

## The American University in Summer: Historical Background

Clay Schoenfeld

**N**othing in American history has been more striking, Frederick Jackson Turner observed, than "the steady pressure of democracy upon its universities to adapt them to the requirements of all the people."<sup>1</sup> The American university in summer has been both a product and an engine of that adjustment. The emergence of the summer university is a story of the evolution of American higher education in microcosm.

### The Ecology of the Summer University

The American university as we know it is the direct product of three separate yet complementary academic backgrounds: the Crown Academy, with its emphasis on prescribed liberal instruction; the German University, with its emphasis on research and advanced study; and the land-grant college, with its emphasis on vocational training and community service. This inheritance, as we shall see, has dictated the evolution of the summer term and is most clearly evident today in the activities of the university in summer. Yet while its roots may reach to nineteenth-century Europe, the summer university is essentially a twentieth-century American invention.

With the advent of the twentieth century, Americans witnessed the removal of many ancient landmarks. Under the impact of modern science and technology, of modern government, and of modern geography, old beliefs, attitudes, and institutions gave way, to be replaced by new conditions, ideas and ideals characterized by their variety and flux. And since a university is not something apart from the social order to which it belongs, it was inevitable that the universities should reflect the change. Since 1890, therefore, the American educator has been coping with the task of making a new university for a new society.

For the two hundred years prior to 1885, American higher education had been, in the main, created and sustained, inspired and controlled by religious groups in a climate that was largely church-centered. Out of this

fairly well-established culture the American college had developed a required curriculum and an assured method of teaching in a community bounded by conventional campus walls. The university of this period was virtually a direct transplant of European institutions, concerned almost exclusively with the conservation of the classics. While this type of institution was adapted to the aristocratic society of the continent, it was not at all suited to serve the needs of a muscular young democracy; so with the shift to secular control in a state-centered climate, with the disintegration of the older life, the older scheme of knowledge and the older social stratifications, came a consequent change in the older concept of university functions and policies.<sup>2</sup>

In the gradual adjustment of the American university to the American environment, we may discern seven reasonably distinct steps:

- 1 The first was the establishment and subsequent flourishing of the land-grant college under the Morrill Act — a public proclamation that higher education in the United States was not for the elite alone but for "the liberal and practical education of the [agricultural and] industrial classes of the several pursuits and professions in life: the most important single governmental step in connection with the training of scientific and professional personnel."<sup>3</sup>
- 2 The adoption of the elective system opened the way for a proliferation of courses, which in turn attracted unprecedented numbers of young people to college. Harvard led the way in widening the classical curriculum to include what is now a bewildering array of sciences and social studies, and other institutions quickly followed.<sup>4</sup>
- 3 The development of graduate schools — with their emphasis on productive scholarship and scientific research — caused the universities to become not only imparters but producers of knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

- 4 With the establishment of numerous professional schools, some in connection with existing universities, others independently, schools of law, medicine, architecture, engineering, education, journalism, business, and so on began to turn out graduates who soon demonstrated the superiority of professional training over experience.<sup>6</sup>
- 5 This was followed by the rise of the "utilitarian" university in which programs of adult education, public service and extension made the skills and resources of the campus available and applicable to people and their problems. And such public involvement in university activities carried back to the campus the impulses and aspirations of American society.<sup>7</sup>
- 6 An increasing awareness of the importance of higher education for both the individual and the nation led to greater financial support of higher education from both private and public sources (federal grants, state appropriations and philanthropy). This in turn led to an accelerated expansion of campus resources, skills and enrollments.<sup>8</sup>
- 7 Finally came the utilization of the summer months to strengthen and extend the impact of the other steps in the adjustment of the American university to American society.<sup>9</sup>

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### Nineteenth-Century Origins

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To assume such an orderly progression of events, however, is somewhat misleading for the modern summer university could not have become what it is without its kaleidoscopic background of early "experiments" in summer education. These, as we shall see, were frequently dominated by the public service motive which had achieved a certain thrust even before it was institutionalized under the Morrill Act.

As early as 1789, members of a Sunday Society in Birmingham, England, organized regular courses of lectures on mechanics for factory workers, and later put together an artisans' library. About 1800 a Glasgow teacher organized a mechanics class for local machine shop workers. When he moved to London he formed similar classes there and out of these grew, in 1823, the London Mechanics Institution. Similar centers spread rapidly throughout England. In 1857 Oxford University introduced a system of local examinations to lend stature to the mechanics' institutes, 300 of which had now formed a national union. Ten years later a Cambridge fellow,

James Stuart, originated the English university system of extension lectures when he accepted an invitation to make a series of appearances in cities of northern England. In 1908 a Crown committee took a look at university extension (the term had been coined there) and reported that 424,500 students had attended 32,146 lectures in 577 centers.<sup>10</sup> Oxford-Cambridge Extension brought these universities to people for whom, until then, universities had been in a world apart and gave to the concept of university public service a distinguished background which was to help make the idea acceptable to conservative American faculties.

As in England, the first American impulses toward adult education came from non-university sources. Mechanics' institutes appeared here almost simultaneously with their inception in England and their growth was stimulated by the moral support of such persons as Benjamin Franklin and the financial support of such philanthropists as John Lowell, Jr.

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### The Lyceum Movement

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Prior to 1840, it was the American lyceum that was the real focus of the adult education enterprise in this country. Initiated in 1826 by a young Yale graduate, Josiah Holbrook, as a lecture system and public forum for the small towns of Massachusetts, the lyceum movement gathered momentum rapidly. By 1839 some three thousand lycea existed throughout the country, their purposes being cultural uplift, instruction in "rational and useful information," and discussions of current issues. In their heyday the lycea were to provide platforms for the leading intellectual figures of the time — Beecher, Phillips, Emerson, Holmes, Taylor, Greeley and Lincoln.<sup>11</sup>

The year 1839 marks another key point in the university summer enterprise for in that year Henry Barnard established the first teachers' institute in Hartford, Connecticut. The idea spread and by 1847 such institutes were operating in ten states. They usually ran from a day to a week and were typically organized by state or county superintendents of public instruction for the purpose of upgrading elementary and secondary school teachers by offering them a variety of "hints" on teaching content and methods. By 1898 more than a quarter of a million teachers were enrolled in almost 3,000 institutes covering virtually the entire nation.<sup>12</sup> By that time many of the institutes had evolved into summer normal schools of longer duration and more solid content, some of them housed on college and university campuses.

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At the same time, another sort of institute was developing to serve the interests of the agricultural community. Lycea held in farming communities of Connecticut had taken on an agricultural flavor. Immediately after the Civil War a Kansas agricultural society sponsored what it called a "farmers' institute." Between 1880 and 1890 farmers' institutes had been established on a more or less permanent basis in 26 states, some under the aegis of local clubs, some under state associations, and some under land-grant colleges. A typical institute met for two or three days. Day sessions were devoted to lectures and discussions on practical farm problems, the evenings to "culture" and entertainment. By 1899 institutes were reported in 47 states with a total attendance of 500,000 farmers and their wives. A *Harper's* writer testified (as something less than an expert to be sure) that an agricultural revolution was taking place, "greatly assisted if not inaugurated by this systematic, popular instruction."<sup>13</sup>

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### Chautauqua: Folk University

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Institutes and lycea played their part in the development of American university summer work but a more potent force was Chautauqua. Take one part each Bible class, circus, political convention, and laboratory seminar, mix thoroughly in a large tent, add a touch of library and a dash of college, bring to a boil over the fires of Utopian planning — and you get a rough idea of Chautauqua. Here was the America of Gladstone, Barnum, Bryan, and Harper distilled into one draught of uplift and spending itself in an orgy of religious and educational evangelism. I'm not old enough to have seen Chautauqua in its prime, but I still remember its 1920 version as a hair-curling experience.

John Heyl Vincent, a Methodist clergyman who later became a bishop of his church, and Louis Miller, a businessman and church worker from Akron, Ohio, started the Chautauqua movement in 1874 when they purchased a camp meeting ground at Fair Point on Chautauqua Lake, New York, and began a two-week summer conference for Sunday School teachers. Thanks to sound management, astute promotion, and the aspirations of dedicated men, Chautauqua's annual assembly quickly developed a staggering variety of educational programs: a scientific conference, a church congress, a temperance conference, all covering an array of secular as well as religious subjects. Chautauqua had become a folk university; it was not long before college instructors were called in to give courses on college subjects.

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Rural ministers attending the "Rural Church Conference" posed for this early-1920s photograph in front of the Agriculture Hall on the University of Wisconsin campus. In 1922 the Conference became the first major noncredit institute under University auspices, to be followed in 1924 by what would become the "School for Workers." Photo by M E Diemer. Permission to publish by courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

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Originally associated with a specific campground in New York, the term Chautauqua later became connected with summer tent assemblies across the country, some at the doorsteps of universities; some Chautauqua instructors joined the faculties of distinguished institutions.

Incorporated in Chautauqua was a summer teachers' retreat designed, according to its literature, "to benefit secular teachers by combining with the recreative delights of the summer vacation the stimulating and quickening influence of systematic instruction." This idea led an increasing number of colleges and universities to make their facilities available in summer to special groups, primarily to elementary and secondary teachers, although the earliest such efforts were usually conducted by entrepreneurial professors rather than by the institutions themselves.

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### University Work: Research + Scholarship

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In 1876 the rapid growth of new knowledge, the evolving concepts of the purpose of higher education, and the

developments in industry and technology that characterized the ecology of the summer university were to find focus in the founding of Johns Hopkins University. This event marks the point when "university work," with its emphasis on research and productive scholarship, began to be a new ideal for institutions of higher education.<sup>14</sup> The influence of scholars returning from German universities, the lure of new fields of inquiry, and public demand for professional disciplines spurred the ascendancy of the graduate school with its paraphernalia of year-round laboratories and libraries. Thus, to the new research-oriented professor, the summer period became just another set of months in which to continue his efforts to extend the boundaries of knowledge.

The next important date in summer session history is 1887. The land-grant colleges established under the Morrill Act of 1862 had had no immediate success in formal undergraduate instruction, but they early established agricultural experiment stations for exploring and testing improved farm practices; and in 1887 Congress passed the Hatch Act, providing each state with a federal appropriation for the support of agricultural research. This marked the beginning of Washington's support of a growing range of basic and applied investigations on campus. As agricultural research, by its very nature, peaked in summer, the Hatch Act gave significant impetus to the year-round nature of professorial appointments.

At the same time, other funds, both public and private, were becoming increasingly available to education. With the help of Carnegie monies, for example, more and more cities and even villages had built libraries in the late 1800s, and the libraries in turn lent their support and sponsorship to educational activities. Addressing the American Library Association in 1887, professor Herbert B Adams of Johns Hopkins urged the importation of the English system of university extension to the United States. Public libraries in Buffalo, Chicago and St Louis responded. The Philadelphia Society for the Extension of University Teaching, organized in 1890, quickly became the American Society for Extension Lecturing, and stimulated the establishment of 23 centers. These centers generally were organizations operating independently of the universities; typically they were formed by libraries. Lectures on literature, the natural and social sciences and a variety of other subjects patterned after English extension were the main forms of educational activity though some systematic class work was also carried on. Many leaders and lecturers were secured from nearby campuses.<sup>15</sup>

In the period between 1888 and 1895 a number of American universities began to offer an English system of extension lectures, with all of its trappings of syllabi,

quizzes and exams. As a matter of fact, systematic public lectures had been given by some colleges as early as 1816. The program enjoyed a momentary popularity. Presidents pushed it and leading professors performed. During 1891, ten thousand people participated in Wisconsin and Minnesota alone. In the same year Indiana University supplemented its summer school for teachers with a series of evening lectures.

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### Harper, Eliot, Van Hise

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At this juncture, in 1892, William Rainey Harper, pirated by John D Rockefeller from Chautauqua, drew up for their brand new University of Chicago a "unique and comprehensive plan" by which he hoped to "revolutionize university study in this country." He viewed extension not as a sideline or an afterthought but as an integral part of university operations and he set up, as one of his five coordinate colleges, a division of university extension, empowered to offer college courses for college credit by lecture, class, or correspondence study. He also put his institution on a four-quarter calendar, thus bringing summer study inextricably into the field.

Harvard University as well played a number of important roles in the evolution of the university summer enterprise. From its founding — and for nearly two hundred years afterward — the Harvard curriculum had consisted of some thirty-odd courses, all of which had to be successfully completed by each student. In other colleges, too, with some minor variations, the mid-nineteenth century curriculum can be said to have consisted of a limited number of courses in ancient languages and literature, philosophy and religion, and mathematics. In the 1880s, however, Harvard took the lead in the fragmentation and proliferation of courses and its example was quickly followed by other colleges. The omnibus courses in natural history broke into departments of physics, chemistry, geology, botany, astronomy, and others. Ancient history was superseded by specialization in modern history. And a great host of social sciences entered the academic spectrum. No longer could students leisurely pursue a common curriculum.<sup>16</sup> The alternatives devised to take care of the problem were the elective principle, which Harvard pioneered; the establishment of professional schools, and the adaptation of the summer term to serve as a vehicle for the acceleration and enrichment of regular credit students.

In its early days, the Harvard calendar had included a summer quarter, but not a winter quarter! The reason was clear enough: to allow Harvard students to teach in the

common schools whose calendars in turn reflected the cycle of the agricultural year. Harvard then gradually joined the trend toward two semesters, with a summer hiatus which was used only for the noncredit instruction of teachers. But the memory of the old summer quarter was to linger on, until in 1900 President C W Eliot proposed a three-year bachelor's degree sequence for Harvard, utilizing the summer term to produce the acceleration. The system operated until 1912. Yale, Johns Hopkins, Clark, and other institutions had similar year-round calendars. Gradually the programs collapsed under a variety of pressures but the status they lent to the summer term was significant.<sup>17</sup>

The effect of all these innovations on the academic world can hardly be overestimated for they gave the concept of university summer service its first real home, its first real budget, and its first coherent philosophy. Harper and Eliot had broadcast the seed — and it was shortly to find its most fertile soil on the campuses of the emerging state universities where public service was a compelling philosophy.

Coming to the presidency of the University of Wisconsin in 1903, it was Charles R Van Hise who enunciated in the clearest terms a bold and vigorous new theory for American higher education. The university, he said, should so embody the combined intellectual life of the community that it can and will apply itself at any level to the betterment of the community. A state university, he continued, should not be above meeting the needs of the people however elementary the instruction necessary to accomplish this. Moreover, utilizing the opportunity to carry knowledge to the people would be a practical advantage rather than a disadvantage to the growth of the university along all other lines.<sup>18</sup>

"Nothing in the whole half century (1900-1950)," said Columbia historian Allan Nevins, "stands out more strikingly than the expansion of higher education. More and more intellectual leadership came from a new source — the universities. From the west came Van Hise's 'Wisconsin Idea'<sup>19</sup> characterized by the expert work of professors in energizing legislative reforms, vigorous extension programs and a burgeoning summer school."<sup>20</sup>

Cheek by jowl with a cadre of campus leaders in contributing to the growth of the early summer term were countless legislators in various statehouses around the country. In response to criticisms of the caliber of public school teaching, they drew up bills encouraging and in some cases compelling further university-level work for elementary and secondary school personnel. As teachers came to recognize its inherent financial benefits, summer study emerged as something more than a novelty or

relaxing diversion. Teachers began to plan their summers around their state university's summer session. Colleges and universities began to tool up for an increasing summer population. The mutually beneficial partnership between summer term and teachers was well on the way.

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### University Summer Term Chronology

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It is somewhat difficult to say exactly when and where the "true" university summer term was born. Educational records are sketchy and the line between informal university sanction and official university sponsorship is not a clear one. Historians generally agree that Harvard began the first program of systematic, specialized, short-term summer instruction in 1869,<sup>21</sup> although the courses offered were thought of largely as refresher work for teachers, and it was not until 1891 that they carried credit toward a Harvard degree. By 1879, when the US Commissioner of Education first mentioned summer schools in his annual report, Johns Hopkins was sponsoring a summer zoological laboratory, and the universities of Virginia and North Carolina offered "normal" courses for teachers. By 1893 the Commissioner reported 47 summer sessions under university auspices and an additional 22 private ventures. Most of these were made up largely of noncredit teachers' institutes and science seminars. Not until 1899 did state universities like Wisconsin begin hesitantly to assimilate the summer term into the "regular" work of the institution.

Then came the era of "the big change." In 1911, when the US Office of Education began to publish summer school statistics in a more organized fashion, the picture becomes clearer. The Commissioner reported that 477 of the more than 500 summer schools held had submitted information. They had enrolled 118,307 students, taught by 8,049 faculty members, in courses for which 180 gave degree credits. The summer period, in other words, had matured as a vehicle for conventional instruction as it continued to carry with it its inheritance as a focus for public service programs and year-round research.

In November 1917, the formation at Ann Arbor of the forerunner of the Association of University Summer Sessions marked the institutionalization of the summer university. It is significant that membership in the organization was limited by its constitution to "institutions engaged in giving advanced instruction during the summer months." Thus did exponents of "regular" university work attempt to capture the summer term. But the freewheeling ancestry of the summer university was to die hard; indeed, it was to flourish.

The chronology of university summer enterprise may become clearer if we take a mythical campus and trace the history of its summer term:

Siwash University, founded in 1846, lies fallow in summer until 1871, when professor Jacob Stone, its professor of languages, is given permission to use university buildings for a private summer institute for teachers. The venture is short-lived, but it is succeeded in 1880 by a summer school for teachers, sponsored by the state superintendent's office. In 1885 two professors of agriculture, together with two graduate students, begin to pursue their research the year-round. In 1893 the university openly takes over the summer school for teachers but grants no credit for summer courses. In 1895 the teachers' school is joined by a summer institute for librarians, arranged by an embryo extension department. In 1899 the college of engineering offers a summer course in surveying and grants credit for it. By 1901 the various summer courses and schools are incorporated into an official university summer session — with a small budget and a part-time director to administer it; certain courses carry full credit for qualified students. In 1903 the summer session plays host to a noncredit school of ethics for adults. In 1905 the catalog of the university speaks for the first time in proud terms about the "educational preeminence" of the summer session, along with idyllic descriptions of the summer campus. In every respect, writes director M Clarke Jones, "the Summer Session has become an integral part of the University." A registration of 661 seems to prove it.<sup>22</sup>

### Early Summer Term Traits

By the early years of the twentieth century, American institutions of higher education were becoming increasingly striated as a result of their different traditions, circumstances, and leadership. Hence there was considerable variation in the nature and scope of activities in the five hundred or so summer terms in existence by 1910. In general, however, we can see three main characteristics:

First, the *public service* theme. On the typical campus, summer work began under the guise of an informal summer institute or summer normal school for teachers. This bent toward providing specialized education for other than "regular" students continues throughout the development of the summer term as a significant aspect of the university summer endeavor.

Second, the *research* theme. On or near the typical campus, summer science camp or experiment station activity predated formal summer instruction. Year-round productive scholarship and graduate training continue throughout the history of the summer term to be of major importance, although they are frequently difficult to document or measure.

Third, the *regular teaching* theme. Somewhat grudgingly, yet

steadily, universities added to their summer service and research programs a curriculum for "regular" students. As the summer term sought status, regular work came increasingly to dominate its literature, and today is often mistaken for the entire operation. Those who do so might as well look at a church and say its work is confined to a one-hour service each Sunday morning.

The three themes were frequently at war with one another in the early days of summer development, and continue today to compete for attention and funds. Yet this tension is not bad; in fact, as a hybrid venture the summer term may be said to exhibit heterosis, or "hybrid vigor."<sup>23</sup>

Certain common aims have prevailed among universities in the country as a whole from the beginning of the summer movement. The single basic aim of the university summer enterprise has been to make its resources available and useful to as many people as possible throughout the year. A correlative aim has been to encourage and help every individual develop to the extent of his or her capacity. Implicit in these aims are a basic belief in man's perfectibility and faith in his capacity to solve his problems peaceably through the application of intelligence.

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that only such lofty generalities inspired the early summer educator. Compelling as these sanguine ideals might have seemed, likewise motivating him — prior to the 1960s it was always a "him" ! — were the tangible, practical, workaday requirements of a developing society experimenting with large-scale political democracy while undergoing rapid industrialization.

Whether moved by liberal ideals concerning the nature of man, or by the press of mundane affairs, the prescription of the summer pioneer was one and the same: the application of knowledge. To him the widespread diffusion of knowledge — or the "socialization" of knowledge as it was expressed at the turn of the century — was an imperative and urgent goal. This sense of urgency and necessity is reflected in the literature of the summer term of the period, as is the confusion between its idealistic and practical motivations. To this day, indeed, some of the original zeal still permeates the movement, though the earlier preoccupation with philosophy and rationale appears to have given way somewhat to operational considerations. So, too, has persisted the dichotomy between the liberal and pragmatic, both of which are represented amply in modern-day summer campus practices.

For instance, when the Regents of the University of Minnesota in 1877 authorized "special summer courses of instruction during the summer vacations," they specified that "no material expense be incurred thereby."

Minnesota emeritus director Willard L Thompson calls this "a pure case of original sin, one that we have persisted in through the years." On the other hand, dean Harland Samson at neighboring University of Wisconsin-Madison can follow the charter of a founding dean — that his summer enterprise be "as broad as human endeavor and as high as human aspirations."<sup>24</sup>

Buffeted by trustees, presidents, or chancellors espousing one or the other of these historic institutional doctrines — the parsimonious or the platonic — yet persuaded by their own proclivities, today's summer term chief executive officers are adding their own handprints to the ongoing history of the American college and university in the summer.

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#### FOOTNOTES

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- 23 Schoenfeld, Clay in Foreword to Ray Young and William McDougall, *College and University Summer Sessions: Perspectives, Practices, Problems and Prospects*, Pullman : Washington State University, ms, 1990.
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Clay Schoenfeld was Dean, Inter-College Programs, University of Wisconsin-Madison from 1965-1985; authored five books on higher education, including *The American University in Summer*, and has won national recognition in four fields: university administration, journalism education, environmental affairs, and the military. In 1988 he was made an Honorary Life Member of the North American Association of Summer Sessions for "unprecedented professional dedication and unselfish service" as president of three national summer session organizations. During World War II and the Korean War, he served as a combat company-grade infantry officer, closing his military career as the Army's reserve deputy chief of public affairs in the Pentagon, retiring in 1974 with honors as a colonel. Schoenfeld was the founding Chair of UW-Madison's unique Center for Environmental Communication and Education Studies, and has authored or edited 12 books in this field. He has also published *On Wisconsin* (with Michael Weimer, Oxford Press, 1988) and Iowa State University Press will soon publish his text on investigative reporting, *Interpreting Public Issues*.