The Medieval University

Universities Past and Present

- To what extent is the modern university based on a medieval model?
  - Dress (Oxford exams, Sewanee dress code)
  - Administrative structure (chancellor, provost, dean)
  - Curriculum (majors, senior thesis)
  - Student life (drinking, violence, $ trouble)
  - Town-and-gown (riots, student housing)
  - Types of degrees (BA, MA, PhD)

Where were universities located?
University specialities

- Paris: Theology
- Bologna: Law
- Padua/Salerno: Medicine
- Montpellier: Medicine

(Oxford Bodleian MS Aust. D. 4.6, f.911, ca. 1160)

What was a medieval university?

- a "guild" or corporation of scholars
  - “Universitas” is Latin for guild
- Community of 200-3,000 scholars engaged in teaching and scholarship at advanced level
- established standards for achievement in scholarship (“degrees”) and in specific disciplines (“schools”, “majors”)
- Fixed curriculum, location, standards

Who went to university?

- Poor/M. class secular boys from the age of 11-22, training to be doctors, lawyers, civil servants
- Both locals and foreigners (the latter in “nations”)
- Religious men (monks, priests) seeking advancement
Why were universities founded?

- Professors want to regulate the curriculum and fees for students; and to restrict entry to the faculty.
- Cities wanted the prestige of a university, and the income from students.
- Students sought professional training, protection of student rights, and goliardic amusement.

What was the curriculum?

- The "Liberal Arts"
- The trivium
  - Grammar
  - Rhetoric
  - Logic
- The quadrivium
  - Arithmetic
  - Geometry
  - Astronomy
  - Music
- Professional training
  - Medicine
    - Galen, Hippocrates, Avicenna, Aristotle
  - Law (civil & canon)
    - Gratian, Justinian, Aristotle
  - Theology
    - Bible, Lombard’s Sentences,
      - (Arts)

"Chained books"

(Hereford Cathedral, England)
What was the pedagogy?

• Memorization & recitation & repetition
  • Suaepius repetita placebit
  • Repetitor, compendia
• Lectures on an ancient text, w/ extensive commentary/gloss
  • Theoretical > practical
• Almost completely oral—books were expensive.
  • Erasable tablets?
  • Disputations
  • Chained books
• Quote: Univ. of Bologna statutes, 1405

Medieval Glosses

Univ. of Bologna Statutes, 1405

• “For the utility and benefit of scholars and students, it is hereby declared that disputations should be held by the doctors and professors in the manner specified below; namely, that the junior faculty should begin with the first lecture once each week, in the morning if it is a holiday or in the afternoon if it is not; and the following week another teacher will lecture upon another question…..He who has argued a question of theory must afterwards argue a question of practice. And every doctor or professor must be personally present at each of the disputations straight though until the end, and must participate in the discussion or be punished by a fine.”
Scholasticism

- Scholasticism
  - Systematic, logical approach to all questions, esp. theology
    - Disputation, commentary
  - Faith and reason can be used together
    - "natural" truths and "revealed" truths
  - Thomas Aquinas, St. Anselm, Peter Lombard
  - A powerful and popular tool, but sometimes abused or misused:
    - Ex: "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?"

A university lecture, 14th century Germany

A lecture hall at the Salamanca University, Spain
Undergraduate study

- could begin study as early as 13 years old (or even younger)
  - only criterion: the ability to read Latin
- student attached himself to a resident scholar
- attended “lectures” on the liberal arts
- no finals; no midterms; no assignments
- Disputatio
- “Bachelor of Arts” (bachelor: young man) after 4-6 years
Graduate study

• “Master of Arts” (M.A.)
  – License to teach anywhere in Christendom
  – Additional 3-4 years of study
• “Doctor of ---” (Ph.D.)
  – Medicine, Law, Philosophy or Theology
  – Additional 7-15 years of study
  – Dissertation not required until 19th c.

More info on academic gowns & hoods

Student Life

• “noisy, quarrelsome, given to drinking, and excessively fond of prostitutes” (Noble, p. 341)
• Examinations
• “Town and Gown” relations

Italian Universities

• Primarily governed by students
  • Older, wealthier graduate students
  • Civil protection for foreigners
• Rector = head student official for 2 yrs.
  • Must be unmarried, at least 24, & wealthy
    – Vestium laceratio
  • Determined faculty salaries/schedules
  • Could boycott or expel unpopular teachers; forbid professors to leave town w/o deposit; fine absent teachers or those w/ fewer than 5 students
University of Padua

University College (1249), Oxford -- from a 17th century illustration

Princeton's Graduate College

The University: How much has changed??