BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

PROVOST’S REPORT: “LIVING THE LAND-GRANT MISSION IN THE 21ST CENTURY”

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PENN STATER CONFERENCE CENTER HOTEL – DEAN’S HALL
Good afternoon!

In working with the University Strategic Planning Council to finalize the content of Penn State’s new strategic plan, I’ve realized that the effort has extraordinary meaning and relevance not just in terms of framing our plans for the next five years, but also in continuing to support the University’s land-grant mission.

Whether the plan’s foundational principles, thematic areas of focus, supporting strategies, and over-arching goals are entirely new or evolutions of prior work and thought leadership, they still clearly align with what Penn State strives to do as a land-grant institution.

Today I want to explain how our longtime land-grant mission informs and emboldens our new strategic plan – in part because some may think that mission lacks contemporary relevance, and because some may still find the concept a little nebulous. What does it mean, exactly, to be a land-grant institution? In the context of the burgeoning technological advances of the 21st century, why should we care about, much less support and sustain, a land-grant mission?

For starters, I should mention that the list of land-grant universities is longer than you might think. You know Penn State is one, and most other Big Ten schools also are land-grant institutions. But did you know that the Universities of Guam, Hawaii,
Massachusetts, and the District of Columbia are, as well? There is at least one land-grant institution in every U.S. state and territory. It’s a select but robust list of many excellent universities that focus, like Penn State, on the pillars of teaching, research, and service.

I should also mention that, after having spent about two years at Penn State, one of my biggest surprises has been the extent to which people – from faculty and staff to current students and alumni – really believe in our land-grant mission. They fundamentally understand what it is and why it matters, and it’s a source of great pride. I’ve even had job candidates mention it as a reason they wanted to work at Penn State!

According to the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 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 missions of these institutions, as set forth in the first Morrill Act of 1862, 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 time, 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 various times, money was appropriated through legislation such as the second Morrill Act of 1890 and the Bankhead-Jones Act, although the funding provisions of those 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 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 a large portion of the federal funds must be matched by the state. To disseminate information gleaned from research at the experiment stations, 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 and requires states to provide matching money in order to receive the federal funds.

Passage of the first Morrill Act reflected a growing demand for agricultural and technical education in the United States. While several institutions had begun to expand upon the traditional classical curriculum, higher education was still widely unavailable to many agricultural and industrial workers. The first 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 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 black students were eligible to receive the funds.
The Commonwealth chartered Penn State 160 years ago to bring modern science to bear in making agriculture more productive and efficient. Penn State admitted its first class in 1859, and the General Assembly three years later designated Penn State the commonwealth’s sole land-grant institution.

As we perhaps should remind our current crop of learners, in those early years, Penn State students attended school from February to December without a break, performed three hours of manual labor every day, and ate in a building that students described as “a shanty behind Old Main.”

In the 1880s, under President George Atherton, the institution expanded its curriculum, and programs in engineering, the sciences, and the liberal arts were developed.

In the early 1900s, we introduced cooperative extension and other forms of outreach programming. Penn State Extension is an educational network that gives people in Pennsylvania’s 67 counties access to the University's resources and expertise. It helps individuals, families, businesses, and communities throughout Pennsylvania with information and educational programs designed to support productive, profitable, and competitive businesses and a strong agriculture and food system.
It also strengthens families; sustains caring, safe, and healthy communities; and ensures the long-term vitality of Pennsylvania's natural resources.

Other significant developments around this time included formation of the Graduate School in 1922 and the establishment of campuses beyond University Park beginning in the 1930s, locations we now call our Commonwealth Campuses.

The College of Medicine and teaching hospital were established in 1967 with a gift from the charitable trusts of Milton S. Hershey. In recent years, Penn State has joined forces with or developed Penn College, the Penn State Dickinson Schools of Law, and the rapidly growing online World Campus.

So, clearly, we've come a long way since the days of the “shanty behind Old Main.” Yet, in 2015, it's worth noting that Penn State remains the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s only land-grant institution. What does that actually mean today – for our faculty, students, and anyone else engaged with the University? And how is it relevant to our new strategic plan, which will take us through 2020, and to the university as a whole in the decades that follow?

The world is a much more complex place than it was in the 1860s. The land-grant mission and the perceived need for it emerged during a time of widely different social contexts, financial and intellectual resources, and national priorities.
Now, Penn State is charged with adhere to that mission in a contemporary, global context, with students, faculty and staff engaged in research, teaching, and service initiatives increasingly driven by technology and not constrained by state or even national boundaries.

Ultimately, the land-grant mission itself has not changed with time, but its intended impact has. The land-grant legacy emphasizing educational access, research, and outreach remains.

But given societal shifts, demographic changes, enhanced technologies, and global connections, the mission today is also about having simultaneous local, national and global impact in a broad range of areas.

In a blog post earlier this year, Christian Brady, Dean of the Schreyer Honors College, wrote that, “Dairy is still a key industry in Pennsylvania, but our University and our graduates are very much in a global market.

For the last several years, 10 percent of our incoming students at University Park campus have been international students. Some of our strongest programs located within Agricultural Sciences are international in breadth and focus – and this is, of course, true across the University. The practical skills needed today include exposure and fluency in crossing cultures. Sometimes that is just across campus.”
In addition, Craig Weidemann, Penn State’s Vice President for Outreach and Vice Provost for Online Education, shared some thoughts with the Board on this topic in 2010 that still resonate today. He said, “Penn State Outreach serves a central role in the University’s land-grant mission to provide teaching, research and public service to the Commonwealth and beyond. Whether it’s helping adult learners transform their careers through continuing and online education, or leveraging Penn State research to confront national and international issues, like childhood obesity and environmental sustainability, outreach is serving and will continue to serve as the University’s vanguard in providing solutions.”

Our colleagues across higher education share Penn State’s keen engagement with the land-grant mission in a 21st century context.

Shane Burgess, Vice Provost and Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the University of Arizona, suggests that today’s land-grant mission is about “delivering new knowledge for a new economy, based in social, environmental and economic resilience.”

Today, he says, the emphasis is on developing a well-educated populace through access to higher education and having relevance and impact throughout the generation, sharing and applying new knowledge in ways that are locally relevant, but that can also have national and global impact.
Christine Geith, the Assistant Provost and Executive Director of MSUglobal at Michigan State since 2001, recently wrote that, “Land-grant universities share a core set of ideals. These include making high-quality education accessible, developing research and technological innovations that address the public good, and infusing contributions to solving the world’s grand challenges into the student experience.

“These ideals,” she writes, “are becoming even more important as the higher education landscape changes dramatically. As our industry becomes increasingly fixed on online delivery and innovative program design that meets short-term goals, making sure programming is also staying true to the land-grant mission is critical. Some institutions are setting up units, or have already, that help their institutions adopt innovations while staying true to their roots.”

**JONES – SLIDE 9 – “From Commitment to Impact”**

Christine’s and others’ expert thoughts on land-grant universities in the modern era are spot on – and I’m thrilled because our ongoing work and our forthcoming strategic plan align quite well with this evolved outlook and approach. Penn State’s Strategic Plan for 2016-2010, tentatively titled “From Commitment to Impact,” represents our blueprint for the future – articulating not only our institution’s mission, vision and values, but also its foundational principles, imperatives, and strategic priorities that will enable Penn State to continue to thrive. It also reveals how Penn State will continue to have positive impacts not only in this Commonwealth, but also throughout the United States and worldwide. Embedded throughout the plan are
references to the importance of our land-grant mission, and how our plan not only supports it, but evolves it to engender new, positive social impacts.

**JONES – SLIDE 10 – Five Thematic Priorities**

The plan highlights five thematic priorities — Transforming Education, Elevating the Arts and Humanities, Enhancing Health, Managing Resources, and Leveraging Cyberculture. Each represents a breadth and depth of expertise and interest across multiple Penn State units where the University is uniquely positioned, with strategic investment of resources, for profound and measurable impacts. The themes intersect unit plans and draw from the human capital, infrastructure, and programs they represent. They also leverage collective energy and resources to enable a previously unimaginable Penn State impact.

A brief look at the priorities reveals how the land-grant mission is integral to and interwoven through all five themes.

By “Transforming Education,” Penn State will be a leader in the evolution of and access to a comprehensive and useful higher education, encompassing topics such as climate change; food, water, and cyber security; sustainability; political instability; terrorism; displaced populations; and global cooperation.

By “Elevating the Arts and Humanities,” Penn State will be a leader in these areas and consider them core to its institutional mission, applying them, along with the sciences, as agents of change in solving complex global issues.
By “Enhancing Health,” Penn State will position itself as a leader in promoting the quality of life through holistic approaches to enhancing individual and population wellness. The centerpiece of this vision is recognition of the need to understand individuals in all their complexity and to leverage that knowledge to create innovative programs, policies, products, and practices for research, education, outreach, and patient care that will improve health and well-being.

By “Managing Resources,” we will lead in creating comprehensive solutions to the fundamental challenges of providing safe and abundant water, clean and accessible energy, and plentiful and nutritious food for future generations. This is a vital manifestation of the evolving land-grant mission that few could have envisioned 160 years ago.

By “Leveraging Cyberculture,” Penn State will prepare students for success in the digital age and use digital extension to foster economic prosperity and bolster community health across Pennsylvania and beyond. Our goal is to lead in defining how digital tools and capabilities reform the land-grant mission at a research-intensive university.

With our ambitious new strategic plan slated for release by year’s end, Penn State is at an exciting crossroads. It is well situated to maintain and even advance its position among the world’s top research universities.
In January, Penn State’s submitted to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education its self-study, titled “Living the Land-Grant Mission in a Global Context.” In it we reflected on our land-grant past and envisioned a strong land-grant-driven future. In June, Middle States responded to that self-study and other key areas of analysis and reaffirmed our accreditation.

At its core, as Middle States validated, our University has incredible depth, breadth, and diversity of talent, along with tremendous resolve and energy. With all key stakeholders working together, the elements are in place for the University to extend its reach and impact through teaching and learning, research, and service.

Continued hard work, creativity, and dedication – through Penn State Extension and many other impactful programs and initiatives – will enable Penn State to achieve greatness, living its land-grant mission as an extraordinary 21st century global university.

Thank you for your attention. I’d now like to invite Doug Cavener, Dean of the Eberly College of Science, to come to the podium to make some remarks. As you recall, the Board approved Doug’s appointment during its meeting at Penn State Beaver in July, but Doug was unable to be with us then. We are pleased to have him here today. Please welcome Doug.