

# Research on the Board of Trustees System and Enlightenment of American Research Universities

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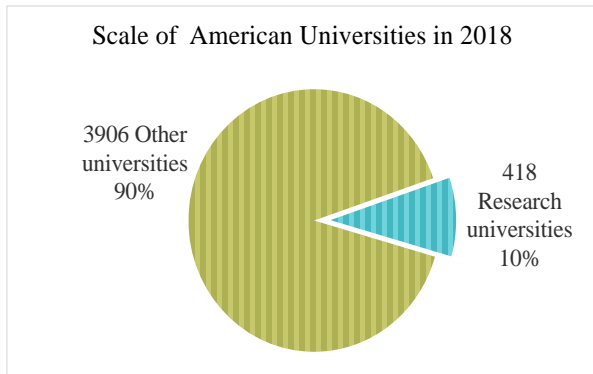
## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to study the board of trustees of American research universities by historical analysis method, survey method and other methods. The board of trustees is the most distinctive higher education governance system in the United States. And research universities are the main strength of American higher education. By studying the history and development, type and scale, responsibilities and mode of operation of American research universities' board of trustees, the results indicate that the board of trustees exercises its power under the guarantee of relative laws and regulations. In addition, there is a clear division of labor between the board of trustees and the principal of the university. Third, the board of trustees has a good operating model. By studying the board of trustees system of American Research University, it is of great significance to promote the construction of other universities' board of trustees system.

**Keywords:** the board of trustees, American, research universities; enlightenment

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The United States is the first country to implement the system of university board of trustees. Its operating system has constructed the model of maintaining ownership, decision-making power, and school-running power in governing universities. In 2018, there are 4,324 higher education institutions in the United States, research and 9.66% are research universities [1], which trained a large number of excellent students for the United States. It is of great importance to study the experiences of the board of trustees of American research universities to promote the construction of the modern university govern system.



**Figure 1.** Scale of American Universities in 2018

This paper studies the board system of American research universities with several different research methods, explores the balances between powers, clear rights and

responsibilities, and coordinated and effective operation, and then analyzes the advanced experience of the board of trustees of American research board to improve other modern universities' board of trustees. In addition, this research has certain practical value in improving the internal governance of other modern university boards, stabilizing the relationship between power subjects, resolving the conflicts of interest of different governance subjects, and improving university organizational strategies. Thus, it is of great importance to study the board of trustees of American research universities to promote the construction of the modern university govern system.

## 2. HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The American research university board of trustees is a typical lay citizen governing board which is dominated by people outside the university. In 1998, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges stated in a statement on institutional governance that although there are huge differences in the governance structure and functions of American research universities. And the existence of the lay citizen governing board equates American higher education with most other countries in the world. There are many names for the board of trustees in American research universities, such as the governing board, board of regents, board of trustees or board of overseers. The lay citizen governing board system is

mainly determined by the specific historical background of American research universities. As shown in Table 1, in 1642, Harvard University established the first American university board of trustees. The colonial government of Massachusetts decreed that the college must be governed by individuals from outside the school to form a board of trustees. For most of the 18th and 19th centuries, boards of trustees were the dominant force in higher education, while in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, university was the era of the president's rule. Since the middle of the 20th century, teachers had increasingly participated in universities' management, but the board of trustees was still in a leading role [2].

### **3. FUNCTIONS AND TPYES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF AMERICAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES**

#### ***3.1. Functions of the Board of Trustees of American Research Universities***

The board of trustees is the policymaker of the university. American research universities implement the principal responsibility system under the leadership of the board of trustees. The board of trustees is essentially entrusted by the public to manage and supervise the university. The board of trustees is the highest decision-making organization and the highest power institution in the university. One of the most important duties of the board of trustees is to ensure that the resources of the university can be effectively used to achieve the goals of the university. The responsibilities of the board of trustees are to determine the school's major policies, establish the university's development plans, review and approve school budgets, establish extensive out-of-school contacts, and make decisions on admission plans, professional settings and other major issues. Also, the university board of trustees is the "bridge" that makes the society and universities organically connected. It not only enables universities to raise funds from society effectively but also helps the school to better adapt to the needs of society. It guarantees that the university is not separated from society and plays a role in supervising the school. Lastly, the board of trustees played the role of "buffer" between the university and society. It protects research universities from direct government intervention, avoids the direct impact of political waves on schools and guarantees the independence and autonomy of universities [3].

#### ***3.2. Types of the Board of Trustees in American Research Universities***

According to the functional role of the board of trustees, American research university's board of trustees could be divided into three types: governing board, coordinating

board, and service agency[4]. The governing board is also called single-layer board with three different types: the board of trustees that manages a research university, the board of trustees that manages the same type of research universities in the state, and the board of trustees that manages all the research universities in the state. The basic function of the governing board is to formulate the school's policies, make decisions on major issues, and have the right to appoint the school's chief administrative officer. The basic function of coordinating board is to coordinate and make plans about the development of several different types of research universities in the state. And the basic function of service agency is to provide advisory opinions to the legislature of the state government, the president of university, governing board, and coordinating board. Usually, universities with service agency or coordinating board has its own management organization, whose functions are equivalent to the governing board [2]. Meanwhile, according to the hierarchical structure of the board of trustees, American research university's board of trustees could be divided into two types: one is the double-layer board, which was first created at Harvard University; the other is the single-layer board represented by Yale University. According to the legal status of the board of trustees of the American university system, it could be divided into two types: board with constitutional power and board with general regulatory power.

### **4. FUNCTIONS AND TPYES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF AMERICAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES**

As shown in Table 2, the board scale of public research universities is relatively small. And the scale of the public research university board of trustees is usually determined by the state constitution or statute of the founding university. And the frequency of meetings and decision-making efficiency are much higher. While the scale of board of private research universities is generally larger, but the frequency of meetings and decision-making efficiency are mostly lower. Board members usually include government officials, outsiders, principals, representatives of teachers and students. Other members are usually well-known people in the cultural, economic, legal, and political areas. For example, there are thirty-eight trustees in Pennsylvania State University board of trustees. Members are the Commonwealth Secretary of Pennsylvania, the Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the president, the Secretary of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Secretary of Education and Pennsylvania State Former chairman of the Alumni Association, six trustees appointed by the Governor, nine trustees elected by alumni, six trustees elected Commonwealth organized Agricultural Associations and

Associations, nine trustees appointed by the board of trustees, one teacher trustee and one student trustee [5].

**Table 1.** The number of boards of trustees of 10 research universities in the United States

Universities	Name of Universities	Number of Trustees
Public Research Universities	The University of Virginia	19
	University of Wisconsin at Madison	9
	Universities of Washington	10
	Universities of Maryland	8
	Universities of Florida	13
Private Research Universities	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	78
	Harvard University	39
	Universities of Pennsylvania	56
	Universities of Southern California	81
	Northwestern University	68

**5. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF AMERICAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES**

The main responsibilities of the board of trustees of American research universities include evaluating and appointing principals, checking the curriculum system construction plan, listening to the demands of teachers and students, setting university’s developing tasks and purposes, supporting and supervising the behavior of principals, reviewing education and public service planning, formulating school development policies and guidelines, appointing university administrators, authorizing the principal to manage the internal affairs of the university, appointing various university work committees, and managing and supervising the school finance. In detail, the first major responsibility of the board of trustees of American research universities is to select and evaluate the president. This is a key responsibility of the board of trustees and the board of trustees usually sets up a selection committee for selecting the president. When searching for candidates, the selection committee generally publishes recruitment advertisements in well-known public domain by the established selection criteria. Also, it contacts with teachers, students, alumni and other heads of universities and research institutions, government officials to let them recommend suitable candidates. When selecting the candidates, the selection committee shall conduct interviews with the candidates and vote for decisions. After determining the candidate, the selection committee submits the candidate list to the board of trustees to make the final decision. Besides, the board of trustees of the American research university is also responsible for evaluating the work of the principal. Second, the board of trustees is the legal representative body of the American university. As the highest authority of the university, no group can challenge the legality of the

board’s decision apart from the court and the parliament. Raising school resources is the third responsibility of the board of trustees. Fourth, the board of trustees generally requires the principal team to formulate a long-term development plan which needs to be approved by the board of trustees. Meanwhile, the board of trustees also needs to approve the annual budget. When the budget is not enough, the board of trustees must make a solution to the problem. Lastly, the board of trustees generally delegates administrative affairs to the team of principals and academic affairs to the council or professors’ committee. It does not interfere with daily operations, but has the role of supervising operations. Once the principal’s leadership style and the resulting performance are unsatisfactory, the board of trustees needs to choose an appropriate time to replace the principal and reorganize the administrative team [6].

**6. THE RUNNING MODEL OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF AMERICAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES**

Firstly, the board of trustees of American research universities needs to hold regular meetings. The charter of the university board of trustees generally stipulates clearly about the meetings’ time, procedures, distribution of meeting materials, meeting records and voting system of the board meeting and its subcommittee meetings. For example, the Bylaws of Massachusetts Institute of Technology board of trustees stipulates that the board of trustees must convene at least four regular meetings each year. The chairman of the board of trustees may advance or postpone any specified meeting date of the board. And the chairman of the board of trustees may organize a special meeting at any time. As shown in Figure 1, the principal is the chief executive officer of the board of trustees. And the vice president and secretary of the corporation is responsible for assisting the principal to coordinate the strategic work of the entire central

administrative department [7]. All written notices of meetings need to be sent to each member's ordinary address at least ten days before the specified date or the date of the change of the meeting. The written notice of the special meeting needs to be sent at least three days before the meeting. The notice of the special meeting should include the topics to be discussed at the meeting. All members could attend and participate in any meeting, vote on the decision and read the meeting records [8].

Secondly, there are several special committees under the board of trustees. The specific affairs of the board of trustees are mainly completed by these committees. For example, the Academic Affairs Committee is responsible for making recommendations on academic policies, the Finance Committee is responsible for supervising the finance of research universities and submits draft budgets, and the Development Committee is responsible for making recommendations for the development strategies and fund-raising plans of research universities. Each committee may propose policy recommendations by the board of trustees. Also, the members of the board of trustees need to participate extensively in the decision-making of each committee. Members of the board of trustees extensively participate in and intervene in the various committees, which not only ensures that the decision-making matters submitted by the committee to the board of trustees matching with the decision-making will of the board of trustees, but also makes a connection between the board of trustees and the committees. Moreover, the committees under the board of trustees must regularly report their work to the board of trustees.

Lastly, the guidelines and policies formulated by the board of trustees must be organized and implemented by the principal. The principal is responsible to the board of trustees and accepts the entrustment of the board of

trustees for daily management. Therefore, if the board of trustees is a "buffer zone" between the school and society, then the principal is the connection between the board of trustees and the school. Also, the principal is responsible for submitting the opinions and suggestions of teachers and students and other management positions to the board of trustees.

## 7. ENLIGHTENMENT OF BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF AMERICAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

First of all, the development of universities is closely related to the support of all sectors of society. trustees is the connection and link between the school and society. And members' identity, status, enthusiasm and ability will directly affect the degree of the development of universities. According to the successful experience of American research universities, the selection of board members should adhere to the principles of authority and diversity. The authoritativeness means that the members of the university board of trustees should be well-known people in the society that have a huge appeal and social influence. And diversity means that the source of trustees should be broad and representative, including representatives from government officials, heads of companies, experts in higher education, teachers, and even students on campus.

In addition, there are clear regulations, detailed specifications and interpretations for American research universities to run the board of trustees. With the protection of laws and regulations, the university board of

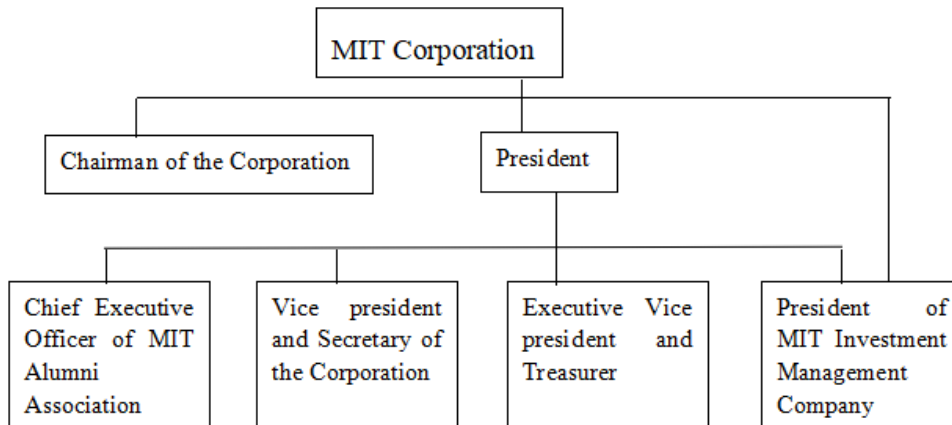


Figure 2. Senior members of Massachusetts Institute of Technology board of trustees

trustees can operate relatively independently without much outside control. The relationship between powers and responsibilities in the rules and regulations also makes each institution, including the board of trustees, have a legal basis, which can effectively balance the interests of

various groups, and avoid vested interest groups infringing the interests of the school [9].

Lastly, American research universities have clear regulations on the responsibilities of the principal, committee and board of trustees. The president of the university is the executive leader to manage the university.

The board of trustees establishes different functional committees through the provisions of the charter, sharing the power and responsibility of the board of trustees to manage the university. The principal and the board of trustees have clear responsibilities, which greatly improves the efficiency of governance. Each committee of the board of trustees also has a clear division of functions to assist the board of trustees in handling important governance matters. By drawing on the experience of the board of trustees of American research universities, there are three pieces of advice for the constitution of the board of trustees. The first one is to further clarify the responsibilities, powers, and benefits of the board of trustees and the principal to ensure that the board of trustees and the principal both have a division of labor and close collaboration. The second one is to make all members of the board of trustees being clear about their responsibilities and powers. The last one is to strengthen communication and coordination among trustees, committees, and the board of trustees of universities in order to create a good institutional environment. This makes the board members better participate in daily operations, exert their advantages and perform their duties and functions.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The university board system is conducive to balancing the interests of all stakeholders. The establishment of a board of trustees is the necessary element to establish a research university system and further improve university governance. American research universities have their school-running powers and academic independence right. Also, American research universities must actively reflect social needs and accept the care and supervision of all sectors of society. The board of trustees system is not only conducive to the internal management system of a research university, but also executes its supervisory function more effectively. The university is a typical stakeholder organization. Everyone in the organization should assume their responsibilities. The university board of trustees is the decision-making body of university stakeholders to express their opinions and can seek a balance among these stakeholders. As the highest authority organization of university management, the board of trustees of American research universities has three characteristics. The first one is that it exercises its power under the guarantee of relative laws and regulations. In addition, there is a clear division of labor between the board of trustees and the principal of the university. Third, the board of trustees has a good operating model. By studying the board of trustees system of American research university, it is of great significance to promote the construction of other universities' board of trustees system.

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