Congressional Documents: Opening Content for Multidisciplinary Studies

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Disappearing disciplinary borders in the social science library - global studies or sea change?

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Introduction

Congressional documents are perceived by many as dry, arcane works, suitable only as sources for narrow research on topics related to political science and law. These perceptions arise from previous difficulty accessing this content and a general lack of understanding about the content itself. In the past, even if it had occurred to a researcher in a non-government field that congressional documents might hold interest or be of use, many of these historical documents were available only in paper or microfiche format. Additionally, the length of hearings and other congressional publications likely to prove richest for multidisciplinary study made the content unsuitable for browsing. Today, while widespread lack of understanding about the nature of congressional content persists, the ongoing digitization and access through full-text searching of both current and historical congressional documents provides enhanced opportunities to allow both sophisticated and novice researchers to easily explore government information sources, including congressional documents, and to discover ways in which the content transcends disciplinary lines.

In addition to foreign relations topics, the U. S. Congress interests itself in an array of domestic concerns relevant to research in a wide variety of fields, including business and the economy, communication and information, scientific developments, and race and gender issues. A study of these topics from past to present, within the appropriate historical and social context, discloses much about the origins of issues and ongoing developments that contribute to the state of affairs in the world today. In this paper, we will use the topic of the U. S. land grant college system of education to explore the widespread reach of congressional primary source material. Many people know something about land grant institutions, and most people who know a little will understand that land grant colleges and universities have a focus on agriculture and science curricula. Most, however, would likely not think of studying the land grant system unless they were specifically interested in Federal aid to agriculture or science education. Using International Federation of Library Associations, Social Science Libraries Section, Satellite Conference, Disappearing disciplinary borders in the social science library - global studies or sea change? University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, 6-7, August 2008
congressional primary documents, we will demonstrate that research on the land grant system touches upon myriad social issues with both national and global implications. After providing background on the establishment of land grant colleges, we will give examples to suggest ways in which perusal of full-text congressional materials can provide insight into numerous interdisciplinary subjects, demonstrating how the past informs the present. How does the land grant program as it was initiated and as it changed over time inform our understanding of race, gender, and societal shifts? How does studying the land grant system enhance our understanding of some key connections between the United States and other nations? How does our awareness of this national program shed light on both State and global concerns? We will also discuss challenges faced by librarians as they seek to make this rich, primary content known to a wider audience of researchers who have not traditionally considered government publications as a source option for their research.

The Vision

The origins of the land grant system date back to 1862 while the Civil War was raging. During the summer of 1862 much of the legislation that passed was directly related to the Union war efforts. It is not surprising to learn that laws went into effect reorganizing the Navy Department, appropriating funds for the Army, praising the skill and gallantry of the officers and men of the iron-clad gunboat the USS Monitor, and aiding in the construction of a railroad from Missouri to the Pacific Ocean and securing its use for military purposes. But on July 2, 1862, landmark legislation was enacted authorizing the donation of “public lands to the several states and territories which may provide colleges for the benefit of agriculture and the mechanic arts.” This Act, which came to be known as the First Morrill Act in honor of its sponsor Justin Smith Morrill, makes clear that the passage of legislation to benefit agriculture and the mechanic
arts was a part of the Federal government’s effort not only to win the Civil War, but also to shape the Union and the nation that would eventually emerge. The breadth of Morrill’s vision for the country’s future is evident in those provisions that specify the inclusion of the mechanical arts on a par with agriculture as a leading objective of the legislation. Furthermore, it was explicitly stated that the course of study at agriculture and mechanical arts colleges should not exclude other scientific and classical subjects. The purpose of the legislation was to promote the “practical and liberal education of the industrial classes,” which at that time included everyone except the very wealthy. The land grant system was established in response to the lack of opportunities for the children of working class families to gain admittance to long-established colleges or to receive an education with a traditional classical curriculum. Land grant institutions that were established under the First Morrill Act were shaped by the customs and necessities of the various States in which they were located, but each in its own way created an educational framework that adhered to the vision of Justin Morrill.

Under the land grant program, States and territories not in rebellion against the Federal government were given the opportunity to receive grants of land which could be sold to support the endowment and maintenance of higher education institutions dedicated to the study of agriculture and the mechanic arts. Although awareness of the status of technical education in Europe was evident even before passage of the First Morrill Act, many of the Act’s original supporters viewed the mechanical arts aspect of the program as having little importance since in the mid-19th century the United States was primarily a nation of farmers. At the time the First Morrill Act was enacted, many European governments had already acted to encourage the establishment of schools and colleges to teach scientific and practical agriculture. For example, Prussia, France, and Russia all had noteworthy programs. In fact, a legislative report accompanying land grant legislation previously introduced by Morrill in 1857 surmised that only Spain, Portugal, and Turkey ignored the subject of agricultural education as much as the United States.
States did. Although this legislative proposal included mechanical arts as an objective, the minority views supporting passage of the legislation based the case on the importance of agriculture and the need for agricultural improvement. Westward expansion resulted in a cheap, plentiful supply of land, but labor was in short supply. Land in the areas that had been settled early on was frequently exhausted and infertile. In both cases the need for improved farming methods was clear. The opposition to the bill was based on jurisdictional issues, not on any argument denying the importance of agriculture to the present and future prosperity of the nation. The 1867 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture stated that the land grant was

...intended for the benefit of farmers; for those whose leisure or whose means do not allow them to pursue an extended course of study in existing schools, and who design to follow the business of farming. It does, indeed, provide the means for becoming skillful in the mechanic arts, but the masses in our country are farmers, and farming is the foundation on which our national prosperity rests. It was intended to give dignity to labor; to elevate it above mere drudgery and routine, and to render it intelligent.

In the years immediately following the First Morrill Act’s passage, societal shifts impacted agriculture and other economic sectors. Despite the increased value of farms in the United States between 1850 and 1860, and continued growth in the number of farms between 1870 and 1880 (due, in part, to the subdivision of large plantations), the state of agriculture nationwide was in transition. The connection between agriculture and the mechanic arts would have been clear at the time of the First Morrill Act’s introduction, but the Act was worded broadly enough so that the mechanic arts objectives were not limited to agricultural innovation. The statutory wording of the First Morrill Act was crafted in such a way that the land grant program was well-suited to the changing educational objectives of the late 19th century, in particular, the emerging importance of science. In fact, “the chief influence of the land-grant idea upon the humanities in the universities has probably been in a trend away from traditional formalities and in a more functionalized emphasis.”

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“Science, Technics, and Industry”

By 1880, the importance of the mechanic arts had greatly increased and John Eaton, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, clarified that the purpose of land grant colleges was “to furnish instruction in the direction of science, technics, and industry.” Morrill approved Eaton’s language but felt it necessary to clarify that while the colleges were intended to be broad enough to comprehend all learning and educate all classes, “their leading objective was to include the branches related to agriculture and other industrial arts and to offer better instructions to those aiming at eminence in such busy and varied walks of life.” Land grant institutions were seen, in part, as a response to the disappearance of the apprenticeship as a useful training ground for boys seeking to learn a skill or trade. The introduction of specialized machinery into the workplace resulted in workers learning very specialized tasks that had no other application and did not prepare them for advancement, even if better opportunities arose. Rather than merely teaching a single trade, a land grant education gave students knowledge of scientific principles that could be applied to a variety of situations.

The land grant system also responded to a changing class system. On October 5, 1888 at the inauguration of the School of Technology at the University of Georgia, N.E. Harris, a member of the Georgia State Commission appointed to organize the new school, remarked that...

...the great middle classes of the country have begun to demand attention—more than at any previous time in the world’s history. Men’s eyes and noses are worth more today than they were a century ago. We approach the days of perfect equality. The lower classes have risen upward and higher classes have moved downward. Legislation for the masses is now legislation for the greatest good to the greatest number. Knowledge must be adapted to their wants. They do not boast the blue blood of the cavalier—they use their hands to make their living. It is no disgrace now. But Americans control the colleges of this continent, therefore as these institutions could not prevent, they have at length decided to lead these reforms. The curriculums are being remodeled all over the country, and no state in the union making pretensions to higher education can be found without its technical school, either in process of erection or already open.
The wording of the First Morrill Act stipulates that land grant education should not exclude classical studies and should result in a practical and liberal education. This meant that a land grant education was to be broad.

General education, positively and negatively, has been a concern of land-grant educators from the beginning. The new colleges started with an old line curriculum, only slightly modified and extended to include the rudimentary applications, in which some brand of metaphysics might be prescribed along with the general sciences for the student of agriculture, and Latin included in the training of the engineer. From this lowly and often humiliatingly subordinate position, the technical subjects came fully into their own with the demands and opportunities of the new industrial age.14

The inaugural address delivered on June 16, 1876 by Purdue University President E. E. White makes a point to explain how the intent of the law can be fulfilled through development of a curriculum for the “industrial classes” that includes the sciences as a leading element and languages, literature, and history as subordinate elements.15 The 1890-91 Annual Register of Purdue states that the purpose of the college was to afford the “young men and women of Indiana an opportunity to acquire a good collegiate education in Mathematics, Science, Literature, and Art, and at the same time to secure instruction and practice in such lines of work as will fit them to engage in the practical industries.”16

Under the more generic term of industrial education, students at the colleges were often exposed to a wide array of courses in trades, manual training, and machine shop practices. Courses in harness, saddle, broom, and mattress-making were prevalent in many of the schools’ initial years, but throughout the period, the more traditional “industries” of bricklaying, carpentry, plastering, shoemaking, tailoring, wheelwrighting, and mechanical drawing served as the backbone of the practical arts curricula at the 1980 land-grant facilities.17

Clearly, from the beginning, the land grant system reflected concerns for both practical and theoretical learning, and expressed a philosophical vision that encompassed the socioeconomic realities of the present with those anticipated for the future.
Institutional Funding and Status

Despite the scope of the land grant vision, the manner in which land grants were funded resulted in significant differences in the size of the endowments of the schools, which eventually impacted their status. The First Morrill Act granted to the States public lands to be sold to create perpetual funds to endow and maintain the colleges. Each State was given land amounting to 30,000 acres for each Representative and Senator in Congress, based on the census of 1860. If the public lands available within a State were insufficient, the State was given land scrip to acquire public lands from out-of-state. Endowments for land grant institutions came to vary greatly. The size of the endowments depended in large measure on the shrewdness of individuals responsible for exchanging the land scrip for public land and gaining the best possible price from their eventual sale. For example, Cornell University obtained a handsome endowment through the efforts of Ezra Cornell. While many States received 50 or 60 cents an acre for land scrip issued under the First Morrill Act, Cornell brokered a deal with New York State that resulted in a significantly higher return. He was able to buy all of New York’s unsold scrip from the original 990,000 acres allotted at 60 cents an acre, with the stipulation that payment would fall due when the scrip was resold and all proceeds obtained above the 60 cent purchase price would go toward the university’s endowment. He then exchanged the scrip for pine forests located in Wisconsin, waited for the price to rise, and eventually sold the lands at an average of $6.73 an acre. Similarly, the financial management of Iowa’s allotment was such that in 1889 the income received was greater than that received by any of the other States, excepting New York, even though the amount of land apportioned to Iowa was less in direct ratio to the population than land apportioned to 19 other States.

Education of Men…and Women

Because many land grant schools provided education to women either from the time of their establishment or shortly thereafter, studying the history of those institutions provides...
insight into gender issues. Some colleges offered separate programs for women that focused on the domestic arts; others admitted women into the scientific and technical programs on the same basis as men, with no provision for alternative coursework. The 1881 catalogue of the State Agricultural College of Colorado at Fort Collins lists a student population of 57, including 25 girls. These “young ladies” pursued the same course of study as the young men, although they were permitted in the last year to substitute the study of German for the designated specialized studies of the Agricultural or Mechanical course. In 1890, one third of the students at Iowa Agricultural College were girls; of 25 faculty members, six were “Ladies.” The 1874 *Hand Book of the Kansas State Agricultural College* promised girls “such educational opportunities as had not been customary in educational institutions.” For industrial training, young men at Kansas State were offered courses in farming, gardening and fruit-growing, carpentry, cabinet-making, iron work and printing, while young women were offered sewing, printing, floriculture, and music, and, if enrolled in the household economy course, were required to cook for one hour a day, learning how to make “substantial articles of food,” although they were also allowed to spend some time on “the dainty dishes.” Ohio State University was open to women, but no special course of study was provided for them. Oregon State Agricultural College offered classes in household economy and hygiene for the special benefit of female students so they might learn to cook, make and repair family clothing, care for the preservation of individual and family health, tend the sick, and beautify and adorn the home.

**Opportunities for African Americans**

The impact of land grant colleges on race relations came about in a different way. The First Morrill Act restricted entitlement to funds to those States not in rebellion or insurrection against the Federal government. States which had been in rebellion against the Federal government at the time the initial legislation was passed were offered an opportunity to enter the program...
under the Second Morrill Act. Enacted on August 30, 1890, it authorized appropriations to all States and territories, including former slave states, for additional aid to existing land grant institutions and the establishment of additional schools.\textsuperscript{26} This act offered cash payments, rather than grants of land, for the more complete endowment and maintenance of agricultural and mechanical colleges. In addition, it provided the newly established institutions with the same status as schools founded under the original Morrill Act. The Second Morrill Act also specified that no funds could be paid out to an institution that made a distinction of race or color in the admission of students, unless separate colleges were established and maintained for white and non-white students. Sixteen States opened separate colleges for African Americans in order to qualify for Morrill Act funds. While the doctrine of “separate but equal” was accepted at the time the Second Morrill Act was adopted, it was repudiated in 1954 when the Supreme Court held in \textit{Brown v. Board of Education} that racial segregation in public education is prohibited under the 14\textsuperscript{th} amendment. By 1962, 18 of 32 previously segregated land grant institutions had desegregated.\textsuperscript{27} Despite the permissibility of segregation within land grant schools for much of the system’s history, land grant institutions did provide educational opportunities for African Americans which otherwise would not have existed.

**Military Training and National Defense**

The First Morrill Act specified that colleges established through its grant program should include military tactics as a leading objective of their course of study. Given that the country was at war, this seems appropriate, and it is not surprising that all institutions participating in the program were obliged to offer military training. Although all land grant institutions were required to offer a military course, in some schools the military emphasis was stronger than in others. In fact, some of the early land grants had a decidedly pronounced military culture. Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College’s catalogue for 1890-91 describes the
students as cadets and their lodging as barracks. A description of the 1881-82 catalogue for the Maine State College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts mentions nine pages of plates, including one of special interest representing the dress parade of the Coburn Cadets; the entry further states that the “attention paid to the military features of the U.S. Land Grant colleges is suggestive.” In their Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) histories, both Oregon State University and MIT mention that the training of officers was an important aspect of the Morrill Act. Ohio State claims that “from the very beginning the story of The Ohio State University was synonymous with the history of the Army ROTC.” In times past, the U.S. Government detailed Army officers to land grant schools, including the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College and the Maryland Agricultural College. The Maryland Agricultural College found this practice useful in applying the military system to the discipline of students, even though the military influence on college life was not permitted to interfere with the other aspects of education or reasonable periods of recreation enjoyed by the students. At Florida Agricultural College, the military element was very prominent in the late 19th century, with all students required to wear a uniform and all not physically disqualified expected to perform military duty. The Commandant, an officer of the U.S. Army, was out-ranked on campus only by the President of the College.

The strong military tradition at land grant institutions continued into the next century. Military training at these schools produced 100,000 men who served in World War I, including 30,000 who served as officers, and generated 50%-70% of ROTC commissions between 1920 and 1941. The role of land grant institutions in national preparedness for World War II was significant, with both General Marshall and President Eisenhower cited as having observed that the mobilization of U.S. troops would have been delayed for at least six months without the availability of the ROTC officers; and even as late as 1960, land grant institutions were still estimated to provide more than one third of all officers not supplied by the military academies.
20th Century Societal Changes and Global Focus

In the 20th century, land grant institutions continued to evolve as society continued to change. Statistics from 1927 indicate that 78% of agricultural graduates from 19 land grant institutions were employed in occupations directly related to their studies.38 As the percentage of the population engaged in agriculture declined, the importance of scientific and engineering studies increased. In 1959, expenditure of Federal funds appropriated for land grant instruction in agricultural programs totaled $792,445, while expenditures for mechanical arts programs were $1,415,823.39 By 1960, land grant institutions constituted fewer than 5% of U.S. higher education institutions, yet enrolled 21% of all students at 4-year institutions.40 They granted 50% of all doctoral degrees and 50% of all master’s degrees in basic biological sciences; 37% of all undergraduate degrees to students who went on to study medicine, veterinary medicine, or dentistry; 30% of all master’s degrees and 39% of all doctoral degrees in mathematics; and 41% of undergraduate degrees to engineering students. These impressive statistics underpin a trend in American education built on the land grant foundation, but the adaptation of land grant ideas by other entities makes it impossible to accurately measure the significance of the land grant vision.

The land-grant idea represents a political idea. The diminishing of their uniqueness is due to the adoption by other institutions of the basic concepts of the land-grant idea; democratization of education; applied or mission-oriented research conducted to the benefit of the people of the states; and service rendered directly to these people.41

In the second half of the 20th century land grant institutions continued to evolve and evince an increasingly global focus. In 1975, Congress amended the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 by enacting Title XII, the Famine Prevention and Freedom from Hunger (P.L. 106-373), which authorized the utilization of land grant institution research and extension capabilities to enhance food production in developing countries.42 Former Purdue President Martin Jischke

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noted that “America enjoys the most abundant, safest, relatively cheapest food in the world, due, in no small measure to the impact of these land-grant universities.” Expanding upon this role, congressional intent in enacting Title XII was to use the capabilities of the land grant schools to address the problem of global hunger by helping small-plot peasant farmers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to stay on their land through increased understanding of labor-intensive agricultural methods. In the opening remarks of a hearing on Title XII implementation, Senator Hubert Humphrey cited the importance of land grant institutions in the development of the U.S. agricultural base. Giving examples of what was expected of land grant institutions and their role in the global context, he noted

> The problems are complex. We will be called upon not to think in terms of the American farmer in 1977, but in terms of vastly different cultures, vastly different settings, vastly different needs, and might I say climates and soils, as tropical agriculture is very different from what we experience here in the more temperate zones. The challenge is to assist in developing a solid agricultural base in developing countries, utilizing the simplest possible, and yet the most effective methods.

Under Title XII, the U.S. Agency for International Development established the Collaborative Research Support Program to enable land grant institutions, acting in conjunction with the United States Government, foreign governments, and for-profit and non-profit entities, to work to support programs that benefit both the U.S. and developing country partners. Testimony and discussion at congressional hearings subsequent to enactment and implementation of Title XII programs raise questions about the self-interest of U.S. agriculture and the moral obligation of the United States to the rest of the world.

Multidisciplinary Importance

The achievements of the land grant program prompted Congress to create sea grant, sun grant, and space grant programs modeled after the land grant system. The sea grant college system, established in 1966, supports the marine sciences and aquaculture; the space grant program established in 1988 supports space-related studies; and the sun grant program, established in 2003, supports the development of bio-based energy alternatives. The International Federation of Library Associations, Social Science Libraries Section, Satellite Conference, Disappearing disciplinary borders in the social science library - global studies or sea change? University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, 6-7, August 2008
multidisciplinary nature of land grant and land grant inspired programs has resulted in accomplishments in areas that could not have been imagined when the original Morrill Act was passed. On March 19, 2008, Professor Karl Kim, Chairman of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, testified that as

...a land, sea, and space grant institution with national and international recognition for its academic and research excellence in the fields of urban planning and earth sciences, the University of Hawaii has the expertise and research and training programs in the fields of disaster management and related topics to conduct research and develop specific models and tools for monitoring natural hazards and evaluating risk to urban areas. Planning for the response, recovery and reconstruction of communities affected by natural disasters will include a special emphasis on islands and at risk vulnerable populations.46

Land grant institutions have educated and continue to educate science and engineering students from around the globe. These students aid the United States in its efforts to remain competitive in the world marketplace and impact the U.S. position in the global community. For example, the University of Missouri-Rolla notes that while it was originally only a mining school and then an engineering school, it has now become a major technological university.47

Collaborative land grant efforts at the regional, national, and international levels are making ongoing contributions to humankind’s efforts to understand important issues, among them climate, food production, and information dissemination and access. The involvement of land grants in modern economic development is increasing.48 In addition, they are creating “multidisciplinary centers that can attract faculty in key areas, helping reduce student-faculty ratios in high demand fields.”49 This is embodied in one way through Iowa State University’s establishment of sixteen multi-institutional, multi-state, and multi-disciplinary communities of practice, bringing the “best of the best” educational resources to the public.50 In the near future, land grant education may have even greater impact on global studies. “The next phase of their pioneering may well be to guide curriculum development and extension to the fields of international understanding and to integrate those domestic policies with international policies when the two are interrelated.”51

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Raising Awareness

Although many newer congressional publications are freely available online, many researchers continue to overlook them. Failure to understand the relevance of congressional primary source materials causes the content to remain something of a well-kept secret, despite the emerging ease of access. In this global age, it is especially important for individuals dedicated to the promotion of primary source research to seek out venues for communication, including in-person and on-line connections. As we attempt to define and explore these venues, we come to understand that we have an opportunity to engage researchers at all levels in a wider variety of primary source activities that can enhance their ability to think critically, learn how the past informs the present, and better understand their place in the emerging world. Librarians are uniquely positioned to educate one another, partner with disciplinary faculty to incorporate this rich content into the curricula, and work with students directly to raise awareness of the existence of congressional materials, their complementarity to secondary sources, and their applicability to research in subject areas including sociology, psychology, gender studies, business and economics, education, and current affairs. These goals are in concert with a growing emphasis throughout higher education on fostering the development of broad information literacy and lifelong learning skills in students. Interestingly, land grant institutions themselves have been credited with being central to the research process itself.

In their original rebellion against classical instruction only, they put things scientific at the center, around which an unusually strong research orientation has developed, with an emphasis on application and problem solving. Thus was born the now famous academic trilogy: instruction research and service—a mission description that virtually every institution, public or private, now embraces, however different the interpretation.52

Finally, educating the general public about the accessibility of these resources will help develop an informed citizenry, better able to engage in the world and make knowledgeable decisions.
Conclusion

The example of land grant institutions is one of many that illustrate the relevance of congressional primary source content to multidisciplinary studies and to understanding social and global concerns. A study of the land grant system touches upon societal changes involving class, gender, race, economics, and the military, and offers insight into global economics. In 1996 Under Secretary of Agriculture Karl Stauber stated in testimony before Congress that

One hundred years ago, American agriculture was radically different than it is today. In 1890, 24,771,000 Americans—or 42.3 percent of the population lived on the farm. There were 4,565,000 farms with 623 acres in production, and the average farm was 137 acres. Congress created the modern agricultural system with the establishment of the land-grant university in 1862, the addition of experiment stations in 1887, the minority-owned land grant universities established in 1890 and the system of county-level cooperative Federal-state extension service in 1914. It is because of these public institutions that U.S. agriculture grew from subsistence farming to a major American industry known for its ability to export around the globe.53

The socio-economic shift that replaced agricultural employment opportunities with manufacturing jobs has now been superseded by global economic developments that impact a diminishing U.S. manufacturing sector. Land grant institutions now play a role supportive of high technology business and industry. Purdue University, the only land grant school in the State of Indiana, is an example of such an institution. Purdue is

,,interested in assisting the State of Indiana with the creation of high-tech companies, as well as with identifying and targeting high tech businesses for recruitment, particularly in Northwest Indiana. The proximity of this area in the corridor between Chicago and Indianapolis, and its link to the Purdue main and regional campuses, provides an attractive setting for high-tech companies who seek to benefit from Purdue faculty’s expertise in engineering and technology.54

There is obviously no way that Justin Morrill could have anticipated that in our time the digitization of the congressional primary source materials would provide us with such easy access to the past, but no doubt he would have understood how his actions and vision can inform the issues of today. The ability to easily access the full text of historic and current congressional documents enables researchers to gain new insight into the interconnectedness of study.
of social science topics previously viewed as falling within the narrow purview of discrete disciplines.

Endnotes

14 Ross (1953) 414.

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48 Cote & Cote (1993), 70.