

Chapter 1: The context of private UB and SUNY's creation

The private 'UB,' 1846-1960

For the initial decades of its history, UB can best be viewed as a congeries of locally oriented professional schools, staffed largely by volunteer faculty drawn from area practitioners. Growth was gradual, responding to personal and group initiatives, rather than proceeding from a master plan.¹ Medicine was the first school established; it was created when practitioners from the Finger Lake area moved to the booming city on the Niagara River. Their school, initially proprietary, occupied modest quarters around Buffalo General Hospital, near its current location at Main and Virginia Streets. Other professional schools emerged gradually.² Their faculty members were often largely drawn from volunteer area practitioners. Although the quality could be high – witness the Law School in the late 1930s, which was staffed by persons some of whom later moved to Harvard Law School – the general commitment of faculty was limited by their other obligations.

Pressures far removed from Buffalo resulted in the creation of the College of Arts and Sciences.³ The noted 1910 Flexner report challenged the foundation of medical education, the cornerstone of UB. Flexner and his colleagues sought to replace the apprentice-type training that future MDs received by a combination of rigorous academic schooling with clinical experience.⁴ Rather than head directly to hospitals and affiliation with existing doctors following graduation from high school, would-be MDs had to receive a baccalaureate degree prior to entering medical school.⁵ UB clearly required a college of arts and sciences that would support its medical school. The College was created June 18, 1913. However, owing to problems with funding and World War I, its formal establishment came January 15, 1915, nearly four-score years after the 1846 establishment of the medical school.⁶ No departments were formed initially, although courses were offered in Latin, French, German, history, mathematics, chemistry, biology and physics.⁷ By 1915, however, several courses were given under department auspices.

The private University of Buffalo developed a modest reputation as a regional institution. Best known for the vigorous leadership of Samuel Capen,⁸ it moved from its Niagara Square base⁹ to the former Erie County poor farm, in the northwest corner of Buffalo.¹⁰ Capen was recruited from the American Council of Education, where he had served as President, to preside over the transformation.

Here is how an institutional history described UB at this point:

Capen, however, recognized the opportunities the Council had envisioned for the future of the University and for Buffalo itself. He shared their vision to build "a university that should provide complete opportunities for higher education equal to the best anywhere obtainable, that should be a focus for the city's idealism, that should change the current of the city's life."

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In his inaugural speech on October 28, 1922 Capen detailed his philosophy on the role of a university administrator:

I do not hold with those who would limit the number of college students on the basis of any distinctions of race or sex or creed or social standing. There is but one justifiable basis on which a university in a democratic community such as this can choose those who are to become members of it, the basis of ability. But a university is a place maintained at great expense to foster the philosophic point of view, to stimulate constructive thinking, because this point-of-view and this mode of thinking have been found necessary to the progress of civilized society.¹¹

UB from 1900 to the end of World War II represented the quintessential urban university. Located after 1920 at the end of the Main Street trolley line, all its students were commuters, overwhelmingly drawn from the Buffalo metropolitan area and Western New York.¹² From an initial modest number of students (1,747 in 1925/26), the University as a whole barely grew in following years, with the hammer blows of the Depression and World War II. Its enrollment in 1942 was only 1,799, although this number was affected by manpower demands during the war. The real growth came under the dual impacts of the immediate post-war GI Bill and the Baby Boom starting in the early 1960s.

Chancellor Capen came to Buffalo from the American Council on Education. He was armed with new-cum-old ideas about quality education. Tutorial instruction lay at the heart of his philosophy. Undergraduates would not take formal lecture courses in their upper division years. Instead, they would participate in individual and (as financial pressures grew) small group tutorials. Little graduate instruction would be offered; that which existed would be confined to MA candidates. The number of staff members remained restricted, with secretaries often shared among Departments. Faculty promotions depended not only on merit, but also on financial considerations. Although significant fund-raising campaigns were mounted to try to put the new University on a sound basis,¹³ the Depression, Capen's time-intensive hands-on educational philosophy, competition from other colleges and universities, and the fact employment could readily be found in the Buffalo area during this era without post-high school education all affected enrollments.

UB, whether in its public or private days, was marked by widely varying relations with its surrounding community. At times, having a quasi-municipal university became an item of local pride. At others, however, classic town-gown tensions surfaced, with consequences negative for both.

Although this excursus interrupts the general chronological flow of this narrative, several broadly-demarcated periods exist. They started with strong local support from small communities of professionals, who supported and taught (often on a volunteer basis); the Schools of Medicine, Dentistry, Law and the like illustrate this first period.¹⁴ The second came after both World Wars and during the Vietnam War, when the liberal

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values of UB upheld by its faculty and administrators conflicted with the basically conservative values of the community. Efforts at rebuilding links with Buffalo became a conscious presidential goal in the 1990's and early years of the third millennium. In almost all these attempts, political scientists at UB played limited but not insignificant roles. Each of these periods merits brief analysis.¹⁵

As noted in the next section of this history, the College of Arts and Sciences was formed in 1915, under the inexorable pressure of changed requirements for MD's qualifications. Fund-raising went slowly, as well-documented by its long-time Dean Julian Park, a member of the Department of History and Government.¹⁶ Without question, the acme of warm town-gown relations in the broadest sense occurred in the major fund-raising drive launched in 1929, just on the eve of the Great Depression.

The antithesis can be noted in three tension-fraught periods, in which imminent, on-going or post-war tension affected UB. In the 1930s, again in the early 1950s, and most explosively in the late 1960s, members of the University became embroiled in roiling national and international issues. Cosmopolitan values of free speech and protest upheld in Academe collided with the metropolitan area's fundamentally conservative heritage.

Buffalo in the Depression era remained a city of heavy industry, marked by sharp ethnic communities, each with its geographic center. Among the most influential were the Irish of South Buffalo. Remembrance of past British misdeeds ran strong, and played out in town-gown relations for them. Another prominent strand in the city's population came from its descendants of German origin. Each had reason to distrust Chancellor Capen and several members of the UB faculty. Those in the ivory tower at Main and Bailey recognized the threats to democracy embodied in Nazism. However, Irish nationalists saw its rise as a direct challenge to England, from which an uneasy independence had not been gained until 1922. Local German-Americans may have taken pride in the rapid way in which Hitler jumpstarted the economy and rebuilt national pride after the crushing humiliation of World War I¹⁷. Many Irish and German citizens thus supported, at least implicitly, the isolationist movements that marked the United States in the 1930s. Campus figures by contrast condemned the anti-intellectual, militarist actions of the Nazis. They became "outspoken proponents" of American involvement prior to World War II's outbreak.

Campus values also came into conflict with markedly conservative pre-Vatican views among local Catholic laypersons and clergy. Professor Stern recalls one of his colleague's tutorial students demurred at reading "The Prince," since it appeared on the "forbidden" list.¹⁸ Finally, the *Buffalo Evening News* was at this time and until late in the 20th century a bastion of conservative views in contrast with the populist *Courier-Express*. It could be counted upon to condemn UB personnel who questioned certain values, as manifested most markedly in the McCarthy era.

"Guardians against subversion"¹⁹ in the Senate and House of Representatives were determined to stamp out and punish any 'un-American' values. Although the witch hunt did not directly affect any member of the History and Government department,²⁰ it cast a chilling effect over academic freedom generally. This sharp

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challenge to Capen in his last years as Chancellor and to his successor Raymond McConnell merits further investigation.²¹ A roughly comparable set of tensions, played out this time at the State level, involved the Feinberg certificate, a requirement west by the Regents that faculty sign a loyalty oath.²² In a case ultimately fought to the Supreme Court,²³ several faculty members and library staff obtained a ruling overturning the "Feinberg Certificate."

The final instance of town-gown tensions comes later in this history, for, without question, national and international events during the Vietnam War set a climate for on-campus radicalism. The significance of these special circumstances cannot be underestimated, and are examined elsewhere in this history.

SUNY: a system without a center

The State University of New York has several distinguishing features.

First, it is the youngest of the state-supported systems of public higher education.²⁴ Established in 1948, it confederated largely community-initiated teachers' training institutions.²⁵ New York's response to the GI Bill was to waive tuition for anyone prepared to seek teacher certification. SUNY also incorporated or encouraged the establishment of community colleges within 57 counties.²⁶ Finally, as part of a drastic overhaul initiated in the late 1950s, SUNY sought to develop comprehensive graduate centers. They would complement existing professional programs in education, fashion, medicine and the like with 'traditional' doctoral programs in the arts and sciences. At its inception, SUNY already ranked as "the second largest of the state universities in the country, has a total enrollment of approximately 32,000 and a faculty including part-time instructors of about 3000."²⁷ By 1962, the year prior to UB's merger into the system, SUNY had grown exponentially. According to the official State publication,

Total State University enrollment in degree-credit courses in the Fall of 1962 was 111,342. This figure includes 68,019 full-time students, of whom 43,323 were enrolled in State colleges and 19,567 in community colleges, and 43,323 part-time students, 17,685 in State colleges and 25,638 in community colleges. The total number of full-time faculty members (instructional staff only) is 4,654 of whom 3,505 are in the State colleges and 1,149 in the community colleges.²⁸

Alone among the 50 states, New York lacks a large, central state university. SUNY as an entity reflects its origin in 19th century local initiatives, which resulted in numerous academies, later transformed, as just noted, into teacher training institutes. The first President of SUNY described the result thus in 1950:

The program by which the State of New York, through the State University, undertook to meet the educational needs of society and of the youth of the State was a pioneering venture into a new pattern of higher education. No familiar structure would be adequate. On the one hand was the need for unification and expansion of the public

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institutions, *supplementing and cooperating with the private institutions*. On the other hand was a need for decentralization, with a diversity of programs integrated to the service of the community, and with a maximum of local control and responsibility. The present organization was designed with all these requirements in mind. While the units work together cooperatively on the development of overall policies, each branch remains free to exercise initiative in developing a local program adequate to accomplish the purposes for which it was established. Ideas that appear sound can be tried out and the results appraised for effectiveness. Plans that prove useful can be adopted by others; those that are ineffective can be discarded with a minimum of loss. So long as the overall objectives are clear and evaluation of results is continuous, a diversity of approaches through local initiative offers the best means for continuously strengthening the university programs.²⁹

The second factor was demographic, leading to the institutional amalgamation and expansion just outlined. The average number of children per family rose sharply. The average American woman bore 3.09 children in 1950, which increased to 3.65 children per family in 1960; the peak occurred in 1957, when the figure stood at 3.77. Between 1940 and 1960, the number of families with three children doubled and the number of families having a fourth child quadrupled.³⁰

Added to these factors was an epochal piece of national legislation. Recognizing the extraordinary contributions made by the ~16,353,700 draftees and volunteers in the American military, Congress passed what is popularly known as the GI Bill. Its educational benefits made post-secondary education possible for hundreds of thousands – including one member of the Political Science Department.³¹

The private University of Buffalo initially met the post-World War II challenge by significant expansion in undergraduate enrollments. Dormitories started to rise on the Main-Bailey campus, as did major new academic buildings such as the Medical School, constructed on Bailey Avenue across from the equally new VA hospital, and facilities for the newly-created engineering school. Overall, the number of students enrolled at UB sprang up briefly immediately after the war (in 1946/47, there were: 11,554), a figure which continued to rise slowly until the merger with SUNY. In 1952/53, 11,251 enrolled; 14,639 in 1957/58 and 15,882 in 1962/63.³²

Political ambitions counted as a fourth factor. Establishing a university with branches throughout the state – in short, one with numerous campuses away from Democratic-dominated New York City – made good sense for ambitious Republican leaders. Governor Thomas Dewey presided over SUNY's formal legislative creation in 1948, when the flood of veterans started to inundate post-baccalaureate education. In 1960, his equally ambitious successor Nelson Rockefeller blessed the transformation of SUNY into a comprehensive university system in its own right, outstripping California in its ambitions.³³

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Finally, and necessarily speculatively, many members of the faculty and staff at the private University of Buffalo favored merging into SUNY. Although this would entail a significant loss in local autonomy, their view coincided with that of several civic leaders. New York State appeared willing to invest millions – and ultimately billions – to develop a new ‘State University of New York at Buffalo.’ Why not do so in the Queen City? Hence, with the promise and soon the reality of a significantly brighter future, the private University of Buffalo signed over all its assets to SUNY in 1962.

To sum up, financial, educational and political considerations pointed UB toward merger. The resulting flow of funds made the establishment of the Department of Political Science possible. It was one of many units that were created, or which prospered extraordinarily with the gush of state funds. That the bloom quickly faded from the rose forms one theme of the following chapter.

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¹ In this respect, UB differed from the more grandly entitled ‘University of Western New York,’ formally created in 1836. Millard Fillmore took a leading role in its establishment.

² According to the official UB website, the School of Medicine led in 1846, followed successively in 1886 by Pharmacy, by Law in 1891 (it had started in 1887 as part of Niagara University), Dentistry 1892, the College of Arts and Sciences 1915, the evening division (Millard Fillmore College) 1923, Business Administration (now Management) 1927, Education 1931, Social Work 1935, Nursing 1940, Engineering 1946, Public Health 1965, and Architecture and Planning 1967. Dates from The University Archives’ Timeline of UB History, found at <http://library.buffalo.edu/archives/ubhistory/timeline.php>.

³ Several relevant publications came from the pen of Julius Park, member of a distinguished Buffalo family and eminent historian in his own right. (He was the nephew of the noted surgeon Roswell Park). See inter alia, *The city and the university* (1920); *The elective system and the tutorial plan at the University of Buffalo, 1923-1953* (1953), *The evolution of a college* (1938); *A history of the University of Buffalo* (1917), and *Samuel P. Capen* (1957).

⁴ The author speaks from personal experience, being the son, brother and father of doctors, and having won a prize as the outstanding pre-med student at Harvard while an undergraduate. However, thanks to an inspiring high school social studies teacher, I found my interests fell far more into international affairs than pancreatitis. Better to ‘cure’ the body politic, I reasoned, than to work one patient at a time, as life-saving as this has been for my kin.

⁵ “The Flexner Report is the most important event in the history of American and Canadian medical education. It was a commentary on the condition of medical education in the early 1900s and gave rise to modern medical education. The report is named for Abraham Flexner (1866-1959) who prepared it. Abraham Flexner was not a doctor but was a secondary school teacher and principal for 19 years in Louisville, Kentucky ... Flexner then took graduate work at Harvard and the University of Berlin and joined the research staff of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. For the Carnegie Foundation, Flexner researched, wrote and in 1910 published a report entitled “Medical Education in the United States and Canada.” It is known today as the Flexner Report.”

<http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=8795>, consulted December 25, 2007. Hundreds of other summaries and commentaries can be found.

⁶ <http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/archives/timeline/time4.html>

⁷ Julian Park. “*The Evolution of a College*,” *University of Buffalo Studies* v.15, no.3, p. 69. He was the son of the noted Buffalo surgeon Roswell Park, after whom Roswell Park Cancer Institute was named.

⁸ Capen was respected not only for his views on educational philosophy, but for his vigorous defense of academic freedom.

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⁹ Courses were offered in Townsend Hall, which was sold by UB in 1954. The City Court currently occupies the site.

¹⁰ The Erie County Almshouse and County Hospital also housed the mental asylum, in current Hayes Hall. A famous photo of Capen's inauguration as Chancellor shows some of its inmates peering curiously from behind a chain-link fence at the procession of elaborately-garbed academics.

¹¹ <http://library.buffalo.edu/archives/exhibits/capen/bio/bio4.htm>.

¹² In 1940, Buffalo counted 575,901 people, making it the 14th largest city in the United States. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab17.txt>, consulted July 25, 2010. This represented a significant drop from Buffalo heyday at the turn of the 20th century, when it ranked sixth nationally and, according to one estimate, the wealthiest of all on a per capita basis. For these halcyon days, see any of several histories, perhaps the best documented and most readable one being Mark Goldman, *High Hopes: The Rise and Decline of Buffalo New York* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983) and, by the same author, *City on the Edge: Buffalo New York* (Amherst NY: Prometheus Books, 2007). The ebullient nature of the city in the mid-1950s has been brilliantly captured in *The Last Fine Time*, by Verlyn Klinkenborg (1991).

¹³ The most noteworthy occurred with efforts to raise money to purchase the Main-Bailey property from the County – an effort strongly supported at its last moments by the Knox family and women's groups – and in 1929. Individual bequests also supported special funds, such as the justly-renown annual cycle of Beethoven quartets endowed by Slee family funds or scattered professorships in the Arts and Sciences.

¹⁴ And, to be certain, such warm relations continue to exist. Fund-raising has almost universally appealed more to donors when the recipient could be a focused professional school, rather than the broad university as a whole or the amorphous College of Arts and Sciences.

¹⁵ Much of the material in these paragraphs comes from discussion with Professor Robert H. Stern August 14, 2009, and a written set of comments he kindly provided.

¹⁶ Julian Park, *The Evolution of a College: A Century of Higher Education in Buffalo* (Buffalo: Buffalo NY 1938).

¹⁷ As Professor Stern observed, Chancellor Capen strongly defended some faculty members

who had become highly controversial in the city owing to their activities, prior to Pearl Harbor, as outspoken advocates for U.S. intervention on behalf of the allies. Not surprising in a community that, prior to our entry into World War II, had its share of Bundists and their isolationist sympathizers. Neither was such advocacy likely to be warmly welcomed among elements of the city's Irish population, who had carried over from World War I (not to speak of decades and centuries before that) a strong distaste for our helping England's cause.

Written comments from Professor Robert H. Stern, given to the author August 13, 2009.

¹⁸ Individually, however, Professor Stern never encountered such an attitude, although he assigned classics such as *Leviathan* or *The Social Contract* that may have offended many Catholic students.

¹⁹ Professor Stern's phrase.

²⁰ Professor William Parry of Philosophy, by contrast, was sharply vilified and did not teach for three years, as a sop to community feelings. He retained his tenured position and remained on the UB faculty, nonetheless.

²¹ One of my hopes in writing this history is that others might prepare analyses of their own Departments or units. UB has a rich, interesting set of stories to preserve and tell.

²² The matter was raised to the U.S. Supreme Court in the Keyishian case *Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 319 U.S. 624 (1967). Richard Lipsitz argued before the Supreme Court, James Magavern the handled the brief. The official title of the case is *Keyishian et al. v. Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York*, available electronically as http://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=15934266528750676067&hl=en&as_sdt=2&as_vis=1&oi=cholarr.

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²³ The Supreme Court emphasized the free flow of ideas in schools, saying the classroom "is peculiarly the 'marketplace of ideas.' The Nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to the robust exchange of ideas." E-mail to author from Charles Lamb August 23, 2009.

²⁴ The 1863 Morrill land-grant act – one of the most revolutionary laws in American educational history, can be compared only perhaps to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and the 1944 G.I. Bill (officially titled the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, P.L. 78-346, 58 *Stat.* 284). This "provided for college or vocational education for returning World War II veterans (commonly referred to as GIs or G.I.s) as well as one year of unemployment compensation. It also provided many different types of loans for returning veterans to buy homes and start businesses. Since the original act, the term has come to include other veteran benefit programs created to assist veterans of subsequent wars as well as peacetime service." Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G.I._Bill, consulted December 18, 2008. Paradoxically, it seems, New York's land-grant institution is Cornell University, the overwhelming majority of whose parts are private rather than public.

²⁵ The largest, ironically, was in Buffalo, at 1300 Elmwood Avenue. Established in 1871, "the school's sole purpose was to train teachers to serve Buffalo's fast-growing student population in the public schools." <http://www.buffalostate.edu/buffalostatehistory.xml>, accessed December 18, 2008.

²⁶ New York has 62 counties, counting the five in New York City. CUNY parallels SUNY in its administrative structure, with community colleges in each borough, as well as free-standing colleges in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens, and the graduate center in Manhattan.

²⁷ John S. Mearns, Ed., *New York Red Book*, 59th edition (Albany, Williams Press 1950), p. 460.

²⁸ Myron D. Hartman, Ed., *New York Red Book*, 72nd edition (Albany, Williams Press 1963-64), p. 585.

²⁹ Alvin C. Eurich, "The State University of New York: A Pioneering Venture in Higher Education," *Higher Education* VI, 15, April 1, 1950, p. 172. Italics added.

³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post%E2%80%93World_War_II_baby_boom, consulted October 15, 2011.

³¹ Robert Stern, who joined the Department in 1950, received his doctorate from Harvard, thanks to the GI Bill.

³² 5/1/27 Annual Reports of the Chancellor/President, 1922- Boxes 2-4.

³³ Unlike California, SUNY brought together three levels of post-secondary education. California governs – perhaps 'coordinates' is a better term – its numerous campaigns through three separately chartered governing boards. In New York State, the picture is quite different. The community colleges retain significant autonomy, given their different funding formula, in which contributions by individual counties were included. The one-time teaching training colleges, now changed in colleges of arts and sciences, offer not only bachelor of arts degrees (as contrasted with the former bachelor of education), but also moved toward giving MA degrees. Comprehensive research centers form the third tier of the SUNY system. Initial plans proposed one in Long Island, the other somewhere in Western New York. Subsequent decisions doubled the comprehensive universities, with Albany and Binghamton joining Stony Brook and Buffalo.