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ABSTRACT

The presence of academically underprepared students at Vassar College from 1865 to 1890 and at Cornell University from 1868 to 1890 was a source of controversy in both institutions. Vassar took on the burden of providing for comprehensive preparatory education for academically-deficient students within the context of the college. Cornell, although publicly stressing that it was not a preparatory institution, did provide some opportunities for remedying academic inadequacies. Rather than creating a separate class of students and distinct preparatory course as Vassar did, Cornell offered subsections of college courses as well as tutoring. In addition, Cornell referred its underprepared students elsewhere for preparatory work. Complaints and protests regarding students' deficiencies in the basic skill areas are prevalent in the records of both colleges. The controversial presence of underprepared students led to a nineteenth century high school/college connection: the colleges worked to elevate the quality of secondary school curricula. However, the colleges viewed the presence of underprepared students as reflecting negatively on their public images, and underprepared students presented instructional as well as administrative problems. (SW)

THE CONTROVERSY OF THE UNDERPREPARED STUDENT AT VASSAR COLLEGE AND CORNELL UNIVERSITY, 1865-1890.

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Controversy has never been a stranger to American higher education. Indeed, controversy has enjoyed a rich and often colorful place in the history of higher learning in the United States. While many of the best know disputes in academe have revolved around the curriculum, the curriculum, by no means, has been the sole source of academic disagreement and dissatisfaction. Throughout its American history, the halls of academe periodically, if not regularly, have been disrupted by issues ranging from matters of governance to academic freedom to student behavior.

During the late nineteenth century, one of the significant but little known and least examined controversies centered on the issue of the academically underprepared student. The academic community, including: college presidents, boards of trustees, faculty, students, alumni, and supporters associated with diverse institutions ranging from the emerging state universities, such as Michigan to the new small, private colleges, such as Smith to the long established, prestigious institutions, such as Harvard faced the dilemma presented by the less than adequately prepared applicant. At the root of the "preparation controversy" was a basic question. What should the role of higher education in regard to the scholastically unqualified student be? Viewed from another perspective, the question became should colleges and uni-

versities admit students who were not prepared adequately in academics. On the level of practice, the question became should colleges and universities engage in providing academic preparation for students identified as being academically unqualified. Further, should colleges offer academic work considered to be on a subcollegiate level?

In his 1869 inaugural address as president of Harvard, Charles William Eliot responded to these questions underlying the issue of American higher education's responsibility to the academically underprepared student. President Eliot in assuming the Harvard presidency stated, "The American college is obliged to supplement the American school. Whatever elementary instruction the schools fail to give, the college must supply" (Eliot, 1869). Eliot's charge reflected what was often the common practice in colleges and universities of the late nineteenth century. Educating the underprepared student was a role assumed by most American institutions of higher learning. Contrary to popular belief, the academically unqualified student did not enter American higher education for the first time in the 1960's when open admissions and equal education opportunity policies and programs opened wide higher education's doors. Indeed, the admission of less than-qualified students has a long history in American higher education, and, indeed, it is a history of controversy.

Vassar College and Cornell University serve as examples of institutions which experienced the "preparation controversy." During the late nineteenth century, Vassar and Cornell provided a particularly useful context for examining the issue. This study

will focus on the period from 1865 to 1890 when both Vassar and Cornell were in the first stages of their own development. Each institution was new, the product of a liaison between a self-made business man and an educational reformer. Each was located in New York State. Each had new missions, in the case of Vassar to provide collegiate education for women, in the case of Cornell to provide any individual, any study. Each served new populations, the uninitiated in academic society. For Vassar the students were women; for Cornell they were the sons and daughters of "farmers" and "mechanics." Each admitted underprepared students. Each experienced controversy as a result of the presence of the academically deficient. Vassar and Cornell differed in the particulars of the controversy. Further, they varied in their approaches to the presence of these less than acceptable students. However, between 1865 and 1890, Vassar College and Cornell University provide a rich and worthy educational landscape for studying the controversial presence of the underprepared student.

Prepration Controversy, Vassar College, 1865-1890

In order to examine the "preparation controversy" at Vassar and Cornell, it is necessary to examine the histories of each institution beginning with their planning stages. The seed for Vassar College was sown in 1855, ten years prior to the college's opening to students. At this time, educator and minister Milo Parker Jewett met wealthy brewer, Matthew Vassar of Poughkeepsie, New York. According to Mr. Jewett, he planted the idea of a women's college with Mr. Vassar. Jewett's account recounts that he said to Matthew Vassar, "If you will establish a real college

for girls and endow it, you will build a monument for yourself more lasting than the Pyramids..."(Jewett, 1860). Vassar's response was indeed positive, and together Jewett, Vassar College's first president and Mr. Vassar proceeded to plan a real college for women.

Jewett, an innovative educator of vision, worked to insure that Vassar College's "plan of organization" would exact the highest academic standards of its female students. Jewett's "Report on Organization" repeatedly emphasized the need for the education of women to be of the best quality. A woman's education at Vassar College "should be limited only by her capacities and opportunities" (Jewett, 1860). Due to the combination of a variety of circumstances, Jewett and his experimental design for the higher education of women were gone by 1865 when Vassar College embarked on the course of actually providing higher education to women. In their place were John Howard Raymond as president of the college and a traditional plan for the college's organization. Vassar College still was committed to offering the highest elevation of collegiate education equal to the best higher education available at the best of the men's colleges (Vassar College, 1864, p. 11).

As President Raymond observed years later, "It is easy to build a college on paper. To produce the real thing is not so easy" (Raymond, 1875). Indeed, this was certainly the case with Vassar. September 26, 1865, the day Vassar College opened its doors to over three hundred and fifty students was the day the "preparation controversy" began. In his annual report to the

board, Raymond commented on the educational attainment of the first Vassar students. They represented "every grade...from that of a respectable College Junior down to a point lower than there was "any convenient way of indicating" (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1866).

Entrance examinations were given in the elementary English branches. Students were expected to demonstrate proficiency in spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, English grammar, and the history of the United States (Vassar College Catalogue, 1866, p. 26). Although Vassar's educational planners had anticipated that some of the first students would have deficiencies (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1866), they were totally unprepared for the results of the vast majority of students' examinations. Further, President Raymond and the faculty were overwhelmed by the amount of time, effort, and energy that were required to reorganize the college's educational plans and to mobilize the college's resources into realistic and functional structures and provisional operating plans. Strategic regrouping was necessary to bring "a fair degree of order" out of the existing "chaos" (Warner, 1888, p.5) which Vassar's first students managed to create with the revelation of their academic deficiencies and the diversity of their preparation (Taylor, 1914, p. 283).

President Raymond reported to the board that trying to classify the students and reorganize the college required "minute, laborious, and vexations detail" not to be wished on one's worst enemy (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1866). From the perspec-

tive of Martha Spooner Warner reflecting on the first days as a student at Vassar, the president and faculty faced a challange in trying to arrange a heterogeneous group of students "into an organized and working whole" (Warner, 1888, pp. 4-5). During Vassar's first days, President Raymond and the faculty were confronted with the disappointing reality of students who did not meet their academic expectations. In addition, they had to develop a reasonable strategy for dealing with these students, their deficiencies, and their diversity.

From the onset there was controversy around the issue of student preparation. While President Raymond and a number of facaulty members felt that Vassar College must meet its students at the academic level where they were, there were other faculty at Vassar who did not share this position. There were those who believed in and lobbied for the college's strict adherence to its academic requirements as stated. President Raymond reported the conflict of educational opinion to the board. He stated that there were some faculty and a number of advanced students who were disappointed and, "almost aggrieved" that students were not rejected on the basis of the entrance examinations and the paucity of their educational backgrounds (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1866). In addition to these internal objections to the admission of underprepared students, "some of the most intelligent friends of the college" argued against the admission of sub-standard students (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1866). Professor E. T. Frost had warned President Raymond that "it was a mistaken kindness on the part of colleges to adapt their conditions, or

their course to the circumstances of their Sub-Freshmen" (Frost to Raymond, 1864). Professor Knapp of Ancient and Modern Languages had a similar point of view. Knapp argued that rather than Vassar lowering or adapting its standards, inferior schools should raise their standards to meet Vassar's high requirements (Knapp to Raymond, 1865).

While Raymond was not against elevated entrance requirements, he opted to attend to other realities young Vassar College was facing. While it might be embarrassing for Vassar to lower its standards, Raymond thought it would be far more damaging to its image to have no students (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1866). In addition to the public embarrassment which would be produced by the rejection of over two-thirds of the students, Raymond responded to the fiscal realities facing the college. In order to meet its financial obligations, the college needed a large enrollment. In reporting to the board, Raymond observed that he thought it necessary on "financial grounds and with a view to the impression on the public mind, that the college should be at once filled." Further, he stated that Vassar's "door should be opened as wide as possible for the admission of students" (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1866). Since Vassar College found its first students to be academically unfitted by the uneven preparatory opportunities available to them throughout the United States, it found it necessary to take what it considered to be a necessary provisional course of action (Wood, 1909, p. 7; Morris, 1915, pp. 13-14). In doing so, Vassar College embarked on what proved to be a conflict ridden course

aimed at providing preparatory education for its underprepared students for the next twenty-three years.

Between 1865 and 1888, Vassar College struggled to bridge the academic preparation gap many of its entering students had. What developed out of these educative and sometimes remedial efforts was a new classification of students, preparatory students and eventually in 1872 a separate Preparatory Studies Program under the supervision of the Lady Principal, Miss Harriet Lyman. By 1872, it was clear to President Raymond and his supporters that the underprepared student was not going to disappear in the near future. When preparatory education efforts in the form of sub-freshmen classes for unclassified students were initiated in 1865, they were considered to be a stopgap measure, a provisional plan aimed at solving an immediate problem. However, rather than becoming unnecessary and obsolete, preparatory education efforts at Vassar developed and expanded in spite of the continued protest among the growing Vassar community. In 1875-1876, preparatory enrollment reached its all time high and constituted forty-five percent of Vassar's total enrollment.

The growth in preparatory enrollment at Vassar was accompanied by a growth in the controversy which surrounded the admission of sub-collegiate students to Vassar College. Opinions on the issue varied among faculty, admistration, students, alumnae, and friends of the developing college. Although there were differences of opinion, there was no lack of opinion. The longer preparatory studies and its students persisted at Vassar, the more the volume and intensity of the "preparation controversy"

increased. However, in the period between 1872 and 1876 as opposition to Vassar's preparatory efforts grew, so too did the preparatory enrollment.

By 1876, President Raymond began to express serious concern about the relatively steady growth in sub-collegiate level students vis a vis declining regular college level enrollments. Raymond warned the board in his 1876 Annual Report, that the shifts in enrollments were not simply a matter of increases and declines, but rather they indicated a "far more serious fact." They indicated that "the character of the institution was changing. Indeed, he went so far as to say if the trends continued that "within seven years the character and function of Vassar would be settled as that of a great preparatory school, of a secondary grade, fitting students for the colleges" (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1876). From Raymond's perspective as well as that of many others associated with Vassar College, the very identity of Vassar as an institution of higher education was at risk.

Not the least among those involved in the controversy were the alumnae. In fact, an alumna writing for The Vassar Miscellany in July of 1872 called on all alumnae to not relent in their efforts until the "reproach is wiped away." Of course, the reproach was sub-freshmen education (Vassar Miscellany, July, 1872 pp. 27-28). The alumna's article referred to preparatory students as "inferior forms" "recruited in a manner obnoxious alike to Faculty, Alumnae, students, and all judicious friends" (Vassar Miscellany, July 1872, pp. 27-28).

Sub-collegiate students were viewed as an embarrassment to Vassar College. Vassar's collegiate students shared this perception also. Preparatory students were called "avandal horde...bent only upon asserting themselves and their tastes, to the general discomforts of those who must needs to come in contact with them" (Vassar Miscellany, March 1882, p. 301). Further, collegiate students felt that sub-collegiate Vassar students frequently misrepresented the college by trying to pass themselves off as collegiate students. According to an editorial in The Miscellany addressing this problems, Vassar College had "no means of defense" against such misrepresentations and embarrassments (Vassar Miscellany, July 1877, p. 219).

Some Vassar Faculty did not want to be associated with preparatory education efforts either. There was an informal, unstated ranking of faculty at Vassar. Those who taught preparatory students and subjects were considered to be somewhat inferior when compared to those who taught upper class students and courses. Advanced students and their teachers were considered to be "a sort of aristocracy" (Wood, 1909, p. 7). Controversely, teachers of sub-collegiate students and subjects refered to themselves mockingly as only prep teachers, according to Frances Wood, one of Vassar's early faculty members and librarian (Wood, 1909, p. 7). In referring to faculty's having to engage in preparatory education, Raymond spoke to the board of "the waste of the teaching force required for the care of so many immature, undisciplined, and backward minds" (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1869). However, the task of teaching the underpre-

pared students was considered to be "a grim necessity" which (Taylor, 1916, p. 33) Vassar was "compelled to perform" (Orton, 1971, p. 258) as well as "an evil long endured" (Morris, 1915, p. 14).

As Vassar entered its second decade, President Raymond called for a "second founding of Vassar, (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1976). By this point, increasing numbers of the Vassar community expressed growing concern that the college was becoming half college and half academy, and academic minotaur. In an effort to arrest the college's shift from college to academy, Raymond called for the college's rebirth, a rebirth which would see the end of preparatory education. Thus, conscious efforts to reduce the enrollment of underprepared students and to eliminate the need for preparatory education began. In addition, administrative changes occurred which resulted in Preparatory Studies becoming a separate department with a distinct administration of its own. Vassar's goal was to put as much distance between the college and the department as possible with the ultimate goal being the elimination of the department altogether.

While internally efforts were underway to separate and eventually eliminate the need for preparatory students and education, alumnae and faculty worked externally to secure the same goal and, thus, rid Vassar College of the "preparation controversy." Alumnae organized to work for the improvement of secondary school options for Vassar applicants. Alumnae were urged to "work in establishing preparatory schools for Vassar "(Vassar Miscellany, January 1877, p. 119). Vassar alumnae were called on

to labor for preparatory schools outside of Vassar "which not only pretended to do, but did, the necessary work" of preparing students for Vassar (Vassar Miscellany, January 1877, p. 119).

Faculty also took positive steps to improve Vassar's image as an institution of higher education rather than as a half college, half academy. In so doing Vassar improved its relationship with secondary schools. Vassar faculty in an organized plan to improve the preparation of students, communicated with and visited secondary schools. Vassar wanted to dispose preparatory schools to recommend Vassar College to their students. Vassar also wanted to influence secondary school curriculum. In 1882-1883, the Vassar faculty frustrated by the controversial and unrelenting presence of inadequately prepared students voted to send faculty representatives to assess the work done in secondary schools, when those schools requested such a visit. Admission agreements were developed between Vassar and a number of secondary schools as a result. (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1884). In addition, Professor Dwight made a series of visits to secondary schools throughout New York State for the purpose of establishing "more intimate" relationships with the schools (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1884). Thus, the high school/college connection had its roots one hundred years ago in part in the "preparation controversy" at Vassar.

With the arrival of James Monroe Taylor to the Vassar presidency in 1886 came the beginning of the end of the "preparation controversy," at least for a while. One of Taylor's first acts was to propose the abolition of the prepartory department. The Vas-

sar community united in its support of the proposal. Thus, Taylor put in motion a plan for the gradual phasing out of sub-collegiate education at Vassar College (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1887). In 1888, Vassar College opened its doors and no longer had a program of preparatory studies. Indeed, by 1890 as Vassar College celebrated its first twenty-five years, it was finally free of the "preparation controversy." Regular collegiate enrollment was sufficient to support the college. Further, the state of secondary education had improved sufficiently to facilitate Vassar's getting out of the preparatory enterprise. Vassar finally had emerged as an institution of higher education.

Preparation Controversy, Cornell University 1868-1880

Cornell University had its beginning in the 1864 legistative session of the New York State Senate, where Ezra Cornell, the senator from Ithaca met Andrew Dickson White, the senator from Syracuse. Cornell headed the Agriculture Committee, and White chaired the Education Committee. In the course of Mr. Cornell's efforts to secure the Morrill Land-Grant funds to establish an agricultural college in Ovid, Mr. White recognized the possibility of realizing his own dream of founding a "great university." Cornell's proposal called for the funds being divided. White, however, did not want the money split. Instead, White believed the funds should remain in tact so that a single great institution of higher learning could be founded. Through personal and political negotiations, Senators Cornell and White joined forces and proposed a bill to charter Cornell University. Although efforts to block the passage of the bill were plentiful, on April

27, 1865, Governor Fenton signed into law the legislation chartering the Cornell University. Thence, Cornell, the wealthy builder and White, the visionary educator and Cornell University's first president, began to create the new university.

The opening of Cornell was no less eventful, no less exciting than the opening of Vassar. Hopeful Cornell applicants converged on the university at the end of September in 1868. Their number far exceeded the university's expectations. In fact, Cornell's first class was the largest ever admitted to any American institution of higher education up to that time. Four hundred and twelve students met the requirements, and sixty applicants were rejected. Those who were not admitted failed to meet the requirements stated in the first university Register. Applicants needed to "pass a thoroughly satisfactory examination" in Geography, English Grammar, including Orthography and Syntax, Arithmetic and Algebra to Quadratic Equations (Cornell University Register, 1868-1869, p. 42). Additional examinations were required of some applicants depending on their proposed course of study.

Early Cornell was not without its "preparation controversy," however. Of the students admitted, a number had conditions placed on them, requirements to be met beyond the standard curricular requirements. Cornell University, thanks to Ezra Cornell's extensive advertising campaign prior to the University's opening, attracted a number of students expecting the university to be all things to all people. In addition to the advertising, Mr. Cornell had an article published in the August 15, 1868, New

York Tribune stating that individuals could get an education while paying for it by working at the university (Becker, 1943, p. 131; White, 1907, pp. 344-345). In his efforts to attract students to the new university bearing his name, Cornell clearly communicated his motto, "I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study" (Cornell University Register, 1868-1869, p. 17).

In the early years, Cornell's words, "any person," "any study" were often taken literally. More than a few individuals came to Cornell expecting to be "taught reading and writing" (von Engelin, 1909, p. 113). Andrew Dickson White referred to extreme cases of applicants taking Mr. Cornell's motto literally. White recalled telling one student who came to the university to learn to read that he should return to the area where he came from and go to the elementary school. White also told of a Russian Greek, who came from Russia to attend Cornell in order to convert the United States to the Russian Greek Church (White, 1909, pp. 345-346).

Cornell's Registers, presidential reports, and minutes of faculty meetings give specific references to the number of students who were conditioned during the early years. The annual reports of the president to the board of trustees refer to students on condition, the inadequate preparation of some students, and the complaints of the faculty about the absence of basic academic skills among students. In his annual report of 1869, President White stated that "the utter ignorance of many [students] coming from the common schools of the fundamental branches is

astounding." In the same report, he also indicated that from the faculty's point of view the students' "failures in the common English branches are lamentable" (Cornell University, President's Report, February 1869).

The faculty in response to their displeasure with students' academic deficiences took action. The "Faculty Minutes" for December 22, 1868, indicate that the faculty resolved to publish the names of all students "who were conditioned or who had "unmistakably fallen below the standard necessary for continuance in the university (Cornell University, "Faculty Minutes," 1868).

During the first year, President White was authorized by the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees to "employ special instructors for students who are deficient in common English studies." White estimated that remedial instruction would consist of eighteen lessons at one dollar each (Cornell University, Proceedings, 1940). Thus, it is clear that Cornell University had its share of academically underprepared students.

Some of the first Cornell students reflected on the presence of scholastically unfit students. According to The Cornell Era, a student newspaper, "the Faculty sifted out a large number of those [students] who were not fit" for Cornell. In addition, the faculty "gave a gentle warning to many more." The Era reported that "The Faculty came down on the weak-kneed and indolent with a perfect vengeance." They conditioned many as well (The Cornell Era, 24 April 1869, p. 4). While the early Registers stated that "The University is not a school for instruction in preliminary English brances "(Cornell University Register, 1868-

1869, pp. 30-31), it is clear that the university admitted students who suffered from academic deficiencies in the elementary branches.

Cornell University was consistent and insistent in presenting a public image of high academic requirements. However, internally it had to deal with students who had been admitted with less than adequate preparation. Dealing with these students was the responsibility of the faculty. In order to relieve the full faculty of the burden of making determinations on the academically marginal cases and to bring some order to the process, on September 15, 1869, at the beginning of Cornell's second year, the Committee on Doubtful Cases was established. The purpose of the committee was to "decide upon doubtful cases of admission "(Cornell University, "Faculty Minutes," 1869).

In addition to the committee's efforts to assess questions regarding admissions, the faculty reviewed petitions from individual students who were seeking exemption from requirements or conditions placed on them. The "Faculty Minutes" are filled with numerous incidents of students' seeking exceptions to academic policy. Over the period of the study, however, the frequency of these requests greatly diminish. By 1872 petitions were sent to the faculty most suited to dealing with the requests. Further, in 1875, the faculty "Committee on the Matter of Conditioned Students" began to deal with categories of students (Cornell University, "Faculty Minutes," 1875). Thus, the work was streamlined.

A common type of student petition requested that a student

rejected in one curriculum be admitted to another or be admitted as a special student. For example, on September 29, 1869, the faculty considered and subsequently accepted the request of a student rejected in the classical course to be admitted as a special student in literature (Cornell University, "Faculty Minutes," 1869). At Cornell, there was an unadvertized but obviously well know second chance for rejected underprepared students. They could petition the faculty for acceptance as a special student. Indeed, many early Cornell students exercised this option.

Another type of petition Cornell's academically inadequate students presented to the faculty was aimed at adjusting degree requirements in individual cases. Students who were not academically prepared to meet all the requirements of a particular curriculum but were prepared to meet almost all of them often asked for an exception. Mr. D. was such a case. On June 24, 1870, the faculty carefully reviewed Mr. D's petition. They resolved that "Mr. D's dificiency in Greek shall not be an obstacle to his receiving the degree of A.B. (Cornell University, "Faculty Minutes," 1870).

While Cornell faculty dealt with student deficiencies by making exceptions and providing additional, supplementary instruction, they were not uncritical of the presence of scholastically deficient students by any means. Cornell's records have many indications that faculty were dissatisfied with the degree of preparation many students exhibited. Spelling was often a target of faculty criticism. Professor Shackford was reported to

have presented the juniors in his class with numerous spelling errors in their writing, In response, the students "each and every one of them utterly disclaimed authorship (The Cornell Era, 26 January 1872, p. 234). President White in looking back on Cornell's early years reflected that Cornell had "attracted large numbers who might better have been receiving instruction in high schools and academies "(Cornell University, President's Report, 1882). Vice President Russel reported to the board that some students had to leave the University "for want of habits of study, want of industry, want of ordinary intelligence" (Cornell University, President's Report,1881).

Faculty expressed complaints about underprepared students in their annual departmental reports first initiated in 1877. Professor Lucas, for example, argued that it was a waste of time "to keep a student in class a single term after he has shown himself unable" (Cornell University, President's Report, 1882). Professor Horatio White expressed a similar complaint and said too "much valuable time is required to be consumed" teaching students in elementary German class "the rudiments of English Grammar which should have been acquired before entrance" (Cornell University, President's Report, 1882). The underprepared student served to frustrate many of Cornell's faculty.

However frustrating they were, the students did not get ignored by the University. Although in all of its publications, Cornell University stressed that it did no engage in preparatory education and that it was strictly an institution of higher education, in actuality it did not overlook the academic needs of a

number of its less adequately prepared students. Without question, Cornell did admit unqualified students as its records strongly indicate. Further, it offered these students opportunities to remedy their lack of academic preparation.

Throughout its early years Cornell continuously raised its admission standards. Simultaneously it made exceptions for those students who fell short of the standards. Along with the faculty's making exceptions on an individual case basis, the University regularly provided opportunities for extra instruction in high risk academic areas. For example, The Cornell Era reported that forty-six students were conditioned in Physiology. Of those students, "thirty-seven form a special class to receive extra lectures" (The Cornell Era, 26 May 1871, p. 236). Similarly, the faculty voted to establish a subsection in Algebra for candidate who had "passed satisfactorily in their other studies" but who failed in Algerbra (Cornell University, "Faculty Minutes," 1869). Extra class sessions were a common remedy Cornell used in addressing students' academic deficiencies.

In addition to providing supplementary class sections, the University also on occassion provided and frequently recommended tutoring as a means of closing the preparation gap. Beginning in 1872, the Cornell Registers contained advertisements for preparatory schools which had developed in close proximity to the University. Mr. Kinne's School was one such shcool which was "preparatory to the Cornell University" (Cornell University Register, 1872-1873, p. 133). Kinne's School prepared students for the Cornell entrance examinations. Some of Kinne's students

also took some of their classes at the University.

Two Cornell professors, Mr. Mac Koon and Mr. Wait operated a "tutoring school" out of Cascadilla Hall, a Cornell residence hall. The professors supplemented their incomes by charging for rather extensive tutoring services for academically deficient Cornell students. Eventually in 1876, Mac Koon and Wait established the Cascadilla School which offered a full range of preparatory opportunities tailored to the requirements of Cornell University, ranging from one to one tutoring to classes in languages and mathematics (Cornell University Register, 1875-1876, p. 202).

Cornell alumni also provided preparatory options for inadequately prepared Cornell applicants. A.C. Green and D.R. Horton offered a summer preparatory program aimed at readying students for the Cornell entrance examinations (Cornell University Register, 1875-1876, insert). This intensive summer program gained in popularity in the next few years and was adopted by other schools.

Although Cornell never ran a preparatory program of its own, it certainlyexerted a strong influence over the growing preparatory opportunities available in the last quarter of the nineteeth century. In addition to supplying teachers and students for the programs, Cornell influenced the program offerings, the the curriculum.

At the same time, the University decided it needed to be more systematic in its admission of students by certificate, a method whereby students from certain secondary schools were ex-

empt from taking entrance examinations and admitted on the basis of their secondary certificates. By the mid-1880's, the problem of admission by certificate had grown into a University controversy. President Charles Kendall Adams, who had succeeded President White, told the board the chief fault with this method of admission was the absence of any provision "for an examination of the quality of work done at the schools whose pupils sought admission without examination" (Cornell University, President's Report, 1887). As a result, systematic "inquiries in regard to the schools from which application is made" was proposed by Adams. The purpose of the inquiries was to determine if "students making such application are properly prepared to go on with the work of the freshman class" (Cornell University, President's Report, 1887). By 1888, the Dean of the Faculty was given the responsibility "to insure uniformity" in the admission of students by certificate (Cornell University, President's Report, 1889). As part of its efforts to be more systematic in admitting certificate students, Cornell sent a questionnaire to the applicant's schools to be completed and returned to the Dean of the Faculty. Then, the Dean made an assessment and subsequently an admissions decision regarding the applicant. In addition to improving the process and quality of the preparation of the students admitted, this approach kept Cornell "constantly en rapport with the preparatory schools" (Cornell University, President's Report, 1889). Before retiring as president of the University, Andrew Dickson White had called for greater interaction between the university and the secondary shcools. In his final message to the board,

White called for the University to push its "roots" "down into and throughout the public school system." He said this would give strength back to the university as well as bring new strength to the lower school. (Cornell University, President's Report, 1885). White's message was heeded. Cornell University paid serious attention to developing stronger, more systematic communication lines with secondary schools under the leadership of Charles Kendall Adams. By 1890, Cornell had established solid working relationships with a number of secondary schools. In doing so, Cornell had once again addressed the "preparation controversy" and attempted to resolve it.

Between 1868 and 1890, Cornell University admitted students who were academically underprepared. As a result, the university experienced continuous controversy, a regular conflict about the preparedness of the students. While each year the President's Report indicated the quality of students had improved over the previous year, each year there were indications that some students fell far below acceptable levels of academic preparation. Cornell did not ignore the problems, although in public it denied them. The controversy remained an internal, private matter for Cornell. Nevertheless, there was a "preparation controversy" at Cornell University between 1868 and 1890.

Conclusions

The presence of academically underprepared students at Vassar College from 1865 to 1890 and at Cornell University from 1868 to 1890 was a source of controversy in both institutions.

During the period of this study, both Vassar and Cornell had to build, define, and refine themselves into credible institutions of higher education. Despite assertions of high standards, Vassar and Cornell, in fact, had to compromise those ever-increasing standards in order to accommodate the students who entered their wide open doors. Many of the students of the early years were ill prepared for the colleges, and, indeed, the institutions were not particularly ready for these students.

Both Vassar College and Cornell University opened at a time when the opportunities for preparatory education were limited, but expanding. Given the undeveloped state of preparatory opportunities available to the new populations both Vassar and Cornell served, it is not surprising that these institutions of higher education assumed some of the responsibility for filling the void.

The extent of institutional responsibility assumed varied, however, as did the extent of institutional controversy over the assumption of responsibility. Vassar, after assessing the conditions of women's preparatory education, took on the burden of providing for comprehensive preparatory education within the context of the college. Unlike Vassar, Cornell did not provide a formal preparatory program for its academically deficient students. In fact, in its registers Cornell stressed that it was not a preparatory institution. However, in spite of its rhetorical, public insistence on being strictly an institution of higher learning, Cornell did provide students with some opportunities for remedying academic inadequacies. Rather than creating a

separate class of students and distinct preparatory course as Vassar did, Cornell offered subsections of college courses as well as tutoring. In addition, Cornell referred its underprepared students elsewhere for preparatory work.

In doing its own preparatory work, Vassar College experienced a much more heated "preparation controversy" than did Cornell. For Vassar, there was a constant tension between trying to refine the preparatory education program in terms of instruction and administration and trying to eliminate it altogether. The administration, faculty, alumnae, students, and friends of the college labored to rid Vassar of its source of constant embarrassment, the preparatory education program and its students. However, as long as the revenue generated by preparatory students' tuition was needed by Vassar College, the preparatory program remained, and the controversy persisted.

By not maintaining a distinct preparatory program, Cornell University avoided the level of controversity which Vassar experienced because of its involvement in preparatory education. However, Cornell did have a more subdued controversy surrounding the lack of academic preparation many of its students brought to the university. Faculty, administration, and students alike called for adherence to elevated standards. However, exceptions to requirements on the basis of students petitions as well as the numerous program options Cornell offered provided Cornell students and applicants ample opportunity to circumvent the requirements. Cornell's institutional records, like Vassar's, are replete with evidence that the presence of scholastically deficient

students was a perennial source of controversy within the institution. Faculty complaints and protests regarding students' deficiencies in the basic skill areas abound in both Vassar and Cornell records.

Out of the frustrations and conflicts which Vassar College and Cornell University experienced because of the presence of underprepared students in each institution grew efforts to develop relationships with preparatory schools. In addition, both Vassar and Cornell worked to elevate the quality of preparatory education by influencing the secondary school curriculum. Thus, the intended impact of improved and working relationships with secondary education was to stregthen and elevate the level of higher education as well as to improve the quality of secondary education. Out of these high school/college liaisons came more standardized admissions processes for the colleges and more standardized preparation expectations for the secondary schools. Thus, the controversial presence of underprepared students led to a nineteenth century high school/college connection.

Another common concern Vassar and Cornell shared during the twenty-five year period of this study was the concern with their public images. Institutional records at Vassar and Cornell clearly indicate that both shared the perspective that the presence of underprepared students reflected negatively on the institutions' public images. In addition, these same students exerted an negative impact on the internal operations of both institutions. They presented instructional as well as administrative problems.

The most frequently cited reason for accepting underprepared students at Vassar and Cornell was the paucity of adequate preparatory opportunities available to applicants. In addition during the period of the study, admission requirements were quite idiosyncratic to colleges. Thus, even a student who had attended a secondary academy might well be unprepared for a number of colleges. The absence of standardized preparation and admission requirements made the task of getting adequate and appropriate preparation difficult. Vassar, like many other institutions of higher education admitted underprepared students because it needed the tuition revenue. Vassar was tuition dependent. Cornell did not identify its problem of underprepared students in financial terms, although it might well have been an unarticulated reason for accepting academically substandard students. Without question, the financial factor was not similar for Vassar and Cornell.

During the period from 1865 to 1890, Vassar College and Cornell University were each involved in the search for identity. The quest for recognition and definition was not an easy task for either Vassar or Cornell. As new institutions with new missions serving new students, the challenges and the obstacles were great. However, the promise and the possibilities were equally great. Both institutions energetically embraced their roles as developing institutions. In this process, they also participated in the complex controversy of academic preparedness. Although the meaning of preparedness and standards was modified in an upward direction, the controversy remained. The lowest levels kept

rising, but a lowest level continued to exist. Further, while the particular approaches to and programs for the academically underprepared changed at Vassar and Cornell, the desire to eliminate the problem of inadequate academic preparation persisted. For Vassar College and Cornell University, the years between 1865 and 1890 were marked by trial and triumph and somewhere in-between by continuous efforts to bridge the academic preparation gap and, thus, eliminate the "preparation controversy."

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