

Licentiates and Graduates, Degrees and Certificates of Competence: A Critique of Present-Day University Education

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Opinion

A university is basically an organization that conducts research and awards degrees. Simply put a university is a degree awarding institution-bachelors, masters, doctorates etc. But what is a degree? The definition of a degree in the 1965 Oxford Dictionary is “academic rank conferred as guarantee of proficiency”. However, the 2018 Oxford dictionary defines a degree as “the qualification obtained by students who have successfully completed a university or college course”. In the modern definition, the “rank” part has been removed from the definition. Rank evokes gentry/gentlemen/men of high-class etcetera. The rank definition more properly reflects the intention of the original universities.

What’s Your Discipline?

It’s a bit old fashioned now. But have you wondered why people often asked a graduate or student what his or her discipline was? ‘Discipline’ of course referred to their course of study.

The Ecclesiastical Origin of the University

Believe it or not the first ever university teachers/professors were monks. Monks of The Roman Catholic Church. They were celibate, lived frugally and imposed all sorts of punishments on themselves-mandatory silence, eating low quality food, wearing coarse and itchy fabrics, beatings and whippings etc. These men were sticklers for physical and mental punishment. When the first universities were set up the primary ambition/goal was to create good Christian Gentlemen who were DISCIPLINED. And of course, to wrest education from the pagans (as had been before Christianity) and Christian non clerics and laymen. In short, they wanted to “Christianize” education. This is the origin of the superfluous course system in use till today. Before the university was invented around a thousand years ago, students learnt an occupation or trade insularly. Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates taught their students philosophy and little or nothing else. Musicians taught their students music, lawyers taught their students law, a mason’s apprentice learnt about stones and nothing else, a knight’s page learnt about horses and mounted warfare and nothing else, a fletcher in training learnt about bows and arrows and a blacksmith’s acolyte learnt about metallurgy. They did not ‘borrow courses’ from other ‘departments. This was the case from classical Greece, Rome, Egypt, Carthage, and Babylon and right up to the beginning of the Dark Ages. And the system must have worked! We still marvel at the pyramids, aqueducts, Parthenon, the colosseum, and the other wonders of the ancient world. Now something odd happened sometime during The Dark ages. Something called a “University” was invented. The monks decided that the more you were forced to learn, the greater mental (and moral) discipline you would have and would be a better Christian Gentleman. A millennium later we are still following the fanatical and idiotic rule of these mad monks!! This is why in some universities today; upon graduation a student is told he has become worthy in “learning and character” to receive a degree. The university of today should be a place to train people to be the best in the skill they have chosen to acquire. Anyone who seeks moral instruction or mental/physical discipline should head for the nearest church, temple, ashram, or martial arts dojo!! University is not a finishing

school! Church and State separated many years ago, but church and university are still firmly tied together without the university staff and students even knowing the origin of their superfluous course system. This applies to universities all over the world even in non-historically Christian nations who have just aped the western system.

Personal Experience

While studying for my degree in physiology I had to do courses in anatomy, mathematics, biochemistry, human nutrition, English, Egyptology, anthropology, ecology, physics, chemistry, zoology, and agriculture. The day I graduated I felt like I had been released from prison! On the other hand, when I studied for a diploma in electrical engineering at the city and guilds institute I learnt about electricity and NOTHING else. The day I completed my diploma I felt like it was my birthday and the certificate issued to me looked to me like my birthday card. When I look at the certificate issued to me when I graduated from university, I feel like I am looking at my prison discharge papers! To summarize- I left the university with a feeling of RELIEF but I left the city and guilds institute with a feeling of PRIDE and FULFILLMENT. At university I was FORCED to learn subjects I had no interest in but at the non-university institution I learnt what I wanted to learn and NOTHING else! So, my argument is that the university licentiate pathway should be open for those interested in acquiring pinpoint knowledge. Let those who want a "broad" education to opt for a degree. Let those who want to learn a certain skill and that skill alone opt for the licentiate and university certificate of competence. Former U.S. Vice President Hubert Humphrey became a pharmacist in less than a year following this (now abrogated) route! Students should have a choice of pathway-

and there must be no discrimination in hiring or distinction in salary for professionals of either route.

A Few Examples of the Ecclesiastical Link

Oxford was founded around the year 1096 by The English King and run by Roman Catholic monks. Cambridge University grew from a community of nuns of Saint Rhadegund and other religious houses e.g. St. John's hospital and Roman Catholic monks were in evidence teaching at Cambridge in the year 1224 [1]

The College of William and Mary was founded by Church of England clergyman James Blair in 1693. He received the charter from the heads of the Church of England King William III (1605-1702) and Queen Mary II (1662-1694).

Harvard was founded in 1636 exclusively to train Puritan Christian Clergymen! The university was named after the clergyman John Harvard. The original motto of Harvard was "Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae" which is Latin for "Truth for Christ and The Church"!

Yale was founded in 1707 by 10 clergyman of the Congregationalist church viz- Samuel Andrew, Thomas Buckingham, Israel Chauncy, Samuel Mather, Rev. James Noyes II (son of James Noyes), James Pierpont, Abraham Pierson, Noadiah Russell, Joseph Webb, and Timothy Woodbridge- all alumni of Harvard!

"The University...until the 15th century had no buildings of its own; its lectures, teachings and meetings were in churches....." [2].

References

1. Chambers (1970) International Learning Systems. Encyclopaedia 2: 790.
2. Ibid. 14: p.168.

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