

Examinations, Degrees and Diplomas

Validation of Competences by Universities from the 12th Century to the Present

International Conference

Organized by Bruno Belhoste (IHMC) and Thierry Kouamé (LAMOP)

University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, September 6 to 8, 2018

Call for Papers

For Émile Durkheim, the granting of degrees fundamentally differentiated the medieval university from earlier educational institutions. Indeed, the validation of competences by universities, from the Middle Ages onwards, has taken the form of regulated examinations, leading to certificates, whose value was recognized by public authorities. As Pierre Bourdieu noted, this formal attestation of skills, which transcended the personal relationship between student and teacher, made the university the first institutionalized education system in history.

Sociology has long been interested in the functioning of university certification. Examinations, degrees and diplomas were analyzed as social institutions, instruments of selection, classification and acculturation, which contributed, depending on the author, either to social mobility or to the reproduction of the elites. Historians of education, too, have studied these issues, by making the degree an object of inquiry, whether it is the medieval and early modern Master of Arts or the modern French 'baccalauréat'. Furthermore, graduates as a class were subjected to a socio-cultural analysis in order to determine their place in society. However, few studies have scrutinized university certification comprehensively and systematically, across all periods¹. The time to develop such an approach has come.

With the collaboration of the International Commission for the History of Universities (ICHU), the 'Laboratoire de Médiévisique Occidentale de Paris' and the 'Institut d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine' organize an international conference devoted to the validation of expertise by universities, from the 12th century to the present. The purpose of this conference is to chart the historical development of university examinations, degrees, and diplomas, starting at the precise moment when the Church transformed the 'licentia docendi' into a standardized administrative authorization procedure. The papers will address these issues from a variety of vantage points.

Themes of the Conference

Theme 1: Modalities of University Examination

Specificities of university examination in relation to other institutions; the nature of assessment (oral, written, theoretical, practical, individual, collective, etc.); course of the tests (duration, eligibility/admission, defence, final/continuous assessment, etc.); the correlation between regulations and practice, and the extent of fraud.

Theme 2: The Work of the Examiners

Methods of judging (collegiality, deliberation, marking scheme, ranking, etc.); independence of juries (appointment, sovereignty, appeals, etc.); sociology of the examiners (social gap with candidates, positioning within university).

¹ This conference is in the wake of one of the few cross-periods studies on the topic: Bruno Belhoste (dir.), *L'examen. Évaluer, sélectionner, certifier, xv^e-xx^e siècles*, in *Histoire de l'Éducation*, 94 (2002), p. 5-199.

Theme 3: Nature of University Selection

Personal qualities assessed on examinations (merit, reputation, knowledge, skills, originality, conformity, etc.); hidden selection methods (examination costs, language of questioning, unwritten rules, etc.); relationship between the social background of the candidates and their success rates in examinations.

Theme 4: Ritual of University Certification

Symbolic analysis of examinations and graduation ceremonies (gestures, speeches, clothes, objects, etc.); public or private nature of the examinations and graduation ceremonies, rites of passage, institution, consecration, legitimation.

Theme 5: Social Function of University Certification

Social recognition of diplomas, debates on the social utility of the university training, role of graduates in society, contribution of university certification to the selection of elites, and in the phenomenon of social reproduction.

Theme 6: University Certification in Education System

Origin and evolution of the degrees and diplomas, weight of the university certification in the educational system, role of the degrees and diplomas in the control of academic curricula, comparison between university certification and other forms of validation across time and space.

Practical matters

Date: 6-8 September 2018

Place: University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne - 12, place du Panthéon - Paris

Languages of communication: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish

The organizers will cover the cost of accommodation and meals in Paris; travel cost remains the responsibility of the participants.

Deadline for submission of proposals: **20 September 2017**

Please send to the organizers (Bruno.Belhoste@univ-paris1.fr, Thierry.Kouame@univ-paris1.fr) the title of your paper and a brief summary, specifying the proposed theme to which it is to be related, and indicating position and institutional affiliation.