It's Complicated: Exploring the Internal Land-Grant Brand at Oklahoma State University

Abstract

Land-grant institutions (LGIs) are tasked with providing accessible education to the common man and improving their quality of life. This study examined faculty members' interpretations of the land-grant mission and opinions about its future. The theory of branding guided this study. Faculty members are the primary deliverers university missions. Past studies have indicated some personnel are unaware of pieces of the land-grant mission. This is troublesome as a strong internal brand increases the likelihood of a positive public image. A purposive sampling method was used to recruit participants for 11 focus groups conducted in the summer of 2020. The audio was transcribed and imported into MAXQDA20 and analyzed using Glaser's constant comparative method to identify themes, which were confirmed by assistant moderators. Participants had multiple definitions of the land-grant mission and interpreted in their work differently. There was a general state of concern for the future, but faculty members had an overall positive outlook on the land-grant mission. Faculty should view their work and behaviors as true building block of the OSU and land-grant brand. Future research should explore the internal brand at other LGIs and university staff, administration, and student perceptions should also be explored.

Keywords: land-grant institutions; branding; internal branding; faculty

Introduction

President Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act of 1862 and initiated what some say is the most unique movement of public higher education, the democratization of education through land-grant colleges (Bonnen, 1998; Nevins, 1962). These institutions were to educate professionals to thrive in an industrialized nation, educate students about agriculture, provide higher education, regardless of wealth or prestige, and enhance the well-being of the common man, i.e. farmers and industrial workers (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018; Goldstein et al., 2019). Eventually the land-grant colleges merged with research institutions to create land-grant institutions (LGIs). LGIs are tasked with educating the common people and creating cutting-edge, scholarly knowledge. This tension between education for all classes of people and striving for academic and scholarly excellence is unique to LGIs (Bonnen, 1998).

The land-grant ideal applies the highest level of scholarship to everyday societal problems (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). However, in the last century the role of higher education has experienced a shift known as the corporatization or commercialization of universities (Jarvis, 2001). Although LGIs are meant to serve the public, there are varying opinions about how to best execute this. Recent shifts in the culture of education tend to treat students as customers, while researchers collaborate with industry and private companies (Barnett, 2019). These industry connections are notable as they can lead to concerns about biased research (O'Connor, October 31, 2016). These shifts can create a hostile environment for land-grant ideals to flourish. Despite that, every year more than 1 million students graduate from LGIs, and a vast majority of graduate education is delivered at LGIs (Sternberg, 2014). More than 2 million students are enrolled at a LGI (Croft, 2022). Although enrollment rates are promising, these institutions are not well understood or recognized by the public they were designed to serve, and administrators believe faculty members do not understand the land-grant mission (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). Despite LGIs existing to serve the public in their tripartate mission, many faculty members lack of interest in engaging with communities (Holesovsky et al., 2020).

LGIs and agricultural education have always been closely linked. In fact, one of our sub-disciplines, agricultural communications, was born of the land-grant model in 1905 (Boone et al., 2000). LGIs are an important part of the broader agricultural education community. Of the 57 1862 LGIs, 45 actively prepare agricultural education teachers or agricultural communicators (Croft, 2022; Miller et al., 2015; National Association of Agricultural Educators, 2022). Moreover, these types of programs at LGIs are essential in training Extension professionals, an essential piece of the land-grant mission. In the *Journal of Agricultural Education*, LGIs are often mentioned as the context where the research was conducted (e.g., Alexander et al., 2017; Lamm et al., 2018; Redwine et al., 2017) or as having some underpinning for the research (e.g., Hartmann & Martin, 2021; Lindley, 1993; Roberts et al., 2004) without analyzing what the Land-grant mission means to the faculty members who are conducting teaching, research, and Extension. There are exceptions, notably historical research narratives that address LGIs and their purpose (e.g., Herren & Edwards, 2002; Herren & Hillison, 1996), but there is a need to directly address how faculty are perceiving and engaging in the Land-grant mission. This study sought to assess faculty members' perceptions of and engagement with the land-grant mission through the lens of branding.

This study examines faculty perceptions of the land-grant brand at Oklahoma State University (OSU). Born of the Land Run, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, the precursor to OSU, was established on December 24, 1890. In 1957 Oklahoma A&M became Oklahoma State University for Agriculture and Applied Science but is most known as Oklahoma State University (Green, 1990; Oklahoma State University, 2020; Rulon, 1975; Sanderson et al., 1990). At this time Pistol Pete was established as the mascot of OSU, and the athletic teams became known as the Cowboys and Cowgirls. OSU is an NCAA Division I university for athletics and is located in in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Stillwater has a population of nearly 50,000. OSU offers more than 300 undergraduate majors and minors, and more than 200 master's and Ph.D. options. OSU is a nationally ranked research university. There are nearly 25,000 students enrolled at OSU. There are more than 500 student organizations available at OSU. OSU is known for their homecoming celebration and *America's Brightest Orange* (Oklahoma State University, 2021). OSU had recently completed a rebranding effort, streamlining logo usage across the university. The College of Education and Human Sciences had recently been formed from two separate colleges: The College of Education and the College of Human Sciences. Furthermore, the college of agriculture had recently been renamed from the College of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources to the Ferguson College of Agriculture.

Theoretical Framework & Literature Review

Branding is a theory and a practice centered around distinguishing a corporation, organization, or product from others. A brand is the identity of a product, idea, or organization that is created from an interrelated system of organizational decisions and consumer reactions. A brand is not only used for identification, but also for building awareness of the brand itself (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). A brand cannot be understood when isolated from the world in which it exists, which means the study of brands and branding is multifaceted (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). Strong brands come from the essence of the organization itself and should be "congruent with its mission, defined by its values" and "match the institution's personality" (Black, 2008, p. 2).

The essence of an organization, and consequently its brand, begins with employees. Therefore, internal branding is essential to a successful brand (Piehler et al., 2015; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). Internal branding is "how a business builds and packages its identity, forms its origins and values, what it promises to deliver to emotionally connect employees so that they in turn deliver what the business promises to customers" (Sartain & Schumann, 2006, p. vi). An employer needs to understand employees' perceptions of the brand in order to improve employees' investment in the brand (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Ind, 2008). A strong internal brand is especially important for service-based organizations that depend on customer and employee interactions, rather than a product (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018). Internal brands are formed and

strengthened through interactions employees have with the organization and one another, a process known as co-creation (Dean et al., 2016).

Although the internal brands of universities need to be understood, faculty members' viewpoints are rarely studied (Chapelo, 2010; Leijerholt et al., 2019; Moorer, 2007; Whisman, 2009; Yang & Mutum, 2015). Faculty members have the most influence and control over the execution and brand of the land-grant mission (Flanagan et al., 2013), and have a responsibility to communicate the institution's brand effectively (Endo et al., 2019). The same can be said for the land-grant mission. For it to be carried out effectively, faculty members must understand and embrace the land-grant mission (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). The end goal of internal branding is employee behavior consistent with the organizational brand, also known as brand-supporting behavior or brand citizenship behavior (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Punjaisri et al., 2008). Universities that engage in internal branding are more likely to have higher levels of institutional commitment (Anwer et al., 2020). However, faculty members often view branding efforts negatively (Gray et al., 2003; Vasquez et al., 2013).

On the public side, trust is an important component in the approval and support of an organization (Kang & Hustvedt, 2013). This is even more important when competing brands have similar offerings or rely upon emotional connections to ensure brand loyalty (de Chernatony, 2001b). This is especially true for universities. University marketers and communications tend to struggle to differentiate universities from one another and depend on loyalty from alumni and current students to promote them (Chapleo, 2010). Unfortunately, the public has become distrustful of organizations associated with the government, especially those intended to provide unbiased, scientific based knowledge, such as LGIs (Birkland, 2011).

LGIs are each unique to their respective states and are fragmented organizations, making their branding particularly complicated (Campbell, 1995; Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). The branding and perception of LGIs has been a concern for researchers for over 40 years (Adkins, 1980; DeBord, 2007; Maddy & Kealy, 1998). There have been studies about external (Abrams et al., 2010; Baker et al., 2011; Smith & Oliver, 1991) and internal brands (Kirkwood, 2018; Ray et al., 2015; Settle et al., 2016; Zagonel et al., 2019), but research is limited given the ubiquity of LGIs and the scope of their impact across their three components. Although past research is limited in terms of the number of studies conducted, it is worth noting in research about the University of Florida, the public was not aware of all three parts of LGIs (Baker et al., 2011), though people had positive perceptions of the land-gran mission when they were aware of it (Abrams et al., 2010; Baker et al., 2011). Similarly, internal audiences at Kansas State University were aware of the land-grant mission but did not have a uniform understanding of its concepts (Zagonel et al., 2019). There is a need for research about perceptions of the land-grant mission, particularly internally with faculty members who are tasked with embodying the tripartite mission through their work.

Purpose and Questions

This study sought to understand if and how the brand of the land-grant mission was being supported and delivered by faculty members at OSU. Two research questions guided the study:

1. How did faculty members translate and deliver the land-grant mission in their work?
2. What were faculty members' opinions regarding the future of the land-grant mission?

Methods

A qualitative approach via focus groups was used to assess the perspectives of faculty members and the context of OSU's brand. Qualitative research is suited to give "an understanding of why things are the way they are and how they got to be that way" (Morgan, 1998, p. 12). Focus groups were chosen to collect data because these group discussions help to mitigate the chances of collecting data not indicative

of the norm by providing an opportunity for participants to validate or refute others' points in real-time (Flick, 2009). Furthermore, meaning is usually derived from individual thought but is often manifested in the behavior of groups (Flick, 2009). This type of inquiry also allows for follow-up questions to clarify points and reach the depth desired by researchers (Flick, 2009; Rubin, 2005).

Homogeneous groups, faculty from the same colleges and tenure track status, were used to increase participants comfort during data collection. Five of the 10 colleges on the Stillwater campus were studied. These colleges were selected because they served both undergraduate and graduate students. The remaining colleges either only served graduate students or did not formally house faculty members. A purposive sampling method was used to recruit participants. Department heads in each of the five colleges were asked via email to suggest two to three faculty members to participate in focus groups. If recruitment emails were unanswered, email addresses were acquired directly from departmental websites. Participants were selected to be representation of faculty rank, race, and gender. All potential participants were invited to participate in a focus group via email three weeks prior to each respective focus group session. Reminder emails were sent two days prior to focus groups to those who had agreed to participate.

A moderator's guide was used to direct the discussion and was developed using recommendations by Bloor et al. (2001), Krueger (1998a), and Litoselliti (2003). The ideal number of questions for each focus group is around 10, but this number can be increased slightly if the group is homogenous (Krueger, 1998b). The first questions were asked to make participants comfortable and engaged. The best questions to begin with are factual questions, which are called opening questions (Krueger, 1998b; Litoselliti, 2003). In the present study, participants were asked to describe their role, home department, and appointment. Next, questions introduced the topic of conversation for the focus group session (Krueger, 1998b), such as "What comes to mind when you think of OSU?" and "What do you think OSU is known for?" Next, transition questions were used to advance the discussion toward the topics that directly addressed the research questions (Krueger, 1998b). Transition questions such as "What do you think OSU values as an institution?" were asked. These questions "make the connection between the participant and the topic of investigation" (Krueger, 1998b, p. 25). Subsequent questions were categorized into four sections: teaching, research, Extension, and the overall land-grant mission. These were key questions. Key questions often require more time for participants to properly articulate answers and fully discuss, which means they also require more time and attentiveness in analysis (Krueger, 1998b). To end the formal questioning portion of each focus group session, an all-things-considered question was asked: "Suppose you had 30 seconds to describe the land-grant mission to someone who is unfamiliar, what would you say?" This type of question encourages participants to reflect on everything they have heard during the session and provides an opportunity for participants to provide a final, clear, and succinct opinion if participants have been sharing contradicting opinions (Krueger, 1998b). The last question asked is known as an insurance question: "Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to share before we finish up?" This ensures important points have not been neglected by the moderator's guide (Krueger, 1998b).

Eleven focus groups were completed in the summer of 2020. Sessions were conducted via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Online focus groups should use fewer participants than traditional focus groups to give participants adequate time to share their thoughts: Three to eight participants is recommended for online focus groups (Abrams & Gaiser, 2017; Poynter, 2010). Table 1 shows the breakdown of participants in each focus group. There were 51 total participants in the focus groups. Conflicts, summer schedules, and non-response to invitations led to an overrepresentation of faculty in agriculture and an underrepresentation of non-tenure track faculty in general. Despite our best efforts, the focus group intended to examine opinions of engineering non-tenure track faculty had only one participant. A second agriculture tenure track session was added because more individuals agreed to participate than anticipated in the initial inquiry, and we did not want to exclude them after they had already agreed to participate.

Table 1

Focus Group Participation by College and Tenure Status

Focus Group	Number of Participants
Agriculture Non-Tenure Track Faculty	4
Agriculture Tenure Track Faculty 1	5
Agriculture Tenure Track Faculty 2	9
Arts and Sciences Non-Tenure Track	2
Arts and Sciences Tenure Track Faculty	7
Business Non-Tenure Track Faculty	3
Business Tenure Track Faculty	4
Education and Human Sciences Non-Tenure Track Faculty	5
Education and Human Science Tenure Track Faculty	6
Engineering Non-Tenure Track Faculty	1
Engineering Tenure Track Faculty	5

Each focus group lasted between one and two hours. This length of time was ideal as it allowed for persistent observation of the phenomenon being studied but was not overly intrusive for participants (Krueger, 1998a; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Litoselliti, 2003). Persistent observation allowed me to recognize the most relevant elements and focus on them. This focus was achieved through probing and clarifying questions. Persistent observation established the credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At the conclusion of each focus group, the moderator summarized the major points and asked participants if it was adequate, which served as a member check. This gave us the opportunity to summarize preliminary findings and gave the participants the opportunity to clarify points, correct researcher errors and challenge interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Krueger, 1998a). To ensure accurate and reliable data collection, focus group sessions were audio recorded (Flick, 2009; Krueger, 1998c).

The protocol in its entirety was audited by an external panel comprised of agricultural communications and education faculty members who were familiar with focus groups, as well as LGI experts from across the U.S. familiar with focus groups. This increases the credibility of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Internal consistency was ensured through comparing moderator's notes, assistant moderators' notes, audio recordings, and transcripts of participants' responses (Flick, 2009).

The audio files from focus group sessions were transcribed by Temi, a web-based app. To protect participant confidentiality, all identifying information was removed and a code was assigned to each participant. The lead author reviewed the completed transcripts to ensure their accuracy. Transcripts, moderator's notes, and assistant moderators' notes were used to confirm data collection and triangulate data (Flick, 2009). Data were further triangulated by collecting artifacts from OSU's website and new faculty orientation sessions. Triangulation is the combination of different methods, theories, or data sources to examine a phenomenon (Flick, 2009) and is used to mitigate the deficiency of a single strategy (Thurmond, 2001). Furthermore, triangulation is used in qualitative inquiry to ensure data are rich and comprehensive and establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thurmond, 2001). It is also standard practice for brands to be assessed through triangulation (de Chernatony et al., 2007; Freling & Forbes, 2005). Triangulation was achieved by comparing how the university presented itself with the viewpoints shared by participants (Carter et al., 2014; Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). The 61 artifacts were analyzed in MAXQDA20 for mentions for these terms: land, grant, mission, purpose, and role.

Transcripts and artifacts were analyzed with MAXQDA20 using Glaser's constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965). Analysis was guided by the research questions (Litoselliti, 2003). The lead researcher indexed the transcripts by assigning codes to data. Codes are labels that assign meaning to a piece of the transcript (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes break data into manageable pieces. Those pieces

were then put together with other data to create meaning (Flick, 2009). Initially, index codes, which are broad, were assigned to data. Codes became narrower as analysis progressed (Frankland & Bloor, 1999). Next, codes were organized into categories around different phenomena related to the research questions. These categories were used to create themes (Flick, 2009). In this study, A theme is "an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the [data] into a meaningful whole" (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000, p. 362). To increase credibility, the assistant moderators reviewed and confirmed the established themes.

As part of the coding and theme discovery process, extensive notes and summaries were created for each theme. These notes were used to describe the themes to external auditors and to write results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These process notes also added to the formal audit trail of the study. The full audit trail of this study includes audio files, transcripts, written field notes, assistant moderator notes, artifacts, coding matrix, structure of categories, theme descriptions, and instrument development information. This information provides rationale for research decisions and improves the confirmability of the study. A dependability audit of the study was performed by a panel of experts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To the extent journal page limits allow, a thick description of the research has been provided in the methods to address the transferability of the study's results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Subjectivity

Subjectivity is an element of a researcher themselves that can impact the attitude toward a study's topic (Preissle, 2008). It is best to be upfront and clear about subjectivity to better understand how these views may influence the research (Peshking, 1988). It is essential to share this subjectivity with readers so they can accurately discern a study's credibility and quality (Peshking, 1988; Preissle, 2008). Thus, in the name of academic integrity and transparency and to enhance the study's confirmability, our subjectivities related to this study are below.

At the time of the research, Audrey King was an agricultural education graduate student specializing in agricultural communications at OSU. This was her dissertation study. She has been involved with components of the land-grant mission since a young age as a 4-H member, received all her post-secondary education at LGIs, and the majority of her professional employment have been at LGIs, specifically connected to colleges of agriculture. Quisto Settle participated in 4-H projects as a youth. He has worked at three LGIs but received his bachelor's and master's degrees from non-LGIs. Dwayne Cartmell has been involved with aspects of LGIs since an early age as a 4-Her. All of his post-secondary degrees were earned at LGIs, and all of his career as a faculty member has been at a LGI. In addition, Cartmell has served as a committee member within the Association of Public Land-Grant Universities.

Results

RQ1: How do Faculty Members Translate the Land-Grant Mission in Their Work?

To understand how faculty members interpreted and expressed the land-grant mission in their everyday work, participants were asked to reflect on teaching, research, and Extension, and how the they integrated the missions in their work. The primary themes associated with this research question were evaluation and expectations guided faculty behavior; performing outside of their actual appointment; missions must be integrated; applied and practical research; industry connections; and difficulties in fulfilling the land-grant mission.

Evaluation and Expectations Guided Faculty Behavior

Although most faculty members were aware of the land-grant mission, many participants stated the *evaluation and expectations guided faculty behavior* rather than the overarching mission of the institution. A tenure-track faculty member in the College of Arts and Science (CAS) admitted,

> I didn't actually have any idea what land-grant meant or that OSU was one when I came here. Maybe it's the department I'm in, but it wasn't anything that had really much relevancy or continues to really have a whole lot of relevancy in what we're trying to do. Or if I'm honest, how we're being judged.

Faculty members from several colleges complained of unclear expectations and unwritten rules associated with their appointments. A tenure-track faculty member in the College of Education and Human Sciences when referring to the execution of ever piece of land-grant mission (CEHS) said, "But then you would have to evaluate people based on their appointment. And currently we don't have that. If you evaluated people based on their appointment, that would be fine." A CAS tenure-track faculty member stated that there was little evidence to support OSU valued outreach, particularly within Oklahoma:

> Does the university actually values outreach? I'd say no. When it comes to research, you're expected to have stuff in your A&D documents about international impact. And we've had to really fight to point out it's important to serve Oklahomans, who are taxpayers . . . Yet the evaluation stresses international.

A tenure-track faculty member in CAS debated with her colleague saying,

> But you are not actually rewarded for your outreach effort. You spend a ton of time on it, and it's not a part of your job. So, I agree that you've done great things and our department, absolutely praises outreach, but I would say that it's not a part of my job. It is 0% of my job. Like sure, I could say the outreach that I might do counts as service, but I'm already doing 150% of the service I should be doing in my department alone.

Performing Outside of Their Actual Appointment

Faculty members routinely spoke of *performing outside of their actual appointment.* A non-tenure-track faculty member in in CAS saw this as a positive saying "any research that I do is completely independent of my departmental obligations. I've gone to conference every year, but it doesn't show up on my A&D form. It's all just bonus and it's, it's never expected." One College of Agriculture (COA) tenure-track faculty member was happy to contribute to Extension efforts: "Even though I don't have an Extension appointment, I'll tag along and give presentations." Other faculty members saw performing outside of their appointments as more neutral: "I don't have a research or an Extension appointment, but I feel like I am required to do research and Extension," said a COA non-tenure-track faculty member. A tenure-track faculty member in College of Business (COB) saw performing outside of their formal appointment as a natural product as academia: "My primary or focus, I guess you might say, is teaching, but obviously being a member of the faculty and a professor, I've had to do research, outreach, service, and all that other stuff." A COA non-tenure-track faculty member suggested the formal structure may not be necessary:

> [The land-grant mission] was always described to me as a three-legged stool, and the stool will not stand without any one of the legs. But I feel like they try to peg you into one of those three legs . . . but then we're involved in every mission in some form, so I don't know that is it necessary to keep that structure.

Still, other faculty members were hostile about being asked to perform outside of their appointments. A CAS faculty member stated, "Until I got to OSU, and it's become worse at times, I've never had a job where I'm expected to do things for which I am not judged and not paid." A

CEHS tenure-track faculty member spoke about appointment splits this way, "It's really 100%, 100%, 100% of everything."

Missions Must Be Integrated

Faculty members indicated that *missions must be integrated to* effectively and efficiently deliver quality education, cultivate meaningful research, and provide relevant information to non-academic stakeholders. A non-tenure-track faculty member in CEHS spoke to the advantages of attending an LGI as an undergraduate student: "Being able to learn about it, being able to experience it and then being able to use it . . . applying their learning is a great opportunity for a students." They went on to talk about the importance of faculty members working together to achieve the land-grant mission and pursue applied research: "I think that's why it's really important that everybody works together because when we do, we can cover that land-grant mission. When we make it work, we are really focusing on making our research usable and applicable."

A non-tenure-track faculty member in the College of Engineering (CE) described integrating the missions as a necessity:

> We can't just teach the same thing because there's new applications. There's new material that's always coming out from research. Then to be giving back to the community on campus, or in Stillwater, or in the state, you can get data there, and it can improve all three of those aspects together.

An example of this integration was using student organizations as a form of outreach. A COA tenure-track faculty member said: "We rely on our student organizations to go into the community to provide services and school activities." One COA non-tenure-track faculty member described an LGI as a vehicle: "So, it's kind of working like a vehicle where research is your engine, teaching is your oil, and funding is your fuel, Extension is your tires . . . . Working together it all moves forward." A CEHS tenure-track faculty member admits it is not a perfect system:

> Even though a lot of us are doing research with members of the community, sometimes there is a gap between what we study and what they're interested in. Or we're not providing findings in a way that the general population can learn what those findings are. Just publishing journal articles is not reaching the public.

Applied and Practical Research

Faculty members recognized *applied and practical research* as a cornerstone of LGIs. A CEHS non-tenure-track faculty member remarked, "One of the things we offer is an evidence-based approach with our research component and the land-grant mission." A COA non-tenure-track faculty member said, "You are doing science that means something, that goes out and is used in agronomy, used by community for health, and improving farm income and stuff like that. . . . Research at OSU is meaningful research."

However, not all research was seen as practical or applicable. A COB non-tenure-track faculty member claimed, "We need to be probably even more practical than what we are. I think sometimes our research, at least in business, gets a little bit . . . heady. It gets a little useless from a practical standpoint."

Industry Connections

When considering the land-grant mission, faculty members also referenced *industry connections.* A COA tenure-track faculty member spoke about the value of industry research and applicable research: "We have a really good connection with industry, whether it's doing Extension or research. But, I think OSU is truly one of the institutions that is trying to strive to do things that are applicable to their

stakeholders." Another COA tenure-track faculty member said of industry-sponsored research, "[Industry partners are] not only sponsoring the work to get the results, but they're sponsoring student education. I think that's a really important link because some of those students go on and work for those industries."

A CE tenure-track faculty members spoke about the value students see and gain from industry connections: "[Students] always value the connection and interaction with industry. They always are very interested in having guest lectures from the industry. Then they can have this kind of a network connection with the industry."

Difficulties in Fulfilling the Land-Grant Mission

Some faculty members experienced *difficulties in fulfilling the land-grant mission.* These were due to expectations from other academics, departmental politics, and the changing needs of audiences. A COB tenure-track faculty member declared, "In terms of getting tenure, the number one requirement is publications. And in addition, preferably publications in top outlets, those don't always lend themselves to doing research that is immediately relevant."

A COA tenure-track faculty member talked about the challenges of publishing applied research in academic journals: "At least in my field, it's hard to do research that Extension and people value because the journals don't appreciate it. So, for that to work you have to have administrators who value that type of research." A CAS tenure-track faculty member was quite blunt about the pertinence of the land-grant mission in their department: "For better or worse, the land-grant perspective for our department is next to irrelevant."

RQ2: What are Faculty Members' Opinions Regarding the Future of the Land-Grant Mission?

Participants were asked what they envisioned as the future of the LGI, obstacles and challenges that LGIs would face, and goals for the future. The primary themes associated with this research question were concern for the future of LGIs; land-grant and the internet: a love hate relationship; communication of LGIs should increase; corporatization and commercialization of education; and what makes a LGI work.

Concern for the Future of LGIs

Faculty members spoke of a general *concern for the future of LGIs*, with an emphasis on the future of Extension, the land-grant as whole, and higher education. A CAS tenure-track faculty member shared their concerns about the future of all higher education saying, "I'm actually apprehensive about our future in general based on how things are going, not just like the land-grant institution, but just the amount of budget cuts that have happened in higher education over the years."

A COA tenure-track faculty member spoke about future challenges., particularly with Extension: "I think we have a big challenge of remaining relevant. We're a model that has been around a long time. It's had its ups and downs. Now, we have this struggle to get citizens to drive to Extension offices." A non-tenure-track faculty member in the COA spoke of the future of Extension with trepidation: "I have a real concern over the future of Extension . . . . I don't think Extension has ever been branded really well for people to know what Extension is." A CEHS tenure-track faculty member disagreed and saw the future of the LGI as bright:

> Because when all three of these components exist, then you are funding faculty members to produce research that can have a positive impact. And they're teaching students who are going out and working in fields, like education, nonprofits, or business who need quality instruction to be effective workers in the community. I really worry a lot about the future of higher education in the coming decades, but I think if anyone has a case to make, it's those of us in land-grant universities."

Land-Grant and the Internet: A Love-hate Relationship

In the theme, *Land-grant and the Internet: A love-hate relationship,* faculty members spoke about the internet and its advantages and disadvantages for LGIs. A tenure-track faculty member in COB who spoke about the challenges the internet presents for higher education claimed,

> You can essentially get a pretty decent education for free by accessing YouTube videos and reading. But I don't think places like OSU or other land-grant schools will close the doors anytime soon. But I think it's certainly going to change things. You could argue Google is fulfilling the mission better than OSU.

A non-tenure-track faculty member in COA stated,

> I think that Google has a pretty big damper on Extension. You used to go to your Extension agent for everything, whether you had a bee problem or you couldn't get your cow to milk or had this weed growing in your yard, but now everything is so instant.

On the other side of the coin, faculty members talked about how much social media has improved the prominence of some Extension programs. One COA tenure-track faculty member said, "Social media platforms have revolutionized Extension and getting that message out. It seems to me the stronger Extension programs are connected to a large number of followers. That's a good way of getting messages out immediately."

Communication of LGIs Should Increase

Faculty members expressed the *communication of LGIs should increase* to either improve awareness of the land-grant mission among external audiences or to improve communication among internal audiences. A tenure-track faculty member in the CE remarked, "We're trying to have a better presence on social media, but the research hasn't quite made its way onto social media yet, except through maybe like student work or activities." A CAS non-tenure-track faculty member wanted to see a more concerted effort in the promotion OSU research, "I'd like to see the university advertised in a way we can be proud of the innovation that's happening here. Most of the research I know about is because it's the research my friends are doing."

A CEHS non-tenure-track faculty member gave an example of the lack of collaboration across campus and the redundancy of efforts. She had written a series of articles on a topic only to discover an agricultural economist had published something similar: "Sometimes we miss the boat. We miss each other going this way and that. Sometimes we're doing the same work in different divisions or departments, and we don't make connections with each other." There were also concerns about communication within colleges as well. A CE tenure-track faculty member talked about the limited opportunities to get to know faculty members in their own college: "For example, my office is one floor above each of yours, and I don't know any of you." Faculty members were also concerned about how the land-grant mission was communicated to internal audiences. Participants mentioned branding several times during the focus group sessions. There were positive and negative sentiments shared regarding branding. A tenure-track faculty member in COA said, "I will say that 'being on brand' is probably the most annoying phrase I hear as an Extension person."

Speaking about university rebranding efforts, a COB tenure-track faculty member said, "The emphasis in the last two years on having one brand has cost us a lot of money. As someone in business I think about those things." However, a non-tenure track faculty member in CEHS spoke very positively of the rebranding efforts and described it as a point of pride among colleagues at other institutions:

> We were having some meetings and I have a Zoom background that has the logo. A colleague asked me about it, and I said, 'Oh yeah it's the new logo.' So, then I told her,

'Yeah, there is a new branding campaign, they basically went away with all other logos and this logo is used by all of the colleges and programs.' And she was like, 'Oh my God, I'm so jealous of you guys'. . . . That made me feel even more proud that we have one cohesive brand.

Corporatization and Commercialization of Education

The *corporatization and commercialization of education* was a major theme within this study. Faculty members had concerns regarding students' expectations and the cost of higher education. Faculty members often mentioned students prioritizing a letter grade above actual learning in a course. A CAS tenure-track faculty member stated, "I think there's such a push about getting A's all the time and not on really learning the material or spending time on the feedback shared by the instructors." A non-tenure-track faculty member in COB commented that students did not expect to work hard for grades or learning: "And so in my introduction class freshmen always have a little bit of shock and awe. I do expect them to read their textbook, which is a little surprising to them." A CE tenure-track faculty member specifically mentioned the disadvantage of the fee structure of their college, "We're at a disadvantage for credit hours. I have students from other colleges interested in taking my class, then they find out engineering has these extra fees. Oftentimes that means they aren't going to take my class."

What Makes an LGI Work

Although faculty members had to contend with several challenges, they also had insight about *what makes an LGI work*. Supportive administration, collaborative colleagues, everyone working toward a common goal, and establishing trust with stakeholders were some of the things that made the land-grant mission possible to achieve. A CEHS tenure-track faculty member spoke about the role administrators play in recognizing academic efforts of faulty members: "I mean the journals we publish in to get to our end user have some of the lowest impact factors. I don't get dinged for that at the moment. And I hope that doesn't change." Another CEHS tenure-track member agreed with their colleague saying, "As long as our administrators and decision makers remember that and honor it, it will be okay."

A COA tenure-track faculty member said a collegial atmosphere was key to creating a successful LGI. However, this faculty member thought the informal connections were the most effective connections:

The thing I'd add about the three segments, research, Extension, and teaching, working together, I find its main benefit tends to be the informal ways they work together. Like, you rarely see big projects where we strategically put research, Extension, and teaching together. But, when you get people who are in Extension and people who do research together, you tend to get a different type of research. And it kind of changes the whole flavor of how things are done.

A COB tenure-track faculty member talked about the importance of working in collaborative teams to execute the land-grant mission: "It's unrealistic to think that every single person should do all of that. I think that's why we have good teams." Another COA tenure-track faculty member asserted all faculty members engage with every part of the land-grant mission: "All of us do every part of the mission. Some of us may have more focus on a certain area, whether it's teaching or research or Extension, but all of us do the land-grant mission."

A COA tenure-track faculty member spoke about the trust between the public and deliverers of the land-grant mission necessary to execute the land-grant mission: "There's a certain trust factor here that's immeasurable feature about what we do. The last thing I want to do is violate that trust because if I violate that trust, then I'm useless."

Conclusions and Discussions

Many faculty members believed integrating all three missions of LGIs was essential to delivering quality education, cultivating meaningful research, and providing relevant information to non-academic stakeholders, which is consistent with past research on improving the value of LGIs (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018; Goldstein et al., 2019). Although many were integrating the different aspects of the land-grant mission, faculty members also reported their behaviors were affected by how they were evaluated, which they did not always believe aligned with the land-grant mission. This is problematic as past research suggests a brand's values should be translated into everyday activities and standards (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007), which includes evaluation of faculty members. Many LGIs deal with this issue because research is readily rewarded and recognized, but community engagement is given "vacuous lip service" (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018, p. 214). Evaluation appeared to drive *what* faculty members did more so than the land-grant mission, however the land-grant mission did affect *how* some of the faculty engaged in their duties. For instance, faculty members were quick to adjust the way they taught to be more inclusive of students with varying academic backgrounds. This may suggest a healthy organizational brand as an organization's brand and how people feel about it affects the behaviors of employees (Smith & Oliver, 1991).

Part of fulfilling the land-grant mission meant faculty members engaged in behaviors they believed to be outside of their official appointments. Some were happy to do so to serve the land-grant mission, but others were not. Those who are willing to go above and beyond contractual obligations indicate support for the brand (Ind, 2008; Thomson et al., 1999). There are several possible explanations for this investment: The internal branding efforts at OSU are strong and well delivered, or the respective faculty members have similar values to the land-grant mission and identify closely with it (Anwer et al., 2020; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Punjaisri et al., 2008). Nonetheless, it is worth noting not all were willing to do so, and given that evaluation drives their behaviors, adjusting job descriptions to be more explicitly inclusive of the land-grant mission would likely benefit the organization's land-grant brand (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007).

In the present study, applied research was considered a cornerstone of LGIs, which past research has shown to be an underpinning aspect of the land-grant mission (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018; Kirkwood, 2018; Settle et al., 2016). In spite of the fact applied research is important for the land-grant mission, that type of research is not always perceived as welcome in many academic journals, which is a key aspect of how faculty members are evaluated. Tension between applied and basic science is common within LGIs (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018).

Faculty members were concerned about the future of Extension. They did not think it was widely understood or used by the public. The need for Extension to intentionally engage in branding has been noted for more than 20 years (Maddy & Kealy, 1998), but Extension is still often referred to as "the best kept secret" internally (DeBord, 2007, para. 1). In the present study, faculty members mentioned users of Extension found it to be highly useful and trustworthy, which aligns with past research (Baker et al., 2011; Ray et al., 2015; Settle et al., 2017), but Extension is likely to continue to struggle with funding and recognition if it cannot broaden its clientele base. Faculty members were concerned Extension was not properly serving all citizens of Oklahoma, particularly those in urban settings, a concern dating back 40 years (Adkins, 1980). Participants were concerned free online resources would replace higher education and Extension. Past research has encouraged Extension to engage in communication with constituents via the internet (Tennessen et al., 1997).

How LGIs interacted with and competed with the private sector showed up in different ways depending on the mission. Faculty members were concerned with the corporatization of education (Barnett, 2019), especially the belief that students saw education as a transactional process (e.g., focused on letter grade) instead of a transformational process (e.g., focused on learning). Outside of teaching, faculty members' statements aligned with Bonnen's (1998) assertion that private industry, especially in agriculture,

is fulfilling some of the land-grant mission more effectively than LGIs themselves. Whereas there were some aspects of the private sector that could be perceived as negatively impacting LGIs, the relationship can also be beneficial because many industry leaders are interested in collaborating with research locate their businesses near LGIs (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). Cultivating private sector partnerships can also lead to donations from industry partners and increased support via lobbying for better budgets for universities (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). This is especially important because state-level funding of universities is a common issue. OSU's state funding support has dropped 26% since 2002 (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2021). On the other hand, private sector connections also present a potential conflict of interest. For instance, there have been university studies funded by industry that reported no link between sugary beverages and poor health, which contradicted 26 other studies conducted by independent researchers (O'Connor, October 31, 2016).

Faculty members were concerned about the communication of OSU's work internally and externally. Participants recommended increasing interdepartmental, intercollege, interuniversity, and interinstitutional communication, which parallels recommendations suggesting collaboration and communication among university colleagues could increase the efficiency and value of LGIs (Campbell, 1995; Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). Faculty members also wanted external communication about the land-grant mission to increase, which aligns with past recommendations to communicate LGIs' value, not just supply information (Baker et al., 2011). Faculty members believe communication needed to improve, simultaneously expressing some frustration with branding efforts. They were supportive of having a unified voice, but did not necessarily want to follow all guidelines. This finding of mixed feelings supports past studies where faculty may recognize the value of branding efforts but do not appreciate the top-down approach usually taken with university branding efforts (Gray et al., 2003; Vasquez et al., 2013). Although they were frustrated, the faculty members illustrated investment in improving the organization's brand, which is positive for the organization (Piehler et al., 2015).

A key aspect of this research is that faculty members were still fairly positive in their perceptions of the LGI, which is similar to past research with university employees (Ray et al., 2015; Settle et al., 2016). Faculty members also spoke of the importance of public approval and trust in the execution of the land-grant mission (Kang & Hustvedt, 2013), which is particularly important in the current environment of distrust in science-related communications (Birkland, 2011). Trust and a strong internal brand are essential for organizations such as OSU that are primarily service based and depend on the interaction employees have with customers (e.g., students, taxpayers, Oklahoma public, and so forth) (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018). Faculty members recognized the importance of public engagement, however they did not necessarily view outreach and engagement as being a priority in their roles, similar to past research (Holesovsky et al., 2020). If universities want faculty members to be more directly engaged in outreach, then including outreach as a part of clearly defined duties would likely be beneficial.

Implications and Recommendations

Faculty members should consider the way their work serves as brand building blocks. As not all faculty members felt their work was relevant to the land-grant mission, it is recommended faculty members are made to feel empowered and responsible for brand creation and the execution of the land-grant mission (Endo et al., 2019). When faculty members are involved in the building of a brand, it is more likely the brand will be successful (Moorer, 2007). Some faculty members were passionate about and valued the land-grant mission. Encouraging all faculty members to foster a deep investment in the mission would be beneficial (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). This may be particularly important for the Extension mission. The general lack of understanding and awareness of Extension is concerning. Faculty members involved in Extension, or the preparation of future Extension educators, should work to create more awareness and knowledge of Extension. If these concepts are not already discussed, new student orientation and freshmen seminar classes would be ideal avenues to introduce new students to Extension or other land-grant concepts.

If they are already discussed, it may be wise to communicate them more clearly.

It is essential to understand employees' perceptions of the brand and help them to feel invested and interested in the brand (Bolman & Deal, 2008). One recommendation to create buy-in is to establish a summit of land-grant scholars for faculty members to discuss their LGI-related efforts, present relevant topics, and network with colleagues across the LGI. This could establish an award or recognition structure related to the land-grant mission to incentivize its delivery. Brand co-creation is a social process, therefore increasing opportunities where faculty members can socialize with one another in a meaningful way could help enhance the land-grant brand at OSU (Dean et al., 2016). It would be beneficial to host events where faculty members could present their work that integrates all the aspects of LGIs' missions.

The qualitative nature of this research means the results may not apply to all LGIs. Each LGI is intended to adapt to its state's citizens' needs (Campbell, 1995; Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). This research should be repeated at other LGIs, including 1890 and 1994 LGIs, especially given that LGIs may not always be properly serving and engaging with all communities (Cropps & Esters, 2021; Hartmann & Martin, 2021). Because of the limited representativeness of qualitative research, a follow-up survey could offer a more generalizable view of faculty members' brand perceptions, values, and expression of OSU's brand (Leijerholt et al., 2019). Future research should address perceptions of other stakeholders, including staff, administrators, and students. It may also be interesting to study the adjustment in teaching methods faculty members engage in to facilitate the land-grant mission from a pedagogical standpoint.

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