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# 1890 INSTITUTIONS IN A CHANGING SOCIOECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Dewitt Jones and Alfred L. Parks

Since their inception, land grant universities have played a vital role in the growth and development of the U.S. economy. Indeed, the land grant model of providing access to and the benefits of higher education to the masses have been effective in raising the standard of living throughout the world. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the focus of the primary unit (the colleges of agriculture and home economics) of land grant universities must change if it is to remain relevant to society.

The focus of the land grant mission has been and continues to be that of increasing agricultural output. However, the original mission given to land grant universities appears to have had more to do with the structure of the economy at that period in U.S. history than with the philosophical mission advocated by the chief proponent of this system of education. In 1962 and 1890, a majority (over 50 percent) of the labor force was employed in production agriculture, which accounted for a significant share of the GNP. Thus, increasing farm output and in turn farm income meant improving the well-being of a majority of society. This situation no longer exists. Today, the farm population accounts for only 2 percent of the total population; 2.6 percent of the employed labor force works in farm occupations, 2.0 percent of the GNP comes directly from farming, and 55 percent of employed farm residents work primarily in nonfarm jobs (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1988). Hence, the relative unimportance of agriculture as a source of employment and income, the rural-urban shift in population, and the skill requirements of today's growth industries have rendered the original focus of the land grant mission obsolete. While this is the case for all land grant universities, it is perhaps even more so for 1890 land grant institutions.

In the succeeding sections of this paper an effort will be made to establish the role that 1890 institu-

tions can play in human resource development in a changing socioeconomic environment. The first section briefly describes the historical role that 1890 institutions have played in our society. The second section looks at the many changes that are taking place in our society that threaten the continued existence of the agricultural program at 1890 institutions. The third section will suggest changes that agricultural programs must make to remain viable. The fourth and final section summarizes implications for the future.

## CONTRIBUTION AND ROLE

The year 1990 marks the 100th anniversary of the passage of the College Aid Annual Appropriation Act, commonly referred to as the Land Grant Act of 1890 or the Second Morrill Act, that resulted in the designation or establishment of sixteen historically black public colleges and universities and one private black university as "1890 institutions." These institutions were to provide for black students in states in which they could not attend the 1862 land grant institution the same opportunities to receive higher education in agriculture and the mechanic arts, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, as their white student counterparts. By all accounts, 1890 institutions, along with the other historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), have been and continue to be the higher education institutions from which the majority of blacks receive their baccalaureate degrees. This statement is substantiated by fall 1987 enrollment figures at land grant universities reported by the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC). The data revealed that 1890 institutions accounted for 33.4 percent of minorities enrolled in agriculture programs at the baccalaureate level (Mugler *et al.*). At the doctoral level in agricultural fields, the proportion of blacks with

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baccalaureate degrees from HBCUs, which one can assume are primarily 1890 HBCUs, is even greater (47 percent) (O'Brien).

However, one must sound a "caveat" at this juncture. The same NASULGC report revealed that of the ten 1890 institutions that reported enrollment data, total enrollment in their agricultural programs was only 878 students. Six of these institutions reported enrollments of less than 100 students. With shrinking higher education funds, there will be a greater demand for accountability on how funds are used. Many of these programs could face mounting pressures to be discontinued if enrollment levels do not increase. In fact, the agricultural instruction program has been discontinued at several 1890 institutions; one institution has seen its college status with several departments reduced to department status with several program offerings, while others are continually asked to justify their instructional programs.

### CHANGING SOCIETY'S CONDITION

Articles that address the problems faced by and the new directions that land grant colleges of agriculture must pursue abound (Connor; Hushak; Lennon; McDowell; Rasussen and Hildreth; Schuh). The common theme in all of these articles is that changing societal conditions mandate that colleges of agriculture change their focus or they will cease to be relevant, and thus their continued existence will be in danger. Schuh, for example, argues that "The land grant universities have lost their way... land grant universities have found it difficult to relate to new and changed social conditions. For these institutions to be relevant to the problems of society, they need major changes in their programs." He goes on to point out that many of these colleges find themselves unable to change. However, the need and the call for change continue to mount.

The forces necessitating change in the mission focus of 1862 land grant universities' colleges of agriculture also apply to 1890 land grant universities' agricultural programs, perhaps even more so. While the traditional population base from which all land grant colleges of agriculture draw a major portion of their enrollment continues to shrink, the shrinkage for 1890 institutions is even greater. Recent population statistics bear this point out. In 1987, the black population constituted 12.2 percent of the total population but only 2.7 percent of the farm population. Estimates place the black farm population as almost nonexistent by the year 2000, if current trends continue (U.S. Department of Commerce). While the population in general has an unfavorable impression of agriculture as a career

choice, the impression held by blacks may be even more unfavorable. Moreover, the impression held about agriculture disciplines as majors is not helped by newspaper, popular magazine, and college placement handbook statements such as: "Employment opportunities in agricultural science for those with only a bachelor's degree are limited" (U.S. Department of Labor). Such sources also indicate that the starting salaries for graduates with a bachelor's degree in agricultural fields are among the lowest for college graduates (*Black Enterprise*; *State Times*; Tevis).

### PRESCRIPTION FOR CHANGE

If agricultural programs are to survive at 1890 institutions, faculty and administrators must make the necessary changes in their programs while there are opportunities to do so. First, the foremost change needed is a realization on the part of faculty, administrators, and others who have a vested concern and interest in the agricultural program that society's conditions have changed and continue to change from what they were 100, or even 30, years ago. The population from which we draw our students is no longer rural farms. The majority of the employment opportunities for our graduates are no longer in areas directly serving farmers, and the economic well-being of rural families is no longer dependent on increasing agricultural production. In other words, the land grant mission at 1890 institutions must be made more applicable to society's conditions of today and tomorrow.

Future growth in employment opportunities will be in the service sector, and women and minorities will account for a majority of the new entries into the labor force (U.S. Department of Commerce). As noted in a feature article on employment outlook in the February 1989 issue of *Black Enterprise*, "Blacks and others who comprise our nation's urban centers continue to be underexposed to technological skills development, as well as the basic workplace skills of reading, writing, and computation needed to compete for entry-level positions." We submit that if the agricultural program at 1890 institutions is to pursue its philosophical mission, then greater emphasis must be devoted to improving the plight of this growing segment of our population.

Second, undergraduate curricula must be revised so that they adequately prepare students for the job market they will face during their work lives. Studies on occupation trends project that today's college students will have to be retrained from four to seven times during their employment careers. Hence, their college education should prepare them for "lifelong learning" rather than for a specific job that exists

today (Gaines-Carter). Therefore, to prepare our students adequately to compete in the job market of the future will require changes in either the curriculum or its content to enhance communicative, analytical, and critical thinking skills. In addition, according to a study conducted for the University of Nevada-Reno College of Agriculture, agriculture majors will need more economics, business market analysis, sales and advertising, computer science, and business management courses to fill positions in the food and agriculture industry (Tevis). Tevis further reports that the study found that perhaps the most striking weakness of undergraduate agriculture curricula is that a majority of the degree requirements focus on technical skills. Agribusiness firms offer very few opportunities to students possessing technical production skills but who are lacking in interpersonal and communication skills. Some changes are being made at 1890 institutions in restructuring their curricula to achieve a better balance between liberal arts and technical course requirements (Lyons). One can only hope that the changes being made in the agriculture curricula are not "too little, too late" for these programs to survive to the year 2000 and beyond.

Finally, to remain viable and relevant, the agricultural programs at 1890 institutions will have to broaden the focus of their research and extension components to include all facets of rural development and revitalization as well as problems of the urban disadvantaged population. The teaching, research, and extension components of the agricul-

tural program must become more integrated to address these problems effectively. Also, the research and extension components of the agricultural program at 1890 institutions must be used to augment and strengthen the teaching element for survival of the total program.

## SUMMARY

The contributions that 1890 institutions have made to human resource development throughout the world is nothing less than noble. Under great adversity, these institutions have provided educational opportunities, and perhaps more importantly hope, to youths from disadvantaged backgrounds who otherwise would have been unable to receive a college education. However, the agricultural program at 1890 institutions, the program for which the land grant mission was established, is headed for extinction unless changes are made to regain relevance. The necessary changes must be initiated from within. Efforts must be expanded to dispel the myths about and to acquaint students with career opportunities in the food and agricultural sector. The mission of the program must move from a narrow focus on production agriculture to a comprehensive focus that includes human and community resource development. There is still time for administrators working with their faculties to ensure the survival of the agricultural program at 1890 institutions. However, this time must be spent wisely.

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