

THE LAND-GRANT CONCEPT AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: A CONTEMPORARY VIEW

Parker V. Foster*

*The Land-Grant University has retained its Readiness to be of Service to People,
but has Changed its Emphasis in Vocational Curricula*

University of California, Los Angeles – Agriculture Teacher (on leave 1971-72) – San Diego City Schools

*Dr. Foster received his degree in March 1972 from the University of California, Los Angeles. During his study at UCLA he was sponsored as an EPDA Fellow under the Leadership Development Program. He is now Program Evaluator for Vocational Education, San Diego City Schools, 4100 Normal Street, San Diego, CA 92103.

In 1862 the passage of the Morrill Act, which offered the opportunity for the establishment of at least one Land-Grant university in each state, signaled a change for American higher education. Prior to this time the higher educational options were largely (although not exclusively) reserved for the more elite social classes and not for the so-called "industrial classes" as were specifically provided for in the Act. The higher education academic offerings had heretofore been almost completely confined to the classical arts and sciences-type courses. The Morrill Act committed the expanding nation to a mass higher education sponsored in public universities. It also was the first time that federal support was to be used for specific rather than general purposes.

PURSUIITS AND PROFESSIONS OF LIFE. The specific purpose provided for, that is of most interest to vocational educators, is the Acts' provision for the establishment of a college where "the leading object shall be . . . to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts . . . to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life." Spawned by this original legislation and later nurtured by the Hatch Act (agricultural research), the Smith-Lever Act (Agricultural extension), and the Smith-Hughes Act (vocational education) these universities ultimately developed into viable institutions with a unique philosophy of instruction and service all their own. Conceptually this philosophy was partially concerned with vocational education. There is some reason to believe that by 1922 the philosophy had flowered to a high degree. Is it still true today? By 1972 how are the vocational aspects of this Land-Grant philosophy reflected in curricular offerings?

In 1971, the research for a doctoral dissertation at the University of California, Los Angeles shed some light on the changing nature of vocationally-oriented instruction in the Land-Grant universities. Four

of the "separate" Land-Grant schools were visited. That is to say, they are separate from other public universities in their own states, and they were specifically established to take advantage of the provisions of the Morrill Act. In 1922 these universities were heavily oriented toward providing practical training for the "pursuits and professions" of life. This is not to imply that the liberal studies were neglected; they were in fact, particularly provided for in the original legislation.

CHANGING EMPHASIS. These universities in 1922 awarded practically no graduate degrees and they had about 10% of their students enrolled as "vocational," usually in one of the five or six two-year technical programs that were offered. By 1972 they were awarding 700 or 800 graduate degrees each, and were enrolling less than one percent of the students in the paucity of two-year curriculums remaining.

The agriculture and mechanic arts proved to be another area in which the relative emphasis has changed. In 1922 these two disciplines together provided 44% of the total undergraduate course offerings. In 1972 their share of the courses had dropped to 23%. In 1922 the Colleges of Agriculture claimed 22% of the campus students, while in 1972 only an average of 10% of the students were so enrolled. If this picture appears bleak, it is not really so. In actual numbers of students for instance, the Colleges of Agriculture are now, on the average, 326% as large as they were in 1922. They are, therefore, dynamic and growing. But this also would have to be compared with an overall campus growth of 763% in the same period of time. Liberal arts is the most rapidly expanding area which seems an outgrowth of the times. It is clear that occupationally-oriented instruction has definitely been placed in a position of less relative emphasis in the Land-Grant university.

In addition to emphasis it appears to have changed in one other important aspect, too. That is to say, in format or in curricular content. The course content has long been moving towards a research orientation rather than a "how-to-do" orientation.

If it is true that the Land-Grant university has changed its format and changed its emphasis on vocational education, does this mean the institution is abdicating its

duty to the citizens of the states? We believe the evidence says no. They are reaching out to meet the needs of their states, their nation, and even the world in other ways that are directly concerned with the needs of our maturing society.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES. Vocational education in each of the states is as important as always; even more important, and essentially an absolute necessity for success in today's world-of-work. The Land-Grant institution may have largely dropped this training in its classical sense. The community colleges, long a stronghold for such training in California, have now come to the fore in many of the states to take up the slack. Many of the respondents in the study cited the growth in the last less-than-ten years of the community colleges. They also were emphatic in their statements that the two-year school is not intended to duplicate the functions of any other institution, but rather to meet a need that is not being met and to work so as to complement senior institutions rather than compete with them.

In conclusion, then, it may be observed that a Land-Grant concept with a unique sense of public responsibility was developed. This concept, with heavy emphasis on training for the pursuits and professions of life was very apparent 50 years ago. It is just as apparent today if one wishes to look for it but many of its components have been altered to coincide with the move away from the agrarian economy. The vocational education aspects of the concept are now apparently being taken over by the two-year community college; which is no doubt an institution far better suited to deal with the "hands on" nature of successful instruction for careers in the sub-baccalaureate type of occupations.

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