

Basics of curriculum changed at IU in mid-1800s

"A GENTLEMAN of good moral character, and one who is well qualified to teach English Grammar, Geography with the use of Maps and Globes, Natural Philosophy, Trigonometry with its application to Surveying and Navigation; and who can also instruct students in Bookkeeping, is wanted to take charge of the English department in the State Seminary at Bloomington by the 15th day of May next."

— *Indiana Journal* (Indianapolis), March 20, 1827

The advertisement in the *Indiana Journal* did not offer a bright prospect for any teacher. Dr. David Maxwell, secretary of the Seminary (early name for Indiana University) board of trustees, who placed the ad, stated flatly that the "compensation to a teacher at the present time, cannot be very great."

The seminary was operating on a financial shoe string and the board simply didn't have the wherewithal to pay very much, even to one who had all of the qualifications described.

Hopefully, the successful candidate for the position could see a long way into his



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

future when he would have the title of professor, rather than instructor, and would receive more than a pittance in salary.

Students who came to the seminary in those early years had to be prepared to knuckle down to a rigorous course of study.

The four-year curriculum included Greek, Latin, compositions in English and Latin, algebra, mechanics, astronomy, physics, mathematical and physical geography, moral and mental philosophy, evidences of Christianity in connection with natural religion, rhetoric, logic, political economy, and the constitution of the United States.

Students were obliged to prove that they could write compositions and dissertations and speak with eloquence before an audience.

That course of study was considered a

classical education. The mental and oratory exercises were intended to teach the students to think on their feet and speak persuasively. Small wonder, then, that a fair number of the early graduates were elected to legislative positions.

By 1840, students were still wading through Greek and Latin texts in the original — Horace's *Odes and Epodes* and *Satires and Epistles*; Homer's *Iliad*; Virgil's *Georgics*; Cicero's *de Officiis* and *de Oratore* and Tacitus, among other writings. Some of the frontier boys may have wondered what that would have to do with their life after college.

In his book, *Indiana University, 1829-1904*, Samuel B. Harding says that by 1845, IU students could choose to follow the liberal arts course of study and take a bachelor of arts degree or follow a scientific course to earn a bachelor of science degree.

The latter course of study did not entirely exempt the candidates from the English and writing courses, but the science students did receive a concentration of mathematics, chemistry, physiology, mechanics, civil engineering, acoustics and astronomy.

In 1880, German, French, political history and geology were electives. The freshman student in 1880 had a choice of three courses of study: classical or language courses (bachelor of arts degree); history, philosophy and English literature, (bachelor of philosophy degree); or science (bachelor of science degree).

Actually, the loosening up of the curriculum had begun in 1868, when students were allowed to choose between modern languages and Latin.

All of the changes from the curriculum in 1824 to 1887 were leading up to the shift from all students having to take the same course of study to what Harding calls "the major subject system of instruction."

This was established after a committee headed by Professor Hans C.G. von Jagemann devised a system whereby all students had some requirements, but that the remainder of the courses in a "specialty" were set by individual departments.

Andrew Wylie, IU's first president, may not have agreed with the changes, but he was no longer living and the world was changing.

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