

The 2015 Land Grant University

As a brief history lesson, land-grant colleges (later referred to as land-grant universities) were a result of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 allowing states to sell federally controlled land to fund new “land-grant” colleges. These land-grants had two purposes: to provide education and training to produce the workforce needed shortly after the industrial revolution and to extend higher education to most social classes. The land grants made it possible for the average family to afford college. This was a pivotal change in higher education, given that before the passage of the Morrill Acts most liberal arts colleges appealed to specific (higher) classes of society.

Fast-forward 150 years to what we know as land-grant universities today. Since 1890, over 75 land-grant colleges (at least one in each state) were created and some turned into very large state institutions like The Pennsylvania State University and The University of Arizona. These universities began to add new disciplines, with some boasting hundreds of separate majors. Many evolved and have created major alternative sources of revenue (beyond tuition and state appropriations), like medical centers and athletics programs. In fact, some universities now rely on these alternate streams of revenue for over half of their overall budget, as The Ohio State University does in its \$5.4B budget.¹ Many of those universities also have large research portfolios with budgets exceeding \$1B. Many, if not most, of these land grants have grown into something much larger than what was originally envisioned back in 1862 in producing talent for the workforce.

In certain places, these land grants are doing great things for their state and are helping to continue the prominence of the state’s economy. Take for instance, the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UWM). With a campus 80 miles from the closest major city (Milwaukee), the university contributes over \$15B per year to the state’s economy.² In addition, UWM plays a major role in the creation of jobs, companies, and research in the state’s strongest sectors, like manufacturing and energy. In other states, however, the land-grant has evolved much faster than the state itself, and one can begin to see an imbalance between where the university is headed is as compared to the where the state is at. This imbalance will inevitably create a “fork in the road” posing some of the toughest questions that the university will ever have to face.

One such place is West Virginia University (WVU). WVU is located in Morgantown, West Virginia, a college town of just over 60,000 people (half of whom are students). Created in 1867 as part of the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act, WVU initially served as an agricultural college, only to add other disciplines over the next 150 years; comparable to most other large land-grant research universities today. This author had the privilege of spending the past year in Morgantown, listening & learning from

¹ <http://www.osu.edu/osutoday/stuinfo.php>

² <http://wearewisconsin.org/2015/01/29/save-university-wisconsin-system/>

people across the state. The conversations were never about the state and the university separately, but about how the two are inextricably linked together...past, present, and future. The first impression made on this author was the abundance of all the intellectual, ambitious, hard-working, and loyal citizens throughout the state.

In the last 50 years alone, WVU has accomplished many great feats including building its enrollment up to 30,000 students and the creation of a new Evansdale campus for expansion in athletics/health sciences and its law school. WVU boasts the #1 medical center in the state with specialties in cancer and diabetes, and is also a worldwide leader in forensics and biometrics. In fact, to demonstrate the impact that WVU had on the community, Morgantown was the center of national attention in 2009 during the recession, with the lowest unemployment rate in the country (largely due to the university's presence).³

However, the state of West Virginia has not shared the same achievements as WVU in the last century. One major contributing factor is coal. Once a state that fueled the industrial revolution with its rich coalmines, West Virginia has had to rethink its economic future after demand for coal declined and companies started to close, leaving many people (and towns) with less-than-adequate infrastructure, education, and healthcare. (From 1983-2012, West Virginia lost 17,000 jobs in coal.)⁴ More importantly, there were not enough alternatives to the coal industry whose job skillsets matched up with the workforce. Ultimately, with factors in addition to coal, there are now many statewide problems that have slowly worsened. Here is a small snapshot:

- No Fortune 1000 company is headquartered in the state.⁵
- Between 1994-2014, the state lost 30,126 manufacturing jobs (or 38.3 percent).⁶
- Median household income in 2011 was \$44,126 compared to \$50,831 nationally, 42nd in the nation.⁷
- The state's education system is rated the 4th worst in the nation. Nearly 3 out of 4 4th graders in the state test as deficient in reading.⁸
- Only 18.9% of adults 25 years and older have a bachelor's degree, the lowest percentage in the nation (29.6% is the national average).⁹
- Ranked last (sixth time in the last 6 years) in the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, which measures how people feel about their health daily.¹⁰

³ <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=100890701>

⁴ <http://www.nationaljournal.com/pictures-video/who-killed-all-the-coal-jobs-20131104>

⁵ <http://www.geolounge.com/fortune-1000-companies-2014-list/>

⁶ <http://www.citizen.org/Page.aspx?pid=3437>

⁷ <http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/publichealthquality/statepublichealthassessment/Documents/2012%20State%20Health%20Profile%20Final%20May%202013.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.wvkidscount.org/second-year-wva-ranks-47th-nation-education-according-kids-count>

⁹ <http://www.msn.com/en-us/money/careersandeducation/america's-most-and-least-educated-states/ss-BB6phtL>

¹⁰ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2015/02/19/gallup-west-virginia-well-being-index-alaska/23608805/>

- The percentage of West Virginians that are obese is now over 30%, with 30% of low-income preschoolers in southern West Virginia now considered obese.¹¹
- The state has very high rates of diabetes, hypertension, heart attacks, cancer deaths, cardiac heart disease, and poor mental health.¹²
- Almost 30% of people in West Virginia are smokers, leading the nation.¹³
- West Virginia is highest in the nation in drug overdose rate.¹⁴

Reading between the lines, one can start to see a pattern. Without education, people make poor behavioral choices in many aspects of life, including what they put into their bodies. Without accessible healthcare, health conditions are not treated early on, and as a result lifetime problems are created for families. Without a growing economy, there are simply not enough trained workers for the current or soon-to-be workforce. And whatever jobs they do find just don't pay enough to live differently from how they were brought up.

A new social class has emerged as a result of these problems. A social class that is made up of those families who are part of a broken system; but the same social class that land grants were designed to serve. This is a fundamental problem in the state of West Virginia that must be confronted from multiple angles, and the state is looking for assistance. Legislation and policy alone cannot help turn the state around; there must be an "all hands on deck" approach to fixing these problems.

*THE DESIGN OF THE (West VA Agricultural) COLLEGE is to **promote the liberal and practical Education** of the youth of our country in the several pursuits and professions of life - Morgantown Weekly Post August 10, 1867*

The original mission of West Virginia Agricultural College (later becoming West Virginia University) as stated above was to "promote the liberal and practical Education" of its youth. It was created so that its youth could be educated and become empowered citizens of the state. And although WVU is doing tremendous things for its constituents day-to-day, this author begs to ask the question, has the land grant university of West Virginia served its state? Has it served that new social class?

This is our "fork in the road":

1. Can WVU continue down the path of becoming an elite university that competes nationally in rankings, enrollment, endowment, and research?
2. Can WVU recommit itself to its original purpose of being an economic engine of the state, creating the workforce and thought leadership needed to

¹¹ <http://mountaineernewsservice.com/poverty-and-poor-health-go-hand-in-hand-in-west-virginia/>

¹² <http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/publichealthquality/statepublichealthassessment/Documents/2012%20State%20Health%20Profile%20Final%20May%202013.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.medicaldaily.com/cigarette-smoking-rates-state-are-there-lot-smokers-near-you-284010>

¹⁴ <http://healthyamericans.org/reports/drugabuse2013/release.php?stateid=WV>

transform critical areas like healthcare, economic development, and K-12 education?

This decision of which path to take is not easy, as WVU is already heavily invested in competing with other large universities in the region and across the country (WVU is currently #168 by US News National Universities Rankings).¹⁵ And the truth of the matter is that limited resources make it nearly impossible to take both paths. The university should continue to progressively evolve as most other universities do, so that it can provide a high quality education to its students for decades to come. At the same time, it must have its eyes focused on continuing problems that exist in the state, because that is what will fuel the long-term sustainability of the university (think future students and healthcare patients). Can it achieve both? The “fork in the road” is just that, *how* do you achieve both?

What is the 2015 Land Grant University?

For West Virginia University, it means leveraging your strongest assets to make significant investments in your state.

If West Virginia University can successfully use its resources to extend into the state and continue to create positive change, then it will really start to change its ideals on how it's differentiated from other institutions (national rankings for instance). It also creates a very special environment where the university and the state can work together to give the people of West Virginia a long overdue revival. It was the most common topic among this author's conversations with the people of the state. The people see WVU as something much more than a university. It's a symbol of hope and prosperity. No matter what hardships a family may be facing, they believe in West Virginia University. They believe that it will lead them to revival. It is truly (and geographically) the “true north” for the citizens of West Virginia.

So how might WVU do more to transform the state? Take for example the university's role in economic development. One way WVU could leverage some of its biggest strengths is to help recruit energy companies to the state, or even create new startup companies focused on energy. Both of these would create jobs (for many in that new social class), as well as bring significant tax revenues and capital investment to the state. When you have such a deep knowledge in energy and also state-of-the-art facilities & equipment, there aren't too many places in the country better than West Virginia. Once there is momentum, more companies will follow, and changes in the social problems can start to be seen (like using tax money to make investments in education and healthcare). But the point here is that WVU can do more to be part of the solution in helping the problems in the state. It must prioritize the state first and foremost, and then look towards its collegiate aspirations. *That* is the land-grant university of 2015.

¹⁵ <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges>

None of this will be easy, and WVU knows it will be an uphill climb. Its current president, E. Gordon Gee, once said “It’s reinvention or extinction”, and that could not be a more true statement than now. WVU is reinventing itself, both internally and externally, in everything from organizational structure to branding to culture. It is creating an identity that is intertwined with the state. It is promoting a “startup culture” on campus and throughout the state, and even raising funds for early stage companies. It is creating a vision that not only its constituents believe in, but can be echoed throughout the state. It is building new relationships, inside and outside of West Virginia, to leverage itself as a key asset in economic development. It is building new models in life sciences, which encourages innovation and embraces failure. It is accelerating the process of outreach in the state, to deliver the university’s strengths that can make immediate impacts in communities. And most importantly, it believes that becoming an elite university cannot be accomplished without a holistic transformation in the state of West Virginia.

The mission of West Virginia University is to be a leader in the revitalization of West Virginia and to work with the state to solve crucial problems, venture into new discoveries, and prove that universities are the pulpits from which the world evolves. Its new marketing campaign captures exactly who they want to be: Mountaineers Go First. This author believes that in due time, West Virginia will be a model for transformation in this country. And this is just the start...

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