

What is a Land-Grant College?



WHAT: A land-grant college or university is an institution that has been designated by its state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. The original mission of these institutions, as set forth in the first Morrill Act, was to teach agriculture, military tactics, and the mechanic arts as well as classical studies so members of the working classes could obtain a liberal, practical education.

Over the years, land-grant status has implied several types of federal support. The first Morrill Act provided grants in the form of federal lands to each state for the establishment of a public institution to fulfill the act's provisions. At different times money was appropriated through legislation such as the second Morrill Act and the Bankhead-Jones Act, although the funding provisions of these acts are no longer in effect.

A key component of the land-grant system is the agricultural experiment station program created by the Hatch Act of 1887. The Hatch Act authorized direct payment of federal grant funds to each state to establish an agricultural experiment station in connection with the land-grant institution there. The amount of this appropriation varies from year to year and is determined for each state through a formula based on the number of small farmers there. A major portion of the federal funds must be matched by the state.

To disseminate information gleaned from the experiment stations' research, the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 created a Cooperative Extension Service associated with each land-grant institution. This act authorized ongoing federal support for extension services, using a formula similar to the Hatch Act's to determine the amount of the appropriation. This act also requires states to provide matching funds in order to receive the federal monies.

WHY: Passage of the First Morrill Act (1862) reflected a growing demand for agricultural and technical education in the United States. While a number of institutions had begun to expand upon the traditional classical curriculum, higher education was still widely unavailable to many agricultural and industrial workers. The Morrill Act was intended to provide a broad segment of the population with a practical education that had direct relevance to their daily lives.

The second Morrill Act (1890) sought to extend access to higher education by providing additional endowments for all land-grants, but prohibiting distribution of money to states that made distinctions of race in admissions. However, states that provided a separate land-grant institution for blacks were eligible to receive the funds. The institutions that, as a result of this act, were founded or designated the land-grant for blacks in each of the then-segregated Southern states came to be known as "the 1890 land-grants." The Native American tribal colleges are sometimes called the "1994 land-grants," in reference to the year they were granted land-grant status.

WHERE: There is one land-grant institution in every state and territory of the United States, as well as the District of Columbia. Certain southern states have more than one land-grant institution as a result of the second Morrill Act, and some western and plains states have several, including 1994 land-grant tribal colleges.

WHO: Justin Smith Morrill, a representative and later a senator from Vermont, sponsored the land-grant legislation that bears his name and is generally credited as having secured its passage. Prior to Morrill's support for land-grant legislation, Jonathan Baldwin Turner, a Yale-educated farmer, newspaper editor, and college professor, made education for the working class his cause in the mid-19th century. His "Plan for a State University for the Industrial Classes" advanced ideas that are now fundamental to the land-grant system, such as experimental research in agriculture.

WHEN: Morrill first introduced a land-grant bill in Congress in 1857, which after much struggle was passed in 1859 only to be vetoed by President James Buchanan. In 1861 Morrill introduced another land-grant bill that increased to 30,000 acres the grant for each senator and representative and added a requirement that recipient institutions teach military tactics. The newly felt need for trained military officers to fight in the Civil War, along with the absence of Southern legislators who had opposed the earlier bill, helped the Morrill Act through Congress in just six months. President Abraham Lincoln signed it into law on July 2, 1862.

HOW: The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) plays a large role in the administration of federal land-grant funds and the coordination of agricultural 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. A portion of the Hatch Act funding supports regional research, enabling scientists to collaborate and coordinate activities and thus avoid duplication of research efforts. The Extension Service of the USDA administers Smith-Lever funding, cooperating with state governments (which also provide funding for extension programs) to set priorities and facilitate the sharing of information within the entire Cooperative Extension System.

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 percent of Hatch Act appropriations. Another program funds extension activities at the 1890 land-grants with an emphasis on reaching socially and economically disadvantaged people.

Today, America's land-grant universities continue to fulfill their democratic mandate for openness, accessibility, and service to people, and many of these institutions have joined the ranks of the nation's most distinguished public research universities. Through the land-grant university heritage, millions of students are able to study every academic discipline and explore fields of inquiry far beyond the scope envisioned in the original land-grant mission.

Development of the Land-Grant System: 1862–1994



SINCE THEIR ESTABLISHMENT, 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 19th 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 20 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 more than 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; and
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 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 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 percent 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 and Universities

A nearly two-year campaign by the 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 (now Association of Public and Land-grant Universities), which had strongly endorsed the campaign, voted to admit AIHEC as a system member of the association with one representative as a member of the organization's Council of Presidents. In January 1995, AIHEC became the Association's newest member.

Land-grant status was conferred on 29 Native American colleges in 1994 as a provision of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Reauthorization Act. (Since then several other tribal colleges have also been given land-grant status.) 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 colleges named in the legislation comprise all the accredited Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in the nation. The TCUs are located on more than 75 sites in 15 states providing access to higher education to over 80 percent of Indian Country. Collectively, the TCUs enroll 19,000 students and provide vital services to more than 47,000 community members. Unlike most institutions of higher education, TCUs provide much-needed high school completion (GED), basic remediation, job training, college preparatory courses, and adult basic education programs. They serve as community libraries and centers, tribal archives, career and business centers, economic development centers, public meeting places, and elder and child care centers. It is an underlying goal of all TCUs to improve the lives of students through higher education and to move American Indians toward self-sufficiency.

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 and February 2012 by the Office of Public Affairs of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities.

The Land-Grant Colleges and Universities



ALABAMA

Alabama A&M University* (Normal, AL)
Auburn University (Auburn, AL)
Tuskegee University (Tuskegee, AL)

ALASKA

University of Alaska Statewide System
(Fairbanks, AK)
Ilisagvik College*† (Barrow, AK)

AMERICAN SAMOA

American Samoa Community College*
(Pago Pago, AQ)

ARIZONA

Diné College† (Tsaile, AZ)
The University of Arizona (Tucson, AZ)
Tohono O'odham Community College (Sells, AZ)

ARKANSAS

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
(Fayetteville, AR)
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff*
(Pine Bluff, AR)

CALIFORNIA

D-Q University (Davis, CA)
University of California System (Oakland, CA)

COLORADO

Colorado State University (Fort Collins, CO)

CONNECTICUT

Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station
(New Haven, CT)
University of Connecticut (Storrs, CT)

DELAWARE

Delaware State University* (Dover, DE)
University of Delaware (Newark, DE)

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

University of the District of Columbia
(Washington, DC)

FLORIDA

Florida A&M University* (Tallahassee, FL)
University of Florida (Gainesville, FL)

GEORGIA

Fort Valley State College* (Fort Valley, GA)
The University of Georgia (Athens, GA)

GUAM

University of Guam (Mangilao, GU)

HAWAII

University of Hawaii (Honolulu, HI)

IDAHO

University of Idaho (Moscow, ID)

ILLINOIS

University of Illinois (Urbana, IL)

INDIANA

Purdue University (West Lafayette, IN)

IOWA

Iowa State University (Ames, IA)

KANSAS

Haskell Indian Nations University†
(Lawrence, KS)
Kansas State University (Manhattan, KS)

KENTUCKY

Kentucky State University* (Frankfort, KY)
University of Kentucky (Lexington, KY)

LOUISIANA

Louisiana State University System
(Baton Rouge, LA)
Southern University System* (Baton Rouge, LA)

MAINE

The University of Maine (Orono, ME)

MARYLAND

University of Maryland at College Park
(College Park, MD)
University of Maryland Eastern Shore*
(Princess Anne, MD)

MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
(Cambridge, MA)
University of Massachusetts (Amherst, MA)

MICHIGAN

Bay Mills Community College† (Brimley, MI)
Michigan State University (East Lansing, MI)
Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College†
(Mount Pleasant, MI)

MICRONESIA

College of Micronesia-FSM
(Kolonia, Pohnpei, FM)

MINNESOTA

Fond Du Lac Tribal and Community College†
(Cloquet, MN)
Leech Lake Tribal College† (Cass Lake, MN)
University of Minnesota (Minneapolis, MN)
White Earth Tribal and Community College†
(Mahnomon, MN)

MISSISSIPPI

Alcorn State University* (Lorman, MS)
Mississippi State University
(Mississippi State, MS)

MISSOURI

Lincoln University* (Jefferson City, MO)
University of Missouri System (Columbia, MO)

MONTANA

Blackfeet Community College† (Browning, MT)
Chief Dull Knife College† (Lame Deer, MT)
Fort Belknap Community College†
(Harlem, MT)
Fort Peck Community College† (Poplar, MT)
Little Big Horn College† (Crow Agency, MT)
Montana State University (Bozeman, MT)
Salish Kootenai College† (Pablo, MT)
Stone Child College† (Box Elder, MT)

NEBRASKA

Little Priest Tribal College† (Winnebago, NE)
Nebraska Indian Community College†
(Macy, NE)
University of Nebraska System (Lincoln, NE)

NEVADA

University of Nevada, Reno (Reno, NV)

NEW HAMPSHIRE

University of New Hampshire (Durham, NH)

NEW JERSEY

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
(New Brunswick, NJ)

NEW MEXICO

Crownpoint Institute of Technology
(Crownpoint, NM)
Institute of American Indian and Alaska Native
Culture and Arts Development†
(Santa Fe, NM)
Navajo Technical College† (Crownpoint, NM)
New Mexico State University (Las Cruces, NM)
Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute†
(Albuquerque, NM)

NEW YORK

Cornell University (Ithaca, NY)

NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina A&T State University*
(Greensboro, NC)
North Carolina State University (Raleigh, NC)

* indicates 1890 land-grant institution

† indicates 1994 tribal college land-grant institution

NORTH DAKOTA

Cankdeska Cikana Community College[†]
(Fort Totten, ND)
Fort Berthold Community College[†]
(New Town, ND)
North Dakota State University (Fargo, ND)
Sitting Bull College[†] (Fort Yates, ND)
Turtle Mountain Community College[†]
(Belcourt, ND)
United Tribes Technical College[†] (Bismark, ND)

NORTHERN MARIANAS

Northern Marianas College (Saipan, CM)

OHIO

The Ohio State University (Columbus, OH)

OKLAHOMA

Langston University* (Langston, OK)
Oklahoma State University (Stillwater, OK)

OREGON

Oregon State University (Corvallis, OR)

PENNSYLVANIA

The Pennsylvania State University
(University Park, PA)

PUERTO RICO

University of Puerto Rico
(San Juan, PR)

RHODE ISLAND

The University of Rhode Island
(Kingston, RI)

SOUTH CAROLINA

Clemson University (Clemson, SC)
South Carolina State University*
(Orangeburg, SC)

SOUTH DAKOTA

Oglala Lakota College[†] (Kyle, SD)
Sinte Gleska University[†]
(Rosebud, SD)
Sisseton Wahpeton College[†]
(Sisseton, SD)
South Dakota State University
(Brookings, SD)

TENNESSEE

Tennessee State University*
(Nashville, TN)
The University of Tennessee (Knoxville, TN)

TEXAS

Prairie View A&M University* (Prairie View, TX)
Texas A&M University (College Station, TX)

UTAH

Utah State University (Logan, UT)

VERMONT

The University of Vermont (Burlington, VT)

VIRGIN ISLANDS

University of the Virgin Islands (St. Thomas, VI)

VIRGINIA

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
(Blacksburg, VA)
Virginia State University* (Petersburg, VA)

WASHINGTON

Northwest Indian College[†] (Bellingham, WA)
Washington State University (Pullman, WA)

WEST VIRGINIA

West Virginia University (Morgantown, WV)
West Virginia State University* (Institute, WV)

WISCONSIN

College of the Menominee Nation[†]
(Keshena, WI)
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College[†]
(Hayward, WI)
University of Wisconsin-Madison (Madison, WI)

WYOMING

University of Wyoming (Laramie, WY)

U.S. LAND-GRANT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

