

Jean-Pierre V. M. Hérubel

Higher Education Institutional Histories: Observations, Discussion, and Definitional Glossary of the Publication Genre in Canada and the United States

Abstract: Institutional histories present a unique phenomenon that institutions account for, as they project their past to their constituents and to posterity. Often, these works are books celebrating challenges and achievements. However, this form of institutional memory has a mixed reputation among professional historians. This observation and discussion offer an insight into this ecology of publication while framing the diverse nature of institutional histories. A sample of college and university histories are surveyed, and a typology of genres is discussed to better ascertain the value and nature of histories of higher education institutions, especially for the study of the academic history of higher education in Canada and the United States. Establishing a critical historiographic typology of genres is a necessary requisite for capturing the essence of institutional histories and publication. A definitional glossary for advanced students and historians in the field of the history of higher education is proposed, which categorizes institutional histories according to publishing and publisher formats to ascertain the relative values of institutional histories.

Keywords: college, university, genres, institutional histories, publishing

When historians of higher education examine individual colleges or universities, they encounter a diverse spectrum of institutional histories. For this reason, it is worthwhile gaining an efficacious recognition and appreciation of their scholarly status and value as historical scholarship. For academics, the history of professionalized academic knowledge occupies a complex scholarly ecology, and its professionalization is as old as the founding of Western European universities.¹ These

Acknowledgments: The author would like to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions and observations.

1 For a still relevant introduction, see Charles Homer Haskins, *The Rise of Universities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965); William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

medieval institutions developed and were responsible for the professionalization of law, medicine, and theology. Since the 19th century, higher education institutions have forged a near monopoly regarding the generation and dissemination of knowledge and learning.² Accompanying this, academic disciplines have emerged and evolved into our present times. Intellectual, scientific, and ancillary disciplinary discoveries and advancements have perforce engendered distinctive disciplinary cultures within the academy.³ Together with provincial academies and similar, higher education institutions have a stake in their respective histories. Therefore, it behooves historians of higher education and graduate students to examine institutional histories of higher education institutions to better understand their varied purposes with an additional critical eye toward their historiographic veracity. For these reasons, understanding, situating, and ascertaining the publishing practices observed in an examination of institutional histories and their various publishing formats is vital for addressing their significance to historians and graduate students of higher education. Without a classificatory framework for institutional histories, they remain an amorphous publication phenomenon.

Purpose and Methodological Approach

The following observations, discussion, and proposed glossary concerning institutional publication genres derive from experiences in university press publishing where the author serves as chair of the faculty review board for a university press. The question of institutional histories revolves around and is tied to their purpose, audience, sponsorship, authorship, and publication. The express nature of an institutional history is not easily defined without considering the nature of why they are undertaken. The following text attempts to frame institutional history as a publishing phenomenon within the context of its importance to higher education scholars, especially historians of universities and graduate students engaged in exploring and ascertaining the relative value for their research. To gain a historical context, this study examines the principal types of institutional histories written on American and Canadian higher education institutions in the period

2 See Sheldon Rothblatt and Björn Wittrock, *The European and American University since 1800: Historical and Sociological Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

3 For useful accounts of this, see Burton R. Clark, *Places of Inquiry: Research and Advanced Education in Modern Universities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Burton R. Clark, ed., *The Research Foundations of Graduate Education: Germany, Britain, France, United States, Japan* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021).

1700–1989, specifically focusing on four-year colleges and universities.⁴ Two-year institutions are not included; however, for illustrative examples, departmental, graduate, professional, or disciplinary histories frame the general discussion. This examination utilizes historical sources offering data that enable a grounded discussion on bibliographic format, authorial context, and type of publisher.⁵ For purposes of this observational examination, a listing of institutional histories was gleaned from these published bibliographic sources and categorized using spreadsheet software for tabulation and analysis. Each entry was examined for type of publication and categorized under the following headings: 1) University Press – Peer-Reviewed; 2) University Press, Illustrated and/or Commissioned; 3) Institutionally Commissioned, Non-University Press; 4) Celebratory Publishing; 5) Commercial Publisher; and 6) Private Printing. The categories were generated by the author based on publishing nomenclature.

These elements further contextualize histories of institutions within a historiographic frame of reference. Originating with and grounded in *de visu* bibliographically and textually examining institutional histories, a definitional glossary of genres was created as a template for identifying individual institutional histories within a genre category. Considering the fact that a comprehensive discussion of higher education institutional publishing is not feasible in this presentation, the following discussion focuses on a limited geographical and historical period concentrating on Canada and the United States. Its scope is to focus on those characteristics and qualities discerned and explicated for the North American experience. Developing an approach and definitional glossary offers a viable template applicable to the European context, especially institutional histories in the United Kingdom and Ireland, and may need to be adapted to non-Western institutional conditions.

4 There is a growing corpus of scholarship devoted to the writing of institutional histories, especially European institutions. The *History of Universities* annual journal provides a bibliography of major and minor studies of higher education institutions, attesting to the interest in examining institutional histories, accessed May 31, 2023, <https://global.oup.com/academic/content/series/h/history-of-universities-series-hou/?cc=us&lang=en&>.

5 Data were gathered from Arthur P. Young, *Higher Education in American Life, 1636–1986: A Bibliography of Dissertations and Theses* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); Linda Sparks, *Institutions of Higher Education: An International Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

The Phenomenon of Institutional Histories

A cursory perusal of a corpus of institutional histories will often leave the reader with the impression that an institutional history is more celebratory than a serious in-depth history adhering to standards of academic or professional historical approaches.⁶ Indeed, this may initially be the case; however, the institutional history ecosystem is much more complex and varied, even though a discernible core exists that conforms to the celebratory approach.

Educational institutions, research institutes, and provincial and national academies all contribute substantially to the ecology sustaining and nurturing intellectual culture.⁷ Public intellectual discourse and varied acknowledged contributions of discovery and dissemination aside, higher education institutions, especially universities and colleges, comprise a veritable intellectual ecosystem. Granted that tertiary institutions reflect more than research, teaching, etc., they are also sites of human interaction, at times ancillary to their professed objectives and justification for these objectives. Not devoid of contestations, they convey political, economic, cultural, and even religious overtones and connotations. Reflecting societal conditions at large, they are also isolated from these societal influences. Indeed, except for the public intellectual arena, higher education institutions in their varied guises constitute the mainstay and principle of advancing intellectual products and theoretical and methodological advances, as well as pure and applied research and instruction.

Professional history is not pursued *ex nihilo* – it is socially constructed and adheres to professionalized protocols and sets of consensus-driven methodologies, normative theories, and approaches.⁸ Assuming that best practice procedural approaches are adhered to, academic historians of higher education, intellectual, or cultural history accede to the demands of historical scholarship. The history of intellectual effort and culture transcends the discrete history of ideas, expanding its purview to encompass the history of intellectual institutions. However, these are constructed over time and space and are open to the vagaries of human inten-

⁶ The challenge to effectively writing an institutional history is expressed in John K. Bettersworth, "What's the Use of Writing College Histories?" *The Social Science Bulletin* 6 (1953): 24–27.

⁷ Highly selective, celebratory, and cursory historical overviews point to the centrality of higher education institutions in human intellectual activities. See Carol J. Summerfield, Mary Elizabeth Devine, and Anthony Levi, *International Dictionary of University Histories* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998); Blaise Cronin, *Cathedrals of Learning: Great and Ancient Universities of Western Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Chandos Publishing, 2016).

⁸ For an insightful discussion of what constitutes historical research and writing, see Sarah C. Maza, *Thinking about History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

tion and justification. This is especially true for institutions charged with the responsibilities of generating, shepherding, and imparting knowledge, old and new. Those who embark on and write histories dedicated to a singular higher education institution contribute to the history of intellectual culture in unique, distinctive ways. These histories become bellwether milestones in an institution's history; when taken together, they assume a critical mass of historical narrative framing the intellectual culture distinguishing the significance of higher education in human societies.⁹ The relative importance of these histories depends on their veracity to convey, in a dispassionate way, the significance and gravity of their undertaking, without which an effective and trustworthy history can add to the intellectual history culture in all its manifestations. For these reasons, an effective introduction for historians and graduate students in the history of higher education fixes and clarifies this phenomenon.

The Archive in Relation to Historical Writing of Institutional Histories

A further consideration with regard to the historical usefulness of institutional histories to historians and graduate students in the history of higher education involves archival primary sources. Without archival sources, institutional histories cannot exist – they are, as rigorous historical research projects, substantially grounded in primary sources. Archives, especially institutional archives housed in higher education facilities, are absolutely critical to the writing of universities and college histories. Their availability, depth of primary materials, rationalized access procedures, and protocols for successful research are essential for the primary sources utilized for historical analysis. Constructing institutional histories is perforce grounded in the availability and veracity of what the institutional archive provides. Just as a higher education institution is a contested arena, the archive is also a contested site, rich in its own evolutionary construction.¹⁰ The cen-

⁹ For a thoughtful reading, see Pieter Dhondt, ed., *University Jubilees and University History Writing: A Challenging Relationship*, Vol. 13 (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

¹⁰ For further reading on the nature of archives, see Irving Velody, "The Archive and the Human Sciences: Notes Towards a Theory of the Archive," *History of the Human Sciences* 11, 4 (November 1998): 1; Richard Harvey Brown and Beth Davis-Brown, "The Making of Memory: The Politics of Archives, Libraries and Museums in the Construction of National Consciousness," *History of the Human Sciences* 11, 4 (November 1998): 17–32; Marlene Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 1 (2004): 9–25; Antoinette M. Bur-

trality of documents encountered in the archives with regard to historical memory and knowledge development also influences the historian's ability to ascertain their veracity. Several questions arise when confronted with the archival collection at a higher education institution: how extensive are the institutional documents, which lacunae are found, and what is the nature of the materials? Are metadata and search guides available, and most importantly, to what extent is the collection predicated upon an administration's prerogatives to direct or selectively sanitize what enters an archive? These tangled and labyrinthine questions also influence any possible institutional narrative. In recent years, institutions have confronted their own culpability during the period of slavery and are grappling with their respective histories¹¹ As shown in the case of Canada regarding indigenous unceded land and in the US with regard to acknowledging slavery and university fiscal aggrandizement, institutional archives may not present the required verisimilitude.

Since institutional histories constitute valuable information and context, derived from archival sources and often utilized as introductions for scholars pursuing research in higher education, the significance of institutional histories is their beneficial primary sources which they contain. Having said this, are they sufficiently grounded in recognized historical methodologies and historiographical knowledge according to professional historical consensus? Are they bone fide contributions to rigorous historical analysis? Is there a hierarchy of significance weighted toward the veracity of a critical historical approach and methodological protocols?

Are these histories peer-reviewed and do they generally adhere to best archival, historical, and historiographic practices? They owe their existence to the need to satisfy a specific interest, often adapted to the prerogative of the institution or alumni. The typology proposed below stipulates a hierarchization of historiographical valuation regarding the histories in order of historical importance from a high of 1 to a low of 6 (Table 1).

ton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹¹ See, for instance, University of British Columbia Indigenous Portal, accessed May 31, 2023, <https://indigenous.ubc.ca>; Brown University, *Slavery and Justice Report* (2006), accessed May 31, 2023, <https://slaveryandjusticereport.brown.edu>.

Table 1: Typology of Six Hierarchical Published Institutional Histories.

1	University Press – Peer-Reviewed
2	University Press, Illustrated and/or Commissioned
3	Institutionally Commissioned, Non-University Press
4	Celebratory Publishing
5	Commercial Publisher
6	Private Printing

Adhering to normative academic practices propounded by professional historians of higher education and publishers provides the lens by which institutional histories are ranked in terms of adherence to accepted scholarly historical scholarship. The most rigorous histories are peer-reviewed and must sustain critical scrutiny and evaluation, generally upheld by university presses, but not exclusively.

Considering the importance of archives for the writing of institutional histories, what is the nature of histories focused on American and Canadian higher education institutions? Specifically, what is the nature of institutional histories purporting to cover an institution's foundation, evolution, and key developments? This overarching question concerns the histories endeavoring to present an institution's *raison d'être* in whatever form the history takes.¹² Generally, these institutional histories present a holistic approach with regard to their subject; that is, they are not necessarily concerned with, nor particularly focused on, a singular facet of an institution's relationship to a set of givens or a specific topic (e.g., governmental relations, civil rights, student life, teaching conditions, gender issues, etc.).¹³ Instead, they attempt to frame their narrative around the locus of an insti-

¹² For an introductory discussion and treatment of the varied and problematic nature of institutional histories pertaining to higher education institutions, see Jean-Pierre V. M. Hérubel, "University, College Institutional Histories, and University Presses: General Observations of a Unique Publishing Phenomenon," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 35 (2019): 352–361; Jean-Pierre V. M. Hérubel, "For Alma Mater: Publishing Institutional Histories of Higher Education and University Presses: Purposes, Genre and Scholarly Value," *Learned Publishing* 35 (2022): 288–291.

¹³ For such historical studies, consult Susan Rumsey Strong, *Thought Knows No Sex: Women's Rights at Alfred University* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008); Stefan M. Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Charles J. Holden, *The New Southern University: Academic Freedom and Liberalism at UNC* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012); Winton U. Solberg, *Reforming Med-*

tution's general life course. The historical and bibliographic complexities surrounding institutional histories present a variegated constellation of historiographic, if not, historical accuracy.¹⁴

Rationales behind Institutional Histories

There is a multitude of reasons for writing institutional histories, and these are not confined to higher education institutions. Museums, libraries, and publishing houses – just to mention a few – also have an interest in furthering their salience in society and have a concerted interest in furthering their own narrative.¹⁵ These cultural foundations may be regarded as complementary, indeed instrumental, and constituent components of intellectual culture. Often, they represent critical contributing factors attached to higher education institutions, facilitating research, instructional pursuits, and programming. Individual centers engaged in research and teaching also have a vested stake in telling their story to insiders and outsiders, of which classical studies represents a firm exemplar.¹⁶ Classical studies or any departmental disciplinary unit may wish to account for their longevity or significance. Generally, any cultural institution arrives at a juncture necessitating a projected narrative, often the subject of more than one history. Occasions such as jubilees or an institutional need to celebrate a watershed change in status (e.g., from

ical Education: The University of Illinois College of Medicine, 1880–1920 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

14 For an incisive discussion of historiographic concerns and similar, see Lester F. Goodchild and Irene Pancner Huk, “The American College History: A Survey of its Historiographic Schools and Analytic Approaches from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Present,” in *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, vol. VI, ed. John C. Smart (New York: Higher Education, 1990): 201–290. There are a number of schools of thinking concerning the writing of institutional histories. For an instructive introduction, consult Joel T. Rosenthal, “All Hail the Alma Mater: Writing College Histories in the U.S.,” *History of Universities* XXVII (2013): 190–222.

15 For instructive examples, consult H. Sarkowski, *Springer-Verlag: History of a Scientific Publishing House, Part 1: 1842–1945, Foundation, Maturation, Adversity* (Berlin and Heidelberg, Springer Verlag, 1996); H. Götz, *Springer-Verlag: History of a Scientific Publishing house: Part 2: 1945–1992. Rebuilding, Opening Frontiers, Securing the Future* (Berlin and Heidelberg, Springer Verlag, 1996); Maurice Hungville, *From a Single Window: Michigan State University and Its Press, 1947–1997* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998); Harry Carter, *A History of the Oxford University Press* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Evan H. Turner, ed., *Object Lessons: Cleveland Creates a Museum of Art* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1991).

16 Louis E. Lord, *A History of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1882–1942: An Intercollegiate Project* (Cambridge, MA: Published for the American School of Classical Studies at Athens by Harvard University Press, 1947).

being designated a college to being designated a university) prompt a desire to narrate the evolution of an institution.

Motivations leading to writing institutional histories represent a complex web not readily accounted for by historians of higher education.¹⁷ When first encountering them, their appearance easily suggests that institutional histories constitute attempts to capture some kind of essence of a college or university – a simple but judicious effort to account for the principal historical heights that an institution has reached. Generally, received wisdom holds that institutional histories are less than bona fide historical analyses of higher education institutions; rather, they represent a particular celebratory genre. Institutional histories convey a sense of the institution, its major challenges, triumphs, and its general and specific mission over time. Most histories come into existence when a sufficient amount of time has elapsed, when there is a story to tell, and an audience is ready to receive and appreciate the institution's story.¹⁸ Almost without qualification, the story told celebrates positive aspects and highlights, while at times also recounting challenges, but with a nod to a satisfactory denouement. It is not uncommon for academic historians to write the history of their own institution.¹⁹ However, there are as

17 An interesting selective survey of universities is Blaise Cronin, *Cathedrals of Learning: Great and Ancient Universities of Western Europe* (Hull: Chandos Publishing, 2016).

18 Recently, a manuscript was discovered for Penn State University's first commissioned history, written but not published due to the board of trustees being dissatisfied with it, see Erwin W. Runkle, *The Pennsylvania State College 1853–1932: Interpretation and Record* (Nittany Valley, PA: The Nittany Valley Press, 2014). For a fascinating account of its discovery and subsequent publication, see <http://www.statecollege.com/news/columns/the-first-history-of-penn-state.1467435/>, accessed May 31, 2023. There have been two commissioned histories since then: Dunaway Wayland Fuller, *History of The Pennsylvania State College* (Pennsylvania State College, 1946) and Michael Bezilla, *Penn State: An Illustrated History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985).

19 For a stellar and illustrative example of commissioned histories, see Jonathan E. Helmreich, *Through All the Years: A History of Allegheny College* (Meadville: Allegheny College, 2005). For an excerpted description of its genesis, see "Through All the Years: A History of Allegheny College," a 560-page volume with almost 900 illustrations, which explores the evolution of the college from its beginnings in the frontier town of Meadville to the present day. The duties of college historian came about after he retired, when Allegheny president Richard J. Cook asked Helmreich if he would serve as college historian on a volunteer basis. Before he wrote Allegheny's history, Helmreich first had to decide for whom he was writing it. "Right or wrong, I decided to write a history of Allegheny primarily for current and future alumni and for past, current and future faculty and staff of the college," he said. "Secondarily, it is for residents of northwest Pennsylvania. If it is of passing benefit to historians of higher education in the United States that is an added bonus," accessed 21 May 2020, <https://sites.allegheny.edu/news/2005/10/03/professor-emeritus-of-history-writes-history-of-the-college/>. It is not uncommon that retired historians write the history of their institutions, see Phillip R. Shriver, *The Years of Youth, 1910–1960* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1960); Walter Havighurst, *The Miami Years, 1809–1969* (New York: Putnam, 1969); David Stra-

many reasons for pursuing and publishing institutional histories as there are institutional histories to be pursued.²⁰

The data reveal a spectrum of historical studies appearing in a variety of genres and publications. For American and Canadian institutions these histories appear in the following formats (figures 1 and 2):

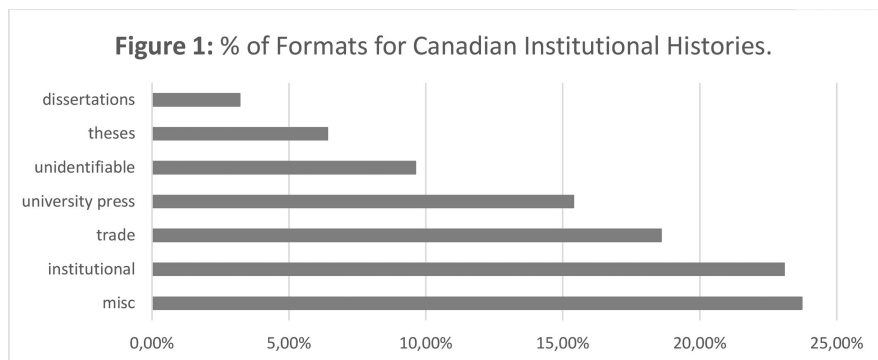


Fig. 1: Total institutional histories = 156.

The number of American institutional histories notwithstanding, both Canadian and American histories are heavily published by trade presses, while university presses capture a significant number of published histories. Canadian histories are likely to be published by their home institution, while theses and dissertations, even though they are not strictly speaking published, constitute a sizable amount. It should be noted that these types of histories conform to critical historical methodology and are generally informed by historiographic approaches. Thus, they are vetted within the protocols of historical practices and are accountable to best practices in historical research. The miscellaneous category of histories constitutes a grouping that includes private printing, alumni publications, institutionally sponsored works by interested groups, as well as a number of works emanating from non-scholarly interested parties, even governmental entities. They owe

dling, *In Service to the City: A History of the University of Cincinnati* (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati Press, 2018), or trained historian archivist Michael Bezilla, *Penn State: An Illustrated History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985).

²⁰ A very anecdotal and entertaining narrative at times exercising tongue-in-cheek asides, comical vignettes, and yet an attempt to narrate a historical account is Christopher Redmond, *Water Under the Bridge: An Unofficial History of the University of Waterloo*, 1st ed. (Waterloo, Ontario: Publications Office, University of Waterloo, 1998); Andrew Schlesinger, *Veritas: Harvard College and the American Experience*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005).

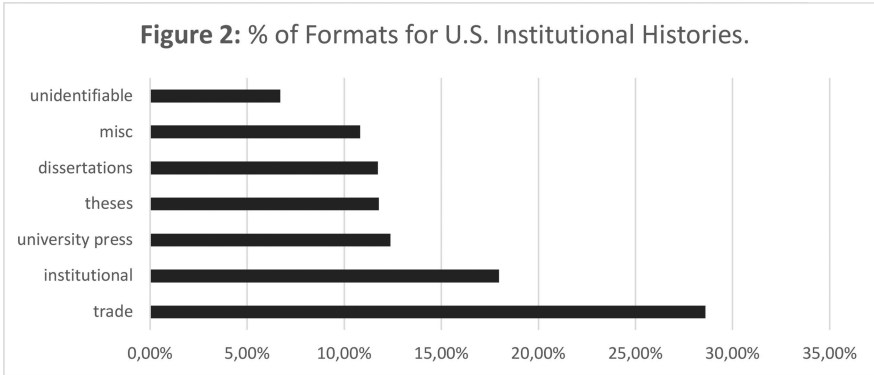


Fig. 2: Total institutional histories = 2,803.

their very existence to the need to satisfy a specific interest, often orientating in the institution's or alumni's prerogative. Nostalgia, notwithstanding the drive to narrate significance, drives institutional history writing – many works in the category miscellaneous have been authored by alumni, former academics, presidents, or former administrators.

General Characteristics of Institutional Histories

Institutional histories comprise an ecology of histories occupying a range of narrative genres. Institutional histories fall under specific categories or genres under which most histories can be classified. Whether celebratory or not, most, if not all, exhibit readily identifiable characteristics. Chronological, rarely thematic, very positive in tone, and given to a sense of ever-achieving success, this normative practice is pursued in many institutional histories, often emulating the well-trodden chronicler's approach to laudatory storytelling. First, the majority of histories appear decades after their institution was founded. They adopt an overarching view rather than getting into the thickets and often emphasize an administrative-centric approach. Rarely concerned with micro-history (e. g., departmental history) or focused on professorial lives, activities, and achievements, they tend to favor higher administrators and institutional leadership as core values. Institutional governance especially favors institutional boards and top-down historical narratives, at the expense of more nuanced examinations. University archives tend to gather under their aegis of student records, departmental records, memoranda, marketing materials, administrative documents, and sundry documentation. The ways in which they are dealt with and accounted for, and how they may be subject

to non-disclosure strictures, may present research complications or impediments. Of course, the ubiquity of student life, sports, and institutional accommodation also exerts a leitmotif. Commemorative in tone, many histories are celebratory publications specifically marking the institution's progress with semicentennial, sesquicentennial, or bicentennial milestones. Among these histories, more seasoned works appear, not expressly commemorative nor celebratory but informed by concerted scholarly examination.

For non-peer-reviewed histories, a particular finding is the marginalization of libraries and museums in institutional histories, in case they are even mentioned. The weight given to administrative history, key players within the upper administration, their efforts, failures, and successes looms large over the nuances of faculty participation in institutional activities. Great issues and instrumental pragmatic exigencies and concerns related to institutional progress generally overshadow individual accomplishments of researchers, teaching innovations, etc. Depending on the institution's relationship to collegiate sports and/or physical facilities, student life and other concerns for detailed narrative often eclipse a balanced and analytical treatment. A major caveat is the use of statistics and photography to highlight the narrative. Moreover, agency, external forces, influences, or pressures treated through this lens occur within the context of the weight of administrative responses.

Published Institutional Histories, Theses, and Dissertations as Historiographical Resources

Beyond the typology of published institutional histories, graduate student degree research constitutes a valuable source of institutional history complementing the published corpus available to historians of higher education. It is critical to note the existence of these other institutional histories emanating from master's theses and doctoral dissertations, albeit in manuscript form. Products of sustained research effort, additionally vetted by a committee of academic historians, such as theses (shorter unpublished studies) and dissertations (unpublished original and substantive analytical research) conform to the rigorous requirements of graduate school history standards, sustained by the professionalization of historical research and final approval by the committee of historians. Moreover, theses and dissertations must embed their institution's history within the context of historiographic knowledge and research execution.²¹ An additional value pertaining to

21 For sound examples of institutional histories, see Albert Lawrence Biehn, "The Development of

theses and dissertations concerns their bibliographies and methodological foundation upon which their historical subject is grounded, making these histories especially conducive as analytical history. While not entirely free from institutional influence, they tend to achieve a more scholarly examination. As pedagogical experiences, graduate students benefit from exposure to sustained evaluation, careful examination of archival methods, and historiographic framing as they experience proficiency in systematic historical research. Selective *de visu* examination of theses and dissertations reveals preliminary but foundational usage of rich archival sources, which might be mined by graduate students and seasoned historians alike.

Institutional histories as primary source material provide critical evidentiary sources for further research. They also provide digestible accounts ascertaining key themes confronting a given institution's position within the wider context of studies of institutional adaptation and evolution. When discernible and feasible, curricular changes may be identified and mapped for greater analysis. Programmatic emphases responding to intellectual, pedagogical, scholarly, and research initiatives, as well as administrative direction and caveats, may be explored in a sample population of institutional histories. Critically, moreover, indicators of changes in degree structure, attrition and graduation rates, or substantive evidence of institutional culture vis-à-vis regional, state, national, and societal influences may be gleaned from these histories. The old chestnut of vocational versus humanistic education is particularly well-suited for examination. Longitudinal studies of institutional responses to institutional concerns, among others, may be broached within the larger context of socio-economic conditions, contingencies framed by the purpose and *raison d'être* of higher education. Cohorts of institutional histories by year of publication, region, state, etc. (whether public or private foundations) may elucidate specific or common pressures affecting institutional missions. Four-year regional liberal arts universities or national research-intensive institutions may be effectively examined for salient characteristics either individually or within a specific category of institutional morphology. Comparative studies in particular may contribute to identifying general preoccupations absorbing institutional energies and resources. As institutions are not the ivory towers they sometimes propose to be and do not exist in splendid isolation, internal and external

the University of Nebraska" (Master's thesis, University of Nebraska, 1934); Melvin R. George, "Northeastern Illinois University: The History of a Comprehensive State University" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1979); Mildred Bernice Gaalot, "Grambling State University, 1901–1977" (Ed.D. diss., Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 1982). For a departmental history, see Ralph Joseph Clark, "A History of the Department of Extension at the University of Alberta, 1912–1956" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1986).

forces and institutional responses constitute an essential avenue of historical investigation.

Definitional Glossary

A critical and advisory component of the discussion on institutional histories of higher education institutions is the conceptualization and formulation of a definitional glossary for this unique phenomenon in the history of higher education publishing and scholarship. As an effective approach for situating institutional histories, this glossary offers additional context for institutional histories assessed for historiographic veracity and content analysis.

1 University Press – Peer-Reviewed

This type of publication is rarer as it generally adheres to the observed principles and normative research characterizing critical historical scholarship.²² Such histories follow the historiographic protocols of historical research and attempt to frame the institution's narrative within the context of critical archival work. Verisimilitudes, problems, challenges, and unresolved concerns are framed along with achievements. These histories are informed by a concern for a critical and disinterested account. It is not uncommon that an institution's history is published by another university press, as this provides a more concerted scholarly approach.²³ Reliance on an institution's archival resources normally grounds the pri-

²² For an outstanding example, see Paul Keith Conkin, *Gone With the Ivy: A Biography of Vanderbilt University* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985); David B. Potts, *Wesleyan University, 1831–1910: Collegiate Enterprise in New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Robert A. McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754–2004* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Martin L. Friedland, *The University of Toronto: A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); John W. Boyer, *The University of Chicago: A History* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

²³ Testimonial from a Research-1 university press director, “While the genres differ, my preference is for a historical approach rather than laudatory. Integrity demands transparency. A couple of reasons come to mind as to why university presses are a good fit: first, such a venture would give the press a visibility on campus that it probably previously did not enjoy. Second, a university press would hold the publication to research and editorial standards that may or may not be held by another unit capable of producing such a volume (e.g., university marketing and communication). Third, a university's institutional history would require true interdepartmental cooperation and expertise.” Email correspondence with author, 19 March 2019.

mary materials, from which interpretative responses may follow. Lastly, but crucially, these histories undergo a peer-review process by readers conversant in higher education history and the like, further legitimizing the historical scholarship represented by these works. As historians, they tend to use a broader source base that does not exclusively stem from the university archive.

Ex.: Martin L. Friedland, *The University of Toronto: A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

2 University Press Publication, Illustrated and/or Commissioned

Sometimes, a university press is approached to consider publishing a commissioned history of their affiliate institution. This is frequently an administrative suggestion carrying a concerted interest with a stake in a successful telling of the institution's narrative. The writing may be either a team effort or an individual effort, quite often a retired administrator with writing or scholarly acumen or a retired former faculty historian. These works can be highly and critically informative, albeit with the caveat that administrative interests may trump historiographical veracity. Yet, these tomes are often grounded in the institution's archival sources, replete with pictorial layouts and illustrations that enhance the narrative drive to a more positive historical account. An important caveat is that these histories do not necessarily undergo peer-review by experts in the field of the history of higher education.

Ex.: University of Illinois administration, *Illini Years: A Picture History of the University of Illinois, 1868–1950* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1950).

3 Institutionally Commissioned History, Non-University Press

Commissioned histories constitute a unique form of institutional publication. These tomes are artifacts directly emanating from administrations, governing boards, or alumni interested in accounts that are more hagiographic in nature. Their historiographic veracity is adventagous only by their usefulness to these agencies wishing to aggrandize their position in institutional memory. Few of these histories can match a well-rounded, penetrating, and historiographically sophisticated study. Their purpose is to maintain a feel-good, self-congratulatory frame of historical reference. Frequently, these publications are predicated upon archival primary sources originating almost exclusively from within the institution.

Ex.: James P. Walsh, *San José State University: An Interpretive History, 1950–2000* (San José, CA: San José State University, 2003).

4 Celebratory

This genre anticipates and captures the institution as a celebration of everything that the institution has achieved, with little regard for seasoned, articulated research. Moreover, it frames the institution's milestones with peppered vignettes and grand achievements with little regard for framing the institutional history within a scholarly context. All forms of historiographical discussion are absent, as is any attempt to contextualize the narrative within the scholarship of the history of higher education. Often accompanied by a plethora of illustrations, campus photography, and reputation-enhancing highlights, these histories are welcomed by institutional administrations and alumni. Celebratory histories are what they purport to be – an unbridled account free of trials, concerns, or the sticky issues concerning an institution's position with regard to a dispassionate historical examination. And yet, some of these narratives offer a chronological development replete with data and, at times, hard-won primary sources.

Ex.: John Norberg and Purdue University, *Ever true: The Campaign for Purdue University: Celebrating 150 Years* (Lafayette, IN: Purdue University, 2015).

5 Commercial Publisher

This type of history is often written and published for a wider readership, broaching a more generalized institutional account. Commercial publishers will publish these accounts, especially if their appeal captures a market interested in an institution's past, while highlighting grand and compelling themes that drive and illustrate easily accessibly written narratives. A concern for historiographical matters generally does not appear in these publications, while illustrations and institutional mythologies prevail. Concern for educational missions, research, scholarly achievements, as well as intellectual position in the larger higher education landscape is less demanding. The staples of student life and administrative triumphs complement an emphasis on sports and overall institutional guiding figures. Institutional archival sources often serve as the basis for formulating the narrative.

Ex.: Verna A. Stadtman, *The University of California, 1868–1968* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970).

6 Private Publication

The privately written and published institutional history stands alone among the possible types available in the institutional history publication ecology. Indeed, it may take many forms and appear as limited editions, pamphlet-like works, illustrated histories, or focused on key figures and bellwether moments in the evolution of an institution. More importantly, subsidies originating from the institution itself or interested parties finance the publication. Generally, these accounts do not follow strict historiographical protocols, nor academic historical research procedures. However, a dependence on primary sources, even if occasionally a very specific selection, buttresses these histories.

Ex.: Daisy Woodward Beck, *Once Over Lightly: An Indiana University Story* (privately printed, 1962).

The Unique Case of the Illustrated History

In terms of palatable history, the illustrated history replete with photographs, maps, and visual asides is the photographic history.²⁴ For many institutions and institutional authors, it offers a ready-made potpourri of easily digestible and identifiable nostalgic cheesecake. Often uncritical, these works offer a narrative of carefully orchestrated storytelling with the advantage of hindsight and purposeful narrative drive. A quasi-cinematic tableau offers the reader a visual introduction into the life of the institution, its architecture, snapshots of student life, selected professorial lights, administrative notables, as well as daily activities selected to capture the spirit, if not the essence, of the institution's life course. Generally, accompanying this visual feast is the proverbial coverage of sports. Aside from the propagandistic nature of these histories, their importance for archival primary photographic and visual presentation may be valuable as primary source materials for historiographic study or inroads into larger collections of visual material available.²⁵

²⁴ For examples, see Christina M. Consolino and Michael Chmura, *Historic Photos of University of Michigan* (Nashville: Turner Publishing Company, 2017). For short vignettes and heavy illustrations, see Kim Clarke, *Always Leading, Forever Valiant: Stories of the University of Michigan, 1817–2017* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017). This book was published by the University of Michigan Bicentennial Office. See also John T. Bethell, *Harvard Observed: An Illustrated History of the University in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

²⁵ The primarily photographic histories published by Arcadia Publishing offer an invaluable primary source for historians of individual institutions and should be consulted, accessed May 31,

The Phenomenon of Specific Institutional Unit Histories

Unlike a history dedicated to an entire college or university, histories dedicated to a single academic unit provide a wide spectrum of genres. In the past thirty years, there has been a growing number of distinct histories focused on a single unit in an institution, such as a college at a university, a medical school or pharmacy school, law school, engineering, or a specific department. However, departmental histories pertaining to the humanities have rarely been broached or published as books. Professional schools are more likely to pursue their respective histories than a humanities entity.²⁶ They are frequently commissioned by the respective unit, authored by the unit, by a faculty member, or retired faculty member. Alumni have also authored such histories. These histories tend to follow similar trends in terms of format as proper institutional histories. They may be celebratory, often reminiscent, offering personal vignettes, and so on, besides presenting the evolution of a particular unit.²⁷ Some institutions have garnered a number of publications, works authored via commission or not.²⁸ Yet, these are more likely published

2023, <https://www.arcadiapublishing.com/Navigation/Subjects/Schools-Education>. As of 12 May 2020, 252 photographic books have been published by authors generally associated with these institutions. These histories include professional schools, universities, flagship campuses, as well as branch or affiliated campuses, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges.

26 A notable exception is the University of Toronto – there have been a number of such studies published for the University of Toronto: R. Helmes-Hayes, ed, *A Quarter-Century of Sociology at the University of Toronto, 1963–1988* (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 1988); Maddalena Kuitunen and Julius A. Molinaro, *A History of Italian Studies at the University of Toronto: 1840–1990* (Toronto: Department of Italian Studies, University of Toronto, 1991); C. D. Rouillard, *French Studies at the University of Toronto, 1853–1993* (Toronto: Department of French, University of Toronto, 1994).

27 For illustrative American and Canadian examples, see Kristen A. Yarmey, *Labors & Legacies: The Chemists of Penn State 1855–1947* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2006); Karanjit S. Rai, *Four Decades of Vector Biology at the University of Notre Dame: A Scientific Perspective* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1999); R. S. Fraser, *Cardiology at the University of Alberta, 1922–1969* (Edmonton: Department of Medicine, University of Alberta, 1992); Roche Duval, *Les Cémentements Éducatifs de l'Orientation et de la Pédagogie de 1943 à 1993 à la Faculté des Sciences de l'Éducation de l'Université Laval* (Sainte Foy: Université Laval, 1995); John W. Steele, *History of the Faculty of Pharmacy 1899–1999* (Winnipeg: Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Manitoba, 1999); Eric Damer, *Discovery by Design: The Department of Mechanical Engineering of the University of British Columbia: Origins and History, 1907–2001* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2001).

28 See Willie M Reed, *Celebrating a Continuum of Excellence: Purdue University School of Veterinary Medicine, 1959–2009* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2009).

by the unit or by the university press by special arrangements with or without the university press *imprimatur*.²⁹

Concluding Observations, Institutional Narratives, and Scholarly Considerations

As with any historical account, the need to minimize overt bias is imperative for an academic historian. To some degree, institutional histories reflect the nature of writing a history of a singular institution without sufficiently situating it within the larger spectrum of the history of higher education. However, each history does represent the attempt to provide an accounting of its *raison d'être* as well as provide a comprehensible and valuable picture of its value to its constituency and society. Given their mixed reception and value to a scholarly history of higher education, individual histories offer the professional historian a roadmap that may be traced and utilized for their provision of first-order history – this is, their value as secondary, if not primary sources in furthering rigorous historical scholarship. Indeed, some set an institution's position within a given context *in situ* but few do. Their true value lies in their attempt to mine primary archival sources, provide vignettes, first-person accounts and testimonies, and to provide a useful framework of what has been pursued. For historians and graduate students of higher education, they provide a treasure trove of information.

Scholarship devoted to the history of intellectual culture, in its different approaches, includes the histories of higher education institutions in their myriad forms. The attempt to establish a viable and efficacious approach for ascertaining the different types of institutional histories provides an approach that can be pursued among other possibilities. Limited to the United States and Canada, this approach offers insights into the nature of the established and growing corpus of such histories as they manifest themselves within the framework of publication types and trends. The salient purpose of this approach is to readily identify and

²⁹ According to a Research-1 university press director, “In these cases, it’s far more appropriate the books be celebratory. The sponsoring group gets something they can use to engage alumni, drive fundraising, bolster their department’s standing, use as gifts, etc.” “But the higher ups do care that we provided this service to make these departmental histories possible—every institutional administrator is constantly reviewing every aspect of the institution and asking university press directors, how does this advance and help our immediate community,” and “It really depends upon the author or sponsoring group to get their facts right.” Email correspondence with author, 4 June 2020.

situate the historical veracity of various individual institutional histories as they appear in publication.

This discussion has focused on the phenomenon of singular histories of higher education institutions, specifically Canadian and American. Their content and different purposes are as varied as their historical veracity and usefulness as historical narratives, especially scholarship. The approach developed to ascertain their characteristics, predicated upon a definitional model and glossary identifying various approaches, provides an efficacious introduction into this variegated primary and historiographic corpus. With necessary qualification and modification, it may be applied to other groups of institutions prone to writing their histories.

Since their inception, institutional histories have been and continue to be published and provide foundational material for further historical scholarship.³⁰ The history of higher education institutions is all the more richer due to their presence among distinct historical scholarship. Moreover, these histories provide valuable insights into individual institutional conditions as well as bibliographic and archival references and practices of self-presentation. They visually contribute to an institution's quotidian activities and built environment; illustrations alone can offer additional critical knowledge beyond textual treatments. Future research into institutional histories as a pragmatic approach for understanding the historiographic conditions characterizing individual institutions will add to articulating an informed historiography of higher education. Indeed, the spectrum of publishers and their relationship to institutions, authors, and authorial intent constitute a complex ecology inhabited by the historian, the institution, and the publisher. These histories alone cannot provide the necessary knowledge required to develop a historiographically grounded collective history of higher education, but they serve as a necessary component in the intellectual vitality and significance of that history of higher education.

30 Some institutions have published more than one history or type of history, see Phillip Raymond Shriver, *The Years of Youth: Kent State University, 1910–1960* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1960); William H. Hildebrand, Dean H. Keller, and Anita Dixon Herington, *A Book of Memories: Kent State University, 1910–1992* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1993); William H. Hildebrand, *A Most Noble Enterprise: The Story of Kent State University, 1910–2010* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2009). Other institutions have garnered more than nine individual histories, including Harvard (30), Michigan (14), Oberlin (13), Princeton (21), Rutgers (10), Stanford (11), Pennsylvania (14), UNC-Chapel Hill (18), Notre Dame (12), Virginia (17), Wisconsin (10), UC-Berkeley (17), Tuskegee (11), U.S. Military Academy (14); McGill (11), Laval (10), Saskatchewan (10), Toronto (17).

About the contributor

Jean-Pierre V. M. Hérubel is Professor of Information Studies in the Libraries and School of Information Studies, Purdue University. His interests include historiography and theory, history of scholarly publishing, history of academic disciplines, and mapping historical scholarship. He has published studies on disciplinary cultures, bibliometric analysis, and scholarly communication.

