

History of the Department of Youth Development

Department Formed in 1973

Written by Bob Stodola, Professor Emeritus, July 2009

When Cooperative Extension was incorporated into the University of Wisconsin System of faculty departments, all Cooperative Extension faculty and academic staff were incorporated into one Department called the Department of Community Affairs.

In the late 60's and early 70's, some of the 4-H and Youth faculty were discussing the possibility of establishing a University Department that professes a unique body of knowledge related to an understanding of the development of youth.

At an event at Upham Woods, Bill Gleason, 4-H Curriculum Specialist, Ivan Morrow, Adams County 4-H Agent, and Bob Stodola, Washington County 4-H Agent, decided it was time to take concrete action toward that goal. They contacted the dean of Department of Community Affairs and asked for his cooperation. The dean called a meeting of a representative group of 4-H Agents from Extension districts around the state. They drew up a proposal for a Department, including the body of knowledge the Department would profess.

The proposal was presented to Henry Ahlgren, the Director of Cooperative Extension. Ahlgren shared the proposal with a representative group of faculty from the Department of Community Affairs. He formed a committee to study the concept and examine the possibility of creating departments relating to Family Living, Agriculture, and Community Development, in addition to Youth Development.

A meeting of the committee was planned for May of 1972. In preparation for the meeting, Norm Everson and Bob Stodola each presented a paper with their thoughts on how reorganization ought to proceed. The committee approved the concept of four distinct departments, and using ideas from both papers, sent a proposal to Ahlgren that recommended the creation of four departments, with each department identifying the unique body of knowledge which it would profess.

Subsequently, each Department was formed and approved by the University. Each Department elected a chairman, formed needed committees and began operating as a unique department. The new academic department of Youth Development was formed at UW-Madison in 1973. Bob Stodola was elected the first chairman of the Department of Youth Development.