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# Mortar Board: A Century of Scholars, Chosen for Leadership, United to Serve

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“In celebration of its centennial anniversary in 2018, the authors have researched and written a history not only of Mortar Board, but also a history of the evolution and complexities of four centuries of American higher education as the context for Mortar Board’s development through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Additionally, the authors have referenced many of the corresponding national and world events that were occurring over the decades and that often shaped or influenced the activities and growth of Mortar Board. Originally established as an honor society to recognize college senior women for their scholarship, leadership, and commitment to service, Mortar Board continues into its next century now recognizing both senior college women and men who continue to reflect these ideals. The authors have captured the challenges that Mortar Board has withstood across the decades, with the earliest challenge being that of a women’s organization in a man’s world of higher education.”

—Mabel G. Freeman, *The Ohio State University (retired)*  
and *Mortar Board National College Senior Honor Society (past National President)*

“Virginia Gordon and Jane Hamblin provide a captivating history of Mortar Board and identify innovative programs established by chapters that are now woven in the fabric of higher education—career programs for women, freshman orientation programs, and leadership programs. Mortar Board members modeled collaboration and, during World War II, contributed to the war effort, including serving as airplane spotters. Mortar Board’s strong historical foundation challenges chapters and members to make a difference on their campuses and in their communities—to act on compelling issues that, as a group, they are uniquely well suited to address. One will learn much about students

and the commitment of alumni in this rich story of a highly acclaimed honor society.”

—Marylu K. McEwen, *Associate Professor Emerita,*  
*University of Maryland, College Park*

“A wise person commented, ‘One can drive safely only by periodically checking the rearview mirror.’ Through this comprehensive history of Mortar Board, we can ‘check the rearview mirror’ to review its evolution over the past 100 years. We are reminded Mortar Board began at a time when women did not have the right to vote and fewer than 4% of women in the United States had completed a bachelor’s degree. With utmost clarity we see the impact of historical events shaping Mortar Board—the Great Depression, WWII, the student protests of the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement, and Title IX. Familiar names of chapter and national leaders remind us of the visionaries who were determined ‘The Torch’ would always be held high.”

—Betty M. Nelson, *Dean of Students Emerita, Purdue University*

“*Mortar Board: A Century of Scholars, Chosen for Leadership, United to Serve* is far more than a skillfully written history of Mortar Board. Embedded in the richly detailed stories of Mortar Board’s founding and expansion are the histories—and herstories—of U.S. higher education, women’s rights, civil rights, and first-person accounts of the impact of Title IX. Using period-sensitive language over the century, the reader gains insight as ‘girls’ become ‘women,’ ‘Miss’ transitions to ‘Ms.,’ and ‘alumnae’ expands to include ‘alumni.’ The painstaking research and original sources result in a scholarly product suitable for classrooms and coffee tables alike.”

—Marlesa A. Roney, *Professor of Practice, Higher Education Administration, University of Kansas*

“This book is different from many organization histories in that it is well founded in the history of our country. The authors tie the history of Mortar Board to the events that were shaping the United States and the world. This is a story of women in academia, World War II, women’s rights, civil rights, professional development, Title IX, and how these events helped guide the formation of a national collegiate honorary dedicated to promoting equal opportunities among all people and emphasizing the advancement of the status of women.”

—*Mary Sadowski, Professor, Purdue University*

“This remarkable history not only chronicles the founding, expansion, and operation of Mortar Board, but it also provides an insightful look at how various societal and educational changes had an impact on higher education and the development of honor societies. From the time women were first enrolled in colleges and universities to the passage and implementation of Title IX to the challenges of today, this book does an excellent job of explaining how Mortar Board adapted and continued to grow as a thriving organization that celebrates and supports collegiate scholarship, leadership, and service.”

—*Tara S. Singer, Executive Director, Omicron Delta Kappa*

“There is nothing like a good story, and *Mortar Board* offers storytelling at its best, taking the reader from the organization’s beginning through its evolution to the present time. Mortar Board’s unwavering commitment to scholarship, leadership, and service has never changed during its one hundred years. Remarkable women, later joined by men, have steadily guided this honor society, always seeking ways to ensure its survival through inevitable challenges. Values, membership, and funding

are constant issues, and they are addressed in this very interesting book. Mortar Board is now one hundred years old. With continued careful stewardship, it will be good for another one hundred!”

—*Jane K. Smith, Assistant Vice President, Academic Services Emerita, San Diego State University; Trustee, Mortar Board Foundation; and Jane K. Smith Cap and Gown Chapter Adviser*

“In 1918, five college women who wanted a national honor society recognizing women’s achievements in scholarship, leadership, and service created Mortar Board. At that time, World War I and a flu epidemic were wracking the nation, men dominated society, and women could not vote. One hundred years later, the founders’ vision remains alive in Mortar Board, the premier national college senior honor society. Mortar Board members come together as ‘family’, sharing their commitments to leadership, service, and lifelong learning. While Title IX brought controversy and male membership in 1975, advancement for women remains a core purpose.”

—*Martha Lewis Starling, The Pennsylvania State University (retired); Mortar Board National College Senior Honor Society (past National President); and President, Mortar Board National Foundation*

“An outstanding read for Mortar Boards of all ages. In addition to being a narrative on the first one hundred years of Mortar Board—covering the overall organization, the collegiate chapters, the alumni chapters, and the Foundation—readers will find wonderful information on the history of higher education in the United States.”

—*David Lynn Whitman, National President, Mortar Board National College Senior Honor Society and Professor Emeritus, University of Wyoming*

# Mortar Board



*A Century of Scholars, Chosen for Leadership,  
United to Serve*

Virginia N. Gordon  
Jane A. Hamblin  
with Susan R. Komives

Edited by Jane A. Hamblin

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*On the cover:* This June 1920 photograph shows the impressive public ceremony for new members held by Mortar Board at The Ohio State University.

A procession of candidates wearing white, accompanied by outgoing members in robes, led to Mirror Lake, a legendary campus location, where the initiation was held. A breakfast followed. The Ohio State chapter still conducts an elaborate procession and “linking” of new members observed by family and friends. An indoor location for the initiation now controls for weather uncertainties since classes now end early in May.

All photographs in this book are copyright Mortar Board, Inc. or The Ohio State University Archives unless otherwise noted.

Additional material about Mortar Board, Inc. history can be found at [docs.lib.purdue.edu/mortarboard](https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/mortarboard).

This publication is intended to provide accurate and authoritative information based on reliable, original sources.

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Author **Virginia N. Gordon**, PhD, was assistant dean emerita and associate professor at The Ohio State University. A critical force behind the nation's growth in academic advising, Dr. Gordon wrote fifty books, monographs, book chapters, and journal articles on career counseling, advising administration, advising undecided college students, and advisor training. She was past president of the National Academic Advising Association and the

founder and first director of the National Clearinghouse on Academic Advising. She was elected to Mortar Board in 1948 at The Ohio State University. Dr. Gordon passed away on November 21, 2017.



Author-editor **Jane A. Hamblin**, JD, CAE, COA, is the executive director of Mortar Board, Inc., and the Mortar Board National Foundation and editor in chief of the *Mortar Board Forum*. She has played senior student affairs roles at Purdue University and the University of Maryland–Baltimore County and has been an instructor at Trinity Washington University (Washington, D.C.) and Purdue. Before coming to Mortar Board in 2009, Ms. Hamblin

had been a senior leader at three D.C.-based higher education associations. She was elected to Mortar Board in 1973 at Purdue University.



Contributor **Susan R. Komives**, EdD, internationally known scholar and observer of leadership development, is professor emerita at the University of Maryland at College Park. Executive editor of the inaugural *New Directions in Student Leadership* series, she has authored or edited a dozen books on leadership and student affairs. Dr. Komives is past president of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education and the American College Personnel Association and

served two colleges as vice president. She was elected to Mortar Board in 1967 by the Torchbearer chapter at Florida State University.

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# Identifying and Referring to Members and Referring to Chapters and Institutions



It is Mortar Board's custom to identify members, when their names appear in writing on first reference, by a parenthetical with their institution and the year of their initiation into Mortar Board: for example, Esther Lloyd-Jones (Northwestern University, 1922). This custom is continued in this publication. It is also Mortar Board's custom, in its other publications, to identify postgraduate initiates by the year of their chapter's installation. However, for this publication, we believe that it provides much richer historical information to supply the year the member was initiated into a local society that predated Mortar Board.

It was customary in the minutes of early meetings to refer to the delegate by the name of the school (e.g., Ohio State for Secretary, Swarthmore for Treasurer, and Syracuse for Historian). We retain this convention.

Though scores of national leaders (eleven of twenty-eight national presidents) held or hold doctorates or other terminal degrees, we eliminate most honorifics for ease of reading and on the theory that all members are equal. However, we refer to subjects with terms like Dean, Dr., or Prof. as a sign of respect for these Mortar Board and higher education icons.

What to call members of Mortar Board is a long-standing debate. "Members of Mortar Board" is always correct. In this work, we interchange this with "Mortar Boards," a usage common throughout the country. "Mortar Boarders" is not preferred, although many chapter members refer to themselves with this shorthand.

Before 1975, all Mortar Board members were women, so we refer to them with the Latin feminine "alumna/alumnae" to make distinctions between members who had graduated and collegiate members. After men joined our Society, Mortar Board has come to use the catch-all plural "alumni" for those who are no longer collegiate members. The words "college" and "university" are used interchangeably throughout the work in reference to an institution of higher education.

On second and subsequent references to an institution, we use an identifiable but shortened version of its name—for instance, University of Hawaii at Manoa becomes Hawaii beyond the first reference.

When appropriate, and depending on the time period, we have used "Miss" or "Ms." (a title that gained momentum in the early 1970s' women's movement) along with a woman's last name. In captions, we have often simply used a first name on second reference.

In spite of Mortar Board's belief in the advancement of women and equal treatment of women and men, we have let stand the word "girls" without further explanation or apology to provide context for society's expectations for college women through much of the last century.

—JAH

# Dedication



## *Advisors*

Every collegiate chapter must have at least one advisor, and as we in the National Office tell chapter leaders all the time, a team of advisors works best for the “most successful chapters.” The National Council has great expectations that chapters will reflect Mortar Board’s purpose well and do good things year after year to provide high-impact practices that add to the quality of student life. But the nature of a mostly one-year senior collegiate experience requires that there be “institutional memory” to ensure that the chapter keeps performing well. The advisor provides this essential historical ingredient to pour into the mixing bowl when officers make the transition at the end of the school year.

There’s another ingredient: being there to challenge, honor, and support your members. I ran across this well-reasoned advising philosophy written by one of our newly minted certified organization advisors:

It’s not my job to be their pal, even though I enjoy “my” chapter members. I believe that cocurricular learning through Mortar Board is icing on the cake of these high achievers. If I help

them plan and learn and then reflect, I feel great. But I can’t do that remotely. I have to be there to support them as they are learning. Otherwise, I don’t get my reward.<sup>1</sup>

“So,” the advisor continued, “even though it’s not in my job description to advise Mortar Board, I believe that it suits who I am as an educator. I make it work within the context of my family, my position, and my classes. It is energizing, challenging, and often hysterically funny. I’d miss a lot if I weren’t there.”

We dedicate this book to Mortar Board chapter advisors who believe in “being there.”

—JAH

## Note

1. M. A. Roney, “Why Advising Matters,” keynote, Leadership Excellence and Advisor Development Certification Program, San Diego, October 8, 2016.



## Editor's Note



*Mortar Board Historian Emerita*

*Virginia N. Gordon, Ph.D.*

*(1937–2017)<sup>1</sup>*

For all of her professional achievements in higher education, Virginia Gordon—Ginger—really saw herself as an amateur historian. She completed an extensive family history, a history of the Ohio State University Retirees Association, and the one-hundred-year history of the Ohio State chapter of Mortar Board, to name a few.

After many years on the national steering committee that developed the idea for some type of centennial publication, Ginger, in 2014, formally volunteered to write our one-hundred-year history. For a year-and-a-half, she worked in the National Office, at the Archives of Ohio State, and in her home office handling some 8,000 separate documents—minutes, letters and cards, telegrams, and transcripts—and reviewing at least 400 issues of our magazine, newsletters, and conference handbooks. Following the lead of historians of Mortar Board who came before her, she carried the right tone that makes for this one-of-a-kind publication.

After the overall history was written, in 2016 it was time for the histories of each of our chapters. Ginger was willing to let me bring archive boxes, a couple at a time, to the sofa by her desk in her comfortable home in Columbus. More often than not, by the next day she would e-mail with the message, “I’m ready for more.” I would bring even more boxes to the sofa, and darned if she didn’t e-mail me within a day or so, writing, “I’m ready for more.” Avidly and steadily, in a way that would match the methodology and drive of any professional historian, Ginger researched the founding histories of nearly 230 chapters. The stories she uncovered are a vital part of this book.

When it came to chapters five and six, it was Ginger who set the direction. Late in October 2017, at what turned out to be our last strategy dinner, she formulated a plan for completing the document that would highlight the one hundred Torchbearers of Mortar Board for our centennial.

Dr. Virginia Gordon did more behind the scenes in our Society than any member in all of our one hundred years. She always put the *more* in Mortar Board, and I would give anything for an e-mail from her right now that says, “I’m ready for more.”

—JAH

## Note

1. Early in 2018, the National Council awarded the title of Historian Emerita posthumously to Dr. Gordon.

# Introduction



One hundred years ago women students from five institutions of higher learning in the United States had the vision to form a national organization to honor outstanding college senior women. Although honor societies had traditionally existed for men on college campuses, there was no comparable national honor society for senior women. The seniors, who represented four established local women's honor societies, met to form a national organization in February 1918. Their vision resulted in the founding of the Mortar Board National College Senior Honor Society. Today the number of chapters has expanded to 232 colleges and universities, and the total number of members initiated into Mortar Board has surpassed a quarter of a million.

The general purpose of Mortar Board as envisioned by its founders has not changed over a hundred years. The preamble to the original constitution read:

We, the undersigned, recognizing the advantages of a national union of Senior Honorary Societies for women, do hereby bind ourselves together to form a national fraternity whose purpose shall be to provide for the cooperation between these societies, to promote college loyalty, to advance the spirit of service and fellowship among university women, to maintain a high standard

of scholarship and to recognize and encourage leadership, and to stimulate and develop a finer type of college women.<sup>1</sup>

Although some of the words composing this purpose have been changed or rearranged over the years (i.e., the reference to college women), the original reason for forming the Society has remained constant. Ninety-four years later at the 2012 national conference, the Society's purpose still contained the same points:

[Our purpose shall be to] . . . emphasize the advancement of the status of women, to support the ideals of the university, to advance a spirit of scholarship, to recognize and encourage leadership, to provide service, and to establish the opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas as individuals and as a group.<sup>2</sup>

## *The Setting*

Mortar Board was founded in an era of great societal and world unrest. When the college women representing the five local societies met



to form the new national honor society, the United States had been involved in World War I for almost a year. These young women were born at the very end of the nineteenth century as part of what Strauss and Howe call (quoting Ernest Hemingway) the Lost Generation.<sup>3</sup> This generation was reaching maturity during and just after World War I, when the country was in a period of great instability. The war had a profound effect on youths' changing attitudes and values. As one young man declared after the World War I armistice, "We have in our unregenerate youth . . . been forced to become realists."<sup>4</sup> The United States was a country of many immigrants—over nine million members of the Lost Generation were born abroad, more than any other generation up to that time. Over one fifth of all children worked in sweatshops. Many young people died in the great influenza epidemic of 1918.

At a time when many Americans were illiterate, an interesting paradox is that college attendance was increasing (the total college enrollment in 1916 was over 330,000 students).<sup>5</sup> There was an enormous expansion of state universities and state colleges of agriculture and mechanical arts. As detailed in the history of higher education in chapter 1, the "democratization of a college education" was unfolding, and the college curriculum was expanding.<sup>6</sup> Higher education increasingly was recognized as a way to improve one's social status and earning power.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the number of women attending college greatly increased. This was due partly to the rise of women's colleges and the admission of women to regular colleges. Women obtained 19 percent of all undergraduate college degrees at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Many other events had a strong influence on the status of women during this period, the most important being the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920 that gave women the right to vote. In addition to women's suffrage, this era also was known for prohibition, organized crime, jazz,

and the flapper, who set a fashion statement with her short bobbed hair, use of makeup, and knee-revealing dresses. One story relayed in the Mortar Board archives describes "one rebellious member with a bob who didn't want the dean of women to know about her haircut. So she saved her shorn hair to wear as an early version of hair extensions, known as a 'fall,' when required to meet with the dean."<sup>8</sup> Those in the generation before the Lost Generation who lived a conservative Victorian lifestyle found the antics of these new youths disgraceful.

So this was the world in which the Mortar Board founders lived. Traveling through Mortar Board's hundred-year history, one is struck by how the changing societal, economic, and cultural milieu reflects the values and interests of each generation of Mortar Board members. Chapter activities and service projects reveal the interests and values of its members at different times during the span of a hundred years. The Great Depression and World War II affected college students in profound ways, and the minutes of local chapter meetings recorded how their members were involved. The advancement of the status of women and women's role in the workplace are illustrated in many Mortar Board chapter activities and programs. During the 1970s national Mortar Board expanded into new types of institutions, and the profile of its members became more diverse. Title IX had a dramatic effect on the organization, as it made the transition from a traditional women's organization to coed membership. Delegates to the 2003 national conference adopted Reading Is Leading as the national project so that all chapters could be involved in a common theme as opposed to a different one every year.

During the early 2000s in particular, the role of technology changed the way chapters communicated with their members, with other chapters, and with the national organization. Mortar Board chapter programs and service projects continued to reflect the important issues that were of interest and concern on college campuses. Service to each

member's institution and its surrounding community continues to fulfill that part of the national purpose. "Advancing the spirit of scholarship and recognizing and encouraging leadership" are still central to each chapter's mission.<sup>9</sup> Mortar Board has not only endured for a hundred years while remaining a force on the nation's campuses, but its local chapters have also been at the heart of its success.

### *Centennial Celebration*

The story of Mortar Board's history and evolution contained in this volume is presented as part of honoring its centennial year. Implicit in this history are three general precepts that have sustained it over the past hundred years:

The **HEART and PURPOSE** of the organization as it has been kept alive by the ideas and talents of its student members and chapters.

The **CONTINUITY** of the organization as it has been maintained through the commitment and support of alumni, chapter advisors and college administrators who have provided their time and resources.

The **CHALLENGE** of the organization as it strives to preserve its founding Ideals and standards and endeavors to create a meaningful experience for outstanding college seniors.

Embedded in this history are areas of academic and societal importance that parallel Mortar Board's evolution and development. The history of higher education, the women's movement, the impact of legislation, and the influence of cultural changes on different generations of students can be studied by scholars through the lens of this

centennial history. The first chapter sets the context for Mortar Board's growth and continuity, examining the changing role and purpose of American higher education and the scope of Mortar Board's role within it. How has higher education been changed by legislation such as Title IX, for example, and how has this influenced Mortar Board's purpose and goals? Chapter 2 describes the evolution and expansion of Mortar Board as a national organization from its beginning to the present. This chapter describes major events that involved Mortar Board, Inc. and the Mortar Board National Foundation through different eras, organizational and structural changes, and important programs, projects, and traditions.

The collegiate chapters are the heart of Mortar Board, and chapter 3 records the fascinating histories of these local collegiate honor societies. The founding dates of so many of these local chapters reflect a growing need to recognize outstanding women students early in the twentieth century. These histories illustrate how activities, projects, and traditions continue to make local groups unique while maintaining an important national affiliation. Chapter 4 describes alumni members' influences and how they have provided continuity and support. Examples of specific alumni chapters' histories and programs complete this section. Finally, the last chapter speculates on future challenges and on Mortar Board's future role as it interacts with its members and college campuses. Appendices available online provide additional information about important people, programs, and milestones that have influenced Mortar Board over one hundred years.

It is hoped that this centennial history of Mortar Board can be used to not only record the remarkable journey of a national senior honor society but also engender a sense of pride in its members. This history also offers an unusual opportunity for scholars of higher education, women's studies, student life, and American history and others to use in their research. The history of Mortar Board reflects a mirror of

generations of college students as they were involved in the important and even mundane issues and concerns of their day. This history is ongoing, and it is imperative that future generations of Mortar Board students and alumni continue to record their involvement in this endeavor for the next one hundred years.

## Notes

1. The Ohio State University Archives, Mortar Board, (RG141/13/3), "Constitution and By-Laws, 1920."
2. The Ohio State University Archives, Mortar Board, (RG054/169/6), "National Conference, 2012." The purpose remains the same at the time of this printing.

3. William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: William Morrow, 1991).
4. *Ibid.*, 255.
5. Samuel P. Capen and Walton C. John, *A Survey of Higher Education, 1916: Bulletin No. 22* (Washington, DC: Department of Interior, Bureau of Education, 1919), 10.
6. *Ibid.*, 7.
7. "Women's History in America," Women's International Center, [www.wic.org/misc/history.htm](http://www.wic.org/misc/history.htm).
8. Alicia Notestone, "Mortar Board's Roaring Twenties," *Mortar Board Forum* (Spring 2009): 14.
9. "Bylaws of Mortar Board, Inc.," Mortar Board, Inc., [www.mortarboard.org/About/GoverningDocuments/](http://www.mortarboard.org/About/GoverningDocuments/).



# Mortar Board in the Role and Scope of American Higher Education

*Susan R. Komives*

Higher education in the United States is distinguished by several characteristics, including the diversity of institution type, the lack of a national university or ministry of education, a general belief in education of the whole person, and the promotion of cocurricular learning throughout the entire college experience.

Mortar Board as an honor society falls into the broad contemporary concept of cocurricular learning. To prize its position within higher education and to see how it developed as a significant factor in American higher education, a brief history of higher education and especially the development of cocurricular learning is useful. To understand its *significance* as more than a cocurricular organization, we'll take

a look at Mortar Board as a capstone experience for its members and its part in providing high-impact practices.

## *A History of the Changing Role and Purpose of American Higher Education*

The roots of contemporary American higher education began with the founding of Harvard University in 1636, 140 years before the American Revolution. For nearly four hundred years the industry of higher education has grown from this start. The mission and purpose of higher

education institutions, the role of faculty, the nature of students and their experience, methods and approaches to funding, governmental intervention, town-gown relationships, and curriculum development have intertwined and changed—and continue to change.

## The Early Years

Influences on the development of higher education in the colonial era through the nineteenth century came from England, Scotland, France, and Germany. Colonial institutions especially sought to develop a learned clergy by replicating the religiously centered educational models of Oxford University and Cambridge University. Harvard was founded by several men of the Massachusetts Bay Colony who were graduates of Cambridge's Emmanuel College. They adopted a classical curriculum and a residential college model, with *in loco parentis* (meaning "in place of the parent") defining the relationship between students (typically thirteen- or fourteen-year-old white men) and the institution. As the eighteenth century unfolded, the rise in denominationalism led to more faith-based institutions (e.g., Princeton, Brown, Rutgers, Dartmouth, Yale). However, as fewer sons of prominent community members wanted to prepare for the clergy, secular institutions also grew in number.

As early as the mid-1700s, the first cocurricular organizations emerged in the form of local campus-based and often secret literary societies that had their own libraries. Their members reveled in disputation methods and political discussions, much of which led directly to the discourse promoting the American Revolution. One of these transitioned to become the first honor society (and Greek letter-named society as well), Phi Beta Kappa, founded at the start of the American Revolution at the College of William and Mary in 1776.

The French supported the colonials in the American Revolution. French influence continued beyond the war in higher education on Thomas Jefferson in particular, with his adoption at the University of Virginia of a faculty-run institution like the University of Paris, which viewed the university as a state within a state, largely independent of government control.

The role and purpose of higher education broadened in the fledgling United States, reflecting President Andrew Jackson's assertion that the common man also wanted an education for his sons. The need for state-offered higher education became apparent. Colonial colleges, however, were private institutions that rejected government takeover. While several universities claim to be the "first" state college (e.g., the University of Georgia and the University of North Carolina), the first to have a charter, financial support, curricula, and students enrolled was "Mr. Jefferson's University" in 1825.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw an amazing diversification by institutional type and purpose. Consider the breadth of missions with the founding of institutions such as West Point, the first military academy (1802); the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the oldest technical research institution (1824); Cheyney College, now Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, the first black college (1837); the Georgia Female College for Women, now Wesleyan College, the first woman's college (1836); and Oberlin College, founded in 1833 and the first, in 1841, to graduate women with a baccalaureate degree alongside men. With many different kinds of students and more of them coming to these diverse institutions, more student societies emerged, including secret fraternities for both men and women. The first men's groups of this type began in the 1820s, and the first women's groups began in the mid-1800s. Predominantly and historically black secret societies (women's and men's) began nationally just after the start of the 1900s. The popularity of the local literary societies of the mid to late 1700s began to decline.

The first direct federal intervention in higher education was the Morrill Act of 1862, which further supported the expansion of public universities through grants of land to states that had not seceded from the Union (and at the end of the American Civil War was expanded to include the former Confederate states). The Morrill Act supported institutions' liberal arts core, emphasizing the agricultural and mechanical curricula for which land-grant colleges are known even today. Their mission was to benefit the citizens of their states and provide access by diverse citizens to postsecondary education.

The second Morrill Act in 1890 required states to show that race was not a consideration in admission or else to designate a separate land-grant institution for persons of color. This resulted in separate institutions for black students, which are the foundation of many of today's historically black colleges and universities. The permissibility of this racially bifurcated system was subsequently upheld by the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* and was not overturned until *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954. In practice, it took at least two more decades for race restrictions affecting admissions in American higher education to be considered discriminatory.

The end of the nineteenth century led to complexity in higher education growth. A profound innovation was the Germanic graduate research university model that emphasized freedoms of teaching and of learning and viewed the university as a workshop of free scientific research. The imposition of a Germanic graduate research philosophy and curricula on top of a largely English residential, student-centered teaching college created tension in mission and purpose that is still evident today.

Throughout higher education's early history, undergraduate faculty cared about the undergraduate student experience, and in the 1890s, college presidents began asking popular faculty to become deans of men and deans of women to capitalize on this concern. These new roles

had no precedent. Stanley Coulter asked the Purdue University Board of Trustees what his duties as a dean of men would be and said that "they wrote back that they did not know what they were but when I found out to let them know." Thomas Clark, dean of men at the University of Illinois, commented on his "untried sea" and observed that "my only chart was that the action of the Board of Trustees said I was to interest myself in the individual student."<sup>1</sup> Regardless of uncertainty in position description, these roles evolved quickly.

Also evolving at the end of the nineteenth century were Greek-letter organizations separate and distinct from Greek-letter fraternities and sororities. The Tau Beta Pi engineering honor society began in 1885 at Lehigh University, Sigma Xi (honoring scientific investigation) began in 1886 at Cornell University, Phi Kappa Phi (superior scholarship with no limit on area of study) began in 1897 at the University of Maine, Scabbard and Blade (military officers' excellence) began in 1904 at the University of Wisconsin, and Pi Delta Phi (French) began in 1906 at the University of California–Berkeley. By 1918 more than fifteen groups, either general such as Mortar Board or discipline-specific such as Tau Beta Pi, had begun and were growing nationally. Their founding concepts emphasized the importance of recognizing excellence *in* the classroom and provided a venue for students and faculty to mix *beyond* the classroom. These were truly cocurricular organizations, and their growth would require the attention of not only the deans of men and women but also the heads of schools and departments.

## Everything Expands in the Twentieth Century

The complexity of American higher education at the start of the twentieth century is mind-boggling and is chronicled well in the next chapter, which guides us through the founding of Mortar Board.



The members of Ohio State's chapter initiated in 1923 surround Dean of Women Elisabeth Conrad in this *Makio* (yearbook) photo. Front, left to right: Alice L. Lawrence, Marjorie E. Reeves, Dorothy L. Blue. Back: Marjorie E. Ferree, Kathryn H. Mathews, Miriam R. Gumble, Dean Conrad, Helen E. Cherington, K. Anita Landacre, Margaret A. Redfield. Source: *Makio*, 1924, 541.

As disciplines such as psychology emerged, ways of guiding youths evolved, including the guidance movement in public schools, the establishment of college counseling services, and the mental testing movement. In the vast United States, new types of institutions were needed. The first junior college was established in 1901 by William Rainey Harper, founding president of the University of Chicago, to allow students in distant Joliet, Illinois, to take their first years of study at home and then move to the university. The growth of this segment of higher education institutions has been steady over the past century.

The concept of *in loco parentis*, accepted practice in American higher education from the beginning, became legal doctrine in 1913 with the *Gott v. Berea College* ruling that institutions must stand in place of the parents to uphold the welfare of the student.

In the 1910s, educators such as John Dewey influenced the academy to consider education in the U.S. democracy as more than rationalistic and intellectual. His pragmatic philosophy asserted that learners be fully engaged in their communities; there was value in experiencing civil life. His work was foundational to concepts of cocurricular engagement, internship and cooperative experiences, service-learning, and the fledgling field of student affairs (begun by those first deans of men and deans of women navigating their new roles). In this milieu and era Mortar Board was founded in 1918 as the first and only national honor society for senior women. Omicron Delta Kappa had been founded four years earlier as an honorary for men of upper-division standing.

As the complexity of administrative roles grew, the American Council on Education commissioned a group to study the emerging role of student services (student affairs). The subsequent *Student Personnel Point of View*, published in 1937, one of whose authors was Mortar Board member Esther Lloyd-Jones (Northwestern University, 1922), explained that deans of men and women and their staff were committed to the development of the whole student, going beyond

intellectual learning to include dimensions such as moral and religious values, vocational skills, and social relationships. Each student was unique and had dignity and worth. These concepts continue as the foundation of student affairs today.

From the beginning, student affairs deans worked closely with student leaders to influence campus culture. This is borne out time and time again in the history of nearly every early Mortar Board chapter, which recounts that the members had the ear of the dean of women, and in return they served as listening posts and sounding boards for her. Thus began Mortar Board chapters' contribution to the quality of student life—what we would call today high-impact practices.

## Evolution in the Last Sixty Years

Contemporary higher education during the last sixty years shows movement from faculty, students, and administrators *internal* to the academy to entities that are *external*, such as boards of control, government, and the public at large. By the mid-2010s, higher education entered a new era of reexamination and the need to rebuild the public trust.

### *The 1950s through the 1970s*

Following World War II and the massive influx of students, including veterans supported by the first extensive federal financial aid initiative, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (or GI Bill), the 1950s became an era most influenced by *faculty*. Faculty developed their academic disciplines into specialties, numbers of faculty members doubled in many departments, and faculty members led the way in determining new policies for student admissions, general education, and campus governance.



The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965 supported a diversity of institutions and increased access to higher education through programs such as federal financial aid. The influx in the mid-1960s of the children of veterans dedicated to civil rights brought a loud *student* voice seeking equity by gender and race. These baby boomer activists used the campus as a platform to influence society and campus governance through protest. One of the growing concerns for them was the parietal regulations that were overly protective of women students and included curfews, dress codes, and gender-segregated housing. The concept of the student as an adult was created with the formal elimination of *in loco parentis* in 1969, reduction of the age of majority to eighteen years (the Right to Vote Act changed the Fourteenth Amendment in 1971), and the 1974 adoption of the Buckley Amendment to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, which changed parents' rights to access their children's academic information. This required rethinking the nature of the student-institutional relationship and led to a fiduciary and contractual relationship with students.

Deans listened to their student leaders to accomplish needed societal change. At Purdue, for instance, it was Mortar Board and the Association of Women Students that encouraged Dean of Women Helen B. Schleman (Northwestern, 1923) that like men, women students did not need parietal hours. Associate Dean M. Beverley Stone (University of Arkansas, 1955) recalled that each semester these parietal hours were lessened, women's grade point averages actually *increased*. As a Society governed by its collegiate members nationally, Mortar Board treated students as adults well before this became established practice by college administrators. Collegiate members led and made policy decisions for the Society, including the decision about the way that Mortar Board would respond to Title IX, which resulted in the inclusion of men in the mid-1970s.

The rapid growth in numbers of institutions in the 1960s, including large numbers of junior and community colleges and the increase in federal laws and regulatory policies, shaped the 1970s into an era of *administrators*. States established boards of higher education to coordinate their rapidly growing systems. Campuses added administrative staff to implement numerous federal policies such as financial aid and services for students with disabilities and to manage the admission of women to previously all-male institutions such as Yale, the University of Virginia, and Johns Hopkins University.

### *The 1980s through the 1990s*

Higher education institutions, disciplines, and other campus programs had grown rapidly in the 1970s, so by 1980 many associations and government entities called on them to examine their role, purpose, and mission and to address new needs created by campus diversity. The 1980s became an era of *senior leadership and boards of control* as presidents, provosts, senior student affairs officers, and trustees stepped up to numerous reforms that signaled the beginning of a new era of accountability. Nearly every institution revisited its mission statement to return to a focus on its core purpose, bringing renewed emphasis on undergraduate teaching, a commitment to campus diversity based on access and retention, a concern for campus community, a demonstrated need to assess everything to ensure evidence-based practice, and a new awareness of computers and the wonders of technology that would unfold past the end of the century.

The 1990s became the decade of "re-," with expectations to implement the reforms identified in the 1980s. Activities such as revisioning, reengineering, and reinvention focused on assessment of the outcomes of a college education. Technologies such as e-mail and the Internet

forced everyone who delivered higher education to rethink how and where learning occurred.

### *The 2000s into the 2010s*

For public institutions the 2000s was a decade of *increased governmental role*, as legislatures began to tie funding to outcomes. Federal involvement and intervention increased too, and the assessment of outcomes by regional and disciplinary accreditation agencies was expected. In 2006 U.S. Department of Education secretary Margaret Spellings's Commission on the Future of Higher Education became a lightning rod for higher education access, affordability, and accountability. Higher education found itself challenged to make its own case for its role in society.

In the 2010s, the public at large asked hard questions about the worth of a higher education based on perceived high costs. Higher education became strapped for revenue. Many public institutions shifted from considering themselves "state supported," then "state aided," to finally just "state located." The media and the public focused on ills of higher education in the wake of challenges to Title IX and the handling of sexual assault cases, cheating scandals, big-time college sports programs, hate speech, and ethical lapses by campus personnel. Under pressure of losing the public trust, higher education looked inward for improvement.

### *Student Engagement in the College Experience*

The history of American higher education is a story of a student body made up initially of monocultural young men to a student body diverse in every dimension including gender, age, race, ability, religion, and

sexual orientation. College students have evolved from highly controlled youths engaged in disputation and recitation pedagogies to adults engaging in experiential curricula that include a wide range of cocurricular experiences intended to create rich learning. Over its four centuries, American higher education, like its students, has become increasingly diverse, with a goal of offering distinct experiences that promote learning and development toward designated, desirable outcomes.

In recent years, many entities have defined these desirable learning outcomes for the college experience. The Association of American College and Universities (AAC&U), through its Liberal Education and America's Promise program, promotes the outcomes of

*knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world* to address contemporary and enduring big questions;  
*intellectual and practical skills* such as critical and creative thinking and teamwork and problem-solving across the curriculum;  
*personal and social responsibility* such as civic knowledge and engagement and intercultural knowledge and competence; and  
*integrative and applied learning* to deal with new settings and complex problems.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, a confederation of forty-two professional associations largely in student affairs, promotes six domains of outcomes:

*knowledge acquisition, construction, integration and application* such as relating knowledge to daily life;  
*cognitive complexity* (e.g., critical thinking, creativity);  
*intrapersonal development* such as ethics and spiritual awareness;  
*interpersonal competence* including interdependence and effective leadership;

*humanitarianism and civic engagement* including social responsibility and global perspective; and *practical competence* such as demonstrating professionalism and maintaining health and wellness.<sup>2</sup>

Accrediting associations for academic disciplines demonstrate common themes in the outcomes they seek, such as *management and collaborative leadership, interpersonal relations with diverse others, ethics, and lifelong learning*.<sup>3</sup> Students should demonstrate these outcomes across the whole college experience—in their major, elective course work, and employment and through cocurricular involvement in student organizations.

The assessment movement in the 1990s and 2000s sought to identify good practices that promoted desirable outcomes. Assessment gained national focus with the founding of the National Study of the Student Experience (NSSE) in 1998, which explained that

student engagement represents two critical features of collegiate quality.

The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning.<sup>4</sup>

Student engagement has been shown to benefit just about everything in the college experience from persistence to academic achievement, from cognitive development to leadership development, and from practical competence and skill transferability to acquisition of social capital.<sup>5</sup>

Years of study led the NSSE to identify projects such as service-learning, learning communities, undergraduate research with a faculty member, and applied work such as internships.<sup>6</sup> The AAC&U and NSSE partnered to present these high-impact practices (HIPs) to college educators. NSSE founder George Kuh wrote in 2008 that HIPs worked because they contributed significantly to all students' learning and development and were particularly helpful to those previously underserved, such as first-generation students. They include capstone courses or other culminating senior experiences.

HIPs “demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback. As a result, participation in these practices can be life-changing.”<sup>7</sup>

Though the terminology is updated, Mortar Board over its one hundred years has prided itself not only on offering a capstone experience, a HIP, to its members but also providing HIPs for other students.

A relatively new arena for assessment emerged in the 2010s. How do college graduates and alumni reflect the experiences they had in college that would contribute to their after-college success, involvement, and development? The Gallup-Purdue Index, released in May 2014, observed, for example, that alumni were 1.4 times more likely to thrive in a variety of measures of well-being (such as being engaged at work) if they had been highly engaged in extracurricular activities.<sup>8</sup> A consistent finding across diverse institutions is that the type of institution matters less than the level of meaningful engagement a student makes within that institution. That is, what a student does is more important than where the student is. True honor societies such as Mortar Board value and honor that meaningful engagement.

## *Mortar Board's Ideals: Scholarship, Leadership, and Service*

Over the history of higher education in the United States, scholarship, leadership, and service have been valued comprehensive outcomes for the college graduate. Woven as it has been into the fabric of higher education over the last one hundred years, it is no surprise that Mortar Board was founded on and continues to thrive because of these three factors—scholarship, leadership, and service. Mortar Board calls these Ideals, as they are always-moving targets for the highly engaged and high-achieving students who are members of the Society. The Society itself encourages its members to develop excellence in each of these three outcomes while in college and commit to lifelong excellence in the Ideals after college days have ended.

Although a fine grade point average may be an indicator of scholarship, a true scholar reflects learning at a high level of complexity, with demonstrated achievement in academic writing, outcomes of laboratory research, recitals and creative performance, publications, and conference presentations, among many other things. Mortar Board members are selected, first, on these expansive measures of a true scholar.

Contemporary models of leadership taught on campus emphasize collaboration, multiculturalism, nurturing inclusive diverse teams, being ethical, emphasizing process as well as outcome, and serving bigger purposes, particularly those advancing social justice. Mortar Board is a living laboratory where these principles are put into action. A well-advised chapter of the Society provides essential affirmation of leadership excellence and sets an expectation for collaborative, ethical leadership.

My own research in leadership identity development showed that what one thinks leadership is influences how it is exhibited. Leadership

is socially constructed. The view of leadership changes over experience, with support, and through exploring oneself in the context of diverse others.<sup>9</sup>

College students initially appear to view leadership as behaviors of persons in authority who attempt to accomplish goals while working with others frequently but trying to do everything themselves and reluctantly delegating. This confusing and hierarchical view changes over time so that leadership is also seen as a process that can be exhibited in nonpositional roles. An awareness develops: “I can be A leader without being THE leader.” This view of interdependence with others requires trust in the process of leadership and in new skills of collaboration and teamwork. Broadening the view of leadership to be both nonpositional and a process leads to the viewpoint that a positional role facilitates the active engagement of members in the work of the group.

The positional leader recognizes leadership as servant-leadership, relational leadership, and ethical leadership. Mortar Board chapters are populated by students already recognized for their *positional* leadership roles. As a group of leaders, they come to learn how to work collaboratively in the process of leadership within their chapter. They often develop a systems view of leadership that recognizes the interdependence of their organizations across their college or university and realizes their ability to leverage the capacity of their diverse organizations to benefit and change their campus community.

Recent research on leadership development affirms that a leader identity is both claimed and granted.<sup>10</sup> Like any identity-developing process, one may claim an identity (e.g., “leader”) that is then affirmed (or not) by others in the context. In this cyclical process, one may also have leadership ability affirmed and then come to a personal awareness and claim that identity. Most Mortar Board members have already held positional leadership roles affirming both the claiming and granting dimensions of that process. On occasion, someone is seen as a



Longwood University's Geist chapter sponsors and organizes the annual Oktoberfest, a highlight of which is Color Wars, with students who began on campus in odd-numbered years, the green team, pitted against those who began in even-numbered years, the red team. The goal is to get the most color on the white T-shirts of the opposition and then come together as a campus community. **Source:** *Mortar Board Forum* 42, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2011): 17.

leader by others but does not claim that identity, and the selection process of Mortar Board provides key affirmation to help the member internalize and claim that identity.

Many ask the question “leadership for what?” Mortar Board values leadership toward service that makes the institution holding the chapter’s charter a better place. Through its purpose, Mortar Board espouses going beyond viewing service as charity to understanding that service is real engagement that identifies root causes of complex issues and applies members’ excellence in scholarship and leadership in service of these causes.

### *Mortar Board as a High-Impact Capstone Experience*

There are two predominant ways of honoring students at the culmination of their undergraduate experience. *Honoraries* select students on designated criteria usually involving academic achievement. The bestowing of the honor recognizes excellence without the student’s commitment to further engagement. As an *honor society*, on the other hand, Mortar Board expects continued leadership and service to the college, the academic disciplines, and the entire campus community. Honor societies value scholarship and achievement and typically seek to select members who evidence quality in their leadership and in their service. Reciprocally, these Mortar Board members agree to actively serve in their senior year and bring great benefit to their institutions with their active engagement in enriching the culture of the institution. Over the years, wise deans of student affairs (and other advisors) worked with Mortar Board as keen observers of student life and engaged them in institutional change. The editor of the *Quarterly* asked deans of women to give their view of the role of Mortar Board

on campus. Their responses present a broad range of ideas, thoughts, and suggestions. Virginia Frobes (Utah, 1932), dean at the University of Utah, wrote that

I resist strongly the possibility that Mortar Board is just another activity in which members “give service” and “do projects.” For this special group of women, Service should become a means, Leadership a tool, and Scholarship an attitude, which all combine to achieve the objective of becoming a truly educated woman.<sup>11</sup>

Nora Chaffin (Vanderbilt University, 1948), dean at Vanderbilt, suggested that “it is [Mortar Board members’] responsibility to invest their personal gifts and accomplishments in furthering the welfare of their school and contemporaries.” Katherine Sherrill (Hood, 1955), Hood College’s dean, advised that “it is in the realm of ideas that Mortar Board can and must play its most important role.”<sup>12</sup>

Mortar Board is a marvelous example of a senior capstone experience—a high-impact practice—that brings students together to serve their institutions and practice their collaborative leadership as a value of service. Mortar Board members become what John Gardner, former U.S. secretary of health, education, and welfare and founder of Common Cause, called “The Responsibles”:

All citizens should have the opportunity to be active, but all will not respond. Those who do respond carry the burden of our free society. I call them The Responsibles. They exist in every segment of the community—ethnic groups, labor unions, neighborhood associations, businesses [colleges]—but they rarely form an effective network of responsibility because they don’t know one another across segments. They must find each



other, learn to communicate, and find common ground. Then they can function as the keepers of the long-term agenda.<sup>13</sup>

This cohort model of a culminating experience with peers from across the diversity of experience at an institution is a tremendous example of a high-impact practice. Mortar Board is the first experience for many students of being in Gardner's kind of network—teaching them to step up and be the *Responsibles*.

Being in Mortar Board teaches members to see a systems perspective of their institutions and value the interdependence of all parts. Being in Mortar Board with other excellent leaders promotes and models the best of collaborative servant-leadership, as members share the leadership in their service. Being in Mortar Board at the ending stage of their college career advances the leadership perspectives of generativity, seeing leadership as a process and teaching, mentoring, and guiding others toward leadership excellence themselves. This culminating experience prepares Mortar Board members to transition to their new worlds of graduate study, careers, community obligations, and family obligations as highly engaged leaders willing to assume responsibility in all of those contexts. Mortar Board members are not spectators; they engage and make a difference in their world.

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Texas Tech's Forum Chapter President Gracen Daniel, like so many Mortar Boards, was engaged in her collegiate experience for reasons beyond the symbols of success.  
**Source:** *Mortar Board Forum* 46, no. 2 (Spring 2016): cover.

## Notes

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