

2022

## Land Acknowledgments at Land-Grant Libraries and Archives: A Systematic Review

Kimberly Anderson

University of Nevada, Reno, [kda@unr.edu](mailto:kda@unr.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Anderson, Kimberly (2022) "Land Acknowledgments at Land-Grant Libraries and Archives: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Western Archives*: Vol. 13: Iss. 1, Article 9.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol13/iss1/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at [DigitalCommons@USU](mailto:DigitalCommons@USU). It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Western Archives* by an authorized administrator of [DigitalCommons@USU](mailto:DigitalCommons@USU). For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usu.edu).



# Land Acknowledgments at Land-Grant Libraries and Archives: A Systematic Review

Kimberly Anderson

## ABSTRACT

Increasingly, land-grant universities are acknowledging their history of benefitting from colonization and the dispossession of Indigenous communities through the Morrill Act of 1862. This study looks at whether academic libraries and archives acknowledge this history in the form of online land acknowledgments; and, where such acknowledgements exist, whether the university also acknowledges its occupation of Indigenous lands. A systematic review of the websites of land-grant colleges and universities and their libraries and archives was conducted. The results indicate that a majority of 1862 land-grant colleges and universities do have a land acknowledgment for the entire campus, but most academic libraries do not have a land acknowledgment specific to the library or archives.

## Introduction

The passage of the “Morrill Act” in July 1862 founded the land-grant system of colleges and universities in the United States.<sup>1</sup> It established a system of public colleges and universities with at least one in every state teaching a curriculum of agriculture and mechanical arts. Acts in 1890 and 1994 followed the initial 1862 land-grant, expanding land-grant status to historically Black colleges and universities in 1890 and tribal colleges in 1994. The United States is home to 112 land-grant colleges and universities: fifty-seven 1862 institutions, nineteen 1890 institutions, and thirty-six 1994 institutions.<sup>2</sup> Land-grant colleges and universities were founded through the sale of federal lands which were originally acquired through the dispossession of Indigenous nations.

1. Justin Morrill, “An Act Donating Public Lands to the Several States and Territories Which Way Provide Colleges for the Benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts,” Pub. L. No. 37-130, § 301, 301 Title 7 (1862), Chapter 130, <https://govtrackus.s3.amazonaws.com/legislink/pdf/stat/12/STATUTE-12-Pg503a.pdf>
2. Genevieve K Croft, “The U.S. Land-Grant University System: An Overview,” Congressional Research Service (Washington, DC, August 29, 2019), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45897>

Scholars are increasingly recognizing that the land-grant system is not an innocent public good: As Stephen Gavazzi notes, “the noble and virtuous land-grant mission was founded on distortions, violence, and the ongoing suffering of dispossessed people.”<sup>3</sup> Criticisms of this aspect of the land-grant system arise because of its dependence on Indigenous dispossession. The landmark “Land Grab U” study explores this history in exhaustive detail tracing each tract of land, the associated treaty or cession, the funds generated, and which university or college benefitted.<sup>4</sup> The Land Grab U study makes clear the method by which the land was seized or ceded and shares the response of each land-grant university to the study itself. The Land Grab U study did not assess whether land-grant acknowledgments existed.

The premise of the current study is that land-grant colleges and universities have an obligation to disclose these histories. This study seeks to understand how colleges and university archives, as memory sites for these institutions, have responded to calls for action by developing land acknowledgments. Since land acknowledgments are a common way for organizations to publicly respond to colonial legacies and current land occupation, the study serves as a comprehensive assessment of which land-grant colleges and universities have opted to use land acknowledgments to do this through their archives, libraries, or at the campus level. Despite increasing scholarly engagement with the issue of land-grants’ ties to colonization and dispossession, there is not a body of research that has systematically examined whether land-grants are disclosing this history via land acknowledgments.

## Scope

The study explores and describes the current phenomenon of land acknowledgements as evinced by land-grant archives, libraries, and campus websites. All 1862, 1890, and 1994 land-grant universities were examined apart from those located in United States territories. The territories were excluded because 1) their law and policy structures are sufficiently different from land-grants within the fifty states that their inclusion would create outliers; and 2) the researcher would have to rely on web-based automated translations of the some of the websites to understand them. Although all non-territorial land-grant colleges and universities were included, not all of them benefitted from direct grants of colonized lands. This is because some land-grant statuses were acquired via cash endowments without the seizure and sale of land, or they received colonized lands under other legislation.<sup>5</sup> The 1994 land-grants

3. Stephen M. Gavazzi, “Reckoning with the Original Sin of Land-Grant Universities: Remaining Land-Grant Fierce While Insisting on Contrition and Repentance,” *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 8, no. 1 (2021): 157-61, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/natiindistudj.8.issue-1>
4. Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone, “Land-Grab Universities,” *High Country News*, March 30, 2020, <https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities>
5. Robert Lee, “How We Investigated the Land-Grant University System,” *High Country News*, March 30, 2020, <https://www.hcn.org/articles/indigenous-affairs-education-how-we-investigated-the-land-grant-university-system>

were included for comprehensiveness and as a point of comparison although they are tribal colleges and universities and are in a very different circumstance from both the 1890 and 1862 land-grants.

Libraries and archives were chosen as a focal point because they are units with obligations towards knowledge and campus history. Libraries are symbolic as sites of knowledge and are described as such on many campuses.<sup>6</sup> More specifically, they frequently serve as the information center for university history. Archives, particularly university archives, are part of the process of remembering, memorializing, celebrating, and exposing a university's distinct history.<sup>7</sup> They are often called on to create exhibits, newsletter items, or contribute historical content that supports recruitment, public relations, or fundraising for the university. They also strive to help students and researchers uncover more complete truths about their universities. University archives are the symbolic and literal site of university history and remembrance— consequently, university archives have a unique opportunity to educate about their university's role in its local history of displacement and dispossession. This is even more opportune when most land-grant university archives have a role in contributing to anniversary celebrations in honor of the founding of the university, including commemorating its settlement.

Processes for creating respectful and accurate land acknowledgments are complicated. This study does not examine the methodology used by each university to create its acknowledgment, nor does it examine if the acknowledgement was purely “empty” or if actual reparation has taken place. It is unable to explain why or why not acknowledgements exist at a given institution, whether such acknowledgments are accurate, or whether there are acknowledgments as a point of policy that are not discoverable via an institutions' website. For example, verbal land acknowledgments at meetings and other programming are growing in popularity, but the practice of using these at a given university will not be reflected on a website. Those that do have verbal acknowledgments are likely to replicate the formal acknowledgment shared online and thus will be incorporated in the study through analysis of the online acknowledgment. Additionally, sub-units may not feel the need to have their own statement and campus bureaucratic structures may limit the autonomy of any sub-unit. The study seeks to understand the prevalence of land acknowledgments at land-grant universities and whether libraries and archives are adopting their own statements.

6. For example, North Carolina State University Libraries “Open Knowledge Center,” Pennsylvania State University Libraries “Knowledge Commons,” University of Nevada Reno Libraries “Knowledge Center,” Ohio State University Libraries “Knowledge Bank.”
7. John R. Thelin, “Archives and the Cure for Institutional Amnesia: College and University Saga as Part of the Campus Memory,” *Journal of Archival Organization* 7, no. 1-2 (May 2009): 4-15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332740902897485>

## Background: Land-grant Colleges and Universities, College and University Archives, and Land Acknowledgements

### The Land-grant System

Literature discussing land-grants falls under three major themes: the land-grant mission as a virtue, land-grants' influence on the development of modern American society, or critiques of land-grants as colonial projects. Works discussing the land-grant mission as virtuous point to the effect it had on American higher education in democratizing both curriculum and access to education for the working classes. G. Lester Anderson argues that land-grants represented a political ideal, democratized higher education, shifted scholarship towards utilitarian purposes, and popularized the idea that the beneficiary of research should be the public.<sup>8</sup> With the focus on practical application and broad access, land-grant universities have been credited with the country's success in technology transfer, military training, economic development, and civic infrastructure.<sup>9</sup>

Works critiquing land-grants position them as both having colonial origins and as being part of an ongoing colonial process.<sup>10</sup> Kertész & Gonzales observe in their analysis of Cornell that the Morrill Act requires the money accrued from scrips be used in perpetuity, thus ensuring the original dispossession and seizure continues to remain on Cornell's ledgers.<sup>11</sup> The early ties between land-grant colleges and universities and militarized settlement are transparent. In the 1850s, Congress grew increasingly concerned with the scientific education of farmers and laborers.<sup>12</sup> Although the curricular focus of land-grant colleges and university formation was on agricultural studies and mechanic arts, the intent was primarily to provide practical education to laborers as part of a colonial project: "The reference to 'several pursuits and professions in life' extends the ideas of the colonial period regarding the church, the law, and medicine to include all activities, particularly those that had evolved in a young and rapidly developing country."<sup>13</sup> The Morrill Act also required each college or

8. G. Lester Anderson, "Land-Grant Universities and Their Continuing Challenge," in *Land-Grant Universities and Their Continuing Challenge*, ed. G. Lester Anderson (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1976), 1-10.
9. Robert J. Sternberg, *The Modern Land-Grant University* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2014).
10. Sharon Stein, "A Colonial History of the Higher Education Present: Rethinking Land-Grant Institutions through Processes of Accumulation and Relations of Conquest," *Critical Studies in Education* 61, no. 2 (2020): 212-228, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2017.1409646>
11. Judy Kertész and Angela A. Gonzales, "'We Grow the Ivy': Cornell's Claim to Indigenous Dispossession," *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 8, no. 1 (2021): 145-50, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/natiindistudj.8.issue-1>.
12. Sternberg, *The Modern Land-Grant University*.
13. *Ibid.*, 9.

university to train students (at this time, free male settlers) in military tactics. As a result of these two foci, the 1862 land-grants centered their curriculum on subjects which furthered settlement, military occupation, and national development. It is for these reasons that land-grant colleges and universities are inextricably meshed with settler colonialism and the violent dispossession of Indigenous peoples.

The mechanism of funding was for states to receive federal lands, the sale of which paid for the establishment of colleges and universities. Not all states had eligible federal lands within their borders. Many eastern states were offered land scrips in exchange for federal lands located in western states. Once these western lands sold, each eastern state benefitted from the sale and was able to found a land-grant university. This is why universities like Rutgers in New Jersey and Cornell in New York benefitted from Indigenous dispossession in places like Nevada and California.<sup>14</sup> The “federal lands” of the Morrill Act were lands wrested from Indigenous populations, frequently without consent or through coercion.<sup>15</sup> These lands were then occupied by settler educational institutions that trained settlers in settlement activities (e.g. as agriculture, engineering, and military tactics) along with classic Western educational topics. John Thelin, historian of higher education, posits that the Morrill Act was less about “building colleges” and more about how to make use of “vast expanses of land in the West.”<sup>16</sup> Nash argues that the focus of the schools on agriculture and mechanic arts directly fostered industrialization, capitalism, settlement, and nation-state building.<sup>17</sup> Land-grant colleges and universities are thus directly part of the twin forces of empire building and Indigenous erasure.

## Obligations of College and University Archives

Literature on college and university archives has focused on the mechanics of managing an academic archives,<sup>18</sup> appraisal in university archives,<sup>19</sup> documenting

14. Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone, “Land-Grab Universities,” *High County News*, <https://www.landgrabu.org/>.

15. Ibid.

16. John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

17. Margaret A. Nash, “Entangled Pasts: Land-Grant Colleges and American Indian Dispossession,” *History of Education Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (November 2019): <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/history-of-education-quarterly/article/entangled-pasts-landgrant-colleges-and-american-indian-dispossession/79E42113A0A51B21903DFB1229F7DE88>

18. Aaron D. Purcell, *Academic Archives: Managing the Next Generation of College and University Archives, Records, and Special Collections* (Chicago, IL: ALA Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2012).

19. Helen Willa Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 1992), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015028468554>

student life,<sup>20</sup> and the role of archives in instruction and outreach.<sup>21</sup> The role of a college or university archives is typically understood to be documenting the institution in a way that reflects its “true nature.” William J. Maher expands this concept to include providing the institution with both “a memory” and a means by which this memory can be verified or refuted: “The archives thus enables the institution to rethink itself by preserving the record of its failings as well as its accomplishments.”<sup>22</sup> However, many people encounter the positive side of campus histories through marketing or fundraising functions of the college or university.<sup>23, 24</sup> The purpose of these offices is not for supporting research and historical truth-telling but are instead for sustaining activities like ensuring people with discretionary income donate to the university, developing and maintaining a branded “story” for the campus, and so on. These units use selected historical evidence in service of their functions, but comprehensive gathering of historical evidence is not the purpose of what they do. In contrast, college and university archives are the body primarily responsible for ensuring documentary evidence of the college or university’s whole history. Therefore, land-grant college and university archives have particular obligations to ensure that the colonial history of the university is part of its body of evidence and that such evidence is discoverable and accessible. For a land-grant college or university, this should mean publicly offering fuller context to inaccurate stories by acquiring, maintaining, preserving, and sharing materials that expose the colonial reality of the university’s development. Land acknowledgments are one way archives can work toward this.

## Land Acknowledgments

Land, or territory, acknowledgements are the practice of prefacing or signing communications with a recognition of the land from which one is communicating

20. Jessica Wagner and Debbi Smith, “Students as Donors to University Archives: A Study of Student Perceptions with Recommendations,” *The American Archivist* 75, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2012): 538-66, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43489635>
21. “Teaching with Primary Sources Bibliography,” TPS Collective, accessed April 2022, <https://tpscollective.org/bibliography/>
22. William J. Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives* (Latham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992).
23. YoungAh Lee, “Understanding Parents’ View on US Higher Education Marketing Communication,” *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 18, no. 3 (October 2019): 279-99, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-019-09249-2>
24. Jeffrey M. Schanz, “Differences in University Fundraising: The Role of University Practices and Organization” (Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York at Albany, 2012), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1283387356/abstract/3B9153C3C42F4BBCPQ/1>

and of the original people from whom the land was seized.<sup>25</sup> Minimally, these acknowledgements name the peoples who were the original stewards of the land. Sometimes, these statements expose and honor the story of Indigenous people's relationship to land and/or survival and resistance to settler colonialism, dispossession, displacement, and/or genocide.<sup>26</sup> There is no universal template for a land acknowledgment as each acknowledgment should be written in consultation with the people to whom it pertains. However, there are some aspects that show up in many of the acknowledgments jointly authored between institutions and Indigenous communities: correct pronunciation and accuracy of who is being acknowledged, using contemporary language to show persistent relationships to homelands, and using empowered language to reflect the agency and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples outside of the framework of the settler perspective.<sup>27, 28</sup> Roland Keshena Robinson notes that territorial acknowledgments are as much about "ancient relations of friendship, kinship, and alliance" between Indigenous nations as they are about seizure "during the expansion of white settler sovereign power."<sup>29</sup>

Dispossession is a key requirement for the creation of land-grant colleges and universities. As such, the development of the land-grant system is an intentional component of settler colonialism in the United States. However, as Margaret Nash notes, this history is treated as of less importance than the story of the promotion of higher education (to free, mostly white, men) and the furtherance of applied sciences.<sup>30</sup> Land acknowledgments hint at a more complex and accurate story than that of just the Morrill Act and the rise of public land-grant universities. They are intended, at least initially, as a sign of respect and recognition and are argued by some to be like many Indigenous nation's own protocols.<sup>31</sup> The literature that

25. Rowland Keshena Robinson, "Whose Land?: Performative Practice and the Analytics of Territory," Maehkōn Ahpētesewen (blog), April 21, 2020, <https://onkwehonwerising.wordpress.com/2020/04/21/whos-land-performative-practice-and-the-analytics-of-territory/>
26. "A Guide to Indigenous Land Acknowledgment," Native Governance Center, October 22, 2019, <https://nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/>
27. Lorén Spears, "A Guide for Land Acknowledgments," Tomaquag Museum, March 22, 2020, <https://www.tomaquagmuseum.org/belongingsblog/2020/3/22/a-guide-for-land-acknowledgments-by-lorn-spears>
28. Felicia Garcia and Jane Anderson, "Guide to Indigenous Land and Territorial Acknowledgements for Cultural Institutions," accessed April 2022, <http://landacknowledgements.org/>
29. Robinson, "Whose Land?"
30. Nash, "Entangled Pasts."
31. "First Nation Protocol on Traditional Territory," Indigenous Corporate Training, July 27, 2019, <https://www.ictinc.ca/first-nation-protocol-on-traditional-territory/>; "How to Make a Land Acknowledgement," Duwamish Tribe, accessed March 28, 2022. <https://www.duwamishtribe.org/land-acknowledgement>

supports the practice of land acknowledgments cites their ability to disrupt settler colonial spaces, to be the start of listening and solidarity, or to provide the apology and/or accountability for past (and ongoing) transgressions that is necessary for reparation and reclamation.<sup>32, 33</sup> For these reasons, land acknowledgements are a burgeoning practice amongst museums, for example.<sup>34</sup>

However, there is also a body of literature that is critical of land acknowledgments. This literature comments on land acknowledgments as political or rhetorical posturing, lack of Indigenous input and/or co-opting indigeneity, and failure to move towards literal decolonization, such as returning land, or other concrete actions.<sup>35, 36, 37</sup> Land acknowledgments without accompanying relationships, commitments to do better, and/or restitution are largely performative.<sup>38</sup> As Chelsea Vowel explains, they can serve a purpose to create productive discomfort in listeners. However, she argues that once the uncomfortable has become comfortable, it has lost its power and it's time to move to concrete actions and protocols.<sup>39</sup> Vowel's 2016 blog post posits that the longer and more consistently land acknowledgements have been performed, the more likely they are to be or become empty gestures: "What may start out as radical push-back against the denial of Indigenous priority and continued presence, may end up repurposed as 'box-ticking' inclusion without commitment to any sort of real change. In fact, I believe this is the inevitable progression, a situation of familiarity breeding contempt (or at least apathy)."<sup>40</sup>

32. Sean Blenkinsop and Mark Fettes, "Land, Language and Listening: The Transformations That Can Flow from Acknowledging Indigenous Land," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54, no. 4 (2020): 1033-46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12470>
33. Kristen J. Nyitray and Dana Reijerkerk, "Searching for Paumanok: A Study of Library of Congress Authorities and Classifications for Indigenous Long Island, New York," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 59, no. 5 (July 4, 2021): 409-41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2021.1929627>
34. Lorén Spears, "A Guide for Land Acknowledgements," *New England Museums Now*, 2020. <https://nemanet.org/nemn/spring-2020/guide-land-acknowledgements/#>
35. Leif V. Fitzsimmons Frey, "Heartless, Robotic Apologies': Indigenizing Toronto Education," *In:Cite Journal* 1 (2018): <https://incitejournal.org/index.php/incite/article/view/28910/23202>
36. Joe Wark, "Land Acknowledgements in the Academy: Refusing the Settler Myth," *Curriculum Inquiry* 51, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2021.1889924>
37. "LANDBACK Manifesto," accessed April 2022, <https://landback.org/manifesto/>
38. Lila Asher, Joe Curnow, and Amil Davis, "The Limits of Settlers' Territorial Acknowledgments," *Curriculum Inquiry* 48, no. 3 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2018.1468211>
39. Chelsea Vowel, *Indigenization in the Time of Pipelines*, Weweni Indigenous Scholars Speaker Series (University of Winnipeg, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8ucu3j-tk&t=7s>
40. Chelsea Vowel, "Beyond Territorial Acknowledgments," *Âpihtawikosisân*, September 23, 2016, <https://apihtawikosisan.com/2016/09/beyond-territorial-acknowledgments/>

Inadequate land acknowledgments are particularly troubling in academic settings in which occupation of Indigenous land is not acknowledged, but the university has a “legacy of collecting, studying, and conducting research on Indigenous Cultures.”<sup>41</sup> Knowledge, ways of being, and objects are valued, but not the people from whom they come. Summer Wilkie refers to this as “a kind of cultural genocide” and concludes that institutional land acknowledgments are still useful while there is such a lack of knowledge about Indigenous people and colonial history, but that “action is the form of acknowledgment needed to support the rights and well-being of Indigenous people.”<sup>42</sup>

Following Vowel and Wilkie’s thinking, the underlying premise is that land acknowledgments serve as an imperfect start to reparative work. To that end, this study methodically surveyed the prevalence of land acknowledgments at land-grant university archives, libraries, and campuses in order to explore how many archives, libraries, and campuses have begun engaging with the colonial aspects of being a land-grant institution.

## Method

This study systematically searched the websites of archives and libraries at land-grant colleges and universities to identify land acknowledgements between 2019 and 2021. The study also assessed whether there was a campus-level acknowledgment. The researcher browsed and searched for specific terms via the main website for each college or university, along with its library and archives’ websites when such sites existed (see Table 1). All searches were conducted on all landing page websites at the archives, library, and university level with each successful query recorded in a spreadsheet. University websites were identified using NIFA’s College Partners Directory.<sup>43</sup> Archives and library websites were identified using either browsing or site searching at each university website.

The search terms were selected because they were deemed most likely to yield results. Most of the literature on land acknowledgments uses some variation of “acknowledgment” and “land” or “territory” in discussion or in the actual texts. Both “Native American” and “Indigenous” were chosen to account for variations in terminology. “Land” was searched via “find on page” (CTRL-F) for all the landing pages. The Diversity, Equity, and/or Inclusion (DEI) pages were the most varied. Sometimes these were found in the form of websites for an Office of Diversity and

41. Theresa Stewart-Ambo, “‘We Can Do Better’: University Leaders Speak to Tribal-University Relationships,” *American Educational Research Journal* 58, no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0002831220983583>

42. Summer Wilkie, “So You Want to Acknowledge the Land?” *High Country News*, April 22, 2021, <https://www.hcn.org/issues/53.5/indigenous-affairs-perspective-so-you-want-to-acknowledge-the-land>

43. “College Partners Directory,” National Institute of Food and Agriculture, accessed April 2022, <https://nifa.usda.gov/land-grant-colleges-and-universities-partner-website-directory>

Table 1. Searching methods.<sup>44</sup>

Type of search	Imposed limitations	Where searched				
		Main landing page	"About"	DEI	Footer	Site Search
CTRL-F (find in page) search for "land"	One page deep	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Manual viewing	One page deep	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Site search for "land acknowledgment"	First screen of search results	Y	N	N	N	Y
Site search for "Native American"	First screen of search results	N	N	N	N	Y
Site search for "acknowledge"	First screen of search results	N	N	N	N	Y
Site search for "Indigenous"	First screen of search results	N	N	N	N	Y
Site search for "land"	First screen of search results	N	N	N	N	Y

44. "Main landing page" refers to the primary home site for the archives, the library, or the college or university. The "About" page refers to pages providing overview information about the archives, library, college, or university. They are typically called things like "About Us," "Information," or "About [name of organization]." "DEI" refers to "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion." The main page footer refers to the footer of the landing page of the archives, library, college, or university.

Inclusion (or similar) and sometimes they were pages primarily about the stance taken by the archives, library, college, or university on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Thirty-two universities of the 104 assessed did not have a campus-level DEI page.

The review was conducted using Airtable. Airtable is a relational database, spreadsheet, and collaboration tool that is used for surveys, planning, and other activities. The researcher constructed a spreadsheet that tracked each land-grant college or university, its land-grant year (1862, 1890, or 1994), whether a search method returned a result, and if so, the URL of the land acknowledgment and the text of the land acknowledgment. The method also enabled the researcher to note when a site was missing a particular element. This process was conducted at the archives, library, college and university levels for each land-grant college or university.

The method worked well for the study, but future work should consider scenarios where no official land acknowledgment exists at the institutional level but instead several land acknowledgment variants at different offices or schools within the university or college. These were not tracked in the current study if the acknowledgment found was not the main campus' acknowledgment, the library's acknowledgment, or the archives' acknowledgment. Additionally, the study used point-in-time analyses. The data was collected on certain days and times and may not reflect current circumstances. The work began in 2019 and continued through 2021, over the course of which new land acknowledgments may have been adopted.

## Results

Unsurprisingly, the majority of acknowledgments are from 1862 land-grants which is the group that most benefitted from Indigenous dispossession. Of the 52 original land-grant colleges and universities, 58 percent had an acknowledgment at the university level. None of the 1890 land-grants had an acknowledgment. The 1994 institutions are tribal colleges and universities. Despite the likelihood that they would not have a land acknowledgment, 24 percent of them did have a place-based statement of culture and cultural affiliation. See Table 2 for a full breakdown.

Amongst the 1862 Morrill Act institutions, the West and Midwest are significantly more likely to have a land acknowledgment at the university level than institutions in the South or Northeast. At the library level, it is the opposite with the South and Northeast somewhat more likely to have a library land acknowledgment even when a campus acknowledgment does not exist. Only two archives in the study had land acknowledgments—one in the West and one in the South (see Table 3).

Table 2. Prevalence of land acknowledgments at each of the land-grant university types.<sup>45</sup>

Level of acknowledgment	1862 (52 institutions)		1890 (18 institutions)		1994 (34 institutions)	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Archives	2	4	0	0	1	3
Library	9	17	0	0	1	3
University	30	58	0	0	8	24

Table 3. Geographic distribution of land acknowledgments at each level for the 1862 Morrill Act institutions.<sup>46</sup>

Region	Archives		Library		University	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
	Midwest					
East North Central (5)	0	0	0	0	4	80
West North Central (7)	0	0	1	14	4	57
All Midwest (12)	0	0	1	8	8	67
	Northeast					
Middle Atlantic (3)	0	0	1	33	0	0
New England (7)	0	0	1	14	3	43
All Northeast (10)	0	0	2	20	3	33

45. These acknowledgments are place-based statements of culture rather than formal land acknowledgments.

46. Regions were delineated using the 2018 FIPS codes from the US Census Bureau.

Region	Archives		Library		University	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
	South					
East South Central (4)	0	0	1	25	0	0
South Atlantic (9)	1	11	2	22	6	67
West South Central (4)	0	0	1	25	1	25
All South (17 institutions)	1	6	4	24	7	41
	West					
Mountain (8)	0	0	0	0	7	88
Pacific (5)	1	20	2	40	5	100
All West (13 institutions)	1	8	2	15	12	92

Across all land-grant years, an acknowledgment at the University level was more likely than an acknowledgment at the level of the library or the archives. Two (4 percent) of the 1862 institutions had a land acknowledgment prominently displayed in the footer or on the main landing page. Only three (6 percent) of 1862 land-grants acknowledged this history in their About page, whereas six (18 percent) of the 1994 land-grant tribal colleges and universities had a place-based cultural statement in their About pages. Most land acknowledgments are primarily findable by actively looking for them and are not findable without using relevant search terms. If land acknowledgments are not easy to discover without actively looking for them, then they are failing to achieve an educational purpose of informing unaware visitors of the campus' occupation of Indigenous land. Tables 4 and 5 provide a complete breakdown of where land acknowledgments were found on archives, library, and campus websites. The 1890 land-grants are excluded from the tables because no land acknowledgements were found for those colleges and universities.

Table 4. Methods used to successfully locate land acknowledgments on websites at 1862 land-grant colleges and universities by website location

Successful method	Archives (2 institutions)		Library (9 institutions)		University (30 institutions)	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Main page CTRL-F (find in page)	1	50	0	0	2	7
“land” search	1	50	6	67	16	53
“acknowledge” search	1	50	2	22	5	17
“Indigenous” search	2	100	3	33	10	33
“land acknowledgment” search	1	50	2	22	13	43
“Native American” search	0	0	1	11	9	30
Browsing main page footer	0	0	0	0	2	7
Browsing About page	1	50	0	0	3	10
Browsing DEI page	0	0	2	22	5	17

Table 5. Methods used to successfully locate place-based statements of affiliation on websites at 1994 land-grant colleges and universities by website location

Successful method	Archives (1 institution)		Library (1 institution)		University (8 institutions)	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Main page CTRL-F (find in page)	0	0	0	0	0	0
“land” search	0	0	0	0	0	0
“acknowledge” search	0	0	0	0	0	0
“Indigenous” search	0	0	0	0	1	13

Successful method	Archives (1 institution)		Library (1 institution)		University (8 institutions)	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
“land acknowledgment” search	0	0	0	0	0	0
“Native American” search	0	0	0	0	0	0
Browsing main page footer	0	0	0	0	0	0
Browsing About page	1	100	1	100	6	75
Browsing DEI page	0	0	0	0	0	0

The researcher compared the tribes and nations acknowledged by the colleges and universities to the territories identified in the Native Land maps. “Mostly same” was marked when 50 percent or more of the Peoples identified by the university matched the territories listed on the map. “Mostly different” was marked when less than 50 percent of the Peoples identified by the university matched the map. Most acknowledgments did not indicate their origin. Those that indicated Indigenous input were typically the same or mostly the same as the map (see Table 6). The five Pacific universities were most likely to have a same or mostly same acknowledgment.

University acknowledgments often do not reflect the findings from the Land Grab U study. Most campuses recognized only a small fraction of the tribes and nations whose lands were used to develop each university. Washington State University specifically cites the Land Grab U data in their acknowledgment and is therefore an exception. Acknowledgment of the fewer number of peoples whose lands the university directly occupies (versus a recognition of the larger number of peoples whose lands were seized and later sold for the benefit of the university) obscures the magnitude of the land-grant university system as a project of settler colonialism.

University extension is a probable reason land-grant colleges and universities may recognize more peoples than just the peoples whose land is occupied by the main campus. Extension offices are typically present in each county in the state so some universities, such as Utah State University and Washington State University, recognize every tribe who had or has homelands in what is now the state.

Table 6. Peoples acknowledged in campus-level land acknowledgments at 1862 land-grants in comparison with homelands from Native Land Digital.<sup>47</sup>

Region	Same or mostly same		Different or mostly different		No acknowledgment	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
	Midwest					
East North Central (5)	1	20	3	60	1	20
West North Central (7)	3	43	1	14	3	43
All Midwest	4	33	4	33	4	33
	Northeast					
Middle Atlantic (3)	0	0	1	33	2	66
New England (7)	1	14	1	14	4	57
All Northeast	1	10	3	30	6	60
	South					
East South Central (4)	1	25	0	0	3	75
South Atlantic (8)	5	63	0	0	3	38
West South Central (4)	1	25	0	0	3	75
All South	7	44	0	0	9	57
	West					
Mountain (8)	3	38	4	50	1	13
Pacific (5)	4	80	1	20	0	0
All West	7	54	5	38	1	8

47. Regions were delineated using the 2018 FIPS codes from the US Census Bureau.

## Discussion

The study allowed for an observation of the percentage of land-grant colleges and universities and their libraries and archives which have land acknowledgments, the location of the land acknowledgment on the websites, and the discovery of other activities related to colonial history. Overall, a majority of 1862 Morrill Act colleges and universities do provide some kind of land acknowledgment through their archives, library, or campus website. However, these land acknowledgments largely do not indicate whether the Indigenous communities and nations to whom they pertain vetted the statements. It is also difficult to discover, without actively seeking them out, that they only partially match the Native Land Digital map and do not reflect the breadth of peoples impacted by land seizure or coercion leading up to each university's founding. The 1890 colleges and universities do not have any acknowledgments at all. The 1994 tribal colleges and universities would be unlikely to have a land acknowledgment, but many do have place-based statements of cultural affiliation.

The presence of land acknowledgments does not directly correlate to anticolonial action. Even with the presence of a land acknowledgment, universities can continue to engage in actions that undermine efforts towards reconciliation and equity. Historically, universities celebrated the history of settlement by honoring settler donors or Justin Morrill, for whom the Morrill Act is named. During this study, the researcher identified that 18 of the 52 1862 land-grant colleges and universities have a building or street named after Justin Morrill. These are typically the initial building on campus or the agricultural college, reflecting an early positive association with the Morrill Act.

While many 1862 colleges and universities did not say much about their colonial pasts beyond the land acknowledgment and buildings named for Morrill, two universities have instead launched projects directly celebrating settlement. Iowa State University has a project called "An Iowa Legacy" with the tagline "This legacy belongs to all Iowans."<sup>48</sup> The project collects archival documents and oral histories of the descendants of settlers who purchased the land as part of the Morrill Act. An Iowa Legacy's description reads, in part:

*The first Iowans called for a new kind of college—one based on science and open to all; one dedicated to the education of the working people of Iowa. That was 1846, today we are Iowa State University. The stories here and ones yet to be added tell of our connection to each other, the land and the people's university.*

*Sharing stories that recall how Iowa's land-grant came to be and ones that tell of significant accomplishments made by those with ties to the university*

48. "An Iowa Legacy," Iowa State University, accessed April 2022, <https://www.landgrant.iastate.edu/front>.

*honors the dreams of early settlers. They are the basis of our legacy and nurture our hopes for future generations—and a strong Iowa.*

Despite Iowa State University's land acknowledgment recognition of the "obligations to this land" and the "17,000 Native people" who currently reside in Iowa,<sup>49</sup> the "An Iowa Legacy" project positions itself as belonging to "all Iowans" but refers to settlers as the "the First Iowans" and invites readers to "learn about how settlers connected to and built a life on the land."<sup>50</sup> The two efforts are incongruent.

The University of Nebraska's "Land-Grant Connects" project was directly modeled on Iowa State's project.<sup>51</sup> Its tagline is "A University Connected to the Land" and describes the 1862 Morrill Act as granting "unclaimed federal lands in order to establish colleges." Nebraska does not have a land acknowledgment. According to Native Land Digital, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is located on the traditional homelands of the Jiwere (Otoe), Pâri (Pawnee), and Očhéthi Šakówiŋ (Sioux).<sup>52</sup> According to the Land-Grab Universities study, the University of Nebraska benefitted from the sale of 89,920 acres of Indigenous land.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the majority of libraries and archives do not have a land acknowledgment statement of their own. Of the 11 libraries that do have acknowledgment text on their websites, or that link to acknowledgment text, nine of them have a statement unique to the library or archives and two of them replicated the campus acknowledgment text. While some university archives' missions only focus on records created by the university as an organization, others refer to themselves as the "memory" for the university and its impact on the world. It is these latter foci that lend themselves to critique when the memory is incomplete. In honoring the Morrill Act without problematization, or in overlooking the source of the land which founded each land-grant, land-grant colleges and university archives are performing work that supports the narrative of imperial history without acknowledging it as colonial.

The study also demonstrates that although land acknowledgments are gaining traction in land-grant universities, a significant portion of the 1862 land-grants do not

49. "Land Acknowledgement," Iowa State University, accessed April 2022, <https://www.diversity.iastate.edu/dei-resources/land-acknowledgement>

50. Iowa State University, "An Iowa Legacy."

51. "About Land-Grant Connects," University of Nebraska-Lincoln, accessed April 2022, <https://landgrant.unl.edu/about>

52. Native Land Digital, "Native Land Digital."

53. Lee and Ahtone, "Land-Grab Universities."

make any kind of acknowledgment of their colonial histories. Lee and Ahtone's Land Grab University study dramatically increased awareness of the exact means by which land-grant universities are part of the colonial project. During data-gathering for the present study, two universities developed land acknowledgments as they said they would in their response to Lee and Ahtone.<sup>54</sup>

Land-grant colleges and universities have an ethical obligation to acknowledge their colonial status. Land acknowledgments are one way land-grants can begin to attend to the concerns of Indigenous communities to whom they owe a debt. Universities that have progressed in reconciliation efforts have done so in partnership and collaboration with Indigenous communities and have taken a coordinated approach to reconciliation. Libraries and archives have particular obligations as sites of knowledge on the campus to document and make available the colonial aspects of the university's history. Some libraries and archives are working towards fulfilling these obligations even when the campus overall is not. Future research should assess whether land acknowledgment policies have led to improved services to and relationships with Indigenous communities, or whether acknowledgments remain merely words without accompanying action.

54. Ibid.