1756: The Legacy of Benjamin Franklin

To the PRINTERS of the PENNSYLVANIA GAZETTE. BY Order of the Trustees, we send you the following PLAN of EDUCATION, now fixed by them for a three Year Trial, in the LATIN, GREEK, and PHILOSOPHY SCHOOLS, of the College and Academy of this City; by a bare Inspection of which, any Parent may know what Progress his Son makes, and what is his Standing, as well as what Books to provide, from Time to Time. The Plan of the English School, and the School for the practical Branches of the Mathematics will also be laid before the public as soon as possible.

... Thus it is hoped the Student may be led thro’ a Scale of easy Ascent, till finally rendered capable of Thinking, Writing and Acting well, which is the grand Aim of a liberal Education.

WILLIAM SMITH,
Provost of the College and Academy

FRANCIS ALISON,
Vice Provost of the College, and Rector of the Academy

EBENEZER KINNERSLEY,
Professor of English and Oratory

THEOPHILUS GREW,
Professor of the Mathematicks

PAUL JACKSON,
Professor of Languages

Philadelphia, College and Academy Hall, August 5, 1756

"Plan of Education in the College," August 1756.

In the spring of 1756, Penn's first Provost, Reverend William Smith, re-organized the curriculum of the College of Philadelphia along the lines of the traditional English college. The Trustees, after a full review, approved the proposal and voted that the new curriculum be published in the Philadelphia newspapers. The syllabus pictured here was published on the front page of Franklin’s Pennsylvania Gazette for 12 August 1756.

COLLECTIONS OF THE RARE BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.
Beginning in 1749 and continuing over a period of seven years, Benjamin Franklin set out and steadily advanced his vision of higher education at the University of Pennsylvania. At the beginning, he authored and published two pamphlets of original and creative thinking: *Proposals for the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* (1749) and *Idea of the English School* (1751). He guided the purchase of the first campus at Fourth and Arch Streets in Philadelphia and superintended the fitting out of the “New Building” for educational purposes. He recruited the first faculty and presided over the opening of the Academy of Philadelphia in January 1751. He dedicated himself to fundraising, in both the private and public spheres and in 1753 was rewarded with the gift of £500 sterling by Penn family proprietors of Pennsylvania, a sum sufficient to pay off the Academy’s initial debt. In 1755 he obtained from the Penns a collegiate charter, empowering the Trustees to confer degrees in the traditional manner of British colleges and universities. The College of Philadelphia, the culmination of Franklin’s work, was thereby established and he was, as observed by another Trustee, the “soul of the whole.”

In 1754 Franklin recruited a brilliant young Scotsman, William Smith, to be the first Provost of the College. In his conversation and writing, Smith was careful to defer to Franklin’s vision for a liberal arts education in the English language. In his actions, however, Smith hewed a very different line. In April 1756, in Franklin’s absence from a Board meeting, Smith introduced to the Trustees a traditional British curriculum, in which several years of preparation in Latin and Greek would lead to the study of philosophy in the classical languages. It was a proposal drawn from Medieval antecedents, not at all sympathetic to Franklin’s forward-looking English School. In fact, it permanently relegated the English School to second class status in the organization of the College. Franklin, whose attention was now drawn to politics and public affairs, was voted out of the presidency of the Board of Trustees in June 1756. He continued to attend Board meetings until his departure for London in the spring of 1757, but his work at the University was finished and his influence gave way to the Provost he had once considered to be his protégé.

**1806 – Rise of the School of Medicine**

Resolved. That the building committee be authorized to contract for the execution of the plan reported by them, for the erecting of a suitable building for the Medical Schools, provided it can be done for any sum not exceeding sixteen thousand Dollars and also to sell such property and collect such of the Monies belonging to the institution as may be necessary to comply with their contract.

Minutes of the Trustees, 4 March 1806

In 1765 William Morgan and others proposed the establishment of a medical school in Philadelphia and the Trustees of the College agreed to take it under their administrative umbrella and issue its graduates the degree of Bachelor of Medicine. Penn thereby became the first university in British North America (Columbia was second, in 1768, when it also established a medical school in addition to its college). The Medical Department, as it was known, flourished and in 1797 the number of its graduates began to exceed those of the College. For the next 110 years the Medical Department boldly stood forward as the largest and most prestigious school at Penn. In 1806 the faculty of the Medical Department proposed a new medical building to the Trustees of the University. Four years earlier both the College and Medical Department had moved to a new campus. It was located on the west side of 9th Street, between Market and Chestnut Streets. For the first few years the two faculties did their best to co-exist in a single, large building. The experiment did not work well. The medical faculty in particular found their space ill-suited to their research in and demonstrations of anatomy, chemistry, medicine, pharmacology, and surgery. The new Medical Hall was designed by William Strickland, Philadelphia’s most prominent architect of the time. It opened in 1807 and enrollment in the Medical Department more than doubled within two years.

Buildings of the College and School of Medicine, 1806.

Penn’s second campus was located on the west side of Ninth Street, between Market and Chestnut Streets, in center city Philadelphia. In 1806 the Trustees authorized the construction of the University’s first Medical Hall (on the left front in this view), which was attached to the earlier College Hall (at the center-right, toward the rear). These two buildings housed Penn’s classrooms and medical demonstration rooms until their demolition in 1828.

Collections of the University Archives and Records Center.
A renewed library was an essential element of the University's expansion in the 1850s. Beginning in the fall of 1856 and continuing to the present day, the Trustees and faculty have demonstrated continuous support for the idea that the University library stands at the heart of the institution. In 1855 and 1856 the Trustees provided space for the library; placed it under the supervision of one of the senior faculty; established an annual budget for library acquisitions; directed that the library be open from Monday through Saturday; made provision for the books to circulate; and made the library available "for the use of the Students, Professors, Trustees, and Alumni of the University."

The Commencement of 1856 reflected an institution of higher education entering the first stages of becoming modern. The College and Medical Department were supplemented in 1850 and 1852, respectively, by a Law Department and the beginnings of a school of engineering and applied science. Also in 1852 the Trustees had established the degree of Bachelor of Science in the College, the first time in the history of Penn when an undergraduate degree did not require mastering the classical languages and literature. By 1856 a new order was apparent in the several graduating classes. The University conferred a total of 189 degrees that year, 147 of which were Doctors of Medicine; 25 of which were the traditional Bachelor of Arts; 15 of which were conferred upon the fifth graduating class of the Law School; and one of which was the new Bachelor of Science. The Trustees awarded one honorary degree, a Doctor of Divinity to The Rev. William Henry Odenheimer, rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, and in later years, Bishop of the Diocese of New Jersey.

The shrinking size of the College in proportion to the professional schools indicated the path the University would follow for the next hundred years.
Two days later, at the Academy of Music, Broad and Locust Streets, the Franklin Bi-Centenary ceremonies continued, with the award, by the Trustees of the University, of no less than twenty honorary degrees. Representatives of learned societies and institutions of higher education across America, Canada, Great Britain, and Europe included the American Philosophical Society, the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin and the universities of Amsterdam, Holland; Cambridge, England; Edinburgh, Scotland; McGill, Canada; St. Andrew’s, Scotland; Chicago; Cornell; Harvard; Johns Hopkins; Princeton; and Virginia. The most notable recipient was King Edward, VII of England, who accepted the honorary degree through his Ambassador to the United States. The Orator of the day was Hampton L. Carson (A.B., 1871; LL.B., 1874). Attorney General of Pennsylvania, who quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson, “He is truly great who is what he is from nature, and who never reminds us of others.”

By 1906, Franklin’s aim of a liberal arts education in the English language had finally become a reality at the University of Pennsylvania. At that year’s Commencement only twenty-seven graduates earned the traditional Bachelor of Arts degree, while 146 earned Bachelor of Science degrees, which required no advanced study of the classical languages. Franklin’s utilitarian approach to higher education was also reflected in the extraordinary growth of Penn’s professional schools. The School of Dental Medicine graduated 110; the School of Medicine, 102; the Law School, 61; and the School of Veterinary Medicine, 30. Taken together, the professional schools were almost twice the size of the College. Though the College was growing rapidly, Penn – as it had been in 1806 and 1856 – was still primarily a training ground for the American professions.

1906: The Persistence of Franklin’s Vision

The opening exercises of the celebration of the bi-centenary of the birth of the founder of the American Philosophical Society and of the University of Pennsylvania, were held in Witherspoon Hall on Tuesday evening last, April 17, 1906.

The greetings of the American Philosophical Society were extended by the president, Dr. Edgar F. Smith, the various learned bodies in all parts of the world delivered addresses, and Andrew Carnegie, as Lord Rector of St. Andrew’s University, Scotland, conferred the degree of Doctor of Laws upon Miss Agnes Irwin, great-granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin and Dean of Radcliffe College, Cambridge.

Every considerable learned body or institution in America and Europe had accepted the invitation of the American Philosophical Society to take part by delegate or communication in the celebration. About two hundred delegates were present.

Old Penn Weekly Review, 21 April 1906

1956: Franklin’s Triumph

Youth will come out of this School fitted for learning any Business, Calling or Profession ... the Time ... being here employ’d in laying such a Foundation of Knowledge and Ability, as properly improv’d, may qualify them to pass thro’ and execute the several Offices of civil Life, with Advantage and Reputation to themselves and Country.

Benjamin Franklin, Idea of the English School, 1751
Historical Notes (continued)

I do not suggest that all of you should earn your livelihood in Government service although I hope that many of you will choose to do so, because that service is worthy of the best that is in you. ... I urge you to do it now, first because in all probability you have more time now than at any other period of your active career. Secondly, it may be too late to remedy some things you know should be remedied if you wait until the evening of your lives, and thirdly, if you do wait until that time you will not have laid the foundation for effectiveness.

U.S. Chief Justice Earl Warren
Mid-Year Convocation, Irvine Auditorium, 11 February 1956

National strength is therefore a fabric which is made up of many different strands. ... Implicit in these is a talent which university education should go far to promote. I refer to the talent for negotiation. The ability to find the common meeting ground, and to work out the compromise to which all can adhere is a useful talent in all public affairs. In our international relations it is vital. In its highest development it is one of the greatest of human talents. ... I am keenly aware of how much the world needs men and women endowed with a genius for negotiation - and for thus moving all humanity ahead on a broad front.

Henry Cabot Lodge
U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations
200th University Commencement, 13 June 1956

Penn initiated the new year of 1956 with a special Founder's Day Convocation, at which the Trustees conferred honorary degrees upon the Presidents and Chancellors of the five universities which had similarly honored Franklin in his lifetime. Franklin received honorary Master of Arts degrees from Harvard, Yale, and William and Mary and honorary doctorates from St. Andrew's in Scotland and Oxford University in England. Nathan M. Pusey, President of Harvard, said, "Franklin perhaps did more than any other individual to nourish higher education in the Colonies. ... [Franklin was a] kind of one-man university" himself.

President Gaylord P. Harnwell,
with honorary degree recipients, June 1956.

At the University’s Two Hundredth Commencement, held at the now-demolished Municipal Auditorium on Wednesday, 13 June 1956, the Trustees conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws on Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and Kenjiro Matsumoto (SEAS, Class of 1895), successful Japanese industrialist.

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Just four weeks later, Chief Justice Earl Warren echoed Franklin's call to public service, an advocacy repeated in June of that year by Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge. It was an age, far more so than in our own day, of a belief in the great good that government may bestow upon its people.

At the Commencement of 1956, held in the Municipal Auditorium on South 34th Street, Penn conferred a total of 2,084 degrees, four times the number of fifty years earlier and more than ten times the number of a century before. The great difference in student population between 1906 and 1956 was the rise of the Wharton School. Wharton's undergraduate school was Penn's largest and its M.B.A program Penn's third largest. Fully 28% of the 1956 graduates took Wharton degrees, substantially greater than the College's 18%. The Law School, School of Medicine, and School of Dental Medicine each contributed about six percent of the total, with the other professional schools trailing behind. More than 50% of all degrees were in the professional schools, both undergraduate and graduate and in this sense Penn retained its 20th century identity as primarily an institution for training in the pragmatic disciplines.

1956 was also year of change and promise for the future. The Ford Foundation granted Penn more than $2 million to increase faculty salaries and total fundraising increased more than 50% over the previous year. The City of Philadelphia prepared to close Woodland Avenue and Penn pur-
chased 21 properties in the triangle of land bounded by Woodland, Walnut, and 36th Street. These were immediately slated for demolition to make way for a new University Library. Building plans were also emerging for the Ravdin Institute on South 34th Street, McClelland Lounge in the Quadrangle, and a new Women’s Residence Hall at 34th and Walnut Streets. Finally, Ivy League football was inaugurated and Penn won its first games in three years! In many ways Penn was beginning to look like our contemporary university.

2006: Franklin’s University Today

Whereas, the well-being of a society depends on the education of their youth, as well as, in great measure, the eternal welfare of every individual, by impressing on their tender minds principles of morality and religion, instructing them in the several duties they owe to the society in which they live, and one towards another, giving them the knowledge of languages, and other parts of useful learning necessary thereto, in order to render them serviceable in the several public stations to which they may be called. ...

Benjamin Franklin
President of the Trustees
Charter of the Academy and Charitable School
13 July 1753

I propose a compact, a Penn Compact, that expresses our boldest aspirations for higher education – a compact based on our shared understanding that “Divided we fail. United we flourish.” By honoring this Penn Compact, we will make the greatest possible difference in our university, our city, our country, and our world. The Penn Compact that I propose encompasses three principles. The first is increased access. ... The second is to integrate knowledge. ... The third is to engage locally and globally. By putting our principles into ever better practice, our Penn family will rise from excellence to eminence in teaching and research as we become ever more accessible.

Amy Gutmann
President of the University
Inaugural Address
15 October 2004

At today’s Commencement the University will celebrate the award of approximately 8,000 degrees, nearly four times more than it did in 1956. Benefiting a major research institution, the School of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate Faculties lead the way. The Bachelor of Arts degree has emerged in modern times as the University’s most popular. Approximately twenty-seven percent of today’s recipients will be taking that degree. The Doctor of Philosophy degree is now the fourth most awarded. Approximately seven percent of the total will be the Ph.D. The second and third most awarded are Wharton’s Master of Business Administration and Bachelor of Science in Economics, representing sixteen percent and eight percent respectively. These four degrees account for more than fifty percent of all Penn degrees. The other professional schools, once Penn’s most populous, remain very prestigious, but much smaller in proportion to the rest of the University than a century ago. The professional degrees of the schools of Law, Medicine, Dental Medicine, and Veterinary Medicine combined will make up only nine percent of all the degrees the University will confer. In the 21st century, Penn is first an institution of teaching and research and second, a consortium of schools of professional practice.

In 2006, the Penn Compact “embodies Penn’s vision for making our University both a global leader in teaching, research, and professional practice, as well as a dynamic agent of social, economic, and civic progress.” Over the past 50 years, the University of Pennsylvania has certainly grown sufficiently large and influential to achieve these impressive goals. Penn’s faculty of 4,200 leads more than 23,000 students through the apprenticeship of higher education and on to lives of public and private service. The faculty also generates more than $700 million a year in sponsored awards and projects. Penn’s staff of 13,000 supports the academic enterprise; the University’s Health System has a work force of an additional 11,000. Penn is thereby the largest private employer in the City of Philadelphia and the second-largest in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Benjamin Franklin would be astonished ... and very pleased.

Also in this year, the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary Consortium has coordinated the Ben Franklin 300 Philadelphia celebrations. Organized by the American Philosophical Society, the Franklin Institute, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Office of the Secretary at Penn, the Tercentenary Consortium’s projects form the official national celebration for America’s first founding father to reach 300. The centerpiece of the celebration is an international traveling exhibition, “Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World” and its Philadelphia venue is the National Constitution Center. The year-long celebration on campus also includes an array of complementary exhibitions, lectures, symposia, concerts, and special events. Notable programs at Penn include exhibitions in College Hall, Van Pelt Library and the ICA, as well as symposia hosted by the Penn Humanities Forum, the School of Nursing, and the McNeil Center for Early American Studies, among others. The University honors its Founder, especially as it celebrates its 250th Commencement.

Mark Frazier Lloyd
Director
University Archives and Records Center