



# Logan Lounge

A Collective Blog for Current and Former Members (and Friends!) of the History and Sociology of Science Department at the University of Pennsylvania

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## The Origins of Us (i.e. Academic Researchers)

Have you ever wondered about where the hallowed traditions we associate with the modern research university--lectures, oral exams, written exams, research seminars, the Ph.D., getting a professorship, library catalogs--came from? Then you might want to take a look at a very interesting new book by William Clark entitled *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (University of Chicago Press, 2006).

This is a fairly long book, but it is filled with lots of funny side comments and detailed examples of how the practice of university life has changed over the centuries. The focus is on the German-speaking lands in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the place and time when many of these features emerged in their modern form. But he also spends a lot of time talking about earlier practices, especially at places like Oxford and Cambridge. This is a deeply researched and delightfully eccentric book, which should be interesting to academics in many disciplines...but especially those of us in the history of science.

Clark also integrates and interprets lots of visual images along with textual sources. The result is often both insightful and amusing. Take his discussion of oral exams. For those who have recently taken oral exams, or who will be taking them soon, there are some great 18th century images (see especially Fig. 4.3 on p. 99) depicting this hallowed event. (Some of the book's illustrations are reproduced at the [author's website](#).) And, anyway, the text is itself is often quite entertaining. For instance, check out Clark's description of one candidate's oral exam... does this bring up any memories for those who have gone through such exams?

"The candidate answered most questions by a hallowed academic strategy: silence. As the least important person in the room, the candidate fulfilled the exam's ceremonial and forensic nature by speaking least. The first two professors responded to the candidate's silence or ignorance at length, in part by giving the answers or trying to elicit them. The rhetoric indicates the exam's link with teaching as a perpetual examination, as well as its nature as professorial theater. The examiners performed as much for each other as they did for the candidate." (p. 100)

Here is just one more quotation, giving you a little bit of the feel of Clark's writing style, here in his own recounting of looking through professorial dossiers kept by German state officials:

"I love the smell of archives in the morning. After getting a whiff of a piping hot cup of fresh-brewed coffee and the morning paper (but not a German one), nothing is quite so satisfying as nosing through a big, fat Bavarian dossier." (p. 289)

How can you resist? Well, I should also point that the book does have a serious and worthwhile argument regarding the shift from oral to written cultural performance and the role of state bureaucracy and rationalization in the development of research university traditions we now regard as quaint or old-fashioned. He doesn't spend much time on what happens after the mid-19th century, alas, so the United States and the rest of the non-European world unfortunately get very little attention. (Granted, the book is already quite long and filled with rich details, so anything longer would probably be insufferable.) But for learning more about where the research university came from the early modern period to the 19th century, this is a fantastic source.

While I'm in the mood to recommend new publications, I see that Tom Gieryn has a new article on lab-field issues in the latest issue of *Social Studies of Science* ("City as Truth-Spot: Laboratories and Field-Sites in Urban Studies" vol. 36 [2006]: 5-38). We are planning to discuss this article in a little group we have here at the MPI. It looks promising.

posted by Jeremy @ [11:41 AM](#)

## 2 Comments:

● At [5:04 AM](#), Anonymous said...

Hello Linux software,news driver ,games <http://italiagame.org> G'night



● At [7:26 AM](#), Anonymous said...

Hi soft for windows software,news driver ,games <http://italiagame.org> Bye

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