The purpose of the following remarks is to explore more deeply the institutional context in which Buridan and Oresme pursued their academic careers, namely the thirty-five year period between the beginning of Buridan’s teaching career at Paris (c. 1325) and the date of his death (c. 1360), which preceded by only a few years Oresme’s move from Paris to Rouen to assume his duties as dean of the cathedral (1364). Much has been written about both men as well as the University of Paris at this time, but a more precise (and updated) understanding of the structure, operation, and resources of the university at that time has not been brought to bear on the relationship of their careers and of others associated with them.

Institutional Structure and its Meaning for Communication and Discipleship

The medieval University of Paris was a corporation composed of largely autonomous groups. This applies not only to its division into four separate faculties of arts, theology, canon law, and medicine, but was true of the four nations of the faculty of arts. Colleges of secular students as well as the convents that served as houses of study for various religious orders operated for the most part independently. Colleges came under the jurisdiction of the university, faculties, or nations only insofar as the masters and students who held burses in them also belonged to nations and faculties. Convents were even more autonomous and came under the jurisdiction of the university only insofar as their student members sought a university degree or their regent master participated in the meetings and academic exercises of the faculty of theology.

At the same time the boundaries that separated these different groups were porous and allowed a certain degree of contact and communication. This was not simply because the schools of the nations in the rue du Fouarre and the convents and colleges throughout the Latin Quarter topographically existed side by side. Students in the faculty of arts had the right to attend...
lectures of masters outside their nation, especially when during a particular term or year no master in their own nation offered lectures on some authoritative text needed to fulfill curricular requirements before proceeding to examination and determination. Disputations by their very nature brought members of these various groups together both as participants and as audience. Access privileges to libraries, even the libraries of religious orders, could be extended to favored individuals, although borrowing privileges were usually restricted to their own members. Thus, although much of a student’s academic life would be spent within the confines of the group to which he owed his allegiance, it would have been almost impossible for him not to be exposed to the ideas and viewpoints of those in other groups.

Both the self-containment and the interaction of the groups that comprised the university are important in order to understand issues of contact, intellectual influence, and discipleship or schools of thought. Inasmuch as Buridan belonged to the faculty of arts, as did Oresme before becoming a master of theology by 1342, albeit in two different nations, we need to look at how the institutional structure of that faculty affected their academic careers and their potential relationship.

In lieu of a matriculation list, which neither the university nor the nations at Paris maintained in the fourteenth century, incoming students in arts enrolled by mutual agreement with a master who would subsequently be responsible for overseeing their studies. The master so chosen had to belong to the nation with which the student would be affiliated on the basis of geographical origin. For purposes of enrollment and affiliation, the

---

1 See the statute of 1290 in Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis (henceforth cited as CUP), ed. H. Denifle and É. Châtelain, 4 vols., Paris 1889-1897, II, 46-7, #570.

9 Although no list of lecture courses attended by a student in the arts faculty survives from this period for Paris, an example from the University of Vienna in the late fourteenth century, cited by Denifle in Auctarium Chartularii Universitatis Parisiensis (henceforth cited as AUP), ed. H. Denifle and É. Châtelain, vol. I, Paris 1894, xxix-xxx, shows a student who took courses under thirteen different masters in the faculty of arts, most of them from the Austrian nation, but at least five from the Rhenish, Hungarian, and Saxon nations. The structure and practices of Vienna were based on the Parisian model.

3 In most cases the boundaries of the nations coincided with the boundaries of groups of dioceses. The French nation comprised all the dioceses in the ecclesiastical provinces of Sens, Tours, Bourges, Besançon, and Lyon, as well as the dioceses of Reims, Soissons, Châlons-sur-Marne, Metz, Verdun, Toul, and studens in the arts faculty from Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Parts of the dioceses of Liège, Trier, and Rouen (the French Vexin) were also included in the French nation. The Norman nation corresponded to the dioceses of the province of Rouen, with the exception of the French Vexin. The Picard nation included those from the dioceses of Beauvais, Noyon, and Laon on the southern edge of Picardy, and all dioceses north and east