National Young Professionals Development Program (NYPDP)

(A program of the MANAGE-University Alliance for Advancing Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services)

MANAGE NYPDP Mentors Diaries:

Reflections That Cultivate Tomorrow's Agricultural Extension

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Graduate Study and Career Opportunities in Extension Education and Evaluation in the United States (U.S.)

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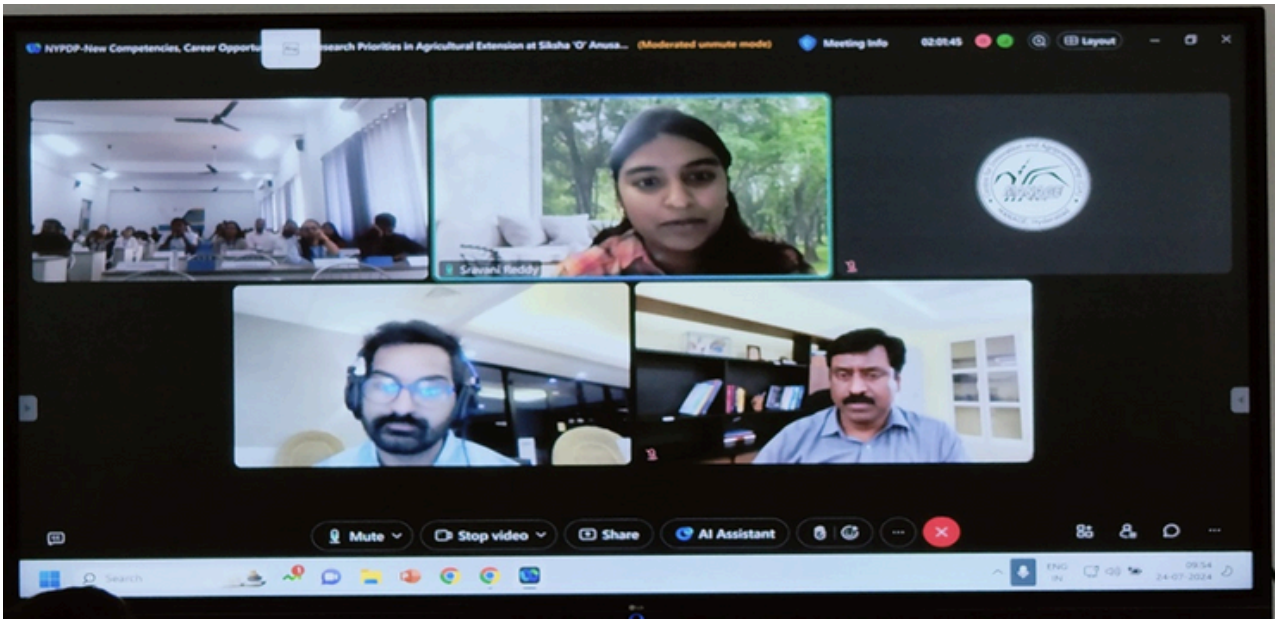
01 About the MANAGE NYPDP Program

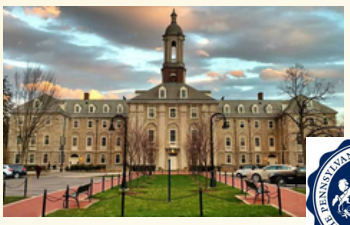
The National Young Professionals Development Program (NYPDP) program appears to be a needs-based initiative that aims to provide essential competencies and strategies for exploring careers in Agricultural and Extension Education in India and abroad. The scale, reach, and efforts to bring together experts from a wide range of disciplines and institutions are indicative of strong teamwork and dedication. The reach of this program is country wide and has the potential to leave a good capacity development model and framework for future generations; for example, the program has successfully included 553 M.Sc. and Ph.D. scholars from 68 universities and 22 states across India, with collaborations extending to agricultural universities in Gujarat, Odisha, Kerala, Meghalaya, Haryana, Rajasthan and Karnataka, which reflects how far and wide program has reached and what it is going to achieve in years to come. While the reach of this program is extensive and inclusive, the outcomes of the program need to be systematically measured, and the impact assessed after a few years of its operation by following up with the cohorts that graduate from the program.



02 Key Institutions for Extension Graduate Studies

In the United States (U.S.), universities offer a diverse range of programs in the field of Agricultural and Extension Education, including extension education (extension program evaluation can be a specialization under this), agricultural education, agricultural leadership, and agricultural communication. These programs offer a combination of skills in the field of communication, education, evaluation, leadership, and extension education; however, they may not be named explicitly as Agricultural and Extension Education as it is common in India. Therefore, great care should be taken while exploring these programs.

Some universities offering programs in the areas mentioned above include



Pennsylvania State University
(Education, Development, and Community Engagement)

Iowa State University
(Agricultural Education and Studies)

University of Florida
(Department of Agricultural Education and Communication)

Purdue University
(Department of Agricultural Sciences Education and Communication)

The Ohio State University
(Department of Agricultural Communication, Education, and Leadership)

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
(Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication)

Mississippi State University
(School of Human Sciences)

Texas A&M University
(Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications)

Texas Tech University
(Department of Agriculture Education and Communication)

Virginia Tech
(Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education)

University of Georgia
(Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communication)

North Carolina State University
(Agricultural and Human Sciences)

03 Eligibility for Extension Education Programs

Eligibility criteria typically include evidence of GRE and TOEFL/IELTS test scores, as well as a relevant academic background. For instance, in the case of Agricultural and Extension Education, degree programs often require a focus on community development, agricultural education, extension education, youth development, international development, or relevant areas in the social sciences. Additionally, educational programs in the U.S. are flexible to accommodate varied interests. Students with an academic background in the natural sciences are also welcome or sometimes switch to pursue educational programs in the social sciences.

- GRE is no longer a mandatory requirement in most of the universities in the U.S. There have been changes introduced in the GRE as a prerequisite for applying to a particular program; Nonetheless, it needs to be verified with the university, as the conditions vary from program to program and university to university.
- International students are required to demonstrate English language proficiency by submitting IELTS-Academic (mostly, at least 6.0 band each module) or TOEFL in (minimum 80s) test scores. The scores requirement varies from department to department as well as university to university. Additionally, it is important to check with the department's program coordinator regarding the eligibility requirements for the GRE/IELTS/TOEFL exams as they vary from department to department.

04 Program Specializations in Extension Education

Graduate programs in Agricultural and Extension Education in the United States(U.S.) offer a wide range of specializations that allow students to tailor their studies based on their interests and career goals. Some of the commonly available areas of specialization include:

- Agricultural Extension Education
- Agricultural Leadership
- Agricultural Communication
- Program Development and Evaluation
- Community Development
- Adult and Continuing Education
- Rural Development
- International Extension Education

05 Funding Opportunities for International Students in Extension Education

In most cases, graduate students are supported through assistantships in the form of research and teaching appointments. These assistantships require international students to work 10 or 20 hours per week during the academic year (mid-August to mid-May). However, students can work up to 40 hours a week on campus during the summer. Research funding for research assistantship positions comes from projects funded by entities like the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Institutes of Health (NIH); the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and many more. Additionally, internal university-based funding options are also available. Teaching assistantships are typically department- or college-funded, where graduate students receive support for teaching or assisting with teaching at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Additionally, students in India can consider applying for the Fulbright-Nehru scholarship and Netaji Subhas - Indian Council of Agricultural Research International Fellowship for pursuing a PhD in the United States (U.S.). It is advised to keep an eye on the call for applications for these fellowships.

06 Experiential Learning in Extension Education Programs

In the U.S. educational system, experiential learning is offered through hands-on experience in real-world settings. The approach is rooted in practical application and learning by doing. Classes are often structured in a way that encourages active participation in discussion and activities, critical thinking, and solving real-life problems in addition to theoretical learning.

As for internships, as you move along in your coursework, you may be eligible to earn course credits for internships. This option is usually more flexible for master's students than for doctoral students, who are often already on assistantships. However, in some universities, even Ph.D. students are required to complete internships as part of their academic program and may be eligible to earn course credits for them.

That said, the structure and expectations around internships vary widely across departments and institutions. While this option is generally more flexible for master's students, who often incorporate internships for credit or experience, Ph.D. students may also pursue internal/ external internships and independent studies depending on their advisor's support, departmental policies, and university guidelines. In many cases, internships, especially external ones, are completed during the summer and may be paid or unpaid. Opportunities may arise through faculty connections, job portals, or institutional programs, but the feasibility and format of such experiences differ greatly across universities.

Fieldwork and community-based projects are often integrated into graduate assistantship responsibilities. If the funding comes from the department, you'll likely get to explore a variety of projects across faculty members. But if you're funded under a specific grant, you'll mostly work within that project's scope. In agricultural education and extension, field-based work often includes assisting in youth development initiatives (e.g., 4-H, FFA), assisting in program or grant evaluations, supporting extension programs, conducting detailed literature reviews, co-authoring, developing manuscripts, and getting involved in grant writing or outreach-focused activities.

07 Career Opportunities in the U.S. for Extension Education and Evaluation Graduates

There are a wide range of job opportunities available upon graduation. Here is an exhaustive list of opportunities that we gleaned based on our experience in the U.S. so far:

- County extension agent or county extension educator (master's)
- State-level extension specialist (master's or PhD)
- State-level extension specialist serving as faculty in academic departments (PhD)
- Professor in academic departments (PhD)
- Evaluation specialist (staff carrying out evaluations) (master's)
- State level evaluation specialist (annual reports for USDA NIFA and some evaluation capacity building of county extension agents) (master's)
- State evaluation leader or evaluation capacity building leader (either academic staff with a master's or academic department faculty with PhDs)
- Communications Specialist (bachelor's or master's, depending on the scope of the job)
- Project Manager (bachelor's or master's)
- Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist in NGOs or International Development Organizations (master's)
- Research Specialist in universities or industry (master's or PhD)
- Evaluation Specialist in industry (master's or PhD)
- Policy Analysts or Policy Specialists in universities or industry, or NGOs (master's or PhD)
- Lead Evaluator (project-based; master's or PhD)
- Evaluation Director (master's or PhD)
- Evaluation Lead (PhD; common in major grant projects funded by NSF, NIH, USDA)
- Evaluation Consultant (PhD or master's; very common in private and non-profits)

08 Global Relevance of U.S. Extension Education Skills

Academic programs in the United States (U.S.) are structured to blend theory with practical application. These programs typically include theories, methods, frameworks, and toolkits with strong emphasis on the application of the theoretical components in the real world. Apart from this, programs are designed to build skills such as critical thinking, interpersonal, problem-solving, and communication skills, which aim to shape the overall personality of the students and, indeed, are transferable. For example, in the Monitoring and Evaluation class, students choose an ongoing program and develop a comprehensive evaluation plan for it. This includes formulating evaluation questions, selecting appropriate methods, and designing protocols. Often, students collaborate with communities and organizations, while gaining firsthand experience in evaluation skills. Such opportunities offer ample hands-on experience to develop practical skills, foster community engagement and networking. Students gain an understanding of the context and complexity of situations, and apply system thinking skills, which enable them to analyze the various components of problem context and enable them to apply these skills to different research and educational settings.

09 Networking Platforms for Extension Professionals

Agricultural and Extension Education students, professors, researchers, extension specialists, and administrators can benefit from attending the conferences organized by the following associations:

Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education (AIAEE); https://aiaee.org/

American Evaluation Association (AEA); https://www.eval.org/Events.
There are several Topical Interest Groups (TIGs) within AEA. Extension Education Evaluation Topical Interest Group is most appropriate for agricultural extension education professionals:
https://comm.eval.org/extension_education_evaluation/home

For those who are already in the U.S. as graduate students or full-time professionals, the following Associations are also helpful:

- *Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP): https://www.jcep.org/ (This Association supports six partner organizations within Extension representing different extension programmatic areas, with National Association of Extension Program and Staff Development Professionals (NAEPSDP): https://naepsdp.org/ being the one aligned with extension programming, evaluation, staff and organizational development, technology, and communications.*
- *American Association for Agricultural Education: https://aaea.wildapricot.org/*
- *Epsilon Sigma Phi: https://espnational.org/*

10 Graduate Engagement in Conferences and Networking

During the graduate program, students are expected to attend university-level, national, and international conferences as part of their program. Participation in academic conferences enables students to refine their research, communication, and networking skills by engaging with a diverse community of scholars working across interdisciplinary, international, and intercultural contexts. Students can derive benefits by familiarizing themselves with current and emerging research areas, seeking feedback on their work from colleagues and mentors, establishing professional connections, and gaining visibility for their work and themselves, which can eventually lead to forming future collaborations. Conferences are ideal platforms for graduate students to gain research opportunities, where they can directly meet their future supervisor, share resources, and seek guidance. Conference participation can lead to better job outcomes after graduation.

11 Conference Planning: India vs. International

Academic and professional conferences in the U.S. are typically planned a year in advance. This planning includes finalizing the host institution, conference theme, and dates, which offer prospective participants sufficient time to prepare and mark their calendars. The planning process is typically led by professional societies or associations comprising faculty and student representatives from multiple institutions, who have clear roles and responsibilities to plan and deliver a successful event. Moreover, this allows the conference planning and organizing committee to open the call for abstracts, review them, and inform the authors about the decision on the submission, as well as provide enough time to prepare presentations and make logistical arrangements for the conference.

12 Conference Scale and Structure: India vs. International

International conferences attract participants from around the globe, and a call for abstracts or papers is typically shared 8-10 months in advance. These conferences bring together faculty, graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and in some cases practitioners from a diverse range of disciplines, organizations, and affiliations. For example, the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education (AIAEE) and American Evaluation Association (AEA) include a wide range of researchers and professionals to present and engage. Depending on the nature, these conferences include keynote speakers, plenary sessions, workshops, professional development sessions, and paper and poster presentations, which span three to six days.

13 Publishing Standards in Indian vs. International Conferences

Most of the associations publish conference proceedings and have their home journals. For example, AIAEE publishes online proceedings and has the Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education (JIAEE). AEA doesn't publish conference proceedings; however, they publish American Journal of Evaluation (AJE) and New Directions for Evaluation (NDE), where rigorous peer peer-reviewed work is accepted. Extension Professional Associations have different conferences where proceedings are published and have their own journals like Journal of Extension, Journal of Youth Development, etc.

14 Publication and Global Visibility Opportunities in International Conferences

A rigorous blind peer review process and editorial or leadership review are followed for accepting conference abstracts. Conference abstracts are typically published as open-access online proceedings. We can reference the abstracts in our scholarly work by citing the conference proceedings. These abstracts may be cited in scholarly work using conference proceedings.

15 Preparing Graduates for Next-Gen Extension Careers

Based on our observation and experiences, the course content in India is imparting subject matter knowledge and skills on par with the U.S. curriculum. However, more analytical components, like take-home assignments where reflections are encouraged instead of rote learning, project-based learning, group work, presentations, and more field work, will serve the students better and prepare them for the emerging job market. Conference presentations and publishing in peer-reviewed journals should also be highly encouraged and made an expectation for awarding degrees.

16 Guidance for Emerging Extension Professionals

Professionals need to stay informed about global developments in the field of agricultural extension education, evaluation, or any other field in which they are interested. In the present situation, researchers are expected to engage in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research. Young professionals should continue to build strong networks, regularly publish, and acquire skills and certifications to demonstrate their competencies to perform different kinds of tasks, such as data collection, analysis and visualization, project management and presentations. Publishing in peer-reviewed journals is the most important competency students should learn, especially if they want to pursue careers in academia. Students should focus more on mastering the subject matter to the best of their ability.

17 Curriculum Enhancements and Future Additions

Improving the course curriculum is a continuous process and happens throughout. New courses can be developed following departmental and college-level processes before they can be offered to students. Student course evaluations and feedback are seriously considered and teaching strategies and learning activities are designed based on this evaluation data.

18 Curriculum Development: India vs. Global Practices

In the United States (U.S.), professors have significant control over the curriculum development and delivery. However, the curriculum must go through the academic approval processes within the university. A typical course curriculum includes various teaching and learning methodologies that allow the students to engage and commit to the class, which enables them to learn effectively with the support of faculty.

Refer to this blog written by three Agricultural and Extension Education PhD students of Indian subcontinent origin for their reflections on the curriculum and teaching at their respective programs: *https://aesanetwork.org/learning-extension-reflections-of-south-asian-students-at-the-university-of-florida-and-purdue-university/*

19 Internship, Courses and Training Programs for Extension Students

Attending some of the conferences mentioned above will be an effective way to develop global competencies in agricultural and extension education. Most of these conferences offer professional development workshops. The extension program development and evaluation units at several state extension systems have free learning resources available for anyone interested in learning about these topics.

Refer to the extension evaluation resources of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension *(https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/programdevelopment/)*

University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Cooperative Extension (https://ucanr.edu/site/anr-ce-program-evaluation)

University of Florida IFAS Extension (https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topics/program_evaluation), and several others.

The Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, University of Florida IFAS Extension, offers a Certificate program to help individuals pursuing degrees in agriculture and natural resources improve their skillset in different learning environments, i.e., formal, informal, and non-formal.

See the link for more details: https://aec.ifas.ufl.edu/graduate/graduate-certificates/

20 Author Competencies, Development Journey, and Contributions in Extension Education

We are a team of four authors, including a faculty member, a postdoctoral researcher, and two PhD students from a range of agricultural and extension education, evaluation, leadership, and communication expertise and focus areas, who collectively contributed to this reflection piece. We gained our competencies from our coursework during our PhD programs, reading research and extension literature, presenting at, and participating in national and international conferences, conducting and publishing research, teaching, and mentoring students.

Disclaimer

The reflection presented in this piece are based on the authors' experiences coming from pursuing master's and Ph. D. degrees in Agricultural and Extension Education at four different universities in India and the United States (U.S.), respectively.The authors pursued their master's degrees at Punjab Agricultural University, Kerala Agricultural University, Acharya Narendra Deva University of Agriculture and Technology, and Acharya N G Ranga Agricultural University. Drs. Singh and Koundinya received their PhD degrees from Pennsylvania State University and Iowa State University, respectively, and Ms. Pasula and Ms. Kandi are currently PhD students at the University of Florida and Texas A&M University, respectively.

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MANAGE launched its flagship National Young Professionals Development Program (NYPDP) in 2024, in partnership with agricultural universities across India. The program is designed to cultivate next-generation competencies, explore emerging career pathways, and identify research priorities in agricultural extension. NYPDP orients young scholars toward contemporary themes in extension research, practice, and policy, fostering leadership among future extension professionals in an ever-evolving agricultural landscape. As of September 2025, ten successful NYPDP cohorts have trained 553 young professionals from 68 universities across 22 states, nurturing a vibrant and interconnected community of emerging extension leaders. Collaborative editions with institutions such as SDAU (Gujarat), SOA (Odisha), KAU (Kerala), CAU (Meghalaya), CCSHAU (Haryana), RAJUVAS (Rajasthan), and KVAFSU (Karnataka) have significantly enriched the program, creating a robust ecosystem of experiential learning and academic exchange.

This publication, "MANAGE NYPDP Mentors Diaries: Reflections That Cultivate Tomorrow's Agricultural Extension", captures the insights and experiences of mentors with the NYPDP participants. It serves as a source of inspiration and guidance for future generations committed to strengthening agricultural extension and building resilient, sustainable farming communities

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