

WHO WE ARE. WHAT WE DO. HOW WE LIVE.

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Diversity in the graduate Community, past, present, and future

One of the most enduring portraits of a research graduate student is from Tom Sharpe's novel *Porterhouse Blues*. The student in question, Zipser, is a lonely lad who lives in the tower of Porterhouse college. Misunderstood, despised by the Fellows and mistrusted by the Head Porter, Zipser sadly ends his days in a freak explosion following an abortive tryst with his bedder. In Sharpe's satire of Cambridge life, the postgraduate is presented as something of a blight on the college, and an embarrassment who gets in the way of the otherwise jolly gettings-on. The realities of the post-graduate community in Cambridge today are in sharp contrast to the world of Zipser, richer for its diversity than at any other time in the University's history. Although the topic of diversity in student populations tends to hinge on ethnic or socio-economic backgrounds, many different levels of diversity exist within the University, including such different aspects as fields of study, gender, and lifestyle. Rather than just rolling out the statistics, the following articles by Cambridge graduate students put these issues into their historical perspective, in order to highlight how our community has evolved over the centuries so that we can appreciate where the roots of our diversity lie. The articles which follow, not only explore the more typical issues of the place of women in the University and the international community, but also the diversity within academia and graduate life. Portraits of current graduate students complement past perspectives and provide a holistic view of who we are.

A HISTORY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AT CAMBRIDGE

Faye Karababa

Many of us are misled in thinking that graduate research at Cambridge University started in the late 19th or early 20th century. Incidentally, this belief strengthens the misconception that academia at Cambridge was primarily organised for, and continues to be based, around undergraduate studies.

The first PhD dissertation was submitted to the Cambridge Research Student Committee (the equivalent of today's Board of Graduate Studies) in May 1921 by Captain Charles Wolf. His thesis, entitled 'Determination of Lactic Acid', marked the start of the

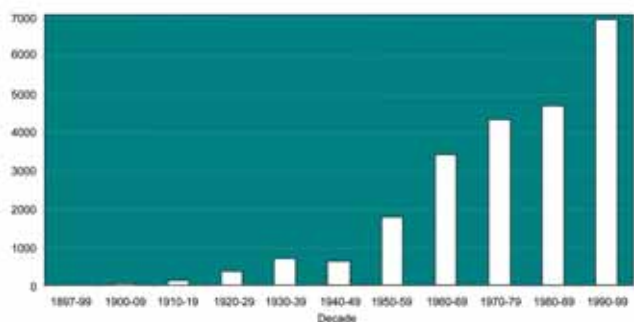
long history of formal postgraduate work and recognition at Cambridge. The first PhD thesis therefore focused on Biochemistry, which set the path for strong scientific research for which Cambridge is reputed around the world. The theses of Herman and Chadwick were submitted a month later and reported research in the English drama and theoretical physics.

Postgraduate research has however been carried out for 8 centuries, since the early days of the university. It was graduate scholars who fled Oxford in 1209 to set up the University of Cambridge. The title of 'Master', held by the majority of these scholars, indicated the achievement of knowledge in the arts of grammar, logic and rhetoric and entitled its holders to teach new incoming students, known as undergraduates.

Later, arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy were also taught.

Undergraduates typically joined the University at the age of 14 or 15 and, after studying the basic arts for three to four years, were awarded the degree of B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) on graduating at the age of 17 or 18. The M.A. (Master of Arts) degree was essentially a licence to teach, delegated to the scholars of the University by the Pope, who in turn could confer the honour to successful undergraduates, at his discretion. However, the requirements for an M.A. stated that the undergraduates upon whom such a degree was bestowed, would have reached the age of maturity of 21 years old. This meant that a seventeen-year old B.A. graduate had to wait five years before being awarded the M.A. . During

PhD Degrees and Advanced Dissertations every decade
(according to UL records)



this period they usually undertook further studies in arithmetic, music and geometry. The requirement for reaching the age of maturity remains until today and many B.A. holders return to University a few years after their graduation to obtain the, now honorary, title of Master of Arts.

After achieving the status of Masters, scholars could become Doctors by engaging in further studies law, divinity and in some cases, medicine. Doctors studying and researching in the same field usually clustered into specific faculties. In the late Middle Ages, colleges primarily catered for the needs of graduates studying in the higher faculties of Theology and Law. Thus, graduates have been the hallmark of the University from its foundation. Not only have they contributed new discoveries and knowledge through their work, but they have also successfully educated a plethora of undergraduates.

The notion of the current graduate originated much later as a result of the socio-political conditions of the times. The Cambridge University Student Handbook which dates back to at least 1862 provides detailed information on how degrees were conferred. No specific distinction is made between postgraduate and undergraduate studies until shortly after the First World War.

The term 'Research Student', which referred to any student holding a B.A. degree from Cambridge University or any other recognized academic institution, was first coined in 1919. In the same year, a proposal was

forwarded to the King's Council regarding the amendment of the existing regulations and statutes in order to formally establish the PhD degree. These initial requirements, defining the aims and expectations of postgraduate studies, have remained almost unaltered in the past 85 years and the current version only has minor modifications.

Postgraduate studies became rather popular during and after the 1920s as a means of attracting international researchers of outstanding calibre to strengthen the academic community at Cambridge. The first official PhD held in the records of the University Library was completed in 1921. This suggests an average duration of 2 years assuming that the proposition for the New Regulations forwarded in 1919 was a result of the upcoming submission by Captain Wolf. However, a closer look to his work indicates an active contribution to research, featuring articles in prominent international journals of Biochemistry since 1914. This may lead one to assume that seven years of research led to the PhD of Captain Wolf.

Although Wolf's PhD thesis was the first to be submitted to the University in a similar format to the one currently in use, previous researchers had completed equally interesting work. The earliest example of such works, then termed 'Advanced Student Dissertations' and held at the University Library, is that of Lord Rutherford in 1897. His research is reported as a collection of papers revolutionising the field of magnetic physics. Interestingly, the term 'Advanced Student' has survived today and is used by several colleges such as Churchill, Selwyn and Trinity

to describe what is now more widely known as postgraduate student. From 1897 to the end of the twentieth century an overwhelming total of 23,169 PhDs and Advanced Student dissertations have been submitted to the University. The graph provides a summary of the number of PhDs and Advanced Dissertations submitted by decade as held in the University Library records.

An overall increasing pattern is observed over the decades with a decrease during the World War II years; the end of WWII marked the lowest PhD. submission rates with only 17 theses being completed in 1945. The 1990s have shown a dramatic increase in the number of dissertations submitted for the doctoral degree, which could potentially be explained by the greater market demands of highly qualified students.

The introduction of a Master's postgraduate course has brought a substantial increase in the number of dissertations submitted to the University. This graduate course has become increasingly popular in the last 15 years as it provides a fast track towards increased employability through further specialization. In addition, many professionals find these shorter courses appropriate to ease the transition to the academic world, often leading to more advanced research. Cambridge currently offers over 100 different Master courses scattered within its various departments, ranging from one to two years and providing the option of full or part-time education.

Throughout its long history, the graduate community has been a lively and leading student body enriching the University's research capacities and driving its reputation to the top of the academic ladder. Statistics speak for themselves; in its last evaluation in 2001, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which is carried out every five years in order to decide

the allocation of £1bn funding for research purposes, ranked Cambridge University at the top of the list, with 30 of its departments achieving the top rate of 5*. This means that more than half of the research submitted by the departments is judged to have achieved a standard of excellence. Therefore, the graduate community carries an equal if not greater role to the undergraduate body in fostering the University's reputation through its outstanding and diverse academic contributions.

CAMBRIDGE: A PLACE FOR THE RICH? STEREOTYPICAL!

A brief historical review of the social background of the students in Cambridge shows that the principal scholars of the early days were ecclesiastics and a large proportion among those came from the poor class. Anderson and Schnaper conducted a research regarding the social background of Oxbridge students in the period between 1752-1886, and note that 'it appears legitimate to conclude that in the first 5 centuries of the Cambridge's existence, the secular nobility and gentry were of much less relative importance in the student body than later.'

Gradually, however, the presence of wealthy sons of the gentry increased as a result of the dissolution of the monasteries and the suppression of religious orders. For the first half of the 17th century as Anderson & Schnaper report, 'the gentry gained in numbers of students but then lost again, the clergy forged ahead and the plebeian (poor class) lost ground.'

It is worth mentioning that until 1858 students who were non-conformist could not take degrees and had to be admitted under special circumstances. This was the effect of the traditional educational system followed at Cambridge, stemming from the church and other learned occupations.

Even though the student hierarchy of the 18th century reflected the aristocratic social structure of England, the University remained loyal to its heritage of provisions for educating the capable children of the less privileged families. In Anderson & Schnaper's report of 1952, Cambridge totalled approximately 400 students at the onset of the nineteenth century of which 1/6 were Noblemen living in luxurious conditions and employing servants to cater for their needs. They also enjoyed the privilege of dining with the Headmasters of their college. Half of the students were *Fellow Commoners* or *Pensioners*. These were men who could well afford to attend the University, but did not enjoy the same level of luxury as the noblemen. The rest of the students were *Sizars* and *Foundation Scholars*. These terms characterized students who were of limited financial affluence and often acted as servants to their Noble and Common Fellows in return of money contributions towards their education.

The twentieth century follows a similar trend. A quote from the 1978 student guide 'Inside Cambridge: I am not a tourist, I live here' emphasizes the fact that contrary to popular belief the majority of students in Cambridge are from middle class homes. Indeed, a good look among our own graduate community reveals that the quest for securing adequate funding for our studies is now the most crucial aspect of graduate student life.

When discussing the stereotypical image of the Cambridge graduate, it is important to demystify this image with respect to his/her origin. With 135 nationalities represented in its student body, the 'Home' student becomes more of a statistic rather than the dominant reality. Although primarily coming from countries belonging to the British Empire, graduate students gradually increased in numbers and spatial distribution. Lord Rutherford, for instance, whose Advanced Studies Dissertation is the first surviving research piece

submitted to the University, came from New Zealand. Even though a British colony, this reveals the worldwide reach of Cambridge's reputation as early as the end of the nineteenth century.

After the First World War and with the introduction of the PhD degree, prominent researchers from around the globe flocked to Cambridge. This expansion was marked by the foundation of the Cambridge International Club, in 1932, with the aim of promoting friendship between people of all nations irrespective of political or religious orientations.

Nowadays, almost half of the graduate students come from overseas. A distribution of the top-ten non-British students members at Cambridge in year 2003 is summarized in the chart.

Evidently, the graduate student community comprising of researchers from around the globe, boasts an even greater diversity among its members. It is this diversity that provides both a stimulating setting to work in, and a challenging environment where opinions, interests and basic understanding regularly differ and can often result in disagreement and conflict. However, any disagreement is appreciated for its enormous potential to provide alternative perspectives enhancing thus the graduates' open-mindedness and desire for learning.

It appears that a new stereotypical image of a Cambridge graduate might be emerging: that of a citizen of the world, who is flexible in their approach to life and research, willing to expand and argue their own predispositions while constantly seeking to understand different perspectives.