

# COLUMBIA COLLEGE

## A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

<b>NOTE:</b> <b>Must; Shall; Will:</b> <b>Should:</b> <b>May or Could; Can:</b>	<b>Clarification of Terms</b> These words or phrases indicate actions or activities that are <i>essential or mandatory</i> . This word implies that it is highly desirable to perform certain actions or activities, but not essential or mandatory. These words imply freedom or liberty to follow an alternative to the action or activity being presented in a document.
--	--

While the field of higher education can trace its roots back to Plato some 2500 years ago, the primary method of instruction hasn't changed much from Plato's simple lecturing approach. However, in 400 BC few books existed and those that did were handwritten as the printing press wasn't to be developed for some 2000 more years. Up until just over a hundred years ago the only higher education institutions that operated were private institutions and most were established by churches which tended to be the center of the community. In fact, the first universities in the world were established in about 1000 AD in Italy and Germany. The Italian university model followed essentially a broad liberal arts approach where learners studied a wide range of subjects and the belief was that any topic of study was valuable. On the other hand, the German model focused more on a single discipline. Accounting was the first degree issued in that state.

Shortly after the United States was formed in 1776, its leaders decided they needed their own universities and after studying the Italian and German models, they agreed to a model that essentially blended the two. Students in undergraduate degrees would normally spend the first half of their education studying liberal arts courses in order to broaden their knowledge base and conclude the remainder of their degree concentrating in a field of specialization.

This model was also adopted by Canadian universities. Once this model was agreed to, several of the private high schools of the day began to establish universities. Some of the first private universities were Harvard, Princeton, and Yale.

As the world moved into the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s, industry began to grow and realized it needed a more educated workforce, one that would require a lot more skilled workers than the private universities were graduating. This led to the establishment of publicly funded post-secondary institutions.

Following the Second World War in 1945 and the return of hundreds of thousands of soldiers, the United States passed the GI Bill which enabled soldiers to enter post-secondary institutions. As many of them lacked high school education, they enrolled in small technical colleges which were few in number. This created a ground swell of activity around the colleges and acted as a major catalyst for growth during the 1950s. The baby boomers created another ground swell of activity in higher education starting in the mid sixties and extending to the early eighties.

During this same period (1970s and 80s) considerable change was occurring within the university community as it tried to respond to the wider ranging needs of younger as well as older learners, and for the first time specific programs were developed by a number of universities aimed at addressing the unique needs of an older student population. While most university programs continued to address the needs of high school graduates (18 to 22 year olds), a few programs were established to attend to older adults (generally age 25 and over). A few smaller institutions actually modified their entire method of operation institution and began to focus all their attention on what is now commonly referred to as "adult education", meaning they are attempting to focus the majority of their attention on learners who are older than 22 years of age.

Columbia College was established in 1986 with the intent of focusing primarily on more mature adult learners. With this in mind, the College has no football field or inter-collegiate sports programs. It has no bar, bands, dances, or intramural programs. Its students are more focused on their spouse, children, part-time jobs, completing assignments, and returning to the workplace as quickly as possible with a highly recognized education that will ensure meaningful employment, advancement, job security, and a higher income.

Although the percentage of mature adult learners enrolled in American colleges and universities was quite small in 1950, it has grown steadily. By 1994 it consisted of forty-four percent of college and university enrollment (National Center for Educational Statistics 1998).

It is expected that the two year diploma, or associate degree as it is commonly called in the United States, will soon replace the high school diploma as the basic entry to employment (Maehl 2000, p.4). As this phenomenon continues to take place, enrollments in colleges like Columbia College should continue to increase. That is assuming Columbia continues to modify and improve the quality of its programs to address the changing needs of industry, society, and mature adult learners.

## **References**

Maehl, W.H. (2000). *Lifelong learning at its best. Innovative practices in adult credit programs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

National Center for Education Statistics. (1998). *Digest of education statistics, 1997* (DEd, OERI Publication No. 98-015). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.