

# Back to the Future: Adjusting University Continuing Education Research to an Emerging Trend

*Walter Archer, University of Alberta  
Kirby Wright, University of Alberta*

## ABSTRACT

A major change is presently occurring in University Extension or University Continuing Education (UCE) units, from ongoing continuing education (CE) programs (certificates, etc.) to unique major projects supporting overall institutional goals and specific community needs. Given this change, the type of research traditionally associated with CE (market research, ongoing program evaluation, etc.) now needs to be at least supplemented, if not replaced, by a type of research more appropriate to the new type of activity occurring in extension/UCE units.

For a number of theoretical and practical reasons, this research should consist largely of case studies of UCE programs and projects. An on-line database of these case studies could serve not only as a resource for improving

## RÉSUMÉ

Un changement majeur se produit actuellement dans les unités de formation permanente et d'éducation permanente universitaires, partant des programmes d'éducation permanente (EP) (certificats, etc.) et allant jusqu'aux projets majeurs uniques appuyant les buts institutionnels généraux ainsi que les besoins spécifiques communautaires. Étant donné ce changement, la recherche traditionnellement associée avec EP (études de marché, évaluations de programmes permanents, etc.) a maintenant besoin au moins qu'on y ajoute sinon qu'on la remplace par une recherche plus appropriée pour le nouveau type d'activités ayant lieu dans les unités EPU/formation permanente.

Pour un grand nombre de raisons théoriques et pratiques, cette recherche devrait consister en

practice, but also as the knowledge base underlying a graduate program offered by a consortium of UCE units. By creating a practice-based graduate program focused specifically on CE, in contrast to the broader, more theoretical programs generally offered by adult education departments, CE units can increase the amount, quality, and relevance of CE research.

grande partie des études de cas de programmes et de projets EPU. Une base de données en ligne de ces études de cas devrait servir non seulement comme ressource pour améliorer la pratique mais aussi comme la base fondamentale de connaissances pour un programme d'études de deuxième cycle offert par un consortium d'unités EPU. Les unités EP peuvent augmenter la quantité, la qualité et la pertinence des recherches EP en créant un programme d'études de deuxième cycle basé sur la pratique, concentré spécifiquement sur l'EP et opposé aux programmes plus étendus et théoriques généralement offerts par les départements d'éducation des adultes.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper was drafted as part of the preparations for the Prairie Symposium for Research on University Continuing Education held in Winnipeg in June 1999. It and its companion pieces (McLean, 1999; Percival & Kops, 1999) were the background for discussions at the Symposium.

The authors of this paper were to address the question of where the research tradition in university extension/CE is now, how it got there, and where it might go in the near future. However, a look at the literature indicated that much of the "where it is now" part of the assignment has recently been addressed in a series of three papers published in the Fall 1996 issue of the *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*.

Thompson (1996), the most broadly focused paper in this set, discussed the nature of the research dance within the UCE field, noted the low ratio of dancers to wallflowers, and invited us to remedy that situation by getting

out there onto the dance floor. Blaney (1996) focused his attention on one purpose for bothering to dance, and argued (evidence from his own data notwithstanding) that dancing serves that purpose. Baskett (1996) felt this dancing business was an inappropriate activity for properly brought up continuing educators, and they ought to do something else. Since this set of papers is recent, we believe the annotated summary of them in the next section will serve nicely as a starting point for a discussion of the past and possible future of research in UCE.

That discussion touches on the general history of extension/CE at Canadian universities, particularly the large western provincial universities, organizers of the Symposium and traditionally very active in extension work. The extension or CE function of these universities has evolved through at least two stages, and may be entering a third. This evolution will naturally have an effect on the nature and quantity of research appropriate for university continuing educators. The meta-theoretical discussion in McLean (1999) is referred to during this section, as is Percival and Kops' (1999) discussion of barriers to university continuing educators' conducting research.

In the final sections of this paper, some suggestions regarding the future of research in UCE are advanced.

## THAT DANCING MAN

Thompson (1996) began by noting that practitioners in UCE do little research, citing evidence from several sources. He also noted that there is some ambiguity about what is meant by the term "research," a point to which we will return later. Barriers to practitioners doing research were discussed briefly by Thompson (1996), and at much greater length in Percival and Kops (1999). Of particular interest is Thompson's list of four reasons why practitioners, and CAUCE members in particular, should do research:

1. Research activities support quality programming.
2. Professional competence is maintained and enhanced through research.
3. University continuing education units have a leadership role to play in conducting research that contributes to practice.
4. Undertaking research enhances individual and unit credibility within the institution. (p. 66)

This list is an excellent way to begin the dance. However, before following this lead, the other two papers in this set, which appear at first glance to be a misstep and a step sideways, respectively, are looked at briefly.

## STEPPING ON YOUR TOE, DANCE PARTNER

The first half of Blaney (1996) is devoted to debunking the common assumption among university continuing educators expressed in Thompson's first two points, namely, that research conducted by practitioners of CE improves their programming. In the study reported in this paper Blaney included, as research, scholarly publication of all types, and he presented data that consists of ratings of the research activity and the programming success of 30 CE programmers. The 30 programmers were individuals for whom Blaney had done performance ratings for at least 2 years during his own career of over 30 years in the field. He assigned each programmer a rating from 1 (low) to 5 (high) on program performance and each individual a rating of 1 to 5 on research (i.e., publication) activity. He checked his ratings against those of a colleague who was also in a position to judge these programmers on the two criteria, and found that their ratings agreed almost exactly. Upon calculating a Pearson correlation coefficient between his ratings of the 30 individuals as programmers and of the same individuals as researchers, Blaney found no correlation between program performance and research activity among this group of UCE practitioners. He concluded that his data did not support the assumption that a high level of research ability contributes to a high level of programming success. Instead, he attributed differential success in programming to personality factors.

Blaney argued for the use of the broader criterion of "scholarship" as described in Boyer (1990), including successful programming, as the basis of the reward structure not only for CE specialists, but for university academic staff generally. This, he argued, would contribute to a rise, in the eyes of the public, in the perceived value of universities generally.

The question of whether or not research contributes to good programming, as discussed by Blaney, may hinge on the definition of research that is used. If research is defined as gathering information relevant to a program and drawing valid conclusions and useful insights from this information, then it seems reasonable to expect program improvement. Conversely, writing down this information and insights in

publishable form could not reasonably be expected to contribute any additional improvement to a program; in fact, it might detract from it because of the time involved to do it. In other words, reading and listening (not rated by Blaney and, in fact, extremely difficult to quantify in any way) should contribute to good programming, whereas publishing (rated by Blaney) should not.

In this regard, there was a peculiar characteristic of Blaney's data that he does not comment on, but which might make sense if the information/insight gathering phase was separated from the information/insight dispensing (i.e., publication) phase of research. Of the nine individuals who received the highest rating on programming, all but two fell on one extreme or the other on research activity. Three of these nine very successful programmers also receive the highest rating on research activity. Four of the nine received the lowest possible rating on research activity, indicating little or no research (i.e., publication). Only one of the nine received a research rating of 2, and one received a 3. There was no such bimodal distribution among the less-successful programmers.

The following conclusion might be drawn from these data. All of the successful programmers did the early information-gathering and insight-generating stages of research; however, only some of them wrote for publication—not necessarily about the information that led to their successful programs, but more probably about the programs themselves (as evidenced in many conference proceedings, a form of publication accepted as such by Blaney). This, of course, is highly speculative, though possibly subject to confirmation or otherwise by Blaney and his co-rater.

Overall, Blaney's paper forces us to question our common assumption of a link between research activity and success in programming in the UCE field. As noted above, one of the things that needs to be questioned is the definition of "research."

## ENOUGH ALREADY WITH THIS RESEARCH BUSINESS

Baskett wrote his 1996 article as an invited reaction to Thompson (1996) and Blaney (1996). He, too, notes that Blaney's data, as well as other studies, contradicted Thompson's first two points. Baskett also challenges Thompson's fourth point, stating that, although the research prowess of some members of his own faculty may have contributed to its success in having a master's program approved, what really counted was being at the right place with the right program at the right time, that is, at the time

when other, more dominant university purposes happened to be served by that program. This, then, is generally the operative success factor in CE units' initiatives; research prowess or lack of same is a relatively minor factor. Furthermore, Baskett noted, "the presumed increase in credibility [due to approval of that faculty's master's program] has been achieved at substantial costs to those who straddle the two cultures of programming and academe" (pp. 79–80). Percival and Kops (1999) elaborated on some of these costs, that is the requirement to do research "on your own time" after doing your "real job" of programming, which itself consumes one and a half times a regular work week.

Baskett's overall conclusion was that, in UCE, it is programming success that counts. Although he applauds Thompson's and Blaney's calls for a broadening of the criteria for reward (in the university generally) to encompass programming and the range of activities described in Boyer (1990), he believes this is unlikely to happen in our lifetime. He also believes that academic research can actually detract from programming success because it competes for time and does not improve practice. Instead, continuing educators should concentrate on reflective inquiry, as described by Schön and others, and not waste time and energy on academic research.

There is much truth in Baskett's criticisms of the research dance in UCE; however his proposed solution of calling off the dance is not what is needed. What is needed is a change in the music and the dance steps, in other words, a change in the definition of research and a rethinking of its purpose. Before describing the new dance, a brief historical digression is necessary, followed by a suggestion that we go back to dancing with them that brought us here.

### THREE ERAS IN UNIVERSITY EXTENSION/ CONTINUING EDUCATION IN CANADA

University extension in Canada began in the late 1880s, when Queen's University, followed by Toronto and McGill, began programming. These institutions, along with a number of American institutions in the late 19th century, operated on the British model, pioneered by Cambridge University and consisting essentially of conventional university lectures delivered "extra-murally" to the general public. Never very successful under North American conditions, this type of university extension had all but petered

out in Canada and the United States by the turn of the century (Selman, Cooke, Selman & Dampier, 1998, pp. 35–36).

The lasting impetus for university extension came from a reconception of the purpose of the university that originated at the University of Wisconsin, starting in 1907. What became known as “the Wisconsin Idea” was essentially that the purpose of a university was not to educate a small, elite class, but rather to serve the educational needs of the community, whatever those might be. It did not mean the needs of only the city in which the university happened to be located, however; one of the slogans associated with the Wisconsin Idea was: “The boundaries of the University are the boundaries of the state.”

This conception of a university’s purpose naturally gave a large and important role to the extension unit. Meeting the needs of all inhabitants involved placing field agents throughout the state, as well as organizing many different types of educational activities in many locations. The extension unit at the University of Wisconsin soon became (and remains) a large and well-respected part of the university. Similar goals and activities were soon taken up by many other American universities, particularly the land-grant institutions.

North of the border, the University of Alberta (1908) and the University of Saskatchewan (1907) were established in their newly minted provinces and immediately began extension work with explicit reference to the Wisconsin Idea (Selman et al., 1998, p. 39). Both institutions remain very active in extension activities.

The remainder of this paper focuses largely on the evolution of extension activities at the University of Alberta as a sort of case study, for a number of reasons. First, the authors are more familiar with the history of this institution; it will be left to others to judge and comment on the extent to which the conclusions drawn from the University of Alberta case can be generalized to other institutions. Second, for the first half of this century, this institution operated the largest university extension unit in Canada; at one point in the mid-1950s, University of Alberta Extension employed more staff than the next three such units in Canada combined (Clark, 1985, p. 298). Third, the history of this unit includes some achievements that will be familiar to readers and, so, can be the focus of informed discussion on UCE research.

## THE HEROIC ERA OF EXTENSION: THE WISCONSIN IDEA

During the first half of this century, university extension units performed some astonishing feats of meeting the needs of their regions or provinces, needs that did not necessarily relate to the traditional mission of universities. The best known of these, of course, is the Antigonish Movement, a community development program centred around the extension unit of St. Francis Xavier University. University extension units played an important role in the founding of the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE) in 1935 and were an essential support for that agency's world-renowned programs, National Farm Radio Forum and Citizens' Forum.

From its beginning, the University of Alberta brought culture and knowledge to the largely rural population of Alberta through a series of lectures on popular topics, supported by lantern slides early on, then by successor media such as filmstrips and films. To much the same end, it started CKUA Radio, one of the earliest ventures in educational broadcasting in Canada, and ran the Extension Library, until the 1950s the only public library to which most Albertans had access (Corbett, 1957). This remarkable library service operated almost entirely at a distance, shipping books to individuals, organizations, and rural public schools until its collection and function were relinquished to the regional library system in the 1980s. The Audio-Visual Program (later Educational Media Services) performed a somewhat similar service for all of western Canada, distributing educational films and eventually videocassettes until this function was transferred to the University Library in 1998. Extension built on its community arts programs by starting summer residential arts programs in Banff in 1933, a programming innovation that eventually developed into the Banff Centre. Somewhat later, in mid-century, it administered the first delivery of university credit courses in Calgary—the beginnings of the present University of Calgary (Clark, 1985).

Leaders of the extension units of that era, people such as Moses Coady, Ned Corbett, and Donald Cameron, had no formal training in adult education because none was available. According to Selman et al. (1998, p. 66), the first university credit courses in adult education in Canada were offered in the 1950s, and the first degree program, a master's degree, was introduced by the University of British Columbia in 1957. Obviously, the heroic age of Wisconsin-style university extension in Canada was not built upon adult education research; indeed, there is no evidence that it was built

upon formal research of any kind (see Cervero, 1991, pp. 21–23, for a similar observation about adult education in general). Certainly, extension educators learned through the systematic (and not-so-systematic) gathering of information about projects elsewhere. Donald Cameron went to Denmark in the early 1930s to observe the Danish Folk High Schools and successfully adapted some of what he learned about residential adult education to the shaping of the Banff School of Fine Arts. On a cross-Canada tour, Jimmy Thompson, a founder of the Antigonish Movement, met Ned Corbett at the University of Alberta and discussed the operation of CKUA Radio. Not surprisingly, a somewhat different but very effective use of educational radio later became an important element of the Antigonish Movement. A decade later, Corbett adapted the Antigonish Movement's use of radio and coupled it with local study groups to form an important element of National Farm Radio Forum (Corbett, 1957).

This type of information- and inspiration-gathering research was usually turned directly into programming, except for some popular publications such as Ned Corbett's charming (and very informative) memoirs (Corbett, 1957). This, however, is not the sort of publication that most academics would count as "research." In contrast, an essentially positivist research paradigm was steadily strengthening its hold on universities by mid-century, spreading from its base in the natural sciences (Neatby, 1985). By the 1950s several of the social sciences, in imitation of the natural sciences, had adopted the positivist research model, and the new discipline of adult education did likewise (Cervero, 1991, p. 24).

The dramatic expansion of higher education in the 1960s and the passing of effective control of universities from administrators to professors with primary loyalty to a discipline rather than an institution (and surrounding community), brought the heroic age of Wisconsin-style extension to an end. The reward structure became publish-or-perish, and the extension function of universities, even those on the Prairies, became even more marginal (Archer, 1995). Extension units began to evolve, in practice, into CE units, with different goals, procedures, and research needs; some formalized this shift by dropping the word "extension" and incorporating either "continuing education" or "continuing studies" into the unit's name. This trend was clearly, if somewhat belatedly, marked in 1974 when the Canadian Association of Directors of Extension and Summer Schools (CADESS) became the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education (CAUCE) (Baker, 1993, p. 53). Extension was out, UCE was in.

## THE ERA OF UNIVERSITY CONTINUING EDUCATION

Gordon Selman, (1995 [1987]), the most prolific historian of adult education in Canada, has referred to the 1950s as “the pivotal decade” in Canadian adult education. He designates this decade because it was clearly the beginning of adult education as a profession, fostered by the CAAE and its executive director during that decade, Roby Kidd. There was also a growing recognition among governments and the public of the importance of adult and higher education, and a great expansion in the number of participants therein. One event of particular interest was the founding, in 1954, of a national organization devoted exclusively to university extension, namely, the Canadian Association of Directors of Extension and Summer Schools (CADESS), the predecessor to CAUCE. The founding of CADESS was, perhaps, symptomatic of the divergence of interest that was developing between university extension practitioners and the majority of adult educators for whom the broadly based CAAE remained the chief reference organization.

Throughout this period, the nature of university extension had been changing. Previously funded mainly by direct grants from provincial governments, with a mandate to serve the public at large, extension units had generated very little turnstile revenue from tuition fees. A dramatic change occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, as delivery of upgrading or CE courses, some of them organized into certificate or diploma programs, became the major activity of extension units and their financial mainstay. In recognition of this new trend away from classical, needs-meeting extension towards demand-meeting CE, several university extension units renamed themselves “continuing education units,” and new units generally incorporated “continuing education” into their names rather than “extension.”

On the positive side, this trend generated a great deal of revenue, which could be invested in additional programming. On the negative side, the influx of turnstile revenue was noted by governments and university administrations, with predictable consequences, particularly in the 1970s when the long postwar economic boom came to an end. At the University of Alberta, the direct government grant to the Department of Extension was terminated in the early 1970s; these funds were now rolled into the university’s general grant without being specifically earmarked for extension activities, placing Extension at the beck and call of the university, rather than the provincial government. Probably not coincidentally,

Extension achieved faculty status in 1975, with the background document supporting this change noting that this new status would help Extension hold its own in the continuous battles among faculties over the sharing out of the institution's base budget. It also sent a clear signal that academic staff in the new Faculty of Extension would be expected to do research and to publish, as in other faculties.

The Faculty of Extension's revenue-generating ability delayed some consequences of this change until the onset of the severe cutbacks to university grants in the late 1980s and 1990s. The change in the character of extension programming was also not immediate. The needs-meeting extension activities dropped off one by one, although some remained until the 1990s, funded by the new herd of cash cows, particularly the business certificate programs. But drop off they did, almost entirely, as the needs they had formerly addressed were met by new agencies such as the regional library system and the new community colleges. Funding for activities also began to disappear because most of the base budget formerly provided by the university was eliminated and the cash cows have begun to slowly dry up. These cows are going dry partly because of increased competition from college and private-provider programs, and partly because of the university's willingness to grant transfer of credit into degree programs for all certificate programs in the province except those offered by its own Faculty of Extension. This continuing decline in CE activity has resulted in Extension turning to new types of activities, the subject of the next section of this paper. This trend is likely occurring now or will soon be occurring in other extension or CE units as well.

The CE era, with its rather routinized creation and operation of courses and certificate programs, did include positivist research, which proved to be somewhat useful. This type of research, derived from the natural sciences, induces general principles from a set of instances and applies them deductively to new but similar instances (Archer, 1994). Much of the growing body of adult education literature from that era, particularly on program planning, is of this type. A number of program planning models were developed in the form of rules that could be learned and then applied to practice. However, these sets of prescribed procedures were often honoured more in the breach than the observance, as noted by some of the focus group participants and authors quoted by Percival (1993, pp. 80–88).

Percival and Kops (1999), among others, feel positivist research has not been particularly successful in the UCE field, partly because the very basic process of sorting entities into categories does not work very well in this

discipline. And if this very basic procedure cannot be done reliably, then the consequent input of garbage will result in the output of garbage. For example, almost every Canadian university seems to have a different definition (or definitions!) of “certificate program,” which makes it impossible to state nationally valid generalizations about such programs. This, among other problems, is why the Statistics Canada data about UCE are notoriously bad.

Clearly, in the era we now seem to be entering (as described in the next section), positivist research is of less value than it was in the past. Instead, the interpretive humanism paradigm as described by McLean (1999) is likely to become much more important.

## THE NEW/OLD MODEL OF EXTENSION

The University of Alberta Faculty of Extension’s experiences during the last decade represent a considerable break with what it was doing even 10 years ago. As an initial response both to declining university funding during the 1990s and to increasing expectations for revenue generation, Extension focused on the creation of new credential programs. However, in many instances these initiatives, in particular, traditionally delivered certificate programs, were not hugely successful. As mentioned previously, the ongoing difficulties in obtaining credit transfer and the competition from the burgeoning community-college sector partially explain some of the disappointing results.

A number of important demographic factors are at work as well. UCE’s primary population, members of the baby-boomer generation, are moving through their work and learning careers, and many have reached an age where a sustained personal commitment to a multi-year program is not as beneficial. Entering a three-year certificate program at age 35 with the hope of career enhancement is very different from a similar investment of time and energy at age 55. Clearly, the primary target audience is rapidly aging. In parallel, a greater proportion of potential participants already possess post-secondary education credentials, making the career return on credentials at the certificate level lower. These potential students also have more choices; the increasing availability of professional masters degrees, in particular MBAs, offers attractive options.

Although nondegree credentials, in particular, on-line programs focusing on advanced, specialized diplomas, will remain an important component of Extension’s repertoire, another interesting pattern has emerged—the

growth of innovative, project-based activities that are redefining the entire faculty. Baker (1993) also noted a shift towards “soft money” (grant-and contract- funded) projects as a characteristic of UCE in Canada in the 1990s (p. 58). Before commenting on these developments, it is useful to provide a brief overview of several of these “new era” projects at the University of Alberta.

The *Access to Justice Network* (ACJNet) is an electronic community that brings together people, information, and educational resources on Canadian justice and legal issues. Web-based technologies are used to create and distribute products and services and to facilitate broad-based consultations. A nationwide service dedicated to making law and justice resources available to all Canadians in either official language, ACJNet has been primarily funded through a contract with the federal Department of Justice.

Within the ACJNet site is another initiative: *VIOLET: Law and Abused Women*. This website is a woman-friendly, safe space on the Internet, providing both passive and interactive services to meet the legal information needs of abused women and their service providers in Alberta. This project developed from the collaboration of women in Alberta communities, the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters, Alberta’s shelters, and the Legal Studies Program at the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta. The goal of the project is twofold: to provide web-based learning opportunities for women involved with family violence and to test the capacity of the Internet to provide this type of service.

*Muni Mall* is a collaborative project between Extension and Alberta Municipal Affairs, with the involvement of provincial associations representing rural and urban municipalities, the private sector, and individual communities and municipalities. During 1999, [www.munimall.net](http://www.munimall.net) will be developed as the site of a virtual community, providing accessible municipal-sector information. In addition to the information services and products, Muni Mall will feature the on-line delivery of the Local Government Certificate Program, phased in over a period of two years. Muni Mall is largely funded by a grant from Alberta Municipal Affairs.

*The Alberta Gaming Institute* involves the collaboration of the University of Lethbridge, University of Calgary, and University of Alberta (through the Government Studies unit within Extension) to develop a research, information-dissemination, and training initiative that will explore a wide range of social, economic, and cultural issues on the growth of gaming in

Alberta communities. It is supported by a grant, as well.

*The Academic Technologies for Learning (ATL)* unit supports the use of technology in teaching and learning initiatives at the University of Alberta. ATL provides training and consultation in instructional design, web and multimedia production, delivery, distance and distributed learning, and evaluation to most effectively utilize learning technologies. ATL is funded by a direct grant from the central administration of the University.

*The Institute for Professional Development (IPD)* is a new agency within Extension that is devoted to supporting continuing professional learning through theoretical, applied, and market research, as well as through program development. IPD's role is to lead and coordinate an innovative, coherent, and sustainable university continuing professional development outreach function. It will also operate the new TELUS Centre being built on campus (through a donation from TELUS) for the delivery of high-end professional development programs, seminars, and services. IPD is funded through various grants, plus fee-for-service arrangements with various clients.

Extension has been involved in an increasing number of fee-for-service, learning-consulting projects, including international technical-assistance projects, workplace learning-design projects with several large corporations, and knowledge-management design and implementation initiatives, as well as numerous feasibility assessments, program evaluations, and general management-consulting interventions. As opposed to traditional fee-for-service arrangements, these initiatives are noteworthy because they lack training activities.

The majority of these "new extension" initiatives have a number of defining features, as follows.

- These initiatives are project based, complete with the many challenges of working on projects. The initial conceptualization and design phase is usually prolonged and inherently risky. As a result, many worthy projects never come to fruition. The project's champion, usually an academic staff member, must work at building both internal and external support, including finding adequate resources. Projects are cyclical and, at times, demand intensive investments of time and resources; extension units are often ill equipped to respond, in a timely fashion, to project cycles. Project management, itself, requires a specific set of skills and systems, but many units are unprepared, particularly in the area of

support systems such as central university accounting and purchasing processes.

- Most of the Extension initiatives focus on new sources of funding and do not use either central university funds or traditional tuition-based revenues. To be effective, faculty members must become adept at finding new sources of funding, at developing budgets, and at writing proposals. By the very nature of these funding models, all financing is “soft” money. For many projects, particularly those funded by public agencies, obtaining adequate financial support is always a challenge. Many funders assume that the institution will invest in-kind resources, but given the existing financial pressures facing UCE faculties, many worthy projects do not receive matching faculty resources. Soft money financing also presents huge challenges to any faculty that is considering its composition, new tenure-track hires, or the need to maintain a higher level of flexibility. Project-based work often uses contractual staffing, and faculties must grapple with the advantages and disadvantages presented by contract academic and administrative staffing.
- Many of these new initiatives require knowledge and competencies not possessed by the existing faculty and staff members. For example, a great deal of work now requires the equivalent of management-consultation and technical-assistance competencies skills, and although CE units have always demonstrated strong administrative capabilities, many of these projects demand different attributes. Unique human and resource-management requirements, combined with inadequate university systems, make it difficult for many units to effectively manage these initiatives.
- Perhaps more important, a project-based model requires a different mind-set. In many ways, these new Extension initiatives call for entrepreneurial skills, not in the commonly understood sense of focusing on revenue generation, but classic entrepreneurial skills of being aware of opportunities and then being able to assemble the required resources and support to implement initiatives.
- Finally, these project-based initiatives may provide a rich opportunity for research activities. A goal of many of these projects is for those involved to gain experience and expertise in order to implement similar or parallel initiatives in the future. For example,

although the Muni Mall project focuses on creating an electronic community to serve the municipal sector, hopefully, the lessons learned in this project can be applied to create similar on-line communities in other sectors. As well, many of the external agencies funding these initiatives expect a number of program and project evaluation activities to be completed; the challenge is possible to design evaluation mechanisms that can be used both to meet external funder requirements and to provide valuable information for research purposes. Tools such as learning histories, case studies, and post-implementation reviews may provide useful results.

In summary, the “new” era of extension involves a move away from the traditional CE programming model. Although a complete transformation is unlikely, the past five years have seen a rapid growth in innovative project-based activities, and there is little indication that these opportunities will diminish. At the same time, the generation of course-registration turnstile revenue has been at best stable, and in some areas declining. This would seem to constitute an important trend away from a dependence upon traditional CE activities, and in a way, a reversion to a new form of the classical extension activities that occupied University of Alberta Extension during the first half of this century.

At the risk of carrying the argument too far, we believe the new era of extension may bring us back to our roots. Many of Extension’s projects have community development components, and all of them focus on the information- and knowledge-dissemination role. Finally, many of the new type of activities move professional faculty away from their recent emphasis on program administration to a more academic and potentially research-intensive function.

One significant new initiative within Extension in some ways seems to run counter to the trend discussed in this section. This new initiative is a distance-delivered Master of Arts in Communications and Technology (MACT), which was approved by the University of Alberta’s General Faculties Council in September 1999. Ironically, although a turnstile revenue-funded program, as are the certificate programs Extension has been operating for decades, it was the only new activity to require a formal change in Extension’s mandate, because it had not previously been permitted to operate degree-credit programs.

In some ways, the MACT is a continuation of the CE era, and not typical

of the activities of the new era described above. However, it may indicate a trend to shift Extension's CE programming to a higher level—focused on individuals with at least one university degree—leaving CE for the general public to other agencies such as community colleges and technical institutes. It may also have the effect of concentrating the more traditional research and teaching activities of faculty members on the content area of this particular program, as compared to the usual (for UCE units) scattering of such activities over many content areas.

## A NEW RESEARCH PARADIGM IN SUPPORT OF NEW ACTIVITIES

If UCE practitioners are now involved mainly in the new types of one-off activities described in the preceding section, rather than in the operation of sets of long-term programs typical of the CE era, then the type of research that will serve to improve practice may have to change.

When a CE unit is running a set of 20 certificate programs, each program is fairly similar to the others and to still other programs at other institutions, then inductive/deductive research makes sense. A market survey carried out for certificate program X, for example, can be a replica or a slight variation of those carried out for certificate programs Y and Z, and many other certificate programs. These programs fit into a category—"certificate program"—so that what has been induced from a study of some of them can be applied more or less directly to all of them. The results of this inductive/deductive research do, in fact, improve practice. However, this sort of very applied research does not have academic credibility and is not usually published; thus, it does not enhance the academic profile of individual programmers or their CE units.

Conversely, when the new program or project under development is so individual that it does not fall neatly into any category, the basis for research dependent upon inductive/deductive reasoning disappears. Nothing can be induced from some members of a category and then generalized by deduction to other members of the category if there is no category. However, research methods based on analogical thinking, that is, on the noting of partial similarities between individual phenomenon, rather than categories of phenomena, become more useful. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) noted that this sort of analogical reasoning is required once practitioners are past the "advanced beginner" stage of competence and moving towards the stage of "expert practitioner." Hofstadter and the Fluid Analogies Research Group (1995) present a discussion of the power of

analogical thinking, particularly in the domain of artificial intelligence. Some educational applications of this insight are discussed in Archer (1994), and will be expanded upon in Archer and Wright (in preparation (b)).

The case study, a research method that depends on analogical reasoning, shows great promise of being a tool that can be used to improve practice in “the new university extension” era, as well as serving numerous other purposes germane to the interests of UCE or extension units. A number of other practice-oriented academic fields such as Business, Medicine, and Law carry out their research and graduate-level instruction, in at least some universities, using the case study method. Of particular interest is Business, as UCE or extension units must operate, to a great extent, as a particular type of business enterprise. Business faculties that use the case method of instruction include the Harvard Business School and the Richard Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario. These prestigious institutions maintain extensive banks of case studies to use in their graduate-level education programs. Much of the research conducted by their faculty members is directed towards the writing and publication of case studies, for which they are recognized within the academic reward structure. This is a clear precedent for the recognition of the writing and publication of case studies as an appropriate and recognized form of academic research within UCE or extension units.

In addition to the good fit between analogy-based case studies and the type of one-off activities that extension units now seem to be undertaking, there are other reasons why this academic field should move to case-based research. Foremost among these reasons is that UCE practitioners presently write a large number of mini- or proto-case studies in the form of program review documents, periodic reports to faculty councils, marketing brochures, submissions to the CAUCE Program Awards competition, and items written for various other programming purposes. Expanding and modifying these documents for purposes of publication as case studies would be a relatively painless process. If these published case studies were recognized as such by faculty evaluation committees, this would go a long way to alleviating the present situation, referred to by Percival and Kops (1999), as doing research and publication after one’s “real job,” that is programming, is done. Concentrating research efforts on case studies, which builds directly on programming activities, would do much to improve the situation commented upon by Thompson (1996) and others—the low research productivity of academics who are UCE practitioners.

Finally, preparing and publishing case studies based on UCE programming, as well as reading case studies published by colleagues, will, in fact, serve to improve practice. To our knowledge, no empirical studies exist to offer deductive support for this position; however, the analogy with successful case-method business programs (Harvard and Western Ontario, among others) that are recognized for improving the practice of their graduates is compelling. Rather more direct evidence is provided by one of the authors of this paper, who has found that some of the most educational reading he has done in the UCE field over the past two years has been the submissions for the CAUCE Program Awards. Besides this anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of reading these mini-case studies, there is anecdotal evidence that the process of writing them also tends to improve practice. A colleague who submitted an application for the CAUCE awards remarked that the process of writing the application considerably improved her understanding of her own program.

Ultimately, the preparation, publication, and study of cases directly relevant to UCE practice can, and should, be focused around the distance delivery of a joint, inter-university, part-time graduate program in university continuing education. A proposal for such a program, to be put forward in Archer and Wright (in preparation (a)), will discuss several reasons for developing it at the doctoral level. It would not only provide a focus and shared purpose for UCE research, but also provide a critically aware market for this research in the form of graduate students who were themselves engaged in UCE practice. As well, such a program would yield a group of graduate students knowledgeable in the field, able to serve as useful research assistants and associates, and ultimately qualified to step into program director positions in UCE units. Thompson and Wagner (1994), among others, have noted the problem of the disciplinary heterogeneity of university extension and CE units. Home growing a UCE/extension doctorate to serve as appropriate CE for programmers hired for their diverse content-area expertise would go a long way towards addressing this problem.

## THAT DANCING MAN REVISITED

This paper started with a brief summary of a previous paper written for much the same purpose as this one (Thompson, 1996). It was noted that Thompson's four reasons why UCE practitioners should do research were

called into question by the two companion pieces to that paper, Blaney (1996) and Baskett (1996). However, we believe that Thompson (1996) got it basically right, and offer these slight modifications and extensions of his four points.

1. *Research activities by UCE practitioners support quality programming.*

This is true, as long as research activities relate directly to the programming carried on by UCE practitioners or their close colleagues, for example, writing up program review documents as case studies for publication. This should not only improve practitioners' understanding of their (or their units') own programs, but also eventually improve the programs. Otherwise, the research does not support programming, but simply competes with it for the programmer's time and energy, to the detriment of both, as Baskett (1996) points out.

2. *Professional competence is maintained and enhanced through research.*

This is also true, particularly if the research being produced and/or studied is of the type (i.e., well-written case studies) from which analogies to partially similar situations in which new programs might be created can be made.

3. *University continuing education units have a leadership role to play in conducting research that contributes to practice.*

This is a policy statement that is hard to disagree with, if only on the grounds of "If we don't do it, who will?" Dean Thompson and his decanal colleagues have taken on this role by instigating and supporting the Prairie Research Symposium. Archer and Wright (in preparation (a)) will suggest a further step by which others in the field can again show leadership in supporting research that contributes to UCE practice.

4. *Undertaking research enhances individual and unit credibility within the institution.*

Although Baskett (1996) questions this statement, the authors' experience tends to confirm it. The process through which the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta has recently secured approval for a new Master of Arts in Communications and Technology has significantly raised the credibility of Extension within the university. It has done so by publicizing our practice of conducting academically recognized research and teaching at the

graduate level. This enhancement of credibility has happened because the program, not individual research achievements, has attracted attention. Prior to this, credit for individual research achievements was dispersed among departmental cognates of various content areas or associated with the Adult Education program within the Faculty of Education. Thus, it is not the research that enhances credibility; rather, it is primarily the graduate program that gives focus and visibility to the research. A graduate program explicitly focused on UCE practice would be even more effective in this regard.

## CONCLUSION

It has been argued in this paper that the practice of university extension or CE units is evolving into something resembling the heroic era of university extension that occurred in the first half of the twentieth century. It has been further argued that this evolution in practice should entail a corresponding evolution in the way in which research is conducted, published, and utilized. This change in our research paradigm can be a highly creative process, playing a vital role in ushering in an exciting new era of practice as the new century begins.

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## BIOGRAPHIES

Walter Archer is Assistant Dean, Research, in the Faculty of Extension of the University of Alberta, where he has been employed for the past eleven years. He is also Acting Director of the recently approved Master of Arts in Communications and Technology (MACT) program.

Walter Archer est Doyen adjoint de recherches à la Faculté de formation permanente de l'University of Alberta, où il travaille depuis onze ans. Il est aussi Directeur intérimaire du programme récemment approuvé, la Maîtrise ès arts en communications et technologie (MACT).

Kirby Wright is currently Program Coordinator, MBA Programs, in the Faculty of Business, University of Alberta. He was previously the Director of Business Programs in the Faculty of Extension at that university. He holds an MBA and is completing his doctoral dissertation in Educational Administration.

Présentement, Kirby Wright est Coordonnateur de programmes, Programmes de MBA, à la Faculté des affaires de l'University of Alberta. Auparavant, il était Directeur des Programmes pour les entreprises à la Faculté de formation permanente de cette même université. Il détient un MBA et complète maintenant son mémoire de doctorat en Administration scolaire.