

6 The Origins of Formal Alignment

The National University Movement and the Creation of the AAU

By the turn of the twentieth century, academic leaders recognized the need to build on the dramatic institutional restructuring and expansion that had taken place in the years since the Civil War. Loosely coupled coordination had encouraged a variety of initiatives. However, its limitations had become apparent to a number of leading academics. Out of such concern emerged two approaches: (1) the reinvigoration of the movement to found a national university and (2) the reinvigoration and establishment of formal associations. For the development of the American state, the most prominent example of the latter approach was the creation of Association of American Universities, a formal collection of the nation's leading institutions for graduate and professional education. Some institutional entrepreneurs would lend their support to both causes, but for the most part, leaders of the elite institutions that comprised the AAU generally frowned on and lobbied against efforts to establish a federal institution of higher education. More than simply further defining and clarifying the relationship of colleges and universities to one another, these efforts were instrumental in structuring universities' relationships to the federal government and their roles as active partners and independent agents of the national state.

Prior to this period, formal coordination was sporadic, driven by individual initiative and institutional need. With the challenge of a federally sponsored university and the creation of the AAU, partnership and agency became more clearly defined. The potential alternative of a national university forced universities to examine and promote their efforts with and on behalf of the American state, while the establishment of the AAU created a regular forum for coordination and clarification in pursuit of such efforts.

The failed efforts to establish a national university and the successful creation of the AAU helped forge formal alliances that furthered the role of schools as partners and agents. The movement to found a national university originated in the desire to establish a center of learning in the nation's capital during the Revolutionary era. John Hoyt, the most vigorous proponent of this cause, had been actively lobbying educators and politicians since the late 1860s. For almost forty years, Hoyt proclaimed both the necessity and the benefit of a federally supported institution of higher learning. Having achieved some success lobbying Congress in 1891, Hoyt stepped up his efforts in the last years of the twentieth century, attempting to create a capstone institution formally overseeing the loosely coupled system of universities that were beginning to pursue research and advanced degrees in earnest.

Simultaneous to Hoyt's efforts, the heads of America's leading universities developed an interest in further formalizing the structure and nature of graduate education. Spurred by the Berkeley chapter of the Federation of Graduate Clubs, University of California president Benjamin Ide Wheeler proposed a meeting of university heads in 1899 to discuss the treatment of American degrees by European universities. Wheeler's peers agreed, and as discussions in anticipation of the meeting continued, the agenda for the first session soon expanded beyond the leading American universities simply sharing thoughts on their relations with foreign schools, to concrete consideration and formalization of their relationships with one another. From these initial meetings developed a coordinating organization that extended the ties and reach of the loosely coupled institutions that had shaped higher education in the later half of the nineteenth century.

Both Hoyt's attempts to establish a national university and the formal organization of America's leading universities are important for our understanding of the development of higher education in the United States. Just as important, these two related efforts are crucial for understanding the process by which university-based expertise grew to be central in the development of the national state. While not necessarily stemming from an "organized anarchy," the rise of expertise did stem from a somewhat chaotic and haphazard process driven by the actions of entrepreneurs and their specification of alternatives.

Since, as I have stated earlier in this book, there was nothing inevitable about the extent and nature of the rise in university support for the national state, detailing the process that led to formal organization of the universities requires consideration of Hoyt's significant alternative and the response it initiated. In considering Hoyt's failure

and the AAU's formation, the powerful position of established universities certainly must be acknowledged. However, one should also recognize that in addition to possessing influence, the institutional entrepreneurs who ran the country's leading schools were able to make a compelling case for how and why the nation's pursuit of specialized knowledge and other related interests would be best advanced by a series of coordinated institutions, rather than through a centralized federal university.

The Persistent Entrepreneur: John Hoyt and the National University Movement

Numerous efforts to found a national university had been undertaken since before the Revolutionary War. Presidents Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Quincy Adams all expressed a desire for the federal government to found a federally sponsored institution of higher learning in the nation's capital. Presidential commitment to such a university varied. Washington was arguably the idea's strongest proponent. He continued to lobby on its behalf after he had left office, and his will even bequeathed Potomac Company stock (which proved to be worthless) for the establishment of a federally run university. While Washington's successors did not necessarily offer their own resources and were not as particularly detailed in their proposals, they all, in one form or another, called on the Congress to found—and on the “General Government” to oversee—a “university or institution for the communication of knowledge in the various departments of literature and science.”¹ Despite this presidential support, a national university was never established. By the 1830s, the election of Andrew Jackson, the rise of spoils-driven “Jacksonian democracy,” and the correspondent decline of the “patrician” presidency meant that grand plans for a national seminary of learning lay dormant.

The effort to found a national university at the turn of century was spearheaded by western educator and political activist John Hoyt. Hoyt's interest and efforts spanned over forty years. From the late 1860s onward, Hoyt served as the most prominent advocate of and organizer for the national university cause. A graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University, Hoyt began his career in education as a professor at Antioch College in Ohio. Among his many positions, his most notable employment was as founding president of the University of Wyoming, where he served from 1887 to 1890. Modern sensibilities might characterize Hoyt as a self-promoter. He was an unceasing advocate for his

idea. He worked almost perpetually to fulfill what he characterized as "Washington's vision."² To better understand the nature of Hoyt's efforts at the turn of the century, we need to examine his first attempts at institutional entrepreneurship years before.

One Union, One University: Hoyt's Early Efforts

With the end of the Civil War and the beginnings of the industrial age, which were marked by a rise in societal complexity and a correspondent evolution of expertise, plans for a national university were rekindled. An early Republican organizer, Hoyt was appointed secretary of the Wisconsin State Board of Agriculture in 1857. In this position, he was an early supporter of the Morrill Act and was actively involved in the development of the state's university. Having attended the London International Exhibition of 1862 as a state commissioner, he was appointed as a U.S. commissioner to the Paris Universal Exposition of 1867. In addition to serving as a representative to the exhibition, Hoyt was asked by Secretary of State William Seward to tour and report on educational institutions and systems throughout Europe and to make a comparative study of the United States. In the course of these tours, Hoyt concluded that the United States was lacking and severely needed a national university dedicated to postgraduate studies. Upon returning from Europe, Hoyt submitted to the secretary of state a report in which he articulated the need for a newly founded national university to address the challenges of the modern era.³

Hoyt built his plan from observation of schools, gymnasiums, and universities throughout Europe. However, he stressed that no system and no country was sufficiently advanced to serve as a model. In proposing what he suggested would be the world's first "true" university, Hoyt sought to draw on the breadth of the European and American experiences to establish a new type of educational institution. Hoyt's university would be dedicated not only to the advancement of knowledge but, more significantly, to the application of that knowledge on behalf of progress and of the nation.

Having spelled out his ambitions, Hoyt immediately set about trying to put his plan into action. In 1869, at the annual meeting of the National Education Association in Trenton, New Jersey, he gave a speech entitled "University Progress," in which he offered his proposal for a national university in Washington, D.C. He maintained that the university would focus on postgraduate work and utilize the vast facilities for literary and scientific culture afforded by the several departments of the government, with the hope of making "the National Cap-

ital the most important intellectual centre in the world." Hoyt's suggestion was generally well received. The association passed a resolution supporting the idea in principal—suggesting that "a great American university is the leading want of American education"—and established a committee, with Hoyt as chairman, to report on the proposal at the next year's meeting.⁴

In addition to overseeing the preparation of the committee's report, Hoyt used his chairmanship to call on many of the nation's leading educators, seeking to gain their support. Among those who expressed sympathy with Hoyt's plan was the commissioner of the federal Bureau of Education, General John Easton, Jr., who praised Hoyt's efforts while speaking before the NEA in August 1870.⁵ Those assembled agreed with Easton's sentiment. Hoyt's committee's report was unanimously adopted, and the committee was instructed to continue its work on behalf of the national university cause. The committee's second report, presented at the NEA's annual meeting in St. Louis in 1871, further specified the mission and scope of a national university. In addition to embracing "every department of science, literature, and the arts, and every real profession" and offering fellowships, laboratories, and the "best known facilities" for advanced study, the report suggested the university should be "established as to command the hearty support of the American people, regardless of section, party, or creed."⁶ Coming less than half a decade after the end of the Civil War, the proposal touted the national university as a unifying institution. Hoyt and his fellow supporters believed it would provide not only advanced knowledge but also a structure to help overcome the nation's sectional, partisan, and denominational differences.

Beyond its role in advancing knowledge and unifying the nation, Hoyt's proposed university would also serve as a standard-bearer for educational institutions throughout the country. Though Hoyt's proposal did not suggest formal coordination, it did state that a national university

should be so coordinated in plan with the other institutions of the country so as to not in any way conflict with them, but on the contrary, to become at once a potent agency for their improvement and the means of creating a complete, harmonious, and efficient system of American education.⁷

In Hoyt's conception, a national university supported by the federal government was to be instrumental in establishing standards and expectations for all of higher education. The committee's report was well received by the full assembly. Its recommendations were

adopted, and a permanent committee to further pursue the issue was established.⁸

Having mobilized a number of leading academics and gained the support of the NEA, Hoyt turned his attentions to Capitol Hill and securing legislation for the establishment of a national university that would serve the nation and promote expertise. In January 1872, Hoyt's committee submitted a draft of a bill to members of Congress asking for "criticisms and suggestions." With significant assistance from Senators Charles Sumner of California and Timothy Howe of Wisconsin, the committee drafted a bill (S 859) that Howe introduced in March. The Howe bill initiated discussion on the topic, but no report was made. However, a subsequent version of the bill, presented in May by Senator Frederick Sawyer of Massachusetts (S 1128) and Representative Legrand Perce of Mississippi (HR 2389), was referred to committee. These initial bills would serve as templates on which all later efforts would be heavily based.

A little less than a year later, in March 1873, the House Committee on Education and Labor, which was chaired by Perce, reported back unanimously in favor of the bill. The committee report stressed the ever-increasing need for expertise and the value a university based in Washington, D.C., would have in producing such expertise for the nation and the federal state. In addition to detailing the structure of the university, its postgraduate nature, and its connection with various government departments, the bill offered a university endowment plan that the committee called "simple, definite, and secure." The federal government would in perpetuity pay the national university 5 percent interest on a "registered, unassignable, certificate" of twenty million dollars to provide for the purchase of grounds, the erection of buildings, the acquisition of equipment, and so forth. It was expected that private donors and tuition would help supplement this income.

Despite the unanimous support of the committee, the bill never reached the floor for consideration before Congress adjourned. Undaunted by their failure to get the bill to the floor and buoyed by their support in committee, proponents of the national university sought to rally support. By the NEA's annual meeting in 1874, the national university movement had gained two prominent supporters, Cornell president Andrew Dickson White and Missouri educator and, later, commissioner of education William T. Harris. Both men addressed the convention on behalf of Hoyt's cause. Reflecting on his travels throughout Europe and his experience as an educator, White stressed:

the history of all civilized nations and especially our own, shows that the thoughtful statesmanship of each generation should provide for the primary, secondary, and advanced education of each.

Accepting this principle the immediate care should evidently be to strengthen by public action the best foundations for advanced education which we already have; and . . . should it create one or more new ones worthy of the nation placing one of them at the national capital, where vast libraries, museums, and laboratories of various sorts now existing may be made of use for advanced instruction, and where the university could act directly and powerfully for good in sending graduates admirably prepared into the very heart and center of our national civil service, to elevate and strengthen it, I believe in spite of pessimists and doctrinaires that the result would be vastly for good upon the whole country.⁹

White did not embrace the specifics of Hoyt's plan, but White's general support for the national university movement brought added national attention. Following his speech, which received coverage in the *New York Times*, he actively promoted the idea in lectures and editorials for more than twenty years. White would soon leave academia to join the diplomatic corps, but even from across the Atlantic, his advocacy would continue.

In a lengthy speech, Harris also praised Hoyt's efforts, stressing that his proposed institution addressed the nation's greatest unmet need, knowledge applied on behalf of educated governance.

All the evils which we suffer politically may be traced to the existence in our midst of an immense mass of ignorant, illiterate, or semi-educated people who assist in governing the country, while they possess no insight into the nature of the issues which they attempt to decide. . . . Our colleges, as at present constituted, do not fully answer the needs of this country at this time. The problems of sociology and statesmanship, the philosophy of science, of literature, of history, of jurisprudence, these demand the concentrated labor of a large corps of salaried professors provided for at well-endowed colleges and universities.

It is in this respect that the National University, founded by the American state and endowed munificently, would prove of the greatest value to the country.

Harris ended his address by articulating the rationale that would drive the national university movement for decades to come. Hoyt, Perce, White, and others had all suggested the importance a national university would have in providing advanced knowledge to both the governed and the governing. Harris built on and clarified such sentiments when he stated (in terms that, though somewhat lengthy, are absolutely fundamental to our consideration):

It is a trite lament of our time that our Government needs purifying; that it should be surrounded by elevating influences. It is the mistake of certain abstract political theorists in this country, who would attempt to purify the Government by divorcing it from its concrete relation to civil society, that has prevented the growth of a science of statesmanship here and has caused the humiliating spectacle of acts of corruption done through sheer ignorance of the proprieties of statesmanship.

When we consider the great advantages that would ensue from the connection that a national university would have with the several bureaus of our General Government, and of the digested results that would proceed from the investigation of the statistical data there collected from the various phases of our social political life; when we consider the effect of collecting, by means of a vast endowment, the best educated intelligence of the time in a university faculty, and the resulting study of our institutions by free disinterested investigation, elevated above the atmosphere of strife wherein the practical everyday world is immersed, the importance of this movement to found a national university is fully apparent. Its advent will correct and prevent wrong tendencies in the direction of common schools, and likewise of colleges and private schools. It will be the source of supply for teachers and professors who shall take up the work of secondary education in the several states. From its lecture rooms will emanate the science that will solve our political and social problems, and furnish the philosophy of true statesmanship.¹⁰

Harris's comments reflect the breadth of the movement's support. Hoyt believed it was necessary to have the support of educators from all levels, not just university leaders, and he actively courted prominent secondary educators, such as Harris. More significantly, Harris's comments represent one of the clearest articulations of the movement's belief that a federally sponsored university was essential not only for the promotion of quality education but also for the promotion of good government itself.

Despite such rhetoric and mobilization, Hoyt and his supporters could not convince Congress to take action on the Perce-Sawyer bill. The movement's most vocal critics denounced the idea as elitist and questioned the feasibility of the funding mechanism. Others wondered how well represented all the nation's regional and denominational interests would be and worried that such an institution would become an instrument for, rather than a relief from, corruption and politicking. The bill languished, inactive.

In 1876, Hoyt attempted the first of many efforts to revive the national university legislation. However, his initial effort at revival was, as he described, "thwarted by the excitement growing out of the electoral contest and by other factors occasioning a further postponement."¹¹ Though the contest over Rutherford B. Hayes's election to the

presidency might have dampened Hoyt's efforts at revival in 1876, it did provide the movement with a vocal proponent in the White House. In his annual message to Congress, delivered in December 1877, Hayes pronounced support for a national university serving as a capstone and benchmark for the American educational system.

The intelligent judgment of the country goes still further, regarding as both constitutional and expedient for the General Government to extend to technical and higher education such aid as is deemed essential to the general welfare and to our due prominence among the enlightened and cultivated nations of the world.

It is encouraging to observe in connection with the growth of fraternal feeling in those states in which slavery formerly existed evidence of increasing interest in universal education; and I shall be glad to give my approval to any appropriate measure which may be enacted by Congress for the purpose of supplementing with national aid the local systems of education in those states and in all states; I here add that I believe it is desirable . . . to the great and lasting benefit of the entire country, that this system should be crowned by a university in all respects in keeping with the national capital and thereby realize the cherished hopes of Washington on this subject.¹²

Unfortunately for Hoyt and the national university's proponents, Hayes was not able to lend much more than rhetorical support. Hayes reiterated his recommendations for a more active federal education policy in his address the following year, but the movement still could not garner enough support or clout to generate movement in Congress.

A New Institution for a New Century: Hoyt's Later Efforts

Hoyt's efforts in the 1870s would be far from his only attempt to create a national university before the turn of the century. Over the next twenty years, he would continue his activities as an institutional entrepreneur. Eventually transforming the NEA's permanent committee into an organization called the Committee for the Establishment of the University of the United States, Hoyt continually promoted his cause in speeches, editorials, and letters to prominent university officials. Hoyt was able to generate public expressions of support from such educational policymakers as Grover Cleveland's secretary of the interior, L. Q. C. Lamar (who oversaw the Bureau of Education), and such university educators as Andrew Dickson White, Charles Kendall Adams, and Herbert Baxter Adams. However, he was frustrated in his efforts to gain the full support of the higher education community and the Washington establishment. From the very outset, Hoyt attempted to promote a federally sponsored university not only as a solution to the problem of developing and maintaining

educational standards, systems, and institutions across the country but also as a unifying force bridging the nation's sectarian and regional divides. While few disputed the need to address such concerns, many questioned the viability of Hoyt's plan and its ability to meet the challenges he had identified.

Despite these setbacks, Hoyt persisted. Even though he had moved further west, to Wyoming (where he took the territorial governorship from 1878 to 1882 and to which he returned as founding president of the University of Wyoming in 1887), Hoyt kept an active presence in Washington, D.C., and remained vigilant in his efforts. At the beginning of the 1890s, he began again to mobilize support in earnest. Hoyt found a willing ally in Senator George Edmunds of Vermont, who introduced a bill in May 1890 for the establishment of the "University of the United States." Edmunds's bill (S 3822) was modeled extensively on the movement's previous efforts and called for a onetime appropriation of five hundred thousand dollars and for the establishment in the Treasury of a perpetual fund of five million dollars from which an interest of 4 percent would be derived annually and put toward operating expenses.

Similar to earlier efforts, Edmunds's bill never reached a floor vote. Having introduced the bill at the end of the session, Edmunds secured the formation of the Senate Select Committee to Establish the University of the United States. The committee, with Edmunds's fellow Vermonter Redfield Proctor as chairman, worked through the recess and actively cooperated with Hoyt's committee in modifying the legislation and securing support. In 1892, Hoyt presented to the Senate his *Memorial in Regard to a National University*. In addition to providing arguments for establishing such a university and for placing such a university in Washington, Hoyt's memorial contained a lengthy historical summary of all previous efforts and expressions of support for the concept, from George Washington onward. The Senate not only received Hoyt's report but authorized the printing and distribution of five thousand additional copies by the Government Printing Office, a not insubstantial expense at the time.

The Senate's action provided the movement with its broadest audience yet. However, Hoyt and his supporters were unable to capitalize. Further committee reports on the Edmunds bill were issued in 1893 and 1894, with Senator Eppa Hunton of Virginia serving as the new chair, but no legislative action was taken before the end of the session. Reconstructing why these committee reports never reached the Senate

floor is difficult. Legislative history simply records that no further action was taken after committee reception of Hoyt's reports.

In a 1902 report to Congress, Hoyt summarized the arguments offered by various opponents to the national university over the past quarter century: (1) the nation had no need for an exclusively post-graduate university; (2) the trend of educational thought in Europe was for the state to create multiple campuses rather than a singular centralized one; (3) higher education was a luxury, more appropriately left to private and denominational benefactors; (4) improved graduate facilities were needed but should not be established by the national government for fear of political interference; (5) existing colleges would be "overshadowed, minified, stripped of their professors and students and reduced to nothingness by the competing Central institution"; and—perhaps the most extreme suggestion—(6) "it is no proper function of the Government to care for interests of education."¹³ These objections were raised by a variety of opponents to the national university, ranging from the heads of four leading universities,¹⁴ who criticized it as unnecessary; to the president of the Methodist-run American University (which had been recently established in Washington, D.C.), who criticized it as "godless"; to a leading radical populist, who criticized it as "elitist." Such disparate forces did not necessarily unify the opposition to Hoyt's proposed university, but collectively they presented significant obstacles.

Seeking to overcome such obstacles, Hoyt sought to mobilize other leading academics whose reputations carried influence and respect. Writing to University of Michigan president James Burrill Angell, Hoyt explained the difficulties the movement had encountered in getting the bill out of committee during the Fifty-third Congress. Hoyt hoped to broaden his movement's support, as he and his colleagues were planning a campaign to introduce legislation at the very beginning of the Fifty-fourth Congress and were seeking "most distinguished of American(s)" to join a "Committee of 100" to promote his legislation.¹⁵

While not providing specifics, Hoyt, in an entrepreneurial attempt to cultivate Angell's membership, suggested that prospective private backing was in the offing. Recognizing Angell's position as the "elder statesman" of university presidents and leader of the flagship university in the West, Hoyt continually sought Angell's guidance and support. In pursuing Angell's membership on his committee, Hoyt also not very subtly articulated his desire that its members would be willing to exert their influence: "Demands for money will be made upon no mem-

ber of the Committee; but we shall confidently expect their friendly advice and hope for their personal influence at all convenient times."¹⁶ Angell was willing to lend Hoyt a sympathetic ear. He would also offer general words of encouragement and suggestions as to how the university ought to be structured and legislation drafted. Angell's polite encouragement, however, was not the equivalent of his support.

Some colleagues of Angell's, such as the president of Hamilton College, E. P. Powell, actively endorsed the proposal. Writing to Angell about efforts to make his college a part of the State University of New York, Powell stressed the need for a national system of higher education: "It seems to me very desirable to work up and lay before the people the idea of completed state systems and to urge immediate incorporation of a federalist National University at Washington."¹⁷

Angell remained skeptical of Hoyt's plan but saw some wisdom in it. Because Senator Edmunds was an old acquaintance of his from Vermont, Angell would not dismiss the legislation out of hand. Edmunds wrote Angell at the beginning of 1896, seeking his strong support. Edmunds wrote of the need for an institution "which shall coordinate and bring the cooperation of all institutions of learning to the work of still higher learning," and he stressed that there was still much to be attained by a properly equipped institution—of "which we, even in this country of wonder, can have little conception."¹⁸ Despite the lobbying of such friends as Edmunds, Angell refrained from joining the "Committee of 100." However, because of Hoyt's persistent correspondence and Angell's position among his peers, Angell would remain a distant observer of the movement. Other leading academics, including Stanford's David Starr Jordan and Mississippi's Robert Fulton, would join the "Committee of 100."

Though garnering active support from various university presidents, Hoyt's efforts in the Fifty-fourth Congress failed. A number of forces contributed to the bill never reaching the floor, including the protracted absence of the education committee's chairman, John Kyle. Most significant was highly influential oppositional lobbying by such prominent university presidents as Yale's Timothy Dwight, Harvard's Charles Eliot, Columbia's Seth Low, and Penn's Charles Harrison. Beyond writing members of Congress, the four presidents spoke publicly and wrote openly against the proposal. Charles Eliot's argument in the magazine *Critic* was perhaps the most influential such piece. The elite universities certainly did not object to the goals of the national university, nor did they necessarily object to the prospective of greater federal involvement in higher education. They did, however, object to the

breadth of Hoyt's plan. Despite having organized his most effective and broad-reaching network of support to date with the "Committee of 100," Hoyt was not able to overcome the challenge presented by such prestigious forces and other scattered sources of opposition.

A remarkably persistent policy and institutional entrepreneur, Hoyt pressed on with the issue. Attempting to use the dawn of the twentieth century as a call for action as well a springboard for attention, Hoyt managed to arrange for Senate committee hearings in January 1899. As Hoyt noted in his letters to Angell, the legislation he offered was little changed from that which he had originally introduced in the 1870s. Over the last decade, Hoyt and his allies had begun to frame their argument around the need for a coordinating institution that would maximize the research and resources of the federal government. Therefore, in addition to mobilizing the support of academic leaders, Hoyt enlisted the support of various federal officials, including Charles Walcott of the Geological Survey and William J. McGee of the Smithsonian Institute.

During his earlier efforts, Hoyt had called on the commissioner of education and the secretary of the interior, the two federal officials most responsible for overseeing national education policy. Their support had not been enough, and Hoyt looked to broaden his base of agency support. In addition to highlighting the coordinating function of such an institution, Wolcott and McGee's testimony in Senate hearings underscored the importance of partnerships that a national university could pursue with existing agencies.

Wolcott spoke of the need for a postgraduate institution in Washington, D.C. Citing the fact that 30 percent of his current staff had done their graduate study abroad, he stressed that Hoyt's proposed institution "would afford American students in Geology the advantages at home for which they must now at present go abroad" and that "what is true of the Geological Survey is true also of many of the other scientific bureaus of the Government." Among the other bureaus Wolcott envisioned as active partners of the national university were the Fish Commission, the National Zoo, the Coast and Geodetic Survey, and the weather, botanical, biological, and entymological bureaus of the Department of Agriculture. He ended his testimony with a strong endorsement of the plan.

I think that the national university would exert an educational influence of the highest type that would be felt in the remotest portions of the country. It should set a standard toward which all persons seeking higher education could look as to an ideal, a standard which would meet the approval of all

our colleges and universities and which would not interfere with the work they are doing.¹⁹

Aware of the basic criticisms of Hoyt's university, Wolcott emphasized its place as a needed supplement rather than an unnecessary substitute.

McGee echoed and extended Wolcott's sentiments. For McGee, the primary justifications for a national university lay in the great resources available in Washington, D.C., and the need for the nation to maximize them.

The National Government, like most of the State governments, has found it expedient to investigate various natural conditions and resources for the public benefit; and thereby experts in different lines of knowledge have been employed and trained. In the national capital this has resulted in the development of . . . [bureaus and departments] engaged in researches and surveys relating to the country and its resources. Thus a corps of scientific and technical experts has grown up, of such magnitude as to render Washington the leading scientific center, not only of the country but of the world.

While we thus have in the United States a superb system of public education, beginning in the common schools and rising well toward the higher grades through State institutions, and while the system is effectively coordinated by the Federal Bureau of Education, we have not yet sufficient provision, or, indeed, any suitable provision, for the highest grades of education in accordance with American principles and standards. Accordingly, there is a need for a Federal educational agency of such sort as to crown and perfect our public school system, to give American citizens the benefit of the highest education, and to fit our men and women to extend the noble career of the nation of which they are constituent parts.²⁰

As Walcott and McGee both represented, supporters of the national university argued that such an institution was necessary to maximize the opportunities for partnerships between academics and the federal government and for a corresponding development of expertise.

Building on these hearings, Hoyt and others rallied supporters over the next few years with letters, speeches, and articles. With the formation of the "Committee of 100," the resurgent support of the National Education Association, and the continued cooperation of such notables as Andrew Dickson White, David Starr Jordan, Robert Fulton, and R. P. Barringer (faculty chairman of the University of Virginia), Hoyt believed he had mobilized his broadest support yet. Michigan's Angell, while still not an active supporter, was intrigued by the latest proposal, and on the request of the NEA, he surveyed various western university presidents to gain their opinion of it.

The responses of those at the most prestigious and powerful institutions reflect an overall difficulty Hoyt encountered: his support might

have been broad, but it was not necessarily deep. Many of the leading academics did not consider such an institution to be an urgent necessity, especially in light of the expansion of graduate education at existing institutions, and thus were less than intense in their support. Charles Kendall Adams, who was now president at the University of Wisconsin, summarized such sentiment. Writing his old colleague Angell, Adams noted that he had been frequently asked to join his mentor White on Hoyt's committee and once had been "ardently" in favor of a national university, but he admitted that "now that graduate studies have been so earnestly and successfully prosecuted in most of the universities, I have had somewhat less enthusiasm." Despite such ambivalence, Adams also stressed that "we are never likely to have too much higher education." Adams had no hesitation in regard to Hoyt's proposal and felt that a national university could be successfully managed "if the incorporators see that it is kept out of the hands of the politicians and guarded in such a way that scholars of the country will be in control of it." He concluded by saying that if such management could be accomplished, "it would be of inestimable advantage to make the various departments at Washington available for advanced studies," and he expressed a feeling that his opinions were in keeping with the general sentiments of the Madison campus.²¹

President Wheeler of the University of California expressed similar sentiments. Emphasizing that he could not speak for others on campus, Wheeler stated, "we do not want another university which shall duplicate, imitate, or even better any existing institutions." Yet Wheeler conceded:

a university organization located at Washington, which shall bring into cooperation all the academic forces now present in that city and supplement these with help from the various universities of the country, would be a very great help to us and our cause. I think of a national university as a means for cooperation among the existing university elements than as a new and distinct institution.

Wheeler suggested that research and publication, rather than teaching, should be a national university's aim. For Wheeler, the Smithsonian provided a "proper nucleus," and different government bureaus, such as the Coast and Geodetic Survey, would "furnish a means for widening the org[anization]."²² Wheeler's comments came at the same time as he was beginning to take the first steps toward helping create the American Association of Universities. Regardless of the organizational form, Wheeler wished to extend the existing trend toward both coordination and partnership.

Besides lacking intense support from leading academics, Hoyt also faced ambivalence from leaders of denominationally affiliated schools. In the previous decade, the Catholics had founded the Catholic University of America, and the Methodists had founded the American University in Washington, D.C. Thus, presidents of religiously affiliated universities, such as Northwestern's Henry Wade Rogers, found themselves in an awkward position. Responding to Angell's inquiries, the former University of Michigan law professor said that he had often been asked to express his support but had declined because "I dislike to appear publicly out of sympathy with Bishop Hurst in his proposal for an American university under the control of the Methodist church." Rogers continued:

I will say to you that I have no sympathy whatever with Bishop Hurst in his proposed American university and think the effort an unwise one for the Methodist church, . . . but since our leadership has endorsed the idea at their Central Conference I do not feel free to speak against it.

Personally, I sympathize with the movement for a national university at Washington and wish to see one established under the auspices of the government of the United States.²³

Rogers noted his impression that his university's trustees also had "no sympathy" with Hurst's scheme for a Methodist-sponsored institution but that they were indifferent as to Hoyt's federal university.

In addition to slight ambivalence and questionable urgency from tepid supporters, Hoyt also encountered increasingly active opposition from elite northeastern institutions. Dismissed by many of them as foolhardy and unrealistic, Hoyt's earlier efforts had largely been ignored by the leaders of the older, eastern universities. As Hoyt persisted and more members of Congress became supportive, ambivalence changed to active opposition.

Hoyt earnestly attempted to bring these older, eastern institutions into the fold at the turn of the century. To help do this, Hoyt called on Angell, asking him to lend the cause his name and formal support, rather than just his usual sympathetic ear. Aware of scheduled meetings regarding the formation of the Association of American Universities, Hoyt asked if Angell could influence those there to support the proposal, pleading, "The scale may turn upon your influence and vote."²⁴ Hoyt's proposal was never formally discussed at the AAU meetings, but he pressed forward in seeking to gain the support of—or, at the very least, to minimize opposition from—the leaders of the oldest and most established universities. He wrote Harvard's Charles Eliot and the newly appointed Arthur Twining Hadley of Yale and Nicholas

Murray Butler of Columbia, providing each with a copy of the draft legislation he hoped to introduce as well as his memorial that Congress had published in 1892. Hoyt believed his new legislation to be “simpler in plan, more explicit as to offices to be filled, and mak[ing] a wider geographical distribution of members of the sole governing body than the legislation of 1896 to which they had objected.”²⁵ Hoyt expressed his hope that his latest draft overcame concerns various opponents had regarding partisan, sectarian, and regional interference, and he asked for comments and critique as well as expressions of support.

Eliot and Butler responded to Hoyt with little more than detached advice regarding the university’s governing structure. However, Eliot, while polite in his correspondence with Hoyt, had little actual tolerance for Hoyt’s entrepreneurial enterprise. A few years earlier, when Eliot and other leaders of eastern universities first expressed their formal opposition to the plan, Eliot wrote to Johns Hopkins University’s Daniel Coit Gilman:

Will you kindly tell me what your view is of Mr. J. W. Hoyt’s present proposal about the “University of the United States”? He has been at this job for more than twenty years, and has introduced bill after bill into Congress. He now seems to have obtained a considerable backing if I may infer from the “authorized” list of members of the “National University Committee.” I see your name on the committee. The actual bill seems to me to propose a thoroughly impracticable plan. Neither the Board of Regents nor the University Council can possibly be a suitable working Board for the government of a university. I remember when Mr. Hoyt was engineering this scheme twenty years ago he used eminent names in support of the project without the least authority. Has he been doing that again? I see various inaccuracies in the list. He puts people in places and offices where they do not belong.²⁶

Gilman responded that while he had not been actively involved in the plan, he did generally support the sentiment, if not the particulars, of Hoyt’s bill.

I have only glanced at the last “bill” and am not entirely in accord [as I have informed him] with the plans of Dr. Hoyt, but as I believe Washington must have something better than what it now has in the way of an organization for the engagement of science and letters, I have contented myself with pointing out what have seemed to me errors or defects in successive schemes that have been proposed.²⁷

Reflecting the importance of personal credibility for policy entrepreneurs, Hoyt’s apparent (to Eliot at least) tendency to overstate the breadth and depth of his support not only clouded Eliot’s opinion of the man but solidified Eliot’s inclination to oppose the proposed institution. Ironically, a list of supporters meant to encourage greater sup-

port had backfired, as it served to stoke the fires of a significantly influential opposition.

Unlike Eliot, who chose to keep a disdainful but courteous distance and not to engage in substantive discussion with Hoyt, Yale's Arthur Twining Hadley responded to Hoyt's inquires regarding his effort of 1900 by expressing, in no uncertain terms, his extensive concerns regarding the national university plan. Hadley began his response to Hoyt by stating that if the goal was the establishment of a national university to more fully organize collections at Washington and give better facilities for instruction, then he was "in full sympathy" with its purpose. However, Hadley stressed:

If it [the National University plan] means the establishment of a central body "to represent the sum of human knowledge," I fear that it will do harm rather than good. This system is most fully carried out in China, and we see the consequences. It is to some degree carried out in France, and I believe that the general testimony of educators is that it has been harmful in that country also. I believe the tendency of the organization of a body which claims a dominant position in the intellectual world, based on any act of incorporation, contains more evil than good. Perhaps I do your plan injustice; but it seems to me to attempt to substitute the principle of intellectual authority for that of intellectual liberty, and to do it in a form so plausible as to commit people in the wrong direction before they really know where they are going.²⁸

As well as questioning the general principle of Hoyt's plan, Hadley questioned Hoyt's analysis of European systems, on which many of the arguments in favor of a national university were based. Hadley offered a list of specific questions—based on Hoyt's 1892 memorial—that he felt needed to be answered.

1) What instance can be cited of a national university in any country which has met the demands of higher education as well as a group of local universities, acting independently? 2) Has not the influence of national universities upon government service been habitually bad, instead of good? 3) Is not their work in coordination pursued to such an extent that it deadens inspiration instead of augmenting it? and 4) Is not the contact with a centralized institution of learning a thing which habitually does harm to those fundamental ideas of liberty which are the basis of a American system of government?

Pardon me if I seem to put things strongly. I believe the danger to be a real one and a great one; and I have not yet seen in any of the memorials in favor of a national university a single paragraph that shows that the writers have ever attended one, or know what it is like, or that they recognize the dangers with which such institutions have been habitually attended in their practical workings.²⁹

Hoyt reassured Hadley that the proposed university sought to supplement, rather than supplant, existing institutions of higher education. For Hoyt, a federal university would not restrain existing institutions but, rather, assist in their development, through its coordination of programs and its facilitation of partnerships.³⁰

Hadley responded to Hoyt's defense by apologizing to Hoyt for portions of his correspondence that might have seemed "scornful" and by praising Hoyt's 1892 *Memorial* as one of the "most compact and forcible presentations of the reasons for such a university" that he had seen. However, he reiterated his skepticism, referring to the controversy between *Ecole Libre* and the university in France and noting that "none of the advocates of the National University, as far as I know, have seen the workings of national university life from the inside."³¹

Hoyt's efforts to gain the support of older, eastern universities had failed, and by the time he provided arguments on behalf of his legislation to Congress in 1902, he dismissed their opposition as representing an antiquated and provincial view. Submitting yet another lengthy report in support of legislation submitted to the Senate by Senator Edmunds, Hoyt summarized the opposition of Harvard, Yale, and other older institutions. Stressing that even these institutions looked elsewhere for advanced degrees and expertise, Hoyt remarked:

There has also been active opposition from a very few of the great and non-sectarian universities—all of them at the northeast and priding themselves quite as much on age as on real worth. The most of their students have always been mere college boys, and many of their graduates hasten to finish their studies abroad.³²

Highlighting the national appeal of the proposed university, Hoyt contrasted the established schools of the northeast with elsewhere: "The noble University of Virginia and all the more important institutions at the South and West have always been staunch supporters of the National University measure."³³

For Hoyt, the opposition of the most established institutions represented anachronistic fear and jealousy rather than progressive analysis and ideals.

The opposition of the four older institutions is well understood. For more than a century they have struggled to gain and to hold a foremost place in the university ranks, and have accomplished so much that neither they nor their friends find it easy to yield any point that may look to the establishment of an institution which, because of its centrality, its supreme standards, its national functions and its international relations, would, in the

nature of the case, secure to it a foremost place among the universities of the world. They simply misunderstand the situation, and it has not been possible for the present leaders in these universities to see how truly the University of the United States, when duly established, would become a mighty force for their advancement, confining its general work to fields beyond those of the other universities, and for the most part limiting itself to special fields and those of research and investigation.³⁴

Hoyt did not envision a federal university as an institution competing with other schools. Rather, he saw it as the national defining source of specialized and advanced knowledge, the caretaker of expertise.

Introducing the 1902 version of his legislation, Hoyt believed that despite the opposition of some leading academics, all legitimate objections to his proposal were answered in its most recent version. In the report accompanying the 1902 version of the bill, Hoyt concluded:

The pending bill avoids every objection ever raised, wisely regards the welfare of all other educational institutions, looks to the best interests of the Government, and to such work in the field of research as will clearly make of Washington both the educational and scientific center of the world. . . . [The Congress] can not hesitate, and will not when satisfied that the pending bill looks purely to the interests of the whole country and gives such control as will best protect the proposed university from all meddling influences, whether individual, local, denominational, or political.³⁵

Believing he had addressed all significant organizational and policy concerns, Hoyt felt emboldened by his ability to fully mobilize many of the nation's smaller universities and normal schools. Their support was summarized in a resolution passed by the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations stating that the AAACES "would welcome with satisfaction the development and organization of a national university devoted exclusively to advanced and graduate research."³⁶

Hoyt's optimism was misplaced. He could accurately claim to have offered his most workable and realistic proposal that had garnered the movement's broadest and most established support to date. However, the 1902 legislation failed to move out of committee. Hoyt and his supporters had raised awareness, but they failed to be the defining force in shaping higher education's relationship with the national state. Their efforts did make some impact. Many who criticized graduate education as elitist had come to recognize the need for advanced education and national standard-bearing institutions. The NEA, the AAACES, and the National Teachers Association also expressed unqualified support. Nevertheless, a federally administered university still remained elu-

sive, as the leading research universities actively lobbied against the concept, suggesting that they presented a more viable and appropriate alternative. Such pluralist arguments, supported by elitist connections, would eventually win out. Hoyt briefly attempted to rekindle his proposal again in 1908, but to no avail. By then, the elite universities had formalized and institutionalized their roles as standard-bearers and capstone institutions, clearly establishing themselves as the preferred alternative.

Hoyt's failed effort to establish a national university highlights the fact that there was nothing inevitable about the evolution of elite colleges into leading universities that would define standards not only for their self-selected peers but also for all of higher education. Proponents of a national university had hoped that their institution would be the next step in an effort begun by fledgling universities across the country to raise national standards and define American expertise. Hoyt and his supporters were among the first to advocate formal coordination among universities to define parameters and expectations for advanced degrees. They were not to reap the idea's general acceptance. Without adequate political support or funding, Hoyt's entrepreneurship fell short, and established institutions would fill a widely recognized void.

Specifying Alternatives: The Formation of the AAU and the Origins of Formal Alignment

Founded in 1900, the Association of American Universities would emerge as an alternative model to a federally sponsored national university. The initial concern of the AAU's founders was the reception of American degrees at foreign universities. In October 1899, prompted by a report detailing the difficulties of students abroad and a request for action from the Berkeley chapter of the Federation of Graduate Clubs, University of California president Benjamin Ide Wheeler wrote his colleagues at Columbia, Chicago, Harvard, and John Hopkins. He inquired how their graduates and advanced degree recipients had been treated when studying in Europe and what formal policies their own institutions had established regarding foreign degrees. Strikingly, Wheeler's concern did not rest solely with how such degrees were seen abroad; rather, his primary interest lay in more formal alignment and standardization of degrees among the nation's universities.

Writing to his colleagues, Wheeler stressed, "it is believed that the time has arrived when the leading American universities should make

a combined effort to induce the authorities of foreign universities to establish more uniform regulations with reference to the admission of American students to the examinations for the higher degrees." Wheeler believed that such a combined effort would help facilitate negotiations with foreign universities, and he assured all that such negotiations would be undertaken

with a view of securing proper credit, where it is not already given, for advanced work done at home at a university of high standing, and for the purpose of protecting the dignity of the degrees of Ph.D., etc., by discouraging foreign universities from conferring the doctor's degree on such American students as are not prepared to take the degree at home at a university of high standing.

Wheeler believed that this objective could easily be attained through discussions with the German Ministers of Education, as long as it came in the form of a joint request by the "leading American universities."

But the German universities would then undoubtedly desire such information as would enable them to rate our American students in accordance with their actual attainments, when they apply to them for a doctor's degree. At present no adequate uniformity exists in the requirements for admission to the various schools of our own country, nor in the standard of graduate work which lead to the higher degrees.

To remedy this situation, Wheeler suggested a "conference of representatives" at the earliest possible date.³⁷

Wheeler wrote Charles Eliot of Harvard, Daniel Coit Gilman of Hopkins, William Rainey Harper of Chicago, and Seth Low of Columbia to facilitate the planning and to establish the agenda for such an initial conference. Noting that Germany was not the only country for which such issues were a concern, Wheeler hoped that such a meeting not only would help systematize relations between American institutions and those in Europe but would be a major step toward uniformity in graduate and undergraduate standards and programs.

Wheeler's letter was well received by all recipients, and within three months, a formal letter was sent by Eliot, Gilman, Harper, Low, and Wheeler to nine of their colleagues at the nation's leading institutions.³⁸ Reflecting the geographic reach of university education at the time, these original members of the movement were primarily concentrated in the eastern and northern regions of the nation. Summarizing Wheeler's earlier arguments, the letter began:

On behalf of the Universities which we represent, we, the undersigned, beg to suggest that the time has arrived when the leading American Universities

may properly consider the means of representing to foreign Universities the importance of revising their regulations governing the admission of American students to the examinations for the higher degrees.³⁹

The authors stressed that in addition to securing due credit in foreign universities, such a conference would help higher education at home as well. By developing greater uniformity among elite universities, Wheeler and others also hoped to facilitate migration between institutions from undergraduate to graduate school and sought to raise standards at colleges and universities of all types across the country. The invitation also noted that in the interest of coordination, the U.S. commissioner of education and a delegate from the Federation of Graduate Clubs would be asked to attend the meeting.

The signatories, representing California, Chicago, Columbia, Harvard, and Johns Hopkins, were active supporters. Yet not all invitees were initially enthusiastic. Some—most notably, newly appointed Yale president Arthur Twining Hadley—questioned the necessity of such an organization. Responding to his colleagues' invitation, Hadley respectfully expressed his skepticism. Noting that the meetings were scheduled during exams, an inconvenient time for Yale and its faculty, Hadley suggested that it was unlikely they could send a representative. Additionally, Hadley asked for further clarification of the meeting's goals and purposes as well as examples of the difficulties suggested.

We are most desirous to cooperate in all matters of common interest. . . . we should not hesitate to do so did we clearly understand the objects which you have in view in response to difficulties with foreign universities as reason for meeting. . . . It is a surprise to us to know that such credit is not given at present, we have had occasion to be grateful for the courtesy with which all such work has been recognized by foreign universities. To put ourselves in a position of complaint concerning evils of whose existence we have no evidence would be unjustifiable from our own standpoint and from that of foreign universities.⁴⁰

Hadley was not opposed to cooperative efforts and often asked his colleagues for advice regarding various aspects of university activity and educational policy. He did not necessarily object to moving from loosely coupled relations to more formally aligned ones. Hadley did, however, question the rationale and urgency of such a meeting.

Writing somewhat more candidly to his colleagues Eliot of Harvard and Harper of Chicago, Hadley detailed his concerns. In correspondence with Eliot, Hadley enclosed a copy of his reply to Wheeler. Saying he was a tad puzzled by the invitation and stressing his desire to cooperate with other institutions, Hadley asked Eliot for his advice.

I can readily understand how the many students and the few professors who conceive of the Doctorate of Philosophy as a sort of inflated Mastership of Arts, for whom attainment of a certain quantity of work can be prescribed, should feel that they have grounds of complaint, and should be glad to identify themselves with a movement of this kind, But I am somewhat at a loss to understand how Harvard, with its traditions concerning the Doctor's degree, comes to be identified with the movement in question.

Perhaps I am making a great deal out of a rather unimportant matter; but I have for so many years been occupied in contending for a qualitative rather than a quantitative conception of the Doctor's degree, and have relied so much on the support of Harvard in this matter, that I am quite unwilling to proceed in any direction without taking counsel with you.⁴¹

Eliot replied by stressing the need for a more formally systematic and coordinated relationship between institutions of higher learning and by highlighting the opportunities for exchange that such a conference would provide.

Hadley still remained unconvinced of the meeting's urgency, especially since it fell during Yale's examination period. He explained his situation to the meeting's host, Harper of Chicago.

I wish I saw my way clear toward attending Pres. Wheeler's proposed conference in Chicago on Feb. 27th. It comes at entirely the wrong time for us at Yale and we have not suffered from the particular difficulties which are alleged as a reason for calling a conference. On the other hand, the advantages of such a meeting and interchange of ideas would be very great indeed.⁴²

As the meeting drew closer and Hadley learned that other leading institutions would indeed be sending representatives, he felt the need to express his opinions on the subject even if absent from the conference. He offered regrets for the inability of himself or anyone from Yale to come to Chicago for the meeting, as no one had "leisure at this especially busy season." Hadley "doubly" regretted this fact "as much cooperation and free interchange of thought between the heads of different universities is at present desirable." He concluded, "I shall hope to have the opportunity to address a letter to the conference dealing with the points included in the call."⁴³

Hadley took the opportunity he desired and authored a lengthy statement of Yale's position, addressed to all of the meeting's attendees. Hadley prefaced his statement by attaching a brief note to Wheeler, the conference's organizer:

It [Yale's position] is stated with a definiteness which may sound rather abrupt. I am sure that you will understand that this does not spring from any want of the spirit of cooperation, but that it is solely the result of our desire to leave no doubt as to our position on the points in question.⁴⁴

Hadley's definitiveness was clear. In addressing the conference attendees, Hadley stressed, as he had in private correspondence, Yale's desire to "cooperate in matters of common interest." However, he also wished to offer questions in regard to the purposes for calling the meeting. First, he stated that he found it

difficult to believe that [quoting from the conference announcement] "the time has arrived when the leading American universities may properly consider the means of representing to foreign universities the importance of revising their regulations governing the admission of American students to the examination for higher degrees."

"Such a step," Hadley argued, "unless very carefully considered, and based on irrefutable evidence of its need, might readily be regarded, and perhaps properly regarded, as an intrusion."⁴⁵

The request of foreign universities to revise their standards was only a portion of Hadley's concern. He also questioned the primary issue on the conference's agenda—securing "such credit as is legitimately due to the advanced work done in our own universities of high standing." Building on his first point of concern, Hadley worried that American universities might offend their European counterparts, especially if the group acted on what he saw as unsupported allegations. He not only took issue with the conference's approach to foreign universities; he also expressed doubts regarding the specifics of any systemization geared toward allowing migration of students from one university to another. Questioning the invitation's stated desire to "secure uniformity" among the leading universities, Hadley stated:

If by this is meant that our universities should adopt rules stating that a student who has already studied a certain number of years, or taken a certain number of majors and minors, in one university can presumably get his degree in a certain specified length of time at some other university, the authorities at Yale would be compelled to question the wisdom of this proposal; inasmuch as it would mean a departure from the qualitative standard, and a reversion to the quantitative one against which they have for forty years protested.⁴⁶

Hadley reiterated that he did not object to formalized coordination. Rather, speaking for the faculty of Yale as well as himself, Hadley concluded that he simply wished to urge caution and to warn against hasty decisions.

Despite specific concerns, Hadley and Yale did not object to the overall purpose or general principles of the conference. Therefore, when formal invitations to AAU membership were extended after the

first Chicago conference, Hadley accepted on behalf of Yale "with great pleasure." He did, however, note that since the annual meeting date was set once again for the same time of year, it would be difficult for he or a Yale representative to attend. He politely requested that an alternative date be considered in the future.⁴⁷

Wheeler's 1899 call for a conference had quickly evolved into a formally aligned organization comprised of the leading universities from across the country. All of the invitees aside from Yale, Cornell, and Wisconsin attended the 1900 meeting, and all accepted membership in the organization. The AAU's constitution described the organization as having been "founded for the purpose of considering matters of common interest relating to graduate study." While coordination was integral to the association's activities, the AAU's constitution stressed that "no act of the association shall be held to control the policy or line of action of any institution belonging to it." Recognizing the association's position as a collection of elite institutions and seeking to establish the association as the standard-bearer for advanced degrees, the AAU's members developed a clear procedure for future membership: "Other institutions may be admitted, at the annual conference, on the invitation of the executive committee, endorsed by a 3/4 vote of the association."⁴⁸ The association did not, however, clearly define the standards for membership, leaving open the question of who might have the requisite common interest in graduate study. The nation's primary arbiters of standards and practices for advanced knowledge and university-based expertise were self-policing.

After unanimously agreeing to form an association from the invited conference members, delegates to the AAU's first meeting set an agenda for the next year's meeting. Proposed topics included a continued discussion of student migration, an examination of fellowships, an assessment of subordinate requirements for the doctoral degree, and the printing of dissertations.⁴⁹ It was decided that to facilitate consideration of these matters, Harper, who was serving as the association's chairman, should appoint for each topic an individual educator to prepare a statement of facts concerning the major issues involved.

Having formally established the association and set an agenda for the next meeting, attendees also took action on a number of matters. They decided not to send association representation to the Paris World Exposition and not to seek legislation from Congress regarding the acceptance of graduate degrees abroad. Despite Hoyt's request of

Angell and others that his national university proposal be considered, there is no record of the matter being addressed.

From the outset, the AAU was concerned with national policy. Though its influence was limited, the Bureau of Education had been invited and did send a representative to attend the meetings. However, rather than work through the federal government and its agencies, the association wished to work with foreign universities and educational ministers directly. In this manner, the AAU began to develop its significant role as an independent agent of the federal state, establishing what would come to be national standards and policies.

*Establishing Credentials: Formal Alignment
and the Certification of Expertise*

Graduate education would grow in the early years of the twentieth century, and so would the significance and reach of the AAU. In the year after its founding, the AAU continued to examine one of the three issues that had been articulated in Wheeler's initial invitation—graduate student migration—as well as several specific issues pertinent to graduate education: fellowships, the publication of dissertations, and the course work required of doctoral students.⁵⁰ Again held in Chicago and hosted by Harper and the University of Chicago, the meetings were attended by all of the association's members except for Yale. The previously skeptical Hadley had expected to attend but was called back to New Haven due to his young daughter's having contracted what was feared to be a deadly case of pneumonia.⁵¹

The association's scope was limited in this initial period, compared to what it would become. However, the 1901 meeting marked the beginning of a formal annual meeting of university leaders who had until this time shared information and expectations mainly through a loosely coupled network based on position and friendships. The AAU was not the first gathering of such men as Eliot, Harper, and Angell; many of the presidents of AAU institutions were also active participants in the NEA. However, the NEA meetings were large, pluralist affairs where the course of graduate education and university-based expertise were only minor concerns. With the formation of the AAU, these leading academics had developed an organization dedicated exclusively to their collective agenda.

At the close of the 1901 meetings in Chicago, it was agreed that the association's 1902 meetings should be held in New York City, with Columbia's Nicholas Murray Butler serving as chairman. The proposed

agenda reflected the association's efforts to expand its scope as well as its desire to more fully define its nature and purpose. Even before the 1901 meetings in Chicago, Michigan's Angell had expressed to Harper his wish to see the AAU's membership consider "the scope and character of the dissertation required for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy."⁵² This topic became the first item on the agenda for the 1902 meetings, coupled with a continuation of the discussion regarding whether there should be a requirement that the doctoral dissertation be printed.

On the one hand, it seems somewhat remarkable that a little over forty years since Yale awarded the first American PhD (in 1861), no standardized requirements for the content or presentation of the doctoral degree had been established. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the number of PhD's granted by American universities remained relatively small. More important, the informal network of loosely coupled university presidents meant that while no formal standards for the doctorate had been set, the elite universities were familiar with one another's training of graduate students and with the research and expertise they produced. For its first thirty years, the PhD been essentially the exclusive property of these elite institutions, and no need for standardization or formal requirements existed. The end of the twentieth century had witnessed a significant rise in the number of institutions calling themselves universities and granting the PhD. In the most extreme case, the relatively obscure Gale College in Wisconsin awarded fifteen doctorates in 1900; this was equal to the combined number of PhD's granted by California, Cornell, Michigan, Princeton, and Virginia in the same year.⁵³ The institutional entrepreneurs who ran universities needed to clearly define advanced degrees and protect one of their distinguishing features. These schools did this not only for themselves but also to further establish the authority of these credentials.

Formalizing Peers: The Question of Membership

The creation of the AAU provided academic leaders a unique opportunity to bring definition and clarity not only to advanced degrees but to their universities overall. In order to accomplish this, the members of the AAU needed to give greater definition and clarity to the association itself. The second item on the 1902 agenda would help in this regard. The AAU's executive committee, comprised of Michigan's Angell, Columbia's Butler, Chicago's Harper, and California's Wheeler, was charged with reporting to the association regarding its membership policy.

The committee was to focus primarily on two questions:

- 1) Should the membership be enlarged? If so, on what principle of selection?
- 2) Should the association devote its attention wholly to questions concerned with the organization and conduct of graduate work; and if so, should graduate work in law, medicine, theology, and applied science be included?⁵⁴

Though the two questions were not necessarily dependent on one another, they were related. The criteria and procedures for membership would certainly influence the scope of the association. Conversely, the prescribed scope of the association would influence both the who and the how of future membership. The executive committee recognized this relationship but sought to keep the issues distinct.

Reporting to the full membership at the 1902 annual meeting, the committee began its report by stressing that the matters referred for its consideration involved "two separate questions." The committee reversed the order of the questions from how they had been presented to them. They thus began by addressing "the range of topics which should be treated by the association in its discussions, and the desirableness of a change in the constitution to provide for such increased range." On this topic, there was little difference of opinion among committee members. Generally, it was "thought desirable to include within the scope of the discussions of the association all those questions and problems which arise in organizing really advanced instruction in the various departments of university life."⁵⁵

The committee saw little reason to distinguish between advanced knowledge and expertise applied to "academic" questions, on the one hand, and advanced knowledge and expertise applied to professional ones, on the other. Stressing this point, the committee continued:

It is impossible to draw a distinction between university studies which are non-professional and those which are professional in their character; because in our modern institutions much of the so-called non-professional work of the graduate departments is intended as a preparation for the calling of the teacher, and much of the work of the professional schools is occupied with actual research. The problems of the different departments are so connected and interwoven that they have to be treated together in the universities themselves; and it seems desirable that a body like the Association should treat them in the same way.

For the committee, extending the reach of the association from purely graduate studies to professional ones was a natural step that mirrored the development of universities themselves. To not include the consid-

eration of questions regarding professional education would have been to develop an artificial and unnecessary division. Thinking that the relationship between graduate and professional education was so apparent as not to necessitate a change in the AAU's constitution, the committee stated, "the very fact that the different things are thus necessarily connected is of itself sufficient to justify the treating of these wider problems as germane to the original purposes of the Constitution."⁵⁶

The first step in expanding the reach of the association had been taken. The membership unanimously supported the committee's recommendation. The AAU had stepped forward as an organization that would set national standards not only for graduate education but for professional education as well. Thus, in the years to come, the AAU and its members, not the federal state, would primarily define national standards for advanced knowledge and its related credentials.⁵⁷ Strikingly, it was 1909 before the association finally issued a full and comprehensive report on the whole of academic nomenclature. At this time, the AAU's decision to extend itself into matters of professional education marked a significant step in the development of formal alignment among elite universities and their activities as active partners and independent agents of the national state.

The committee presented a clear and definite recommendation in regard to the scope of the association, but it was unclear and conflicted in regard to "the policy to be adopted with regard to increasing the membership of the Association, in order that the numerous applications submitted to this body may be wisely and intelligently handled." In fact, the executive committee reported to be split, with two equally valid, but opposing, lines of argument.

The report summarized proponents of expansion as follows:

Those who advocate an increase say it is unjust to institutions which are doing excellent work to leave them out of a body of this kind. They think that the effect of omitting these institutions will be to prejudice the influence of the Association, to stimulate jealousy, and perhaps to lead to the formation of a rival body which should be more extended in its scope.⁵⁸

Concern regarding competing associations was genuine, especially in terms of public institutions. That previous summer, merger discussions had taken place between the National Association of State Universities and the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations.⁵⁹ Like Hoyt's attempts to establish a national university, these merger efforts recognized the ever-increasing importance of formal national coordination. If the AAU were to be the preminent coordi-

nating organization, proponents of expansion argued, it would need to ensure that it was broad enough so as to legitimately oversee the advancement of knowledge and the definition of expertise through the development of uniform standards and practices.

Opponents of AAU expansion stressed the value of exclusivity and familiarity that they believed allowed for candor and encouraged relevance. To them, the association's small size was simply a reflection of the small number of "true" universities who could contribute to discussion regarding graduate education. The original members were included in the association because of their value and contribution as peers. Additionally, opponents of an increase feared that expanding membership would place the AAU in the distasteful position of having to make formal and public judgments on petitioning institutions. They did not see any need to publicly declare the requirements for membership. Instead, they believed the association to be detached from the public view. The report summarized:

Those who oppose such increases of membership say that the value of the discussions which we have hereto had is in large measure the result of the smallness of the membership; and that any attempt to admit all those institutions whose claims we cannot publicly disprove would make the body so large as to interfere with its original purpose.⁶⁰

For opponents of expansion, broadening the scope of the association did not necessarily imply a need to increase the membership. Both sides in the debate expected and welcomed the fundamental role the AAU would play in shaping American higher education. Their differences grew from competing visions of how the association would go about developing this role.

Understanding that the question concerned more than simply an increase in the number of members, the committee recapitulated the issues at the core of the debate.

The real question seems to be one concerning this fundamental purpose. Is our body an organized association, intended to take in all who reach a certain grade of merit, and charged with the duty of establishing an objective grading of standing among universities? Or is it a club for mutual improvement and enjoyment, without the necessity of telling them the reasons for this exclusion in a form for publication? Accordingly as we regard the association in the one light or the other, our policy with regard to membership will be totally different.⁶¹

With an understanding of the stakes involved, the executive committee did not recommend a specific course of action. Instead, it unanimously called for further discussion and deliberation, effectively tabling all

proposed expansion for at least a year.⁶² The new association continued to evolve, from a simple conference called to discuss the acceptance of American degrees abroad in 1900 to a formal association highly aware of its growing importance and stature only a few years later.

Even with unanimous approval of the executive committee's recommendations regarding further deliberations on the subject, the fires of controversy still surrounded the question of membership. Responding to the request of a number of members—notably, Columbia's Butler and Yale's Hadley—regarding the timing of the meetings, the 1903 annual meeting was held on December 29 and 30, 1902. The meetings were again held in New York. For the first time, in conjunction with the meetings, an alumni dinner was held for graduates of AAU institutions. Seemingly an ancillary event, this dinner would ignite arguably the most vociferous and detailed attack on the association in its formative years.

Among those invited to the dinner were a number of alumni who now served on the faculty of New York University (NYU). A little over eighteen months earlier, NYU had asked to be considered for membership in the AAU, but no offer—and essentially no explanation for the absence of an offer—was extended from the association. In response to the invitation for the alumni dinner, the faculty took the opportunity to issue an open letter, addressed to the committee sponsoring the dinner but also published in the *New York Times* and delivered to the presidents of AAU institutions “as one(s) who may be interested in its subject matter.”⁶³

The faculty began by offering their regrets and rationale.

The undersigned professors of New York University respectfully acknowledge your invitation for Tuesday December 30th. We regret that we cannot take part in the dinner because of what seems to us to be the policy of the Association. For this apparent policy we recognize that your Committee is in no way responsible, since it has no official connection with that body. Yet as you are seeking to serve the Association, we will frankly describe this seeming policy which forbids professors of New York University accepting your invitation.

Rather than simply decline the invitation, the NYU faculty detailed the history of their efforts to join the association.

Early in 1901 the New York University Senate presented to the Association the question of admission of other Universities than those represented at the first meeting, and the question of the conditions of membership in the Association. It was not until after a very long delay and the sending by us of an urgent reminder that any report was received from President Harper of

Chicago, the secretary, in regard to the action taken by the Association at their meeting, March, 1901, in response to the communication of the University which we have the honor of serving. The report when received failed to present any complete statement in regards to the conditions of membership in the Association, and why certain Universities are admitted while others are not admitted.

The faculty then took the opportunity to specify their grievances and outline criticisms of the membership policy. For NYU's faculty, the AAU's treatment of their application represented undue exclusivity and bordered on being a monopoly. They stated this position in no uncertain terms.

This University doubts both the academic expediency and the moral right under these circumstances, of a few Universities assuming such an exclusive title as "The Association of American Universities." It is suggestive of the methods of the commercial combines of our day (against which the Government is now proposing to move in order to secure greater publicity), much more than of the open liberal methods of the greater Universities of the world. We feel that we cannot in any way support or wish success to the Association until it frankly announces worthy conditions by the fulfillment of which any American University may become entitled to membership.

While the NYU professors were not directly aware of the debate within the association regarding its membership practices, they were cognizant of the fact that some members wished to expand the organization. The NYU faculty concluded their letter, "we may add that letters received by New York University nearly two years ago, from the presidents of several of the Universities included in the Association, conveyed to us the impression that they were in sympathy with the position which is taken by New York University."⁶⁴

Despite the pleadings of the NYU faculty, it would still be another two years before the AAU expanded its membership. When it did, it was the University of Virginia, not NYU, that was asked to join. The association still considered institutions on a case-by-case basis and refused to establish any criteria for membership, other than the approval of three-quarters of the institutional members. NYU's membership in the association (1950) would be many years in coming.

The NYU faculty members were unsuccessful in their appeal. However, they had been fair in assessing the association's unique position. None of its members would characterize the association as an academic monopoly or cartel. However, there remained some conflict over the organization's exclusivity. Associated with these concerns was an overall recognition of the potential influence of the association. Though not

necessarily founded to counter the national university movement or other efforts at standardization and coordination, the AAU became the preferred alternative. Over the next fifteen years, the association, institutionalizing a formal alliance among the leading universities, would come to define national standards not only for graduate and professional schools but for all of higher education.

Extending the Influence and Reach of Elite Institutions

In 1904, the leading universities were among those supporting an enlargement of the federal Bureau of Education and an elevation of its status through the formation of a department of commerce and labor, within which the Bureau of Education could be housed. Writing a confidential letter to his colleague Nicholas Murray Butler, Chicago's William Rainey Harper noted that he had recently discussed this effort with Charles Eliot and other members of the association. In conjunction with general support for the plan, there existed a belief that such an effort could not be effectively undertaken if the aging William T. Harris remained commissioner of education. Harper recounted:

certain questions were presented which involved the future tenure of office of Mr. Harris. As a matter of fact, it seems impossible to go forward with the enlargement of that bureau and the securing for that bureau its proper recognition by the government so long as Mr. Harris occupies the position. His great worth and value are acknowledged from the educational point of view, but his ability as an administrator is questioned.

Harper proposed what essentially amounted to a buyout plan.

He is now an old man and the question has been suggested whether a few universities might not unite in inviting him to occupy a lectureship on educational questions which would make provision for him for a few years, and constitute a call to a higher work than that which he is now doing.⁶⁵

Harper's plan called for offering Harris somewhere between twelve to fifteen lectures a year, with the reasonable stipend of six hundred dollars per lecture. Butler replied by saying that he held such an appreciation for what Harris had "done for education in this country and his intellectual gifts" that he would with pleasure urge the trustees of Columbia to offer Harris a lectureship.⁶⁶ Butler passed Harper's note and his own reply along to Yale's Arthur Twining Hadley, with the request that Yale participate in the scheme as well.⁶⁷

Despite the efforts of Harper and Butler, the effort to move the Bureau of Education out of the Department of the Interior never gath-

ered any steam. Harris would remain commissioner of education for another two years. The discussion between Harper and Butler represented the dependency federal educational policies and administration had on the established universities. Their failure did not detract from the attempts of the nation's most prominent universities to develop collective influence.

University presidents were often the ones who would direct government's relationship to America's institutions of higher learning. The foundation of the AAU marked the beginning of formal alignment and the institutionalization of coordination. Over the next twenty years, federal policies would be further shaped by the pursuit and application of research and expertise. The AAU did not drive all such efforts, but through their training of scholars, their prominent public positions, and their active efforts to maintain societal relevance, the institutions of the AAU came to define standards for American higher education as a regulatory agency, if not to arguably serve as branches of a "national university." A contemporary observer might think of these in opposition. However, emanating from the founding framework of the University of Michigan⁶⁸ and other public institutions of higher learning, many public universities were established to serve as regulators as well as educators. The collection of institutions that comprised the AAU helped define education not only for themselves and their states but for the developing nation as a whole.