When we first apply for academic positions, we are all interested in the appointment. Research, teaching, and extension: the three pillars of foundation for all land-grant universities in the United States, but with three very different objectives. Recent Ph.D. graduates often look to their mentors for advice on what types of positions to apply for and what benefits/obstacles come with each type of academic appointment. Others simply look for open positions in their area of expertise and figure that they will make the shoe fit if offered the position. The majority of academic appointments involve two of the three primary areas, and in most cases, consist of a split between research and teaching. Research pays the bills and teaching educates the next generation of scientists and professionals. But where does extension fit into all of this?

When I talk with my colleagues across campus that are in non-agricultural disciplines, they are intrigued about this idea of “extension.” Their most common response is “Oh, you mean service,” to which I reply, “Well, not exactly.”

I was lucky enough to be hired into an often spoken about, but rarely seen, three-way split: 65% research, 25% extension, and 10% teaching. The reactions I get to the mention of my three-way split are a mix between sympathy and that “ewww” face you make when you open a container of month-old leftovers. For just over two years, I have juggled the three-way split appointment and have realized that it is more common than people might think for both young and seasoned faculty alike. Although each of us have a designated appointment that our administrators use to evaluate us and pay our salaries, we as academic professionals are not bound to those seemingly rigid appointment structures.

I would like to provide some specialized insight to early career members regarding the benefits and struggles of managing an official or unofficial three-way split. My experience with the three-way split is that planning and time management, as always, are critical in being successful. There are four keys that I always remind myself of and that have helped keep me straight:

1. Research is Year-round

For most faculty, research is a portion of their appointment. I have colleagues that are 100% extension, 100% teaching but still have very large research programs and is the engine that drives academic disciplines. My research is the foundation of all great teaching programs and is the engine that drives academic disciplines. They are intrigued about this idea of “extension.” Their most common response is “Oh, you mean service,” to which I reply, “Well, not exactly.”

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How often have you as a majority teaching or research appointment faculty been asked to give an extension talk? On the other hand, how many primary extension personnel have been asked to guest lecture in an undergraduate crop science course? Even though most faculty have two-way split appointments, they are often times asked to serve in capacities beyond their primary appointment in order to fill a need or provide some specialized insight on a particular topic whether it be research, teaching, or extension. Speaking from experience, I would like to provide some specialized insight to early career members regarding the benefits and struggles of managing an official or unofficial three-way split.

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