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The Impact and Importance of Understanding the Role of Land-Grant Universities in Higher Education

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Book Review:

Gavazzi, S. M., Gee, E. G., Magrath, C. P. (2018) Land Grant universities for the Future: Higher Education for the Public Good. Johns Hopkins University Press.

216 Pages. Available in hardback and digital format. Price \$33 (hc), \$19 (ebook)

Keywords: land grant university, teaching, public, research, service, extension, community

Reading *Land-Grant Universities for the Future: Higher Education for the Public Good* (2018) was a professionally and personally enlightening experience. At first, I was hesitant, however strongly encouraged by others because of my unique experience in both worlds of technical and higher education. The earlier chapters were most beneficial to me as I revisited the origins of land-grant institutions, their purposes, and the significant impact they have or rather should have on communities. I was drawn as well to the latter part of the book speaking of the role of faculty members in land grant institutions as "invested constituents." Furthermore, I took great satisfaction in the view of students, both undergraduate and graduate, being referred to as the very lifeblood of the land-grant university. Throughout the book, I was intrigued by comments made from Chancellors and Presidents alike on their views of topics and discussions presented in this writing.

At its inception, the land-grant institution was to help meet the needs of the "sons and daughters of toil," intending to make the educational experience available to the offspring of working-class parents who were to benefit the most from this new legislation. I find this initial cause to be most significant in helping to instill the value of education in working-class families

in the U.S. who often were denied or because of proximity could not attend urban institutions of higher learning. While currently working as an administrator of Utah State University in Northeastern Utah, one cannot help but wonder if we have been involved sufficiently to help ensure that part of the land-grant mission is still being kept. It definitely has caused me to rethink scholarship opportunities, along with marketing and recruitment efforts to those we serve. The limiting factors that once existed for those of toil seeking higher learning have certainly decreased; however, we should continue to seek out and concentrate on those with limited access to university education.

I enjoyed the reminder of how significant land-grant institutions should be within their communities. A sports team and significant contributions of a medical center often make the headlines; however, our communities seldom see other contributions of the land-grant institutions. Gavazzi and Gee discuss that universities are commonly referred to as "isolated and arrogant institutions" often not routinely asking our partners, as in a marriage relationship, what they want you to do, therefore not knowing in entirety what the needs are in our communities. The term servant leadership is quoted often in the book; this aptly describes the vision of Abraham Lincoln's model of the land-grant. The priorities of land-grants need constant attention as we seek to meet the needs of those in the area we serve.

Often, I refer to faculty colleagues as the lifeblood of our institution. This parallels well the distinction given in the book of invested constituents and workhorses of the institution. Their areas of expertise in our communities are recognized and appreciated. During my career, much of my time has been devoted to marketing higher education within our area of influence. I would welcome a more heightened approach at our regional campuses in creating more dialogue with community leaders and faculty as to ways our faculty could serve in the community. More opportunities will help create the atmosphere and attention needed within our communities to showcase our worth. The term engagement was brought up throughout the book, and indeed to be engaged, both entities need to be aware of one another to help find solutions.

Indeed, our students do bring hope, new ideas, and a drive as one administrator put it. They help the rest of us become better at reaching their needs. We need occasions to get to know them better. To me, that is the benefit of a rural land-grant institution. Our students are often our neighbors and acquaintances. We should be in a position to know them better and to help them become better acquainted with us.

This book confirms the land-grant university mission and emphasizes the individual responsibility mandated to serve those we influence. This includes all residents in the communities within our service area. Engagement with neighbors, civic leaders, businesses,

education institutions, and any other interested community partners, should all be recognized and listened to.

Our faculty, as busy as they are in areas of teaching, research, and service, should have at the forefront of their minds, the critical role they have in our society.

Students are fortunate to be the recipients of the knowledge our faculty gain. I hope that we do not forget the worth of each student as they present new ideas, new experiences, and a desire to learn so that they can solve tomorrow's problems as well as celebrate the success of tomorrow.

I wholeheartedly endorse Stephen M. Gavazzi and E. Gordon Gee's book, *Land-Grant Universities For The Future*, not only to those who work at land-grant colleges but to community members at large. Both audiences would do well to learn or to be reminded of the crucial role our colleges are to the local citizenry. Engaging together after 150+ years since the inception of land-grant colleges is still the right thing to do.