Experiencing eXtension Online Professional Development Course

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Experiencing eXtension will introduce Extension educators to the personal finance information and features in the Financial Security for All content area of eXtension. With the goal of helping participants navigate through features and maximize their use of eXtension to make their day-to-day work easier, the course will serve as a one-stop location for links to specific eXtension features for future reference.

eXtension, a new paradigm for Cooperative Extension program delivery, has primarily focused on providing information directly to consumers via 24/7/365 access. Information products and services include just-in-time information, learning lessons, and the opportunity to receive personalized feedback and answers to specific questions from Extension experts. Even with the focus on external customers, eXtension is a powerful tool for educators. Its internal components allow Extension personnel to share resources and to participate in online, inservice training conducted by experts from over 100 land-grant institutions. The learning lessons feature of eXtension has resulted in a compilation of online courses for consumers as well as courses that educators can access for general information, for professional development, and as inservice training.

The Financial Security for All (FSA) Community of Practice (CoP) has incorporated a variety of strategies to acquaint Extension educators with the features of eXtension and has continually encouraged active participation as a member of the CoP to assist in the further development of resources in the personal finance area. The CoP has long believed that educators and staff need an easy to use, one-stop reference source to help them navigate and find helpful information within eXtension. Thus, the *Experiencing eXtension* course was created to meet those needs.

Moodle is the course management system used by eXtension for a majority of the learning lessons. It is open source, is built on a sound educational philosophy, and has a large community that develops and supports it. More importantly, Moodle does not require expensive license fees and maintenance contracts. It is an easy-to-learn system and courses can be developed fairly quickly. The *Experiencing eXtension* course incorporates several Moodle features including web pages, PowerPoints, on- and off-line activities, questionnaires, and quizzes to make it interesting and to increase interaction and learning. The *Your Two Cents* and *Try It* activities within the modules are opportunities for participants to practice skills and provide feedback via chats and forums, which are designed to increase social networking among the course facilitator, participants, and the FSA CoP leadership.

The *Experiencing eXtension* course contains 14 topic modules. In addition to eXtension and Financial Security for All, titles include: What's In It For Me (WIIFM); Working in the Wiki; Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and Ask an Expert (AaE); Finance Calculators; Learning Lessons; Chats; News Stories; Research Briefs; Calendar; Approved Resources; and Program Implementation. An additional module provides information about the national initiative, Managing in Tough Times (MiTT) and the MiTTNet Directory. Participants will become more informed of resources at their disposal for developing, marketing, delivering, and evaluating programs to help consumers thrive during challenging times. In addition, directions on how to enter resources they have developed into the MiTTNet database are provided.

Course forums provide the opportunity for participants to ask questions, post interesting information and additional resources, enhance learning by helping others, as well as inform the leadership of the FSA CoP of ideas and suggestions for improvement. The forums are set so that every course participant is subscribed initially, which means that each participant receives copies of all forum posts via email until they choose otherwise by unsubscribing. Thus, a social networking email group is formed.

Experiencing eXtension can be accessed via the directory of eXtension professional development courses (http://pdc.extension.org) or directly at: http://pdc.extension.org/course/view.php?id=327. Registration is free and participants can complete any or all of the modules as time allows, returning again and again as needed to locate important information or to renew skills such as working in the eXtension wiki.

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