Building A Better University:
Psychology and the Search for Administrative Order in the 1920s

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College student John J. Kilgariff of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was mad—and maybe a little crazy. At the start of the 1930 academic year, in an open letter to *School and Society,* one of the nation's most widely respected journals of education, Kilgariff went off. For starters, Kilgariff admitted that he was "not yet a college graduate . . . [and] never expected to be." Since arriving at school three years prior Kilgariff said he had been lazy, skipped classes, and on the rare instances that he did attend not taken any notes. College, Kilgariff fumed, "was a futile pursuit," and contrary to popular opinion no "guarantee of success." Run by "parrot" professors who specialized in rote recitation and populated by "automaton" students bereft of original ideas, college was nothing short of the "height of folly." Convinced that there was no real learning in higher learning, Kilgariff concluded: "The only remedy [is] to abolish all colleges and to hang all professors."[1]

Needless to say, few people in or outside academe agreed with Kilgariff's radical solution to the mind-numbing uselessness of the modern university. Yet it is likely that even the most optimistic university booster would have agreed with the sentiment of Kilgariff's diatribe. In the first place, continuing a trend of accelerated enrollment growth that dated back to the turn of the twentieth century, in the decade following World War I student enrollments doubled to exceed 1.1 million students, ushering in the United States' first experience with a truly mass system of

[1] John K. Kilgariff, "A Modest Proposal by a College Senior," *School and Society*, 32 (September 20, 1930), 382-385.

higher education.[2] Second, high demand encouraged rapid institutional growth: a new college or university, or institution that called itself by that name, opened every ten days during the 1920s.[3] Third, slower relative growth among faculty than among students, compounded by insufficient academic and student housing space, reinforced students' sense that "impersonalism" was the defining characteristic of the modern university, if not modern life.[4] Fourth, during the 1920s between 50 and 60 percent of college students failed to graduate in four years, one-third of whom did so at some point during their first year.[5] Although a lack of financial resources was often a cause of student attrition, institutional research revealed that more students failed out than actually dropped out, and that many students left school for no readily apparent reason at all.[6]

What college administrators at the time dourly referred to as "student mortality" was not new to the institution. After all, four-year graduation rates had been steadily declining since 1900.[7] Yet the realization that, as one university president put it, "many students enter at the bottom but comparatively few go over the top" confirmed undergraduates' sense that the university was "a huge, heartless place" and raised serious doubts about the future of the

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[2] Enrollment figures in National Center for Education Statistics, *120 Years of American Educational: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington, DC, 1993), 78. Heretofore *NCES.*

[3] From 1919-1929, the total number of accredited institutions increased by 368, from 1,041 to 1,409; see *ibid.*, 75.

[4] In 1923-24 the faculty-student ratio was 1:12; in 1929-30 the ratio was 1:14. Professorial employment data, *ibid.,* 80.

[5] For national data from the 1920s, see Arthur J. Klein, *Survey of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, Bulletin No. 9* (Washington, DC, 1930), 281; William Mather Lewis, "Student Failure Rate Alarms the Colleges," *New York Times,* September 9, 1928, 137. For institutional trends during the 1920s, see Ivan A. Booker, "Reducing Withdrawals," *Journal of Higher Education,* 4 (May 1933), 249; George W. Rightmire, "The Floundering Freshman," *Journal of Higher Education,* 1 (April 1930), 185-192. "Student Mortality" referred to a student who for academic, financial, or personal reasons dropped out of school. University officials and researchers used "student mortality" interchangeably with "student elimination" or "The Freshman Problem."

[6] Klein, *Survey of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, Bulletin No. 9*, 474-75.

[7] Frank M. Phillips, *Statistics of Universities, Colleges and Professional Schools: 1927-1928, Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 38* (Washington, DC, 1929), 5. High attrition remains part of higher education. The average four-year graduation rate at NCAA Division I institutions is 56 percent, *The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac 2002-2003*, 30 August 2002, 12.

university itself.[8] The lack of a unifying institutional aim was often cited as perhaps the modern university's greatest shortcoming. "Undergraduate thought is now in a period of disorganization," confessed one professor. University leaders "[are] feeling around for a new adaptation, putting forth shoots in various directions with the hope of working out a fresh principle of organization."[9] But what should that principle be?

Piety and discipline, liberal culture, utilitarian training, and research were each suggested as possible answers. Yet, not one of these on its own came close to satisfying the crosscutting demands and expectations of administrators, professors, or students. "We are exposed for four years to lectures on Plato and Popular Astronomy, to courses in Roman History and Contemporary Poetry," griped one Whitman College student. "This scrambled mass. . . . [produces] intellectual paralysis which shrivels our enthusiasm and saps our vitality."[10] More than a few old-time professors predictably pinned the travails of the university on a surplus of poorly prepared students who "don't think—can't think, and never can be taught to think."[11] But a majority of professors and administrators took a more sympathetic view, shouldered at least some of the blame, and agreed with the opinion leveled by one distraught undergraduate: "The students of this generation are clamoring for attention . . . demanding consideration of our special problems . . . asking strange, new things of the university."[12]

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[8] Rightmire, "The Floundering Freshman," 185; Robert C. Angell, *A Study in Undergraduate Adjustment* (Chicago, 1930), 50.
[9] Robert C. Angell, *The Campus: A Study of Contemporary Undergraduate Life in the American University* (New York, 1928), 13-14.
[10] Howard Jay Graham, "We Young Barbarians," in *The Students Speak Out! A Symposium from 22 Colleges,* ed., *The New Republic* (New York, 1929), 4-5.
[11] Robert C. Angell, *Campus,* 43.
[12] National graduation rate information is difficult to determine with any real degree of certainty. According to a 1930 Survey of Land-Grant Colleges, 28.5 percent of students graduated; see Klein, *Survey of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, Bulletin No. 9* (Washington, DC, 1930), 281. Princeton University Dean Christian F. Gauss placed the graduation rate at 37%, see Gauss, *Life in College* (New York, 1930), 63. Quote in Ralph M. Stogdill, "An Undergrad Searches for an Education in College," *School and Society,* 32 (September 20, 1930), 378-79.

I argue that university leaders tapped the emerging science of psychology in order to make sense of their students' special problems, and that their romance of psychology transformed the ways in which the American university framed its entire educational enterprise. In adopting a psychological frame of reference, university officials found themselves on the cutting edge of systems' building theory and practice. Throughout the 'teens and twenties the modern military, big business, and American higher education turned, with varying degrees of sincerity, to professional psychology for scientific techniques to adjust and readjust individuals to evermore bureaucratized settings. By the mid-twenties, according to historian David Napoli, academic psychology's interest in the study of "adjustment" was the "fundamental topic of concern" within the profession.[13] Psychology staked its claim to professional competence by marketing social technologies to corporate chiefs, military planners, and university leaders that, they claimed, would aid in the adjustment of workers, soldiers, and students to the realities of laboring, fighting, and learning in a bureaucratized world.

While psychologists agreed that the study of adjustment constituted a fruitful research agenda, different camps of psychologists approached their investigations from divergent theoretical orientations. The extent of the professional rift first surfaced during World War I. As I explain in the first section of this chapter, the war provided psychologists with an opportunity to define their service, refine their technologies, and demonstrate the usefulness of their expertise in the crafting of social policy. Specifically, two loosely federated camps of psychologists—intelligence testers and personnel specialists—migrated to the Committee on Classification of Personnel in the Army armed with different theoretical assumptions and solutions to the adjustment of soldiers to life in the military bureaucracy. Intelligence testers insisted adjustment

[13] Donald S. Napoli, *Architects of Adjustment: The History of the Psychological Profession in the United States* (New York, 1981), 30.

was inborn and fixed, and that mental tests offered the most accurate measurement of it. By testing and sorting soldiers based on inherited intelligence, mental testers claimed that a rationalized and efficient bureaucracy could readily be achieved.

Personnel specialists, however, doubted the veracity of hardwired intelligence. Building upon the philosophical doctrine of contextualized selfhood first explicated by John Dewey and William James, this psychological camp entered the war believing that the achievement of adjustment required more than a mere mathematical calculation, as the intelligence testers averred. Rather, personnel specialists, as Morris Viteles explained, were interested in "individuals considered as total entities, as personalities, and in the influence of such 'total personality' differences upon individual adjustment."[14] Relying on crude but serviceable subjective assessment techniques devised for corporate personnel operations before the war, personnel specialists believed that adjustment was a product of emotional and experiential factors, and not simply innate intelligence. According to personnel gurus, personality was a complex and multi-dimensional reflection and projection of the individual in a social context, and the creation of harmonious bureaucracies depended on the continuous adjustment and readjustment of individuals and institutions.

Following the war, these competing understandings of adjustment shaped the ways in which all large-scale organizations approached the management of individuals. For reasons that I explore, personnel theory and practice proved to be especially conducive to the institutional design, political temper, and educational goals of the modern university. Its emphasis on malleable personhood and individuality fit perfectly with the institution-building agenda of American higher education. As I explain in the second section of this chapter, the university's adoption of what came to be known as the "personnel point of view" provoked more than

academic deliberations. To an extent not seen in contemporaneous business firms, whose interest in personnel management proved to be lukewarm, personnel theory captured the imagination of university leaders by providing a "fresh principle of organization": personality.

By considering the intellectual and organizational power of personality in the development of the modern university, this chapter raises doubts about social and cultural historians' existing, and still dominant, understanding of the emergence of personality as an historical construction. For the past three decades, scholars have accepted Warren Susman's "big bang" theory of cultural change. Historians have accepted his argument that the creation of personality as a modal type of selfhood was inextricably tied to the expansion of consumer capitalism in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. My study suggests that the development of Susman's "culture of personality" was more gradual and contested than previously assumed. Furthermore, in using the university as my test site, I demonstrate the importance of personnel theory—which has been routinely dismissed by business historians and historians of science—in the development of personality as a category of psychological research.[15]

As we shall see, administrators gave up on weeding out would-be failures and turned their attention to making the environment more flexible. They sought to accommodate a range of personalities rather than identify the "perfect" one because personality, unlike intelligence, was

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[14] Morris Viteles, *Industrial Psychology* (New York, 1932), 33.

[15] For the rise of a "culture of personality," see Warren I. Susman, "Personality and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture," in *New Directions in American Intellectual History,* eds., John Higham and Paul Conkin (Baltimore, 1979), 212-26. For works dealing with the rise of personality in higher education, see John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: An American History: 1636-1956* (New York, 1958), 317-38; Paula Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York, 1977); and Sol Cohen, *Challenging Orthodoxies: Toward A New Cultural History of Education* (New York, 1999), 203-26.

regarded as malleable. Once embraced, this framework all but demanded that administrators intervene on behalf of their students to build a better university.

I. Adjusting Soldiers and Reorganizing Bureaucracies

Sigmund Freud's celebrated 1909 Clark University lectures and young Walter Lippmann's exploration of Freudian ideas in his *Preface to Politics* four years later introduced members of New York and Boston high society to the affect of unconscious motivations in human behavior. World War I, however, represented psychology's true coming out.[16] By making psychological insight and practices a feature of the average soldiers' military experience, the psychology community's first mass sortie away from the confines of the university campus "put psychology on the map of the United States."[17]

Personnel specialists were the first group of expert psychologists to march off to war. Organized by Carnegie Institute of Technology (CIT) psychologists Walter Dill Scott and Walter V. Bingham, the personnel community matriculated from a wide array of professional contexts, including industrial and individual psychology, psychiatric social work, mental hygiene, and corporate marketing and advertising. Despite the odd assortment of professional affiliations, what these experts shared was a belief that "human relations" problems lay at the root of modern industry's most vexing challenges.[18] In many ways the rise of personnel theory was a response to

[16] Almost as soon as Lippmann embraced Freudian ideas in *Preface* (1913) he rejected them in his follow-up book, *Drift and Mastery* (1915). For details, see Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (New York, 1980), 76-79. Nathan Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985* (New York, 1995), 72-73.
[17] Franz Samelson, "Putting Psychology on the Map: Ideology and Intelligence in the Alpha and Beta Tests," in *Psychology in Its Social Context,* ed., Allan R. Buss (New York, 1979), 106.
[18] For details on the rise of personnel theory in American business, see David F. Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York, 1977), 257-320; Sanford M. Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions, and the Transformation of Work In American*

Frederick Winslow Taylor's "scientific management," which was based on the assumption that the worker was a key part of the production process and that his ultimate value was a function of the quantity of his production. Personnel management theory, however, viewed the worker as more than a machine, and they speculated that the pacification of labor would only occur if workers were made to feel like vital contributors to the industrial enterprise. Like scientific managers, personnel specialists aimed to make industry more efficient and hence profitable. Unlike the Taylorites, however, they believed that these aims could only be reached when managers looked beyond the "bottom-line" and honestly considered "the maximum well-being of the human element in industry."[19]

On the eve of World War I, however, utopian sentiments such as these fell upon deaf ears within the federal government. Of greater interest to officials within the War Department and the War Industries Board, which was saddled with coordinating the business sector's wartime employment and production effort, was personnel management's apparent skill in coordinating and rationalizing the organizational life of bureaucracies and the behaviors of the men who populated them. Perhaps driven as much by desperation as genuine affection, Bernard Baruch of the War Industries Board and Commerce Secretary William Redfield led the charge to increase the available supply of qualified personnel specialists to help manage the federal government's rapidly expanding administrative architecture. Given top priority by Baruch, within a mere year's time the government, working in concert with University of Rochester, the New School, Berkeley, and Scott's home institution, Carnegie Tech, trained 600 personnel managers to

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Industry, 1900-1945 (New York, 1985), 127-140; and Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*(New York, 1990), 159-212.

[19] Viteles, *Industrial Psychology,* 25.

streamline governmental-business relations and to bring a semblance of administrative order to the rapidly expanding federal universe.[20]

It was against this backdrop that Scott and Bingham, as representative members of the American Psychological Association, convinced the War Department to let them oversee the development and direction of the Army's Committee on Classification of Personnel. Having established personnel departments at companies such as AT&T, Carnegie Steel, and Westinghouse before the war, the arrival of Scott and Bingham relieved military leaders overwhelmed by the prospects of mobilizing a military force that in 1917 grew seventeen-fold in fewer than six months. Scott requested, and received near total control. By August 1917, Scott's Committee—which tapped the services of some 7,000 personnel specialists—was up and running.[21]

Scott was the supremely logical choice to head the army's recruit testing and placement program. Similar to many psychologists of his generation, he received his doctorate in psychology under Professor Wilhelm Wundt at Leipzig University in 1900. Following a brief stint at Cornell University studying under Professor Edward B. Titchenter, however, Scott abruptly abandoned his academic training as an experimental psychologist dedicated to unearthing the laws of mental life for a career in applied psychology. Scott's journey from a pure scientist dedicated to the introspective exploration of consciousness to an applied psychologist interested in the practical applications of psychology to everyday life was replicated innumerable times by other members of the psychological profession during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Although they maintained a toehold in the academic realm, the challenges of

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[20] Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy,* 144-45.
[21] Daniel J. Kevles, "Testing the Army's Intelligence: Psychologists and the Military in World War I," *Journal of American History,* 55 (December 1968), 569-71; Edmund C. Lynch, *Walter Dill Scott: Pioneer in Personnel Management* (Austin, 1968), 32-33.

America's secular, industrialized, urban culture determined psychology's research agenda. Psychology flourished in Europe as a pure science of mind. In the United States, however, psychology earned its professional credentials by lending a scientific hand to the nation's larger search for order.[22]

For Scott this meant using psychology to resolve business problems. From his headquarters at the Bureau of Salesmanship Research at Carnegie Institute of Technology before the war, Scott and Bingham and their junior associates designed and disseminated a host of novel, cutting edge psychological technologies to help business firms systematize the selection process, education and training of salesmen. The psychological instruments they developed and popularized—the personal history blank, the application blank, the reference letter, and the interviewer's scale and rating sheet—provided business firms with an ostensibly objective way to select the right man for the job.[23]

In fact, the Bureau's suite of tools was anything but objective, even for a fringe-branch of applied psychology not known for rigorous experimental design. Scott and Bingham asked business leaders to develop a list of characteristics and traits found in the "ideal salesman." Using the ideal salesman as their normative referent point, the "man-to-man" approach advocated by Scott essentially became an elaborate exercise in passing judgment. The application of the interviewer's scale and rating sheet illustrates this point. The first step required the rater to draw up a list of twenty-five known salesmen who ranked high, intermediate, and low in each of the following five traits: appearance, convincingness, industry, character, and value to

[22] On the American flight from pure psychology, see John M. O'Donnell, *The Origins of Behaviorism: American Psychology, 1870-1920* (New York, 1985).
[23] On the founding and early accomplishments of the Bureau of Salesmanship Research is available in Leonard W. Ferguson, "Bureau of Salesmanship Research," *The Heritage of Industrial Psychology,* 5 (Hartford, CT, 1963).

the firm. The rater than used this list in gauging the extent to which the five traits manifested themselves in a given interviewee.[24]

Ironically, it was precisely because of the subjective, rough-and-ready quality of the Bureau's psychological tools that made them a ready solution to the military's vast administrative problems in 1917. The personal history blank and rating scale emerged as blueprints for the Soldier Qualification Card, which was intended to aid in both the selection of army officers and in the placement of all soldiers into appropriate military vocations. It emerged as the centerpiece technology of the army's entire personnel operation. Created with the help of trade-test specialist Louis B. Hopkins of General Electric and psychologist James R. Angell of the University of Chicago, the card was administered by personnel associates during the introductory recruit interview. The Soldier's Qualification Card was approved for limited use in September 1917, and contained a record of all the personal information "deemed necessary in order to utilize [recruit] services to the greatest advantage in the Army."[25]

The card expediently organized a soldier's occupational, educational, and personal qualifications and attributes in a manner that helped personnel associates determine the best use for each new recruit.[26] Although it was administratively cumbersome—each recruit was interviewed individually—the Committee's array of assessment techniques helped efficiently place some 3,000,000 soldiers into various military occupations. The army was impressed. Believing that Scott's Committee had helped to limit recruit rejections and increase the army's

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[24] Lynch, *Walter Dill Scott,* 15-23.
[25] *The Personnel System of the United States Army: A History of the Personnel System,* I (2 vols., Washington, DC, 1919), 143. Hereafter cited as *PSUSA*.
[26] For information on the Soldier's Qualification Card, see *PSUSA,* I, 143-52. Additional cards and scales were developed for senior officers, too. For background on the development of the Officer's Qualification Card, see *PSUSA,* I, 543-58; and for the Officer Rating Scale, see *PSUSA,* I, 559-80. For Louis B. Hopkins' background in industrial research, see L.B. Hopkins, "Personnel Research at Northwestern University," *Journal of Personnel Research,* 1 (October-November 1922), 277-78.

overall administrative capacity, the Army continued the Committee and its recruit placement practices at the end of the war.[27]

The personnel community's long-term organizational achievements were overshadowed during the war by intelligence testers, the second group of expert psychologists to converge upon the U.S. Army. Led by then American Psychological Association president Robert M. Yerkes of the University of Minnesota—and assisted by Lewis H. Terman of Stanford, Carl C. Brigham of Princeton, and Henry H. Goddard of the Training School for the Feebleminded in Vineland, New Jersey—eugenic intelligence testers submitted that an objective and even more efficient mass system of testing army recruits was possible through the measurement of native intelligence.[28]

Scott and members of the military command were not at all optimistic about the prospects of measuring new recruits' native intelligence. The relative novelty of mass intelligence testing, the need for more—not fewer—soldiers, and Scott's personal dislike of Yerkes cooled the military to intelligence testers' initial petitions for a wartime role.[29] Following behind-the-scenes

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[27] Kevles, "Testing the Army's Intelligence," 572-81; Lynch, *Walter Dill Scott,* 43-45; Ellen C. Lagemann, *An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Education Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 90-92.

[28] *PSUSA,* I, 671. A complete roster of the intelligence testers and/or personality testers who served on the Committee on Classification of Personnel in the Army is available in *PSUSA,* I, 671-77. The core committee members included, Walter Dill Scott, E.L. Thorndike, W.V. Bingham, J.R. Angell, R.C. Clothier, John J. Coss, W.R. DeField, Raymond Dodge, H.L. Gardner, William Browne Hale, P.J. Reilly, Winslow Russell, J.F. Shepard, Edward K. Strong, Jr., J.J. Swan, L.M. Terman, J.B. Watson, R.M. Yerkes.

[29] The fallout between Scott and Yerkes occurred during the executive council meeting of the American Psychological Association on April 21, 1917, two weeks after the United States had entered World War I. As a result, the intelligence testers, led by Yerkes, and the personality testers, led by Scott, organized separately for a place in the war effort, before ultimately ending up serving together, with Yerkes as the junior partner, in the Committee on Classification of Personnel. For the complete details of the rift, see Richard T. Von Mayrhauser, "The Manager, the Medic, and the Mediator: The Clash of Professional Psychological Styles and the Wartime Origins of Group Mental Testing," in *Psychological Testing and American Society: 1890-1930*, ed., Michael M. Sokal (New Brunswick, 1987), 128-57. For an overview of Yerkes' appointment within the Sanitary Corps, which he coveted for personal—he considered mental testing a branch of medicine and not psychology—as well as professional reasons—medicine was better established than psychology, see Leonard W. Ferguson, "Psychology and the Army: Examining Recruits," *The Heritage of Industrial Psychology,* 8 (Hartford, Conn., 1963), 107.

negotiations, however, Yerkes finally secured a beachhead for intelligence testing in the Surgeon General's Sanitary Corps, where trial runs of his tests (which had been designed in less than two weeks at Goddard's Vineland asylum) revealed some utility in pinpointing the truly mentally deficient recruit. Scott and members of the Army Staff, persuaded that intelligence testing was not completely unreliable, reluctantly supported Yerkes appointment to the Committee on Classification of Personnel. But with one major caveat: Yerkes had to agree that his tests would perform a subordinate role to the personnel communities approved techniques for recruit evaluation and placement.[30]

Despite their inferior status within the Committee on Classification of Personnel, intelligence testers managed to administer their Alpha (for English-speaking recruits) and Beta (for non-English-speaking recruits) examinations to more than half of the three million recruits interviewed by the Classification Committee. Although the exams did help identify the genuinely mentally "feeble," the majority of results and recommendations derived from the Army Alpha and Beta intelligence tests (as Scott had feared) were not only inaccurate but also absurd: Yerkes' testing corps determined that the average "mental-age" of the army's white recruits was 13.08 years, or slightly higher than that of a "moron," to use the intelligence testers' own psychological taxonomy. Not surprisingly, army officials generally ignored Yerkes' wartime recommendations, discharged few soldiers for "low" intelligence, and ultimately disbanded his testing unit altogether after the war.[31]

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[30] Kevles, "Testing the Army's Intelligence," 570-71; Joel L. Spring, "Psychologists and the War: The Meaning of Intelligence in the Alpha and Beta Tests," *History of Education Quarterly,* 12 (Spring 1972), 5.

[31] Kevles, *ibid.,* 574-81; John Carson, "Robert M. Yerkes and the Mental Testing Movement," in *Psychological Testing and American Society: 1890-1930,* ed., Michael M. Sokal (New Brunswick, 1987), 76; Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York, 1996), 225-26. For the psychology profession's commitment to an objective and scientific basis for the study of human behavior and intelligence, see Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (New York, 1991).

The United States' involvement in the war was mercifully short. But for the psychological community, it was also sweet. Widespread interest in the use of psychology to measure intelligence, place and sort human beings, and bring overall administrative order to large-scale organizations exceeded even the most outlandish pre-war aspirations. The hoopla surrounding intelligence testing, fueled by the publication of Yerkes' massive monograph *Psychological Examining in the United States Army* in 1921, helped mainstream eugenic ideas within an American polity hungry for a return to "normalcy." Nationally, intelligence testers supported the enactment of harsh immigration restrictions while offering a new rationale for the practice of racial segregation in the American South; institutionally, education and business magnates were immediately intrigued by the alleged discovery of the scientific measurement of mental ability. Leaders in both arenas enumerated countless potential benefits of such testing in the selection and placement of both workers and students. In business, the measurement of worker intelligence appeared to hold the key to overcoming worker intransigence and unruliness. Strikes had halted production of key military materiel during the war. Although harsh working conditions, low pay, and brutal managerial oversight were the most proximate causes of the labor-management divide, Yerkes highlighted another, less obvious reason: "It has come to be recognized. … [that] however well the physical requirements of a job are met by the individual, his intelligence may be inadequate or he may be unsuited temperamentally to his occupation."[32] Many corporate leaders, eager to assuage workers and thwart unionization, agreed.

Educational leaders likewise saw the measurement of native intelligence as a solution to the interrelated problems of student selection, placement, and mortality by preemptively weeding out individuals unsuited for higher learning. Mass testing of potential college students promised

[32] Robert M. Yerkes, "What Is Personnel Research?" The Journal of Personnel Research, 1(May 1922), 59.

to efficiently and effectively vet who should and should not be admitted, by determining who was and was not educable. What is more, colleges could now sort students into appropriate educational tracks specially designed to meet their inborn educational capacities.[33] With the discharge of over three million veterans eager to find work, go to college, or both, the ability to accurately select and place both workers and students appeared more pressing than ever in 1919.[34]

Yerkes hoped that research foundations and the wider public would warmly greet the mental testers. He was right. By 1920 he was swamped by "many hundreds of requests" for customized versions of his Army Alpha intelligence test, and generous foundation support ensured that intelligence testing would dominate the research agendas of university psychologists after the war.[35] According to a comprehensive report by Columbia University researchers, better than 60 percent of all psychology research done between 1920 and 1924 was dedicated to the study of such tests.[36] Attracted to intelligence tests by dint of the exam's administrative ease and seemingly boundless utility, interest in intelligence testing was keenest among high-school officials. With a $25,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation's General Education Board, the country's leading non-profit supporter of the social sciences, Yerkes and Terman designed a National Intelligence Test for students in grades three through eight that was widely adopted, while the sale of the Terman Group Test (for student in grades 7-12) as well as the Stanford Achievement Test (for students in all grades) exceeded 1.5 million annually.[37] As David Tyack

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[33] Charles H. Judd, "Applications of the Psychological Doctrine of Individual Difference," in *Provision for the Individual in College Education*, ed., William S. Gray (Chicago, 1932), 13-20.
[34] Kevles, "Testing the Army's Intelligence," 579-81; Lagemann, *An Elusvie Science,* 92.
[35] Kevles, "Testing the Army's Intelligence," 580.
[36] Ruth Strang, "Trends in Educational Personnel Research," *The Personnel Journal,* 10 (October 1931), 179-88. There was a decrease in the research of intelligence tests after 1924, see *ibid.,* 182.
[37] Or to put it another way, during the 1920s an estimated 20 percent of all high school students took at least one of Terman's tests; see Lagemann, *An Elusive Science,* 93.

argued, the rise of compulsory education laws, which increased enrollments a staggering 711 percent (from 202,963 to 1,645,171) between 1890 and 1919 convinced secondary education leaders of the value of mass intelligence testing in measuring and sorting students and in guiding school officials in the design of differentiated curricula. For these reasons, the high-school arena was the perfect market for intelligence testers to peddle their wares.[38]

College, however, was not compulsory: getting students in the door, and keeping them there was the real challenge. So, despite the doubling of student enrollments in the 1920s the collegiate market proved more difficult for intelligence testers to advance their testing regime. College administrators, confessed Dean Charles H. Judd of the University of Chicago, "came out of the war with a high degree of confidence in psychological tests."[39] But enthusiasm for the tests waned almost immediately. In the first place, genuine uncertainty over exactly how to balance the use of mental exams while fulfilling higher education's democratic mission worried administrators.[40] To be sure, the use of intelligence exams for the express purpose of limiting student enrollments seemed contrary to many college presidents' sense of duty and to the civilizing and citizenship-training duties of higher learning. For "true believer" eugenicists like Terman, Yerkes, Goddard, and, until his change of heart in the mid 1920s, Brigham, there was little to no concern that the tests themselves were inherently undemocratic.[41] Certain they had

[38] David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974; 1996), 177-255, esp. 183; Kurt Danziger, *Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research* (New York, 1990), 110-17.
[39] Judd, "Applications of the Psychological Doctrine of Individual Difference," 14.
[40] Harold Wechsler, *The Qualified Student: A History of Selective Admissions in America* (New York, 1977), 240-43. College presidents defined "democracy" differently. Some, such as Columbia University's President Nicholas Murray Butler, viewed the college's democratic mission as the discovery of the best talent; others, such as University of Minnesota President Lotus D. Coffman, viewed the college's democratic mission as the education of all interested students, especially those with minimal qualifications.
[41] For Brigham's renunciation of the eugenic agenda, see Nicholas Lemann, *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* (New York, 1999), 32-41.

finally devised an utterly objective means of measuring individual native intelligence, their vision for the future of higher education was quite clear: Intelligence testing could be used to separate the thinkers from the doers, the intellectually gifted from the feebleminded. The eugenic fantasy was to test first and to admit later—to measure pupil intelligence and to either accept or deny admission based on a student's raw score. In short, intelligence testers believed that a definitive answer to the nagging question "Who should go to college?" was within reach.

Second, intelligence tests were theoretically unsound. Just as the intelligence tests had proved to be an inadequate measure of soldiers' future performance during the war, intelligence tests proved no more predictive of future academic performance. Intelligence testers' inability to demonstrate statistical "validity," that is, to create exams that accurately forecast students' academic success, proved costly. In 1926, Arthur Klein, chief of the Division of Higher Education, Federal Bureau of Education spoke for many members of the higher education community when he reported: "Mental testing has made enormous strides since the Army tests . . . but the results have not been so satisfactory as the friends of psychological testing would desire. To be valuable, the correlations between test and scholastic record must be between .7 and .80. No such high correlation has been obtained."[42]

The search for validity continued to elude researchers. Intelligence testers achieved decent correlations when they combined mental test scores with other subjective factors of student performance—such as individual high-school grades, class rank, letters of

[42] Arthur J. Klein, *Higher Education: Biennial Survey, 1922-1924, Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 20* (Washington, DC, 1926), 11. A follow-up federal study published in 1934 revealed an equally low (.36) coefficient of correlation on mental tests; see David Segel, "Prediction of Success in College," *Office of Education Bulletin 15* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1934), 1-76, especially 69.

recommendation, and subject examinations.[43] But the use of intelligence tests to predict future success remained out of reach, forcing many mental testers to back away from their most grandiose scientific claims. Internal disagreements among testers seeped into public debate following criticisms from Walter Lippmann and Franz Boas, not to mention numerous other non-testing psychologists and social scientists. By the mid-twenties the intelligence testing movement was in a state of disarray. "Their use is extending enormously year by year," admitted Miriam Gould, Director of the Vassar College Research Bureau, "but their value as measures of ability has not improved in proportion."[44] To be sure, Arthur Klein struck a sympathetic note when, in 1924, he declared that, "mental tests are not to be trusted."[45]

Finally, the economic realities confronting by American higher education did not favor the eugenic commitment to exclusionary testing. Without a doubt, some university officials shared intelligence testers' desire to limit the influx of thousands of new students, many of whom, chided one dean, "showed neither great interest nor ability in college work."[46] But this longing was offset by an unforgiving postwar higher education economy. Specifically, cost-inefficiencies borne from a 79 percent increase in wartime inflation diminished institutions' real

[43] As Harold Wechsler has argued, "The period after World War I was the heyday of the correlation coefficient. An endless debate persisted over whether intelligence test scores, high school average, or some other indicator best predicted success in college"; see Wechsler, *Qualified Student,* 247-49.
[44] Miriam C. Gould, "Theoretical and Practical Dilemmas in Personnel Research," *Annual Meeting of the National Association of Deans of Women* (1928), 98-99.
[45] Widespread reliance upon intelligence tests as "valid," that is, predictive, standalone measures did not occur until after World War II. According to Nicholas Lemann, as late as 1941 only 20,000 high school students were subject to the SAT. See Lemann, *Big Test,* 40-41; Klein, *Higher Education: Biennial Survey, 1922-1924, Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 20* (Washington, DC, 1926), 12. For the struggles of mental testing in the 1920s, see Hamiton Cravens, *The Triumph of Evolution: American Scientists and the Heredity-Environment Controversy, 1900-1941* (Philadelphia, 1978).
[46] John J. Coss, "Introduction," in *Five College Plans*, ed., Herbert E. Hawkes (New York, 1931), 1.

postwar purchasing power, therefore compounding the need for both more students and more tuition revenue.[47]

Private and public institutions responded differently to the increased-demand/decreased-revenue postwar economic climate. On the one hand, elite private schools in New England—led by Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia—responded by raising tuition and establishing selective admission policies to slow the rate of institutional growth. As has been well documented by other scholars, private elite institutions, led by the Ivy League, established selective admission policies and began using the College Examination Board entrance exams to limit enrollments. Certain institutional factors permitted Ivy League schools to follow this path. Namely, large endowments, established benefactor networks, and close relationships with private college preparatory feeder schools, such as Groton, Exeter, and Andover. It must also be admitted that another key impetus behind the Ivy's push toward selective admissions must be chalked up to boldfaced racism, especially a desire to limit Jewish student enrollments by preserving a majority of seats for the sons of Protestant upper middle class families from socially desirable socioeconomic backgrounds.[48]

Few colleges enjoyed the surfeit funds and status enjoyed by those of the Ivy League. Public institutions in the Midwest and West adjusted themselves to the gloomy postwar

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[47] Although there have been huge increases in the total revenues for higher education during the 20th century, fund sources have displayed relatively stable patterns. Indeed, the proportion of revenues from tuition and fees was 24 percent in 1909-10 and in 1989-90; see *NCES*, 71; Roger Geiger, *To Advance Knowledge: The Growth of the American Research Universities* (New York, 1986), 131.

[48] David O. Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940* (Ithaca, 1986), 136; For the best study of the racialized justifications behind the Ivy League's shift toward selective admissions, see Marcia Graham Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900-1970* (Westport, Conn., 1979); Harold Wechsler, "The Rationale for Restriction: Ethnicity and College Admissions in America, 1910-1980," *American Quarterly,* 36 (Winter 1984), 643-67. For an excellent synopsis of these authors' major points on selective admissions, see Geiger, *To Advance Knowledge*, 129-39. For an early assessment of New England schools' adoption of a selective admission policy and its in appropriateness for most public schools, see Klein, *Higher*

economic climate by raising tuition and admitting more, rather than fewer students. At public institutions—which is to say at most schools—enrollment restrictions of the kind instituted by elite colleges, warned the Federal Bureau of Education, resulted in a "reduction in tuition income" that produced "a unit which is not economical."[49] The mere suggestion of disqualifying an applicant who possessed a high-school certificate in the early 1920s was to badly misunderstand the demand-driven, tuition-dependent nature of 1920s-era American higher education. First of all, the degree of success in secondary education remained the best predictor of college success. Moreover, with a new university or college popping up practically every week, and with more students than ever wanting to attain advanced study, to deny admission to a student bearing a high-school certificate made little sense when a competitor institution located down the road would in all likelihood admit the same applicant the very next day.[50]

The political and economic fallout of limiting enrollments, made all the more suspect by intelligence exams well-documented theoretical shortcomings, were not the only reasons why intelligence exams remained little more than a novelty in the immediate postwar period. Whether an institution opted for a selective or open admission policy, and the overwhelming majority of schools chose the latter, neither elite private nor non-elite public institutions needed the help of intelligence tests to get rid of students during the 1920s—students were quite skilled at leaving school on their own. Student mortality, what university officials euphemistically called "The

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Education: Biennial Survey, 1922-1924, Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 20 (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1926), 6.

[49] *Ibid.,* 5; Levine, *American College and the Culture of Aspiration*, 137-39.

[50] My ideas for this section have been shaped by Hugh Davis Graham and Nancy Diamond, *American Research Universities: Elites and Challengers in the Postwar Era* (Baltimore, 1997). Graham and Diamond discuss the three unique institutional features of American universities as inter-institutional market competition, institutional pluralism, and decentralized federal-state relations. For more details on Graham and Diamond's analysis, see *American Research Universities*, Introduction. For the role of the high school certificate as a predictor of college success, see Ruth Vesta Pope, *Factors Affecting the*

Freshman Problem," surfaced as the main source of institutional instability at all types of colleges in the 1920s. A few illustrative examples demonstrate this point: Data secured from 36 two-year junior colleges in the Midwest, the South, and the Far West between September 1923 and June 1927 revealed a dropout rate of 66 percent.[51] In 1922 officials of Virginia's Sweet Briar Women's College reported that a mere 25 percent of entering students matriculated to graduation, a majority of whom left in the first year.[52] Larger co-educational institutions performed better, but still poorly. At the University of Pittsburgh the average mortality rate of its freshman from 1920-1924 was 35 percent.[53] Institutions in the South reported similarly high mortality rates. University of Georgia registrar Hugh H. Caldewell's study of 107 colleges and universities in the region revealed a 32 percent freshman mortality rate.[54] Any temptation to blame the South's freshman mortality rate on its historic pattern of low education funding was belied by the fact that elite universities with "good holding power" experienced similar rates of student withdrawal. In the Northeast, Harvard and Yale Universities lost an average of 20-25 percent of freshman in the early and middle 1920s; in the Midwest, University of Wisconsin witnessed the departure of 13 percent of its freshman population, University of Minnesota 30 percent, and University of Chicago 37 percent.[55] As one might expect, freshman attrition

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Elimination of Women Students: From Selected Coeducational Colleges of Liberal Arts (New York, 1931), 4-5.

[51] Joseph V. Hanna, "Student-Retention In Junior Colleges," *Journal of Educational Research,* 22 (June 1930), 1-8.

[52] Elise Murray, "Freshman Tests in the Small College," *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 7 (September 1923), 258-76.

[53] Grover H. Alderman, "Failures Among University Freshmen," *Journal of Educational Research,* 16 (November 1927), 254-56.

[54] Luther Sheeleigh Cressman, "Maladjustments Between High Schools and Colleges Due to Difference in Aims and Methods and Suggested Corrections," *Journal of Educational Sociology,* 3 (March 1930), 389-401, esp., 390.

[55] Booker, "Reducing Withdrawals," 249; Klein, *Higher Education Biennial Survey: 1922-1924, Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 20* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1926), 10; J.R. Sage, "Freshman Mortality," *Bulletin of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars,* 2 (Baltimore, 1926), 56; Jay Carroll

estimates varied widely from one school to another, but a multi-region study determined that one-third of all college freshman did not return as sophomores during the 1920s.[56]

As the "open-door" to higher education became the revolving door, professional psychologists began to rethink the applicability of their social technologies to academic settings. The realization that limiting enrollments was not advantageous to American higher education, the desire to more tightly couple inputs and outputs, forced psychologists from across disciplinary and theoretical bounds to consider a more coordinated approach to developing and marketing their psychological tools. The personnel community provided the institutional base for all applied psychologists, regardless of their theoretical predilections.

The personnel community wasted little time in advancing its own professional agenda. And in the years immediately following the war personnel specialists joined hands with intelligence testers in order to widen the jurisdiction of their expertise beyond the confines of the university. Although former Committee on Classification of Personnel members helped establish new personnel procedures for the U.S. Civil Service Commission after the war, their true object of affection was American business. Personnel experts fervently believed that the future of their own professional enterprise lay in the corporate world, which had flirted with personnel theory and practice before the war. Scott and other members of the Committee on Classification of Personnel were now interested in securing a long-term commitment. Scott and several Committee on Classification of Personnel alums started the Scott Company in 1919 to help spread the personnel gospel of "the worker as an individual" throughout American business.[57]

Knode, *Orienting the Student in College: With Special Reference to Freshman Week* (New York, 1930), 21.

[56] *Ibid.* Booker's estimate is also substantiated in "Editorial," *Journal of Higher Education,* 2 (January 1931), 48.

[57] The other members included Robert C. Clothier, Louis B. Hopkins, Beardsley Ruml, Joseph Hayes, and Stanley Mathewson.

The Scott Company helped establish personnel offices at 40 leading industries immediately after the war, when fears of worker turnover and unionization appeared to necessitate a more personalized, hands-on approach to labor management.[58] Focusing on "individuality" as its major research frame, The Scott Company worked with both managers and unions, and played a prominent role in ending industrial strife in the Chicago garment trade in the early 1920s. Two years later, James McKean Cattell and J.B. Watson connected with Scott, Bingham, Yerkes, and Terman to form the Psychological Corporation. The Corporation served as a publicity agent, referral service, and supply company for all applied psychologists.[59]

In addition to widespread entrepreneurial activity, the personnel community also created professional organs to discuss and promote new knowledge and theories concerning the personnel movement. The Personnel Research Federation (PRF) was the hub of the personnel community's intellectual and theoretical endeavors. Established in 1921, the PRF commenced its operation with Beardsley Ruml at the helm. The *Journal of Personnel Research*, in which Bingham assumed editorial duties, was first printed the following year; it served as the PRF's major publication, and provided a mouthpiece for personnel experts, labor leaders, and corporate heads to talk about the various and sundry issues surrounding the personnel movement. One need not look any further than the docket for the PRF's first national meeting to get an idea for exactly how ambitious an agenda the organization was setting for itself: James R. Angell, then-president of Yale University and a leading light in the personnel movement, and Samuel Gompers, the renowned labor leader, provided introductory remarks. According to Angell, the founding of the

[58] Lynch, *Walter Dill Scott,* 34-42.
[59] Richard Gillespie, *Manufacturing Knowledge: A History of the Hawthorne Experiments* (New York: Cambridge, 1991), 31. On the Psychological Corporation, see Michael M. Sokal, "The Origins of the Psychological Corporation," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences,* 17 (1981), 54-67.

PRF marked "a definite forward step in the solution of those crucial problems which center about personnel in industry."[60]

It was Scott, however, who left the most indelible mark on the theoretical underpinnings of the personnel movement. The 1923 publication of his book *Personnel Management: Principles, Practices, and Point of View* crystallized existing thought on the subject of personnel theory and pointed the way for its future growth and development. During the war the guiding belief of the personnel community had been, "The Right Man in the Right Place." But Scott's mammoth exegesis on the topic revealed a more nuanced description of the personnel point of view that captured its diverse intellectual lineage. Drawing from Freudian psychoanalysis, pragmatism, social and industrial psychology, and Taylor's efficiency school of worker productivity, Scott's somewhat trite wartime mantra evolved into an elaborate seven-part schema based on "The Principle of Individual Difference."[61] According to Scott, "individual difference"—what he elsewhere called the "human conception of labor"—was the recognition by managers that each "individual differs from another" and that "different kinds of work are done best by persons who, temperamentally, are particularly interested in them." Scott challenged business managers to disavow their old belief in the commodification of labor and of "putting square pegs into round holes." Worker personality, as Scott's wartime experience revealed, was dynamic. And the key to efficient production lay in creating a cooperative, interdependent working relationship between management and labor. A difficult task under the best of circumstances, Scott's prescription for the cessation of labor unrest would only occur if, and

[60] James. R. Angell, "Reasons and Plans for Research Relating to Industrial Personnel," *Journal of Personnel Research,* 1 (May 1922), 1.

[61] The expansion of Frederick Winslow Taylor's rigid conception of "scientific management" was crucial to personnel managers like Scott. Where Taylorites tended to treat workers as simple and simple-minded beings requiring discipline, the personnel theorists revised Taylor by seeking to account for the

when, managers recognized that "work," properly defined, was social and psychological as well as physical. By taking seriously workers desire for "self-expression" and "self-realization," Scott asserted that managers had a moral obligation (and financial interest) to help individual workers make as much of their lives as possible.[62]

In its most developed, if admittedly rare manifestation, personnel theory provided an important ideological justification for corporate management's provision of employee representation on corporate boards, health plans, stock options, and subsidized recreational opportunities. It is true, as numerous critics of so-called "corporate welfarism" have pointed out, that managers only agreed to such concessions because they offered a relatively painless way to avoid worker unionization and collective bargaining. But it is also important to remember, as historian Richard Gillespie suggests, that "busting unions" was not the only motive fueling corporate interest in personnel theory and practice. In a very real way, personnel theory appealed to business leaders because they truly believed that it would help transform the corrupt business firm of old into a model democratic institution. By treating each worker as an individual endowed with unique capacities, interests, and emotions, personnel specialists such as Walter D. Scott honestly believed that businesses could permanently reduce waste in production, increase human happiness, and build a more democratic society.[63] For a time, American business seemed to agree: the proportion of business firms with at least 250 employees that established a personnel department increased dramatically between 1915 and 1920, from 5 to 25 percent.[64]

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psychological and social dimensions of the work experience. For more details, see David Nobel, *America By Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York, 1977), 264-65.

[62] Walter Dill Scott and Robert C. Clothier, *Personnel Management: Principles, Practices, and Point of View* (Chicago, 1923), 1-18.

[63] Gillespie, *Manufacturing Knowledge*, 25-27; Scott and Clothier, *Personnel Management*, 8.

[64] Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy*, 137; Lynch, *Walter Dill Scott,* 13-14.

Yet the urgency that surrounded the personnel movement during the war quickly waned in peacetime. Authoritative federal oversight combined with a worker deficit during the press of wartime forced many industries to build personnel offices and to adopt what surely was a more conciliatory posture vis-à-vis organized labor. Both of these factors disappeared in the conservative, lasses-faire 1920s. Unprecedented economic growth combined with a flush employment market decreased union activity and unrest that for the time being diminished business's need for the further expansion of its personnel departments. Having rediscovered that the threat of occupational termination was the most potent weapon to keep workers productive, employers' interest in personnel departments waned. Although the number of firms who organized personnel departments continued to grow, growth was much slower. According to business historian Sanford Jacoby, the majority of employers, with several notable exceptions, were never completely won over by the personnel perspective. Firms thus reverted to their old ways: get-tough labor policies that stressed worker discipline instead of worker morale.[65]

The business sector's declining interest in personnel theory forced personnel specialists to find new organizational arenas in which to pursue their research agenda. They didn't have to look very far. For all their efforts to leave the university and to transform the outside world, the university ended up being the institution where personnel specialists' technologies and theories about human behavior had the most profound and lasting effect. In what can only be described as one of the supreme ironies in the history of American psychology, the university—ripe with high student turnover and general administrative chaos—became the leading test case for the development and institutionalization of the personnel perspective.[66] That prominent leaders of

[65] Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy,* 171-73.
[66] For an early account in support of the cross-fertilization of personnel theory in industry and higher education, see W.V. Bingham, "Student Personnel Service and Industrial Research," *Journal of Personnel Research,* 2 (June 1923), 55-64.

the personnel movement assumed university presidencies—at Northwestern, Yale, North Carolina, Cornell, and Wabash College—and positions of influence across higher education strengthened its hold. Moreover, the geometric growth in the production of the university-trained psychologists—whose membership increased from 300 to 3000 practitioners between 1919 and 1939—likewise contributed to the spreading authority of personnel theory, and of psychology in general, during the interwar period.[67]

University administrators warmed themselves to the personnel gospel for numerous reasons. In the first place, it was considered to be financially prudent. The University of Wisconsin's registrar confessed that the "drop out" was both a "liability and continual drag on the time and energies of the faculty." Lewis Terman's own study of the unqualified student suggested that he cost Stanford University upwards of $100,000 in institutional resources beyond tuition and fees. Altogether, Terman estimated that Stanford was dedicating roughly "a third of its instructional budget on material officially labeled unsatisfactory or doubtful."[68] Second, administrators found in personnel theory a popular as well as convincing source of professional legitimatization. Personnel theory provided administrators, long considered the handmaidens of the president and trustees, with a new source of credibility and authority. In addition to raising money and serving at the whim of restless trustees, administrators discovered that serving the needs of students was professional astute. Finally, personnel theory provided administrators with

[67] Statistics on the growth of psychology, see James Capshew, *Psychologists on the March: Science, Practice, and Professional Identity in America, 1929-1969* (New York, 1999), 1. Based on my own analysis of the activities of the Committee's membership in the postwar period, I have traced the following members to these colleges: John J. Coss at Columbia University; Clarence Yoakum at University of Michigan; Donald Patterson at University of Minnesota; Robert C. Clothier at the University of Pittsburgh; and Joseph Hayes at the University of Michigan. Beardsley Ruml, meanwhile, took over the directorship of the Laura Spellman Charitable Foundation, which provided much of the financial support for personnel research during the entire interwar period.

a way to frame the university's mission in a way that made sense to students, parents, and policymakers.

The key question for personnel specialists was simple: What should colleges do to keep students in school? By asking this question, the personnel community challenged college officials to look beyond mere biological explanations to consider instead the role of academic preparation (or lack thereof), environmental factors, interpersonal relations, emotional constitution, and myriad other irrational factors that contributed to student failure and maladjustment. Instead of focusing solely upon "native intelligence," personnel specialists studied the subjective characteristics and traits of students in the hopes of devising new ways to keep more of them in school. Unlike business firms, which literally relied upon the carrot-and-stick of wages and force to keep workers in line, higher education leaders needed to develop genuine, mutually agreed upon methods to help select, retain, and graduate students. College officials started to accept personnel theory's emphasis on personality development—on the unique needs of each individual—as a possible solution to their student failure problem.

Precisely because students paid to attend, university officials were compelled to take seriously their individual needs and emotions, that is, "personality." In 1924, President E.D. Burton of the University of Chicago explained the college's growing interest in the personal lives of its students: "[T]he main thing I want to say and to emphasize is that the business of the college is to develop personalities, personalities that are capable of large participation in life and of large contribution to life."[69] The ways in which the 1920s college sought to measure and

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[68] Lewis Terman and Karl Cowdery, "Stanford's Program of University Personnel Research," *Journal of Personnel Research,* 7 and 8 (November-December 1925), 263; J.R. Sage, "Freshman Mortality," *Bulletin of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars,* 2 (July 1926), 59.
[69] James C. Littlejohn, "Personal Rating Systems," *Bulletin of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars,* 1 (Baltimore, 1925), 208.

shape student personality in order to build a better university is the subject of the second half of this chapter.

II. Reorganizing Higher Education and Adjusting Students

A culture of personality availed itself well before a professional commitment to the study of personality did. As Warren Susman has explained the emergence of a "culture of personality"—that is, as a "modal type" of selfhood—occurred in the first decade of the twentieth century. Professional psychologists, although they routinely referred to personality, and defined it as a malleable outward manifestation of selfhood, did not begin studying personality in earnest until the middle 1920s. Led by Gordon Allport and, if to a lesser extent, his older brother Floyd, the study of personality as a distinct category of analysis evolved gradually over the course of the 'teens and twenties. Even as psychologists and laypersons spoke freely on and about shaping and creating "personality," it did not have the monolithic power that Susman and others have previously suggested. To be sure, personality was on the rise and proliferating, but older modal types also existed and were often used by psychologists and personnel aficionados alike.

Although the personnel movement was committed to, and an important harbinger of, personality psychology, one must still account for the persistence and dissolution of an older modal type: character. As we shall see, it was not uncommon for university leaders, not to mention psychologists, to speak of personality and character as if they were interchangeable. One need not look any further than James R. Angell, President of Yale University, for just such a usage. In describing the changing admissions practices at Yale, Angell advocated accounting for both "sound character and those other qualities which make for fine and wholesome types of

personality."[70] Several scholars have commented on the burst of interest in "character education" during the twenties. Based on this reading, however, the re-emergence of character was not a new beginning, but rather a last nostalgic gasp for the orderly and refined, if mythical, nineteenth-century denominational college.

The decline of character as little more than a commencement talking point was attributable to both the extension of psychological authority as well as to the changing face of American higher education. The slow but steady secularization of the academy was one major factor in the decline of character. Character implied moral rectitude, integrity, durability, and religious conviction. These values were increasingly challenged by a campus culture in which mandatory chapel and courses in moral philosophy were considered passé. The belief in character as measure of internal qualities was another reason. Given the vast heterogeneity of the college campus in terms both of student numbers, their upbringing and educational background, the cultivation of character seemed increasingly difficult to achieve. Finally, and most important, professional psychologists did not consider the study of character to be a viable scientific research project. As Dorothy Ross has shown, the social sciences made a professional commitment to objectivity and value neutrality in its efforts to achieve the status of the physical sciences. In doing so, however, the study of character went by the wayside. Character's close association to words such as "duty," "honor," and "self-sacrifice" was of little interest to professional social scientists interested in extending their reach beyond the university laboratory. Plastic words such as "adaptability" and "adjustment" were the code words of modern social

[70] Charles Franklin Thwing, *New York Times,* June 8, 1924, p. XX16.

science: value neutral and universally applicable, personality was the perfect category for psychology's energetic professionalizing agenda and for a bureaucratic age.[71]

Yet, professional psychologists were not exclusively responsible for popularizing their own ideas. Organized in 1924, the professional body tasked with overseeing the development and spread of the personnel perspective to American higher education was the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). Originally titled the National Association of Appointment Secretaries, the group changed its name to reflect its new interest in the advancement of personnel theory and practice into the collegiate setting. By 1930, the organization boasted a small but prestigious membership of 129 colleges. Though few in number, the ACPA was supported by many of America's leading colleges in the Northeast and Midwest, including Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, Cornell, Minnesota, Michigan, Chicago, Iowa, Ohio State, and Northwestern.[72] The emergence of a professional community dedicated to "bringing the college into closer organizational touch with its students," as Louis B. Hopkins described it, marked the beginning of the college's effort to do whatever it could to "best serve the individual."[73]

In a career trajectory that matched Walter D. Scott, who more than any other person helped spread the personnel gospel to business, Hopkins endeavored to translate that vision into a workable set of practices for higher education. Following his work on the Committee on Classification of Personnel, he helped found the Scott Company, served as Director of Personnel at Northwestern University, and took over as President of Wabash College in 1924. But it was his groundbreaking 1926 report on personnel operations in American higher education that

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[71] Ian A.M. Nicholson, "Gordon Allport, Character, and the 'Culture of Peronality,' 1897-1937," *History of Psychology,* 1 (1998), 52-68; and *Inventing Personality: Gordon Allport and the Science of Selfhood* (Washington, DC, 2003), esp. 73-102, 133-162.

[72] For a list of all 129 member-institutions in 1930, see "American College Personnel Association, Eighth Annual Conference," *Personnel Journal,* 10 (June 1931), 53-57.

established him as the leader of the college personnel movement. Funded by a grant from the Benevolent Fund of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and supported by the National Research Council, Hopkins's "Personnel Procedures in Education: Observations and Conclusions Resulting form Visits to Fourteen Institutions of Higher Learning" served as the master plan for the creation of college personnel offices all over the country. "Personnel Procedures in Education" did not have the impact on higher education that Abraham Flexner's 1910 report *Medical Education in the United States and Canada* did, it was nevertheless considered a landmark study in its own right. Indeed, a decade later Hopkins's study formed the basis for the American Council on Education's landmark publication *The Student Personnel Point of View*, which quickly emerged as the standard guide on the subject, and remained so for decades thereafter.[74]

Hopkins's vision for the personnel movement was nothing if not sweeping. A fully realized personnel operation, he argued, should include continuous personnel services to assist students before, during, and after college. Vocational, academic, and personal counselors, armed with the latest tests of aptitude and attitude, would be readily available to assist students in overcoming the difficult challenges presented by the transition into and out of college life. Ideally, Hopkins construed personnel administration as touching every aspect of a college student's experience. Whether curricular, pedagogical, or social, Hopkins insisted that any problem could be solved if administrators relied upon "the point of view which concerns itself primarily with the individual."[75] To Hopkins, the personnel point of view provided a framework

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[73] Louis B. Hopkins, "Personnel Procedure in Education: Observations and Conclusions Resulting From Visits to Fourteen Institutions of Higher Learning," *Educational Record,* 7 (Washington, DC, 1926), 3-5.
[74] H.E. Hawkes, et al., "The Student Personnel Point of View: A Report of a Conference on the Philosophy and Development of Student Personnel Work in College and University" (Washington DC, 1937). For the Council's debt to Hopkins, see iii-iv. For funding information of Hopkins' 1926 study, see David A. Robertson, "Personnel Methods in College," *Educational Record,* 8 (Washington, DC, 1927), 310.
[75] *Ibid.,* 5.

and set of practices to reorient the whole of undergraduate life to meet the individual needs of students. By looking at every aspect of college life through the personnel lens, Hopkins hoped to "show the relationship of one piece of work to another and that there [was] a unity in the movement to individualize education."[76] In short, higher education's most pressing need was to locate ways to transcend what Hopkins saw as the artificial academic, bureaucratic, and social boundaries that wreaked havoc upon students' personal development and often led to failure and maladjustment. As one college president warned a new class of freshman, "when you come to college, you make a violent break with your past."[77] The personnel perspective, or at least as Hopkins imagined it, was intended to remedy this very problem.

The focus on the individual life of each student profoundly changed the way the college conceived of its educational mission. Whereas colleges had previously separated the academic from the social side of undergraduate life, and only claimed responsibility for the former, the emphasis on the cultivation of personality inextricably linked the two. The recognition that what occurred outside the classroom impinged upon what ultimately went on inside it, and vice versa, encouraged college administrators to take greater responsibility for the entire life—social, emotional, as well as academic—of its students. By creating academic and social programming to bridge personality differences among individual students and to discern and develop favorable personality characteristics within individual students, colleges fostered a campus environment that was adaptable to the multiple needs of different students. "This change of attitude," as Dean Herbert E. Hawkes of Columbia College explained the institutional evolution from

[76] *Ibid.,* 95.
[77] "President Speaks of College Life to New Students," *Ohio State Lantern*, September 26, 1921, p. 1.

"impersonalism" to "personalism," "involved the explicit assumption of responsibility for, attention to, and, if possible, education of the entire individual—mind, body, and soul."[78]

Few schools possessed either the money or the credentialed personnel experts to establish centralized, all-encompassing personnel operations of the sort advocated by Hopkins. Consequently, most personnel duties fell upon deans of men and women, registrars, members of the faculty, and even college presidents. Although these administrators were sometimes, but not always professionally trained psychologists, they all agreed that the mission of the university was to be understood as primarily a psychological one. So, when the executive director of the Columbus, Ohio, Y.W.C.A. declared at the 1921 Ohio State Convocation that "students attend college in quest of personality," everyone in attendance new what that meant.[79] By considering the ways in which mid-level administrators latched onto Hopkins's personnel perspective, we can begin to accurately chart the path by which psychological ideas transformed the daily life of American higher education.[80]

Among the most important administrative developments was the sudden interest in the collection and analysis of increasingly large quantities of students' personal information as a condition of acceptance and admission. Using an Admissions Blank, colleges required students to submit detailed case-history information on their academic and personal lives. This information, according to University of Wisconsin registrar Frank O. Holt, was used to form a

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[78] Herbert E. Hawkes, "Fundamental Values in Personnel Work," in *Provision for the Individual in College, IV*, ed., William S. Gray (Chicago, 1932), 22.
[79] "Students Attend College in Quest of Personality," *Ohio State Lantern*, October 25, 1922, p. 1.
[80] Louis B. Hopkins, "Personnel Work at Northwestern University," *Journal of Personnel Research,* 1 (October-November 1922), 278-279; Klein, *Survey of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, Bulletin No. 9* (Washington, DC, 1930), 420; George F. Zook, "The Administration of Student Personnel Work," *Journal of Higher Education,* 3 (October 1932), 349-354.

system of records and as the basis for the establishment of an individualized program of counseling to increase the likelihood of a new student's "success and happiness."[81]

Prior to 1915, few colleges required much less requested such copious personal data. By 1922, however, it was the overwhelming tendency of institutions to require personal information "concerning such matters as the date and place of the student's birth; his special interests with regard to study, athletics, and self-support; his intentions with regard to college and vocation; his school offices, honors, and other activities."[82] These were just several of the personal questions that schools asked students to answer. Often times there were many more. Indeed, one study tracking the rise in the amount and detail of personal data required by colleges in the 1920s noted that many colleges required incoming students to respond to upwards of 60 questions.[83]

Colleges readily advertised the importance of personality as a significant criterion for admission. According to Hopkins, there was a growing consensus among administrators at the schools he studied that the measure of personality was the most reliable means of determining an applicant's suitability for college.[84] Harvard University, for instance, reminded applicants that while scholarly attainments were necessary for admittance, high "regard [was] given to character, personality, and promise."[85] Columbia University likewise stressed that the "satisfaction of the minimum academic requirements does not insure admission." The demonstration of intangible non-academic qualifications such as "character and personality" also

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[81] Frank O. Holt, "Securing a More Highly Selected Student Body at the University of Wisconsin," in *Provision for the Individual in College, IV*, ed., William S. Gray (Chicago, 1932), 45.
[82] Clyde Furst, "College Personnel Requirements," *The Educational Record* 8 (Washington DC: The American Council on Education, 1927), 308.
[83] Robertson, "Personnel Methods in College," 319.
[84] *Ibid.*, 13. According to Hopkins' assessment, "Most of these institutions are conscious of the unreliability of these ratings but continue to use them because they are better than any other device which is known" (13).
[85] *Ibid.*, 11.

figured prominently into the admission decision.[86] At the University of Minnesota, and at many other schools, the goal of higher education, proclaimed Dean J.B. Johnston, was "the all round development of personality."[87]

To ensure an accurate rendering of an applicant's personality, colleges also required recommendations from persons other than the student. Former instructors, principals, employers, ministers, and even friends were often tapped to provide assessments of incoming students' personality. The most common approach was the comparative rating blank, which asked referees to rate the presence and strength (or absence and weakness) of specific personality traits—including everything from "industriousness" and "straightforwardness" to "public spirit" and "leadership"—and to compare these traits with "boys graduating from secondary schools the country over." Perhaps because comparisons of the type just described were impossible to achieve, other schools preferred less structure and opted instead for pure letters of recommendations from teachers, family members, and friends. Northwestern University, for example, "in order to develop . . . students in intellect, personality, and character," requested that referees provide meticulous written expositions on, among other personal attributes, applicants' "popularity," "seriousness," and likelihood of "being benefited by college life."[88]

In addition to letters of reference, some institutions began making targeted appeals to the people they presumed knew their students best of all—parents. Beginning in 1924, Harvard's Dean of Students sent out letters to parents requesting their help. Admitting that Harvard was too big, and that it took too long to gather all the personal information it needed about each new student, Harvard counted on parents to help teachers and administrators know their students as

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[86] *Ibid.*
[87] J. B. Johnston, "Methods of Improving Scholarship in the College of Liberal Arts," *National Association of Deans of Women, Twelfth Yearbook* (1925), 149.

"individuals." "Will you," pleaded a Harvard Dean, "as a service both to your boy and to the college, write us about him, with reference to his individual qualities and needs, as fully as you are will to do, so that even from the beginning we may feel that we know him!"[89]

In the many instances where parental assistance failed to emerge, institutions turned to the next best source: faculty and fellow students. Northwestern University, for example, required annual faculty and peer reviews that required referees to categorize whether a pupil's or fellow student's personality was "inspiring," "indifferent," or "repellant."[90] Personality information culled from the annual reviews was then entered into the student's permanent Personal Record Card, which was kept with the student's entire personnel portfolio at the Personnel Department. With clear measures for prognosticating student achievement wanting, and in an era before close coordination among high schools or between individual high schools and colleges, personnel officials submitted that the collection and evaluation of personal student information could provide a window into the personality characteristics of successful and unsuccessful college students. "This process may seem at first a rather long and tedious one," admitted the registrar of Clemson Agricultural College, James L. Littlejohn, "but it makes for greater uniformity and produces satisfactory results."[91]

Specifically, the comparative analysis of students' detailed personal information confirmed personnel specialists' belief in the existence of independent elements of personality in each student and in each class of students. This realization persuaded college administrators to couch the entire undergraduate college enterprise in highly psychologized terms. Indeed, college

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[88] *Ibid.*, 13-14; Robert L. Kelly, "Colleges Are Trying New Ways Teaching," *New York Times,* February 12, 1928, p. 124.
[89] Charles Franklin Thwing, "New Tendencies Seen in College Education," *New York Times,* June 8, 1924, p. XX16.
[90] Louis B. Hopkins, "Personnel Work at Northwestern University," *Journal of Personnel Research,* 1 (October-November 1922), 286.

administrators began to speak of the transition from high school to college as a potentially difficult, even traumatic, period of personal adjustment. According to Hopkins, "for a very large percentage of freshman, the very fact of being on the threshold of a college career involves an emotional crisis of exceptional intensity."[92] It was in this way that ensuring the smooth transition of new students into the college environment emerged as a top priority of the 1920s college.

The most commonly employed vehicle used to guide new students' toward safe harbor prior to setting foot in their first college class was the freshman week program. For as one administrator at University of Chicago put it: "If a college is interested in the success and welfare of its newcomers, it is worth while to concentrate for a few days on the task of adjusting freshman rightly to their new situation."[93] The University of Chicago was scarcely alone in this assessment. In 1924, Mary Frazer Smith, registrar of Wellesley College, reported to the membership of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars that fully forty-one colleges had organized freshman week programs.[94] By the end of the decade, according to another study, 149 institutions were using freshman week programs to help adjust students to their college life, work, and environment.[95]

Different colleges selected different items from a large menu of possible freshman week offerings. Typically, however, administrators used the allotted time for student adjustment and socialization, guidance, and academic placement.[96] In 1923, the University of Maine established

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[91] Littlejohn, "Personal Rating Systems," 213.
[92] Hopkins, "Personnel Procedure in Education: Observations and Conclusions Resulting From Visits to Fourteen Institutions of Higher Learning," 15-16.
[93] Ernest H. Wilkins, "Freshman Week at the University of Chicago," *The School Review,* 32 (December 1924), 746.
[94] Mary Frazer Smith, "Freshman Week," *Proceedings*, American Association of Collegiate Registrars, 1924 (April 2-4, 1924), 190-197.
[95] Knode, *Orienting the Student In College*, 31.
[96] Lester D. Crow, "Orientation of College Students," *Journal of Educational Sociology,* 3 (October 1929), 119.

one of the very first freshman week programs.[97] It served as a model for other schools, including Harvard, Chicago, and Michigan, and is by all accounts representative of the movement as a whole. The objective of Maine's freshman week, according to its President John Little, was to "study carefully the individual problems of freshmen and to assist in estimating their ability to meet the responsibilities and difficulties of college life."[98]

Maine's freshman week included an array of different activities that the *New York Times* suggested were intended to "save the freshman." The program required all freshmen to arrive to arrive on campus one week in advance of all upperclassmen. Upon arrival, freshmen were assigned to small groups of between ten and twenty students led by one or several group leaders, typically from the faculty and student body. All freshmen received the same instruction, but did so on different days. The schedule of events was highly structured with each day divided up into periods dedicated to lectures, exercises, tests, and recreational events. A schedule from the 1924 freshman week program at University of Maine included forty-five separate required events for students to attend. In addition to touring the campus and visiting all buildings, especially the library, freshman spent the balance of each day attending lectures, presided over by the university president, dealing with such topics as "Taking Notes and Examinations," "Use of Books," "Social Conduct," and "College Students' Day's Work and College Customs," among others. Placement tests in mathematics, English, foreign languages, and chemistry were also administered along with an intelligence test and physical examination in advance of meeting one's faculty adviser and scheduling first-quarter classes. Evening hours were set aside for

[97] Knode provides evidence that less comprehensive forms of "Freshmen Week" were offered by several schools prior to 1923, but admits that the University of Maine's was the earliest weeklong program available in higher education. See Knode, *Orienting the Student in College*, 15-16.
[98] Charles Franklin Thwing, "New Tendencies Seen in College Education," *New York Times,* June 8, 1924, p. XX16.

socializing and recreational activities. Scheduled events included a "mixer," "stunt night" (entertainment furnished by freshman), athletic rally, or the viewing of a motion picture at the Orono Theater.[99]

Needless to say, many a freshman bemoaned the lockstep inflexibility of the typical Freshman Week experience. A student referendum at the University of Maine, for instance, forced administrators there to lessen the "intensity" of the weeklong program.[100] A similar set of concerns emerged at Ohio State University, but in this instance they stemmed from faculty rather than student complaints. At a meeting following the inaugural run of Ohio State's freshman week program, over 100 faculty members agreed that the too much was compressed into a too short a period of time. The desire to overload the week with various activities and events, reported the *Ohio State Lantern*, caused "students to become so tired they were unable to do their best work in the examinations and placement tests and do not enjoy the tours of the campus." The mish-mash of activities apparently got the best of the faculty charged with the freshman week program. In what must have been a major embarrassment for faculty, the student paper also reported that the freshman week bulletin, which outlined the week's events for all incoming students, was filled with "grammatical errors."[101]

Pockets of dissent aside, most institutions and individuals found freshman week programs to be beneficial. In a survey of student opinion at the University of Maine, students from three classes who had freshman week experience overwhelmingly concurred that the program had helped them. At the University of Michigan, the Union Student Advisory Committee was formed, comprised entirely of upperclassmen, to direct freshman week activities. Unlike other

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[99] *Ibid.* Charles Tabor Fitts and Fletcher Harper Swift, *The Construction of Orientation Courses for College Freshmen* (Berkeley, 1928), 187-88.
[100] Knode, *Orienting the Student In College*, 57.
[101] "Committee Meets to Discuss Success of Freshman Week," *Ohio State Lantern*, October 6, 1927, p. 1.

schools, Michigan aspired to forge more permanent bonds between old and new students. Believing that every new student should feel that he has a "friend," 450 upperclassmen volunteered to help instruct four freshman, according to Michigan's student newspaper, *The Wolverine,* "in the traditions and ideals of the University, and to answer their inevitable questions concerning the ways of the place."[102] National data tracking the outcomes of freshman week by Teachers College, Columbia University substantiated these findings. Administrators credited freshman week with an "increase in cooperative spirit" among students and a decrease in the amount of freshman mortality.[103] With good reason, then, the Federal Bureau of Education leveled its own optimistic assessment of freshman week activities: "The plan is so simple, results obtained so excellent . . . that general adoption of the device . . . may be looked for among institutions which are seriously trying to meet their educational and social problems."[104]

Colleges buttressed freshman week initiatives by requiring students to enroll in mandatory orientation courses during their first year. These courses varied from one institution to the next. But there existed widespread agreement that new students in particular needed special guidance to find "one's self . . . one's bearings . . . of learning one's relationship to the society in which he resides."[105] Researchers Charles Fitts and Fletcher Swift identified three main types of orientation courses in their 1928 study *The Construction of Orientation Courses for College Freshmen*. The first, and oldest of the orientation courses was the "world-problem" course. A throwback to the nineteenth-century college's moral philosophy course, administered at the end of a student's career, and intended to bring unity and ultimate meaning to the one's acquired knowledge, the "world problem" course was used to good affect at Columbia University,

[102] "450 Advisers to Assist Freshman," *Wolverine*, August 2, 1921, p. 1.
[103] Knode, *Orienting the Student to College*, 181.
[104] Klein, *Higher Education Biennial Survey: 1922-1924, Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 20,* 10.
[105] Fitts and Swift, *The Construction of Orientation Courses for College Freshmen,* 150.

University of Chicago, University of Minnesota, and Dartmouth College, among others. Rather than a destination, however, the "world problem" course was now point of embarkation. It was intended to provide incoming students with a shared academic experience upon which they would build in the years ahead. Columbia University's "Introduction to Contemporary Civilization" exemplified this type of orientation course. Using a combination of lecture and discussion, it offered students an overview of the historical background of contemporary civilization with a special emphasis of its impact on current-day problems.[106] The Association of American University Professors supported the institutionalization of this type of freshman course, summing up its chief benefit thusly: "The course on the nature of the world and of man, being informational, will afford less initial difficulty to the freshman."[107]

The second main type of orientation course was the "methodology of thinking" orientation course. This type of course focused on improving students' study habits and reading abilities. At the University of Michigan, research demonstrated that mental deficiency was not the main cause of student failure. "A surprising number of students who have really excellent mental capacities are placed on probation," admitted Professor G.M. Whipple, of the School of Education. "Many students claim that they are ignorant of the method of studying and are therefore unable to get the full benefit from their courses."[108] To help overcome poor study habits, schools established new courses. Students' problems often involved more than time management. One of the major problems identified by researchers, and one that was closely linked to poor study habits, was inferior reading ability. Ohio State, one of the nation's largest schools, made improving students' reading ability a top priority. Headed by reading expert Dr.

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[106] *Ibid.,* 183.
[107] Charles Franklin Thwing, "New Tendencies Seen in College Education," *New York Times*, June 8, 1924, p. XX16.

Luella C. Pressey, Ohio State established fifteen sections of remedial reading to assist troubled students, 75 percent of whom, according to research, would fail at least one course during their first year of college without improved reading habits.[109]

The third, and most popular type of orientation course noted by Fitts and Swift was the "adjustment to college life" course. This type of course in many ways functioned as a continuation of the ideas and issues introduced during freshman week. Illinois Woman's College's "College Fundamentals" course was illustrative of this type of course. According to college officials, the purpose of the course was "to help the student adjust herself to her new environment and to give her a deep appreciation of the benefits of a college education."[110] Based on data collected during the 1925-26 academic year, Fitts and Swift identified 79 colleges around the country as operating at least one of the three types of orientation courses described above.[111]

The use of orientation courses to level the educational playing field precipitated interest in creating educational tracks for students of limited as well as exceptional ability. In order to maximize institutional capacity, administrators realized that their institutions could not simply cater to the needs of simply one type of student. Schools such as the University of Chicago and the University of Minnesota experimented in different ways to meet the needs of students of limited ability. At the University of Chicago, administrators divided the four-year college cycle into two distinct parts. The first two-years became the "junior college," which sought to provide

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[108] "Mental Exams Show Students on Probation Are not Below Average," *Wolverine*, August 4, 1921, p. 1.
[109] "Freshmen Organized for Remedial Work to Improve Reading," *Ohio State Lantern,* October 10, 1928, p. 1.
[110] Fitts and Swift, *The Construction of Orientation Courses for College Freshmen,* 181.
[111] For a listing of all 79 colleges offering orientation courses, and for a breakdown of the numbers of participating schools in each of the three orientation course classifications, see Fitts and Swift, 166 and 192, respectively. A good overview of the orientation movement that builds on the research of Fitts and Swift is Theodore H. Copeland, Jr., *Freshman Orientation Programs: A Study of Their Development and Present Status with Special Reference to Middle Atlantic Colleges* (New York, 1954).

all students with a "general education." Students who showed exceptional skill, however, were permitted to matriculate on for two additional years while those students who did not were asked to leave. Dean Chauncey S. Boucher viewed the program as providing Chicago and its students a mutually beneficial arrangement: "All of our students, who either end their requirements or who continue . . . have in common this much: an introduction to each of the four large fields of thought, an essential minimum of proficiency in English usage, and a respectable minimum training in a foreign language and in mathematics."[112]

At the University of Minnesota, which organized its "General College" as a standalone entity wholly separate from the regular four-year institution, the intent of its two-year college was likewise geared toward providing students of "lesser ability" with a chance to secure at least the rudiments of a formal college education. Besides, intoned President George Rightmire of the Ohio State University, "something in the college environment may set him on a new track and he may develop into a productive 'citizens', even if he does not become a 'scholar.'"[113]University of Minnesota officials defended their junior college—which one professor decried as a "place for dumbheads"—in ideological as well as financial terms. Not only were America's public universities created to benefit the public good, Dean John Johnston reminded his faculty that, they also depended on the financial beneficence of society: "The income taxes of these students will be paying your salaries in a few years."[114]

At the other end of the educational spectrum, the formation of honors programs and classes gained momentum for students of superior ability. Used to good effect at Ivy League

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[112] Chauncey S. Boucher, "Curriculum Provision for the Individual in the University of Chicago," in *Provision for the Individual in College, IV*, ed., William S. Gray (Chicago, 1932), 102.
[113] "President Rightmire Urges Bettering of Methods of Teaching," *Ohio State Lantern,* January 5, 1928, p. 1.
[114] John B. Johnston, "The Junior College of the University of Minnesota," in *Provision for the Individual in College, IV*, ed., William S. Gray (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), 111, 118.

colleges such as Princeton and Harvard, the intensification and refinement of third and fourth year study extended to other colleges around the country. University of Buffalo, for instance, established its honors program in 1924. The plan called for students of exceptional talent to work under the close supervision of a faculty member toward the completion of well-defined, independent research project. The results of the program were so positive, even as it forced faculty to deal with "new and difficult forms of teaching," that Buffalo made the honors format, what they called a "tutorial method," a permanent part of every students' undergraduate experience.[115] Swarthmore College's honors program, organized in 1922 under the careful oversight of President Frank Aydelotte, was run in much the same fashion, though it was never extended to the entire student body. The standard course of instruction, Aydelotte explained, was geared toward the "hypothetical individual—the average student." The honors program, however, catered instead to the educational needs of those "who are capable of going faster than the average, who do not need the routine exercises which are necessary for those of mediocre ability."[116] Students appreciated the added attention and rigor of the new honors' courses. A student at Smith College described her experiences in glowing terms. "The greatest thing we 1924 special honors students can hope for," she said, "is that we may start a tradition of the love and fellowship of study, for that is what special honors has brought us."[117] Between 1923 and 1927, the number of colleges offering this type of specialized, one-on-one undergraduate training increased from 44 to 150 institutions.[118]

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[115] George A. Works, "A Survey of Curriculum Provisions for Individualizing Instruction," in *Provision for the Individual in College, IV*, ed., William S. Gray (Chicago, 1932), 73-74.
[116] Frank Aydelotte, "Honors Courses at Swarthmore," in *Five College Plans: Columbia, Harvard, Swarthmore, Wabash, and Chicago*, ed., John J. Coss (New York, 1931), 59-61.
[117] "The Community's Stake in the Brilliant Student," *Report of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the National Association of Deans of Women* (1924), 116.
[118] Brubacher and Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition*, 264.

Perhaps inevitably, the interest in creating specialized educational options for students of advanced and basic ability led to heightened scrutiny of professorial instruction at all levels of the undergraduate college. The criticism of college professors was hardly new. But as colleges focused more intensely upon meeting students' personal needs, they also agreed that something had to be done to moderate the potentially deflating influence of "bone-dry scholastics . . . lacking in personality" on unsuspecting college students.[119] In response to this concern, the Land-Grant College Association adopted a 1922 resolution "in favor of professional training of college teachers."[120] Whether this declaration fueled wholesale changes is difficult to know. Evidence suggests, however, that colleges around the country experimented with various approaches to improving the quality of undergraduate instruction and to enlisting the services of "inspiring human contact teachers."[121]

Colleges stressed the importance of smaller lecture and discussion sections and especially the role of student questions, often gathered anonymously, in adjusting the pace and direction of professorial instruction.[122] More striking still was the growth in teacher training and administrative courses—replicated at as many as twenty colleges and universities—for graduate students and practicing faculty. Offered during both the regular academic year and summer session, these courses commonly explored the current day problems of the college and its students, oftentimes by articulating these problems in decidedly psychological terms. Purdue University's "Psychology of Learning and Teaching Applied to College Work" was one such

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[119] William B. Munro, "A Self-Study of College Teaching," *Journal of Higher Education,* 9 (December 1932), 459-63; J.O. Creager, "The Preparation of the College Teacher," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 6 (October 1932), 67-77.
[120] F.J. Kelly, "The Training of College Teachers," *Journal of Educational Research,* 14 (November 1927), 332-39.
[121] Richard H. Edwards, *Undergraduates: A Study of Morale in Twenty-Three American Colleges and Universities* (New York, 1928), 315.
[122] H.H. Newman, "An Orientation Course," *Journal of Higher Education,* 2 (March 1931), 121-26.

course. Ohio State University, the acknowledged leader in the college teacher training movement, offered a whole bevy of classes: "College Teaching," "Administration of Colleges and Universities," and the "Psychological Problems of Higher Education," among others.[123] For those professors unwilling to undergo further study, and they were undoubtedly in the majority, colleges relied on teaching awards and the use of student evaluations to persuade poor performing professors to take a greater interest in their students' academic as well as personal lives.[124]

The emphasis on improved classroom instruction cannot alone be attributed to the rise of personality and to administrator's desire to quell student failure. Surely, student complaints about the dry, pedantic, and boring instructional methods of professors resonated with administrators.[125] But additional factors also contributed to the push for both better teachers and new instructional approaches. The rapid expansion of graduate education and training in the postwar period raised fresh questions about how best to prepare would-be professors for a life of teaching, research, and service. Disciplines, demarcated by clear departmental bounds, advanced particular research techniques and modes of inquiry. Unique approaches to knowledge production and dissemination required specialized techniques for conveying this knowledge to uninitiated undergraduates: in psychology, the laboratory was the vehicle of choice; in history, the seminar; and in sociology and anthropology, the field study. In a departure from the nineteenth-century college "lecture," aimed at transmitting known facts to a quiet audience of

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[123] Archie M. Palmer, "Educating the Educators," *Journal of Higher Education,* 1 (June 1930), 334-38. Other schools offering teaching courses for college instruction and administration included University of Kentucky, New York University, Duke University, Colorado University, Idaho University, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, University of Texas, and University of Wisconsin.
[124] Munro, "A Self-Study of College Teaching," 459-463; Merle I. Protzman, "Student Rating of College Teaching," *School and Society,* 34 (April 20, 1929), 513-15; John J. Coss, "Improvement in College Teaching at Columbia University," *Journal of Higher Education,* 3 (March 1932), 121-26.
[125] Robert C. Angell, *Campus,* 36-37.

students in the name of preserving knowledge, the 1920s classroom, whatever the discipline, took a different approach. Knowledge was now produced rather than preserved, and professors' aim in teaching necessarily acquired a more social and student-focused approach.

The university's sudden student-centeredness in the classroom was even more pronounced away from it. Involvement in students' personal lives outside the classroom was deemed crucial to success in it. Thus colleges' commitment to preventing maladjustment compelled them to revisit their laissez-faire policy toward student living arrangements as well as students' involvement in extracurricular activities. The construction of suitable dormitories was considered a crucial step in bringing students into closer contact with one another, with their professors, and with their surroundings. A Michigan freshman claimed that his room "crushed his spirit . . . [and] typified all the loneliness that a freshman can have." He was so "ashamed" of his room that he would not allow friends to visit.[126] In order to improve adjustment and temper student complaints such as these, wealthy schools, such as Harvard and Yale, not to mention the country's elite women's colleges, vastly expanded their undergraduate dormitory space during the 1920s, often using private monies.

At most public colleges, however, funding for such projects remained difficult to obtain. "The housing problem is serious," wrote a house-mother at a large co-educational university. "The present houses are none too sanitary; e.g., the one made long ago, that students must be permitted a least two hot baths a week, is now generally interpreted not more than two."[127] Another public college located in the Midwest reported finding a student "living in a shack which he had erected with his own hands from discarded lumber."[128] So, even as research

[126] James R. Angell, *A Study in Undergraduate Adjustment*, 64.
[127] Edwards, *Undergraduates*, 23.
[128] Rufus H. Fitzgerald, "Personal Adjustments in Relation to Living Conditions," in *Provision for the Individual in College, IV*, ed., William S. Gray (Chicago, 1932), 189.

revealed that students who lived on-campus typically stood "first in grades," due to financial constraints, boarding houses, fraternities, and sororities remained the most common forms of student housing in the 1920s.[129] Much to the dismay of college administrators, then, typical undergraduates, as one personnel official griped, had "no place where he can sit down in comfort . . . entertain his chosen friends . . . and develop his taste and personality, his individuality."[130]

Possibly because it cost less, colleges enjoyed far greater success forging tighter relations with student groups than they did building new dormitories.[131] Although some college professors continued to link student maladjustment with too many extracurricular activities, many more college leaders viewed the extracurriculum as a gateway to academic success and marker of a well-rounded personality. Numerous studies revealed as much. In 1927, Northwest Missouri State Teachers College, for instance, reported that, "the students who make the best grade tend to find an outlet for their extra-curricular activities."[132] Other studies conducted at University of Kansas, University of California, University of Minnesota, and Wittenborg College, in fact, suggested that students who failed to participate in extracurricular activities, actually registered the lowest scholarly accomplishments.[133] Administrators at Middlebury College considered the extracurriculum so important that they actually adopted a policy of giving grades for participation.[134] President Frank Aydelotte of Swarthmore College, an outspoken advocated of the extracurriculum, believed that the academic planners had much to learn from the excitement and energy that undergraduates dedicated to their campus activities and clubs: "If the regular

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[129] *Ibid.*,192.
[130] Brubacher and Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition*, 327.
[131] Edwards, *Undergraduate*s, 126-27.
[132] O. Myking Mehus, "Academic Achievement of College Students in Different Kinds of Extra-curricular Activities," *Journal of Educational Sociology,* 9 (December 1935), 56.
[133] O. Myking Mehus, "Extracurricular Activities and Academic Achievement," *Journal of Educational Sociology,* 6 (November 1932), 143-49.
[134] Edwards, *Undergraduates*, 124.

curriculum could offer the same opportunity for the development of independence and initiative that is now offered by clubs and teams . . . some of the energy which undergraduates put into the miscellaneous pursuits would go into their studies with infinitely greater educational results."[135] Some faculty members complained that "there [was] altogether too much forcing boys into activities." Yet, by the end of the 1920s most college leaders believed that extracurricular involvement was a key ingredient in its recipe for student success.[136]

Even with the close oversight of students' academic and social lives, some students were nevertheless victimized by bouts of severe maladjustment. In order to provide instant treatment for the worst cases of student maladjustment, therefore, select institutions organized mental hygiene clinics to provide emotionally confused students with professional psychiatric care. Although psychiatrists and hygienists had little experience in personnel activities, the vision of the college as taking care of the student's "whole life" paved the way for the organization of psychiatric services at college campuses around the country. That the personnel point of view provided the backdrop for the creation of psychiatric services seemed like a logical turn of events. "Attention has been given to the gifted student and the probationer," suggested one hygenist, "[but] the maladjusted student, whose emotional development is confused . . . is just beginning to attract notice."[137]

A wave of student suicides during 1927 pushed the alleged plight of college students into the national consciousness. From a statistical standpoint, there was not a "suicide epidemic," as some newspapers erroneously reported. Indeed, from a purely statistical standpoint, claimed *The*

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[135] Quoted in Angell, *The Campus,* 50.
[136] Edwards, *Undergraduates*, 107; George F. Dunkelberger, "Do Extracurricular Activities Make for Poor Scholarship?" *Journal of Educational Sociology,* 9 (December 1935), 215-18; F. Stuart Chapin, "Research Studies of Extracurricular Activities and Their Significance in Reflecting Social Change," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 4 (April 1931), 491-498.

Washington Post, "the proportion of suicides among students [since January 1927] was no greater than among clerks or other groups of the same age."[138] In fact, a study by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company revealed conclusively that the death rate from suicide had been decreasing at all ages in the United States since 1910. Yet, the reality of some thirty student suicides over the course of one semester was more than enough to capture the nation's attention.[139]

Possible explanations for the wave of suicides came from every corner. Religious leaders chalked up students' distress to an abiding belief that "this life is hell," as one reverend bluntly put it.[140] The decline of religious belief was likewise cited by some college presidents. Wesleyan University President James L. McConaughy, for example, believed that the root cause of student suicide was attributable to "psychological behaviorism," which had "caused students to think of themselves as playthings of fate without God-given wills."[141] McConaughy's insistence that psychology was the cause of student suicide flew in the face of most experts who instead viewed psychology as the best way to diagnose and treat student problems of adjustment.

With the financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Commonwealth Fund, the National Committee on Mental Hygiene (NCMH) oversaw the establishment of a small but potent network of mental hygiene facilities in cities and at colleges around the country. By 1930, the NCMH could point to the operation of over 30 NCMH mental hygiene clinics in the United States, half of which were located at colleges or universities.[142] Included among the ranks of schools with mental hygiene facilities by the end of the 1920s were Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth,

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[137] E.L. Stogdill, "The Maladjusted College Student—A Further Study With Results," *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 8 (October 1929), 440-441.
[138] "No College Suicide Wave is Shown By Statistics," *Washington Post*, June 12, 1927, p. SM8.
[139] Number of suicides drawn from "Student a Suicide," *New York Times,* March 9, 1927, p. 27.
[140] "Lays Suicide Toll To Machine Age," *New York Times,* March 21, 1927, p. 22.
[141] "Wesleyan Head Urges More Spirit," *New York Times*, June 20, 1927, p. 8.

Harvard, West Point, Smith, Brown, Wellesley, Northwestern University, the University of Michigan, Ohio State University, and the University of Chicago.[143]

The question that the college mental hygiene clinic wrestled with was whether academic problems precipitated maladjustment, or maladjustment academic difficulty. One thing that all agreed upon was that poor academic performance was the outward sign of an inner psychic problem.[144] In this way, the college professor was oftentimes the individual responsible for referring a student for psychiatric care. At the University of Minnesota, Donald Patterson and his protégé E.G. Williamson organized a novel means of coordinating their institution's hygienic regimen. They did this by setting up a faculty-run "Contact Desk" to take calls from students and to arrange for referrals to their mental health clinic.[145] In 1929 the Contact Desk fielded and placed over 2,000 student requests—a majority by telephone but some by mail—during the academic year.[146] At Ohio State University, meanwhile, the Student Consultation Service was organized in a similar fashion and likewise relied on students to admit themselves for further evaluation.[147] The gradual production of student interest in seeking psychological counseling was described well by one University of California psychiatrist: "The patients, of course, were few at first and the growth of the service has been gradual.… However, as the knowledge of it has spread in the student body, by word of mouth and by lectures on mental problems by the staff

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[142] Hale, *Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States,* 87.
[143] Cohen, *Challenging Orthodoxies,* 209; Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States,* 87. On the spread of the hygiene movement during the early 1930s, see Harold W. Bernard, Ph.D., "College Mental Hygiene—A Decade of Growth," *Mental* Hygiene, 24 (July 1940), 413-18; Cohen, "The Mental Hygiene Movement and the Development of Personality: Changing Conceptions of the American College and University, 1920-1940," 81-82.
[144] Zoe Emily Leatherman, *A Study of the Maladjusted College Student* (Columbus, 1925), 12-13.
[145] E.G. Williamson and D.G. Patterson, "Co-ordinating Counseling Procedures," *Journal of Higher Education,* 5 (February 1934), 75-78.
[146] *Ibid.*, 79.
[147] Stogdill, "The Maladjusted College Student—A Further Study With Results," 442-50.

psychiatrists in the freshman hygiene course, the material has come to assume fairly sizeable proportions."[148]

That undergraduates voluntarily sought out help at college mental hygiene clinics should not come as much of a surprise. Undergraduates were well versed in the language of psychology and were undoubtedly adept at crude self-diagnoses. The Ohio State Lantern encouraged students to seek help. "Psychology Clinic Will Give Help on Student Problems," announced one headline in the *Ohio State Lantern.*[149] Open discussion about the role of the clinic in the daily life of college students undoubtedly gave greater comfort to those students who did seek assistance. At Ohio State, for example, it was reported that, "every class and practically every college is represented among those consulting the clinic."[150]

Exposure to psychological discourse was everywhere at the 1920s college. Undergraduates experienced such language during the admission process, at freshman week, and in orientation classes where the topic of personal adjustment to college was framed in terms of adapting one's personality to the organizational structure of the college. Moreover, as Kurt Danziger has explained, in the 1920s undergraduate college students frequently became the subjects of classroom psychology experiments.[151] Questionnaires and surveys with such titles as "The Neurotic Self-Inventory" and "Personality and Sex Life" are two of the personality inventories that probably encouraged students to think about their own mental well-being in a similarly psychologized way. At Syracuse University, a 1925 study of undergraduate attitudes undertaken by psychologists Daniel Katz and Floyd Allport revealed the extent to which students thought of themselves in terms of personality. According to the findings of 4,238 questionnaires,

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[148] Sydney Kinnear Smith, "Psychiatry and University Men: A Study of 300 Cases on the Psychiatric Service of the University of California," *Mental Hygiene,* 12 (January 1928), 38-47.
[149] "Psychology Clinic Will Give Help On Student Problems," *Ohio State Lantern*, January 15, 1925, p. 1.
[150] *Ibid.*

the most commonly named personal problem cited by students had to with their own "personality development."[152]

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The rapid spread and institutionalization of the personnel point of view throughout American higher education marked the culmination of the protracted search for an answer to the institution's student mortality problem. After intelligence testers' exams of native ability proved inadequate to the task, college officials looked to personality testers with expertise in personnel management for a different explanation of, and solution to, student mortality. That they ultimately accepted the cultivation of student personality as a worthy goal of higher learning, however, did not simply occur because of a dearth of better alternatives. Used to good effect in military and business settings, the conscious pursuit of the development of student personality provided the college with structure and direction.

By accepting the notion that different personalities responded differently to college, colleges attempted to create an environment that would meet the needs of all students. Imperfect though this effort was, higher education's focus on individual personality laid the groundwork for the creation of a very different type of institution than had existed previously. The structural and emotional integrity of the new university would be put to the test in the 1930s.

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[151] Danziger, *Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research*, 88-100.
[152] Daniel Katz and Floyd Allport, *Students' Attitudes: A Report of the Syracuse University Reaction Study* (New York, 1931), 88-89. For a similar take on the use of undergraduates "bodies" for medical science, see Heather Munro Prescott, "Using the Student Body: College and University Students as Research Subjects in the United States during the Twentieth Century," *Journal of the History of Medicine,* 57 (January 2002), 3-38.