Advancing as a global land-grant meeting

Monday, October 5, 2015

Participants: Barrett, Knox, DePauw, Harder, Hart, Hopkins, Marathe, Mostaghimi, Stephens, Venable, Walters, Zvonkovic

Meeting Summary

We started by discussing the potential for developing case scenarios that the group could collectively map out, reviewing several put forward by Paul. Case scenarios, sometimes called vignettes, pose a hypothetical environment or situation that allows the group to produce recommendations that can help articulate broader priorities and demonstrate how Virginia Tech needs to be malleable to circumstantial shifts. Some of the ideas that flowed out of this discussion were: With one foot in NCR and one in Blacksburg, can the university “manifest trans-urban thinking?” How do we harness assets and scale them out? Karen also encouraged us to think about what the future of a global university look like from 30k feet, including considering types of global universities suggested by graduate students [document is attached].

Second, a thread of our discussion asked: could VT create a globally-oriented experiment station? Bill suggested that Virginia Tech’s local ecosystem could allow the university to become a leader in environmental research and could encourage global universities to partner with VT because of our distinctive/attractive natural setting. Someone later called this the living labs idea, and Chris mentioned that Virginia Tech has an obvious role to play in Appalachia. Although urbanization is driving a lot of research and broader higher education trends, I challenge the group to think about how Virginia Tech might exploit its rural setting, as well as the natural diversity of Virginia.

Third, we talked about partnerships. Could Virginia setup a UC system (a la Kerr)? Could we partner with UVA for languages? How could we attract collaborations at the university level? Chris mentioned “how do we earn the right to be asked” to participate in collaborations? We also discussed the potential of building on the extension/experiment station format outside of the field of agriculture.

We then transitioned into a conversation about the need to un-bundle education. There was some consensus that “universities get in the way of where students want to go.” Rob brought up the need “break the university” and Karen mentioned her desire to break up the furniture. Some of the ideas that came up: Could we find disciplines that are “connected through problems?” Could undergraduate education become more open in its disciplinary focus? Could we break up disciplinary walls in faculty? [Karen has shared a link to her blog which addresses π-shaped learning. This is contrasted by the universities existing emphasis on t-shaped learning.]

Committee members might think about how these models, or a complete lack of degree structure, could contribute to producing global students, as well as how these plans might appeal/discourage international students.

We (indirectly) talked about Virginia Tech’s land grant status in some pretty disparate ways. People said:

- We could abandon the land grant if it got in the way of excellence.
- The global land-grant requires us to think about exchange for teaching, students, research and curriculum.
- Is the land-grant still hyper-focused on agriculture, engineering and military?
• Land-grant really boils down to teaching, research and engagement.
• Virginia Tech has been discussing the global aspect of the land-grant for a long time but never truly capitalized on it.
• What is the next logical step in the land-grant tradition?

James reported that in a meeting with John Dooley this past week they discussed that in many ways the land-grant focus on agriculture, engineering and military sciences originated because of the demands of that time and place. Instead of these fields, he encouraged me to focus on the Morrill Act’s motivating purpose: “to create and disseminate knowledge to enable people.” If we answer that call, with a version that is scaled to a global and interconnected world, we will have arrived at a strong working definition of a global land-grant.

Assignments

Everyone needs to write a case scenario (around 300 words) that poses a hypothetical similar to those discussed in Monday’s meeting. Case studies can be a useful way to organize our thinking about the future. As a starter, Dr. Knox has shared an example of one scenario, but please do not let this influence the content or style of your vignette:

A series of natural disasters and environmental conflicts in the United States, all linked with long-term climate and environmental change, has prompted a special presidential decree of an Indefinite State of National Emergency. As part of the federal response a small number of universities are granted ‘global land-grant’ status, with the responsibility of emphasizing teaching and research in climate change, water resource issues, urban and regional resilience, disaster risk management and associated data analytics. Virginia Tech is one of them.

Bill has already submitted the attached scenario which may provide a model for those of you working on other scenarios. Paul’s are attached as well (shared previously at meeting on 10/5).

Rob and Paul are currently working on a summary of what the world will look like in 30 years. We will distribute this early next week.

Please send your case scenario to James Harder by Thursday, October 22nd (jharder@vt.edu). We will distribute the scenarios to the group in order for you to review in advance of our next meeting on October 26th.

Next Meetings

Monday, October 26, 1-3pm at VBI

• Discuss scenarios and emerging themes
• Small groups will leave the meeting with one or two scenarios to refine and identify barriers/boundaries
• Post some ideas/hypotheticals to website for public comment

Wednesday, November 11, 10am-12noon at VBI

• Anoint scenarios
• Discuss barriers
• Provide feedback on characteristics of a global land-grant (James and Kate will draft)
• Review public comment

Attachments
• The global university: Variations on a theme (provided by Karen DePauw)
• Scenario examples (from Bill Hopkins and Paul Knox)
• Documents are also available on SharePoint
The meeting started by articulating the committee’s goals for the next two meetings. Paul summarized these to include President Sands’ three objectives for the committee at the Beyond Boundaries kickoff event:

1. Define the attributes and characteristics of a global land-grant university. In advance of our next meeting a working definition of a GLG will be written by James/Kate and provided to the group for comment.
2. Write several scenarios of the future that speak to the possibilities and constraints of the current university. This was our primary goal in meeting 2.
3. Consider how the university might become more flexible and prepare to meet the challenges of 2047. This will be the primary goal of our next meeting.

Discussion of committee members’ scenarios led to a discussion about the elements that need to be included in the scenarios we develop (under (2) above). It was concluded that each case should address, as far as possible:

- reduced state funding
- technology
- environmental conflict and pressure
- partnerships
- complex problems - water, food, energy
- demography
- security and resilience
- black swan - events we can’t predict; disruptions either positive or negative
- politics; increased regulatory requirements

Each of these elements are believed to be “given” future influences on the university. The committee proceeded to select three scenarios for breakout discussions and went into smaller group discussions for 30 minutes. Each group then reported back to the larger group and revised their scenario to incorporate new elements.

The first two groups’ case scenarios are attached. The third breakout group – centered on Rob’s disaster scenario – has been summarized as tensions that underpin all of the case scenarios. Those who were unable to attend on Oct 26 are encouraged to provide their feedback and recommendations about the scenarios and tensions.

The next meeting will take place on Nov. 11 at 10am in VBI Room 225. Before this meeting, each committee member is encouraged to review the attached scenarios and address the following questions:

1. What are Virginia Tech’s strengths in response to this scenario?
2. What threats could thwart Virginia Tech’s success in the scenario?
3. Is anything missing from the scenario? Alternative hypotheticals?
4. What opportunities and boundaries can Virginia Tech exploit in response to the scenario?
5. Is there are a model or tool that could help Virginia Tech address this scenario?

We have put the scenarios in a Google Doc that can be edited by all of the members of the group. Please select a distinctive color and use your initials as you add comments.
3rd Meeting Summary
Global Land-Grant Committee
November 11, 2015

The meeting focused on finding a way to fuse the three scenarios into a practical recommendation. The framework that emerged would superimpose Bill’s Global Land Grant Observatory onto Virginia Tech’s existing extension system. This would encourage cooperation across land-grant universities (and other partners) as a way to bolster their collective competitiveness. The discussion was led by Chris Barrett and drew from the varying perspectives of the group to identify opportunities and threats to the framework.

Chris volunteered to prepare two paragraphs that would serve as the foundation of the idea, which James and Kate have finalized and distributed (see attachment). Group members, especially those that were unable to attend, are encouraged to provide feedback. The group also decided that an additional meeting would be necessary to (a) finalize the recommendation, (b) review the global land-grant definition, and (c) to sort out any additional business. Details of the fourth meeting are forthcoming (but will likely take place in January).

Next Steps
- Workshop the functionally of the framework. Does this portray what the committee discussed?
- How do we make this design better? Do you see opportunities in your field that would benefit from a structure like this?
- Suggest commonwealth-wide, multi-land grant, non-land grant and non US problems and programs that would fit into the organization. This may take the form of useful scenario-based suggestions of important problems for the global land-grant university to confront and address and perhaps to solve.

Please send any feedback or ideas that you have to James. Members of the committee are also encouraged to review and provide feedback for the Global Land-Grant definition.
Attendees: Barrett, DePauw, Gonzalez-Rocha, Harder, Hart, Jones, Keeney, Knox, Stephens, Venable, and Zvonkovic

The bulk of the meeting was devoted to refining and revising the LGENeration framework in advance of its distribution to the Steering Committee. The current version of the LGENeration framework is included on p. 2. The committee, especially members who missed the meeting, are encouraged to submit edits and/or recommendations (please send these to jharder@vt.edu).

A large portion our discussion focused how we could present LGENeration, and our broader work, to the Steering Committee. For example, Chris felt that it was important to convey the four options we considered (and/or rejected) for globalizing:

1. External Partnerships – project the university outward to new geographic locations
2. Outreach/Capacity – creates partners that come to work with the university in Blacksburg
3. Global Campus – build campuses that create university assets abroad
4. Problem-Based – partnerships and organization follow the form of problems that can be fitted to specifics but aren’t necessarily geographic or permanent

The LGENeration idea recommends the problem-based option because it is realistic about the university’s financial position, capacity to compete for research dollars, and the need to identify partners with similar needs and functions (e.g. land-grants).

We also wanted to find ways to make LGENeration more appealing to external partners. For example, land-grants and other similar institutions are looking for a reason not to be ignored and would like to partner with Virginia Tech to increase collective capacity. The framework also gives a replicable structure to partnerships, which helps appeal to private-sector funders and other institutions since LGENeration would become a proven, consistent formula over time.

We then discussed the need for the LGENeration framework to include an “ethics statement.” This would outline the basic language of how LGENeration would: (a) maintain an environment of free and open thought; (b) remain an honest broker that stays above competitive forces, (c) ensure that faculty have a voice in LGENeration’s management, and (d) set out a structure for navigating conflicts of interest and proprietary issues. Anyone who missed the meeting is encouraged to think about what additional ideas might be included in the ethics statement.

Next, the committee discussed the global land-grant definition for Virginia Tech. After the holiday break James will: (a) make revisions to the definition that incorporate Virginia Tech specific attributes, (b) workshop the definition with people recommended by committee members (Peter Wallenstein), and (c) draft a final version that will be sent to the committee for review.

Thank you each for the hard work that you’ve given to the Beyond Boundaries project this fall. We have created several tools and ideas that will help the Steering Committee make informed decisions this spring. These products are a result of the high-quality discussions and creative thinking that our members and co-chairs fostered throughout our meetings. Thanks and Happy Holidays.
Virginia Tech would lead the organization of a distributed research and extension network that will co-evolve alongside the world’s complex problems. The Land Grant Extension Network (LGENeration) capitalizes on the dispersed nature and existing infrastructure of the national land-grant system to enhance teaching, research and engagement in new ways. It relies on institutions’ distinctive academic and geographic strengths and as such, is adaptable over time as new relevant topics emerge and institutional capacities evolve. The LGENeration is based on the rational that it will provide a competitive advantage to participating institutions that increases their collective leverage to gain access to research dollars, partnerships, as well as solving complex global issues.

**Global and Local:** LGENeration is setup to produce research, teaching, and outreach that contribute to the good of the Commonwealth. Most of the world’s complex problems are issues faced by Virginia. LGENeration helps Virginia Tech engage with other high-performing institutions to increase Virginia’s access to cutting-edge research and solutions. Equally, offering Virginia (e.g. extension network, distinctive eco-system) as a laboratory to the world allows expert researchers and resources to flow into the Commonwealth and solve complex problems on Virginian soil.

**Scalable and Adaptive:** Projects existing within LGENeration would be discrete, transient experiments that could be scaled depending on specific demands of the problem being engaged. Iterations of LGENeration could have a single partner or a wide-ranging coalition of institutions from various sectors. Time and size of LGENeration projects could be scaled to the context/circumstances of the specific issue and would typically dissolve upon completion. The model relies on institutions’ particular academic and geographic strengths and as such, is adaptable over time as new relevant topics emerge. One of the benefits of the LGENeration framework is that it circumvents the monolithic, traditional university.

**Attractive to talent:** LGENeration institutions would have open-disciplinary focus structured to draw faculty, students and researchers from across Virginia Tech, as well as visiting professors, researchers and students from collaborating institutions. The model allows for mobility for faculty and students (cf the Erasmus Programme).

**Partnering formula:** The original LGENeration idea was designed to provide a framework for partners in other land-grant universities to utilize their distinct advantages (e.g. extension system, common specializations, deeply rooted engagement) as a means for creating a robust, collective capacity. However, this original intent is too narrow. LGENeration’s success hinges on incorporating a broad range of international and domestic institutions that could be drawn from higher-education, K-12 education, the public sector, private industry, think tanks, research labs, NGOs, and NPOs. An intentional aspect of the LGENeration system is the opportunity to facilitate coordination/collaboration across a broad set of actors. Addressing complex global issues requires a diverse set of skills (and resources), and creating temporary strategic groupings around problems is an attractive model to Virginia Tech and potential participants. The initial rollout of LGENeration would require a high-quality “first partnership” that demonstrates how the collaboration would function and how the partnership advances each institution and opportunities for learning.

**Unique advantage:** Universities from outside LGENeration system would struggle to match the capacity of collaborating institutions. For example, a partnership of several land-grant universities would have a competitive advantage in solving health and environmental issues due to their existing networks of engagement, extension and outreach in communities.

**Student/Faculty Experience:** LGENeration has the opportunity to support broader initiatives like increasing student and faculty portability between member institutions. This could take the form of course transfer agreements, access to international internship opportunities, and faculty research collaborations.
5th Meeting Summary
Global Land-Grant Committee
February 9, 2016

Attendees
Staff: Harder, Hundley, Keeney, and Ridinger

Paul shared that we have an aggressive timeline based on the meeting with the co-chairs at the end of January and today’s meeting is intended to finalize what we want to put forward to the other groups. All work will need to be in place by the end of the semester.

In response to the question “what happens to document” i.e. next steps, Kate explained that the work of sub-committees will be completed by the end of February and how this work will be used going forward.

James walked through the visioning document. The term modern land-grant and the 21st century was discussed briefly to ensure it is the right terminology or if other words such as modern, future, forward-looking should be considered. The global land-grant terminology may suggest a vulnerability since everyone claims to be “global” and possibly it has a domestic feel. We need to be clear that our natural partners are other universities in other countries.

Chris suggested that we add a sentence or two when we introduce the Hatch Act to indicate we still serve the Commonwealth while we are more connected to the world and that issues of today are global...informationally, economically, infectious disease, immigration are all highly connected to the global landscape. One or more specific examples could be included.

It was suggested that something be added about creating empathy focused students which includes ethics and cultural differences. Characteristics of a “modern land-grant” would be inclusive, integrated and dynamic.

Tracy shared that the university is talking about the VT-shaped student which is learning and adding Ut Prosim. She gave some general background on their discussion which includes X+T = destination areas.

Some concern was raised that the document is science and technology heavy and that a statement that includes other areas of the university. We should build upon strengths of the university in the arts humanities, etc.

Chris talked about the graphic he provided and pointed out that destination areas are point A, not point B. Beyond Boundaries would be point B. We have to fit into what the university is doing. The process will run into headwinds in many forms. First, we have to acknowledge existing structures and functions. Like extension, for example and living labs, departments, schools, the process of certification of knowledge (i.e. history degree.) We don’t have the presence we need and we must move past that and find a place for us to do meaningful research in a crowded field. We must define and possibly re-brand ourselves to compete for existing and new resources. We don’t have the presence that we need and we must move past that and re-brand ourselves. As long as we are changing, we should change with the future and not try to be like another institution.
We must acknowledge the existing structure and establish where we have excellence which can help take us forward—destination areas. There is not a clear path to point B.

- Academia “factors” shows knowledge of the world by disciplines, schools and departments and these disciplines have boundaries (ex. Math is different from Economics, etc.)
- The university mission includes generational transfer of disciplinary knowledge and certification which is operationalized by 101, 201, 301, etc. structure of credentialing in a discipline.
- Within disciplines, there are envelopes such as an institute. When these overlap, they form interdisciplinary relations in a given problem and most acknowledge this cross over and how we factor into the world.
- Disciplinary spreading works on a natural problem. There is an overlap and these are the destination areas where the structure of the university and the real world problem are factored into the problem.
- The envelopes are stretched beyond the disciplines to the problems themselves. We need to get beyond boundaries into the natural goal. We all have to work on expanding our envelopes. Collaborations with others are important both within the university and outside the university.
- Rather than bring the problem into the institution, we situate onto the problem. Take the factors that have reasons (institutional process) and then we go beyond boundaries. A “living laboratory” of distributed institutions is formed.
- A more formal structuring process may be needed to make this happen. Acknowledge existing structure and its value. Create sustainable model for model transfer and creation. We are uniquely qualified to deliver.
- The individual(s) inside the collective area could be called a living college or network.
- A SWOT style analysis to find weaknesses and strengths to solve a problem would be beneficial.

Another issue raised was whether the group’s visioning document was skewed. Who is “underserved” is not clear and needs to include those not having access to wealth and power...those who are marginalized and left out. It is a social responsibility to empower people through knowledge and this should be acknowledged in the document.

It was again acknowledged that headwinds will form when people don’t understand how this fits with the approach to their careers and a cultural change within the university will be needed to encourage working across areas. However, that should take care of itself. We need to remember this is a 30 year process.

Paul wrapped up the discussion by reminding folks that A is where we are now; B is the work of the destination areas; and C is the beyond boundaries. We need a very different model to get to where we are talking about.