Purpose
The purpose of this dissertation project was to identify benefits and drawbacks of public land-grant universities with tourism planning and development capacity and to develop a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of tourism engagement initiatives.

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.

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 and recreation, 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 lesser 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: semantic 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.

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

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.