

A proposed Land Grant Institute at the University of New Mexico: progress report

The Land Grant Studies Program (LGSP) and the New Mexico Land Grant Council (Council) have been in conversations since last summer with land grant-*merced* leaders and the staff of the Office of the Vice President for Research at the University of New Mexico to formally establish a Land Grant Institute that would house both the LGSP and the Council and would provide a stronger administrative framework within UNM to serve community land grants and to support the University's mission of public service and research as these relate to New Mexico's historic land grant communities. In July the Advisory Committee of the LGSP met and approved a plan to initiate such a proposal. In October the Council held a Zoom workshop to discuss the feasibility of this idea and voted to support it in principle. The next steps include conversations with the University administration and the Faculty Senate, to arrive at a final approval for the establishment of the Institute as a University-sponsored activity.

This report seeks to provide the Interim Committee some background on this effort, explain why this is a desirable end, and request that the Interim Committee send a letter to the Office of the Vice President for Research that stresses both the importance of the State's and the University's support for community land grants-*mercedes* and the significance of raising the profile of this effort by acknowledging the work of the LGSP and the Council through the recognition of a Land Grant Institute.

Background on the existing arrangements with the University of New Mexico

The Interim Committee is intimately familiar with the work and operations of both the Council and the LGSP, and this brief report will not go over those activities in any detail. But it may be useful for the members of the Committee to be reminded of the institutional arrangements that both units have, as well as their history with UNM. The LGSP is a Research and Public Service Program funded by the Legislature and housed at UNM since 2008. It conducts historical and policy research and works closely with the Council, established in 2009 remains administratively attached to DFA though it moved to UNM so that it could share staff and resources with the Land Grant Studies Program. The two units share the goal of advancing the community development of land grants and their activities are coordinated and mutually reinforcing. In a sense there has been an informal Land Grant Institute with the collaboration of the University program and the state agency for several years now.

What establishing an institute signifies—and what it does not

The principle focus of the Council is technical assistance to land grants-*mercedes* organized as units of government. The principal focus of the LGSP is research and public service, including outreach to the University community and the broader public outside of land grants. The Council and the LGSP have initiated youth program activities, some of these

funded by a local foundation. Establishing an institute would allow these different initiatives and programs to operate under a single administrative unit as far as the University is concerned and, as an interdisciplinary category III center, allow it to work more effectively with other units and departments on the UNM campus. The need for such an institute has been especially made evident as the Council and the Program have collaborated with the UNM Law School to organize continuing legal education credit programs for attorneys, law students, and judges on land grant law. In addition the Council works closely with the UNM Law School Natural Resources and Environmental Law Clinic in order to connect individual land grants-*mercedes* with legal services provided by the clinic. As an Institute this unit would be better positioned to develop joint projects with the Departments of Community and Regional Planning, History, and Chicana and Chicano Studies. Other possibilities still to be explored include the Departments of Geography and Environmental Studies and American Studies and the School of Public Administration.

A category III center which is the status sought in establishing a Land Grant Institute provides the combined units of LGSP and the Council with the opportunity to seek funding as an interdisciplinary research center within UNM, synergistic opportunities for collaboration with the departments previously mentioned, and a higher profile that would enhance opportunities for office space and other forms of University support. It also makes a statement about the University's long-term commitment to be engaged with the rural communities that constitute the state's land grants. And it adds an institutional structure and permanence to research and public service relating to these important historic communities.

What it does not signify, at the present time, is an expansion in the number of staff or other resources. This report to the Interim Committee is not a request for legislation or resources. But by indicating its support for the concept, this committee helps improve the position of the Council and the LGSP, through an administrative umbrella called a Land Grant Institute, to obtain resources other than from the State to advance the overall mission of land grants.

Next steps

Establishing a new category III center at UNM is an internal university process which will entail multi-step reviews within the Office of the Vice President Research, which has already indicated its preliminary support in principle, to higher levels within the administration and the Faculty Senate. We expect the process may take a year and we will keep this committee posted on its progress.