

Defining the Contribution of Your Work and August *JOE* Highlights

Abstract

In producing a scholarly manuscript, one must justify why the work deserves publication. I address this imperative in the "Defining the Contribution of Your Work" section of the Editor's Page. In "August *JOE* Highlights," I discuss a focus on program evaluation that exists in this issue and give examples of other topics that are covered.

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Defining the Contribution of Your Work

Recently a *JOE* peer reviewer contacted me to communicate a trend he has observed in *JOE* submissions. He was troubled by the tendency of some prospective authors to fail to elucidate the contribution of their work relative to existing literature.

His concern is valid: If you submit manuscripts for publication in *JOE*, take heed. When multiple articles on a particular topic have been published in *JOE* and/or other extension-related journals, you must be persuasive about why your work deserves standing in the literature. And you must make your argument within the text itself. For example, your introduction should provide the reader with a clear understanding of (a) how your project relates to previous work and (b) why you anticipated that undertaking the project would contribute to solving the relevant problem. Later aspects of the manuscript, such as a discussion of your findings or a presentation of your project's implications, should include "reasoned and justifiable commentary on the importance" of your effort (VandenBos, 2010, p. 36). In other words, you must answer the "so what?" question relative to that which already has been studied, written, presented, and so on regarding your topic.

The *JOE* Submission Guidelines and other author materials on the *JOE* website contain messaging indicating the importance of an author's situating his or her work within both an Extension context and the scholarly dialogue on the topic. As well, the author materials explain that because *JOE* is the official refereed journal for Extension professionals, articles published in *JOE* naturally provide foundational matter for manuscripts submitted to *JOE*. Clearly, this messaging is not reaching all who submit manuscripts to *JOE*. Therefore, I emphasize here the need for any prospective *JOE* author to clarify the value of his or her work by defining its contribution relative to what has come before.

August *JOE* Highlights

"There is increasing pressure on Cooperative Extension services to demonstrate program effectiveness and improve accountability in the face of resource limitations. . . ." So opens this issue's leadoff Research in Brief, "[Evaluating Extension Program Impacts Through Comparison of Knowledge and Behavior of Extension Clientele Versus Others](#)." And the sentiment is echoed multiple times across the issue. As often, however, *JOE* authors present compelling information and ideas to help Extension professionals address this circumstance. For example, the author of said Research in Brief proposes an effective new approach to documenting effects of Extension programming. The authors of the Feature "[Program Evaluation Challenges and Obstacles Faced by New Extension Agents: Implications for Capacity Building](#)" recommend institution- and system-level measures for supporting newly hired Extension personnel in meeting the accountability expectation. The Ideas at Work article "[Engage Stakeholders in Program Evaluation: Throw Them a Party!](#)" describes a method, and associated tools, for obtaining a richer interpretation of evaluation data and motivating stakeholders to use evaluation to make data-driven program improvements. Back-to-back Tools of the Trade entries—" [Linking Extension Program Design with Evaluation Design for Improved Evaluation](#)" and "[Promoting Program Evaluation Fidelity When Data Collectors Lack Research Design and Implementation Expertise](#)"—stress, respectively, using evaluation design appropriate for the type of program being examined and ensuring that all parties involved in evaluation follow protocols that lead to accurate assessment of program outcomes.

Program evaluation may be a common topic in the issue, but the content overall is wide-ranging. For example, "[Participatory Research Engages Industry and Leads to Adoption of Methods That Challenge Long-Held Production Standards](#)," in the Ideas at Work category, addresses a citizen science endeavor that stakeholders have deemed one of the most important research projects for the targeted industry. The author lays out the keys to successful implementation of such a project. Other articles representative of the issue's diversity include the Commentary "[Increasing Global Thinking and Engagement Within Extension](#)," the Research in Brief offerings "[Youth Participatory Evaluation: Matching 4-H Youth Experience to Program Theory](#)" and "[Influencing Water Consumption Through the Water Check Program](#)," the Ideas at Work articles "[Using Geographic Information System Technology to Identify Environmental Education Field Sites](#)" and "[A Model for Youth Financial Education in Extension Involving a Game-Based Approach](#)," and the Tools of the Trade entry "[The Purdue Center for Commercial Agriculture Crop Basis Tool](#)."

Reference

VandenBos, G. R. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

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