

TEXAS EXTENSION SPECIALISTS ASSOCIATION
TESA Promotion Task Force

Status Report for TESA Board of Directors on April 29, 2014

The TESA Promotion Task Force was appointed by TESA President Mac Young to identify career ladder issues, needs, and challenges and to make recommendations related to career ladder progression for two categories of Extension professionals: professorial specialists and program specialists.

The members of the TESA Task Force include Buddy Faries, Joice Jeffries (Prairie View A&M University Cooperative Extension Program), and Nancy Granovsky (chair). Consulting members include TESA President Mac Young and President-elect Diann Mitchell.

The primary charge is for the task force to determine how we, as an Association, can become involved in ways that help members obtain the next level of promotion. Additionally, the task force is charged with developing a means of communicating with Extension Administration that will enable TESA to provide input to the administration regarding matters of promotion and career ladder issues.

The task force has held some discussions this winter and spring, but felt it was essential to meet personally with Director Steele for input and guidance. The Task Force is aware that the career ladder topic will be on the agenda of the planning retreat scheduled in May for Extension's organizational leaders. TESA wishes to be seen as supportive of organizational goals and to offer input to administrators.

The task force met with Director Steele for approximately 90 minutes on Monday, April 14th. Prior to the meeting, we provided the director with a one-page Briefing Document (see attachment) which listed several topics for possible discussion.

The meeting was a productive one and the items discussed enlarged our perspectives. Dr. Steele indicated that "the door is always open" for regular communications with association leaders. He also indicated that there is ongoing collaboration between Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Prairie View A&M University Cooperative Extension administrators and that the career ladder process for each institution is autonomous.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Dr. Steele re-emphasized five main points:

1. Examine the roles of specialists and program specialists. What are the differences in qualifications, hiring process, onboarding, expectations, salary, etc.? Dr. Steele asked whether there is a strategic reason for moving so many positions from specialist to program specialist, as there has been a 30% increase in program specialist positions and a decline in the number of professorial specialist positions, perhaps due to budgetary reasons. He suggested we examine the criteria and guidelines for both types of positions. He indicated that in Montana, program specialists were responsible for implementing programs that specialists developed. He suggested looking at the consistency of criteria for both tracks.

2. Examine the process for the annual review of position descriptions. Dr. Steele indicated that position descriptions should be reviewed annually and revised as needed and that the annual review process itself should re-affirm or re-direct, rather than being punitive.
3. Examine and strengthen the role of TESA by what we can do to enhance professional development of members through mentorship and “how to” opportunities: “how to” prepare for an annual performance review, “how to” prepare for the career ladder process, “how to” format one’s c.v., “how to” work with IRB, SRS, and compliance officers, new and emerging technology. He suggested we might consider offering quarterly webinars and also include sessions during our annual meetings to address the ways we can help our members be successful in their promotion process.
4. Dr. Steele shared that while he was in Montana, he was highly supportive of the Extension professional associations and provided financial support to the organizations. This may be something that he pursues for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.
5. Examine how our association can promote a “public value” orientation and emphasis with our Extension work. He indicated that the recent PILD meeting highlighted this need for Extension to demonstrate the larger, public value impact of our work.

Next Steps for the Task Force

We plan to continue our work between now and the annual meeting but will need your help in prioritizing the issues related to our charge that will be most beneficial to TESA members and to our role as a professional Extension association.

We are interested in receiving recommendations for needed changes in the two key career ladder documents – 1) Professorial Career Ladder for AgriLife Extension Specialist Faculty (2008) and 2) Professional Career Ladder System for Extension Program Specialists (2005, agency name revised 2008). We are also interested in receiving comments regarding the differences and similarities between specialist and program specialist roles.

We expect to provide a written report with recommendations at the annual meeting after obtaining additional input from you and members of the association.

We solicit your input as board members and encourage additional input from your chapter. Our collective voices are needed. We remain committed as an association to maintaining strong communications with our Extension administrators.

Attachment

Briefing Document for meeting with Director Steele on April 14, 2014