



It was in the midst of the Civil War (1862) when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act. The act provided federal land for sale to establish and finance public universities. With the enactment of the Morrill

Act, higher education — which at the time consisted of private colleges and universities for the elite — changed to a system where the general population had university access to education, research and something radical at the time that we call extension or outreach. The land grant mission established within the act is fundamentally about democracy, equality and access.

Established in this country's most perilous time (consider two World Wars, the Great Depression, the campus unrest of the 1960s and now the global market), the mission or *what* land grant universities do — research, education and extension — has not changed. Through its existence universities have provided a stabilizing influence against the latest buzzword, fad or slogan — an anchor in a world full of change. This stabilizing effect is often reflected in the loyalty people have, almost like a religious loyalty, toward an institution. We see this loyalty within turfgrass programs among golf course superintendents and staff toward their alma mater.

Although what we do essentially remains the same, how we accomplish our mission of teaching, research and outreach undergoes constant challenge and change both from within and outside the institution. From an educational perspective the students and their families are assuming a greater burden of the educational cost, which is probably no surprise to those currently paying tuition and housing costs. To provide a perspective, in 1985 a student attending The Ohio State University contributed roughly 35 percent of the total educational cost, while the government, both state and federal, provided 65 percent. In 2005, those percentages flip-flopped. The burden no doubt will continue to shift more to the student, raising the question of affordable access.

With regard to turfgrass students, rising costs along with a downturn in the golf industry is reflected in many turfgrass program enrollments declining or remaining flat. The availability of

The Challenges of Land Grant Schools

BY KARL DANNEBERGER



**TURFGRASS
PROGRAMS NEED
TO STAY ENGAGED
IN DETERMINING
THE NEEDS
AND MEANS
BY HOW WE CAN
PROVIDE A BETTER
GOLF WORLD.**

employment and starting salaries, like most majors, is a regulating force on student numbers.

The majority of turfgrass research is conducted at land grant institutions. We have seen a steady erosion in state and federal funding for science. With the decline in the monies provided by state and regional turfgrass foundations, along with reductions in golf related funding agencies like the USGA, the type of applied and basic turfgrass research that has been influenced by the turf industry will be guided more by government-directed competitive funding sources, which may or may not relate to industry needs.

The greatest change and challenge in the land grant mission is occurring with extension or outreach. The dissemination of information to the industry and the public has resulted in a better quality of life in general, and specifically a higher and environmentally sound quality of turf. That this information is “free” is difficult to sustain in a current world where everything we do must pay for itself.

For turfgrass programs at land grant institutions and the golf industry, we need to stay engaged in determining the needs and means by how we can provide a better golf world.

Whatever the challenges, land grant institutions will play an important role in the golf industry due to our inherent comprehensive nature. Dr. Roger Geiger, distinguished professor of higher education at Penn State, stated in a recent conference, “I think the distinctive mission of land-grant universities is to provide access to expertise, which they have developed and cultivated.”

Karl Danneberger, Ph.D., Golfdom's science editor and a professor at The Ohio State University can be reached at Danneberger.1@osu.edu.