

What is a Land-Grant College?

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 that 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such as the second Morrill Act and the Bankhead-Jones Act, although the funding provisions of these acts are no longer in effect. Today, the Nelson Amendment to the Morrill Act provides a permanent annual appropriation of \$50,000 per state and territory.

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 U.S. 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 that the states 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 29 native American tribal colleges are sometimes called the "1994 land-grants."

Where?

There is now at least one land-grant institution in every state and territory of the United States, as well as the District of Columbia. Certain southern states have two land-grant institutions as a result of the Second Morrill Act, and some western and plains states have several of the 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-nineteenth 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 United States Department of Agriculture 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% 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.

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