

Service or self-promotion?: University-community tourism engagement in question

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Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation project was to identify benefits and drawbacks of public land-grant university involvement with tourism planning and development, an emergent form of university-community engagement.

Key Definition

Public land-grant university involvement with tourism planning and development encompasses four primary campus-based services and facilities including cooperative tourism extension services (Figure 1), visitor information centers (Figure 2), conference/event services, and academic tourism programs.

Critical Observations

- Leading public land-grant universities – particularly members of the Association of American Universities – tend to frame their involvement as community engagement.
- Though public land-grant university involvement with tourism planning and development is being promoted as a form of university-community engagement (Figure 3), it is questionable as to whether or not it is a viable way for public land-grant universities to advance a genuine community engagement agenda.
- With growing skepticism regarding universities' contributions to society, tourism tends to be viewed as a less pressing regional and community development topic area than traditional public policy areas such as workforce development, public health and nutrition, information technology access, and housing.



Figure 1

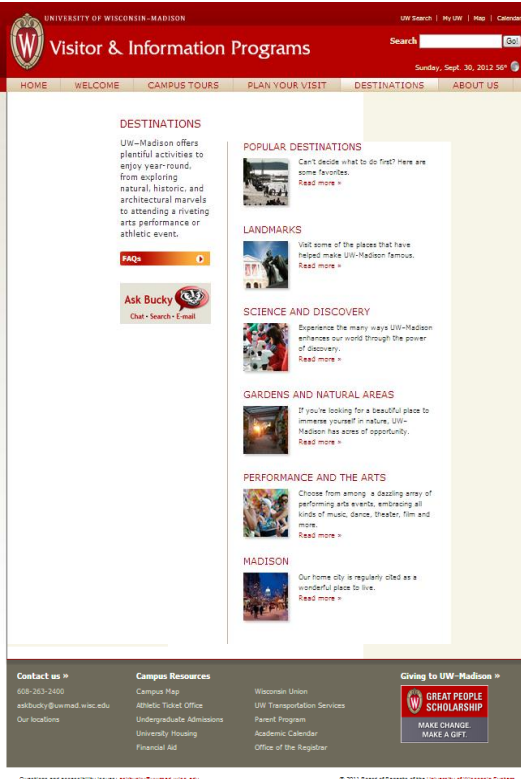


Figure 2

Conclusion

Ironically, tourism engagement among public land-grant universities reinforces class, race, and place-based power hegemonies that the university-community engagement movement seeks to address.

Methodology

For this emerging area of inquiry, the project employed an inductive, three-phase qualitative research design.

Phase I – Grounded theory (literature review)

- Identified gaps and discovered integration among three bodies of literature: (1) planning, (2) tourism planning, and (3) higher education public service (Figure 4).
- Established a theoretical space for examining university-community tourism engagement critically.
- Provided a basis for developing and refining the study's primary research questions:

R1. How are public land-grant universities with greater tourism planning and development capacities distinguished from public land-grant universities with lower capacities?

R2. What are reciprocal benefits and drawbacks of university-community tourism planning and development? Do benefits and drawbacks differ based on institutional capacity?

Phase II – Grounded theory; semiotic analysis

- Visual and textual data were interpreted from over 150 university-community tourism-related websites (e.g., Figure 4).
- Over 150 in-person and phone survey interviews were conducted with university and community leaders to verify interpretation of data.
- Five levels of public land-grant university tourism planning and development capacity emerged from the analysis.

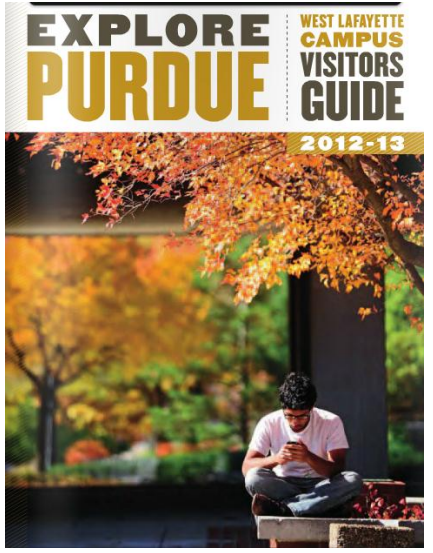



Figure 4



Phase III – Case study; institutional ethnography

- Rutgers University in New Jersey's Gateway Tourism Region – high capacity Level 3 institution
- Alcorn State University, legislative partner in the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area – low capacity Level 1 institution

Finding 1

University Tourism Marketing Reinforces Historic Institutional Hierarchies

Classification System of Public Land-grant University Tourism Planning and Development Capacity

	Tier	Description	Examples	General characteristics
High capacity (42 total)	Level 4	Public land-grant universities that feature all four tourism planning and development mechanisms (13 total)	Clemson University (SC) Cornell University (NY) Iowa State University Purdue University (IN) Texas A&M University	Institutional types <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association of American Universities members: 38% • Historically Black 1890 universities: One (2%) • 33% serve states located in the Mississippi Delta and Great Plains regions; none of these are historically Black public land-grant universities
	Level 3	Public land-grant universities that feature three of the four tourism planning and development mechanisms (29 total)	University of Illinois - Urbana University of Maryland–Eastern Shore University of Minnesota–Twin Cities Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey University of Wisconsin–Madison	Perceived commitment to community engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus Compact members: 71% • 2010 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification designation: 19%
Medium capacity (11 total)	Level 2	Public land-grant universities that feature two of the four tourism planning and development mechanisms (11 total)	University of Connecticut–Storrs Fort Valley State University (GA) Kansas State University Montana State University Virginia State University	Institutional types <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association of American Universities members: 0% • Historically Black 1890 universities: 36% • Three (27%) serve states located in the Great Plains or Mississippi Delta regions; one of these is an historically Black 1890 university Perceived commitment to community engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus Compact members: 72% • 2010 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification designation: 36%
	Level 1	Public land-grant universities that feature one of the four tourism planning and development mechanisms (9 total)	Alabama A&M University Alcorn State University (MS) South Dakota State University Tuskegee University (AL) University of Wyoming	Institutional types <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association of American Universities members: 0% • Historically Black 1890 universities: 88% • 69% serve states located in the Great Plains or Mississippi Delta regions; 81% of these are historically Black public land-grant universities
Low capacity (16 total)	Not applicable (N/A)	Public land-grant universities that feature none of the four tourism planning and development mechanisms (7 total)	Langston University (OK) North Carolina A&T University South Carolina State University Southern University (LA) Tennessee State University	Perceived commitment to community engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus Compact members: 56% • 2010 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification designation: One (6%)

Finding 2

Destination Creation Is an Indicator of Institutional and Place Competitiveness

The adoption of tourism engagement marketing strategies among high capacity public land-grant universities creates a “new playing field” driven largely by sophisticated, collaborative tourism engagement programs that shape perceptions of their power to help advance their communities as competitive destinations.

High capacity public land-grant universities

- Collaborate with others within their ranks on tourism development projects (Figure 5) which codifies prestige and socioeconomic power structures
- Effectively distinguish themselves and the geographic places surrounding them as competitive, desirable destinations.
- Institutions are positioned for sustained public support as well as long-term survival.




Figure 5

Low capacity public land-grant universities (Figure 6)

- Tend not to have the tourism engagement resources that their high capacity counterparts do.
- Appear to be divested from rather than invested in their communities, despite evidence to the contrary.
- Communities that they serve tend to be characterized by chronic poverty, depopulation, and disinvestment (MS Delta; Great Plains).
- Lack tourism engagement resources that can assist the communities that they serve to compete in regional, national, and global destination

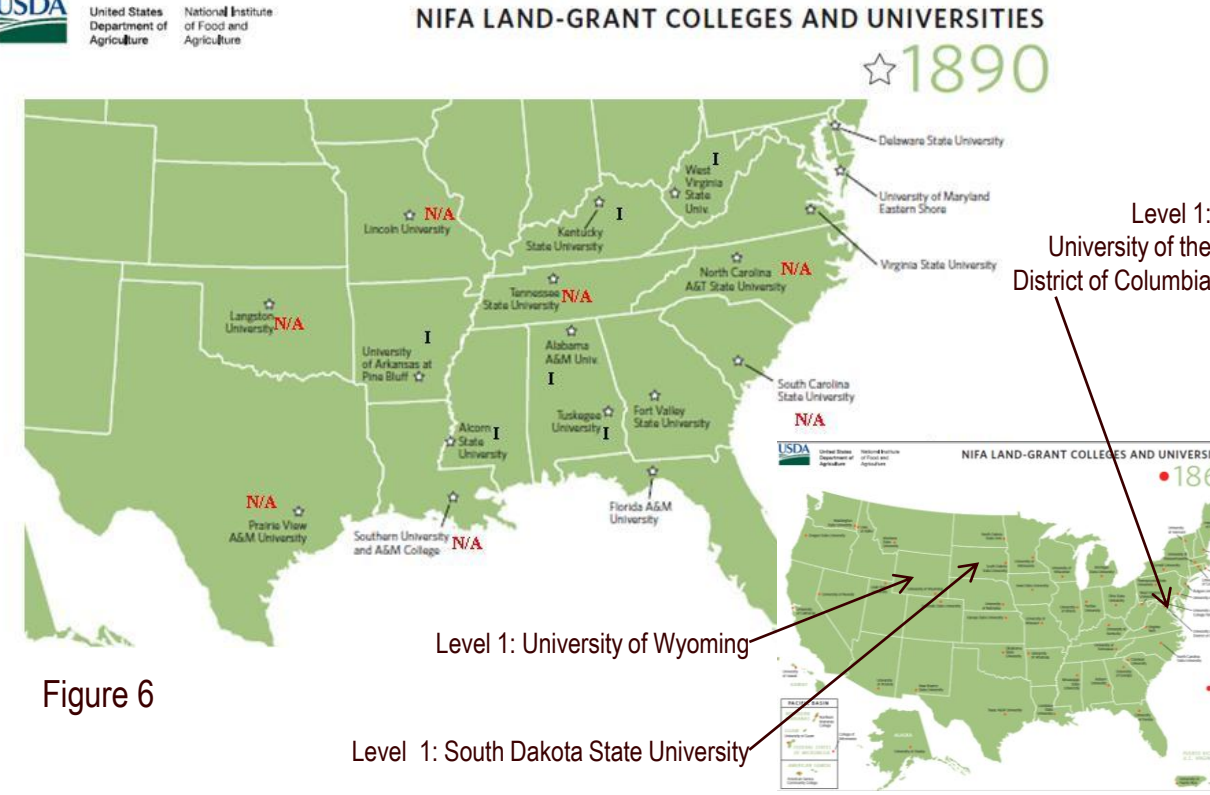


Figure 6