation, and open-ended questions (Marshall, Higginbotham, Harris, & Lee, 2007). The demographic information collected included information such as gender, marital status, household income, racial or ethnic heritage, age, number of children, and number of times divorced. The posttest-then-retrospective-pretest questionnaire asked participants to rate six levels of relationship knowledge before and after the program (e.g., "knowledge of how to listen effectively to a spouse/partner," and "understanding of how to settle disagreements well") on a rating scale from poor (1) to excellent (4). These items reliably measured knowledge of relationship skills (α = .84 pre and .83 post for men, and .87 pre and .86 post for women).

For the formative evaluation, participants rated their perceptions of how valuable the program was using five questions (e.g., "what I learned will help me strengthen my relationship," and "I'd like to take this class in the future"). The rating scale ranged from very low (1) to very high (5). These questions reliably measured program value (α = .91 for men, and .90 for women).

Finally, the last section consisted of an open-ended question. Couples were asked to describe the most important things they learned at the date night activity.

Findings

Summative Evaluation

Mean scores were calculated separately for men and women. This was done because husbands' and wives' responses were correlated, and separating them accounted statistically for that correlation. As reported in Table 1, men reported a significant increase in relationship knowledge (2.83 pre and 3.18 post, $p < .001$). Women also reported a significant increase in relationship knowledge (3.00 pre and 3.26 post, $p < .001$). There was no significant difference in the levels of knowledge between counties.

Table 1. Retrospective Pre-Post Change in Knowledge of Relationship Skills

Group	Pre-Program Mean	Post-Program Mean	*t*	*df*
Men	2.83 *(SD = .50)*	3.18 *(SD = .49)*	-11.20***	134
Women	3.00 *(SD = .53)*	3.26 *(SD = .47)*	-8.36***	144

***$p < .001$

Formative Evaluation

As mentioned previously, the formative portion of the evaluation requested participants to indicate how valuable the date night was by answering a series of five questions. On a scale of 1 to 5, men's mean rating was 4.23 (*SD* = .62), and women's mean rating was 4.50 (*SD* = .57). Thus, both men and women rated the program to be high in value. There was no significant difference in the ratings between counties.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Approximately 200 open-ended responses to the question, "What are the most important things you learned?" were compiled and analyzed for this study using a combination of quasi-statistics and content analysis methods. During analysis, categories began to emerge which highlighted specific topics individuals felt they had gained from the interaction of the evening. As analysis continued, topics were combined to create categories and subcategories, and researchers used common prompt words or phrases from statements to help categorize topics, such as *focus on each other*, *to listen*, and *working together*. In some cases, one response contained multiple topics and was included in more than one category. When a participant provided a new topic, it was often combined within one of the previously created categories, or it highlighted the need to create a new category of topics. After topics were collapsed and expanded and categories created, researchers tallied the total number of responses in each category to understand the most important items participants felt they had learned. In the end, four major categories emerged, which included communication, cooperation/teamwork, time together, and finding joy.

Communication. Approximately 40% (*n* = 79) indicated that "communication is key." Responses were divided into several sub-categories including (1) learning to listen and be more effective listeners (e.g., "listen; don't fix things"); (2) learning to understand their partner's communication style (e.g., "how to help each other understand"); and 3) learning to be open-minded while discussing issues (e.g., "develop new ideas for resolving issues"). One respondent indicated that he had gained knowledge on "how to communicate effectively and how to resolve concerns."

Cooperation and teamwork. Twenty percent (*n* = 40) of respondents indicated that cooperation and teamwork were important concepts learned during relationship activities. For example, one participant said they learned "to be patient and work as a team." After a dance class activity, another participant shared, "I learned that I need to let him lead and learn to trust and relax more, while still pulling my own weight." At the end of a couples' cooking class, one participant wrote, "Relationships take work (just like pasta), but it is SO worth it in the end."

Time together. A third major construct included spending time together (*n* = 38). This included taking time to connect with their partner (e.g., "spending time together as a couple without children helps us to become close"); spending time focusing on their spouse (e.g., “appreciate her beautiful face when she smiles”); and spending quality time together (e.g., “dates do not have to consist only of the movies”).

Finding joy. Finally, responses indicated that participants had a strong desire to find “joy in the journey” during their date night experience (*n* = 34). Many responded about how much fun they had at the activities with their spouse. For example, one participant stated, “I enjoy spending time ‘playing’ with my sweetheart. Silliness and laughing is a good thing.”

Other respondents described learned skills, such as massage or cooking techniques, without specifically connecting the new knowledge to a relationship concept. Some responses did not fit in any of the four major categories, but included topics such as gaining awareness of their attitudes or behaviors and how those attitudes affected their partner; learning to try new things; and recognizing that it is okay to ask for assistance.

Summary of Findings

Experiential date nights encouraged increased participation in relationship education by providing a low-cost, nonthreatening, and fun opportunity for couples to develop and enhance their relationship skills. Date nights consisted of interactive workshops designed to appeal to men and their partners, and also provided relationship education on topics such as communication, spending quality time together, and working together to solve problems. Date nights provided opportunities for couples to strengthen their couple relationship through positive communication, spending time together, having fun together, and working together to accomplish similar goals. Participants were able to significantly increase their knowledge of positive relationship behaviors and how to build stronger and healthier relationships in the future.

Beyond the evaluation results, impacts for this program were measured in a variety of other ways. For example, many couples, after first attending an experiential date night, repeated attendance at second, third, or fourth events. In addition, couples recruited other couples to attend with them. Many couples also began making date plans every Friday night, regardless of whether there was an organized activity or not. Lastly, couples who attended experiential date nights found companionship and camaraderie with other couples in similar situations, which reinforced participation and led to the development of a network for support and friendship.

Implications for Extension

Offering date nights through Cooperative Extension expands awareness of Extension programming in the community. Through partnerships and organizations were encouraged to promote Extension events and many participants and organizations requested additional information about Extension offerings through signing up for e-mail updates or newsletters, when these resources were available. This expanded awareness has led many class participants and additional community members to attend a variety of Extension offerings.

Programming Considerations

The following key considerations may be helpful to consider when planning and implementing similar programming:

Funding. In Utah where this project took place, a portion of TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) funds was allocated for relationship education, specifically to help individuals and couples develop and sustain healthy relationships. A TANF grant supported date night activities and provided some funding for light refreshments and a relationship enhancement tool for participants, both of which were incentives for participation.

Extension professionals desiring to organize date night activities without additional funding could easily do so. For example, depending on the activity, couples could pay as much as $25 to $30 per couple to attend an event. With community and local business partnerships, the activity registration or supplies generally cost $10 to $15 per couple and the remainder would be ample for refreshments, and a relationship book or activity enhancement tool, such as a game or other resource that could be used by the couple to reinforce the relationship concept taught during the date night. Any remaining registration money could also be utilized to offer scholarships for couples who could not afford the registration cost. In this way, the program could sustain itself.

Business Partnerships. Because date nights promote and provide business to local facilities, businesses are often willing to provide reduced costs and/or free facility use for date night participants, such as a two-for-one admission price with a free use of the party room for a group meeting area. Collaborations are generally initiated through contacting managers of companies and explaining the educational nature and goal of the date nights. While not all businesses are willing to provide a discount, facilitating date nights may still allow couples to participate in events that may be challenging to participate in without a group rate.

Child Care. Many couples with children found it challenging to attend marriage enhancement events. Unfortunately, providing child care can be a great cost and liability for those planning events. Due to this challenge, it would be helpful to provide contact information for a local child care resource and referral agency in the area for those who do not have a friend or family member who could provide child care. Depending on the age of the child, some child care facilities will watch children on an hourly basis, and some include evenings. For couples who cannot afford child care, it may be helpful to suggest creating a babysitting co-op within their neighborhood, or trading child care with friends or family members. Another possibility may be coordinating efforts with county 4-H leaders and volunteers to provide youth-focused education and activities on site, while parents are participating in a date nights.

Additionally, the time frame of the date nights can be crucial to supporting couples with children. It is helpful to have date nights encapsulated within a two-hour time frame, starting late enough that couples have time to make dinner and child care arrangements before arriving at the event, and ending early enough to not inconvenience those providing child care.

Size of Event. Because of the experiential nature of date nights, these events often tend to be smaller in size than other traditional relationship educational activities. The ideal size of a date night event depends on the activity itself, and is often limited based on venue capacity. When venues can accommodate larger groups, breaking the group into smaller sub-groups may allow for all couples to more fully participate.

Experiential date nights allow couples in various stages of their relationship to participate in strengthening their relationships through inexpensive and fun activities. Couples attending traditional marriage education may feel like they are admitting they need help in their relationship, which can be viewed negatively. Men, especially, are less likely to participate in traditional marriage education (Walker, 1999). On the other hand, experiential date nights allow relationship education to be absorbed in an enjoyable, nonthreatening environment. Many couples begin valuable conversations with each other during date night activities, which they can later revisit using skills they have learned. Successful partnerships with local businesses and organizations allow this program to sustain itself. Finally, evaluations indicate that participants found the experiences to be highly valuable and suggest a significant change in the knowledge of relationship skills before and after date nights. Information and skills taught during classes left an impression on participants immediately following the event and introduced new skills to develop long term changes and strengthen relationships.

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An Investigation of Leadership Orientation of Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Professionals in Relationship to Functioning on Subject Matter Teams

Doris Herringshaw

Research conducted on the connection between leadership orientation and functioning of Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) subject matter teams is limited. The purpose of this study was to determine the leadership orientation profile of FCS professionals and how subject matter teams functioned. FCS educators, state specialists, and center specialists completed a Bolman and Deal (1991) Leadership Orientation (Self) Survey, combined with Kelbaugh's (2003) indicators of team success. Of the four leadership orientations described by Bolman and Deal (i.e., structural, political, human resource, and symbolic), the primary leadership orientations identified by extension professionals were human resource and structural. These orientations were then corresponded to team functioning criteria determined by Kelbaugh. The results supplied information on leadership orientation skills and needed leadership training for Extension educators.

The economic crisis across the United States has brought about funding pressures for most Extension organizations. Some states are proposing budgets for fiscal year 2012 that are 10% below 2008 budget levels, and there is still a strong possibility of additional federal level cuts (Leachman, Williams, & Johnson, 2011). Limited financial resources have caused many state Extension systems to downsize and develop new ways of meeting the needs of the public (Bitsch & Thornsbury, 2010; Morse, 2011; Northouse, 2001). As organizations change and Extension professionals' breadth of responsibilities increase, education and training on needed skills to keep Extension viable is imperative.

A large body of research has been devoted to team development (e.g., effective teams and interactions between team members). However, the actual functioning of teams is still not well understood (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008). Indicators of team success are usually related to team outcomes, impacts, behavior, interaction, and how team members work together (Kelbaugh & Earnest, 2008). The identification of leadership orientation among team members has been shown to help teams build on individual strengths and determine the roles and functions of each team member (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Research indicated that the more leadership orientation skills one used, the more effective the leader (Bolman & Deal, 1997). This information can be by Extension professionals to determine the types of leadership training that would facilitate FCS educators in becoming better leaders in the community and in Extension (Safrit & Owen, 2010).

One way to extend Extension expertise in solving important issues was through a statewide team approach (Bitsch & Thornsbury, 2010; Leholm, Hamm, Suvedi, Gray, & Poston, 1999). In Ohio, limited budgets required FCS educators to work across county lines, despite a history of limited reciprocation between county offices and personnel, either financially or programmatically. In 2009, a statewide Extension organizational structuring model was developed in Ohio. This new model advocated for a statewide team approach designed to identify and meet programmatic needs with greater depth and efficiency (Bitsch & Thornsbury, 2010; State Restructuring Model, 2009). Instead of a single or several FCS professionals creating numerous isolated programs, the new diverse statewide team approach extended extension resources and expertise. Additionally, increased commitment from stakeholder participation further extended resources and facilitated the development of collaborative projects (Torppa & Smith, 2009). This new emphasis on a team approach required FCS educators to acquire new leadership skills designed to assist teams in leveraging program and community resources.

In some states, statewide program teams created business plans with educational goals that included public value statements and lists of potential audiences, community partners, and marketing needs. The creation of statewide subject matter teams composed of FCS professionals and stakeholders has the potential to target critical issues related using a collaborative approach. This type of approach extended limited resources as teams addressed statewide problems and issues within specific subject areas.

Objectives

This study was conducted to identify the individual leadership orientation of Extension FCS professionals and determine similarities and differences in light of organizational restructuring. Additionally, the study explored leadership orientation of FCS educators functioning in subject matter team.

Method

Procedures and Participants

In Ohio, FCS subject matter teams were developed that focused on ten areas (1) aging and adult development, (2) nutrition, (3) parenting, (4) health, (5) money management, (6) food safety, (7) lifeworks, (8) jobs and families, (9) childcare, and (1) family life. FCS Educators served on one or more teams, while maintaining their county program responsibilities in all subject matter areas. Each team had a chair, co-chair, and members. Team chairs were state specialists with a graduate degree, and the leadership of the team was part of the specialist's professional responsibility. Co-chairs were county educators who were selected or appointed by team members. All regional specialists were co-chairs by virtue of position responsibilities.

The explanatory sequential mixed design method best matched the problem and the approach to the study. This research design resulted in the collection of sequential data, first quantitative, then qualitative; these two phases obtained significant research results. The sample consisted of all FCS educators, state specialists, and regional FCS specialists in the state of Ohio (N = 89). The Bolman and Deal (1997) Leadership Orientation Survey and team functioning survey was mailed with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Extension FCS professionals at the county, district, and state levels.

Instruments

The instrument selected to collect leadership orientation data was Bolman and Deal's (1991) Leadership Orientation Survey, combined with indicators of team success as identified by Kelbaugh (2003). Authors of these assessment tools granted permission to use the instruments and indicators for this research. These scales had been used previously by Extension organizations and proven to be appropriate for assessing leadership and management styles of FCS professionals.

The Bolman and Deal survey consisted of 32 self-rating statements, including eight from each of the four leadership orientations (1) structural: goals and creating rules, policies and procedures in response to change; (2) political: power, conflict, competition, and organizational politics; (3) human resources: needs, skills, and relationships with others; and (4) symbolic: culture, meaning, ritual, ceremony, and stories. Survey questions on the four leadership orientations were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = never, 2 = occasionally, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = always). The highest score on the survey indicated the primary leadership orientation, and the second highest score indicated the secondary leadership orientation.

The next section of the survey was Kelbaugh's (2003) indicators of success identifying three fundamental elements of teamwork critical to the success of teams. The areas were: organizational readiness and support of teams, organizational expectation of teams, and behavior and teamwork practices. Kelbaugh (2003) used a modified Delphi study to determine indicators of team success within the Extension system, which was agreed upon by Extension administration across several states. FCS respondents completed a Kelbaugh's 25-item checklist. For each team-functioning statement, the participant had an opportunity to identify statements that best described the functioning of the team using the following scale: 1 = disagree, 2 = no opinion, 3 = agree, 4 = non-applicable.

Twenty-one additional statements of high importance dealt with member's roles on the team and team outcomes. The author was interested in determining what connection existed between Kelbaugh's (2003) indicators of team success, and leadership orientation as defined by Bolman and Deal (1997), and how they could be used as implications for the successful functioning of Extension teams.

The data were entered in SPSS to provide a quantitative framework. Quantitative results indicated the leadership orientation of the FCS sample, the team functioning scores for individuals and teams, background information on each professional. Quantitative results were used to purposefully select three teams for the qualitative portion of the study—the three teams were selected using the pre-determined characteristics and the results of the SPSS output. The methodology used was nine individual interviews using a predetermined list of questions. Teams varied in size from five to ten members; however, only the chair, co-chair and two members of each team were interviewed.

Findings

Analysis

The quantitative data analysis generated descriptions of each of the nine subject teams and individual leadership orientations of 72 out of 89 professionals surveyed. Seventy-five surveys were returned (84% response rate), two surveys were incomplete, and one respondent did not belong to a team and that survey was discarded.

A leadership orientation profile served as an indicator of the leadership functioning style of the individual. Each individual profile was based on recorded responses to the leadership orientation section (Bolman & Deal, 1991) of the survey instrument. An individual profile consisted of the top two leadership orientation scores, and served as an indicator of the style and approach to leadership held by the individual. According to Bolman and Deal (1997), individuals may be drawn to one or two frames and repel the others. The primary and secondary orientation scores were used to create an individual profile and were recorded both as an individual profile, and as part of the team profile.

On a scale of one to five, mean scores for the four leadership orientation frameworks were: human resource 4.18; structural 3.87; political 3.16; and symbolic 3.56. Differences in these scores indicated leadership skills that were most dominant. While the highest and lowest scores had little variance, results indicated differences in leadership orientation of FCS professionals. Higher scores indicated more frequent and comfortable orientations by individuals, while lower score showed a need for developing skills such as revenue generation, program development, and impact delivery.

The team-functioning score was based on Kelbaugh's (2003) 25 indicators of team success and his statements that described the functioning of issue teams by members on that team (Kelbaugh, 2003). All individual responses were discarded in the scoring and combined for a team functioning score (i.e., each participant's team functioning score was converted to a *z* score, representing that members' relative position on the team, so individuals and teams could be scored on the same level for comparison purposes).

The most popular leadership orientation profile was human resource combined with structural (36 team members or 50%); the second most common profile was human resource combined with symbolic (15 team members or 20%). Eleven team members (15%) had a combination of structural and symbolic, and a tie with human resource. Ten team members (13%) had political as part of the profile in combination with structural, symbolic, and/or human resource (Table 1).

Research on successful teams indicated that the acceptance of a common goal was essential for successful teamwork—a component of structural leadership orientation (Bitsch & Thornsbury, 2011). Commitment created a powerful and well-performing team; without it team members were simply individuals (Katzenback & Smith, 1993). An additional component of successful teams was communication between team members, which was a human resource leadership style. While many Extension educators had lower orientation scores in the political orientation, this leadership skill was identified as necessary to obtain funding, grants, and program support (Kelbaugh & Earnest, 2008).

Factor analysis was conducted to confirm that team functioning indicators measured an overall factor. Results indicated that one factor accounted for 46% of team functioning scores and every item loaded on the first factor with a minimum loading of .42. The quantitative phase of this study determined the need to have leadership training in such areas as working with individuals in political situations, leveraging finances for future programming, writing impact statements, symbolic training on how to nurture leadership, and celebrating wisdom and knowledge of individuals and teams.

While this article addressed results of the quantitative phase, qualitative results identified recurring themes across all three teams. The most frequently emerging themes related to person and team relations, areas of specialization determined by county needs, team communications, awards and recognition, organizational change and challenges, fluidity of teams, and potential for restructuring Extension and teams.

Summary and Implications for Extension

This study focused on leadership orientations of Extension FCS professionals and functioning of subject matter teams. Extension is an organization that helps people help themselves, and subject matter teams with effective leadership can produce results efficiently and effectively to meet the mission of Extension. In this study, Extension professionals' leadership orientation was primarily human resource (e.g., personal satisfaction from creating visions and accomplishing team goals—skills that produce positive outcomes for teams). Extension also uses structural leadership orientation (e.g., goal setting, providing a vision, and organizing a plan). These results correlated with similar studies (Kelbaugh, 2003; Bolman & Deal, 1997). Outcomes such as these demonstrate that determining leadership training needs of team members and team leaders can help teams function better.

Some limitations to this study should be noted. Consistent team membership was difficult to maintain due to FCS retirements, job losses, changes of specialization, and members switching teams during the study. These changes made it difficult to determine precisely how teams functioned. Additionally, Extension was undergoing reorganizational changes which created challenges when team financial support was eliminated. As teams were already in existence when the study began, additional information might have been provided if the study had been conducted from the inception until the culmination of these teams.

The results of this study are important to Extension as states struggle with limited resources and continue to conduct programs to demonstrate impact. Identifying leadership orientations and training subject matter specialists on specific leadership skills can result in more effective leadership and team results. Extension needs to identify, nurture and create team building skills. Although Extension has moved into the technology age, FCS educators value personal connections. Implications for training and for balancing leadership orientations become even more important for the morale of Extension professionals and future effectiveness of Extension programming. In times of change, Extension educators must fulfill more obligations and be experts in more areas than ever before. A more even balance of the four leadership orientations is necessary. This can be achieved by identifying FCS professionals' leadership orientations and providing more training where needed.

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Table 1.

Frequency of Leadership Orientation Use
(N = 72)

Leadership Orientation	Primary	Secondary
Human resource	53	13
Structural	12	35
Political	3	7
Symbolic	6	20

Note. Ties for leadership orientation are recorded in both categories

Major Concerns of Families in 1984 and 2009: A Twenty-Five Year Comparison of Public Policy Issues by the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences

Jan Scholl, Cheryle Jones Syracuse, Christine Kniep

The members of the National Association of Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS) have been in a unique position of being able to address family concerns at community and county levels. In 1984 and 2009, corresponding to the Association's 50th and 75th anniversaries, national studies were conducted to determine the major concerns of America's families. In 1984 a random sample of members was surveyed by surface mail. In 2009 the entire NEAFCS membership was surveyed by electronic mail. In 1984 the top four issues were: medical costs, pay equity for women, preschool childcare, and the elder care. In 2009, the top four issues were: employment, health care, financial security, and taxes. Reasons for the differences in findings are discussed and recommendations are made for a similar study in 25 years, for the association's centennial anniversary.

Historically, Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) educators have been in a unique position of addressing family concerns at county and community levels (Agricultural Extension, 1913). FCS educators take pride in creating programs that reach "grass roots" needs of the consumers with whom they work. Since its inception in 1934, the National Home Demonstration Agents Association (which became known as the National Association of Extension Home Economists in 1964, and the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences in 1995) has been the professional association of Extension educators addressing areas of family and consumer sciences. This association completes its work through professional development and public policy leadership (NEAFCS, 2011). In 1984, the 50th anniversary of the National Association of Extension Home Economists (NAEHE) served as a catalyst for conducting a survey of its members to determine the major concerns of families they served, as perceived by the members (NAEHE, 1984).

According to then NAEHE president, Charlotte Young, "It was decided that a national survey of our membership could be used to assess the problems confronting families and give direction to decision makers such as politicians, business leaders, and volunteer organizers" (Brown, 1984, 2). Funding was acquired and NAEHE members were surveyed. Results were shared with NAEHE members at the association's Annual Session that year, and subsequently summarized in graphic form (Figure 1) on the front page of *USA Today* (USA Snapshots, 1984; USA Today Features, 1984).

In 2009 the 75th anniversary planning committee of National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS), formerly NAEHE, recommended that a similar survey be conducted among the membership to identify current critical needs and trends. USDA Community Systems National Program Leader, Jane Schuchardt agreed that there was a critical need not only to conduct a survey, but to report on the growth of the organization in reaching its Cooperative Extension mission (personal communication, August 25, 2009).

Objectives

The objectives of this study were to (1) compare methods and findings of the 1984 and 2009 studies, (2) ascertain any changes in issues identified as top concerns between 1984 and 2009, and (3) provide documentation about the two studies, should the Association decide to conduct a study during its centennial year in 2034.

Method

In order to compare methods and findings of both studies, a number of resources were accessed including: reports, summary statistics, comments from investigators, news articles, and other documentation. Although quantitative measures were part of these studies, this article is largely a descriptive and qualitative comparison. The qualitative methods for this paper are those outlined in Berg (2004) and Berg and Latin (2004), as they address reporting and descriptive comparisons of studies.

Methods of the 1984 Study

The purpose of the 1984 survey was to identify public policy issues of greatest concern to women and families across the country and to use the findings to launch a public policy program. Funding was secured from Chesebrough Ponds, Inc., with assistance from public policy experts associated with the company, and by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The 1984 survey consisted of two parts: first, Extension home economists were asked to rate a series of 13 public policy issues on a four-point, Likert-type scale; and second, respondents were asked to list and rank three family concerns or issues that they felt were important, but were not among the 13 public policy issues previously listed. The survey also collected demographic data including age, marital status, region of the country where they worked, and rural/urban status of their clientele.

The 13 public policy issues included (1) fair insurance rates, (2) pay equity for women, (3) medical costs, (4) court-ordered child support enforcement, (5) preschool care for children, (6) before/after school care for school age children, (7) care of the elderly, (8) care of the handicapped, (9) flextime and job sharing opportunities,(10) employment training opportunities, (11) equal pensions for men and women, (12) survivors benefits for spouses, and (13) equity of social security for women. These items were selected by a steering committee and two USDA specialists with expertise in family life education and family economics, based on timeliness and relevance to the priority areas of their Extension home economics programs at that time.

Survey respondents were asked to rate each public policy issue on a four-point, Likert-type scale with options ranging from “extremely concerned” to “not at all concerned.” They were asked to base their ratings on personal observations of issues affecting the majority of people in the county or area where they worked.

Methods of the 2009 Study

In 2009 a similar study was conducted by NEAFCS to expand the knowledge base and identify shifts in public policy trends. The design of the 2009 survey included two phases: one phase to study the same questions as in 1984, and another to study any additional critical issues of families.

Phase I. The first phase of the 2009 survey replicated the same questions asked in the 1984 survey. The same 13 public policy issues offered in the 1984 survey were listed with an open-ended option of adding three additional issues not already identified. NEAFCS members rated their level of concern using the same criteria as before, namely, issues that they perceived as most important to their clientele. The top three issue that emerged from open-ended responses included (1) high unemployment and lack of jobs, (2) family stability, and (3) housing problems and cost of housing. The same four-point Likert scale was applied and responses were weighted with 3 points for “extremely concerned,” 2 points for “very concerned,” 1 point for “somewhat concerned,” and 0 points for “not at all concerned.” The quantification method was the same method used in the 1984 study.

Phase II. The second phase of the 2009 survey utilized the top ranking public policy issues arising from Phase I survey responses, as derived from the 16 identified public policy issues, and 1,408 issues that were identified through open-ended responses. The top 20 ranking public policy issues emerged as (1) employment, (2) housing, (3) food security, (4) education, (5) aging population, (6) energy, (7) environment, (8) resources and services to support families, (9) financial security, (10) financial literacy, (11) health, (12) health care, (13) obesity, (14) family stability, (15) substance abuse, (16) transportation, (17) economy, (18) population changes, (19) taxes, and (20) violence. In Phase II of the survey, respondents were asked to rate these issues using the same four-point Likert scale of "extremely concerned" to "not at all concerned." Respondents were also asked to rank their top three concerns from the list of twenty.

Demographics of the 1984 Survey

The 1984 survey included a sample of 865 recipients, representing 25% of the membership of NAEHE in 1984. This sample was randomly selected to complete the survey. Responses were returned by 547 of the 865 who received the survey representing a 64% return rate. The geographic profile of the clientele in the county as indicated by the respondent was: 58% rural, 17% urban, 5% suburban and 19% were indicated as a mix of the above. Thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents were 31 to 40 years old; 22% were 41-50 years old; 22% were 41-50 years old; 21% were under 30 years; and nearly 19% were 51-50 years old. Most respondents were married (63.3%); 23.6% were single; and only 10% were widowed or divorced.

The Southern region had the greatest number of members and the largest number of surveys returned—253 out of 547, representing (46.4%). The Central region accounted for 155, representing 28.3%. The Eastern region totaled 71 respondents representing (13%). And the Western region contributed 54 (9.9%). The response rate by region was reported as being proportional to the regional membership in 1984 (NAEHE, 1984) [Table 1].

Demographics to the 2009 Surveys

Phase I. Utilizing technology available in 2009, the entire membership of NEAFCS (3,273) was surveyed using electronic mail and Zoomerang™ survey software, including retired members who had known e-mail addresses as of June 2009. Of the 3,273 electronic survey notifications sent, 3,042 (93%) were delivered (i.e., did not bounce back). The first survey (Phase I) was sent June 30, 2009 and responses were accepted until July 13, 2009, with 760 members completing the survey, representing a 25% response rate. Respondents included 714 active members (94%) and 46 retired members (6%). A breakdown of responses by region included Southern (41%), Central (31%), Eastern (18%), and Western (10%) [Table 2].

Phase II. The second survey (Phase II) was sent July 20, 2009 and responses were accepted until August 1, 2009, with 473 members completing the survey, representing a 16% response rate. This number included 432 active members (91%) and 41 retired members (9%). The breakdown of responses by region for the second survey was Southern (43%), Central (31%), Eastern (17%), and Western (9%). Response rates by region for both Phase I and Phase II surveys were determined to be proportional to regional NEAFCS memberships in 2008-2009 (NEAFCS, 2009).

Findings

Analysis of the 1984 Survey

In 1984 respondents selected "medical costs" as the leading public policy issue facing families at that time. Thirty-six percent ranked medical care first; 61% included it in their top three most important issues; and 96% reported people in their communities were extremely or very concerned about rising medical costs. Responses varied by region. For example, 40% of respondents in the Central region expressed medical care as their top concern, compared to 28% in the Eastern region.

"Pay equity for women" was the second highest ranked item, selected as the most important issue by 19% of respondents, and ranked among the top three by 40%. Pay equity was identified by 28% of respondents in the Southern region, and 22% in the Western region, as an extreme concern for their communities. Two closely related issues virtually tied as the third highest ranked response. Thirty-one percent of respondents named "preschool child care" as their top concern, with 30% naming "care for the elderly." Differences in responses among regions were minimal for both child care and care for the elderly.

Analysis of the 2009 Surveys

In Phase I of the 2009 survey, respondents identified leading public policy issues as (1) medical costs, (2) high unemployment and lack of jobs, (3) family stability, and (4) housing problems and the cost of housing. Seventy-six percent of respondents indicated that the people in their county or area were extremely concerned about medical costs, with 21% very concerned; 67% were extremely concerned about employment issues, with 23% very concerned. Forty-three percent were extremely concerned about family instability, with 44% very concerned; 33% were extremely concerned about housing problems and cost of housing, with 39% very concerned.

Analysis of Phase II of the 2009 survey indicated that 54% of respondents were extremely concerned about employment (including unemployment, under-employment, lack of jobs, low paying jobs, and the closure of businesses), with 32% very concerned. Ranking second highest was health care (including costs, coverage, accessibility, quality, prescription drug costs, and dental costs), with 44% extremely concerned and 47% very concerned. Taxes (including property tax, income tax, farm tax, and government spending) ranked third highest, with 33% extremely concerned and 43%

very concerned. Financial security (including cost of living, household debt, credit debt, living wages, bankruptcy, and poverty) ranked fourth, with 36% extremely concerned and 47% very concerned. Ranking fifth was the economy (including the U.S. economy, global economy, cost of goods and services, and the national debt), with 28% extremely concerned and 40% very concerned.

Finally, responses to the question, “Which are the top three concerns for the majority of people in your county/area?” were as follows: employment (64%), health care (38%), financial security (37%), economy (34%), taxes (18%); and housing (17%).

Summary

Of the thirteen issues presented in the 1984 survey, the cost of medical care clearly emerged as the top concern among American families at that time. This was followed by pay equity for women, preschool child care, and care for the elderly. Among the write-in issues, the most frequently identified concerns were: unemployment, the availability of jobs, parenting, family relationships, and housing.

Of 20 issues presented in Phase I and Phase II of the 2009 survey, nearly all concerns related to employment and the economy. Health care was also a strong issue, ranking second out of the five issues. However, the remaining three issues were also of a financial nature: financial security, the economy, and taxes.

Comparison of the Studies

The purpose of both the 1984 and the 2009 studies was to determine major concerns of families as perceived and reported by Extension Family and Consumer Sciences educators (Syracuse, Kniep, & Beebe, 2009). The sample differed in the two studies (i.e., random sampling in 1984 and population sampling in 2009). The method of survey distribution also varied (i.e., surface mail in 1984 and electronic delivery and response in 2009). Another variation occurred when life members were included in the 2009 survey, but not in the 1984 survey. Respondents were also asked to identify “future areas of concern” in Phase II of the 2009 study, although this wording was not included in the 1984 study.

Though the investigators in the 2009 study wanted to replicate the 1984 study as closely as possible, a population study was thought to be more representative of the membership, giving all members an opportunity to reply. The overriding decision to use electronic rather than surface mail was the cost of postage, printing, and collation of surveys and findings. With the ease and prevalence of electronic communication in 2009, it might be questioned whether any kind of response rate would have been obtained had the surveys been distributed by ground mail.

One difficulty with the electronic study was that some of the surveys were not deliverable because e-mail addresses were no longer in service. Another difficulty was a significantly lower response rate to Phase II of the survey. When some respondents were asked about their lack of participation on the second survey, they reported being confused by the number of messages received reminding them to respond to the first survey, not realizing that there was a second survey (e.g., there was nothing in the subject line that indicated a second survey). Timing may also have been an issue since respondents were given little more than a week to enter and submit their responses.

If there was one topic missing from the top-ranking issues of 2009, it was pay equity. It was also unusual that other key topics populating the news in 2009 (e.g., obesity, education, energy, the environment, and substance abuse) actually ranked lower in 2009 than they did in 1984.

Comparing results of the 1984 survey (commemorating the association's 50th anniversary) and the 2009 study (representing the association's 75th anniversary), it might be said that family concerns were the top foci in 1984 and financial issues rose to the top in 2009. As Schuchardt related, "affluenza" had been building over the past 25 years and put painful strains on families and communities (personal communication, August 25, 2009). "The year 2009 [was] a teachable moment for personal finance," according to Extension financial specialist, Barbara O'Neill, "due to eroding government and employer supports in 2008" (Conway, 2009, 3).

Implications for Extension

The value of the 1984 and 2009 studies, in comparison, is a heightened awareness of public policy issues. It is important that Extension educators be aware of the trends and needs of their clientele and consider using this information to guide programming throughout the nation. This study not only provides data for current use, but also provides a template for a future study when the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences celebrates its centennial year.

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Table 1.

Demographics of 1984 Survey Respondents

Respondent Variables				
Locale	Rural	Urban	Suburban	Mix of two or more
	58%	17%	5%	19%
Age	Under 30	31-40	41-50	51-60
	21.6%	22.3%	36.0%	14.8%
Marital Status	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced
	23.6%	63.3%	2.6%	8.0%

Region (N = 547)	Response Rate	Percentage
Southern	253	46.4%
Central	155	28.3%
Eastern	71	13.0%
Western	54	9.9%

Table 2.

Demographics of 2009 Survey Respondents

	Response and percentage	
Variable	Phase 1 (n = 760)	Phase 2 (n = 473)
Respondent		
NEAFCS Active Member	712 (94%)	432 (91%)
NEAFCS Life Member	42 (6%)	41 (9%)
Region		
Southern	308 (41%)	203 (43%)
Central	236 (31%)	146 (31%)
Eastern	139 (18%)	80 (17%)
Western	77 (10%)	44 (9%)
Population of clientele		
Less than 1,000	13 (2%)	11 (2%)
1,000-10,000	143 (19%)	74 (16%)
10,000-50,000	304 (40%)	176 (37%)
50,000-100,000	119 (16%)	89 (19%)
Over 100,000	184 (24%)	123 (26%)

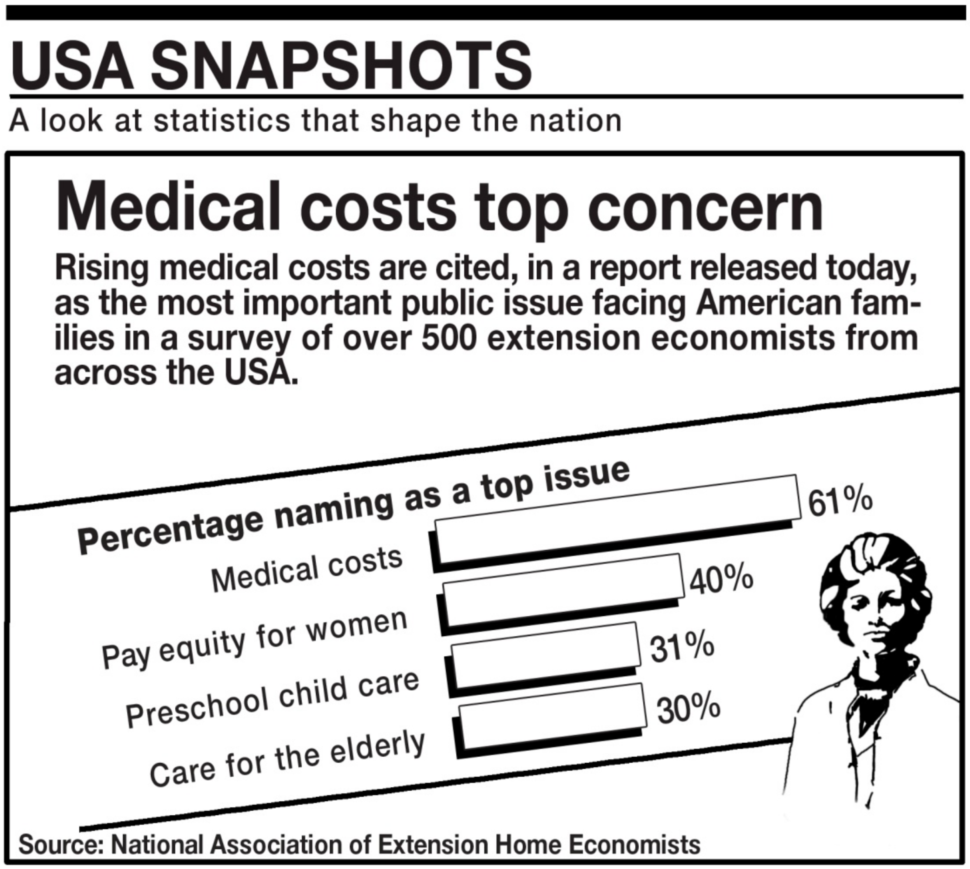

Figure 1. Front page graphic from *USA Today* in 1984 demonstrating results of a survey conducted with members of National Association of Extension Home Economists (NAEHE).