

Over a Door at Harvard

Harvard University is a private Ivy League university located in Cambridge, Mass. It was established in 1636 by the Massachusetts legislature.

Harvard is the oldest institution of higher learning in the United States, and the first corporation (officially incorporated as *The President and Fellows of Harvard College*) chartered in the country. Harvard's history, influence and wealth have made it one of the most prestigious universities in the world. As an example, it has the largest financial endowment of any academic institution in the world, standing at \$27.4 billion as of September 2010.

Harvard was named after its first benefactor, John Harvard. Although it was never formally affiliated with a church, the college primarily trained Congregationalist and Unitarian clergy. Harvard's curriculum and students became increasingly secular throughout the 18th century, and by the 19th century had emerged as the central cultural establishment among Boston elites.



During construction of Emerson Hall (named after the Unitarian minister Ralph Waldo Emerson and home of Harvard's philosophy department), the university's president, Charles Eliot, invited psychologist and philosopher William James to suggest a suitable inscription for the stone lintel over the doors of the new building.

After some reflection, James sent Eliot a line from the Greek philosopher Protagoras: *Man is the measure of all things.*

James never heard back from Eliot, so his curiosity was piqued when he spotted artisans working on a scaffold hidden by a canvas. One morning, the scaffold and canvas were gone.

The inscription? *What is man that thou art mindful of him?*

Eliot had replaced James' suggestion with words from the Psalmist. Between these two lines lies the greatest distance between the God-centered and the human-centered points of view.

And how you choose between the two options will greatly influence your peace of mind and serenity of soul.

– Beecher Hunter