

# Transactional Factors Influencing the Implementation of Intercollegiate Extension Programs at United States Land-Grant Universities






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## Abstract

University engagement within communities is becoming more important, and public land-grant universities (LGUs) are uniquely situated to create knowledge that benefits society. Intercollegiate Extension programs could be a novel approach to improving university engagement by using the Extension mission as a catalyst for socially relevant programs. However, a gap remains in the literature regarding specific guidelines to overcome barriers toward intercollegiate Extension programs. The purpose of this study was to explore how transactional factors influenced the implementation of intercollegiate Extension programs at LGUs. A qualitative descriptive phenomenological research design was used. The Organizational Change model guided the interview protocol creation. All eight participants were employed by LGUs. Template analysis was applied to the data combined with the constant comparative method. Four themes and six sub-themes emerged from the interviews. The transactional themes were: (a) promotion and tenure, (b) utilizing LGUs' organizational structures to support intercollegiate Extension programs, (c) task and individual skills required for successful intercollegiate programs, and (d) professional recognition. Utilizing LGUs' organizational structures to support intercollegiate Extension programs was most relevant to the success of intercollegiate programs. Intercollegiate Extension programs should use existing assets like the county-based infrastructure to assist in disseminating university knowledge relevant for addressing public needs.

## Keywords

Collaboration, interdisciplinary, Organizational Change model, complex problems

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## Introduction and Problem Statement

University engagement within communities is becoming more important for society and research (Engagement Scholarship Consortium [ESC], n.d.). Public land-grant universities (LGUs) are uniquely situated to create knowledge that benefits society and prepares students to become active citizens (Fitzgerald et al., 2012). The Kellogg Commission Report (1998) called for LGUs to go beyond service to what was termed engagement wherein institutions “redesign their teaching, research, and extension and service functions to become more involved with their communities” (p. 9). Three important aspects to university engagement are better quality research, socially relevant science, and universities providing valued degrees (McDowell, 2001). The Community Engagement Carnegie Classification is a prestigious accreditation metric that ranks universities based on community engagement efforts (New England Higher Education, n.d.).

Intercollegiate Extension programs have been a novel approach to improving university engagement by using the Extension mission as a catalyst for socially relevant programs; however, a gap exists in the literature regarding guidelines for managing these collaborations. Intercollegiate Extension programs were operationally defined as Extension programs involving personnel from at least two colleges within an LGU. The ESC (n.d.) reported 17 LGU member institutions but the exact number of intercollegiate Extension programs was unknown. Previous research has documented some interdisciplinary university engagement efforts designed to address complex challenges of the 21st century such as drug addiction (Caillouet & Harder, 2021), rural economic revitalization (Caillouet & Harder, 2021), technology accessibility (King, 2018; Warner et al., 2017), and healthcare concerns such as recycling medical equipment, diabetes, and food safety (Buys & Koukel, 2018; Condo & Martin, 2002; Walsh et al., 2018). Although, previous literature documented many types of intercollegiate Extension programs and their importance (Culp, 2009; Garrett & Belle, 2022; Holland et al., 2019), a vagueness exists about how these collaborations function within LGUs.

## Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The Organizational Change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) was developed to explain the sources of organizational change. The model illustrates the interrelated nature of external and internal forces at work within organizations. Burke and Litwin (1992) suggested the model be used “as a guide for what to look for and as a predictor for what and how to manage large-scale organizational change” (p. 541). The Organizational Change model helped frame the investigation of organizational factors impacting the implementation of intercollegiate Extension programs and provided insight into how these collaborations work within LGUs.

The Organizational Change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) can be explained in terms of transformational and transactional factors. Five of the external and internal forces in the model are classified as transformational factors: (a) external environment, (b) mission and strategy, (c) leadership, (d) culture, and (e) individual and organizational performance. Transformational

factors are likely caused by environmental influences, which require entirely new behaviors from individual members (Burke & Litwin, 1992).

In contrast, transactional factors are the short-term, mutually beneficial exchanges that occur between members of an organization (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Transactional factors create change via short-term exchanges among people through a mentality of “you do this for me, and I’ll do that for you” (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 530). Transactional factors within the Organizational Change model are: (a) management practices, (b) structure, (c) systems (policies and procedures), (d) work unit climate, (e) task and individual skills, (f) motivation, and (g) individual needs and values (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Transactional factors affect a greater number of organizational change variables than transformational variables (Caillouet et al., 2022); however, all factors are equally important to explore (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Therefore, this research focuses on transactional factors that influence adoption of intercollegiate Extension programs.

Leahey and Barringer (2020) found universities that made a formal commitment to interdisciplinary research efforts typically underwent a reorganization of university units (e.g., academic departments and centers). This type of organizational restructuring has led to increased research and awarded grants, but universities likely need to move beyond structural commitment to produce higher impact research (Leahey & Barringer, 2020). Specifically, Lyons and Mann (2018) suggested LGUs “move beyond agriculture to encourage innovation in a diversity of industries” (p. 43), and that LGUs should utilize Extension to strengthen university-community linkages. The Organizational Change model is well suited for examining organizational changes because many of the model factors are relevant to intercollegiate Extension programs. For example, Rubens et al. (2017) provided recommendations for improving Extension outreach at institutions of higher education including: (a) restructuring faculty assessment procedures (e.g., promotion and tenure) and incentivizing faculty for their efforts, (b) developing partnerships within and external to the university, and (c) investing in support structures which encourage entrepreneurial activities (e.g., sufficient human resources, administrative support, etc.) which were similar factors as those included in the Organizational Change model. LGUs are complex organizations and change can be challenging; however, organizational restructuring, revisions to promotion and tenure processes, and employee skill development can be used to increase interdisciplinary Extension efforts aimed at solving real-world challenges faced by communities (Kellogg Commission, 1998).

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore which transactional factors influenced the implementation of intercollegiate Extension programs at LGUs in the United States, and then better understand how they did so.

## Methods

This study was part of a larger-scale study (Caillouet, 2022) examining the implementation of intercollegiate Extension programs at LGUs in the United States. A qualitative descriptive phenomenological research design was used (Thompson et al., 1989). The phenomena under investigation were the lived experiences of individuals working within intercollegiate Extension programs at LGUs and the organizational factors influencing the implementation of those programs.

Criterion sampling determined participants' eligibility (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Potential participants had to fit the criteria of being employed by a university-based Extension system and working with and having some leadership responsibility for an intercollegiate Extension program. The Engagement Scholarship Consortium (n.d.) was used to identify LGUs conducting intercollegiate programs. Then, after additional internet searches documenting program details, 10 potential participants were identified. Two individuals were later excluded because they were not employed by Extension. The eight selected participants were employees at LGUs with R1 research status (Carnegie Classification of Institutions, 2018) and held a variety of positions employed full-time by Extension including: (a) LGU administrators, (b) Extension specialists, (c) center directors, and (d) program coordinators. They worked within intercollegiate programs covering topics related to community-driven challenges like business development, rural revitalization, sustainable tourism, and healthcare access. For example, respondents were connected with the following colleges but not necessarily employed by them: (a) College of Liberal Arts, (b) College of Business and Economics, (c) College of Landscape Architecture, (d) College of Communication, (e) College of Human Ecology, (f) School of Nursing, (g) College of Design, (h) Colleges of Health, and (i) College of Education and Human Development. During the member-checking process, participants were asked to provide a pseudonym (Allen & Wiles, 2015). One participant opted to create a pseudonym, while the remaining participants requested that a pseudonym be assigned to them by the researcher.

The Organizational Change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) influenced the semi-structured interview guide creation. The semi-structured interview guide was comprised of 15 main questions and six probing questions. Questions used in the interview guide included asking about the individual's background and current LGU Extension structure and were based off the Organizational Change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) such as "What has the change meant for Extension policies and procedures?". Prior to data collection, the instrument was reviewed by a content expert whose knowledge about the functioning of LGUs came from 20 years of employment in various Extension roles at three LGUs. Then, interviews were conducted by phone or Zoom by the lead researcher from July 20, 2021 to August 18, 2021. Interviews ranged from 51 minutes to 63 minutes and were audio recorded using Zoom or Otter.ai. The interview protocol documented information such as: (a) pseudonyms; (b) meeting date, time, and length of meeting; (c) meeting type (e.g., phone or zoom); and (d) specific questions asked. Individual

expertise and applicability of questions were taken into consideration when selecting which questions to prioritize within the agreed-upon time limit of an hour for the interview.

Data was analyzed using template analysis (Brooks et al., 2015) influenced by the Burke and Litwin (1992) Organizational Change model and the constant comparative method (Saldaña, 2015). Member-checking was performed after transcriptions were complete (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A methodological decision was made which required themes and sub-themes to be statements provided from three or more interview participants which helped increase the credibility of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A review of the data procedures was conducted by the primary researcher to determine accuracy of transcription and possible research conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Detailed audit trail records were kept (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Two peer debriefings with an Extension faculty member knowledgeable in the subject area, but not associated with the research as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), led the primary researcher to reorganize two themes into more well-defined themes and sub-themes. In total, there were 24 template iterations.

Recognizing possible sources of researcher bias is important when establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research team had life experiences as students and employees of LGUs; all received at least one degree from a LGU and were employed by the same LGU at the time of this study. The team's Extension experience included roles as an intern, an agent, and administration. Two researchers were relative outsiders to Extension with no formal experience in the field but who had expertise in formal education. In addition, the research team provided input regarding the research design, data analysis, and individual subject matter expertise.

## Findings

Four themes and six sub-themes emerged. The transactional themes were: (a) promotion and tenure, (b) utilizing LGUs' organizational structure to support intercollegiate Extension programs, (c) task and individual skills required for successful intercollegiate programs, and (d) professional recognition. Each theme will be presented in detail in the following text with the associated transactional factor provided in parentheses.

### **Promotion and Tenure (Management Practices)**

Promotion and tenure are important considerations for university system employees and can have varying effects on intercollegiate Extension programs. Faculty are more likely to engage in intercollegiate Extension programs when they see how that work helps their pursuit of promotion and tenure. Leah, who led a research and Extension outreach unit, explained that faculty were motivated by "publications, and however much funding they get to have on a particular project or a grant [that] gets added to their funding on their vita." Levi said, "it can't just be 'Hey, bring a class in and help us do this work'." Levi explained that successful intercollegiate Extension programs may have "some limited success" regarding positive community impacts by having students in a class complete a project; however, true faculty

engagement comes “if there's also funding and publication opportunities then that's really helping them [faculty] in their tenure process as well.”

Anna raised some concerns about administrators creating positions for intercollegiate Extension programs without taking into consideration how faculty in those positions will successfully navigate promotion and tenure. Anna explained how the intercollegiate Extension positions have been “creatively designed ... which is great, and administration has been forward thinking.” However, Anna elaborated, “I think for university administrators who dream up these great positions they sort of don't remember what it was like to be working on tenure and they haven't thought about it.” To support intercollegiate Extension programs, Charlie said his LGU recently added a way to evaluate diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the promotion and tenure process. Charlie shared that they “have a lot of faculty that are doing great work in that area and a lot of scholarship in that area” but there were no mechanisms in place for recognizing the value. Ultimately, intercollegiate programs were more likely to be successful engaging faculty when there were clear linkages between the programs and faculty pursuits towards promotion and tenure.

### **Utilizing LGUs' Organizational Structure to Support Intercollegiate Extension Programs (Structure)**

Participants shared four sub-themes related to how the organizational structure of their LGUs impacted their intercollegiate Extension programs: (a) leveraging the county-based infrastructure improves intercollegiate Extension programs, (b) autonomy from agricultural colleges creates a more intercollegiate environment, (c) thoughtful position creation can increase success of intercollegiate Extension programs, and (d) sufficient human resources help to carry out intercollegiate Extension programs.

#### ***Leveraging the County-based Infrastructure Improves Intercollegiate Extension Programs***

A unique aspect of LGUs are the county-based offices located around each state to assist with Extension and outreach efforts. Benefits emerged regarding leveraging the county-based infrastructure of LGUs as a means to promote intercollegiate Extension programs, advance scientific discovery, and address real-community needs. Anna explained, “So, there are [many] offices spread across the state. So, we have the opportunity because we're associated with Extension to talk, to have information flow out across the whole state about our programs both Extension things and academic.” Similarly, Charlie elaborated on the power of leveraging LGUs' county-based infrastructure by using the county offices across the state to provide more streamlined and efficient continuing education opportunities. When asked if he foresaw any challenges or opportunities with the rest of the LGUs utilizing the county-based infrastructure, Charlie elaborated by sharing:

I see opportunity for growth. I see opportunity for more cohesiveness between us [Extension] and the academic departments across campus and I see a great opportunity, and this is starting to come to fruition, a great opportunity for all the academic affair departments to utilize Extension to do outreach across the state.

County Extension offices provide an invaluable resource for LGU intercollegiate Extension programs to establish trusted relationships within and between communities across the state.

### ***Autonomy from Agricultural Colleges Creates a More Intercollegiate Environment***

The term autonomy was used to describe LGUs where Extension functions as a separate unit from the agricultural colleges. Historically, LGUs have been closely tied to colleges of agriculture. However, Charlie explained, “There are also a lot of other faculty [outside of agricultural colleges] who are doing engagement type work that – that’s not showing up in Extension reports.” Anna shared, her LGU “is a little bit atypical” because Extension was not associated with the College of Agriculture but rather its own entity. Additionally, Charlie felt Extension gained autonomy because there was a visionary who advocated it be placed outside of the College of Agriculture and within a more centrally positioned office within the LGU.

At LGUs with the separation between Extension and the agricultural college, Extension’s autonomy fostered the growth and development of intercollegiate programs. Levi explained the benefits that comes with Extension’s autonomy such as the ability to develop partnerships with numerous colleges or centers across the LGU. Leah explained how her Extension unit directly benefited from the flexibility of not being tightly bound to a college. Her unit is “funded partly through Extension, and partly through the College of Arts and Sciences and ... by the projects that we bring in. We’re what the university calls an entrepreneurial unit.” Leah described the benefits of leading an entrepreneurial Extension unit which included greater access to funding sources, expanded programmatic opportunities, and partnerships with faculty university-wide.

Charlie also explained a negative outcome of Extension being embedded within agricultural colleges is that other colleges may perceive this resource as “hands off.” According to Charlie, Extension offices that are accessible to faculty university-wide can attract “faculty who are in other colleges that really want to do engagement scholarship across their state.” Participants explained that faculty felt more willing to collaborate on intercollegiate Extension programs when Extension was organizationally separated from agricultural colleges.

### ***Thoughtful Position Creation Can Increase Success of Intercollegiate Extension Programs***

Employee roles and responsibilities are also components of an organization’s structure. Some LGUs were not strategic or intentional when adding new positions to support intercollegiate Extension programs. Anna recalled her “position was created for the program kind of in a happenstance manner.” Jessica explained her LGU did not start with a strategic approach when developing leadership positions for intercollegiate Extension programs. Jessica said her position came only after several other “fragmented attempts” to hire someone failed. Jessica’s position was ultimately successful because it strategically intertwined the need for marketing, innovative programming, personnel development, and navigating grant/contract partnerships. Participants reflected on the time and resources that could have been saved if their intercollegiate Extension programs had begun with the creation of strategic positions.

Conversely, one LGU successfully demonstrated thoughtful planning when adding human capacity. Charlie provided an anecdote about his LGU Extension system purchasing faculty time in disciplines which had not historically been closely linked with Extension. For example, Charlie said:

We bought 40% of one of the Associate Dean's in the College of Medicine. You've got a high-ranking administrator in the College of Medicine that has an Extension appointment. And so, that marries these two together – the College of Medicine and Extension through a person. And what that has led to is ... looking at developing a network of new Extension professionals that can be dispersed across the state to help for clinical trials. Resources can be saved and employees are more likely to be successful if thoughtful consideration is taken when developing intercollegiate Extension job positions.

### ***Need for Sufficient Human Resources to Carry Out Intercollegiate Extension Programs***

Another sub-theme which emerged was the need for sufficient human resources to successfully conduct intercollegiate Extension programs. Participants explained that Extension, in general, has experienced a decline in financial support for human resources. Levi explained, “When I was hired, I think we had three full time Extension appointments in community development. Now, we're down to two statewide specialists, just myself, and we also have a rural economist.” Leah also commented about Extension's lack of sufficient employee capacity due to budget constraints and said, “we don't, we don't really have the capacity to do that so much at this point,” especially regarding disseminating intercollegiate Extension program impacts with stakeholders and marketing programs to clientele.

Several participants highlighted how Extension has been financially stretched to provide the human support needed for traditional programming which has made innovative programs, like intercollegiate Extension programs, challenging to implement. Anna felt it was important to have personnel dedicated to leading an intercollegiate Extension program, explaining “You got to have somebody to run a program like this and you have to have somebody who's not jammed packed full of other things.” Clint felt intercollegiate Extension programs should embrace a model with recurring funding to ensure sufficient human resources are available to manage and support the programs.

### **Task and Individual Skills Required for Successful Intercollegiate Programs (Task and Individual Skills)**

This theme was comprised of two sub-themes: (a) viewing the larger picture beyond siloed disciplines and (b) diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI) skills.

#### ***Viewing the Larger Picture Beyond Siloed Disciplines***

Intercollegiate Extension programs require faculty to fight their “impulse to silo” within their departments, according to Jackie. Anna's experience led her to believe a necessary skill needed when working with intercollegiate Extension programs is the “knowledge of how systems work.” Additionally, Charlie said employees should be able to think holistically, understand how



individual parts of programs fit together to achieve the end goals, and collaborate with faculty across LGUs to maximize program impacts.

Jessica explained how her interdisciplinary Extension work feels like “two different worlds” and observed how the “university doesn't really understand the urban context of scale, diversity, complexity... So, it's kind of like being able to navigate in both of those environments in a way that brings greater understanding.” Jessica explained that individuals who work with intercollegiate Extension programs should be able to see how the university is an integral part of the community and should work to meet community needs as well as university needs. Anna also noted how working beyond siloed disciplines has been critical for her interdisciplinary Extension programming because she must know “what kinds of things are taught generally in each of the departments.” Having knowledge of the different departments allowed Anna to select appropriate priorities and opportunities for her intercollegiate Extension programs.

### ***Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity Skills***

Intercollegiate Extension program faculty need to understand and be able to navigate collaborations with diverse individuals by using effective DEI skills. Jessica explained that successful partnerships require “making it easier [community members] to reach not just one of us, but more than one of us [university departments and faculty experts].” Richard also agreed about the importance of DEI for successful intercollegiate Extension programs and how across the state is a “somewhat different culture” coupled with “a lot of racial diversity as well”. Richard elaborated, working with diverse audiences was particularly important for intercollegiate Extension programs which had a nutrition or community economic development component because they were delivered to a wide range of stakeholders across the state. Specifically, DEI skills were necessary for intercollegiate Extension programs that engaged university-faculty who had limited experience interacting with the public through Extension outreach and education.

Clint expanded on the benefits of diverse collaborations and explained, “The more diversity we have, you know, in our learning, the more we have to share and the more we benefit from that and the more viewpoints we gain” and that “increasing partnership and collaboration and diversifying our partners helps us be more effective educators.” Clint also said that his LGU intercollegiate Extension programs have had “a cultural awareness and cultural proficiency committee” to ensure cultural awareness was built into Extension programs. Clint and Charlie emphasized the importance of having adequate resources to create intercollegiate Extension program materials in multiple languages for specific topics such as food safety trainings. Regardless of the intercollegiate Extension program, participants supported the need for LGU employees to be skilled interpersonal communicators and feel comfortable working with diverse people in all aspects of their profession.

### **Professional Recognition (Motivation)**

Professional recognition was the only theme that emerged regarding employee motivation, a Burke and Litwin (1992) transactional factor. For example, Anna described her colleague's work

with gardens at a women's prison. The project that started as a skill development opportunity for offenders to turn barren land into vegetable gardens has continued for over five years and led to improved visitor experiences and healthier parent-child relationships. According to Anna, her colleague's work "got lots of press... [and] attention at the upper levels of the administration because she was willing to do this [community-driven, innovative] work."

It was clear that Charlie took pride in the intercollegiate programs he was involved with and praised his LGU for acting "with intentionality" to create programs which served the public. Charlie also advocated for others to be recognized for their work as well. Specifically, Charlie explained how he took action steps, along with support from the Provost Office committee, to implement "mechanisms" that reward faculty for innovative programming. Levi reflected that working with intercollegiate Extension programs "gives us a lot more opportunities and it gives us a higher, kind of, level of recognition with that, at the upper levels of leadership, the President, the Provost, they recognize the work that we're doing." Professional recognition is a powerful tool that can be used to incentivize faculty to engage with intercollegiate Extension programs and can be a way of communicating the importance of these types of programs to stakeholders.

## Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

Transactional factors are important for organizational change because they focus more on the subtle areas of improvement (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Half of the participants agreed that restructuring Extension to have no academic allegiances but rather administrators who work university-wide could foster greater community engagement (McDowell, 2001). Similarly, structure can be used to impact individual skills such as leveraging county Extension offices to allow faculty opportunities beyond academic silos (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Importantly, not all states have county offices; therefore, states should examine if the same benefits apply to their organization.

Extension autonomy from agricultural colleges was described as creating a more intercollegiate environment (McDowell, 2001). However, changing the Extension structure could also change promotion and tenure policies, which are a driving factor for how faculty make decisions (Fitzgerald et al., 2012). More information is needed to understand possible unintended consequences from Extension's separation from agricultural colleges such as changes in stakeholder support. Intercollegiate Extension programs were described as more successful when strategic planning was used to develop employee positions. Successful intercollegiate Extension programs must also have enough resources for adequate program support staff without being reliant on traditional Extension programming resources which have been strained (Harder et al., 2009).

Faculty involved with intercollegiate Extension programs should be able to look beyond disciplinary silos and understand that complex societal issues require collaborative solutions (Kellogg Foundation, 1998). Moreover, successful intercollegiate Extension program employees

possessed the skills necessary to implement DEI practices into their work. Last, participants expressed a need for professional recognition regarding their work with intercollegiate Extension programs because it helped them feel like valued members of the organization (Fitzgerald et al., 2012). Although, promotion and tenure as well as professional recognition were both forms of extrinsic motivation, promotion and tenure has been a job requirement while professional recognition is not. These two factors are related because all the Organizational Change model factors are interconnected but separate transactional factors.

Intercollegiate Extension programs should take into consideration faculty requirements for promotion and tenure and provide opportunities for teaching, research, and publications to encourage participation in these programs (Rubens et al., 2017). Clear guidelines developed by departments beyond agricultural colleges may be useful in the tenure and promotion evaluation process for faculty engaged in Extension efforts. Furthermore, the structure of LGUs may be used to support intercollegiate Extension programs by utilizing the county-based offices (Lyons & Mann, 2018), and clear operating procedures may need to be implemented so that university faculty understand how Extension offices can and cannot be utilized.

We agree there is a lack of contemporary references specifically focused on intercollegiate programs. Further, there is not a singular model for intercollegiate Extension. We have added an additional recommendation to focus on the specific models of intercollegiate Extension programs. Future research could focus on determining the relative importance of the transactional factors participants identified as important for the success of intercollegiate Extension programs. Also, future research may consider using various theoretical lenses, such as social exchange theory, to provide additional insight into the success of intercollegiate Extension programs. Case studies may prove useful to better understand the intended and unintended consequences of Extension separating from agricultural colleges and creating a more welcoming Extension environment to faculty university-wide. The majority of participants, six, found the county offices to be great assets for intercollegiate Extension programs. But future research may consider identifying the views of county agents which may be an important factor too. Future research may examine funding strategies for intercollegiate Extension programs and the willingness of various current and potential new partners to contribute financial support. This study examined intercollegiate Extension programs at very high research activity LGUs; however, additional research should determine if recommendations vary for different university designations such as high or moderate research activity universities. Last, our study examined intercollegiate programs from the perspective of those employed directly by Extension; future research should seek to determine the perspectives of other university employees engaged in intercollegiate Extension programs.

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