

Extension Oral History Project – Duane Johnson - Part 4

Date: March 29, 2008

Place: Duane's home in Corvallis

Time: 30:41 minutes

Interviewer: Elizabeth Uhlig, Oral Historian

Transcriber: Sue Bowman

EU: This is part 4 of the oral history with Duane Johnson.

[00:05]

Duane, you were talking about some of the organizational changes and the movement into the different departments. Could you talk about some of those staffing changes and sort of the implications or the impact of those changes?

DJ: I'll take this from two or three different positions. One is that about every ten years, starting in about 1963-64, it seems like Higher Education and the Extension Service took a big budget cut and so we saw a lot of downsizing of the Extension Service. I can remember when there was between four and five hundred Extension professionals in the state back in the '60s and early '70s and the cuts took that back down to half of that size in essence. So that has brought about for the organization, I think, a real opportunity to say, how are we staffing and what are we doing? What has happened in this, I think we saw a good evaluation of what programming areas we want to maintain, which ones do can we no longer afford to, what are the duplications in emphasis and we've seen the combining of units...a good example today would be the family and community development. That used to be two separate programs and now it's into one. So we see that.

I think the other thing that you see that has happened; we talked about the program assistants and that has emerged too. Also a lot of volunteer programs – volunteer food preservers, forestry programs, etc., all have their volunteer based programs.

The other change I think we've seen – when I came into the Extension Service a lot of the disciplines were dominated by either a male or a female person. And we have seen a number of males move into the foods and nutrition program, into home economics programs who are coming out into that education area. In the dominance of agriculture and so on, we have some very outstanding female educators have emerged into those particular discipline areas.

In the 4-H program, for example, I would venture to say it was probably about a 60/40; sixty percent male and 40 percent female faculty that was working with the 4-H youth development back in the 1960s. I would say today, it's probably 80/20, 75/25 of females to males. Now why is that about? I think a lot of the female professionals in the area have come out of the areas of education, youth development, family development backgrounds which enhance and focus on the youth development side of the 4-H program. I also think that in many cases, the women in the Extension program for 4-H has found that they have enhanced their career opportunities in the profession. In the case of a drop in the males, I think a lot of that is that there has been a lot of shortages in some of these areas and a lot of the males have found that higher income levels in different kinds of work environment has been available for those graduating in the disciplines that would normally come to the Extension Service.

[4:10]

Now, the Extension Service still has some problems in these areas, although I think they are making progress. The idea of flex scheduling has helped to build this. I think the Extension Service still has a problem of balancing work, family and personal and the professionals in it. I think that although we're seeing some change in that, when I came into the Extension Service and this is no different in Oregon than anywhere else in the country, is you had a job that was built on 60 or 70 hours a week because you had to have eight to five, five days a week and then you had all the nights and the weekends and so on. And there was probably no position in Extension than the 4-H program because you had to deliver the program when families were available and they were

working so here you were at nights and on the weekends. But I think that is starting to be resolved but certainly not totally resolved today.

I think the other thing that Extension Service, staffing wise that I have seen is that when I came in a lot of people were committed to the organization and to their profession for life. And as I've seen across the country, you know, we used to have lots and lots of faculty members that were 25 and 30-year career people. Now you see them for 10 or 15 years, 20 years and they go on to something else. It may be the job demand; it may be a major problem, I don't know, in causing that. But we are seeing that kind of a change so you've got more of a change so you've got more of a change in faculty and staff. Those are some of the things that I've noticed over the years but I think that I've had the fortune to work with some fantastic professionals, both males and females. I would not be where I'm at if it hadn't for the great support and great team that I worked with.

[6:40]

EU: Could you talk a little bit about the ethnic representation in the Extension Service, and how maybe the populations that you served have might have changed over the years?

DJ: Yeah. I think what you are seeing in the Extension Service - when I first started working within the Extension Service the Asian and the Black populations were the primary ethnic audiences other than the Caucasians.

The thing that I think we see now is with the tremendous growth in the Hispanic audience under the leadership of Beverly Hobbs who is currently on the staff - tremendous programming in reaching the Hispanic audience has resulted. She's had very much of a vision and the skills to really expand programming into that area. Significant population. I think the Asian population has found in their cultural drive they have found that the 4-H program offers tremendous opportunities for the areas of sciences and career building where real focus is.

I think we are also seeing with the changes in our makeup of our educational system, so many charter schools and home schools and so on, the 4-H program has been very effective in working with those audiences to strengthen the curriculum they get and the experiences they get. The homeschoolers have taken advantage of participating in the 4-H program development of the activities and the social skills. And then many of the charter schools are utilizing 4-H curriculum to enhance the curriculum that they can offer because they just don't have the large amount of faculty in order to be very focused. Those are all positive relationships and the Extension Service and the 4-H program in particular have been willing to really reach out and try to design educational programs for those audiences.

So, I think the other thing we see is that you know, out of the 100 and some thousand 4-H members that are currently involved in the program, the "traditional" program which was a club based, volunteer led, subject matter led program is probably less than 25 percent of that total. We now have school enrichment and outreach educational programs and so on.

We also saw the 4-H program; again under the leadership of Beverly Hobbs develop a program that was called the "4-H Adventurers Club" which is designed for young people that are K through 3rd grade. Oregon actually was one of the very first states in the country that switched from an age-based program to a grade-based program to tie the curriculum and the experiences more to the developmental level of young people and the best correlations is grades in school. And that has moved across the country significantly. There are still some that are on an age basis but there's a lot of difference between a 4th grader who is eight years old or a 4th grader that's ten years old. So what we saw if we would develop the program the curriculum based upon that and that also impacted our design of curriculum so it became sequential and so designed for 4th and 5th graders, 6th and 7th graders, 8th graders, and so on into high school.

And again, I think as we work with those curriculum that we have, then we have audiences, we've got to be very, very cognizant of the need to understand the cultures

from which they come. The values of people emerged from their cultures, the manner in which you work with them. And so, this means different flexibility, different approaches, a great deal more patience and so I think you are seeing that. It's an evolving thing as we work with the very diverse audiences that we have, not only in Oregon but throughout the country. I hope that's answering...

[11:40]

EU: Yes, yes. Another question having to do with benchmarks. Could you talk a little bit about those?

DJ: We had back when SIM and CAM and all of those whatever they were, and they still are part of the education system testing, is that we saw the real need for developing literature and educational programming that would help young people meet those benchmarks. And many school districts in the State Department of Education agreed that the learning and the development and the skills demonstrated in the 4-H program could suffice for demonstrating the competencies.

Jim Hermes, who is a poultry specialist at Oregon State University and Brad Jeffreys who was a 4-H specialist probably did the very first, I think, developing a poultry curriculum called "Egg to Chick" - science based - that was designed to meet those benchmarks. And since then benchmarking, looking at the benchmarks that the development of young people have always continued to be a major focus of the Extension faculty in design of those experiences so where they are wanted to be used, could be used in meeting those. I think 4-H has been a partner with education in a very positive way of doing that.

[13:25]

EU: I wanted to also ask you about the recognition program.

DJ: Well, recognition programs have always been a very special part of my career in the sense that I felt very strongly that you have to have a balanced recognition program. One that focuses on... I believe everybody likes some type of recognition. We had to have a recognition program to recognize the very creativeness and the innovativeness

and the risk taking of our Extension faculty. We needed a recognition program for our volunteers who contribute so much to the young people of this state. And we had a recognition program for young people, too, that is developmentally appropriate.

Now, I call it recognition, not competition purposefully. I don't call them awards. I call them recognition and I feel very strongly in that position. Recognition is earned and is recognized by your peers and others. Awards you can apply for. And competition is competition and I don't think necessarily competition is bad, but I don't think it should be the focus.

And so the recognition program in Oregon, which I think has the footprint of a Duane Johnson on it quite a bit is that recognition should be provided for a combination of skill learning, leadership, community service, public speaking, you're talking the well rounded individual. And whether it's a faculty member, or whether it's a volunteer, or whether it is a youth, it fits, or whether it's a family or it's a community. I think what it has done is to continue to build young people who are well rounded rather than narrowly focused and I think that's the real point of strength of the 4-H Youth Development Program and the Extension Service as a whole in Oregon. But it's also true in other places too.

[16:00]

EU: Could you talk a little bit about your work with the foundation and the foundation board?

DJ: The 4-H Foundation in Oregon in the early years when I first came to Oregon it was in name only. And the foundation was really only formed for the purposes of establishing the 4-H Education and Conference Center at Salem. But the Foundation provided an opportunity for the private sector and individuals to support something that they believed in and something they wanted to have happen. And so during my years, and I have to go back really into the Burton Hutton and the Joe Meyers years, they established it and moved it forward. But I was fortunate enough to come along about the same time that we really got some great people to provide the leadership but we

built the Foundation board of people from within and outside and the 4-H Family. The early foundations were made up of volunteer leaders. That's now been, there are a few volunteer leaders, there's a couple Extension faculty, but most of them are from the broader section, as foundation boards should be established.

Then on her retirement, Alberta Johnston assumed the responsibility of the Executive Director as a volunteer position. And she has provided tremendous leadership to that in partnership with the leadership of the Foundation, the president and other members of the board. And so the 4-H Foundation in Oregon, now is on very solid ground with a tremendous amount of investments in endowments that will go on forever, not just bring the cash in and spend it. It also has provided, it's got great visibility for public support, but it has also been organized as a model that many states across the country have followed.

And I have worked with the foundation for a number of years, first as a specialist and then program leader, secretary, served on the board, but I have to admire her leadership, but also the leadership of the public participants on these boards that have helped to move this forward to a multi-million dollar foundation. And the future support of many of the programming of Extension and 4-H will depend upon that private public sector and the Foundation is going to continue to play an expanding role in the support of the 4-H program at the county and state level. The foundation is now managing accounts for many of the counties around the state to support programs at the county level. That's another dimension to it. And I think we have made, under my leadership I think we've made tremendous growth in the number of college scholarships that are being offered through endowed programs. And so I think it's on solid financial, we have an outstanding conference and education center in Polk County outside of Salem and so I think the Foundation will play a very big role in what we do in the future.

[20:15]

EU: So, I think you said you retired in 2000 after 41 years with the Extension Service.

DJ: That's correct.

EU: When you look back on your career, what things gave you the most satisfaction?
What are you proudest of?

DJ: Well, I guess the thing that I would say is probably my greatest satisfaction was seeing my faculty, the county faculty and the faculty in the Department of 4-H and Youth Development be successful. I hope that I just left a little bit of a footprint for those who follow, by the introduction of being innovative, being a risk taker, being an encourager of others to be visionary, and challenging individuals don't just stay with the status quo.

I think that Oregon has been extremely fortunate to have had some absolutely outstanding county faculty. I don't think they always got their recognition that they should have, but the partnership between county faculty and state faculty working as a team, the interdisciplinary within the university, having a Department of 4-H and Youth Development in the School of Education, the design of curriculum based upon the developmental levels of young people, a focus on leadership and community service and citizenship programming meant a lot to me. And probably the one way you achieve that more is you have quality staff, you trained them well and you supported them well and I would hope that I did that in a positive way. History, time, will tell. But you know there are some great people out there that have made a career in Extension and are doing a wonderful job.

[22:45]

EU: So in your retirement, what have you been doing in these past years? And then I specifically want to get into your work with Epsilon Sigma Phi.

DJ: Well, I was very active in professional associations as a professional in my career. The professional associations, the National County Agents Association, the Ag Association, the 4-H Agents Association which is a 4-H association, the Epsilon Sigma Phi which is the Extension professionals association that reaches across to everybody, all gave me an opportunity for great professional developmental experiences and for

those personally enriching experiences and developmental experiences, working with colleagues across the country, it was very important.

At the same time, Extension was a great career for me. Like every career you have ups and downs, but we don't worry about the downs, we worry about the ups. And probably, one of the things I saw, it's characteristic of me, is having professional faculty, volunteers and young people achieve where they want to achieve – great satisfaction. I'm kind of an emotional person and so I always wanted to see others really accomplish what they wanted to and if I could help them a little bit along the way I would do so.

Now, it isn't limited just to 4-H. When I look at people in agriculture and family living and so on, we've talked a lot about 4-H, but Extension's faculty across the whole discipline area is very, very good. And I don't think always the people get the credit for the impact they are having on our families and communities and individuals across the country. As I said earlier, Extension has been good to me and I made a decision early on that I'm going to give back and so that's what I'm doing being active in Epsilon Sigma Phi, both in the Oregon Gamma Chapter and at the national level. I have been blessed and I am humbled over the fact that the people in this country asked me to be their President, which I am currently serving and I just hope that we can leave a little bit of a footprint for sometime in the future that this is what we have done.

You see, the tradition is, if I can step away from that just a little bit, the Extension Service has been built upon the history of people. The 4-H program in Oregon has very deep roots by a group of three people - Harry Seymour, Doc Allen and Helen Cowgill, who in the early years of the Extension Service, actually they were the very first for the 4-H program for a long, long time, as a team of three and they established the county based programs, the first boys and girls 4-H clubs across the country and so on and had a great reputation in the history of 4-H in the country.

Frank Ballard is probably the dean of Extension Directors and really established some very solid philosophical basis for the Extension Service; not just for 4-H but all of us.

The position of a state 4-H leader when you figure that from 1910, depending on who you talk to, when it started, but there haven't been a lot of state 4-H leaders. ... Now there have been more changes since then, but being in a group of people who have been asked to provide leadership to the people and professionals, there's nothing more enriching and I can't say that I took on any of those jobs just for the sake of my own gratification because I didn't. I did it for others and that's kind of following through on what I'm doing with Epsilon Sigma Phi.

[27:45]

Now, I'm also involved very much in the Kiwanis Club of Corvallis, again community service, serving others. I had great involvement on a lot of university committees and so on and played probably a significant role with two people, Dean Bud Weiser, Conrad Weiser, College of Agriculture and Roy Arnold who was the provost, and Andy Hashimoto. We played a great role in the transition of having Extension integrated into the P&T [promotion and tenure] process in departments and doing the training and that was a great experience training deans how to look at Extension and evaluate Extension instead of a researcher or as a classroom teacher. And so, maybe a little bit of a foot print in the whole education system of the university. But, no I am giving back at this time. It won't go on forever, there's going to be other things.

But I think the other thing is that my family is very important to me and within the means that you can doing the things that you do as a family and being supportive of my wife who is the most gracious person and the people from both of my sons and their families, my grandchildren. It's not going to be long until those young people that are my grandchildren now are going to be in college, out on their own, so it's something great to look forward to. So that's kind of where I am today.

[29:50]

EU: Are there other things I should have asked you about with your career or anything we missed?

DJ: I really don't know. We have talked about a lot of things, a lot of highlights, but this has been a very enjoyable experience with you, and I hope that I can make a small

contribution to the history of the Extension Service as this project is trying to accomplish.

EU: The insights and overview you've given me have been amazing for me. Thank you very much.

DJ: Well, thank you very much for asking me.

[30:41]