

## **NACO Position Paper on the Status of University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE) and the Proposed UNCE-College of Agriculture, Biotechnology, and Natural Resources Consolidation**

In 2012-2013, the Nevada Association of Counties (NACO) had conversations with President Marc Johnson and other representatives of the University of Nevada, Reno regarding their proposal to consolidate the University's Cooperative Extension (UNCE) program with the College of Agriculture, Biotechnology, and Natural Resources (CABNR). After hearing NACO's objections, in a letter to NACO dated June 13, 2013, University President Marc Johnson stated that the University was not going forward with the proposal at that time and would be working to build relationships with the counties and engage in quarterly meetings with NACO. During the subsequent two years, there were no meetings between NACO and UNR in which the consolidation or future status of UNCE were discussed. Then, this summer (2015), only after NACO requested an update, counties were told that the consolidation proposal would in fact move forward.

Following two meetings with representatives of the University, it has become clear that the reasons that counties were concerned about both the proposed merger and the health and stability of UNCE in 2013 are even stronger in 2015. NACO would like to take this opportunity to make clear the concerns regarding both the proposed merger and the current state of UNCE. Cooperative Extension provides programs, services, and research that benefit not only Nevada's counties, but also, and more importantly, the Nevadans whose lives are improved by the outreach, education, and resources that Cooperative Extension provides. NACO urges NSHE to reconsider the proposal for consolidation and also to make assurances that the cuts and administrative changes that have been made to UNCE will be restored and that the program will be fully supported by the University going forward. Following the outline below of the programmatic compromises that have been made to Cooperative Extension in Nevada and the subsequent impacts to Nevada's communities and to the UNCE mission, is a list of assurances that NACO believes must be met if UNCE is to continue to be the viable, award winning, program that has served our State, the University, and Nevada's communities so well in the past.

### **Opportunities for Collaboration and UNCE's Record**

In a letter from Provost Carman to the Faculty Senate dated August 25, 2015, the Provost stated that one of the reasons behind the consolidation is to enhance collaboration; however, currently there is not a lack of opportunity for collaboration between UNCE and other University departments, just as there is no evidence to suggest that there will be an overall increase in those opportunities were UNCE to be put within one specific college. UNCE in its current form has actually been remarkably successful and has received national recognition on a number of occasions for their work - this is despite the fact that, comparatively, UNCE receives less state dollars and is smaller in size than many of its counterparts across the nation. In fact, recent data demonstrates that Rhode Island is the only state that has less Extension faculty positions than Nevada. Yet, UNCE is the only extension

program in the country to have received the National Excellence in Extension Award twice. UNCE also received the USDA-NIFA (National Institute of Food and Agriculture) Partnership Award twice, for two programs that support Nevada's kids and families. And the Living with Fire program was so successful that it became a national model for wildfire prevention.

### **UNCE Funding**

Since FY 2008-2009 the State portion of the UNCE budget has been cut over 70%, resulting in a reduction of 39 positions (out of 69). During that same time, despite severe county budget shortfalls and layoffs, counties have continued to dedicate about the same amount of county dollars to Cooperative Extension. The results of the 2009 cuts to Cooperative Extension were profound and the effects continue to be felt by Nevadans across the State. Since 2009 there has been a relative rebounding of the economy and recently much of the University's budget has been restored, with positions being added throughout University departments. Cooperative Extension, however, has received only one small increase in funding, for \$500,000 (only 8% of what it would have taken to restore the cuts from 2008-2009.) Furthermore, this modest funding increase for UNCE was not supported by University or NSHE Administration - it was awarded by the Legislature due to the advocacy of UNCE Advisory Board members.

### **UNCE Positions**

In addition, there has been no real restoration of UNCE positions. University administration will argue that five new positions have been given to UNCE; however, these positions are all split positions with other departments/colleges, and, the evaluations and requirements for tenure will be determined by the other departments/colleges, not UNCE. This clearly places the focus of the positions on on-campus work and other departments/colleges and does not encourage faculty members to go out to counties and do outreach, UNCE programming, or education. Without a focus in, or even the incentive to perform UNCE duties out in the field, these positions are of little use to stakeholders throughout the state, and are also not based on Cooperative Extension needs assessments that are regularly conducted at the county level. Furthermore, these "new" split positions were granted to UNCE over the past two years, despite the fact that in the June 13, 2013 letter to NACO, President Johnson promised, "There will be no further split appointments between UNCE and teaching responsibilities." If past performance is the best indicator of future action, these examples are indicators of how UNCE positions and activities will continue to be managed going forward. The fears that UNCE will continue with a lack of support and positions, and that UNCE dollars intended to fund programs off campus will continue to be pulled onto campus and into other departments/colleges, are not unfounded.

In addition to funding cuts, the administration has taken other actions that have compromised UNCE's ability to meet its mission and provide education and vital programs in communities across Nevada. One is the newly created requirement that all UNCE faculty members who want tenure track positions have PhDs. UNCE

faculty has traditionally been a mix of PhDs and faculty with other advanced degrees - this reflects the varied academic and professional backgrounds required to meet the complex needs of the Cooperative Extension mission. Extension faculty conduct research but also meet community needs by doing outreach, education, and coordinating and carrying out programming that ranges from 4-H and gardening to career training and family support programs. This requirement handicaps the ability of UNCE to replace retiring extension educators with the most qualified professionals, especially in rural counties, yet increases incentives for the type of solely research oriented candidate that might want to dedicate more time to on campus activities. It also hinders the ability of UNCE to recruit and retain faculty. A recent survey found that most Extension units in the West consider the master's degree the advanced degree required for tenure track Extension educators. There are already examples of Nevada extension educator positions going unfilled as educators retire.

### **Proposed Consolidation with the College of Agriculture**

The University Administration has insisted that housing Cooperative Extension within the College of Agriculture will enhance UNCE and will not pull state UNCE dollars onto campus and out of extension offices and counties; however, the counties are still concerned that this will not be the case. The aforementioned examples of changes to the program, which were not vetted with stakeholders and are contrary to previous commitments, have already weakened the program, and counties have received no real assurances that such policies will not continue.

Though the College of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural Resources overlaps with a portion of UNCE's charge, a significant portion of Cooperative Extension activities are outside the purview of CABNR. This leaves further doubt as to whether the proposed merger would support the full mission and activities of Cooperative Extension. Though Agriculture is an important portion of UNCE's Mission, it is not the only focus. According to NRS 549.010, Cooperative Extension's charge is to "provide for continued educational, research, outreach and service programs pertaining to agriculture, community development, health and nutrition, horticulture, personal and family development, and natural resources ***in the rural and urban communities*** (emphasis added) in the State of Nevada...." This is a broad mission and an extremely varied list of program areas, making UNCE's current position as a stand-alone college with the ability to nimbly work with any other department or college in the University system appropriate.

There are other Cooperative Extension programs in other land grant universities in the U.S. that are housed within agriculture but only three of these are in States with a similarly small sector of the State economy dedicated to agriculture (UNCE/CABNR Planning Group Report, p. 11). NACO would ask whether programs addressing small business support, youth career training, and literacy will be supported within a college primarily focused on agriculture and natural resources? And, if UNCE's mission is to take many different types of knowledge into communities in order to improve the social, economic, and environmental well-

being of Nevadans, how would being one further step removed from departments like economics, health sciences, and education better achieve that goal?

### **Transparency and Communication with Partners and Stakeholders**

Aside from a handful of recent meetings, some called by the counties themselves, throughout the discussion on consolidating UNCE and CABNR there has been a lack of effort to involve counties in the planning process for this decision, despite the fact that UNCE and counties are partners. Discussions on the current proposal were initiated by NACO, though it was clear that late this summer, when the counties did reach out, that the proposal had already been discussed with faculty and that planning had not included county stakeholders. Counties value extension because of the connection that is created between their communities and the University, and because of programs like 4-H, the Family Storyteller Literacy Program, and the support of master gardeners, which many view as invaluable to all of the communities in the State. There is an official mechanism through which the administration and the counties work together on planning for UNCE and that is the UNCE Advisory Board. This board, however, has not been called to meet for almost two years and is, for all intents and purposes, currently defunct. This breakdown in communications is further evidence that outreach to counties from the University, whether it is in programming or governance, has not been made a priority.

The process for making a decision for a UNCE-CABNR consolidation has been handled haphazardly at best, which is also a concern. The Administration has not kept their promise, and their responsibility to the counties, to have them participate in a process “over the next two years to... evaluate the most appropriate and beneficial administrative structure for UNCE, CABNR, UNR, and the state of Nevada,” as promised in June 2013. The original Planning Group, made up of UNCE faculty and others and that was organized to produce a study on UNCE/CABNR consolidation, stated in the final Planning Group Report that their product was incomplete as they were not given enough time or the opportunity to incorporate the input of key stakeholders and analysis (including from the deans of both the College of Ag and UNCE, UNCE Advisory Council members, and fiscal officers (p. 32). In addition, the majority of concerns that were raised by the Report were dismissed in a letter from Provost Carman dated February 15, 2013. There is no reason for NACO to believe that this lack of transparency and dedication of proper analysis and resources will not continue and further compromise UNCE.

### **Commitment and Assurances**

As it stands now there are examples across the State of counties who, though they are contributing the same amount of county revenue to their local cooperative extension office, are seeing a significant decrease in Cooperative Extension services. From Nye County to Pershing County, and from Washoe to Clark, there are fewer extension educators, specialists, staff, and services, and communities are being impacted. Each county has evidence of important programs, like 4H and Master Gardeners, or programs that support families, being either cut or significantly reduced. In 2006 UNCE published about 135 fact sheets, special publications, and

other information documenting much of the research and work of UNCE faculty. By 2014, the production of these resources had fallen to a quarter of those produced eight years earlier. This information is used by stakeholders and in support of communities around the State and in 2014 consisted of only 36 publications.

The county funding that goes to UNCE programs, as well as the State budget dollars that have been allocated, are both already approved for Cooperative Extension outreach and educational programming, and, Nevada's counties ask for a guarantee that the entirety of this funding be used solely for UNCE activities that result in off campus outreach and educational programs, both for this fiscal year and going forward. Not only are counties the University's partner in Cooperative Extension, but counties also provide the largest single revenue source to the program. Counties are justifiably concerned that significant policy changes continue to be made to UNCE without any real notice or input on their behalf. The mission of Cooperative Extension is an important one to counties, our State, the University System, and one from which all Nevadans benefit. It is the position of Nevada's counties that, as a land grant university, the University administration should commit itself to supporting a thriving Cooperative Extension and that, unless the following assurances are officially adopted, Nevada's counties, on behalf of all of those throughout the State who benefit from the invaluable services that UNCE provides to Nevada's communities, must continue to question and protest the decisions of the Administration regarding this program.

1. UNR and NSHE will request and support restoration of state-appropriated resources for Extension programs throughout the state similar to the FY 2008-09 levels in the next Legislative session. This funding proposal should be developed in collaboration with Extension Leadership and based on needs identified at the county level.
2. ALL UNCE funds shall be used for UNCE activities only, activities intended to be carried out "in the rural and urban communities in the State of Nevada" (NRS 549.010):
  - Per NRS.549.050, "All moneys appropriated pursuant to NRS 549.040 must be expended under the direction of the Director." The UNCE Director shall have all authority of expending all Extension funds and managing its resources – state-appropriated, county and federal, in accordance with state and federal laws.
3. The UNCE Advisory Committee will resume, at a minimum, quarterly meetings, effective first quarter 2016. As was the case prior to 2013, it will have representatives/stakeholders from throughout the state with diverse interests in UNCE programs – rural, urban, various programs, various geographic areas, etc., selected by UNCE leadership (Dean, Director, Area Directors, Extension Educators, etc.), in consultation with the NACO Board of

Directors. NACO shall have two appointments to this Board, one county commissioner, and either the NACO Executive Director or Deputy Director.

4. UNCE shall maintain separate financial accounts and management of its funds, and UNCE funds shall be under the exclusive control of the UNCE Director. This shall include UNCE having its own CFO/Financial Director, who is separate from any other entity/college.
5. UNCE shall be led by a Dean or Director, not an Assistant or Associate Director.
6. UNCE shall conduct a national search for the Dean/Director of the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.
7. The terminal/advanced degree required for Extension Educator positions will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the appropriate UNCE Area Director, in consultation with the UNCE Director, and the UNCE Advisory Committee.
8. The terminal/advanced degree required for other UNCE faculty positions with regional or statewide responsibility will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the UNCE Director, in consultation with other UNCE leadership (Dean, Director, Area Directors, Extension Educators, etc.), and the UNCE Advisory Committee.
9. All UNCE faculty positions and Extension Educator positions shall remain tenure track positions.
10. No joint appointments located on campus with UNCE and other NSHE units shall be instituted from this point on with county funds, or with any state-appropriated funds specifically designated for Extension (including general fund, as well as federal and county pass-through funds).
11. The UNCE Dean/Director may, in consultation with the UNCE Advisory Committee, recommend approval of MOUs for joint appointments located on campus with UNCE and other NSHE units that are to be funded by UNR's general state appropriations or other NSHE funds, funds not specifically appropriated to UNCE.
12. The UNCE Director may, in consultation with the UNCE Advisory Committee and NACO Board of Directors, recommend approval of MOUs that use proportional Extension-appropriated funds for joint appointments located off campus with UNCE and other NSHE units.
13. In future MOUs for joint positions, or for any current joint positions, with UNCE, despite the origin of the funding, an MOU shall be created that

includes measurable goals and evidence that the position is meeting UNCE's mission to provide education, outreach, and service programs to people outside of the University, "in the rural and urban communities in the State of Nevada," (NRS 549.010). The MOUs shall also provide a mechanism for ending the relationship if the UNCE Director concludes these goals are not being satisfactorily met, and provide that the UNCE Director may redirect the UNCE portion of the funding to other programs supporting the UNCE mission as he/she sees fit, and as defined by state and federal law.

14. UNCE shall have the rights and responsibilities of a "major unit," as defined by NSHE and UNR bylaws and codes. This is to guarantee that any changes in status would have to be approved at the level of the Board of Regents.
15. If there is consideration of elimination of any faculty or staff positions, or combining of positions, resulting in termination of UNCE employees that may result from the consolidated leadership, the UNCE Advisory Board shall be consulted and given the opportunity to voice their opinions; and, any such terminations must be approved by the UNCE Director, as well as the Northern and Southern Area Directors, unanimously. Any such terminations shall strictly adhere to procedures and give due notice, as dictated by NSHE and UNR bylaws and codes.
16. Per NRS 549.070, "All supplies, materials, equipment, property or land acquired for the use of county agricultural extension offices under the provisions of chapter 213, Statutes of Nevada 1919, shall remain the property of the county extension offices set up under the provisions of this chapter."