



Extension: Not your typical academic job

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If you were like me as a graduate student—after spending multiple, grueling years finishing your degree—you spent a lot of time questioning what you are actually doing with your life. Don't worry, this is normal.

As I weaved my path through research projects, teaching assistant jobs, and never-ending data collection, I kept wondering: 'Where will this lead?' Then one day, my adviser asked me to go out and do a talk at an extension event.

I reluctantly said yes, but I was terrified. I was a graduate student! I didn't know what I was doing, and I was scared of not having all the answers. Turns out, the experience was life changing for me. I loved the thrill and excitement of presenting research-based

information in front of an audience.

This led me to explore the career of an Extension Specialist and, ultimately, to my current position within Texas A&M AgriLife.

All universities across America lean on the pillars of research and teaching, but more than 100 of our land grant university systems include a third pillar—extension. Extension provides research-based education in a non-formal setting to millions of people around the world.

This column is brought to you by the Early Career Members Committee (ECMC), which serves members beginning their careers—new professionals and graduate students in agronomy, crop, soil, and environmental sciences. The ECMC consists of members from each of the three Societies who serve three-year terms. Learn more at www.crops.org/membership/early-career.

The roots of extension can be traced back to the 1800s, when agriculture clubs and societies encouraged farmers to report their successes and share problem-solving practices. In 1914, the Smith–Lever Act (you can't talk about extension without mentioning Smith–Lever) formalized extension and established academic university connections with the USDA to conduct research and outreach education in the field of agriculture.

As an extension turfgrass specialist, I travel throughout the state of Texas, the United States, and internationally to speak on educational topics and research relevant to turfgrass science and management. In extension, you must be both a scientist *and* a people person. Making your seminars educational as well as interactive is vital for success. A seminar is more than just a lecture, it's a discussion that allows everyone in attendance to feel that they are both heard and an integral part of the experience.

In extension, you get to speak with and meet a wide variety of people and experience many different situations. My schedule is never the same each week, which is one of the things I love about my job. In a typical week, I could be answering emails all day, writing a peer-reviewed journal article, riding around on a golf course inspecting issues, crawling on my knees at a sod farm, speaking at an event, or planting and implementing a research trial.

If you love spontaneity, hard work, researching applicable topics to the public, and speaking in front of large groups, then extension may be the job for you. Through my experiences, I am no longer concerned about being able to answer all of the seminar attendee's questions because now I know the appropriate answer in extension is always, "It depends."

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