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# IS HARVARD A UNIVERSITY?

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## IS HARVARD A UNIVERSITY?

BY H. P. BOWDITCH.



OUR Alma Mater publishes every five years a *Catalogus Universitatis Harvardianæ*, and in the annual catalogue we find the term "University" used to designate all the educational institutions which are under the control of the governing bodies, though the closeness of this relation varies very much in different cases, and though the legal title of the Corporation is "President and Fellows of Harvard College."

The enormous growth and development of Harvard College during the last twenty years, and its somewhat closer connection with the professional schools have been supposed to justify this usage, and in discussions of college affairs one often hears the remark that the last two decades have really witnessed the transformation of Harvard from a College to a University. It is true that protests have been uttered against this mode of designating our Alma Mater. We have been accused of "trying to force University forms into College methods too narrow for them," and the orator of the day at our recent 250th Anniversary told us plainly that "we still mainly occupy the position of a German gymnasium." The phrase "Harvard University" is, however, in sufficiently common use to justify the following inquiries:

(1) Can Harvard at present be properly termed a University?

(2) If not, are changes of organization or method, which would justify the use of the term, desirable?

(3) If so, what are the character and extent of these changes?

To obtain a satisfactory answer to the first of these questions it is proper to inquire what is understood by the word "University" in those countries where, by long usage, the term has acquired a definite meaning. It will be sufficient for our purposes to consider the use of the term in England, France and Germany.

In England we find the word "University" used to designate a collection of educational institutions, styled "colleges" each quite independent in the management of its own affairs, but connected for common purposes by a bond which, in a general way, may be said to resemble that which unites the various states of our Union.

In France the term "University" is used in a vague, abstract way to designate the teaching function of the government. An individual is said "to belong to the University" when he holds a position in an educational institution under government control.

In Germany a "University" comprises the four faculties of Theology, Law, Medicine and Philosophy presided over by a rector chosen from among the professors. Each faculty determines the appointments to its own body and when once appointed, a professor has absolute freedom to give his instruction as he pleases. In fact this *Lehrfreiheit* of the teachers and the corresponding *Lernfreiheit* of the students are regarded as the most important features of German University organization.

In Switzerland, Austria and some other European countries the organization of the Universities is essentially the same as in Germany. It is evident, therefore, that Harvard cannot be styled a "University" in the sense in which the term is used in any European country. It may, of course, be maintained that we are not bound to follow other nations in our use of language, and that the American is quite as much entitled as the German or the Englishman to have his own idea of what is meant by a University. This view would be entitled to more consideration if any well established American usage existed or even if there were any prospect of establishing such a usage.

It must, moreover, be admitted that, in the interest of clear thinking, it is undesirable that the same term should be used with different significations, even when those using it belong to different nations, and if it can be further shown that the changes in Harvard College which have been supposed to justify its designation as a University are chiefly changes of degree and not of kind it will be evident that the use of the word in connection with our Alma Mater can scarcely be justified.

Let us inquire therefore, what are the essential differences between the Harvard of today and the Harvard of thirty years ago when the phrase

"Harvard University" was much less frequently heard. The most obvious changes are, of course, the great development of the elective system and the somewhat closer connection which has been established between the professional schools and the academic department. It is impossible to overestimate the value and importance of the first of these changes. Freedom in the choice of studies, associated, as it has been, with a relaxation of the rules relating to compulsory attendance on college exercises has gone far toward establishing the *Lernfreiheit* which has been alluded to as one of the important features of a German University. Yet recent experience has shown clearly that the complete freedom which the German student enjoys cannot safely be granted to the Harvard collegian. The reason for this difference cannot be sought in the greater age (and consequently increased sense of responsibility) of the German student for the age of the average German student at the beginning of his University career is very nearly the same as that at which students enter Harvard College. Why an American youth should not make as good use of his freedom to improve his mind in his own way as a German of the same age is too large a question to be here discussed, but it is interesting, in this connection, to note the fact that something very like the German freedom of study actually exists in our professional schools, which, in this respect, furnish a certain justification for the phrase "Harvard University."

The closer connection between the professional schools and the academic department has been brought about mainly by the personal influence of the President and by his custom of presiding at the meetings of the different faculties. The valuable results which have been thus secured are obvious to all who are familiar with college matters. The establishment of the Academic Council, in which the professors of the various faculties meet to vote the higher degrees and to discuss questions of general interest, has also tended to foster a feeling of community of interests between the different departments. This feeling, however, by no means forms the close bond which should unite the different faculties of a university. In fact an inclination to regard the professional schools as appendages, and not as integral parts of the institution, is apparent to those who watch closely the course of events in Harvard College. A

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sharp distinction is drawn between the academic department and the professional schools by the fact that the graduates of the latter have no voice in the election of overseers, an exclusion which can certainly no longer be justified by any of the reasons which were urged in favor of it at the time the statute was enacted.

It thus appears, that the progress of Harvard college during the last twenty or thirty years has been almost wholly on academic lines and that the various departments still have but vague and indefinite relations with each other. It must, therefore, be admitted that our Alma Mater has, in her recent remarkable development, really furnished no sufficient reason for styling her a University.

The next question is whether it is desirable to make such changes as will enable Harvard to take her place among the universities of the world. It is, of course, possible to maintain that Harvard has undergone a natural development in accordance with the needs of the community in which it is established, that there is no reason why it should be modelled after existing institutions in any other country, and that the name by which it is known is a matter of no importance.

This view will, however, hardly commend itself to any one who has been impressed by the growing tendency of students in every department of human knowledge to assemble in international congresses for the discussion of subjects of common interest. Every year Harvard professors sit side by side with their colleagues from the ancient universities of Europe, and are called upon to answer questions with regard to the American university to which they belong. Even as a simple traveller in Europe the Harvard professor is frequently met by the question: "To what faculty do you belong?" The question is easily answered by the professors of the professional schools, but in the case of professors of the academic department it involves a somewhat awkward explanation that the faculty to which they belong occupies a position somewhat higher than the teaching corps of a German gymnasium, but not so high as a philosophic faculty of a German university, and that the Harvard academic faculty is not strictly comparable to any teaching body in any European educational institution.

A similar difficulty is experienced by any one who attempts to explain

to foreigners the exact significance of the Harvard degree of A.B. It may, of course, be said that these are individual inconveniences, and do not furnish a sufficient reason for making changes in the organization of our Alma Mater. They are inconveniences, however, which affect a constantly increasing number of individuals, as the relations between our own students and those of foreign universities become more and more closely established. Moreover, the exceptional position which the academic faculty occupies among the teaching bodies of the world must make it more difficult to attract teachers of reputation from foreign universities; and in this respect Harvard suffers not simply an inconvenience but a positive injury.

If it be admitted, therefore, that it is desirable for Harvard to take rank as a University, we must next inquire by what changes of organization or of methods of instruction this result can be brought about. From what has been said of the development of the academic department, it will be evident that it is here that the changes in question are to be chiefly wrought. The nature of the changes will be best understood from a consideration of the functions of Harvard College as an educational institution. These are chiefly two in number, viz:

(1) To furnish a liberal education, as complete as possible in itself, in directions determined by the choice of the student.

(2) To prepare students to enter upon professional careers.

Thirty or forty years ago, this sub-division of function could not be made. Students entered Harvard College at sixteen or seventeen years of age, and the simple academic training then furnished was the minimum required by every one who aspired to be considered a liberally educated man. Students then took the Harvard A.B. degree as the best possible preparation for a course of professional training.

At the present time, however, we are confronted by a very different state of things. The enormous expansion of the academic courses and the greater requirements of the Harvard examinations have led to an increase of the age at which students enter college. The average age of the entering class at Harvard is now nearly nineteen, and that of the graduating class nearly twenty-three years. A Harvard A.B. therefore, passing from the academic department to the Medical School, and taking the four years

course there recommended, finds himself between 26 and 27 years of age before he can receive the degree of M. D. This age is about two years in advance of that at which graduates of Foreign Medical Schools begin the practice of their professions. The evil results of this postponement of the period of professional training have been so seriously felt that the medical faculty has recommended to the "consideration of the Academic Council the expediency of granting the degree of A.B. to all undergraduates who shall subsequently take the longest course of study offered at the professional schools, after three years in the academic department." This recommendation was considered by the Council as a special order, on Dec. 22d, 1886, but nothing has yet been done to remedy the evil complained of.

The difficulty has obviously been caused by the fact that in the development of the academic department the second of its above mentioned functions, viz: that of a preparatory school for a professional career, has been very little considered. Many subjects useful to professional students are, indeed, taught to undergraduates, but the advanced age at which these branches are pursued deprives them of a great part of their value as a preliminary training. The biological studies, for instance, of the Harvard undergraduates are of the same general character as those which lead up to the preliminary scientific examination of the London Medical Schools and this examination is taken by a large majority of students before they are twenty years old. An examination of the programme of the academic department cannot fail to produce the conviction that its courses have been arranged with very little regard to any other department and with special reference to providing a liberal education in as many different directions as possible. This excessive development of one department without reference to the others of course tends to prevent that consolidation and unification of purpose which should characterize a large educational institution. In fact, it is not too much to say that it is the great development of Harvard college on academic lines which now prevents our Alma Mater from taking her proper rank among the Universities of the world.

It remains to be considered how the academic department can be modified so as to bring it within a scheme of university organization. The double function above spoken of suggests a double organization, for

it hardly seems possible to provide by one scheme of instruction for two such different objects as preparation for a professional career and a liberal education complete in itself. Moreover, it is in accordance with a universal law of development that organic subdivision should be associated with differentiation of function.

It seems, therefore, a very natural step in the evolution of our Alma Mater that the somewhat overgrown academic department should be divided into two distinct departments, presided over by faculties separate in their organization, but not necessarily so in their *personnel*. The terms "Academic Department" and "Philosophical Department" might properly be used to designate these subdivisions, and in each the course of study might extend over three years. In the former the studies would be preparatory to those of the philosophical department, and of the professional schools, and would lead to the degree of A.B. at an average age which should not exceed twenty-one years. In the latter, which would be analogous to the *philosophische Facultät* of the German universities, advanced courses would be offered in all subjects except those taught in the professional schools, and would lead to the degree of Ph.B. at about twenty-four years of age. "Harvard University," thus as organized, would consist of a preparatory department and four advanced schools, co-equal in dignity and importance, which together would furnish instruction in every branch of human knowledge. The degree of A.B. would be regarded as marking not the completion but the first step in a course of liberal training, and young men coming to Harvard would be encouraged to spend six years, instead of four, in acquiring their education. The degree of A.M. might be given to holders of the A.B. degree for a year of additional work in one of the four advanced schools, and the degrees of Ph.D. and S.D. reserved for those who, after graduating in the professional schools or the philosophical department, devote themselves for one or two years to original work in their chosen lines of study.

The philosophical department would correspond in the character of its instruction to the present senior year, and to two years of the graduate department, and judging from the constantly increasing demand for the instruction furnished in the present graduate department, it may be confidently predicted that a philosophical faculty, organized as above suggested,

would find its field of usefulness as broad and as important as that of any other department of the University. Its courses would be attractive to all graduates of the Academic department who might have leisure and means to devote a few more years to liberal study before beginning the business of life, particularly to those looking forward to a career as journalists, diplomats, teachers or authors.

This department would also draw to Harvard many graduates of other colleges anxious to complete their education by obtaining a Harvard Diploma, but for whom the present degrees of the graduate department do not offer a sufficient attraction. Finally, the establishment of a philosophic Faculty would make it easier to attract teachers from other Colleges, both American and Foreign, to Harvard University, since a professorship in such a faculty would naturally be regarded, not only as a position of greater dignity, but also as offering better opportunities for the highest sort of educational work.

As a financial objection to the plan as above outlined, it may be urged that, in reducing the Academic course from four years to three, great pecuniary loss would be incurred. It must, however, be borne in mind that this change would doubtless be followed by a great increase in the number of students in the Academic department, since many young men are now deterred from seeking the Harvard A.B. by the length of time necessary to obtain it. It may be reasonably expected that the additional fees thus obtained, together with those secured by the increased attractions of the philosophical department would more than compensate for the loss incurred by shortening the Academic course.

But financial considerations are of only secondary importance in deciding a question of this sort. The history of Harvard has abundantly proved that the community will not fail to sustain the College in any effort which it may make to raise its educational standard or to enlarge its sphere of usefulness. Harvard College, moving in the direction here indicated, could not only count on the cordial support of all its best friends, but, by establishing a standard for American Universities, would confirm its position as the most important seat of learning in the country.



