

## Land-Grant Universities

**1.** The first building on the Nevada campus was Morrill Hall, named for Justin Smith Morrill, the congressman (later senator) from Vermont who was responsible for passage of the Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862. This provided early federal funding for the University of Nevada and greatly impacted the development of the University.

**2.** Lincoln Hall, along with Manzanita Hall, is the oldest continuously operating residence hall in the western United States, and is named after the signer of the Morrill Act, Abraham Lincoln. The first land-grant bill was introduced by Morrill in 1857 and vetoed by President James Buchanan. The movement for agricultural colleges developed in Illinois and Lincoln gained respect for it there. Note the timing of the bill, 1862, and that military tactics were added as a subject area at a time of increased need for military training.

**3.** Land-grant institutions were founded on two governing principles: equality of opportunity and utility of knowledge. Before the land grants, colleges were elite in terms of selectivity and stressed subjects like Latin, logics and classical studies. There was no need for the “common folks” to attend college and certainly agriculture and engineering were not considered suitable subjects for college study.

**4.** The expectation for the federal endowment was explicit. . . at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts . . . The “mechanic arts” was engineering. Many colleges originally included A&M in their names to reflect this mission (some still do, Texas A&M is an example).

**5.** The original funding under the Morrill Act was via a land grant of 30,000 acres of federal land for each senator and congressman in the state. This is the origin of the term “land-grant institution.” Unfortunately the land grant did not amount to a vast sum for Nevada as land prices were not great and the state had but one congressman.



*Morrill Hall ca. 1890*

Photo provided by University of Nevada, Reno Archives

**6.** Today there is at least one land-grant institution in each state, territory, and the District of Columbia. Usually there was one single institution created under the 1862 Act. Some were founded as land-grant institutions (Kansas State University was the first of this type). Some were established from existing institutions (Iowa State University and the University of Nevada, Reno are examples). Many of the major public “flagship” universities are land-grants (the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Penn State are examples).

**7.** There was a second Morrill Act in 1890 that provided additional endowments to land-grant institutions, but only those that did not make a distinction of race in admissions. However, the state was eligible for funds if separate institutions existed for black students. The then-segregated Southern states established “1890 land-grants” that became some of the best known “historically black universities” in the South (Tennessee State University and the University of Maryland-Eastern Shore are examples). Later, a group of Native American tribal colleges became the “1994 land grants.” These are located mainly in the Western states.

**8.** The Hatch Act of 1887 was an extension of the Morrill Act that established a network of agricultural experiment stations at the land-grant institutions. The McIntire-Stennis Act of

1962 added forestry to the experiment station research agenda. Original funding was via land grants with annual funding based on a formula using the number of small farms in the state. The goal was to strengthen agricultural and forestry production through research. This is why the Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station exists.

**9.** The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 created a cooperative extension service associated with each land-grant institution. The goal was to extend University research results directly to farmer’s fields. That is why the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension has 19 offices scattered across the state as the “college that puts University research to work.”

**10.** Since land grants have experiment stations, they tend to have significant lands scattered around the state used for agricultural and forestry research. Nevada is no exception. It has five field stations and eight field laboratory sites. An example is the Gund Research Ranch located near Austin. The ranch has more than 10,000 acres with grazing rights on adjacent lands and is used for research like the impact of commercial livestock production and wildlife management on private-public rangelands.

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