

**Report  
of  
Breakout Session A**

**Preparing ISU for the Twenty-First Century**

**April 30-May 1, 2004**

**Iowa State University**

by  
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**I. Charge to the Session**

- A. The charge to the Session was “How Should ISU be a Leading Land-Grant University”? The two sessions recognized that the charge posed two questions—
1. Should Iowa State University continue on a land-grant trajectory?
  2. If so, how could Iowa State University be a **leading** land-grant university?
- B. The group identified three distinguishing features of a land-grant university—
1. A land-grant university endeavors to keep tuition and fees as low as possible consistent with economic reality and the cost of offering a quality education, to assure that middle and lower income families can afford higher education;
  2. A land-grant university, with its strong research capability, focuses an appropriate part of its research capacity on real world problems of significance to its constituents;
  3. A land-grant university maintains the capacity to engage real world problems and to work with its constituents in seeking solutions to those problems.

**II. Continuing the land-grant tradition**

- A. Both groups were asked to identify reasons for continuing the land-grant tradition and reasons for abandoning the land-grant mission.
1. Reasons for remaining faithful to the land-grant tradition—

- a. Several mentioned the moral imperative of continuing to focus attention on the problems and the plight of middle and lower income members of society and to focus on the important problems of the era, particularly those involving public goods-type developments.
  - b. Maintaining a close relationship with citizens enhances the support the university enjoys, both financially and in terms of respect in society.
  - c. Although information on almost any subject is available in veritable torrents from the private sector (via the internet and otherwise), governmental agencies, friends and other sources, the land-grant university which maintains total objectivity provides the “gold standard” for evaluating alternative sources of information, be it weight loss compounds, rates of fertilization or the use of non-prescription drugs for animal health.
  - d. Iowa State University has a long and rich tradition as a land-grant university, perhaps the richest and certainly the longest tradition in the country. Many find it very difficult to envision Iowa State University embracing any other relationship with its various constituencies.
2. Reasons for considering jettisoning the land-grant tradition -
- a. One note of caution was voiced on what was characterized as cross-subsidization of the components of the university that did not engage in extension or outreach in favor of those with reduced teaching loads. It is clear that inequitable work loads sow dissent and resentment and are probably best handled by clear guidelines and sensitivity in the administration of those guidelines. The extent to which cross-subsidization occurs, if it does occur, is unclear.
  - b. A few are inclined to view the extension budget as a sum of money that could be used for research or teaching if the extension function were discontinued. It should be noted that those funds are not fungible and would likely be lost if the extension function were curtailed. Such is almost certainly the case with federal extension monies.

**III. Strong support for the land-grant mission is not an endorsement of the status quo, however**

- A. Both groups, while strongly supportive of continuing the long-standing land-grant tradition, have very definite suggestions for engagement, extension or outreach (the three terms are used herein almost interchangeably) to enhance the benefits to society
  - 1. The groups articulated a broad view of extension, to include every aspect of the university and to view every component of the institution as a potential part of the

process by which knowledge is extended. Indeed, the groups saw no reason to exclude any discipline or subdiscipline in the extension or outreach function.

Such a broad view, coupled with the point discussed below that extension should not be limited to activities and programs in Iowa but should be international in scope opens the extension function to a much broader segment of departments and faculty than has traditionally been the case on this campus.

2. The groups voiced an approach of focusing on the needs of local communities, in a partnership fashion with constituents and other providers of knowledge, including high schools, community colleges, private institutions and private sector firms, so long as the university as the regenerative force in society maintains unquestioned objectivity.
  3. The groups view the research-extension relationship as a continuum or seamless web with, ideally, one individual spanning the entire spectrum or a research-extension team with effective working relationships. The groups warn, however, that the extension function should not be limited to research generated by the institution but rather should embrace knowledge wherever it may originate.
- B. The groups were appropriately concerned that extension or engagement be encouraged with incentives, both monetary and in terms of administrative approbation, or the full potential will not be reached.
1. The view was voiced, with substantial support in the group, that many factors have tended to elevate research above teaching and extension as functions of the land-grant university. Prominent among the contributing factors is the cacophony of pronouncements that a particular institution was striving to be or become the number one land-grant university in the country. Five institutions, as of 2000, stated in their mission statements that part of their mission was to become the premier land grant university in the United States. The problem with that is that the drive to become number one has resorted to the only national ranking available which emphasizes published research in the leading disciplinary journals. There is no operational national ranking for teaching or extension. That tends to tilt the hiring process and the promotion and tenure granting process as well as the annual evaluation for adjustment in compensation. The reward system tends to reflect institutional priorities. If only research output counts, that is what individuals under review will emphasize. It is critically important that – (1) models of excellence be developed to provide an objective evaluation with co-equal weight for all three functions– research, teaching and extension; (2) administrative monitoring of the hiring process be heightened to assure fair and balanced reviews of candidates for positions in light of the function or functions for which the individual is to be hired.
  2. As one participant suggested, involvement in the real world whether through extension or engagement in the local community, helps new hires “break the surly

bonds of the department” and develop a sense of identification with the community in which they live and to take advantage of the opportunity to apply their training with real world application. The view was voiced that such an approach could well reduce the loss of quality hires after three to five years as they seek proverbially greener pastures.

C. The geographic dimension –

1. The groups believe that the traditional focus by land-grant universities on the state only is not in keeping with reality –
  - a. The reality is that states can no longer afford a full range of extension services in that jurisdiction;
  - b. Many of the problems encountered in the extension or outreach function are similar if not identical across state lines;
  - c. The situation cries out for the development of a “common market” of knowledge among a group of states with similar problems with each state focusing on areas of its greatest strength. That suggests the formation of regional (or even national) extension or outreach centers to serve two or more states. In 2002, the United States Senate approved a provision that would have required 25 percent of extension resources to be devoted to regional activity. That provision did not survive the conference committee for the legislation but the message is clear. Iowa State University would be well advised to move aggressively to identify the area of greatest strength and then to seek federal funding for as many of the identified areas as possible. This is an opportunity for Iowa State to play a leadership role on a regional or even national level in areas where such a role is warranted by the strength of the program.
  - d. The scope of outreach activity is constrained to a degree by source of funding, of course, but relates also to important questions of value to society
  - e. The groups do not believe that the geographic dimension should be limited to the United States. Part of the current frontier for extending knowledge is outside this country. Indeed, the long-term value to the human family of sharing knowledge throughout the world on Third World economic development, dealing with food safety issues, addressing food security, coming to grips with common environmental and ecological problems, focusing on troubling trade issues and grappling with other pressing concerns including global disharmony, is incalculable and may well be the most productive use of society’s scarce resources.
2. Taking a very broad view geographically of the world’s problems is complementary with the importance of building the “brand value” of Iowa State

University in what promises to be a highly competitive world for institutions of higher education—

- a. A strong and consistent presence in developing countries is a valuable asset in recruiting the best and the brightest in the decades to come from those countries.
  - b. In a world where virtually all services (including educational services) can be traded and “outsourced” to areas of lower cost, heavy emphasis should be placed on quality of teaching, students should be broadly educated to adjust to successive job shifts and “brand identification” will be of considerable importance.
3. It should be recognized that some of the most prominent scholars in the country burnished their already acknowledged reputations with work abroad. In Economics, Rudy Dornbusch of MIT, Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia (and for a many years a member of the Harvard faculty) and Joseph Stiglitz of Columbia all have achieved renown in their extension or outreach activities. It should also be noted that scholars working in the real world also gain intellectually in the process and often become better teachers and researchers.

#### **IV. To sum up**

Iowa State University is confronted with a valuable opportunity to address highly significant problems in the real world, contribute to the enhanced welfare of the human family, improve its standing in the national and international communities and increase support among critical funding constituencies by mounting an effective and comprehensive extension or outreach program. Many land-grant universities are moving toward abandonment of that function, making it possible for Iowa State University to position itself to better serve the human family. Iowa State University should seek to become a leading research university, an institution where quality of teaching matters and, at the same time, be *extending knowledge to the world.*