

A Brief History of Boston College

Boston College was founded by the Society of Jesus in 1863, and is one of twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States. With three teachers and twenty-two students, the school opened its doors on September 5, 1864. At the outset and for more than seven decades of its first century, the college remained an exclusively liberal arts institution with emphasis on the Greek and Latin classics, English and modern languages and with more attention to philosophy than to the physical or social sciences. Religion, of course, had its place in the classroom as well as in the nonacademic life of the college.

Originally located on Harrison Avenue in the South End of Boston, where it shared quarters with the Boston College High School, the College outgrew its urban setting toward the end of its first fifty years. A new location was selected in Chestnut Hill, then almost rural, and four parcels of land were acquired in 1907. A design competition for the development of the campus was won by the firm of Maginnis and Walsh, and ground was broken on June 19, 1909, for the construction of Gasson Hall. It is located on the site of the Lawrence farmhouse, in the center of the original tract of land purchased by Father Gasson, and is built largely of stone taken from the surrounding property.

Later purchases doubled the size of the property, with the addition of the upper campus in 1941, and the lower campus with the acquisition of the Lawrence Basin and adjoining land in 1949. In 1974 Boston College acquired Newton College of the Sacred Heart, a mile-and-a-half from the main campus. With fifteen buildings standing on forty acres, it is now the site of the Boston College Law School and residence halls housing 800 freshmen.

Though incorporated as a university since its beginning, it was not until its second half-century that Boston College began to fill out the dimensions of its charter. The Summer Session was inaugurated in 1924; the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in 1925; the Law School, 1929; the Evening College, 1929; the Graduate School of Social Work, 1936; the College of Business Administration, 1938. The latter, along with its Graduate School established in 1957, is now known as The Wallace E. Carroll School of Management. The Schools of Nursing and Education were founded in 1947 and 1952, respectively and are now known as the William F. Connell School of Nursing and the Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch School of Education. Weston Observatory, founded in 1928, became a department of Boston College in 1947, offering courses in geophysics and geology.

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences began programs at the doctoral level in 1952. Now courses leading to the doctorate are offered by twelve Arts and Sciences departments. The Schools of Education and Nursing, the Carroll Graduate

School of Management, and the Graduate School of Social Work also offer doctoral programs.

In 1927 Boston College conferred one earned bachelor's degree and fifteen master's degrees on women through the Extension Division, the precursor of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the Evening College, and the Summer Session. By 1970 all undergraduate programs had become coeducational. Today women students comprise more than half of the University's enrollment.

In 1996 the Evening College became the College of Advancing Studies, offering a master's degree as well as the bachelor's degree; in 2002 the College was renamed the Woods College of Advancing Studies. In July 1996, the University's longest presidency, 24 years, came to an end when Father J. Donald Monan became chancellor and was succeeded in the presidency by Father William P. Leahy.

During the decade of the nineties, the University completed several major construction projects, including the expansion and renovation of Higgins Hall, the updating of residence halls on the upper campus and Newton campus; and the construction of a new office building for faculty and administration on lower campus. These projects provided on-campus housing for more than 80% of the college undergraduates.

In recent years, major advances have also occurred in student selectivity. Between 1996 and 2003, freshman applications increased from 16,501 to 22,424, and the middle range SAT scores of admitted students increased from 1200-1340 to 1260-1390. During this same period, the dollar amount of sponsored project awards received by the University more than doubled. Since 1996, the University's endowment has grown from \$590 million to approximately \$1.2 billion, the result of successful investment strategies and the Ever to Excel campaign which raised more than \$440 million in gifts from approximately 90,000 donors.

A milestone in the history of the University took place on June 29, 2004, when Boston College acquired 43 acres of land and five buildings in Brighton previously owned by the Archdiocese of Boston, making it possible for Boston College to expand its campus well into the future. In November 2004, St. Stephen's Priory in Dover, encompassing 78.5 acres of land, was purchased by Boston College from the Dominican Fathers Province of St. Joseph and will serve as a retreat and conference center for the University. In 2004, BC's Church in the 21st Century initiative, originally designed to examine critical issues confronting the Catholic Church, was transformed into a permanent Center with its own director.

Source: University Historian and Public Affairs