In these times of continuous change and challenges to higher education, it is not a bad idea to ponder whether or not its fundamental mission has changed. Most people accept that the main mission of colleges and universities is the transmission of knowledge. Whether that knowledge is used to teach skills, get a better job, or simply for advancement of intellectual growth, is that and has always been the mission of higher education.

The first institution of higher education was devoted to teaching things that we would consider the broad spectrum of today's K-12 schools today — reading, writing and counting. These studies would later lead to proficiency in both literature and mathematics. This training was exclusively offered to males and eventually copied religious texts for use in temples. And since medicine at that time was closely associated with religion, interest started to develop in medical and theological practices. We see the production of the first textbooks in Egypt over 3,500 years ago. Educated people formed part of the scribal class and were given high status in Egyptian society.

In the Middle East practical education was practical in nature and reserved to administration of the state. Al-Khwarizmi developed a more open system of education that was not only applicable for the sake of knowledge itself, mostly in the areas of mathematics and astronomy. The Greek philosopher Plato advanced the idea in the fourth century B.C. of a form of education that was totally different from what we consider as religious thinking. Plato hypothesized a clear separation of the state and the church. He suggested that the private lives of citizens should be separated from their public lives, and that the church should not have any role in education.

The modern university began in Timbuktu in what is now Mali in the year 996, it was located at the crossroads of major commercial routes in Africa. At this point it contained an extremely large collection of manuscripts, estimated at between 400,000 and 700,000. In 1270, the Mongols invaded the area, and the school was destroyed. This event is considered to be the end of all the earlier schools in Africa.

The modern university was established in the West in the 12th century, as a result of the need to train clergy and officials for the church. It was a time of great importance for the church, as the spread of Islam was causing a need for the church to expand and grow. The church needed new ideas and new ways of thinking to counteract the growth of Islam. The church needed to develop new ways of teaching and learning, and to create new institutions to support these activities.

The modern university began in France, where the university of Paris was established in 1200. This university was the first to be established in Europe, and it quickly became the model for other universities across the continent. The university of Paris was characterized by its focus on the study of theology, and the teaching of philosophy and law. It was also the first university to be granted the right to confer degrees, and it was the first to be granted the right to issue licenses to practice law.

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