

Strategic Plan Steering Committee – Land-Grant Focused Inquiry Group

Develop recommendations on how to frame and articulate the land-grant history and mission of Michigan State University within the Strategic Plan document and beyond

Consider the contested meanings of MSU as a “pioneering land-grant university”

There seems to be a lack of common understanding about what it means to be a land-grant university in the MSU community. Many at MSU use the term colloquially, as a catchphrase, to describe the university’s commitment to “discovery with a purpose,” outreach, access and community engagement.

Recommendations

- Discontinue using “pioneering” or “pioneer” in combination with “land-grant” to describe MSU. The combination of terms particularly invokes images and notions of colonialism.
- Be restrained with use of the term “land grant” and avoid overusing the term.
- Critically unpack the historical and contemporary multiple meanings of “land grant,” making distinctions between historical land-grant legislation (and the university historical identity) and the university’s twenty-first century land-grant mission and future trajectory.
- Work within the state and nationally in consultation with Indigenous communities to “come to grips” with the usage of the term “land-grant” and further define and refine its usage in the future.
- Highlight the values of what is often implicitly conceived as “land-grant” (i.e., “highly engaged,” “public service university,” “community engaged,” “community-partnered mission,” “public access,” “providing opportunity for all Michiganders to benefit from access to MSU programs and services,” supportive of the “public good” or “common good,” etc.)

Adopt a land acknowledgement

A land acknowledgement for use across the university is currently being conceptualized and developed at MSU under the guidance of VP and Chief Diversity Officer Jabbar Bennett. Preliminary discussions have taken place and will continue over the summer with a working group. Central to this concept will be to acknowledge the land we inhabit, recognize the impacts that land-grant policies have had on Indigenous communities and to establish and nurture relationships with Native American and Indigenous peoples in the MSU community and Michigan.

Recommendations

- Establish a university task force comprising faculty, staff and graduate students with expertise in this area and working in partnership with EAGLE and Native American

communities to develop a land acknowledgement. “The voices of the community and tribal leadership should be at the forefront” of these partnerships”—see *Reciprocal Research: A Guidebook to Centering Community in Partnerships with Indigenous Nations* (2021).

- Acknowledge that land-grant universities are the byproducts of settler colonialism and “a state-sponsored system of Native dispossession.”
- Document and communicate the impact that land-grant legislation had and continues to have on Native American and Indigenous peoples.
- Recognize that the land acknowledgement is the first step in actions that would reflect an ongoing and unwavering commitment (i.e., “A land acknowledgment without action is just a statement”).

Increase awareness about MSU’s history and legacy as a land-grant institution through sustained education efforts and infusion in the curriculum, research and production of knowledge

Increase awareness and understanding of MSU’s history as a land-grant institution with full context and an appreciation for the positive and negative dimensions of that history. Ensure the university’s leadership and spokespersons exemplify the responsibilities that come with this awareness, and reflect it in the university’s curriculum, research, service and outreach.

Recommendations

- Develop communications that educate the MSU community about the relationship between the history of the the land-grant university system and the dispossession of Native Americans’ land.
- Counsel administrators about how to appropriately use the term “land grant” when describing the history of MSU to community members and visitors.
- Provide guidance to administrators and communicators to move away from labeling MSU the “pioneer” or a “pioneering” land-grant university.
- Increase educational efforts about the university’s land-grant origins and openly acknowledge the ways in which this connects us to acts of violence and oppression against Native Americans (i.e., a reconciliation of the past.)
- Increase Native American and Indigenous ways of knowing, culture, histories and experiences in the university’s curriculum.
- Promote MSU scholars’ research on Native American and Indigenous issues.

Enrich Michigan State University with a stronger Indigenous presence

- Collaborate with Michigan’s Native American and Indigenous communities to create physical spaces on campus where recognition of Indigenous peoples who inhabited campus could regularly occur (i.e., a memorial or designated physical space where people could congregate and events could be held; interactive maps).

Collaboration with Native American and Indigenous Communities

MSU should collaborate and partner with communities who were historically impacted by land-grant policies. Native American and Indigenous voices “should be at the forefront.”

Recommendations

- Use the Poitra, C., Kolonich, A., Mitchell A. E., Proctor, E., Baier, A. & LaPensée, E. (2021) *Reciprocal Research: A Guidebook to Centering Community in Partnerships with Indigenous Nations* for planning and reflecting upon partnerships with Native American and Indigenous communities.
- Conduct an inventory of the university’s collaborations with Native and Indigenous communities.
- Strengthen the relationships/partnerships with the Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College, Bay Mills Community College and Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College.
- Create intentional partnerships and ongoing collaborations.
- Provide culturally supportive services for Native American and Indigenous students, faculty, and staff.
- Explore expansion of the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver (MITW), including covering room and board, and consider the development of a MSU Tuition Reciprocity policy that allows out-of-state members of federally recognized tribes and Canadian First Nations to enroll at the in-state tuition rates.