

Temple: The Story of an Urban University

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Abstract

This article provides a brief history of the formation of Temple College in the late 19th century and its official recognition as a university during the early years of the 20th century. The institution evolved from very humble origins of private tutoring sessions in a Baptist pastor's office. In only a few decades, the institution attracted faculty with reputable academic credentials, offered undergraduate degrees in practical and scholarly fields, and provided graduate and professional education to men and women of the working class, various racial and national heritages, and wealthy families. Despite numerous obstacles, Temple's founder, Russell Conwell, turned his dream into reality by providing a viable postsecondary educational opportunity to the residents of Philadelphia and beyond.

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The history of American higher education reflects a diversity of types, locations, and missions of postsecondary institutions. Regardless of their peculiarities, all institutions have been founded because of a need to provide advanced education to a specific constituency. Temple University is one such example. Temple College became "Temple University" in 1907, during which the seventh generation of American higher education experienced its growth and standardization (Geiger, 1999). Generation Seven, covering the period from 1890 until World War I, was a time in which colleges and universities began to offer professional and graduate education and experienced remarkable growth in enrollments. This article provides a brief history of the formation of Temple College in the late 19th century and its official recognition as a university during the early years of the 20th century.

Beginnings of a Nonsectarian Baptist College

The genesis of this urban university began when Charles Davies, a young man working in a print shop, showed up at Pastor Russell Conwell's office one evening after a service at Grace Baptist Church in Philadelphia in June, 1884 (Miller, 1920). Davies had strongly desired to prepare for the ministry, but he did not have sufficient finances to attend college because his father had died and he needed to provide income for his family. Conwell sensed the urgency of the situation, and he offered to teach Davies and any of his friends one evening each week. When the first class began, Davies showed up with six friends; by the third class the number had reached forty. In short time two buildings were acquired for the rapidly expanding student body (Shackleton, 1943). Within several weeks when the count had exceeded one hundred sixty it became clear that some type of official organization was needed. The Grace Baptist Church quickly created a temporary board of trustees to handle the formalities associated with the program, and when the board conducted its first meeting they named Russell H. Conwell president of "The Temple College." Four weeks later, a council representing thirty-four Philadelphia Baptist churches met to discuss the future of this enterprise (Sack, 1963a), but they adjourned without any meaningful decisions. The general reaction by influential council members was that the venture was too "wasteful and secular" (Miller, 1920, p. 99). Determined to pursue the project, Grace Baptist Church appointed a new board of trustees, printed official admissions files, and issued stock to raise funds for new facilities. Regardless of whether they had the resources to support the school, Conwell's desire was "to give education to those who were unable to get it through the usual channels" (Shackleton, 1943, p 134).

Philadelphia granted a charter in 1888 to establish “The Temple College of Philadelphia”, but the city refused to grant authority to award academic degrees (Sack, 1963a). Temple’s tri-partite mission was to provide instruction best suited to the higher education of people currently employed in a trade; to cultivate a taste for higher and more practical disciplines; and to encourage the working class students the desire to be useful to society (Shackleton, 1943, p 136). By 1888 the enrollment was nearly 600 (Shackleton, 1943). The college admitted students regardless of denominational affiliation to prepare for vocations in ministry, business, law, medicine, education, and other common professions. Because all students were working day shifts, classes were held during the evening. (Sack, 1963a). There were no admissions requirements and tuition was free, similar to Stanford University’s aim of offering free education to the pioneer families of California.

In April, 1891 the charter was altered to include the authority to confer college degrees (Sack, 1963a). It was also in 1891 that the first graduating class of eighteen men received the Bachelor of Oratory degree. However, state and federal education agencies would not identify Temple as a legitimate college level institution.

Faculty and Baccalaureate Programs

Temple’s early faculty came from the University of Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia school district, and local business professionals who volunteered as part-time instructors after their regular employment hours (Shackleton, 1943). Even when Temple was capable of funding an instructional budget some of the professors refused to receive their salaries so that the money for their pay could be used in another manner (Miller, 1920).

The Temple College undergraduate program in arts and sciences duplicated what would be offered at traditional institutions such as Princeton and Yale. The complete college course was established in 1895 (Miller, 1920). The pedagogical format included lectures and recitations, and these were scheduled at the convenience of the students. Flexible scheduling made Temple attractive to the working class who were the institution’s target populations, and in fact, some classes met as late as 10:00pm (Shackleton, 1943). Also in 1895, Temple re-organized to enhance the quality of the academic product by requiring faculty to hold credentials from reputable universities and by establishing new admissions requirements. Two years later a department for day classes was organized, and with it, the Bachelor of Arts degree. The day school included regular instruction in mathematics, natural science, history, literature, elocution, oratory, bookkeeping, music, Bible, grammar, and modern languages (Sack, 1963a).

Graduate Degrees and Professional Studies

Philadelphia was ready for a new institution that would enhance the quality of its citizenry and working professionals. The city of brotherly love had only one university, there was no free public library system, and the rapidly growing immigrant population added to the educational demands (Foundation, 1926). This metropolitan area employing one-tenth of the American workforce proved to be a pipeline for professional students (Foundation, 1926). The rapid succession of professional and graduate programs at Temple around the turn of the century were illustrative of the new foci of academe, no longer content to serve in a multipurpose function (Geiger, 2000).

Created in 1895 the theological department offered both day and evening classes, and after a re-organization of the curriculum it was renamed the “Philadelphia Theological School”, which led to a five-year bachelor of divinity degree. Temple’s theological school began offering graduate degrees in 1903, (Sack, 1963b), and a doctor of sacred theology was awarded in 1904 (Sack, 1963a).

The law school evolved from the concern that practicing lawyers did not have the time to provide practical instruction, yet a theory-only legal curriculum would be insufficient to prepare the next generation of lawyers. After

evaluating their options Temple hired twelve attorneys to teach legal courses during the evening (Miller, 1920). Legal education at Temple began with the offering of day courses in collaboration with the Business Department in 1895, and in 1901 the Philadelphia Law School graduated sixteen students.

The medical school evolved in similar fashion. Doctors in the city realized that their apprenticeship method of instruction was unable to mold a “modern” physician, so they organized an evening medical school at Temple. Temple opened its medical school in September, 1901 leading to a doctor of medicine. Medical students enjoyed hands-on practice at Samaritan Hospital, a free health care provider founded by Conwell in 1892. The first recipients of medical degrees received their awards in 1905 (Sack, 1963b). In short time, however, the older, established medical schools urged the American Medical Association to ban the evening schools. Temple was hurt by this action, but eventually offered permanent day classes (Miller, 1920).

Degree programs in other health professions soon followed. In 1901 the pharmacy program began and conferred its first degree in pharmacy in 1905. It became a distinct academic school within the university in 1907 (Sack, 1963b). The Philadelphia Dental College, the second oldest dental institution in the world (chartered in 1863), merged with Temple in 1906 (Miller, 1920; Sack, 1963b).

Recognition as a University

It was in 1907 that Temple College revised its institutional status and incorporated as a university. Legal recognition as a university enhanced Temple in noticeable ways including its reputation, professional and graduate programs, overall enrollment, and financial support.

Despite the fact that Temple’s charter revision in 1891 authorized the conferring of collegiate degrees, it was not until 1908 that education agencies recognized Temple as a bona fide postsecondary institution. Temple suffered an image problem that was corrected after its re-birth as a university. Because of the negative public opinion against evening schools, day students felt humiliated to attend a college that offered evening instruction. Further, the American higher education community tended to view Temple along with other “sham” evening schools during its first decade. To compound the problem, highly credentialed, experienced faculty from accredited universities would sacrifice their careers by accepting a position at Temple (Miller, 1920, p. 97). It was in 1908, the year following Temple’s university recognition, that the Pennsylvania College and University Council include Temple as one of the state’s higher education institutions (Sack, 1963a).

Official status as a university also produced immediate rewards in the professional and graduate level programs. The Pennsylvania Board of Law Examiners granted accreditation to the law school in 1907 (Sack, 1963b). Garretson Hospital merged with Temple in 1907 to become the second major health care provider affiliated with the university. Additional health sciences programs were added in nursing (1911) and chiropody (1915). The creation of the chiropody program, now called the school of podiatry, represents the first university-affiliated curriculum of its kind in America (Sack, 1963b). Temple’s education department was promoted to the level of a Teacher’s College in 1914 (Sack, 1963b). Temple was the first postsecondary institution in Philadelphia to offer courses for public school teachers after the regular school hours (Foundation, 1926) so teachers who receive graduate degrees would be qualified for college professorships (Shackleton, 1943). In 1923, the master of science degree in education was offered as the first graduate program in education, then the doctor of education was made available two years following (Sack, 1963b). As one of Pennsylvania’s state-related universities today, Temple is now the third largest provider of professional education in America.

University status, combined with the above two factors, boosted enrollment significantly. “Conwell’s Folly”, the moniker given by doubters when Temple was chartered in 1888, seemed to reflect widespread initial concern because the best students transferred to established universities while the under-achievers dropped out.

Consequently the only students who were left were those who foolishly thought they could earn a respectable college education (Miller, 1920). While the original intent of the institution was to educate primarily the working class, many students from wealthy families began to enroll at the newly recognized university (Miller, 1920). A glance at the enrollment trends shows remarkable growth during the years after 1907 (raw data were not available). School of Commerce enrollment rose 200% from 1915-25 (Temple, 1926). College of Liberal Arts and Sciences enrollment increased nearly 500% from 1905-1915, and over 400% from 1915-25 (Temple, 1926). Teachers College enrollment rose about 500% from 1919-25 (Temple, 1926). School of Dentistry increased 100% from 1915-25 (Temple, 1926). Students pursued courses in the School of Commerce more than any other department, and the Teachers College enjoyed offering the second most popular discipline.

Financial support was the final major area that improved after university recognition had been granted. Since its inception Temple had chronic money problems. It was during this era that the large, established universities were attracting the philanthropists and amassing sizable financial support while small, new institutions were often overlooked (Geiger, 1986). When Temple created evening preparatory classes in 1895 to teach students who had not earned a high school diploma, the college incurred serious debt. The board of trustees quickly moved to charge college tuition and sell bonds as methods for off-setting the expenses (Miller, 1920). To compound the problem during its first three decades Temple had neither an alumni fund nor a formal campaign drive (Miller, 1920), two fund raising strategies that many universities had relied upon for non-tuition revenues (Geiger, 1986). The frustration was exacerbated when prospective donors balked at the last minute and refused to give money for student scholarships. After incorporation as a university, however, Pennsylvania began to support Temple. In 1910 the legislature granted the university's first appropriations totaling \$850,000 (Sack, 1963a). One year later the state gave \$95,000 to cover maintenance expenses of the two hospitals and \$110,000 for construction of university facilities (Sack, 1963a). State funding became a reliable source of income during the following years.

Conclusion

Russell Conwell passed away in 1925 after a 38-year presidency at Temple. The university owes its rapid development in large part to its founder. Conwell, a former Yale student, Civil War captain, Boston lawyer, and Philadelphia minister, saw his dream of providing working class Philadelphians the opportunity for higher education. It has been estimated that by the time Conwell died at age 82 he was responsible for over 100,000 men and women pursuing higher education. Conwell used his income from his famous "Acres of Diamonds" speech to provide funding for approximately 10,000 students (Foundation, 1926).

It is helpful to see how Temple University fits into the larger picture of American academe. There are various labels that educational historians place on institutions to help identify common characteristics during a given historical period. Temple may be considered a "utilitarian university" according to Veysey (1965) because it did not require applicants to know classic languages, and because the institution offered programs in professional fields. Although it was founded by a church, Temple should not necessarily be viewed as a true denominational institution because religious loyalty tests were not required of faculty or students, it was committed to a nonsectarian position, and its founding was not a corporate effort by a denominational governing body or conference. Temple illustrates some of the characteristics of the seventh generation of higher education in the United States (Geiger, 1999) in which there was rapid growth and movement toward graduate education. It is unclear, however, whether the enrollment gains were part of the general trends in higher education nationwide at that time or whether they were a direct result of university status. Also, one key element of Generation Seven that is missing from Temple University's evolution is its research activities. All in all, however, Temple's history shows remarkable progress from a weekly tutoring session in a Baptist pastor's office to a unique urban university in just a few decades.

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Appendix – Key Dates During Temple University’s Early Years

<i>Date</i>	<i>Accomplishment</i>
1884	Founded by Russell Conwell at Grace Baptist Church in Philadelphia
1888	Temple College receives charter
1891	Charter altered to award degrees; First graduating class of 18 men
1892	Samaritan Hospital founded
1895	Law School opens; Theological Seminary opens
1897	Four-year BA program available
1901	Medical School opens

1906	Philadelphia Dental College merges with Temple
1907	Temple College becomes Temple University; School of Pharmacy becomes a distinct unit
1908	Pennsylvania Colleges and Universities Council recognizes Temple
1910	Pennsylvania state appropriations begin
1911	School of Nursing opens
1914	Teacher's College becomes a distinct unit
1915	Chiropody Department opens
1925	Russell Conwell passes away