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THE ROLE OF THE LAND-GRANT INSTITUTION IN THE 21ST CENTURY¹

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the land-grant mission of outreach to its community. It reviews the history of the land-grant institution and its missions, especially in the context of changes in higher education at the end of the 20th century that affect funding, demographics, and institutional mission and culture. UC Berkeley provides a case study. The paper proposes that land-grant institutions need a specific organization or unit dedicated to lifelong learning, and that there needs to be a national, standard-setting body for engagement.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to spend some time with you today. I welcome the opportunity to share with you some of my ideas on the land-grant mission. I need to stress that possessive pronoun. What I will be presenting today is one man's view of that mission and its relevance in today's world. I am open to different perspectives being developed from the same realities.

Today's presentation also represents the viewpoint of one engaged in outreach in the broadest sense. When I think of land-grant institutions, I focus not on the curriculum targeted at the traditional age, full-time undergraduates, but rather at those learners or potential learners who do not fit that mold either through age or circumstance. To me, this latter group is the one for whom the land-grant institution truly becomes "The Peoples' University."

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I am sure that the audience is familiar with the concept of the land-grant institution, but I would like to take a little time at the beginning of these remarks to set the context.

In 1862 Congress passed the Land-Grant College Act. Also known as the Morrill Act, after the man who introduced the legislation, Justin Smith Morrill of Vermont, the act provided a means to fund institutions of higher learning in each state. The mechanism for such funding involved the state receiving 30,000 acres of federal land for each congressional representative from that state. This land would then be sold to create an endowment to support, in the words of the act:

... 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 the agriculture and the mechanic arts...

The ultimate goal of the act was to promote “liberal and practical education” among the agricultural and mechanical classes.

In 1890 the Second Morrill Act created additional funding for the new institutions. A proviso of the act was that a state had to demonstrate that race or color was not a criterion for admission to its land-grant institution or it had to designate a separate land-grant college for blacks. There are a group of institutions today known as the “1890 Land-Grants” that developed in the then-segregated South. Finally, in 1994, 29 Native American tribal colleges gained land-grant status. Thus out of these three pieces of legislation were born what many like to refer to as the “Peoples’ University.”

The foundation of the land-grant colleges was in keeping with American History and tradition. Ever since colonial times, Americans viewed basic education as a way of inculcating ideals of citizenship. After the formation of the American Republic, primary education funded by public monies became a staple in the belief system of democracy and individual advancement. Such education was seen as benefiting both the individual and society. Thomas Jefferson hoped to see an “aristocracy of achievement rising out of a democracy of opportunity.” He urged the establishment of laws for “educating the common people,” and assured those opposed that “the tax which will be paid for this purpose is not more than the thousandth of what will be paid ... if we leave people in ignorance...”

Precedents for the Morrill Act came even before the adoption of the Constitution. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 required that states created from the Northwest Territory had to set aside two or more townships of government owned land per state for the support of higher education. Over the course of the first half of the 19th century several congressional actions built on that precedent. Legislation providing grants of land to establish primary schools as well as institutions for advanced learning was part of several bills in that era.

I think it important to spend time discussing the historical antecedents of the Morrill Act in order to emphasize the belief Americans had in the transformative power of education. Such discussion also downplays the timing of the Morrill Act. The Civil War created the opportunity for passage of the act, but it did not create the impetus for that passage. Finally, such discussion prepares the way to discuss the 21st century because it

emphasizes a fundamental principle of American belief, and it justifies the belief of people in the current century that such a principle still exists.

To further emphasize that connection, I would like to offer two quotations. The first is a comment made by Abraham Lincoln, in 1862, upon the passage of the Morrill Act. Lincoln stated: "The land-grant university system is being built on behalf of the people, who have invested in these public universities their hopes, their support, and their confidence." The second quotation comes from a report by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities in its report *Renewing the Covenant* issued in 2000. The authors wrote:

Each of us [state and land-grant institutions] is publicly created, publicly supported and governed by public bodies for public purposes...
Our mission is a mindset as much as a program. The irreducible idea is that we exist to advance the common good...
How can we maintain an education that is both liberal and practical with benefits apparent to both students and the larger society...?
In sum, what are the responsibilities of public higher education to the American people as the 21st century dawns?

The concept of land-grants and their mission developed and expanded over the course of the century following the passage of the first Morrill Act. The agricultural side of the mission grew with the passage of the Hatch Act in 1887 and the Smith-Lever Act in 1914. The latter established and defined the role of the Cooperative Extension Service housed at the land-grant institutions.

Land-grant institutions such as Wisconsin, Penn State, and Nebraska quickly grew beyond the agricultural and mechanical arts in their programming. Each became a leader in the distance education of the day – correspondence study. Each saw its outreach mission as literally bringing all the resources of the institution to the people within its service area. By World War I, two distinct organizations were emerging within institutions, the Cooperative Extension Service and something that varied in name from Continuing Education to Continuing Studies, but saw its role as broader in reach and in programming than did its governmentally funded partner.

As the century progressed, the role and mission of Cooperative Extension remained unchallenged and well funded. The role of Continuing Education was less clear. Very often, forced by circumstance to be self-supporting, its programming efforts did not appear as robust or all encompassing as Cooperative Extension. Being self-supporting in a tax funded institution created identity problems and often resulted in some lack of understanding.

Organizationally, the two outreach arms maintained single reporting lines until the post-World War II period. At that time, Cooperative Extension further emphasized its agricultural connections while Continuing Education sought broader mandates and became more generally campus-focused. Whatever the reporting structures, the mandate of the land-grant institution to provide outreach to its community seemed to be strong and well served.

In the last quarter of the 20th century this commitment to outreach became less clear. In retrospect, some of the causes of this occurrence predate its appearance. Hindsight is

also perfect vision. The confusion over what constituted outreach, how it should be paid for, who should benefit from it, and how was it to be evaluated all appeared at a time when public higher education was facing a raft of other challenges. Many factors contributed to this uncertainty or loss of clarity in the land-grant mission. To note a few is to give evidence of the complexity of the environment and size of the challenge.

First of all there were funding issues. All of us in public institutions are familiar with the old joke about the senior campus administrator who claims to have started his career as a young assistant professor at a state-funded institution. By the time he achieved tenure and was promoted to associate professor, he served at a state-assisted institution. He then served as a full professor at a state affiliated institution. Now he is a senior administrator at a state located institution. Of course he managed to play all these roles over his career without ever having left the campus where he started his career. The point of the story is that the last 30 years of the 20th century witnessed a significant decrease in the percentage of a land-grant institution's budget that came from public coffers. So while alumni and citizens continued to cheer for dear old "State U," administrators had to look elsewhere to find an increasingly large share of their operating budgets.

At the same time, the post World War II era witnessed a large growth in the size of land-grant campuses, both in land and population, and the subsequent expansion of curriculum. Both the GI Bill and the Baby Boom contributed to the old "ag schools" becoming much more comprehensive institutions in terms of both course offerings and diversity of student population.

The demise of the family farm played a significant role in the land-grant confusion. The traditional "customers" of Cooperative Extension were disappearing. In their place corporate farms appeared with different needs or no needs at all because they employed their own agricultural specialists. As the number of family farms fell, their former residents engaged in a migration to the cities. What did this mean for Cooperative Extension? Was it an anachronism, or would it be able to re-invent itself for new audiences with new needs in new localities? In some states, the funding models for Cooperative Extension were undergoing change. The old models of combined state, federal, and local funding were being challenged. Some were even saying that perhaps Cooperative Extension ought to be charging for its products and services.

Another factor in play was the changing nature of higher education in this period. As campuses grew, there was a shifting of emphasis between teaching and research. Greater and greater emphasis was placed on the research part of the university's mission. As original research became the fast track to academic success, it appeared that there was less and less time available for the public service mission of the institution. Another aspect of this shift was the pursuit of private or corporate research sponsorship. Funding from these areas meant less and less public disclosure of research results or free dissemination of the products of research.

A much broader change that was having a variety of impacts on the United States also had implications for the land-grant mission. The composition of the American population was changing. Non-white immigration was increasing and was creating challenges different than those created by the waves of late 19th century immigration. Language, cultural, religious, and economic beliefs, patterns, and expectations were viewed differently and prioritized in new ways. To engage in outreach meant new things and

required new skill sets. Learning needs were defined differently and resources were required to be assigned in response.

Finally, some social commentators would point to the last few decades of the 20th century as a time when the country, as a whole, placed less emphasis on the “common good” and more on individual good. It was a time for individual success, individual achievement, and individual wealth. There was, although certainly never expressed this blatantly, a rebirth of a kind of Social Darwinism that offered the message that those who weren’t successful somehow contributed to their own lack of success or that anyone could be successful if only one worked hard enough.

All of these factors contributed to the clouding and, in some cases, forgetting or diminishing of the land-grant mission. Across the United States, this was certainly evident in the last decades of the 20th century. Although some forgot, not all forgot. By the 1990s some leaders of land-grant institutions were becoming increasingly concerned over what they saw as an abandonment or at least a shift in emphasis away from the principles upon which their institutions were founded. These leaders understood that some of the causes of this movement were of their own making, but also recognized that American society, itself, was experiencing structural changes unparalleled in the history of the country.

To better understand what was happening and to seek ways to recapture or re-invent the role of the land-grant institution, these campus leaders, through their national organization, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, sought funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to study the future of public higher education in the United States. Thus was created the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities.

The Commission, chaired by Graham Spanier, president of The Pennsylvania State University, was comprised of campus or system presidents and chancellors. It met over a four-year period, January 1996 through March 2000, and issued six reports. Those reports, better than any other source, examine how and why the land-grant mission was impacted by the changes noted, and others, and what was to be done about it.

Moving on from this point, it is worth noting some of the points raised by these reports and then taking a look at the University of California Berkeley as a case study. Finally, I would like to offer a recommendation as a concluding thought for this discussion.

For those interested in an overview of the land-grant mission at the dawn of the 21st century, the six reports of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities offer an invaluable resource. They provide a philosophical context for consideration of the mission, as well as some specific examples of the challenges faced by mission supporters. We have already identified some of the challenges, but it would be fruitful to see how the Kellogg Commission regarded them.

Three issues in particular take prominence for the Commission. The first is the changing demographics of the audience for the programs of the land-grants. In the report *Returning To Our Roots*, the Commission noted that:

Land-grant institutions were created to open opportunity and broaden access to higher education. Today, this historic commitment must

encompass the different educational needs of many different kinds of students coming from different and ever more diverse backgrounds. Anything short of that is not true access in terms of our institutions' history.

A second issue relates, in part, to the changing demographics of the audience, but also to the changing needs of that group. We noted earlier the increasing urbanization of the nation and the demise of the family farm as calling into question the traditional programming and delivery methods employed by the land-grants. This function, traditionally labeled outreach, has to change in the 21st century. The Commission addressed this issue in a report entitled *The Engaged Institution*.

The report sought to "modernize" the mission of the land-grants and give it a more realistic focus. The report proposes reconsidering the three-legged stool of Teaching, Research, and Service and reframing it as Learning, Discovery, and Engagement. Believing that words are powerful, the Commission sought to use language that implied inclusivity and collaboration, while at the same time recognizing that new technologies and methodologies had broadened the former principles. In its report the Commission put it this way:

Inherited concepts emphasize a one-way process in which the university transfers its expertise to key constituents. Embedded in the engagement idea is a commitment to sharing and reciprocity.

The third issue of import was raised in the report *Towards a Coherent Campus Culture*. The Commission was addressing the increasing complexity of the university and the ever-expanding breadth of knowledge it represents. The Commission commented:

Increasingly, the idea of an integrated academic ethos seems somehow archaic today. Institutions of higher education were once understood to be places where all knowledge came together and was unified (i.e., the uni – versity). In today's multi-versity, knowledge is understood to be something that fragments even as it expands, resolving itself into ever-newer, kaleidoscopic patterns.

If the proliferation of academic disciplines has been the source of the creativity of today's public university, it has also encouraged what threatens to become a permanent lack of institutional cohesion.

The Commission recognized that what it was describing was not all bad and, certainly, that one could not turn back the clock. However, it did present a recommendation:

The mine shafts [referring to the specialized departments and groupings of today's university] are essential as a source of new discoveries, but we need to match our commitment to specialized academic units with a stronger awareness of overall institutional mission.

Turning now to the University of California Berkeley, I think you have already, in your own minds, made the connections to the broader statements made above. Certainly, Berkeley, as the premier public research institution in the country, has its mineshafts. The reward systems of this institution recognize those who toil most successfully in those shafts.

Of course, the University of California system and Berkeley, in particular, have recognized and sought to address the issue of audience diversity. However, the question could be asked, by making more individual students “UC eligible,” are we really accomplishing the mission of making a land-grant the “Peoples’ University”?

Berkeley also represents another aspect of the land-grant mission struggle. The university has a long-standing unit called University Extension. It has been in existence since the late 19th century and has been nationally and internationally recognized for its programming. As an aside, one of Extension’s deans, Leon Richardson, is credited with coining, in the 1930s, what has become a universally accepted descriptor for continuing education, the phrase “lifelong learning.”

The question arises, certainly among the more cynical, is University Extension’s role to facilitate the campus’ commitment to outreach or engagement, or is its role to perform outreach or engagement? By this I mean, is engagement something central to the entire campus and delivered through Extension, or is it something segregated to one unit of the University so as to free the remainder from its burden?

Chancellor Robert Berdahl recognized the challenges of meeting the land-grant mission in the 21st century in remarks he made to the National Press Club on June 2, 1999. The chancellor stated:

The legitimacy of the public university’s claim as an instrument of progress in a democratic society hangs in the balance on the question of access – and not only on access, but quality and purpose. Are we providing the broadest possible cross-section of America’s population access to the best possible education? Are we excluding by any means anyone who has a right to be included? Are we serving society – with our research and by teaching people to serve as leaders and citizens? Are we thereby, in answer to all of the questions, meeting our highest obligation, clearly spelled out in our charge to fulfill the public trust?

So, the challenges are there. The mission is there. I doubt anyone could contest the assertion that the mission of the land-grant institution is as essential today as it was in the 19th century. Words, times, structures, people have changed, but the need to provide the best possible public education to America’s citizens has not changed. In fact, with recognition of the need for lifelong learning, the educational needs have grown and diversified.

I promised to offer a recommendation as a concluding thought in this presentation. This recommendation is based on two premises. The first is that the ability to develop and deliver lifelong learning experiences requires special skills and knowledge, as do the activities of other academic units on campus. This premise leads me to the conclusion that it is as necessary for a land-grant institution to have a separate organization or unit dedicated to this function as it is for the institution to have a separate English Department or Chemistry Department.

The second premise upon which the recommendation is based is that the need for lifelong learning opportunities in any sector or geographical area exceeds the capacity of any institution to meet those needs. Put another way, the question is, what kind of

programming should an institution offer and to whom should that programming be targeted?

If one goes back to the original Morrill Act or comes forward to the various reports of the Kellogg Commission, one is struck by a lack of specificity about what constitutes outreach or engagement on the one hand and the audience on the other. Philosophical principles can only go so far in helping to structure and evaluate the activities of the outreach arm of the university.

Therefore, my proposal is the creation of some national, standard-setting body for engagement. I am thinking along the lines of an AACSB, the Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business, or an ALN, the American League of Nursing. There are organizations that might be able to grow into this role, such as the University Continuing Education Association or the Association for Continuing Higher Education, or maybe a new entity would have to be formed.

The goal of this proposal would be for the practitioners of outreach or engagement to be able answer the question that all employees ask, or should ask, "What constitutes success in this job?" To further flesh out this recommendation a bit, perhaps we are looking at a multi-level organization such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Thus doctoral, Research I, public institutions would be looking at a set of standards that differed from those of a regional, private, masters'-level institution. Or maybe there would be a series of levels and an institution could choose, rather than be assigned, a level. This would be more like the NCAA.

The need for such a standard-setting body has never been greater. Today's realities, previously discussed, make formalizing criteria for success essential. Not only must institutions know if they are doing a good job but, in an age of increased demands for accountability, they must be able to demonstrate that to their multiple constituencies.

So in conclusion, the mission, first articulated in colonial times and given life in the Morrill Act of 1862, of providing education to all citizens is, today, both enduring and changing. The philosophical principles and lofty goals remain. The audience, the programming, and the geographical reach of the institutions are changing. The world is a much more complex place than it was in 1862. It is my contention that a greater or tighter focus must be placed on the mission-specific aspects of the role of the land-grant institutions. Better definition of success will both clarify and facilitate the role of the land-grant institutions in the 21st century.

Thank you.