

# WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY: A BRIEF HISTORY

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Wesleyan University was founded in 1831 by Methodist leaders and Middletown citizens. Instruction began with 48 students of varying ages, the president, three professors, and one tutor; tuition was \$36 per year.

Today Wesleyan offers instruction in 46 departments and 45 major fields of study and awards bachelor of arts and graduate degrees. The master of arts degree and the doctor of philosophy are regularly awarded in 11 fields of study. Students may choose from more than 900 courses each year and may be counted upon to devise, with the faculty, some 900 individual tutorials and lessons.

The student body is made up of approximately 2,900 full-time undergraduates and 140 graduate students, as well as 100 part-time students in Graduate Liberal Studies. A full-time faculty of about 300 is joined each semester by a distinguished group of visiting artists and professors. But despite Wesleyan's growth, today's student/instructor ratio remains at 8 to 1, and about three-quarters of all courses enroll fewer than 20 students.

Named for John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, Wesleyan is among the oldest of the originally Methodist institutions of higher education in the United States. The Methodist movement was particularly important for its early emphasis on social service and education, and from its inception Wesleyan offered a liberal arts program rather than theological training. Wesleyan's first president, Willbur Fisk, a prominent Methodist educator, set out an enduring theme at his inaugural address in September 1831. President Fisk stated that education serves two purposes: "the good of the individual educated and the good of the world." Student and faculty involvement in a wide range of community-service activities reflected President Fisk's goals in the 19th century and continues to do so today.

Wesleyan has been known for curricular innovations since its founding. At a time when classical studies dominated the American college curriculum, emulating the European model, President Fisk sought to put modern languages, literature, and natural sciences on an equal footing with the classics. When Judd Hall, now home to the Psychology Department, was built in 1870, it was one of the first American college buildings designed to be dedicated wholly to scientific study. Since the 1860s, Wesleyan's faculty has focused on original research and publication in addition to teaching.

The earliest Wesleyan students were all male, primarily Methodist, and almost exclusively white. From 1872 to 1912, Wesleyan was a pioneer in the field of coeducation, admitting a limited number of women to study and earn degrees alongside the male students. Coeducation succumbed to the pressure of male alumni, some of whom believed that it diminished Wesleyan's standing in comparison with its academic peers. In 1911, some of Wesleyan's alumnae helped to found the Connecticut College for Women in New London to help fill the void left when Wesleyan closed its doors to women.

Ties to the Methodist church, which were particularly strong in the earliest years and from the 1870s to the 1890s, waned in the 20th century. Wesleyan became fully independent of the Methodist church in 1937. Under the leadership of Victor L. Butterfield, who served as president from 1943 to 1967, interdisciplinary study flourished. The Center for Advanced Studies (now the Center for the Humanities) brought to campus outstanding scholars and public figures who worked closely with both faculty and students. Graduate Liberal Studies, founded in 1953, is the oldest program of its kind and grants the master of arts in liberal studies (MALS) and the master of philosophy in liberal arts (MPhil) degrees. During this same period, the undergraduate interdisciplinary programs, the

College of Letters, the College of Social Studies, and the now-defunct College of Quantitative Studies, were inaugurated. Wesleyan's model program in world music, or ethnomusicology, also dates from this period. Doctoral programs in the sciences and ethnomusicology were instituted in the early 1960s.

During the 1960s, Wesleyan began actively recruiting students of color. A number of Wesleyan faculty, students, and staff were active in the Civil Rights Movement, and the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. visited campus several times. By 1968, women were again admitted as exchange or transfer students. In 1970, the first female students were admitted to Wesleyan's freshman class since 1909. The return of coeducation heralded a dramatic expansion in the size of the student body, and gender parity was achieved within several years.

Wesleyan's programs and facilities expanded as well, and new interdisciplinary centers were developed. The Center for African American Studies, which grew out of the African American Institute (founded in 1969), was established in 1974. The Center for the Arts, home of the University's visual and performance arts departments and performance series, was designed by prominent architects Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo and opened in the fall of 1973. The Mansfield Freeman Center for East Asian Studies was established in 1987. The Center for the Americas, which combines American studies and Latin American studies, was inaugurated in 1998. The Center for Film Studies, with state-of-the-art projection and production facilities, opened in 2004.

An addition to the Freeman Athletic Center opened in 2005 with the 1,200-seat Silloway Gymnasium for basketball and volleyball, the 7,500-square-foot Andersen Fitness Center, and the Rosenbaum Squash Center with eight courts.

Fall 2007 marked the opening of the Suzanne Lemberg Usdan University Center and the adjacent renovated Fayerweather building, which retains the towers of the original Fayerweather structure as part of its facade. The Usdan Center overlooks Andrus Field (home of Corwin Stadium and Dresser Diamond), College Row, and Olin Library, and houses dining facilities for students and faculty, seminar and meeting spaces, the Wesleyan Student Assembly, the post office, the box office, and retail space. Fayerweather provides common areas for lectures, recitals, performances, and other events; it contains a large space on the second floor, Beckham Hall, named for the late Edgar Beckham, who was dean of the college from 1973 to 1990. In winter 2012, the historic squash courts building (41 Wyllys Avenue) on College Row was renovated; now renamed Boger Hall, it is the state-of-the-art home for the Gordon Career Center, the Paoletti Art History Wing, and the College of Letters.

Michael S. Roth '78 became Wesleyan's 16th president at the beginning of the 2007–08 academic year. He has undertaken a number of initiatives that have energized the curriculum and helped to make a Wesleyan education more affordable for many. He has emphasized a three-year degree program that can save families as much as \$50,000; eliminated loans for most students with a family income below \$60,000, replacing them with grants; and ensured that other students receiving financial aid are able to graduate without a heavy burden of debt. Allbritton Hall, opened in 2012, has become a hub of civic engagement—encompassing the Patricelli Center for Social Entrepreneurship, the Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life, and the Jewett Center for Community Partnerships. Four new interdisciplinary colleges also have been launched: the College of the Environment, the College of Film and the Moving Image, the College of East Asian Studies, and the College of Integrative Sciences. Another new initiative, the Shapiro Creative Writing Center, brings together students, faculty, and visiting writers seriously engaged in writing. Since 2011, applications for admission have increased substantially to record levels. During this time Roth oversaw the most successful campaign in Wesleyan's history. The campaign raised a total of \$482 million, including more than \$270 million in support of one of Wesleyan's highest priorities: new endowment and annual funding for financial aid.