



SO THAT'S WHERE WE CAME FROM!

A SHORT HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

BY FRED GRATTO

Working on a college campus is pretty special. There is always something fun going on, sporting events to watch, lots of interesting opportunities to help people, and the setting to do work that really matters. Colleges are complex organizations, so it is good to have a broad institutional perspective to better understand what people do and why they do it. Do you ever wonder how and why your wonderful campus became what it is today...ever stop to think about the history of your institution? If so, you might enjoy this brief historical summary of American higher education.



A CITY UPON A HILL

While at sea on the ship *Arbella* in the spring of 1630, John Winthrop borrowed an analogy from Matthew 5:14 in the Bible when he preached to future leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony: “Men shall say of succeeding plantations: the Lord make it like that of New England: for we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill and the eyes of all people are upon us” (Lucas, 1994, p. 103). The Puritans were convinced that God would bless them and that the world would notice their endeavors.

After building houses and finding a way to eat every day, they had three priorities in the new world: building churches, securing a stable form of government, and finding a way to provide learning for future generations. This third goal set in motion the creation of colleges in what became the United States.

Nine colleges were founded before the American Revolution: Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton, Columbia, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth. They all shared the same two purposes: educating civic leaders and preparing a learned clergy.

SO MANY COLLEGES!

In 1819, the Dartmouth Case had a significant impact on higher education. Dartmouth College was originally chartered by the English Crown. This deed of trust provided a self-perpetuating board of trustees and authorized the president to appoint his own successor. When the first president Eleazer Wheelock died, his son John became president. A short time later, the new president was rebuked by the board for what they considered to be an erratic administration, and they voted to dismiss him. He responded by challenging the board’s authority to meddle in his affairs. The New Hampshire legislature supported him when they amended the original charter to create a reorganized Dartmouth University. The original board did not accept this, of course, so at that point Dartmouth College and Dartmouth University began to operate in legal competition with each other.

The original board took their case all the way to the United States Supreme Court. The basic issue was whether the college was a public corporation whose charter could be amended by the State of New Hampshire, or a private corporation whose charter the legislature could not change. Two famous Americans fought this battle in court. Thomas Jefferson argued on behalf of the state’s right to change the charter and Daniel Webster represented the original board. First Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, John Marshall, ruled in favor of the original board, prohibiting the state from exercising direct control over Dartmouth College. This decision established the distinction between public and private colleges. The result was a proliferation of private colleges during the next several decades.

There are other reasons so many colleges were created. They were a source of income and pride, so every state wanted one.

Vermont in 1819, for example, estimated that \$14 million had been lost to neighboring states because there was no public institution of higher learning in the state. Moreover, colleges aspired to be something special. Princeton, for example, wanted to be the “Athens of America.” It is no coincidence that Ohio University and the University of Georgia are located in Athens. Regarding name recognition, consider also the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi and Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. There were nine colleges at the time of the American Revolution and 250 by the Civil War. Today, there are more than 3,900 colleges and 17.5 million students in the United States.

I NEED HELP!

In colonial colleges, character development was emphasized as much as learning was. In 1887, President W.W. Strong of Carleton College in Minnesota commented: “The grand aim of every teacher, from Socrates to Hopkins, has been the building of character” (Lucas, 1994, p. 168). Likewise, Harvard’s first president stressed to his faculty: “You shall take care to advance in all learning, divine and humane, each and every student who is or will be entrusted to your tutelage, according to their several abilities; and especially to take care that their conduct and manners be honorable and without blame” (Lucas, 1994, p. 104).

In addition to making sure that he and the faculty were enhancing the character of every student, presidents also had to teach, register students for class, keep students entertained and out of trouble, raise money, provide food and shelter, communicate with parents, and repair buildings that were usually too hot or too cold. The job of college president was demanding and time consuming. No longer could presidents know everyone’s name, greet each student at the door, and monitor the academic progress of everyone on campus. The big job got bigger as time passed and there was only one thing to do, get help. As duties were divided and delegated, the world of student affairs, as we know it today, began.

Character development of students is still a priority, but it is a more difficult challenge these days. Consider this assessment by Dr. Martin Luther King: “We must work passionately and indefatigably to bridge the gulf between our scientific progress and our moral progress. One of the greatest problems of mankind is that we suffer from a poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we become materially the poorer we have become morally and spiritually” (Willimon, 1995, p. 55). College students on campus today need and expect a great deal of help and care. Consider your campus, where all of these support groups are a major part of the collegiate experience: dining services, residence life, Greek affairs, career resources, disability services, financial aid, freshmen orientation, student healthcare, student activities, and counseling services. There is a big world beyond physical plant, and now you know a little bit about how it came to be.

BLACKS AND WOMEN ON CAMPUS

These minority groups are relative newcomers to the world of higher education. Almost all students at the earliest colleges were young white men. However, in 1826 Amherst College in Massachusetts and Bowdoin College in Maine became the first institutions to award a bachelor's degree to African-American students. There is an interesting but awful page of American history, however. Blacks were not considered equal to whites, and this seriously limited their access to higher education. Certainly, this view died hard. For example, a few years after the Civil War, New Yorker Lucy Spelman was traveling in the south and observed the struggles of people trying to teach young black girls to read and write. She convinced her husband John D. Rockefeller to contribute money to the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary, and the school's name was changed to Spelman College in 1884.

During the antebellum period, people of color were a rarity on campus, and in the south there were few chances of a black person being admitted to a white college. The situation did not get any better in 1896 when the Supreme Court handed down its historic decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*, affirming separate but equal rights. The problem lingered for decades, culminating in the race riots of the 1960s. On some college campuses, the situation was rough, a sad time in our history. Many of us remember Governor George Wallace in 1963, trying to stop blacks from being admitted to the University of Alabama. It has been a long hard struggle.

Women also had difficulty gaining access to higher education. Not until 1841, at Oberlin College in Ohio, did a woman earn a bachelor's degree. The problem, of course, was access, greatly limited by the prevailing perspective of the times. Consider this comment about women from President Benjamin Wheeler at the University of California in 1904: "You are not like men and you must recognize this fact. You may have the same studies as men, but you must put

them to different use. You are here for the preparation of marriage and motherhood" (Lucas, 1994, p. 158). At the University of Florida and at many institutions there is a Center for Women's Studies. Now I know why.

GIVE ME SOMETHING I CAN USE

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to earn a living with. The problem was that classical learning on campus was not meeting the needs of society and students, according to the prevailing sentiment of the times. Critics asserted that a college curriculum ought to offer something more than personal discipline, culture of the mind, and the study of dead languages. The solution was set in motion in 1859 when Congressman Justin Morrill of Vermont sponsored a bill to create a college in every state, institutions where the curriculum would help students learn agricultural and mechanical skills.

The Land-Grant bill was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862. It provided to every state, the donation of 30,000 acres of federal land for each state senator and representative. Some of the land was intended to be sold to raise money for buildings, faculty, and anything else needed to create a college. The purpose of these institutions was threefold: teach agricultural and mechanical skills, create new knowledge, and disseminate new knowledge. Long-term consequences of the land-grant act are many and include creation of the cooperative extension

service, the preeminence of research on college campuses, and thousands of inventions and advances that changed the world and improved the quality of life for millions of people. A few of the earliest land-grant institutions include these world-class universities: Iowa State University, Michigan State University, Pennsylvania State University, Cornell University, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Minnesota, and Texas A&M University.

GI JOE

At the conclusion of WW II, 15 million American soldiers returned home. Many returned to a normal life and about two million of them went to college, which was not normal. Prior to the war, higher education was elitist and discriminatory with respect to race, sex, and religion. For these and lots of other reasons, most people did not go to college. “Before WWII, most people had not gone beyond elementary or secondary school; a high school diploma was a rare achievement, earned by less than 25 percent of the population” (Greenberg, 2004, p. B9).

The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill, was intended to help with the dislocation of human capital and serve as a reward for military service. Tuition, books, fees, and supporting stipends were available for up to 48 months for those wanting to pursue a college education. These generous benefits ushered in a new era on campus. The immediate change was marked by overcrowded classrooms and a serious lack of housing. The long-term change was significantly increased access to higher



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education. Thousands of people were the first ones in their family to ever attend college.

Also, diversity increased as women and minorities arrived on campus and the median age of students increased. No longer, was there such thing as a normal student. Traditional age students, 18 to 22 years old, shared their campuses with thousands of others. For example, the number of part-time students increased exponentially. Moreover, the curriculum changed and expanded as well because older, experienced, impatient, veteran students wanted more practical learning as they prepared for work after graduation. The GI Bill, an historical event, meant the world of higher education would never be the same.

ARE YOU READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL?

In 1869 Rutgers and Princeton played the first college football game, which was organized by the undergraduates themselves. It was a harbinger of things to come because the fervor of the sport caught on. Soon, college administrators noticed the valuable publicity so football games became sanctioned and managed by the university administration. By 1881 when Michigan played Harvard, football had become a regular weekend diversion for dozens of colleges around the country. Excitement surrounded the game, crowds became larger than anyone could believe, and alumni began returning to their alma mater to cheer on the home team. Football became a colossus, something for students to rally around, and a mechanism for accessing potential donors. The incorporation of football on campus is a defining moment in the history of American colleges and universities. It transformed campuses in ways that are hard to describe, especially on game day.

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

This summary of higher education has provided a glimpse of a few of the major events in American higher education. Even now, we are in the throes of events that are changing and shaping the way colleges do business, events that will in hindsight someday, be regarded as milestones. Consider, for example, the impact of the September 11, 2001 attacks and the 2007 deaths of 32 students and faculty at Virginia Tech on the ways facility managers deal with security on campus.

Another challenge and opportunity is sustainability. As managers of facilities, we have found ways to contend with and embrace this approach to design and construction because it is the right thing to do for the environment. "In a world where the U.S. is losing its competitive advantage in computer science, engineering, and research science, the nascent fields of

environmental architecture, sustainable engineering, and ecological science provide a new universe for innovation and training for the jobs of the future. U.S. colleges and universities, acting in concert, can lead the world by training the corps of professionals whose ideas and actions will save the natural world" (Marthers & Rahnamay, 2006, p. 1).

We will help save the world because facility managers are proactive and resilient. We always find ways to accomplish tasks and take care of business. We do this by being aware of trends and advances in society that impact what happens on campus. In my view, another way to understand what is happening on campus is to have some understanding of the past...to know what happened, and why. ☎

NOTES

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