

## Extension Program and Customer Satisfaction: Are We Serving All Clients Well?<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

The quality of services provided by the Florida Cooperative Extension Service (FCES) has been measured every year since 1988 using a customer satisfaction survey (CSS). This practice, initiated from a recommendation by the Florida Board of Regents in 1988, also meets requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993.

FCES' performance standard is that 92% of clientele will be "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the quality of the service received. The perception of quality by the clientele has remained at high levels in recent years, increasing slightly from 92.3% in 2003 to 95.3% in 2006 (see Figure 1) (G.D. Israel, unpublished data). To maintain this trend, FCES strives constantly to identify, prioritize, and provide solutions that meet the needs and expectations of the different market segments that it serves. This fact sheet explores whether race or gender have an effect on the perceptions of the clientele regarding the quality and outcome of services provided by Extension.

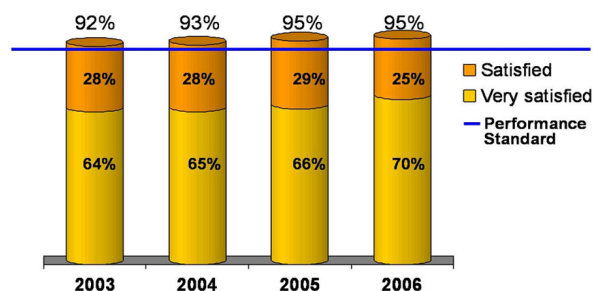


Figure 1. Overall satisfaction with Extension services in Florida from 2003 to 2006.

### A Diverse Clientele

The population of Florida is highly diverse. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2005), the proportions of Hispanic/Latino and Black people in the state are greater than those at the national level (19.5 vs. 14.4% and 15.7 vs. 12.8%, for Hispanic/Latino and Black, respectively). The report also shows that women account for 51% of the population in Florida. The importance of the state's diversity for planning and marketing Extension programs in Florida has been widely discussed (Brennan, 2005; Guion, 2005a; Guion & Kent, 2005; Place & Toro, 2006).

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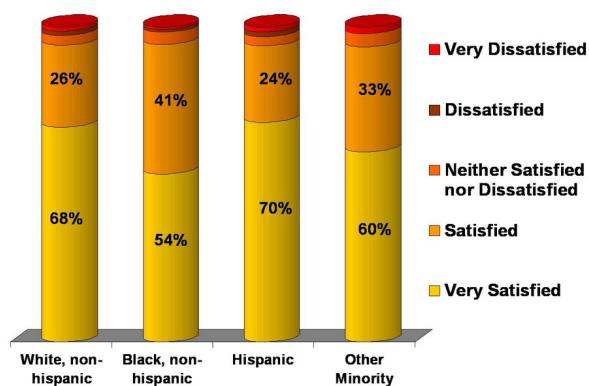
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Though the overall Extension customer satisfaction in Florida has been high and meets performance targets (Haile & Israel, 2005), it is important to determine whether the quality of experience with Extension remains constant across different market segments, particularly those characterized by race and gender. From an equal opportunity perspective, involving diverse audiences in Extension programs meets the minimum criteria for quality. Exploring clients' experiences with Extension measures another dimension of program quality.

The dimensions of quality measured with the survey were: (a) accuracy of information, (b) timely delivery of information, (c) relevance of information, (d) ease of use of information, and (e) overall satisfaction with the service. The outcomes of the use of Extension services measured with the survey were: (a) opportunities to use information, (b) whether the client's problem was solved or question was answered, (c) sharing information with other people, (d) the number of times using FCES during the past year, and (e) number of years using FCES. The latter two are indicators of repeat customers. Two demographic variables, race and gender, were used to differentiate market segments. Race includes the following categories: "White, non-Hispanic", "Black, non-Hispanic", "Hispanic", and "other minority." Data for gender were categorized as "male" and "female." Survey data for the years 2003 to 2006 were analyzed and the chi-square statistic was used to determine whether an association was significant.

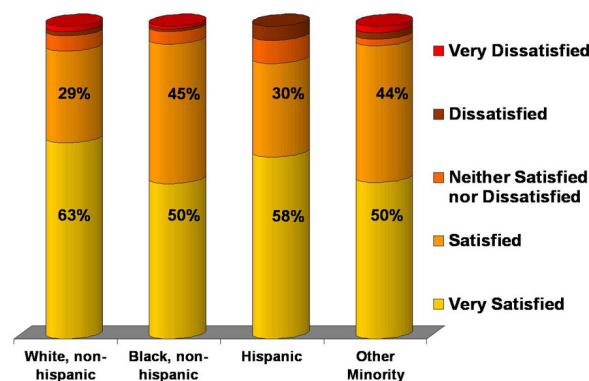
## Survey Results

Significant associations were found to exist between the race of the respondent and the perception of quality of Extension services. Although the overall satisfaction reported by Extension clients was above the state's performance standard, Figure 2 shows a significant association between race of the respondent and satisfaction with the service provided by Extension. More Whites and Hispanics (68% and 70%, respectively) were very satisfied with their experience with Extension than Blacks (54%). The gender of the respondent was not significantly associated with the perception of satisfaction.



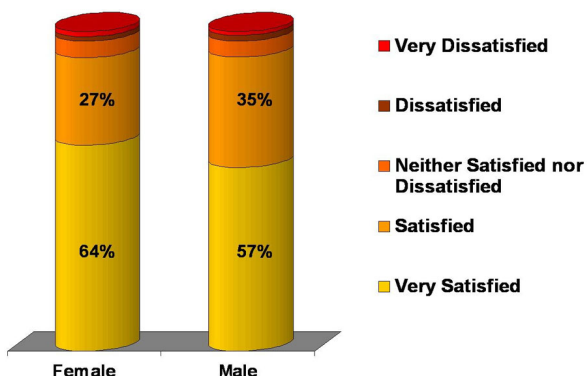
**Figure 2.** Satisfaction with Extension services by race of the respondent.

Both race and gender of the respondents were found to be significantly associated with the perceived relevance of the information provided by Extension. Figure 3 shows that more Whites and Hispanics (63% and 58%, respectively) reported being very satisfied with the relevance of the information than did Blacks and other minorities (50%). In addition, Figure 4 shows that more females were very satisfied with the relevancy of the information than males (64% vs. 57%, respectively).

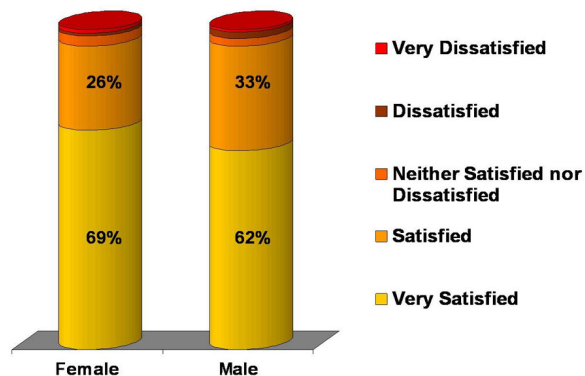


**Figure 3.** Satisfaction with the relevancy of the information received from Extension by race of the respondent.

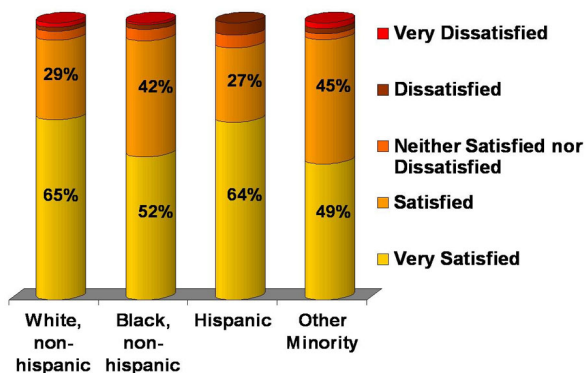
Race and gender were significantly associated with the perception of timeliness in the delivery of Extension information. Figure 5 shows that more Whites and Hispanics (65% and 64%, respectively) were very satisfied with the timely delivery of information than Blacks (52%) and other minorities (49%). Similarly, more females were very satisfied with the timely delivery of information than males (66% vs. 61%, respectively, Figure 6).



**Figure 4.** Satisfaction with the relevancy of the information received from Extension by gender of the respondent.

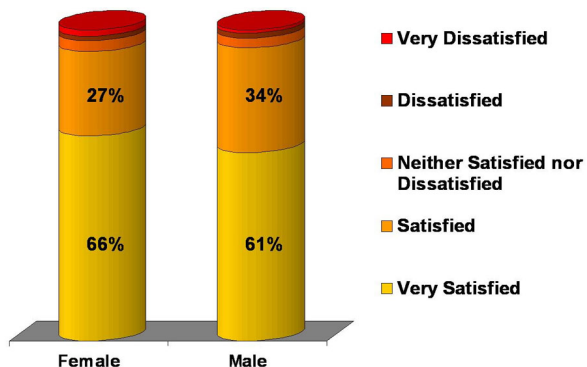


**Figure 7.** Satisfaction associated with the ease of understanding of the information provided by Extension by gender of the respondent.



**Figure 5.** Satisfaction regarding the timely delivery of information by Extension by race of the respondent.

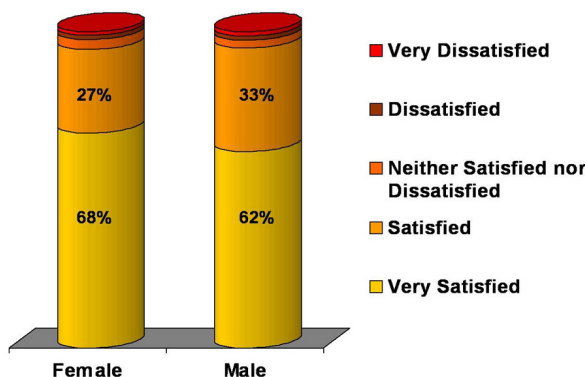
Regardless of their race, respondents found the information provided by Extension accurate. However, Figure 8 shows that gender of the participant is significantly associated with the respondents' perceived accuracy. More females than males were very satisfied with the accuracy of the information (68% vs. 62%, respectively).



**Figure 6.** Satisfaction regarding the timely delivery of information by Extension by gender of the respondent.

Other dimensions of quality, although not significantly associated with race, exhibited differences consistent with this trend.

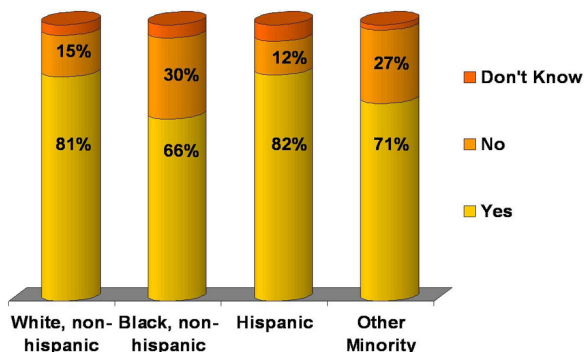
The gender of the participants significantly affected their perception of the level of difficulty of the information provided by Extension. As Figure 7 shows, more females than males were very satisfied with the fact that the information was easy to understand (69% vs. 62%, respectively).



**Figure 8.** Satisfaction with the accuracy of the information provided by Extension by gender.

Few significant associations were found between the respondents' race and gender and the results of their use of Extension services. The opportunity to use information, as an outcome of receiving Extension services, was significantly associated with the participants' race (Figure 9). More Whites and Hispanics (81% and 82%, respectively) reported that they used the information provided than did Blacks (66%) and other minorities (71%). Among those who used the information however, there was not a significant difference between these groups in the outcome. That is, all groups were equally likely to have their question answered or the problem solved. Nearly, three-quarters of respondents also shared

information with someone else (which indicates a positive regard for Extension) and again there was no difference based on race or gender.



**Figure 9.** Opportunity to use the information received from Extension by race.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The results have shown that Blacks and other minorities perceive having had a somewhat lower quality experience with the services provided by Extension than do Whites and Hispanics. This is particularly true for timely delivery, relevance of the information, and overall satisfaction. One implication is that Blacks and other minorities are less likely to develop loyalty to the organization and continue to patronize Extension at the levels of Whites and Hispanics because patronage depends on achieving a high satisfaction level (Terry & Israel, 2004). The respondent's gender was also found to be significantly associated both with the quality of experience and with the outcomes of receiving Extension services.

Three actions can be recommended from the results of this study. First, Extension should use more participatory approaches to promote equal involvement among its diverse clientele during the processes of assessing needs and developing Extension programs. One important step is to ensure that county advisory councils' composition reflects the diversity of the local population. Making face-to-face contacts with members of minority groups also can build rapport and help agents to develop empathy for specific audiences (Guion, 2005b). Both formal advisory committee meetings and informal conversations can contribute to

well-designed programs with appropriate educational activities.

Second, Extension professionals should develop information delivery skills that are suitable for culturally diverse audiences. Practicing educational methods designed for diverse audiences can enhance the quality of clients' experience and, in turn, result in greater satisfaction and patronage. For example, Guion and Kent (2005) note that Black audiences will be more receptive to information that includes examples involving Blacks or validating their culture and norms. Guion and Kent also suggest having Blacks present the message and encouraging audiences to ask questions about programs. The latter accommodates Blacks' preference for oral communication.

Finally, Extension should make an effort to identify and gain a better understanding of the cultural characteristics of the different market segments that are part of its clientele or community. As noted by Brennan (2005), people are more likely to accept solutions that are consistent with their local culture. One practical step for meshing with a group's culture is to take the program to their turf and present it on their terms.

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