



University Senate 125 Year History

Timeline based on the *“Living the Vision”* by Beth A. Bowser

- **1784:** The Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) established Cokesbury College at its first General Conference. (v)
- **1820s:** MEC General Conference granted Annual Conferences authority to autonomously establish educational institutions. (i)
- **1844:** MEC General Conference established a course of study for ministerial education after years of resistance to theological education. Factors contributing to this decision included difficulties in recruiting clergy, the poor reputation of MEC clergy relative to other clergy, and the increasing education levels of church members. (ix)
- **1868:** MEC General Conference created a Board of Education (Board) to oversee the collection and dissemination of scholarships and to provide supervision to institutions; it dealt primarily with administering monies for scholarships and institutional aid. (x)
- **1892:** MEC Board petitioned General Conference for the creation of a University Senate. The proposal was endorsed by the president’s association. The resulting University Senate was comprised of 16 practical educators from each General Conference district to provide coordination, guidance, and stability to the 117 MEC-related institutions and included one African American member. General Conference required that institutions must provide a historical and literary bible course. (xi, 4, 13)
- **1900:** MEC General Conference changed requirements from “practical educators” to “persons actively engaged in the work of education” to deal with the potential problem caused by too many retirees serving on the Senate. The Senate initiated a practice of doing site visits to institutions. (5, 8)
- **1908:** Senate required a minimum endowment of \$200,000 and gave institutions until 1916 to meet this requirement. (15)
- **1910-1916:** Senate appointed a subcommittee to undertake an ambitious survey project to gather detailed information on degree offerings, weekly recitation hours, and Methodist representation among students, faculty, and trustees at MEC-related institutions. The subcommittee also worked with two Annual Conferences to chart demographic trends and forecast demand, determine institutional needs, and suggest potential partnerships. Project was widely praised but struggled to get desired information from institutions and could not develop additional Annual Conference partnerships. Minutes of future meetings indicate no recorded consequence of this significant effort. (32)
- **1912:** MEC Board conducted a year-long investigation into the definition of Methodist college, indicating that MEC-related institutions should “frankly declare” the relationship and “aim to serve the Kingdom of Christ.” The Senate approved the Board’s language, although it was deemed by many in the denomination as inconclusive and unspecific. (19, 40)
- **1916:** MEC General Conference considered a memorial to require at least 4 hours of English Bible, but referred it to the Senate for consideration. The Senate did not adopt this practice. (38)
- **1919:** MEC General Conference empowered the Senate, rather than Bishops, to determine standards and qualifications for theological schools. (20)
- **1920:** MEC General Conference made official the practice of placing the Senate budget within the Board and using Board staff to support the group. Senate resolution to MEC General Conference offered the possibility of expansion beyond the U.S. The Senate briefly listed Wesley Foundations among the classification list. (2, 20, 31)

- **1924:** MEC General Conference removed Annual Conference approval as a requirement for classification and placed theological schools under advisory supervision of Board and Senate. (20, 27)
- **1925:** Senate published standards for theological schools in its handbook. (20)
- **1928:** MEC General Conference discontinued considering geographical representation as a primary qualification for Senate membership. As the market for higher education became less localized and regional accreditors gained prominence, technical expertise became the primary consideration. (5) 1929: Senate appointed a special committee to study Wesley Foundations. No recorded results. (31)
- **1930s:** MEC Board shifted focus to defining what is a Christian, rather than Methodist college. (43)
- **1932:** MEC General Conference empowered the Senate to begin approving non-Methodist schools of theology for students seeking ordination and mandated representation by precollegiate schools on the Senate, with a maximum of three slots to be reserved for this purpose. (2, 6)
- **1936:** MEC General Conference required that admission into ministry was contingent upon graduation from a Senate approved college. It also ruled that institutions could not receive church money if they were “established or acquired without approval of the Board of Education” or classification by the Senate. (9, 60)
- **1938:** Senate adopted standards of regional accreditors as its own. (23)
- **1939:** The Methodist Church (MC) was formed by uniting the MEC with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and Methodist Protestant Church, increasing the number of institutions to 140 and the number of senators to 21. MC General Conference deleted the requirement for “opportunities for Bible study” and removed the requirements for precollegiate representation on the Senate. It determined that members should now be appointed, in part, by the Board of Education rather than entirely by the Council of Bishops. (6, 44, 72)
- **1946:** Commission on Theological Education met for the first time and completed plans for a comprehensive survey of Methodist theological schools. (60)
- **1948:** The episcopal address at the MC General Conference asked the Board and Senate to take seriously that our institutions should “stand deliberately for something in the field of religion and the practices that religion demands.” Commission on Theological Education reported that the practice of accepting the American Association of Theological Schools list meant that some students fall below the Senate standards. Senate suggested to General Conference changing the requirement to be a BA or higher from US accredited or approved institution. (53, 61, 73)
- **1949:** Senate appointed an internal committee to examine religion on campus and requested that the president’s association, the Board of Education, and the Senate share best practices in church relationship and that the Board of Education add a staff person to study, encourage, and foster religious activities on campuses. (74)
- **1951:** Board adds a staff person and produces a checklist for campuses. (74)
- **1952:** Senate surveyed institutions to determine the amount of money being spent by on formal and informal religious programs. (75)
- **1953:** Senate, president’s association, and Board collaborated on projects including Religion in the Church College and the formation of the Faculty Christian Fellowship. (75)
- **1956:** MC General Conference determined that total classification responsibility should now reside with the Senate rather than jointly with the Senate and the Board. (54)
- **1956:** Higher Education was General Conference emphasis for the quadrennium. (67)
- **1960:** MC General Conference empowered the Senate to approve the organization and classification of theological schools or departments of theology in colleges or universities. It also empowered Senate to cooperate with the Board to study population trends and made recommendations to annual conferences regarding mergers, etc. (53, 54)
- **1965:** MC Board established the Methodist Foundation for Christian Higher Education to receive and establish monies to create “permanent funds” and to help institutions devise a consistent and increasing means of financial support. This was part of the denomination’s solution to the continued decreases in financial support from all sectors. (101,102)

- **1968:** The United Methodist Church (UMC) was created by the merger of MC and Evangelical United Brethren Church, increasing the number of institutions to 144. UMC General Conference added two paragraphs to the Book of Discipline regarding financial stability of institutions. (80, 83)
- **1968:** UMC General Conference determined that support to institutions should be provided using the MC model of working through Annual and Jurisdictional conferences rather than the EUB church-wide model. It offered to EUB institutions \$770,000 annually until 1972 to allow Annual Conferences time to increase their giving. It charged the Board with developing an educational plan and purpose to relate the educational institutions of the Church to the Church. Board was concerned with making clear legally that the church did not control the institutions. (101, 109)
- **1970:** All UMC-related institutions had attained regional accreditation. (83)
- **1971, 1973:** US Supreme Court decisions protected public aid to private institutions, assuming an absence of religious discrimination in selection of students and faculty; absence of required attendance at religious services; absence of required courses to indoctrinate or proselytize; and a strong commitment to academic freedom. Western Maryland College and Northwestern University disaffiliated during this era over issues with federal aid. (103, 104)
- 1972: UMC General Conference continued special appropriations to EUB schools until 1976. (101)
- **1973:** Senate appointed a special subcommittee to evaluate bylaws and charters of four year colleges. The subcommittee made a series of recommendations, including that colleges should remove all evidence of sectarianism, including requirements for majority of Trustees to be determined by the church or approved by the Senate, etc. (110)
- **1975:** Board appointed a National Commission on United Methodist Higher Education, an ad hoc body designed to terminate at the end of 2.5 years. (90)
- **1976:** UMC General Conference deleted the accreditation function from the Senate's charge, reframing it as the "professional education advisory agency for The UMC and all educational institutions related to it." It offered 8 purposes for the Senate, which included representing interests common to the institutions and the church; helping institutions to meet the standards of the church; monitoring institutions; gathering data; publishing annually a list of institutions; providing guidelines and counsel to institutions seeking new or renewed affiliation; assessing church relationships; and making available consulting teams. General Conference changed the election process such that 11 senators were now elected by the president's association, 5 from the Board, and 5 from the Council of Bishops; it indicated that care should be taken to appoint women and minorities to these positions. (86, 87, 89, 90)
- **1976:** UMC General Conference charged Board with reporting annually to the Senate on the levels of types of institutional support rendered by conferences and agencies and evaluating such support; studying trends in higher education and recommending and approving plans for institutional cooperation, consolidation, and merger; and evaluating, classifying, and determining eligibility for church support; approving changes in institutional relationship to any entity of the denomination; and investigating institutions. The latter function was moved because it was perceived as too time-consuming for the Senate to undertake. (88)
- **1977:** Board adopted 25 recommendations from the National Commission, including requiring accreditation (or in process of attaining it) and a statement of agreement with the supporting Annual Conference or agency; enhancing data collection and consultative services; and creating a Management Support System Unit and Legal Services Center. The Commission framed the denomination's role as providing a major means for a pluralistic society by sponsoring and maintaining a significant system of higher education not entirely dependent on the state. (91, 109)
- **1977:** The Carnegie Commission established guidelines for determining college and university status, a perennial topic of conversation for the Senate. (105)
- **1978:** Senate task force proposed balancing evaluative role with supportive one; planning regional meetings; and serving as a repository for data. Full Senate declined consultative role due to lack of funds or personnel. (91-92)

- **1979:** Senate appointed three task forces to implement recommendations from the National Commission - Church Relationships, Finances and Management, and Academic Quality. This began a period described in minutes as a renewal of the Senate. The Senate and Board also began using the MINDS data system to conduct trend analysis and comparative ratios (92, 93, 94)
- **1980:** UMC General Conference adopted higher education as the quadrennial emphasis. (103)
- **1980:** UMC General Conference changed the language of the Senate's charge from monitoring process (1976) to review process. It reduced the number of Senators elected by the president's association, Board, and Council of Bishops to allow for up to four at large, non-voting Senators who would be elected by General Conference and added one GBGM representative with voice but no vote. It accepted the Senate's proposed legislation that "declarations of church relationship are expected to differ...be of institutional design." The Senate produced broad guidelines for church relationship. (86, 99, 110, 111)
- **1982:** Senate instituted the use of categories to publicly describe affiliations: listed, listed with probation, and removal from affiliation. Privately, it subdivided "listed" into "without qualification," "with alert," or "with warning." It adopted guidelines for church relatedness, academic quality, and financial management. (105, 106)
- **1983:** Senate determined that all educational institutions should be reviewed once every ten years, established the current (2015) visit process, and developed the Commission on Institutional Review, Commission on Theological Education and Commission on Black Colleges. Senate produced 10 questions to review financial health and administrative effectiveness. (95, 104)
- **1983:** Following investigation into an institution for public mismanagement, the resulting probation, and its subsequent recovery, the Senate decided to use the Social Creed in cases where institutional integrity was in question. (113)
- **1984:** UMC General Conference increased the size of the Senate to 25 and set a simple formula that limited the number of presidents at the suggestion of the Board. UMC Board of Global Ministries petitioned General Conference to lift the requirement of Senate approval for its institutions, but the petition failed. (96, 97)
- **1988:** UMC General Conference added a paragraph indicating that the Senate should publish "the names of institutions of other historic Methodist churches which wish to participate in research projects, the insurance program, and technical services of the Board." (107)
- **1988:** Senate added a Commission on College Preparatory Schools. (95)
- **1989:** Senate changed the process for reviewing the 5 university-related schools of theology, determining that they would send only one team to review the entire institution as well as the theological school. (96)
- **1991:** Senate and the president's association had been approached by colleges in Latin America for closer ties. A meeting was planned during the 1991 World Methodist Conference, and the International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (IAMSCU) was formed. (107)