

# Past and Present Contradictions in Land- Grant and Hispanic Serving Institutions

A Historical Case Study of the University  
of Arizona

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## **Abstract**

*This article interrogates the political contexts leading up to the University of Arizona's designation as a land grant and Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). As a white settler teacher, I reflect on how researching this history helped me confront how increasing access to the university was met by exclusionary gatekeeping mechanisms that function more generally in higher education. While historicizing this tension between access and exclusion at the University of Arizona, I recognized how racist and classist gatekeeping mechanisms emerged in the nineteenth century in ways that are continually recycled in the*

*composition classroom. This case study provides an example of the sort of local historical research that encourages educators to unearth the colonial and racist infrastructure of FYW born from nineteenth-century educational policies and engage with the collective responses of BIPOC student activists from the civil rights movement. In this way, composition instructors can interrogate their universities' institutional history to reimagine the role they might play in creating a more socially and linguistically just future.*

## Introduction

Composition instructors at land-grant institutions and HSIs have a critical opportunity to hold their institutions accountable to their mission of expanding access to higher education. This is especially true for instructors at institutions in the Southwest, which were “founded within multilingual and multicultural border spaces” but whose “institutional identity...side-stepped a recognition for multiple literacies and cultures” (Leahy, 2017, p. 61). Instead of “side-stepping” these multilingual and multicultural realities, we can learn about the historical relationship between our university and the Mexican and Indigenous communities that host it. Learning these histories in my context has helped me engage with the historical and contemporary contradictions between my university’s institutional missions and its institutional practice.

This research process helped me reflect on what it meant to be a white-settler teacher and newcomer to Arizona teaching in a place I did not grow up. Importantly, it did not make me more qualified to teach. Rather, engaging in this research has made me more aware of my sense of displacement and emphasized that students would gain much more from learning about Tucson and the University of

Arizona from the Mexican, Mexican American, and Indigenous communities here.

This historical research also reveals the problem of existing within a national system of research-oriented universities and a profession constituted by national professional organizations. Researchers in higher education at the University of Arizona have demonstrated how national job markets and tenure and promotion systems force BIPOC faculty to move away from the communities they come from and hope to serve (Rhoades et al., 2008). I hope that Ernest Boyer's (1996) widely influential argument for "engaged scholarship" continues to inspire organizational designations, like the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification which recognizes institutions that use scholarship, knowledge, and expertise to address real problems in their communities. These new reward systems should prioritize hiring faculty from the communities they purport to serve.

However, my outsider positionality also provides me with an important opportunity to reveal the work of writing history and how the role authors' interestedness in a specific history plays in their interpretation of archival documents and secondary sources. As Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch (2010) have discussed, histories are "always partial and always interested—partial in the sense that it remains incomplete with respect to the reality they presume to depict and interested in the sense that it is an interpretive rendering of evidence" (p. 21). I attempt to model this transparency by signaling my archival and secondary sourcing and discussing how I found and interacted with those materials.

My sense of responsibility to address the histories of settler colonialism and white supremacy at my university is influenced by my experience teaching high school English in Greeley, Colorado,

where predominantly working-class Latine students helped me create courses about the legacy of racism in our community. One of the central lessons my former students taught me was that history is personal. Studying the historical foundations of racism in our city meant reflecting on the experiences of students' parents and grandparents. As a white-settler teacher who had not grown up in that context, I could not understand the emotional labor my students experienced while conducting this research. As I collaborated with them, research was not enough. They wanted to present their arguments at city council hearings, school district meetings, and assemblies. These students helped me transition from being a white-settler teacher who thought activism meant learning about racial injustice in his city to being an "accomplice" who worked alongside student-led initiatives addressing racism (Hutchinson, 2021, p. 126). I have attempted to bring those same sensibilities to Tucson by working with students to create curricula that not only trace racial injustices in our city but also to learn from the students who have fought to ameliorate those injustices.

The University of Arizona, where I teach now, is a land-grant and Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Land-grant institutions resulted from the Morrill Act of 1862, which granted "public lands" to state governments to establish public universities. As the federal government's first major investment in higher education, the land grant movement claims ideals of equity and opportunity, but as Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone's *Land-Grab Report* (2020) demonstrates, the land-grant movement sanctioned the seizure of 10.7 million acres from almost two hundred and fifty indigenous tribes. The land-grant mission to democratize higher education was founded on the dispossession of Indigenous land.

HSIs were established in 1992 when legal advocates from the Hispanic Higher Education Coalition successfully argued for

expanding Title III of the 1965 Higher Education Act to include funding for HSIs. This legislation established that a university would be designated as an HSI when twenty-five percent of its undergraduate population identified as Hispanic, and fifty percent of those Hispanic-identifying students received Federal Pell Grants or other need-based financial aid ("White House," 2023). When institutions turn into HSIs, it takes time for them to revise their institutional identity, and a major component of becoming an HSI is acknowledging that institution's history of white supremacy and revising its racist infrastructure. However, many recent HSIs celebrate and advertise their designation before they have begun this equity work. This inconsistency has led some scholars to differentiate between "Hispanic-serving" and "Hispanic-enrolling institutions" (Gasman et al., 2015, p. 129).

In my investigation of the events leading up to these two critical junctures, I found that UA's designation as a land grant university and its settler colonial foundations led to its failure to serve its local Mexican and Indigenous communities. These failures fly in the face of contemporary land-grant administrators' calls to prioritize community engagement. I also found that the civil rights efforts of Xicanx students at UA directly combatted the remnants of assimilatory educational policies of the nineteenth century. When put into conversation, these two historical moments helped me learn about my university's historical gatekeeping practices, the coalitional and rhetorical strategies that Mexican American student organizations used to combat those gatekeeping practices, and the institutional transformation their efforts inspired in the form of the HSI designation.

## Historical Accounts of Access and Exclusion

My focus on these two historic sites follows historiographical trends that put nineteenth-century pedagogical approaches in conversation with critical pedagogy born out of the civil rights movement (Foner, 1990). In *Reclaiming Composition*, Iris Ruiz (2016) looks to these two eras of reconstruction to ask how contemporary scholars might “foster the inclusive tradition evident” in these two periods (p. 16). In this way, historians are encouraged to examine how the educational efforts of the late nineteenth century contradicted their democratizing promises and to evaluate how civil rights efforts revived and furthered those failed efforts.

Importantly, the two eras of reconstruction Ruiz (2016) analyzes are also the two eras that see the most significant democratization of universities in US history. However, Ruiz notices that these eras of expanded access “provoked. . .backlash and counterchange” (p. 116). Specifically, Ruiz points to the reactions against affirmative action that manifested in arguments for “reverse discrimination” and “color-blind” racism (p. 116). Tom Fox (1999) helps explain the root of those exclusionary reactions. He points out that every effort to deny access to the university appeals to the idea of maintaining high academic standards to justify exclusionary practices. Fox argues that this appeal is a masked desire to maintain social inequalities: “we know each time standards are called into question, each time professors or educational bureaucrats begin to moan about the failing quality of student work, what’s really underfoot is a desire to make sure the same students who have always gone to college still go” (p. 7). It is important to notice that exclusionist appeals to standards only become relevant when there are efforts to democratize the university. Fox explains that this “maintenance of standards is prompted by fear and defensiveness” (p. 21).

For Fox (1999), the most insidious exclusionary standards are those associated with language. His recounting of nineteenth-century composition pedagogy shows how class distinctions were symbolically solidified in linguistic distinctions and how composition instructors reinforce those classist linguistic distinctions through a “pedagogy of initiation” (p. 59). Fox critiques the pedagogy of initiation in several ways. First, he argues that it disenfranchises students because it says students are being “initiated into, but do not change, the academic community” (p. 57). Second, he points out that a pedagogy of initiation promotes deficit models of understanding students primarily because “the language with which they are familiar is an interference” to internalizing academic language (p. 58). Lastly, Fox argues that the pedagogy of initiation forces students not only to master “skills” but also “a new way of understanding, knowing, arguing, and reflecting,” thereby marginalizing the cultural and linguistic assets our students bring to our classrooms (p. 59).

In reading Ruiz (2016) and Fox (1999), I wanted to study the history of those student activists who advocated for their social and linguistic rights and democratized the university where I teach. The following reflection on that history is my attempt to historicize my university’s oppressive language standards, center the coalitional efforts of student advocacy groups during the civil rights movement, and hold my institution accountable to its stated values and missions. I hope this history inspires all readers, but especially white-settler teachers who work at HSIs and land-grant institutions, to historicize the contradictions of their institutions’ designations and reflect on how those contradictions inform how they relate to the place they teach.

## Holding the Land-Grant Institutions Accountable

There are two contradictions within the land-grant mission. The most egregious is democratizing higher education through the dispossession of Indigenous land. Proponents of land-grant institutions say that their mission is to increase access to higher education with a focus on agricultural and mechanical arts and leverage their institutional resources to improve the communities within their state. However, these rhetorical appeals to serving local communities and democratizing higher education often silence and ignore the reality that land-grant institutions are predicated on the dispossession of Indigenous land. The second contradiction is the implementation of traditional academic standards while using egalitarian and anti-elitist rhetoric. Land grants' appeals to egalitarian investment in community engagement obfuscate their commitments to traditional academic standards and national rankings.

The history of any land-grant institution reveals that they were funded by the dispossession of Indigenous land and acted as major components of settler-colonialism in their local context. The federal legislation that instituted land-grant universities, the 1862 Morrill Act, was passed in conjunction with the Pacific Railway Act and the Homestead Act. These pieces of legislation were a coordinated effort to colonize Indigenous land. Lee and Ahtone's 2020 *Land-Grab Report* recovered documentation for ninety-nine percent of the eleven million acres taken from over 250 Indigenous tribes for land-grant institutions. Their report emphasizes that land-grant universities were not only built on Indigenous land but paid for with the profits of stolen Indigenous land. Lee and Ahtone reconstructed each land parcel taken for each university, the amount of money the



US government paid to sovereign tribal nations for that land, and the profit that land generated for university endowments. In total, the federal government paid less than \$400,000 to Indigenous tribes for lands that were worth half a billion dollars.

Within these statistics are legions of egregious examples of settler colonial violence. For instance, the land taken from the Arapaho and Cheyenne after the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 was sold to endow Colorado State University. The 150,000 acres taken from the Pima, Yuman, Tohono O'odham, Navajo, and Apache after the Apache War funded the University of Arizona's endowments. Many land-grant institutions still own the land parcels they received and continue collecting revenues from that land. The University of Idaho owns over 33,000 acres of land and 70,000 acres of mineral rights, which generated \$359,000 in revenue in 2019. Montana State University profited over \$630,000 from the 63,000 acres that they still own. Overall, 500,000 acres of Indigenous land remain held by land-grant institutions and generated \$5.4 million of profit in 2019.

Lee and Ahtone's *Land Grab Report* (2020) has inspired researchers to conduct institutional case studies detailing the settler-colonial harm of this land dispossession at their home universities (Fanshel, 2021; Rocha Beardall, 2022). The *Land Grab Report* has also initiated important conversations among administrative leaders in land-grant universities. For example, Stephen Gavazzi (2020), one of the notable proponents of the land-grant institutions, published an argument in *Forbes* that administrators at land grant institutions must take two necessary steps in response to Lee and Ahtone's 2020 study: publish official statements of apology and make appropriate reparations. While many universities have created official land acknowledgments, few have instituted reparations. Lee & Ahtone (2020) highlight how South Dakota State University's

Wokini Initiative models how land-grant institutions might enact reparations. The Wokini Initiative uses the profits from their remaining land parcels to support Indigenous students attending SDSU. The university used the \$636,000 revenue from their Morrill lands to sustain scholarships and academic outreach programs for Indigenous students and finance the American Indian Student Center.

Land-grant institutions' appeals to democracy and egalitarianism are also contradicted by their commitments to traditional academic standards and national rankings. The story that contemporary administrators at land-grant institutions tell themselves usually begins with the nineteenth century's rapid economic development and the need for universities to accommodate dramatic increases in demand for human capital. Where universities were once only seen as arbiters of national culture and language, they also needed to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding nation. These new economic demands on the university necessitated a reevaluation of the purposes and methods of the educational system in the US. In particular, higher education administrators at prestigious institutions were asked to justify how their liberal arts curriculum aided the economic demands of leading industrialists.

Notice here that I say *industrialist* demands and not *populace* demands. The industry leaders pressured universities to reorient their curriculums, not the collectivized voices of the workers they employed. Fox (1999) makes this distinction repeatedly in his chapter on the history of nineteenth-century universities. He argues that "business and *industry* demanded that universities expand their traditional base of students and educate the middle class" (p. 20). This contrasts with Robert Connors' (1997) understanding of how "Jeffersonian and then Jacksonian democracy... produced an ethic of egalitarianism that extended into all areas of national life,

including education and language” (p. 112). In this way, the rhetoric of egalitarianism in the nineteenth century was a political tool for industry leaders to use rather than the true voice of the working class.

While the story of land-grant institutions as egalitarian and pragmatic is contrived, it has driven many administrators' critiques of large public research institutions that fall short of serving the land grant mission to democratize higher education. For example, in an editorial for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* from 2005, Michael Martin, then president of the University of New Mexico, argued that land-grant institutions are trying too hard to emulate top-tier East Coast universities. He finds that they are spending too much time maximizing their enrollment and retention rates by recruiting wealthy white students and increasing their admissions requirements. Martin argues that simply recruiting great students and then graduating great students is a farce compared to recruiting struggling students and graduating good students. He ends his article by saying that land-grant institutions are “becoming more like filters than ladders” (p. 26).

Martin's (2005) criticisms align with Stephan Gavazzi and E. Gordan Gee's (2018) interview study with twenty-seven university presidents at land grant institutions. Gavazzi and Gordan found that many administrators agreed that their universities do not value community engagement nor do they incentivize faculty to seek out community involvement. While each of their chapters seeks to build towards institutional changes that better serve the land-grant mission, Gavazzi and Gee acknowledge that the focus on recruitment and national rankings has made land-grant institutions places “where the needs of the middle and upper classes have been reinforced, and have increasingly failed to provide opportunities for

the very people who originally were intended to benefit from the land grant university” (p. 75).

Gee & Gavazzi's (2018) uncomfortable realization is that land-grant universities' idealized missions and values exist within a larger reward system of higher education that privileges national rankings, research funds, and tuition dollars. While land-grant universities may sincerely commit to partnering with their local communities and leveraging their resources for the betterment of those communities, the value of those efforts must continually be articulated through the traditional reward systems of higher education. Given this situation, it is unsurprising that land-grant colleges are falling short of their mission.

## **University of Arizona's Contradictory Beginnings**

When I moved from studying the history of land grants generally to the history of the land-grant mission at the University of Arizona, I learned that UA never lived up to its ideal of serving its local communities. There were three main reasons for this failure: the university was predicated on settler colonialism, perpetuated the territorial government's efforts to Americanize Mexican and Indigenous communities during its quest for statehood, and established a preparatory school meant to filter out “underprepared” students.

Acknowledging that UA's campus sits on Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yaqui land is only the first step towards recognizing the contradiction of the University of Arizona's land grant mission. UA has profited from the stolen land of eight tribal nations. These 521 land parcels totaled 143,564 acres (Lee & Ahtone, 2020). The US

government paid nothing to the eight tribal nations—Pima, Western Apaches, Tohono O’odham, Apaches, Maricopa, Walapai, Navaho, Cocopa--for this land, and the university’s profits are incalculable (Lee & Ahtone, 2020).

One of the first primary documents I read while studying this history was UA’s inaugural address. The ranking member of Arizona’s Board of Regents, CC Stephens, delivered the speech at the University of Arizona’s opening ceremonies. His rhetoric reveals the blatant settler-colonial logic that UA was founded on. He congratulated the Anglo-Saxon civilization for “advancing” West and “successfully disputing” the “relentless” Apache (Martin, 1960, p. 29). He viewed the university as a sign of progress, one step further towards civilization, but more importantly, he viewed it as part of the Anglo project to rebuild an emptied space. He writes, “This wonderful land full of the crumbling monuments of a great prehistoric people, and endowed with a more genial climate and greater natural resources than any other part of the Union” (p. 29).

I found this speech reprinted in Douglas Martin’s seminal history of the University of Arizona from 1960. Martin follows the settler-colonial process of characterizing the beginning of settler history as an end to Indigenous history. For Martin, the US government left Anglo settlers in Arizona “at the mercy of the Apaches” at the start of the Civil War (p. 5). Without the protection of federal troops, the prospect of establishing any educational institutions was impossible. Arizona’s first territorial governor, John Goodwin, frequently argued that creating and sustaining an educational system would not occur until the Apache were “dealt with” (p. 13). While the Apache were the barrier to establishing an education system in territorial Arizona, they were also the motivating factor. Estevan Ochoa, Tucson’s most influential businessman and Mayor at the time, successfully passed the Stafford-Ochoa Act of 1871,

establishing territorial Arizona's public education system by saying, "Unless we educate the rising generation, we shall raise up a population no more capable of self-government than the Apaches themselves" (p. 17). Ochoa's comment embodies the settler-colonial goals of public education in territorial Arizona.

Ochoa's comment also mirrors the settler-colonial rhetoric that Arizona's territorial legislature used to justify an education system devoted to Americanizing Mexican-origin and Indigenous communities. The territorial legislature's quest for statehood accelerated their investments in Americanization reforms. Federal legislators conducted reports on the effectiveness of these programs. For example, in 1902 Albert Beveridge, a representative from the congressional sub-committee on territories, traveled to New Mexico and Arizona to report on the territories' readiness for statehood. Rhetorical scholar Elizabeth Leahy (2020) documents Beveridge's reasoning for keeping New Mexico and Arizona out of the union:

when the immigration of English-speaking people ... does its modifying work on the Mexican element; ... the committee hopes and believes that this mass of people, unlike us in race, language, and social customs, will finally come to form a creditable portion of American citizenship (p. 132).

Leahy reveals just how explicit federal and state officials were in trying to assimilate Mexican-origin students in Arizona and New Mexico.

It is important to note that these Americanizing efforts played out differently in Arizona than in New Mexico. Linda Noel (2011) illustrates this by showing how progressive Anglos and Mexican elites in New Mexico emphasized the Spanish heritage of Mexicans

to legitimize Mexican claims to citizenship. Anglos accepted these sentiments on a national scale because the Spanish conquest mirrored the Anglo's colonization of the Northeastern Indigenous nations. Noel cites Theodore Roosevelt mimicking this romanticization of Spanish ancestry in a speech to New Mexicans and Governor Miguel Antonio Otero, "some (Spaniards) had come to New Mexico, as did your ancestors, Governor, at a time when not one English speaking community existed on the Atlantic seaboard" (qtd. in Noel, 2011, p. 446). In this speech, Roosevelt sets colonization as a measure for the cultural and linguistic legitimacy of ethnic Mexicans and the Spanish language in New Mexico.

Arizona opted to marginalize its Mexican-origin population rather than emphasize their Spanish heritage to win statehood. These approaches differed so severely that when the Senate Committee on Territories suggested New Mexico and Arizona be joined and admitted as a single state in 1906, Anglo-Arizonans voted 16,265 to 3,141 against the measure (Muñoz, 2006, p. 104). In the years leading up to the Beveridge Report, Arizona's education system focused primarily on assimilating Mexican Arizonans through English-only education. However, the booming mining industry and escalating labor issues surrounding the "double wage system"<sup>1</sup> contributed to Arizona's education system evolving into "a systemic program that combined elements of racial segregation with industrial education" (p. 56). The racial tensions surrounding these labor disputes culminated in white labor unions advocating for legislation that marginalized Mexican Arizonans. Anglos in Arizona "rejected the argument that these workers had a pure Spanish heritage" (Noel, 2011, p. 452). Moreover, Laura Muñoz

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<sup>1</sup> *A law that required mining companies to pay Mexican laborers less than Anglo laborers.*

(2006) argues in her history of education in Arizona that “Anglos could not conceive of a citizenship in which Mexicans could participate” (p. 104). In this way, educating the “Mexican Race” was no longer about assimilation but dealing with the “Mexican Problem.” The introduction of Jose Moreno’s (1999) book titled *The Elusive Quest for Equality: 150 Years of Chicano/Chicana Education* identifies three strategies employed by public schools at the end of the nineteenth century to deal with “the Mexican problem”: create segregated Mexican schools, use scientifically flawed intelligence testing to justify the practice of segregation, and develop a vocationally focused curriculum (p. xv).

Thomas Sheridan’s (2012) research on the history of Tucson public schools shows how these regional conversations around “the Mexican problem” played out in Tucson. C.E. Rose’s 1920 superintendent report was filled with the same rhetoric that Noel, Muñoz, and Moreno detailed. Rose argued that Mexican American students needed to be Americanized, but they were intellectually inferior to white students, so they needed to enter vocational training. Sheridan reports that Rose’s ideas were not unique. He was simply “following the lead of thousands of other teachers and administrators around the country when they attempted to “awaken” Mexican children and their parents to the “high ideals and customs” of the United States” (p. 226). In other words, Mexican students needed to assimilate into Anglo society but were marginalized by educators who did not give them the tools to assimilate. Instead of recognizing this cognitive dissonance, Rose’s report “implicitly blamed the Mexicans themselves for their own poverty and discrimination” (p. 232).

This political and social antagonism against Mexican-origin students in Arizona resulted in overt gatekeeping strategies at UA’s preparatory school. Leahy (2017) demonstrates the effects of these



financial troubles with her analysis of the University of Arizona's catalogs from the 1890s. She shows that these catalogs designate that the university would only admit "candidates for admission into the Freshman class in the University must be at least sixteen years of age, of *good character* and must pass a thorough examination in Arithmetic, Geography, Grammar, and History of the United States, and show evidence that they have a sufficient knowledge of language to write a short essay in good English on some assigned topic" (p. 68). By 1893, university president Theodore Comstock told the preparatory school principal and English professor, Howard J. Hall, that he should consider raising the requirements for the preparatory curriculum because "the somewhat low order of intellect of the students of native and mixed races coming to us, necessitates a training different from that usually given students in public schools throughout the country" (p. 76).

Leahy's (2017) analysis of Arizona's catalogs and Martin's (1960) descriptions of the early years of the university clearly show that the university set up an academic landscape "as a means of deciding the worthy from the unworthy" (Fox, 1999, p. 20). In no uncertain terms, President Comstock's comments show that officials at the UA wanted to set up gatekeeping mechanisms to filter out Indigenous and Mexican students. These efforts were legitimated with appeals to raise academic standards, heighten the university's prestige, and recruit wealthy Anglo colonists.

## Let the Land Speak

As I learned the story that the land-grant designation tells about my university, I reflected on how I related to my campus and community. *The Land Grab Report* from Lee and Ahtone (2020) encouraged me to move beyond reading secondary sources or

archival documents and listen to the land itself. Lisa Brooks (2008) explains that the "practice of place-making is... a form of narrative art" that brings portions of the past into being by paying close attention to "where events occurred" rather than to "when events occurred" (p. xxii). Brooks draws from Keith Basso's (1996) ethnographic study of the Western Apache language to demonstrate how the land itself evokes stories that "go to work on you like arrows... make you live right... make you replace yourself" (Basso qtd. in Brooks, 2008, p. xxvi). In particular, Basso (1996) studies how Western Apache place names do not simply "produce a mental image of a particular geographic location" but can "be used to summon forth an enormous range of mental and emotional associations—associations of time and space, of history and events, of persons and social activities, of oneself and stages in one's life" (pp. 80 & 63). For example, Basso examines how one Apache place name, "Tséé Hadigaiyé yú 'ágodzaa" (translated: "It happened at Line Of White Rocks Extends Up And Out, at This Very Place!"), evokes a "historical tale" about a young girl who put herself in harm's way after acting against her maternal grandmother's advice (p. 76). Each time that place name is spoken or seen, it evokes this historical tale and the ancestral lessons it teaches. This way, history and historical events are ever-present in the land. Brooks (2008) points to Basso to explain how Indigenous understandings of history are meant to "instill empathy and admiration for the ancestors themselves...and to hold them up to all as worthy of emulation" (pp. xxiv-xxv).

While reading Basso's (1996) book and learning to listen to the land my university sits on, the land began to "go to work" on me (p. 38). When I walked on campus, I noticed how my university, like so many institutions of higher education, intentionally and deliberately shaped how students and faculty relate to their campus. As Eve Tuck (2014) has discussed, colleges and universities

in the US are part of a network of educative spaces that perpetuate and justify settler emplacement. Tuck describes settler emplacement as “the desire to resolve the experience of dislocation implicit in living on stolen land” (p. 15). Tuck argues that settler emplacement is based on “fantasies of the extinct or becoming-extinct Indian as natural, forgone, inevitable” (p. 16). Not only does this complicity assume the extinction of Indigenous people, but it also ignores the land’s ontological and sacred role within Indigenous histories and epistemologies. One of the central tools that universities use to craft these settler fantasies is their institutional designation. As a white-settler composition instructor teaching at a land-grant institution, studying the history of settler colonialism at that institution has helped me interrogate the settler stories I tell myself and consider how the land can act as “a teacher and conduit of memory” and a “living critique of the dominant culture” (Tuck, 2014, p. 9; Grande, 2004, p. 95).

Interrogating the stories that the land-grant designation tells about UA also helps me transition from *residing* to *inhabiting* the place I live. David Orr (1992) explains that “a resident is a temporary occupant, putting down few roots and investing little, knowing little, and perhaps caring little for the immediate locale beyond its ability to gratify,” whereas “the inhabitant... ‘dwells’... in an intimate, organic, and mutually nurturing relationship with a place” (Orr qtd. in Gruenwald, 2003, p. 9). One of the first steps towards living as an inhabitant is “learning to live-in-place in an area that has been... injured through past exploitation” and “identifying, affirming, conserving, and creating those forms of cultural knowledge that nurture and protect people and ecosystems” (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 9). In other words, acting as an inhabitant requires interrogating the palimpsest of colonization in places where we reside and listening to the Indigenous communities who have stewarded and cared for the land since time immemorial.

## Civil Rights at UA—Clear Demands and Widening Coalitions

I followed Ruiz's (2016) comparative model of analysis and studied how the civil rights efforts of students at the University of Arizona responded to the marginalization of Mexican-origin and Indigenous students' culture and language during the nineteenth century. I found Darius Echeverría's (2014) book *Aztlan Arizona*, which documents the work of Xicanx student activist groups at Arizona's three major universities during the civil rights movement. In his close analysis of student newspapers and magazines at UA, he details how 200 Xicanx students not only advocated for their demands of racial equity but also actualized those demands. Those students organized successful campaigns to hire more Xicanx professors, laid the groundwork for the university's Mexican American Studies department, created a student and faculty advisory board to council school administrators on racial equity, and organized an annual Chicano Senior Day for local high school students to visit the campus. Each of these reforms resulted from the leadership of student advocacy groups at UA.

I was captivated by the organizational and rhetorical strategies these student activists used to effectively fight against the gatekeeping mechanisms that disadvantaged them and their communities. Their work provided important insights for partnering with my students to revise contemporary iterations of those same gatekeeping policies and incentivize my university to be more responsive to its local communities. One of the central lessons I learned from studying these student activists was clearly articulating demands for institutional change. For example, the main Xicanx student organization at UA, the Mexican American

Liberation Committee (MALC), submitted a list of demands to the university president, Richard Harvill, in December of 1968. They called on the university to create a Mexican American studies department, fund a library dedicated to Mexican American history and culture, and organize a lecture series focused on contemporary issues facing Mexican American communities in the Southwest. A central component of those demands was for student organizers from MALC to help design these programs and to sit on hiring committees for the new faculty that would facilitate them. In response, Harvill agreed to fund a Mexican American studies department and organize a public lecture series, but "under no circumstances" would he include student organizers in creating curricula or hiring faculty (Schuler, 1969). He said, "competence in this area depends upon preparation, knowledge of the subject fields involved, and experience. Regardless of how sincere and capable students may be, these matters cannot be assigned to them" (Schuler, 1969).

MALC activists responded by emphasizing the need to revise an educational system fundamentally unequipped to serve Mexican American students and therefore needed to be led by Mexican American students. MALC chairman at the time, Sal Baldenegro, made this point by arguing that the university did not "recognize the [Chicano] problem and failed to prepare professors to productively cope with the Mexican American student" (Echeverría, 2014, p. 94). As a result of these failures, Baldenegro and MALC student organizers put up "wanted" posters of university President Richard Harvill for "crimes against the people" because his views and values reflected the position that only the "Anglo community is to be served by the University" (p. 96). Regardless of the response from the UA administration, MALC was determined to transform the university because it was located "in the center of the Southwest surrounded by Mexican Americans" but was "not

responsive to the brown community” (p. 96). MALC turned the university's focus toward the community by broadening its coalition to include Mexican Americans from Tucson's community.

MALC's response to Harvill's criticism offered me a second important lesson: build widening coalitions with local community organizers to support well-articulated demands for institutional change. The coalition between Mexican American students and Tucson's Mexican American community demonstrates the power of students and teachers moving beyond the confines of a university setting. This type of community partnership was integral to the tenants of the Chicano Movement as a whole. The historic *El Plan de Santa Barbara* called on Chicano Studies to link campuses with their communities and "provide students with knowledge of the Chicano experience to allow them to extend their leadership into the communities" (García & McCracken, 2021, p. 17). In this way, "Chicano Studies was to produce new knowledge that would further empower" Mexican American students and their communities (p. 17). This unique coalition called for student organizers at UA to advocate for the rights of Mexican Americans in Tucson high schools and invited Tucson's Mexican American community to support UA students' campus activism. For example, the first *La Semana de La Raza* (or Chicano Culture Week), an event that "served to inform the larger Tucson community about ongoing discriminatory practices against Arizonan Mexicans" and provided educational resources for local Chicano communities, focused on the ways the Tucson School District isolated Mexican American children within the district (Echeverría, 2014, p. 98).

One of the main factors that caused this isolation was the Tucson School District's lack of attention to teaching Mexican American students to take pride in their culture and language. At the center of these conversations was establishing well-organized bilingual

programs in both K-12 and university settings. Members of MALC at UA fought for "Spanish-for-Spanish-speakers at the University of Arizona" at the same time that they advocated for bilingual courses "to be implemented at Tucson High School" (De La Trinidad, 2008, p. 195). Similarly, Tucson high school teachers and UA professors worked on research demonstrating bilingual education's positive impacts on Mexican American students' academic success. Pueblo High School's Maria Urquides led a team of researchers on a tour of ten schools across five states in the Southwest to "evaluate programs aimed at teaching Spanish-speaking students" (p. 184). Their research resulted in a report entitled *The Invisible Minority, Pero No Vencibles: Report of the NEA-Tucson Survey on the Teaching of Spanish to the Spanish-Speaking*. This report showed that well-structured bilingual programs designed for Spanish speakers resulted in lower dropout rates and higher academic success (p. 184). Urquides and her team shared the results of their report at Tucson's 1966 Symposium on Bilingual Education. In attendance were Senator Ralph Yarborough (Texas) and Congressman Henry B. Gonzales (Texas), the legislators that would introduce the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) to Congress just a year later (p. 186).

The success and impact of this coalitional research filtered up to UA. One of the team members of Urquides's research coalition, Adalberto Guerrero, became the first Dean of Chicano Students in 1970 and dedicated his career to "promoting the Spanish language and Mexican American student culture" while also helping to build the first bilingual teacher education programs at both Pima Community College and UA (De La Trinidad, 2008, p. 195). These teacher education programs were vital after the passing and implementation of the BEA because few teacher candidates had formal training in bilingual education. This involvement with high school teachers and community organizers working to further Mexican American students' right to bilingual education allowed

student activists at UA to partner in those advocacy efforts and hold their university accountable to its state values of community engagement.

The way that student activists at UA articulated clear demands and built coalitions both within and outside of their university provides a series of exemplary advocacy efforts that hold the university accountable to its stated institutional mission to serve its students and its local communities. As our students look towards the future and engage with contemporary issues of access, they can look to the legacy of those student advocates who came before them and continue their work by engaging with the institutional reforms they inspired.

The work of these Xicanx student-activists in Tucson instilled in me a sense of responsibility to work in solidarity with the profound history of activism at UA and in Tucson's public schools. For example, the present battle against the demonization of Critical Race Theory in public schools continues the work of coalitions like the Tucson Council for Civic Unity (TCCU), which created reports exposing the de facto segregation of Mexican-origin and Indigenous students in Tucson during the 1950s and helped a coalition of Mexican American and African American parents argue that Arizona's segregation laws were anti-democratic and anti-American (De La Trinidad, 2018). It also means recognizing that the coalitions that are presently fighting to defend multilingual programs in Arizona continue the work of the coalition of Tucson educators in K-12 schools and the University of Arizona, who played a pivotal role in the passage of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (De La Trinidad, 2015). In this way, I attempt to teach in solidarity with the transhistorical community of activists by fighting to preserve and continue the reforms they instituted. One of the most significant of those reforms is the HSI designation.



## The HSI Mission and Measures of Success

While these advocacy efforts inspired incredible progress and offered a roadmap for future change, the realities of marginalization for Mexican Americans persisted. It took time for change at the national level to become institutionalized. The Hispanic Higher Education Coalition (HHEC) addressed these inequities by advocating for the legislation that enacted HSIs as early as 1979. Legal advocates from HHEC were giving testimony to Congress to convince legislators to expand Title III of the 1965 Higher Education Act (HEA) which allowed for extra funding to underdeveloped institutions. From there, the HHEC advocated for each legislative step towards realizing HSIs.

The main issue that HSIs ran into was that unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), HSIs were not *founded* to serve Latine students. Instead, they *became* HSIs after meeting the requirements for the designation outlined in the 1992 legislation. This has led scholars to question newly designated HSIs' commitment to their Latine populations because "an institution can be designated an HSI but have no established commitment to educating Latinx populations. This inconsistency has led some scholars to differentiate between 'Hispanic-serving and Hispanic-enrolling institutions'" (Gasman et al., 2015, p. 129).

Gina Garcia (2019) complicates this distinction between "serving" and "enrolling" in her book *Becoming Hispanic Serving Institutions* by emphasizing how the standards by which we measure all institutions of higher education are predicated on white normative standards. She identifies many ways white standards have been normalized but focuses on the race for prestige through national

rankings, graduation rates, and retention rates. Similar to the administrators at land-grant institutions, Garcia argues “Institutions that strive to rank higher are therefore less likely to enroll students of color, simply because of the negative correlation between achievement and race” (p. 14). This drive for national rankings also leads to a deficit-based perspective of HSIs that are expected to live up to white standards of success while also serving BIPOC students. This means that HSIs are expected to “sufficiently address the history of oppression and subjugation of Latinx students throughout the educational pipeline” (p. 7). Given that history of oppression and the normalization of white standards, Garcia argues for enacting an organizational identity that accounts for culturally engaging practices as well as graduation rates, job placement, and retention.

To account for both measures of cultural belonging and organizational outcomes, Garcia (2019) theorizes a new taxonomy for determining HSI’s effectiveness. Instead of viewing HSIs as either Latine-serving or Latine-enrolling, her taxonomy allows for Latine-producing and Latine-enhancing institutions. In this way, we can account for institutions that might graduate and retain Latine students at high rates but neglect to enact a culture that enhances Latine students’ racial/ethnic experience (i.e., “Latinx-Producing”) or institutions that cultivate a rich organizational culture that enhances Latine students’ racial/ethnic experience but do not have high graduation or retention rates (i.e., “Latinx-Enhancing”) (p. 31).

See Garcia’s table below:

**Table 1. Typology of Hispanic-Serving Institution Organizational Identities**

**Academic Outcomes**

High	Latinx-Producing	Latinx-Serving
Low	Latinx-Enrolling	Latinx-Enhancing
	Low	High

**Culture Reflects Latinx Students**

Garcia’s metric for measuring the effectiveness of HSIs provides me with a powerful interpretive tool to analyze my university. These distinctions gave me the language to hold my university accountable to its stated mission as an HSI.

## **The University of Arizona Becomes an HIS**

Garcia’s (2019) consideration of cultural and academic considerations is a useful tool as I reflect on UA’s path toward becoming an HSI. In 2005, the dean of UA’s College of Humanities, Chuck Tatum, conducted a report on the steps the university needed to take to become an HSI. Tatum (2005) focused on the economic and political advantages of UA investing in recruiting local Latine high school students. Tatum’s report echoed Garcia’s argument that HSIs must address inequities facing Latine populations throughout the K-12 educational pipeline. Most of his recommendations focused on how Arizona’s K-12 pipeline failed Latine students. Tatum argued “Our current efforts in affecting the

Pre-K-12 pipeline appear to be well-intentioned but uncoordinated, random, anemic, and unfocused" (p. 17). In response to Tatum's argument, the university needed to know that its *investment* in Latine students would pay off. The then-current number of "college ready" Latine students was continuing to grow and could have grown more with proper interventions from the university. However, UA determined that its focus would be marketing itself to Latine students at all levels rather than funding educational opportunities for Latine students throughout K-12 schools.

The financial crisis of 2008-9 stunted Tatum's calls for increased investment in Latine students throughout K-12 schools. As the state's unemployment rate skyrocketed from 3.7% to 9.7% between 2006-2009, UA's budget was cut by 45% (Sheridan 2012, p. 386). These financial troubles and heightened tensions between cartels in Sonora gave Arizona politicians the fodder they needed to scapegoat Mexicans for political gain. Their scapegoating culminated in SB 1070, which essentially legalized racial profiling by police. Also, Tom Horne's crusade against the Tucson Public School's Mexican American studies class resulted in a ban on ethnic studies courses in Arizona public schools with the passing of HB 2188. Thomas Sheridan points out that students taking that Mexican American studies class were "twice as likely to graduate and three times more likely to go to college," which shows that "Arizona's political leaders were deliberately sabotaging the state's [K]-12 public education system" (p. 397).

While the university's journey to becoming an HSI was tumultuous, it finally earned its designation in 2018. In only a few short years, UA has earned the "Seal of Excelencia" from Excelencia in Education, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing HSIs. In that time, UA established the HSI Fellows Program, a family outreach initiative, a summer STEM program for local Latine high

school students, a webinar series on issues facing Latine students in higher education, and an HSI week that disseminates information to undergraduates about these programs. All of these initiatives have produced high academic outcomes and earned national recognition. However, UA still has work to do to address Garcia's (2019) measure of culturally engaging practices. We can see this in Cathy Gastelum's (2020) qualitative study at UA, where she conducted twenty interviews with Latine-identifying students, asking how the university could better serve them. The students Gastelum interviewed gave concrete examples of the institutional practices that made them feel excluded or included as Latine students. The majority of students reported experiencing a lack of empathy from tutors, advisors, and graduate teaching assistants. All students identified the Guerrero Cultural Center as the place they felt most welcome on campus (p. 34). From these findings, Gastelum recommends expanding cultural centers on campus and mandating that all faculty instructors receive training in Critical Race Theories (p. 36). A main theme in Gastelum's conclusion was that "awards and designations are not representative of the actual practices of the institutions and are not student-centered" (p. 36).

Gastelum's (2020) finding points to a core contradiction in the land-grant and HSI institutions: their missions require serving minoritized student populations, but they exist within a reward system that incentivizes exclusionary measures. When administrators talk about balancing institutional demands with a commitment to access, they are talking about this contradiction. While there has been some progress towards revising measures of success at the national level, individual universities should follow Gastelum's lead and listen to minoritized student populations they purport to serve and invite them to take a leading role in their university's HIS and land-grant initiatives.

As a white-settler composition instructor, studying the contradictions between my university's institutional practice and stated missions offered me a critical opportunity to learn from the past and present educational activists from the communities that host my university. Their activism has taught me the harm of passively accepting the settler-colonial rhetoric of my university. Instead, their work demonstrates how student activists have been and continue to be the main catalysts for actualizing social and linguistic justice in higher education.

I hope these reflections underscore the importance of local historical research and encourages all educators to confront the colonial and racist foundations of educational policies and engage with the history of BIPOC student activists' collective action. This history has encouraged me to listen to the land my campus sits on and instilled in me a responsibility to act in solidarity with the legacy of educational activism that shaped where I teach.

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