

# Towards a Pluriversal Land-Grant

## Reconciling the Land-Grant through Radical Reciprocity

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The mission of the land-grant (LG) system of higher education in the U.S. has long driven the work of LG colleges and universities. This mission, however, was drafted during a time of widely different social contexts, financial and intellectual resources, and national priorities (1865). With an increase in the number of LG colleges and institutions overtime (1865, 1890, 1994), a shift in focus from agriculture to industry, and changes from a not-for-profit fiduciary and public interest model that once funded the LG system to a commercial model, the LG mission has evolved. Like other “public” universities, LGs are now organized within a commercial model that focuses largely outward with a goal toward expanding US national interests abroad (e.g., *World-grant* institutions). This model shifts the priority from work aligned to the public mission to efforts guided by revenue generation. In turn, the current LG model:

- Renders unnecessary relational connections with communities
- Prioritizes and commercializes a unidirectional diffusion of knowledge
- Marginalizes local and global economies concerned with social, environmental, and economic resilience.

Abandoning the commercialized model of higher education, however, will not solve the problems associated with commercialization and the limits of growth and change given the ongoing centrality of capitalism as the primarily economic system in which higher education functions. Accordingly, LGs need to change their internal practices, motivations, and value-added systems to consider how commercialized models may better align with an LG mission in need of evolution. This mission — which equally values teaching, research, and outreach — has seen minimal change overtime, with its outputs frequently led by “expert knowledge” flowing outward from institution to community.

Still, we do not advocate the development of new commercialized business models for LG institutions based on structural variables such as standardization, centralization, and specialization. Rather, the unique structures of LG institutions (i.e., public-serving, decentralization, divisiveness) should remain constant. We propose that LGs evolve their public missions by adopting a form of engagement we term *radical reciprocity*. For us, *radical reciprocity* refers to a shift in the unidirectional flow of knowledge to ensure that communities serve as experts and co-producers of knowledge both inside and outside LG institutions. Moreover, we intentionally employ the term radical, “or forming the root,” which allows us to get to the systemic roots of oppressive and exclusionary practices. Doing so will allow the pluriversal incorporation of multiple knowledge models or “worlds” within the LG mission, including the commercial, the community, the public and many others.

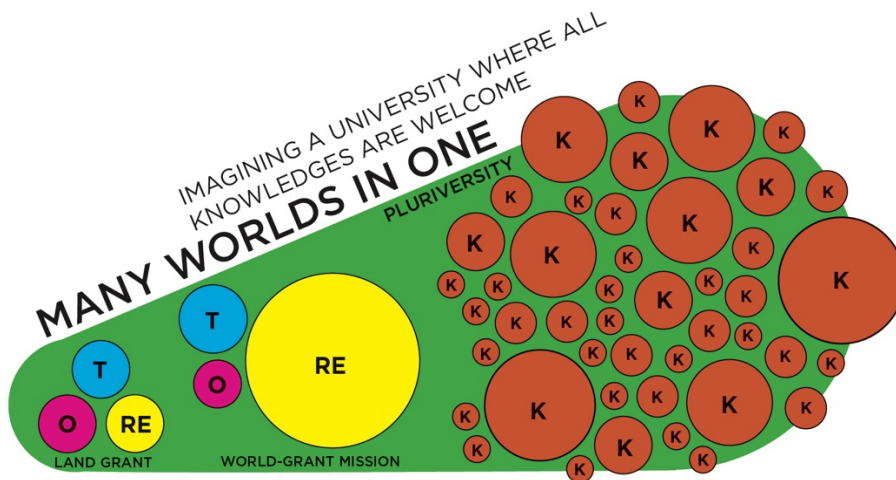


Figure 1: Original Land-grant outreach, teaching and research mission compared to proposed pluriversal knowledge mission through Radical Reciprocity.

See [www.radicalreciprocity.org](http://www.radicalreciprocity.org) for more information.