

# **The Land Grant Tradition**

## **Development of the Land-Grant System: 1862-1994**

Since their establishment, the land-grant colleges and universities have grown to represent to the world a unique system of widely accessible higher education. In the colonial days in the United States, higher education was available only at a few institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and William and Mary. These institutions at different times were subject to varying degrees of public control but were essentially privately controlled. After the Revolutionary War, the states began to organize universities as publicly controlled institutions. They were not essentially different in academic orientation from the privately controlled ones, which by that time had grown relatively strong and were setting the pace for the development of college education throughout the country.

## **Classical or Professional**

During the first half of the 19th century, the two types of colleges and universities, publicly controlled and privately controlled, developed side by side. Both were greatly influenced by the European universities, which had educated many of their leading professors. But these European universities were organized to serve a society not predominantly democratic. University education was for the male leisure classes, government leaders, and members of the professions.

At first American institutions, functioning in somewhat the same fashion, offered chiefly the classical and professional curricula. Although the importance of science was gaining recognition, scientific education was not widely available. But by the middle of the nineteenth century, the general and scientific press were making widespread demands for more agricultural and technical education. Agricultural societies in many states also were insisting that colleges be available where students could study agriculture. One of the most notable campaigns was led by Jonathan Baldwin Turner.

A Yale graduate who had been a farmer, newspaper editor, and professor at Illinois College, Turner championed the cause of the laboring class. His "Plan for a State University for the Industrial Classes," presented in 1850, contained many of the ideas now considered fundamental to the land-grant system, such as experimental research in agriculture. (Although the relationship between Turner's plan and the eventual land-grant legislation is unclear, Turner saw his intent realized in Illinois twenty years later upon the establishment of the University of Illinois under the provisions of the Morrill Act.)

Vermont Representative Justin Smith Morrill introduced his first land-grant bill in Congress in 1857. After a year of legislative maneuvering, Congress passed the Morrill Act of 1859. President Buchanan vetoed it, essentially on the grounds that it violated the traditional policy of the federal government, which until then had left control of education to the states.

In 1861 Morrill again introduced the land-grant bill with, among other changes, the provision that the proposed institutions teach military tactics. Given the need for military officers that had been created by the Civil War, along with the absence of Southern legislators who previously had opposed the bill, the land-grant act faced a friendlier climate the second time through Congress. The Morrill Act was passed again and signed by President Lincoln on July 2, 1862.

### **The Purpose**

There has been much discussion since the passage of the First Morrill Act as to its true intent. In the act the purpose is stated in the following words:

*. . . the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the states may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life. (1)*

Speaking at the Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1887, 25 years after passage of the Act, Senator Morrill again set forth his views on the general purpose of the Morrill Act in the following words:

*The land-grant colleges were founded on the idea that a higher and broader education should be placed in every State within the reach of those whose destiny assigns them to, or who may have the courage to choose industrial locations where the wealth of nations is produced; where advanced civilization unfolds its comforts, and where a much larger number of the people need wider educational advantages, and impatiently await their possession . . . . It would be a mistake to suppose it was intended that every student should become either a farmer or a mechanic when the design comprehended not only instruction for those who may hold the plow or follow a trade, but such instruction as any person might need—with "the world all before them where to choose"—and without the exclusion of those who might prefer to adhere to the classics. (2)*

Speaking before the Vermont Legislature in 1888, Senator Morrill said:

*Only the interest from the land-grant fund can be expended, and that must be expended, first—without excluding other scientific and classical studies—for teaching such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts—the latter as absolutely as the former. Obviously not manual, but intellectual instruction was the paramount object. It was not provided that agricultural labor in the field should be practically taught, and more than that the mechanical trade of a carpenter or blacksmith should be taught. Secondly, it was a liberal education that was proposed. Classical studies were not to be excluded, and, therefore, must be included. The Act of 1862 proposed a system of broad education by colleges, not limited to a superficial and dwarfed training, such as might be supplied by a foreman of a workshop or by a foreman*

*of an experimental farm. If any would have only a school with equal scraps of labor and of instruction, or something other than a college, they would not obey the national law....*

*The fundamental idea was to offer an opportunity in every State for a liberal and larger education to larger numbers, not merely to those destined to sedentary professions, but to those much needing higher instruction for the world's business, for the industrial pursuits and professions of life. (3)*

From the legislation itself and from Senator Morrill's statements it seems clear that at least three purposes were embodied in the legislation:

1. A protest against the dominance of the classics in higher education;
2. A desire to develop at the college level instruction relating to the practical realities of an agricultural and industrial society;
3. An attempt to offer to those belonging to the industrial classes preparation for the "professions of life."(4)

### **Federal Funding**

From these purposes has grown a system of colleges and universities managed by each state but conforming to certain broad policy stipulations of federal law. The federal support contemplated in the initial Morrill Act was to be the income from public lands (30,000 acres or equivalent in scrip for each representative and senator) made available to each state. The state was expected to contribute to the maintenance of its land-grant institution as well as to provide its buildings.

From this modest beginning, the federal government has significantly expanded its contributions to the land-grant colleges and universities. Recognizing the need for research as a basis for developing agriculture, Congress passed the Hatch Act in 1887. This authorized federal funding for an agricultural experiment station in connection with each land-grant institution.

In 1890, the Second Morrill Act was passed, supplementing by direct appropriation the income from the land grants. To receive the money a state had to show that race or color was not an admissions criterion, or else designate a separate land-grant college for blacks. Thus was born in the then-segregated South a group of institutions known as the "1890 land-grants."

In 1914 the Smith-Lever Act established the system of cooperative extension services to bring people the benefits of current developments in the field of agriculture, home economics and related subjects.

Land-grant institutions, designed to foster a program of education suited to the needs of the agricultural and industrial classes, came to encompass a program of on-campus instruction, research, and off-campus extension work. In the decades following 1914, several acts were passed expanding the scope and increasing the support of all three aspects of the program. Now, in addition to the income from the original land grants, the

appropriations of federal funds to aid the states in the maintenance of land-grant institutions amount to more than \$550 million annually.

These funds are distributed to the states on several different bases. Some funds go in equal amounts to all states; some go to the states on the basis of their farm population, or on their total population in relation to the total population of the United States.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) plays a key role in the administration of federal land-grant funds and the coordination of land-grant activities at the national level. The USDA's Cooperative State Research Service (CSRS), for example, administers both Hatch Act and Morrill-Nelson funds. The Extension Service of the USDA administers Smith-Lever funding, though it cooperates with state governments—which provide additional funding for extension—in setting priorities and and sharing information nationally.

Because the 1890 land-grants do not receive Hatch Act or Smith-Lever funds, special programs have been created to help finance agricultural research and extension at these institutions. The Evans-Allen program supports agricultural research with funds equal to at least 15% of Hatch Act appropriations. Another program funds extension activities at the 1890 land-grants with an emphasis on reaching socially and economically disadvantaged people.

### **Later Additions to the Land-Grant System**

In recent decades the land-grant system has expanded to accommodate additional U.S. jurisdictions. The University of the District of Columbia, arguing that it was "the last substantial area in the nation without the services of a land-grant college," received land-grant status and a \$7.24 million endowment in lieu of a land grant in 1967. Beginning in 1971 Guam, Micronesia, American Samoa, Northern Marianas, and the Virgin Islands repeated the argument that these territories were "the only areas under the American flag which have not been allowed to participate in the land-grant college program." Their land-grant status was approved in 1972 in a Special Education Amendment, each receiving a \$3 million endowment instead of land or land scrip. Research and extension funds are appropriated to these institutions on a similar basis as they are to other land-grant universities.

### **The Tribal Colleges**

A nearly two-year campaign by the 29 tribal colleges that comprise the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) was brought to a successful outcome in October 1994, when Congress passed legislation granting them land-grant status. In November, the board of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, which had strongly endorsed the campaign, voted to admit AIHEC as a system member of the association with one representative as a member of NASULGC's Council of Presidents. In January 1995, AIHEC became the newest member of NASULGC, the nation's oldest higher education association.

Land-grant status was conferred on the 29 Native American colleges in 1994 as a provision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Reauthorization Act. The bill also authorized a \$23 million endowment for them, to be built up over five years. The colleges were to receive interest payments from the endowment each year.

In addition, the legislation authorized a \$1.7 million challenge grant program for higher education programs in agriculture and natural resources, much like the successful program at the 1890 colleges, and \$50,000 per school for higher education in agriculture and natural resources (similar to the original Morrill-Nelson funds).

The legislation also provided \$5 million to go to the Cooperative Extension Service of the 1862 land-grant institutions in states that also have tribal colleges. The 1862 institutions were to cooperate with the tribal colleges in setting up joint agricultural extension programs focused on the needs of the Native American institutions, as identified by the tribal colleges.

The 29 1994 colleges named in the bill comprise all of the American Indian tribal colleges in the nation. Of these, 24 are tribally controlled colleges, two are tribally controlled vocational/technical colleges, two are owned and operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and one is federally chartered.

The 29 American tribal colleges are located on or near reservations. Most are two-year colleges and technical schools, but three are four-year institutions, and one offers a master's degree. Located in twelve states, the schools are the most important provider of higher education opportunities for Native Americans, serving 14,000 students (almost 10,000 FTE). They have been notably successful in retaining students and sending them on to four-year colleges and universities. They also provide a variety of community services, such as family counseling, alcohol and drug abuse programs, job training and economic development.

## **Notes**

(1) Morrill Act of 1862, sec 4

(2) Hon. Justin W. Morrill. Address 1887. Reprinted under title, "I Would Have Higher Learning More Widely Disseminated" by University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1961.

(3) Hon. Justin W. Morrill. An address in behalf of the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College. Free Press Assoc., Burlington, Vt., 1888.

(4) George A. Works and Barton Morgan. The Land-Grant Colleges. The Advisory Committee on Education, Staff Study No. 10, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1939.

This history is based on a chapter in the 1962 Department of Health, Education and Welfare publication Land-Grant Colleges and Universities 1862-1962, by Henry S. Brunner. The history was adapted and updated in February 1995 by the Office of Public Affairs of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.