

Government 1521
Bureaucratic Politics:
Government, Military,
Social and Economic Organizations

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Lecture 20:
The Early Modernization of Harvard

Armada or Flotilla?

“Economists want more economics. English professors want more literature. And historians want more history. Among the areas of study proposed in the recently unveiled general-education report, the only field many professors don’t seem to want more of is religion.

At yesterday’s meeting of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, professors had their first chance to discuss publicly the preliminary report of the Committee on General Education, released in early October. Many used the meeting as a forum to challenge both the report’s specific recommendations and its underlying vision.”

Crimson, 20061115.

<http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=515758>

“Pre-Modern” (Brahmin) Presidents
Eliot and Lowell

Era of colleges as seminaries (18th c. Harvard, Yale, ...)

Early science in zoology and botany, separate from literature and arts

In U.S., land-grant colleges and West Point (Army Corps) are early bases of scientific education.

Copying of German system: Johns Hopkins (1876), University of Chicago (1892)

Charles W. Eliot (1867 – 1908): from “College and schools” to “University.” Growth of medical and law schools.

Abbott Lawrence Lowell (1908 – 1933): Tutorial system, concentration and distribution requirements. Buildings.

**Early Modernization:
James Bryant Conant (1933-1951)**

Conceptual model of “three forces”:

- (1) non-research dogmatic view – university as a place of teaching universal knowledge rather than advancing it
- (2) Utilitarian-vocational approach – universities should train professionals and apply knowledge to social problems
- (3) University as place for advancing knowledge (his preferred)

Think of (i) limits of this metaphor, (ii) constituencies to which this tripartite division corresponds.

**Conant’s Goal:
Legitimacy and Survival**

“Conant wondered: Would private universities in the future be able to win that popular admiration and respect which alone can guarantee their survival?”

...

What will be the fate of these institutions thus suddenly developed to such dimensions? Can they escape the curse which has so often plagued large human enterprises well established by a significant history – the curse of complacent mediocrity?”

Keller and Keller, MHM, 10.

**Major Transition:
Towards Meritocracy**

Tension between meritocratic vision and social class vision. “Brahmin elite” is local constituency and alumni base.

Role of outside forces: G. I. Bill brings different social-econ classes to nation’s universities.

51% veterans nationwide take advantage; ~ = 7.8M

One year of education, additional month of education free with each month of service, to max of 48 months.

1945 General Education Report

Creation of modern Core.

“Redbook” [*General Education in a Free Society*] sells 40,000 copies by 1950.

Other universities had something like this already, but this is general justification, and much more influential.

How does Conant accomplish this?

1. Weak Deans (“meant that Conant was in effect his own dean, deeply engaged in curriculum, student recruitment, and above all the selection of faculty” [MHM, 65])
2. Coalitional politics among Departments – deference to the most powerful.
3. Debates over “politics and balance” then, too. [Galbraith, Samuelson] Conant stays out.

Centralization – Weberian Style

1. Creation of tenure and ad hoc process [up-or-out in eight years, with Presidential veto]
Multiple interpretations: efficient selection, but also control over “periphery” of organization.
2. Separation of faculty from administration.
3. Overhead – grants are taxed by administration.
This is ~ 70% now. 25% in 1950s.
4. University begins to share patent revenues.
