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GEOGRAPHY IN THE BELLWETHER UNIVERSITIES OF THE UNITES STATES*

Foreign observers of the American scene are often struck by the bewildering variety of institutions of "higher" learning—institutions that give remedial instruction to illiterates and also offer seminars led by Nobel-prize-winning scientists. Perhaps this cafeteria style of education should be expected in a large democracy that prides itself on individualism and social responsiveness. In most other countries, education above the secondary level is almost entirely the monopoly of the state, but in the United States independent (or "private") institutions have not only survived but wield disproportionate power. American state institutions are supported by a combination of federal, state, and private monies, with no single source enjoying predominance.¹

A small number of private universities in the northeastern United States, usually designated by the term "Ivy League",² began as colleges in the

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¹ In fact, the states are not the major sources of funding for the state universities in this survey. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), for example, derives less than one-third of its revenues from state appropriations (32.2% in the fiscal year 1982–1983). Student fees made up 9.1% of the total, the federal government supplied 14.6%, and another 5.1% came from private gifts, grants, and contracts. The teaching hospital accounted for 20.4% of the receipts but spent 8 million more than it earned. See UCLA Annual Report, 1982–83: University of California, Los Angeles (Los Angeles: UCLA, Public Affairs Department, Academic Publications, 1984), p. 27.

² The Ivy League universities are Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Brown, Dartmouth, Columbia, Pennsylvania, and Cornell, all colonial creations except for the last-named, Cornell, which was founded in 1865. Dartmouth is the only Ivy League institution that is not a member of the Association of American Universities, because it is predominantly an undergraduate institution. The term "Ivy League" was first used informally in connection with intercollegiate athletics but has now been formalized (as "Ivy Group") and extended to cover academic relations among the constituent universities.

colonial period (i.e., before 1776), and, although they now share leadership with a few private and state universities that originated in the 19th century, they still enjoy enormous prestige and power. To an American, "going to college" typically means spending four years to earn a bachelor's degree in an unspecialized curriculum either in a small institution that offers no postgraduate instruction or in one of the undergraduate colleges of a large university. Although some mid-19th-century reformers favored replacement of the old liberal arts colleges with research universities on the German model, the renovation of American universities that occurred mostly between 1870 and 1910 produced instead hybrid constructions that might be described as German research institutes grafted onto English colleges.

Before the American Civil War (1861–1865) truly advanced training was scarcely possible in the colleges because of the lack of professors who knew how to conduct research, the lack of decent libraries and scientific equipment, and the rigid curriculum consisting of rather elementary subjects. Renovation began in 1869 when Harvard's president, Charles Eliot, instituted the elective system, which allowed students "to vote with their feet"—i.e., to select from a much wider range of courses—a situation that enabled a greater degree of specialization to develop among the professors. Seven years later, the first truly modern university on the German model was established, the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Johns Hopkins, under its geographer-president Daniel Coit Gilman, became a solid success, although it never followed the original idea of creating an entirely postgraduate research institution. A later development, Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, founded in 1887, tried steadfastly for several years to avoid undergraduate instruction but found it necessary to compromise in order to survive.

The period from 1870 to 1910 was truly remarkable in the rate and direction of change. More changes took place in that 40-year span than have occurred in the subsequent 70. The American university today closely resembles its appearance in 1910 but not at all what it was before 1870. Remarkably few basic changes have occurred since World War I. It is not surprising that the period of growth and change in the last third of the 19th century paralleled, and was certainly aided by, the increased prosperity of that era of rapid urbanization and industrialization. In this the United States was not unique because one can see very similar trends in European countries.

One of the most significant changes in the pre-World-War-I generation was the departmentalization of American universities. The growing number of students, courses, and professors, combined with the increasing professionalization of the professoriat, created the need for clusters of specialists in each discipline and the means to offer research degrees or doctorates in those fields. These clusters, which might consist of two professors or even only one—hardly a "critical mass", were called by various names, such as "school", "institute", or "seminary", although "department" was the preferred

designation from the 1890s onward. The German-style Ph.D. was first awarded by Yale University in 1861, and by 1900 approximately 350 doctorates were awarded annually by more than a dozen universities.³ In that year the Association of American Universities was founded in order to provide for communication among the nascent graduate schools that were giving the majority of doctorates in the United States. From 14 charter members in 1900, the membership has grown to 52 in 1982, including two Canadian universities (McGill and Toronto) that were admitted in 1926. These universities might thus be considered the leading, or "bellwether",⁴ universities of North America, although I am not prepared to argue the relative merits of member and nonmember universities.

This paper is a survey of the vicissitudes of the field of geography in the 50 U.S. member universities of the AAU in the 20th century. The status of an academic discipline depends greatly on its success in the bellwether universities, particularly in the ten or twelve most elite members of the AAU. This may be the most important factor in explaining geography's variable success in the United States and the contrast with other parts of the world.

Although we geographers are fond of calling our subject the "queen of sciences" or the mother-science from which so many of the other disciplines have sprung, in truth the field that we know today was actually formed in the late 19th century during the period of rapid change that produced all of the modern university subjects. Although no logic can prove that geography is any more or any less important than other fields, the fact remains that a century of circumstance has created an intricate order of numerical ratios in which geography is relegated to an inferior position vis-a-vis such disciplines as Chemistry and History. Geography in the United States does not have the relative strength that it enjoys in Western Europe or even in neighboring Canada. In a non-growth or slow-growth situation such as that in which most universities in the western world have found themselves in the last fifteen years, small fields are forced into a series of rearguard actions or even fratricidal conflicts. Largesse can hardly be expected from those whom Dame Fortune has seated at the high table.

I have prepared the following summary to show the extent to which the field of geography has been accommodated in the fifty U.S. universities that are members of the Association of American Universities. About half of the member institutions now give doctorates in geography, and it is possible to earn a Ph.D. in the field in approximately twenty non-member universities as well.

The information for this table was gleaned from published sources as

³ That figure is approximately 1% of the number of doctorates awarded annually by American universities in the 1970s.

⁴ A "bellwether" is literally a balled wether, or sheep, the leader of the flock, and the word is used by extension to mean "leader" or "leading".

GEOGRAPHY IN THE MEMBER UNIVERSITIES OF
THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

Columns:

1. Name and location of the university
2. Indication of whether the university is private (P) or state-supported (S)
3. Founding date of the university
4. Date of admission into the AAU
5. Has the university ever awarded doctorates in geography?
6. Has the university ever had a department of geography or a department with the word "geography" in the title?

Brown University Providence, Rhode Island	P	1764	1933	No	No
University of California Berkeley, California	S	1868	1900	Yes	Department of Geography, 1898-
University of California Los Angeles, California	S	1919	1974	Yes	Department of Geography, 1919-
University of California San Diego, California	S	1912 ^a	1982	No	No
California Institute of Technology Pasadena, California	P	1891	1934	No	No
Carnegie-Mellon University Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	P	1900 ^b	1981	No	No
Case Western Reserve University Cleveland, Ohio	P	1826 ^c	1969	No	Department of Geography, 1961-1967 (Dept. of Geology and Geography, 1936-1961)
Catholic University of America Washington, D.C.	P	1887	1900	No	Department of Geography, 1946- 1976 (Dept. of Geology and Geo- graphy, 1938-1946)
University of Chicago Chicago, Illinois	P	1890	1900	Yes	Department of Geography, 1903-
Clark University Worcester, Massachusetts	P	1887	1900	Yes	Graduate School of Geography, 1921-
University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado	S	1876	1966	Yes	Department of Geography, 1957- (Dept. of Geology and Geography, 1937-1957)
Columbia University New York, New York	P	1754	1900	Yes	Department of Geography, 1919- ^d
Cornell University Ithaca, New York	P	1865	1900	Yes	Department of Physical Geography (at first called Dept. of Dynamic Geology and Physical Geography) existed as a subdepartment of the Department of Geology c. 1895- 1914
Duke University Durham, North Carolina	P	1838	1938	No	No
Harvard University Cambridge, Massachusetts	P	1636	1900	Yes	Department of Geology and Geo- graphy, 1897-1958
University of Illinois Urbana, Illinois	S	1867	1908	Yes	Department of Geography, 1945- (Dept. of Geology and Geography, 1934-1945)
Indiana University Bloomington, Indiana	S	1820	1909	Yes	Department of Geography, 1946- (Dept. of Geology and Geography, 1900-1904, 1931-1946)

University of Iowa Iowa City, Iowa	S	1847	1909	Yes	Department of Geography, 1946–
Iowa State University Ames, Iowa	S	1858	1958	No	No
Johns Hopkins University Baltimore, Maryland	P	1876	1900	Yes	Department of Geography, 1943– (Isaiah Bowman School of Geo- graphy, 1948–1953; Isaiah Bow- man Department of Geography, 1953–1969; Department of Geo- graphy and Environmental Engi- neering, 1969–)
University of Kansas Lawrence, Kansas	S	1864	1909	Yes	Department of Geography, 1947– (Department of Geography-Meteo- rology, 1963–1984)
University of Maryland College Park, Maryland	S	1856	1969	Yes	Department of Geography, 1946–
Massachusetts Institute of Technology Cambridge, Massachusetts	P	1861	1934	No	No
University of Michigan Ann Arbor, Michigan	S	1817	1900	Yes	Department of Geography, 1923– 1982 (Dept. of Geology and Geo- graphy, 1915–1923)
Michigan State University East Lansing, Michigan	S	1855	1964	Yes	Department of Geography, 1955– (Dept. of Geology and Geography, 1929–1955)
University of Minnesota Minneapolis, Minnesota	S	1851	1908	Yes	Department of Geography, 1925–
University of Missouri Columbia, Missouri	S	1839	1908	No	Department of Geography, 1950–
University of Nebraska Lincoln, Nebraska	S	1869	1909	Yes	Department of Geography, 1928– (Dept. of Geography and Econo- mic Geology, 1909–1912; Dept. of Geography and Conservation, 1912–,1918; Dept. of Geology and Geography, 1918–1928)
New York University New York, New York	P	1831	1950	No	Department of Geography and Geo- logy, 1914–1920
University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, North Carolina	S	1789	1918	Yes	Department of Geography, 1962– (Dept. of Geology and Geography, 1936–1962)
Northwestern University Evanston, Illinois	P	1851	1917	Yes	Department of Geography, 1945– (Dpt. of Geol. & Geog., 1919–1945)
Ohio State University Columbus, Ohio	S	1870	1916	Yes	Department of Geography, 1924– (Dept. of Social and Economic Geography, 1922–1924)
University of Oregon Eugene, Oregon	S	1876	1969	Yes	Department of Geography, 1949– (Dept. of Geography, 1910–1913; Dept. of Geol.&Geog., 1913–1932; Dept. of Geography, 1932–1947; Dept. of Geog.&Geol., 1947–1949)
University of Pennsylvania Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	P	1740	1900	Yes	Department of Geography and In- dustry, 1912–1963
Pennsylvania State University University Park, Pennsylvania	S	1855	1958	Yes	Department of Geography, 1946–

University of Pittsburgh Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	S	1787	1974	Yes	Department of Geography, 1943-1983
Princeton University Princeton, New Jersey	P	1746	1900	No	No
Purdue University West Lafayette, Indiana	S	1869	1958	No	No
University of Rochester Rochester, New York	P	1850	1941	No	Department of Geology and Geography, 1946-1967
University of Southern California Los Angeles, California	P	1880	1969	No	Department of Geography, 1936-
Stanford University Stanford, California	P	1885	1900	Yes	Department of Geography, 1950-1963
Syracuse University Syracuse, New York	P	1870	1966	Yes	Department of Geography, 1946- (Dept. of Geology, Geography, and Mineralogy, 1931-1946)
University of Texas Austin, Texas	S	1881	1929	Yes	Department of Geography, 1949-
Tulane University New Orleans, Louisiana	P	1834	1958	No	No
Vanderbilt University Nashville, Tennessee	P	1873	1950	No	No ^e
University of Virginia Charlottesville, Virginia	S	1819	1904	No	Department of Geography, 1946-1970 ^f
University of Washington Seattle, Washington	S	1861	1950	Yes	Department of Geography, 1935- (Dept. of Geol. & Geog., 1928-1935)
Washington University St. Louis, Missouri	P	1853	1923	Yes	Department of Geography, 1919-1956
University of Wisconsin Madison, Wisconsin	S	1849	1900	Yes	Department of Geography, 1928- (Dept. of Geol. & Geog., 1921-1928)
Yale University New Haven, Connecticut	P	1701	1900	Yes	Department of Geography, 1948-1977

^a Scripps Institution of Marine Biology was given to the Regents of the University of California by the Scripps family in 1912. Designated as general campus of the University in 1959.

^b Carnegie Technical School founded 1900; became Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1912; CIT merged with Mellon Institute in 1967 and adopted present name.

^c Western Reserve College established 1826; Western Reserve University and Case Institute of Technology merged in 1967.

^d Teachers College (founded 1888) was absorbed into the Columbia University system in 1898. Geography was part of the Department of Science until 1899, when a separate Department of Geography emerged.

^e In 1979 Vanderbilt merged with George Peabody College for Teachers, which has a Department of Geography.

^f At the University of Virginia, departments were called schools before 1954, so that the Department of Geography was actually called the School of Geography from 1946 to 1954. In 1970 the departments of geography and geology were merged to form the nucleus of a new Department of Environmental Sciences.

well as from letters that I received from archivists and geographers in the various institutions in response to my queries. The most difficult data to obtain were the dates of origin (and, in some cases, demise) of the departments of geography. One would think that such dates would be a matter of record and would be easily obtainable, but such is not the case. One might expect such dates to be most difficult to track down in the *fin-de-siècle* period, when departmentalization was just beginning in American universities, but

they proved to be equally hard to find in the recent period. The dates were perhaps most difficult to obtain for some of the older private universities, although their archivists were unusually helpful. In the Ivy League institutions, senior professors often behave like "mandarins", and departmental lines are not so carefully observed as they are in state universities. There is also a surprising lack of documentation for some of the departments established in state universities in the recent past. For example, it would appear that the University of Illinois Department of Geography broke away from Geology and became a separate department "in a fit of absent-mindedness", without the necessary approval of the Academic Senate and the Board of Trustees.⁵

At one time or another, courses in geography were probably offered at every university on this list, although they were usually given by non-geographers—e.g., physical geography courses offered by geologists or economic geography by economists. There are geographers today at many of the universities that have never had geography departments. For example, Brown University has a geographer in its Department of Sociology, the California Institute of Technology has a geographer in its Division of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Carnegie-Mellon University has a geographer as Dean of the School of Urban and Public Affairs, and Princeton University has a geographer in its Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Geography has continued in various guises in universities where the department was terminated or merged into a larger entity. Although Harvard University removed geography from a departmental name in 1958, geographers could be subsequently found in various niches, most notably in the Graduate School of Design. In the University of Virginia geography was merged with geology and other subjects to form a new Department of Environmental Sciences in 1970, but three geographers remain, and it is possible to form Ph.D. examining committees with geographers as chairmen or committee members. Stanford University dissolved its Department of Geography in 1963, but courses in geography were taught in Stanford's Food Research Institute down to 1978.

Although the numbers are too small to permit any real analysis, it would appear that certain trends are discernible from the table. Most of the geography departments in the AAU member universities were founded in one of the following periods: I, 1898–1914; II, 1919–1928; and III, 1943–1950. These periods coincide roughly with times of economic prosperity and growth, and the intervening years were those of wars and depression. Since 1950 no major departments have been created, except for the splitting of combined

⁵ Jerome D. Fellmann, *Geography at Illinois: The Discipline and the Department, 1867–1974* (Urbana: University of Illinois, Department of Geography, 1974). J. D. Fellmann's 71-page monograph is the fullest departmental history I have seen, and it might well be used as a model for writing such histories.

geology-geography departments in universities such as Michigan State and Colorado, but the most obvious postwar trend has been rather towards dissolution of geography departments or their submergence in larger entities. The 1950s and 1960s were otherwise years of great expansion of the American academic establishment. New geography departments emerged in the state colleges but not in the older universities. All departments saw great growth in numbers of students and professors. Departments of geography that consisted of only two or three professors before World War II grew steadily after the war and now might have fifteen to twenty professors.

One can see from the table that geography was originally often perceived as too weak to stand alone, and so it was often included as the junior partner in a joint department, usually with geology. It would appear that the universities of Oregon and Nebraska prematurely established departments of geography, which were later merged with geology and finally reemerged as separate geography departments once again. In few universities could geography be considered a "foundation" department—that is, as one of the first units to be created when departmentalization began. Among the AAU universities, only the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) had a Department of Geography from the very beginning of the University. In fact, the department was a carry-over from the previously existing Los Angeles State Normal School. When the Normal School was transformed into the Southern Branch of the University of California in 1919, the former faculty members and departments were carried over. In this case, the Department of Geology grew out of the Department of Geography, instead of the other way around, as in many other universities. Incidentally, UCLA's belated entry into the AAU in 1974 resulted from the belief that the charter membership granted to the University of California in 1900 also covered all the branch universities that subsequently grew out of the parent organization in Berkeley. As UCLA grew in size and prestige, it was seen that separate membership in the AAU was appropriate. Apart from this anomaly, one might use the date of admission into the AAU as a sign of the "coming of age" of an American research university. Although it would be unseemly of me to suggest it, it would appear that UCLA had earned AAU membership perhaps a quarter of a century or more before it was actually granted.

Some Concluding Remarks: This survey of geography in the bellwether universities of the United States might unfairly lead one to the conclusion that geography is in a precarious position. The field is actually doing very well in many of the AAU member institutions and in a high percentage of the state colleges and universities across the land. In numerical strength it probably ranks nationally with some sister disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, but these fields do not have the handicap of non-representation at Harvard and some of the other elite universities. I offer no solutions to the problem of improving geography's image or re-establishing its presence in these institutions. My intention is solely to describe the

situation as it has evolved within the American university system over the past century. I hope that I have imparted some understanding of the variety within the system and the variable success of the field of geography.

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

There is a large literature on the subject of higher education in the United States, and I can recommend several outstanding works to the interested reader: Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Jurgen Herbst, "Diversification in American Higher Education", pp. 196–206 in *The Transformation of Higher Learning, 1860–1930*, ed. by Konrad H. Jarausch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities, 1636–1976*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976); Joseph Ben-David, *Centers of Learning: Britain, France, Germany, United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977); and Alexandra Oleson and John Voss, eds., *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860–1920* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).