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## University extension and rural tourism enterprise development: A rare Australian case

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### 1. Introduction

Transferring knowledge to society is integral to the function of the university (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1967; Hawkins, 2006; Ticha & Havlicek, 2008); indeed, “Throughout history, higher education institutions have been challenged to both create and disseminate knowledge” (Hawkins, 2006, p. 15). In fact, universities can be seen as knowledge organisations that exist to transfer knowledge to society (Hawkins, 2006; PhillipsKPA, 2006). The knowledge transfers occur in various ways: through publications, conferences, events, consultancies, research partnerships, and committee memberships, to name a few (Hawkins, 2006; PhillipsKPA, 2006; Ticha & Havlicek, 2008).

University knowledge transfer aligns with what has been called the ‘third mission’ of universities (the first and second missions being teaching and research). The third mission describes assorted forms of university outreach benefitting society (Ca, 2009; Göransson, Maharajh, & Schmoch, 2009; Innovative Research Universities Australia, 2005; Molas-Gallart, Salter, Patel, Scott, & Duran, 2002). Australian universities have tended to emphasize the missions of teaching and research, apparently paying lesser regard to public service (Australian Technology Network of Universities, 2006; Innovative Research Universities Australia, 2005).

University extension is a form of knowledge transfer falling within the ambit of the university’s third mission of public service (Lamble & Thompson, 2000; Roper & Hirth, 2005). The knowledge transfer of university extension is thus a distinct form of public service, distinguished from other types of university public engagement. As Hawkins (2006) says, “The ultimate goal of knowledge transfer is knowledge use” (2006, p. 14). This is what university extension does. University extension entails educational outreach for public benefit (Jones, 2009; Lamble & Thompson, 2000). More precisely, it is a deliberate program of educational outreach to external parties, primarily effected through unconventional lectures, purposely designed to convey useful knowledge for practical effect. Properly conceived as a deliberate program of educational outreach, as distinct from other forms of public engagement, university extension has scarcely featured in the subordinated public service mission of Australian universities.

Although university extension has featured significantly in the history of English and American Universities (Jones, 2009; Roper & Hirth, 2005), the role of university extension in Australian universities remains underexplored. Given the significant historical tradition of university extension in the close cousins of English and American universities, the lack of university extension practice at Australian universities is surprising. The anomaly invites further contemplation.

University extension offers a possible response to calls for Australian universities to “engage more fully with community needs, regional issues and economic development” (Winter, Wiseman, & Muirhead, 2006, p. 212). However, to do so, university extension must be properly conceived and practiced. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to clarify the nature of university extension and identify features of effective extension practice. To that end, this paper explores a rare, relatively recent historical case of university extension in an Australian university context—that of the Agritourism Business Development Program (ABDP) formerly delivered by Southern Cross University. In this way, the paper seeks to both illuminate the situation of university extension in an Australian university context and identify features contributing to effective extension practice in that particular case. The discussion broadly

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provokes contemplation of the relevance of university extension as a form of public service engagement in Australian universities. The findings are relevant to Australian universities contemplating university extension as a form of public engagement, most particularly in realms of rural enterprise and tourism development.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, it clarifies the meaning of university extension and its relation to university function. The paper then turns to the case, outlining the history of the ABDP before illuminating particular program features apparently contributing to successful extension results, while also commenting on university extension as a component of the public service mission. The case serves to illustrate important features of university extension practice, while also drawing attention to the possible role of university extension in the public service mission of Australian universities.

## 2. Literature review

University extension is a kind of educational outreach. As [Lamble and Thompson \(2000, p. 52\)](#) say, ever since its inception, university extension has always described “deliberate efforts to extend learning opportunities beyond the full time on campus students of the university to people in the larger community.” Moreover, university extension has particular features distinguishing it from other forms of university outreach.

As [Jones \(2009, p. 20\)](#) explains, university extension began in England among other reforms to “widen university education, both geographically and socially....[and] the idea of what became known as ‘university extension’ was born, with proposals from the late 1840s for societies to be formed in towns and villages with lectures by university academics”. However, the first practical example of university extension did not occur until 1867, when James Stuart of Cambridge University delivered a popular lecture series to women's groups in northern industrial cities of England, an event now widely held to be “the *terminus a quo* for university outreach” ([Jones, 2009, p. 19](#)). According to [Jones \(2009, p. 21\)](#), the success of Stuart's lectures eventually prompted the University of Cambridge in 1873 to accept Stuart's earlier proposals to “establish provision for those who were denied access to university education on grounds of either geographical remoteness or social class.” Two years later, in 1875, the University effected that decision by establishing a permanent committee to provide university courses at locally financed centres ([Jones, 2009](#)). Shortly after that, in 1876, the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, and London formed the Society for the Extension of University Teaching, a development heralding a rapid expansion of university extension lectures throughout England ([Jones, 2009](#)). Thus, extension became a central pillar of university function in England. As the [University of Cambridge \(2018\)](#) reflects, “Extension lectures in provincial centres were an important feature of University activities in the late nineteenth century.”

The concept of university extension spread to universities in the United States, arising in connection with the land-grant institutions that were formed to foster socioeconomic development through practical education ([Roper & Hirth, 2005](#)). As [Roper and Hirth \(2005\)](#) describe, with the passing of the Morrill Act in 1862, each state was allotted public land to support economic prosperity through “widespread education in agricultural and practical arts” (2005, p. 4). The Hatch Act of 1887 then added agricultural experiment stations to conduct research to inform practical teaching, and the Morrill Act Amendment of 1890 strengthened land-grant universities by providing for ongoing federal funding ([Roper & Hirth, 2005](#)). Taking inspiration from English universities, the American Society for the Extension of University Teaching was formed in 1890, growing out of an organization formed by Provost Pepper of the University of Pennsylvania ([American Society for the Extension of University Teaching, 1891, p. 4](#)). Its avowed aim was the advancement of university extension, conceived as transformational educational outreach, namely “to bring as far as possible within the reach of everyone the advantages which at present are accessible only to those who can attend the college and university... to widen the intelligence and enlarge the sympathies of the masses” ([American Society for the Extension of University Teaching, 1891, p. 3](#)). The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 formally enshrined extension as a core function in land-grant universities, establishing a cooperative extension partnership with the Department of Agriculture and providing funding to support extension activities ([Lamble & Thompson, 2000; Roper & Hirth, 2005; Swanson, 2008](#)).

University extension stems from the basic notion that universities exist to serve society ([Lamble & Thompson, 2000; Roper & Hirth, 2005](#)), an orientation placing it within the third mission of public service alongside missions of teaching (first mission) and research (second mission). The third mission concerns “the outreach of a university to society at large” ([Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1967, p. 10](#)), describing assorted activities that “try to reach out to society” ([Ca, 2009, p. 91](#)). The outreach entails knowledge transfers for societal benefit. As [Göransson et al. \(2009, p. 84\)](#) say, the third mission is about universities “stimulating and guiding the utilization of knowledge for social, cultural and economic development.” Consequently, the authoritative Science and Technology Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex defines third mission activity as “the generation, use, application, and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments” ([Molas-Gallart et al., 2002, pp. iii-iv](#)). It is widely held that these public service engagements confer benefits to both society and the university ([Australian Technology Network of Universities, 2006; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1967](#)). As the [Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching \(1967, p. 13\)](#) describes, third mission activities can heighten the relevance of teaching and research and assist the university to “gain new admirers and allies and broader public support.”

However, as [Göransson et al. \(2009, p. 84\)](#) point out, the third mission is “a rather amorphous concept,” so it is often treated as a residual “encompassing all university activities not covered by the first two missions.” This seems to be the case in Australian universities, wherein the third mission is typically inconsistently described and incoherently performed ([Australian Technology Network of Universities, 2006](#); Innovative Research Universities [Australia, 2005](#)). Teaching and research are the main priorities in Australian universities, and there is little systematic attention to public service ([Australian Technology Network of Universities, 2006](#)). Despite policy rhetoric urging more community engagement by Australian universities ([Winter et al., 2006](#)), public service remains a subordinate concern ([Australian Technology Network of Universities, 2006](#)). University extension, properly conceived as a

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