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**Freshman Daze: The Origins of  
Orientation Programs**

**IHELG Monograph**

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### **Freshman Daze: The Origins of Orientation Programs**

In 1892, John Mott, the College Student Secretary of the International Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) published a small booklet entitled *The Fall Campaign*. Meant to offer ideas to campus YMCA officers, the booklet compiled information on the services aimed at welcoming and orienting freshmen to college life and to the student organization. Mott's publication represented the accumulated wisdom of practices that had been evolving on campuses across the nation since 1873. The future 1946 Nobel Peace Prize recipient originally learned about the rituals and requirements of Cornell before transferring to his new campus in 1885 through a ubiquitous product of the campus Y, the student handbook. *The Fall Campaign*, the handbooks, receptions, and logistical services became durable and pervasive programs on campuses across the country. From the mid-1870s through the 1922 academic year, the campus YMCAs often sponsored the only orientation for new students at most colleges and universities.

However, with the diverse institutional changes that occurred at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "how to turn the bewildered freshman as speedily as possible into a college man [became] a problem which the growth of numbers and the variety of the curriculum [made] increasingly difficult" (French, 1916, p. 297-298). To further complicate the situation, the post-World War I enrollments escalated at many institutions, achieving a diversity of students who towed new backgrounds and issues to the campuses. Thus, the pressure to systematize the services of the institutions inflated over the next decade and simultaneously overwhelmed the social functions managed by the YMCA.

Parallel to the post-war expansion, the knowledge gained through psychology, educational psychology, and statistics gradually accreted. By the mid-teens, American psychologists had begun to gather knowledge through testing the general intelligence of students (and non-students) and to explore correlations between physiological and mental proficiencies. This knowledge kindled an interest among collegiate administrators who sought to ease the transition to college for freshmen and to address their increasingly diverse academic needs. One particular orientation program established in 1923 quickly was adopted and adapted by other colleges and universities across the nation.

In this paper we argue that between the 1880s and the 1930s, the shift in the sponsorship, function, and scope of freshman orientation practices from the campus YMCA associations to the institutional administration was a by-product of the advancement of academic knowledge about student attributes in conjunction with rising social, demographic, and institutional pressures. Further, the absorption of freshman orientation programs represented a major element in the shift in the relationship between institutions and their students.

### **Literature Review**

Scholars have recently been filling in the gaps in the history of student affairs. From Helen Horowitz's (1987) descriptions of student sub-cultures to the more recent work on the evolution of the roles of deans of women (Bashaw, 1999; Nidifer, 2000) and deans of men (Gatyas, 1998; Schwartz, 1997, 2003), our understanding of the development of personnel services and the subsequent institutionalization of student affairs departments has become more robust. The customary explanation of the development of the student personnel movement begins with the installation of a small three-person office devoted to testing and counseling at Northwestern University in the 1922 and the adoption of the Personnel Point of View statement (Lloyd-Jones, 1934). President Walter Dill Scott, who conducted intelligence testing in the

Army during World War I, is credited with recognizing that mental testing would enable colleges to serve students more effectively. Absent though is an adequate explanation of the actual transition from the limited administrative intervention in student life to specific standardized and institutionalized practices of student affairs.

The student affairs history also tends to neglect the turn of the century establishment and early 20<sup>th</sup> century growth of professional preparation as well as the simultaneous work conducted by myriad researchers in the rapidly expanding discipline of psychology as they advanced knowledge about student mental and emotional processes as well as procedures for testing (Goodchild, 1996; Bell, 1916; Wylie, 1922). Goodchild (1996) details advances made toward the study of the administration by G. Stanley Hall at Clark University and offers an incipient academic kinship tree relating Hall's mentorship of some (seemingly forgotten) early higher education researchers, such as Henry Davidson Sheldon (1901) and Clarence Prouty Shedd (1914). Both men published detailed research on student activities and behaviors stemming from their graduate work in Worcester (Sheldon, 1901; Shedd, 1914) and contributed to university administration as practitioner-researchers.

The increase in student enrollments and the participation rate in colleges are often cited as primary reasons for the remarkable institutional change following World War I (see Levine, 1986). However the magnitude of heterogeneity within the enlarging collegiate population is often overlooked. Students from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, as well as levels of familial assimilation entered college after the war in unprecedented numbers (Bowman, 1926; Knode, 1930; Wechsler, 1977; Synnott, 1979). These new students entered college without benefit of familial experience and the traditional educational coaching from private preparatory schools, which had long supplied many institutions. Significantly, the new

populations suffered high mortality rates due to a lack of finances rather than scholastic problems (West, 1928).

Reminiscent of presidential 19<sup>th</sup> century moral philosophy lectures, a few presidents, a dean or two, and the occasional faculty member published speeches or lectures given to freshman in the first years of the new century (Briggs, 1904; Lockwood, 1913; Rice, 1915). However, the imperative to orient new students beyond this provision of avuncular advice did not emerge until after the post-war boom in enrollment. During the later years of the 1920s and into the 1930s, a considerable number of scholars described the new innovation of freshman orientation (Knode, 1930; Wilkins, 1924; Harriman, 1925; Dellinger, 1931), and others took note of the recent advances in these institutional activities (Twing, 1924; Rightmire, 1930; Zook, 1932). And by the mid-1930s, scholars had begun to actually study orientation practices in place (Stoddard, & Freden, 1926; Crow, 1929; Cowley, 1931; Cordrey, 1933; Gerberich, 1936; Williams, 1936).

Regardless of early scholarship, current discussions of freshman orientation programs lack an appreciation of the roots of this annual event (Ward-Roof & Hatch, 2003; Fabich, 2007). Rather than merely describing the institutional freshman programs initiated and refined by student YMCAs and annexed by administrators in the early 1920s, this paper situates both types of programs *ad seriatim* within the contemporary state of knowledge about students and of administrative requirements due to shifting institutional imperatives.

## **Methods**

Our analyses of historical documents relating specifically to the YMCA services as well as to the institutional orientation programs serve as the basic starting point. The information on the YMCA results from work at and communication with 10 collegiate archives and the YMCA national archives at the University of Minnesota. Additionally, 220 handbooks (from a personal

collection of 440+), primarily published between 1894 and 1953 by campus YMCAs representing 98 institutions, were analyzed to establish the approximate start and end dates of the various Y services as well as the absorption of administrative orientation programs. Archivists from four additional universities supplied us with specific documents related to the initial administrative orientation programs on their campuses. Additionally, a personal collection of two dozen 1923-1938 freshman week pamphlets published by university administrative offices provide detailed information on the nature, scope, and functions of these operations. Literature from the 1920s and 1930s provided us with information on the use and results of psychological testing during the 1890s-1930s and access to the lively discussions of and considerable bragging by administrators about experiments that their HEIs employed to orient students to college life.

### **The Roots of Freshman Orientation**

In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, college attendance was still not a common activity for most young Americans and yet colleges continued to spring up across the established nation. In 1879, 811 colleges and universities enrolled 115,850 students, two-thirds of whom were men (Snyder, 1993). Although the average per institution calculates to 143 students, established eastern colleges attracted more students than most newly-established ones in the mid-western and southern states. Having recently expanded to include graduate degrees, Harvard enrolled 1,175 male students by 1875; its undergraduate population numbered 706, of whom 270 were freshmen (Drone, 1874). That same year, Cornell, only ten years old, enrolled 542 undergraduates (Official Publications of Cornell University, 1922).

Unless they were graduated from a preparatory school with which their intended college held a compact, prospective students gained entrance into most colleges through institutional examinations held just prior to the start of the fall term. As long as applicants numbered in the dozens or hundreds, this method worked well; students who were not prepared could be funneled

into preparatory department rather than be turned away. However, after the turn of the century, student enrollments increased by the year. By 1900, for example, Cornell's undergraduate enrollment stood at 2,316 with another 205 graduate students sharing the campus. Twenty years later, the combined enrollment numbered 5,668 including 440 graduate students (Official Publications, 1922). Gradually, the public universities in the mid-west also expanded and after World War I at an even higher rate. At Purdue, enrollments dropped from 2,226 to 1,687 from 1916 to 1917, but rebounded to more than 2,500 in 1918, reaching the 3,265 mark by 1923 (Purdue University Enrollment Management, personal communication; Hurt, 1923). This trend was even more dramatic at the University of Illinois where 6,759 students enrolled in 1916, decreasing by more than 1,400 in 1917, but increasing rapidly to 8,743 by 1921 and to 10,627 by 1923 (University of Illinois, 1916-1920; Hurt, 1923). The increased popularity of college attendance after the war made institutional examination cumbersome; a more standardized process had to come to light. Thus, by the early 1920s, many colleges accepted high school graduation as a sign of adequate preparation for college, but continued to utilize institutional entrance examinations for students coming with questionable training (Hurt, 1923).

During the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the new century, these pre-term entrance examination days afforded first-year students only a small window of time to acclimate to their new surroundings, to find room and board so often not provided by the colleges, and possibly to secure employment to help defray their expenses (Klein, 1930; Cowley, 1934). However, beyond the examinations, catalogues, and registration processes, colleges offered no help to new students in their attempt to acclimate to their new environment (Holmes, 1939). Into this void of explicit orientation services stepped the campus YMCAs.

### **The YMCA and YWCA College Movements**

Oblivious to each other, students at the Universities of Virginia and Michigan established their own campus YMCAs in 1858. This student grass-roots religious organizational movement swept the nation during the post-Civil War period and through Progressive Era (Setran, 2007; Finnegan & Alleman, 2005). In the early days, Y members gathered on their campuses in student-initiated Bible-study classes and then attempted to strengthen local Christianity through deputations to townspeople and rural neighbors. Rather than remaining isolated on their individual campuses, they corresponded with members on other campuses through a national newsletter, *The College Bulletin*,<sup>1</sup> participated in state-based college YMCA meetings, and as of the mid-1880s sent representatives to ten-day regional summer camps to receive religious and organizational instruction from national YMCA officers, who were based in New York City.<sup>2</sup> Far from a fleeting enthusiasm, 772 YMCAs operated in 1912, claiming 69,296 members, on slightly more than 1,000 American college, normal school, and seminary campuses (Shedd, 1914; Hopkins, 1951; Snyder, 1993).

Begun in the Midwest, the founding of the campus Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) was actually stimulated by the rejection of women as members by the national YMCA officials. Women students at Illinois State Normal University gathered in late 1872 for Bible study and prayers, calling themselves the Young Ladies Christian Association of Normal, Illinois. By mid-January, the group adopted a constitution, based on the campus YMCA model (Wilson, 1916). Through the 1870s, women convened similar religious-based associations at four other Midwestern colleges.<sup>3</sup> Separate women's groups did not spread as rapidly though as many early campus YMCAs at co-educational colleges included women

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<sup>1</sup> The *College Bulletin* became *The Intercollegian* in 1898.

<sup>2</sup> By 1909, regional summer YMCA conferences were held at Northfield, MA, Silver Bay, NY, Blue Ridge, NC, Lake Geneva, WI, Estes Park, CO, , and Gearhart Park, WA; campus YWCAs also gathered at most of these sites during the summer, but were also held at Pacific Grove, CA, Cascade, CO, and Mountain Lake Park, MD.

<sup>3</sup> The colleges include Northwestern University, Olivet College (MI), the State Normal School at Carbondale (IL), and (the defunct) Lenox College (IA).

students as members. They included women, that is, until 1882 when the YMCA International Committee of the decided that the “M” should be defined narrowly and excluded women as members (Hopkins, 1951). Thus, the rejection prompted the establishment of YWCAs on campuses that previously supported a co-ed YMCA. During the summer of 1884, women student representatives from mid-western campuses at the regional summer camp at Lake Geneva established the National Campus YWCA (Penn College YM/YWCA, 1898; Hopkins).

### **YMCA-YWCA Freshmen Orientation Services**

By 1910, extensive orientation services at both large and small institutions provided to first-year students by the campus Ys—both the men’s and the women’s associations—addressed genuine needs that most students felt as they began their collegiate careers. Beginning in 1878, a number of services gradually developed as the associations grew in membership and organizational knowledge. Student association members provided incoming freshmen with logistical and academic information, housing and employment opportunities, introductions to faculty and upperclassmen, and eventually student leadership programs. The first point of contact between the Y associations and new students was the student handbook.

#### *The YMCA Handbook*

During the summer of 1885, the future YMCA College Secretary, John R. Mott, transferring from Upper Iowa College after his freshman year, received a copy of Cornell University’s student handbook. “When I had written from the West asking for a university catalogue, the [YMCA] sent me a handbook of information, issued annually by the Christian Association, which it published for the benefit of the students” (Hopkins, 1951, p. 284). As early as 1883, at least four student handbooks had been compiled and produced by campus YMCAs: University of Virginia, Northwestern University, Otterbein University, and Hillsdale College; Ohio State and the University of Illinois Ys joined the ranks the following year. The popularity

of the handbooks among the Y associations as a point of connection with new students spread rapidly—so much so that few campuses were without a handbook by the end of the 1890s. Each campus YMCAs published their own pocket-sized, leather-bound student handbooks detailing their institution. In order to subvent the cost and distribute them free of charge to incoming students, the associations secured increasingly extensive local advertising. Not until the 1920s would any of the student handbooks be authored by other agencies, either student government groups or the institution and even then, non-Y handbooks were few.

From the beginning, the handbooks were written to orient the incoming freshmen. The 1883 Otterbein University *Students' Hand-Book* explained that

This book has been prepared especially to assist students, new and old, in their college work, and to suggest important points for consideration in their college life. ...Every item of this little handbook has been prepared with a view to one of these features of college life, and the time given to its perusal will not be thrown away. (Otterbein University Christian Associations, 1883, p. 1)

By the 1890s, the YMCA handbooks detailed three general categories of information: logistics, student activities and organizations, and student culture. Logistically, the handbook provided new students with basic information about how to get to the college and what to do when they arrived. Train, and later bus schedules, as well as post office hours and occasionally neighborhood fire siren codes were included. Students were instructed on the process of matriculating and provided a college directory locating administrative and professorial recitation rooms and eventually offices; descriptions of college buildings appeared as campuses expanded. At some institutions, prospective students receiving the handbooks during the summer could contact current students for information as some handbooks, such as Indiana University's *Red Book, 1911-1912* that supplied a directory of returning students with their home addresses

(Indiana University YMCA, 1911, p. 84-124). As early as 1889, one notable feature of most handbooks was the fold-out detailed campus map, often located just the inside back cover of the handbook.

Prominently and not surprisingly, the handbooks highlighted the campus and community services and activities of the YMCA and if present, the YWCA. Prior to the 1880s, the Y associations sponsored primarily religious meetings and Bible Study courses, but as they became more complex organizations, their services and activities multiplied. New students were thus apprised of the mission and committee work of the Y associations. Through the 1890s, non-Y campus activities, such as literary clubs, publications, and honor and social fraternities, flourished and assumed more detail and handbook space. Athletics played a prominent role in the handbooks; competition schedules and campus sports records were noted with pride and were accompanied by cheers and songs, including the *alma mater*.

Finally, handbooks enumerated social rules of campus life, first as suggested *Freshman Rules*. On many campuses, freshmen were expected to don their special first-year “caps” (except on Sundays and holidays) and to touch the brim when seeing a faculty member or to remove it entirely for the president. Exclusionary customs noted places where freshmen were not allowed to sit, clothes they were not allowed to wear, and people with whom they were not allowed to speak (often the opposite sex). But the cultural guidance offered in the handbooks also extended beyond merely relating freshmen traditional Freshmen Rules.

No doubt reflecting on their own struggles to adapt to college life, Y writers encouraged new matriculates to engage actively in all parts of the collegiate experience: classmates, faculty, athletics, organizations, and of course, academics. The handbooks also instructed first-year students on what to avoid: self-promotion and frivolous behavior. “Don’t be continually telling people what you are. Let them see it from your life and work” (Washington & Jefferson YMCA,

1901, p. 5). “Don’t get wild and spend all your money; remember that your mother and father are sacrificing for you” (Newberry College, 1916, p. 14).

Thus, the handbooks presented new students with logistics, a peek at campus life prior to their arrival, and sage advice for managing their first months. Regardless of how much information initiates were provided beforehand, they arrived as strangers in a strange land (see Alleman & Finnegan, 2009). In a striking shift, the handbooks by the first decade of the new century featured messages by college presidents and various deans welcoming the first-year students and often imparted overt or subtle endorsements of the work of the Associations. Rather than detailing the matriculation directions step-by step, the 1910 Cornell Students’ Handbook reminds freshmen to pay attention to the dean’s letter of instruction (Cornell University Christian Associations, 1910). As administrators started to exercise more interest and control over student life, student opinions of what constituted important campus information gave way to descriptions of institutional policies and codes of conduct.

#### *The Fall Campaign: Getting Students Settled*

By the late 1880s, the young men of the campus YMCAs had developed several proactive tactics designed to meet the immediate physical and social needs of the new students and of course, to solicit members in the process. The young Y leaders shared their knowledge liberally, representing their campus programs at college Y meetings at the state level and at the regional Y summer camps and submitting articles to *The Intercollegian* to disseminate their socialization tactics to other campus associations. However, it took a young man who had appreciated the open hand when he arrived at college to organize and promote these tactics as a strategic plan. John R. Mott, following his graduation from Cornell in 1889, was hired by the national office of the YMCA as the first permanent College Secretary. Mott (1891) detailed the

many of the services that had been developed on individual campuses, calling the strategy the Fall Campaign.

### *The Fall Campaign*

The Fall Campaign was calculated and thorough. Handbooks of course had to be compiled, published, and distributed to incoming students during the summer—tasks that had to be started during the spring term. Another tactic in the Fall Campaign, which by the end of the 1890s was widespread, was to greet and help to settle the incoming students. Train Committee members, sporting ribbons or badges of school colors, met students at the station and would convey new students and their trunks to campus. Conveyance often meant that the first rooms or buildings that freshmen entered on their new campuses belonged to the YMCA or YWCA.

Between 1879 and the late 1920s, at least 50 campus YMCAs had constructed or less frequently acquired their own substantial buildings on campus after conducting self-initiated capital campaigns. On other campuses, such as Washington and Jefferson College (W&J YMCA, 1889), The College of William and Mary (W&M YMCA, 1909), and Worcester Polytechnic Institute (The History of Tech YMCA, 1913), administrators gave the YMCAs and YWCAs dedicated rooms to conduct their religious and social activities. New students visiting the Y rooms or buildings for the first time found information, housing, and employment bureaus, administered and managed by the associations' committees. Freshmen could secure matriculation instructions from the Information Bureaus as admission to the institution for some and course registration for all was crucial. Locating housing was also an immediate concern for most men. Since most colleges and universities lacked dormitories, new students could consult lists of approved lodging in local rooming houses. The 1886 *Students' Handbook* published by the University of Virginia Y provided a list of licensed boarding houses "situated outside the

University grounds” as well as University Boarding Houses and University Mess Clubs (p. 10-11). Many institutions at the time had no student dining accommodations, the Purdue University Hand-Book also explained how to find an eating club, advising that “an underfed student is generally an inefficient student” (Purdue YMCA & YWCA, 1913, p.15). Information about room and board continued at some institutions, primarily the large state institutions, such as Indiana University through the 1930s (Indiana YMCA, 1937).

Well before institutionalized financial aid offices, freshmen often needed assistance to pay their expenses and most YMCAs operated Employment Bureaus to connect work with workers. The earliest notation of an Employment Committee within the YMCA committee structure appeared in the 1896 Vanderbilt handbook (Vanderbilt YMCA, 1896). Three years later, the University of Michigan YMCA (1899) bragged of “helping a large number of students in finding employment...and asking for nothing but [their] gratitude and friendship” during the previous year (p. 6). In 1903, students at Brown University could be engaged in “table waiting, caring for lawns and for furnaces, clerking, tutoring, collecting, typewriting, etc.” (Brown University YMCA, 1903, p. 15). In the 1917 Colorado Agriculture College Handbook, the Y boasted that “last year approximately \$5,000.00 worth of employment was handled through the office” (CAC College Christian Associations, 1917, p. 12). Although the University of Michigan shifted the responsibility for student employment to the Dean of Students as early as 1921, employment bureaus continued to be operated by the Y on most campuses through the 1920s and even into the 1930s (University of Michigan YMCA, 1921).

The creation of one of the primary events of the Fall Campaign preceded John Mott’s student experience at Cornell by a decade and continued on many campuses well into the 1930s. Regardless of what other freshmen activities the campus Ys sponsored, the Freshman Reception was ubiquitous. In October, 1878, the campus YMCA at East Tennessee University (now the

University of Tennessee) sponsored the first reception for new students. With a welcome banner stretched across the hallway, the Y members welcomed the new students to its evergreen-decorated meeting rooms and to the campus. New students gazed upon biblical pictures and “spatter work” religious mottoes. Freshmen sang “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” accompanied by a cadet at the organ, prayed, sang again, listened to Scriptures, were welcomed by the Y president and by one of the professors, and finally were rewarded with refreshments, provided by townswomen (Johnson, 1878, p. 9).

Indeed, the purpose of this first reception and those held by almost every campus association from the 1880s through the first decade of the new century was foremost religious and association-oriented. At Dickinson in 1909, the program for the reception, held the first Friday of the fall semester, followed much the same pioneering religious agenda from Tennessee (Dickinson College Christian Associations, 1909). Y members of course sought to extend their membership and influence among the new students. Yet by the second decade of the twentieth century, the receptions began to shift in their content and emphasis.

From the earliest days, associations invited faculty and administrators to participate in the receptions; at first, the professors who attended were members themselves. But as the receptions became institutionalized, the social event prompted additional ends. Freshmen were often warned not to miss the reception as it became *the* opportunity the new students to become acquainted with administrators and faculty but also the leaders of the campus associations. By 1910, the YMCA receptions featured campus leaders at Williams and Dartmouth, who provided overviews of the various student activities that new students could join (Williams College Christian Association, 1910; Dartmouth College Christian Association, 1910).

By the late 1920s, the receptions seem either to have dwindled in popularity or may have become too expensive for the Associations on larger campuses. Instead, some campus Ys jointly

hosted “mixers” during the first days of the fall term, a decidedly secular activity (Denison University YMCA & YWCA, 1926; Ohio Northern University YMCA, 1927). On the campuses with the stronger Y associations, receptions continued well into the late 1930s, but often had been incorporated into the institution’s orientation program. At Harvard’s religious associations’ Phillips Brooks House (1939), the Y sponsored films orienting students to the campus on one evening and speeches and songs the next. The Penn State (1938) and Clemson (1940) YMCAs held evening events featuring spoofs about administrators and stunt nights. Weiner roasts, corn roasts, picnics, and suppers became an added inducement to attract freshmen to the Y receptions by the mid- to late-1930s (Carnegie Institute YMCA, 1938; Muskingum College, 1939).

#### *Continuing Methods of Socialization*

As the Y associations developed their roles on campus, they initiated new activities aimed specifically at freshmen. The YMCA president of Northwestern University noted in his annual report of 1894-1895 that

The most critical day in a young man’s life is the day on which he leaves home for the first time to enter upon a college career. To aid in practical ways young men to whom the college surroundings are new and strange, to make the beginnings of the college life pleasant, and above all to help them in the formation of safe friendships, is a part of the mission of every College Christian Association. (Lee, 1895, p. 4)

This mission continued through the decades. The Massachusetts Agricultural College (MAC, now University of Massachusetts, Amherst) Freshman Handbook, 1925-1926 stated that “The first duty of the [MAC Christian Association] is to welcome the freshmen, to help him get settled and become acquainted with college life.” (p. 10). The student associations continued to receive suggestions from the national YMCA through manuals subsequent to Mott’s early pamphlets (see Porter, 1927; Seamans, 1927).

Although many of the campus associations apportioned responsibility to a standing committee entitled Freshman Work or New Student Committee as early as the teens, after Gale Seaman published his 1921 pamphlet, several also created Freshmen Councils, Cabinets, or Clubs. These groups, such as the Freshman Friendship Club at the University of Florida or George Williams Club at the University of Minnesota, enabled freshmen to address their own unique first-year problems through discussions and lectures and to contribute to Y work (McVoy, 1932; University of Minnesota YMCA, 1927). As late as 1941, Vanderbilt upper-class Student Christian Association members served as leaders of Freshman Group Discussions held between late November and early December. They facilitated the first-year students in probing such student development issues as “How to strike my balance between classes and activities,” “With whom shall I make friends and what for,” and “How to be myself in college (in the midst of conventions)” (Hart, 1940).

In addition to these secular year-long activities, campus YMCAs across the nation operated a specialized orientation program beginning in the mid-1920s—the Freshman Camp. Held just prior to the beginning of the fall term, the campus YMCA Freshman Camps focused on cultivating freshmen talent, for the campus as well as the Y. The first Freshman Camps coincide with some of the earliest administratively-sponsored freshmen orientation programs. On some campuses, the camps served as the institution’s freshman orientation; elsewhere they supplemented the official institutional program.

The first camp apparently was initiated at the YMCAs at and Illinois in 1926, although the same year, the Universities of Minnesota Y involved freshmen in a pre-term retreat for student leaders. Immediately successful, the University of Minnesota YMCA was known as “a place where friends, not speeches would be made” and continued under Association control until the institution took over in 1954 (University of Illinois YMCA, 1926; YMCA Centennial

Committee, 1987). Within three years of the first outings, Freshman Camps were held at such geographically diverse institutions as Nebraska, Vanderbilt, and MIT. The programs became increasingly popular with each year; the MIT camp attracted 88 students during its first year, but by the third year accepted only 160 applicants in order of application receipt (Technology Christian Association of MIT, 1929).

At the 1929 Blue Ridge YMCA/YWCA Summer Conference, Y representatives from 13 southern campuses received instruction on organizational methods as well as potential “Frosh Week” (Freshman Camp) activities: find a suitable location off campus; provide lectures on making the most of college and information on religious education and employment; schedule recreation time with upper class men; and develop leaders from the orientation experience (Blue Ridge Conference, 1929, p. 4).<sup>4</sup> By 1932, the camps—taking first-year students off-campus to a rural campsite to train leaders, build camaraderie, and recruit association members—had spread to institutions such as Ohio State, Miami University, Cornell, Brown, and Colgate. As the idea of Freshman Camp spread across the nation’s campuses, the programs and their length varied from a weekend to a full-week of activities. Some Freshman Camps lasted for quite some time. In 1962, the Texas A&M Y held its two-day Freshman Camp over the two days prior to “Fish Week” (New Student Program), limiting its participants to 200. Like their predecessors, new men students participated in group discussions, worship, and group sports (Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas YMCA, 1962).

The services offered to new students by the campus YMCAs all over the country specifically addressed the immediate needs of information, employment, housing, and friendship.

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<sup>4</sup> The schools listed with Frosh Week programs varying in length from four events to one full week are North Carolina State University, Louisiana State University, Emory University, Roanoke College, Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, Wofford College, University of Tennessee, Mississippi A&M, Tusculum College, University of South Carolina, Vanderbilt University, University of Virginia, and the University of Miami (FL).

The young men (and often young women following the men's leadership in this area) devised these services on their own, tackling areas of need that the institutions either ignored or neglected. Presidents and deans welcomed the involvement of the YMCA and the YWCA not only to fill in the gaps resulting from limited professional personnel, but because the mission of the associations was wholesome. However, the domination of orientation by the Y associations was doomed to change with the transformations that occurred after World War I.

### **The Colleges Take Over**

As President of the University I cordially welcome the freshmen to the University. You are entering upon a new adventure. We are planning this "Freshman Week" in order to assure you of the best chances to make the most of this adventure. There are many changes of your getting started wrong. We want to increase your getting started right.

-- Louis D. Coffman, President of the University of Minnesota (1927)

During the second decade of the twentieth century, the war effort took a brief but significant toll on collegiate enrollments due to enlistment and the draft: at Penn State, enrollments dropped nearly 20% between 1916 and 1917. However, by 1919, nearly 400 more students were enrolled than had attended prior to the war (Pennsylvania State University retrieved 12/15/07). At Purdue, enrollments dropped from 2,226 to 1,687 from 1916 to 1917, but rebounded to more than 2,500 in 1918, reaching the 3,000 mark by 1925 (Purdue, n.d.). This trend was even more dramatic at the University of Illinois where 6,759 students enrolled in 1916, decreasing by more than 1,400 in 1917, but increasing rapidly to 8,539 by 1920 (University of Illinois Annual Registers, 1916-1920). The fall 1918 increases were the direct result most colleges participating in the federal government's Student Army Training Corps, which introduced higher education to men who otherwise might not have stepped on a campus (Faughnan, 2008). New resources brought about by World War I enabled the 1920s to become a time of collegiate enthusiasm, but also spurred institutional interest in both selecting and preparing students for matriculation.

In the immediate years leading up to World War I, American educational psychologists made significant progress conducting psychological experiments in the 21 laboratories that had been established (Charles, 1976, 1988). From these labs, the proliferation of research stimulated the growth of newly-established journals in educational psychology. Although the early testing was primitive by today's standards, researchers attempted to amass an understanding of psychological processes specifically related to college students. Bingham (1916) tested 200 Dartmouth freshmen in 1913, testing such psychological functions as, suggestibility, memory span, perception of form, color naming, and endurance grip. Bell (1916) conducted a variety of similar tests on University of Texas freshmen correlating their scores to their grades in an attempt to "throw light on the differences in the intellectual capacity among" them (p. 387).

These early experiments built on each other and suggested that future student generations of students would benefit from the results of the accumulation of norms in this new field of mental measurement. Meanwhile Kitson (1917) suggested to researchers to consider the developmental complexity of matriculates, arguing that the student is "a psychological entity, a social being and an economic force, and that in making a complete study of him the institution must measure him in various aspects" (as cited in Bowen, 1933, p. 312). The research piqued both interest and application among a few college administrators: embryonic orientation programs emerged at Wellesley College in 1913 and at Brown, Rochester, and Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute in 1918 (Knode, 1930).<sup>5</sup> By the early 1920s, the "Week of Instruction" at the University of Rochester enjoyed "a preliminary series of lectures, banquet, and examinations... [including] the Columbia psychological tests... and an examination covering the work of the week" (*Freshmen Receive First Taste*, 1922). However, at the administrative level

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<sup>5</sup> A three-page history of the National Orientation Directors Association notes that orientation programs first began at Boston University in 1888 (Fabich, 2007). However, no citation is offered for this claim by author, nor can the archives at Boston University find any documents to verify this claim.

on the ground at most campuses, entrance examinations tended merely to be placement examinations. Without a vehicle or group of professionals to utilize the accumulating data on the psychological capacities of college students, the research generally continued to be shared among the researchers.

The sharp inclines in enrollments following the war presented the opportunity and need for colleges to become selective in admission, but the technology necessary took a decade and a half to devise. Group testing originated with the application of the Stanford-Binet Scale (IQ test) on the military as the country entered the war, but quickly was adapted by Lewis Terman to school children and then by E.L. Thorndike for college students immediately following armistice (Caldwell, 1919; Arlitt & Hall, 1923). Seashore (1923, p. 29) warned that “mental tests are therefore not merely a possible substitute for the old time entrance examination”, reports during the early 1920s demonstrate that IQ testing was commonplace and the test results were limited to sorting students (McKown, 1923; Laird & Andrews, 1923; Toops, 1926).

The SAT, originally a modification of the World War I intelligence test, was introduced by Carl Campbell Brigham in 1926 and used at first primarily to “build up a validity record by correlating the scores with the takers’ freshman grades” (Lemann, 1999, p. 32). Some universities employed the early SAT in a limited way for admission for out-of-state prospects.<sup>6</sup> However, not until 1936 did IBM perfect a machine to grade standardized examinations, making mass pre-admissions testing possible. A year later, the SAT was administered at 150 sites around the country (Lemann, 1999).

From the use of testing, administrators recognized that the flood of new entrants into their institutions were not without consequence. Students coming with both manifold abilities and

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<sup>6</sup> The 1931 Purdue catalogue advises “applicants who are not graduates of secondary schools recognized by Purdue University” that they must pass the entrance examinations offered by the College Entrance Examination Board in June.

sundry backgrounds presented a multitude of challenges to the faculty, the likes of which had not been experienced. Retention had always been a problem for colleges, but was now exacerbated by the heterogeneity (and sheer size for some institutions) of the student population (West, 1928). Until administrators had the means to evaluate its applicants individually through mass testing with the SAT, admittance to an institution often rested on the mere possession of a secondary school diploma (Hurt, 1923). Ill-prepared students entered college by the droves and just as often swiftly departed. Thus, many administrators realized that a mechanism was essential to determine the disparate academic needs of their new students. Without a specific answer to the retention problem, many encouraged the Y associations to continue their social programs. The social and logistical orientation provided by the YMCA could no longer suffice, nor could these student groups contend with the number of new entrants logistically or financially. A planned program that addressed the initial diverse needs of students became essential. However, one young president in the snowy wilds of Maine decided deliberately to address the diverse needs of the incoming students.

### **Freshman Week**

Incipient institutional programs for freshmen appeared on a few campuses during the teens, and the Instruction Week at the University of Rochester had developed to a robust academic program; most however, focused only on effective methods of study (Harriman, 1925). The earliest multi-dimensional pre-semester program for first-year students, initiated and sponsored by a collegiate administration, took place at the University of Maine in 1923. Freshman Week, as it was called by the program's creator, Maine's young, newly-installed president, Clarence Cook Little, was meant to address "the transition period from school to college...with the arrival of the freshman on the college campus. Like a row boat thrown blindly from a wharf he is likely to be completely swamped by the tremendous confusion of his

environment” (Little, 1925, p. 1). Writing to parents of the new student prior to the second Freshman Week, President Little advised that the object was to “provid[e] an opportunity, before the rush of the returning upper-classmen starts, to study carefully the individual problems of freshman and to assist in estimating their ability to meet the responsibilities and difficulties of college life” (Little, 1924). Reminiscing about his presidency at the University of Maine years later, Little indicated that his idea resulted from a

study of undergraduate records [that] showed that there was a high degree of maladjustment and a large number of “drop-outs” soon after the students came to Orono. In this situation, homesickness, loneliness, and lack of understanding of what a college was and the sage use of its faculties and opportunities loomed up as all-important factors. (Little, n.d., p. 5).

Indeed, the first-year class arriving on campus in 1924 was diverse in its needs. Of the 353 students, on the IQ test (otherwise called a psychological test) administered during the second Freshman Week, 22 scored an 80 quotient and 23 scored a 120 or higher quotient. The vast majority of students fell between the 90<sup>th</sup> and 115<sup>th</sup> quotient. Although the average age was 18.9, several new students were 16 or 17, while others had reached their mid-twenties (Results of tests, 1924).

To dispel homesickness and loneliness, the 1924 Freshman Week program established more intimate groups. The 353 new students, regardless of their intentions for residence during the school year, were housed on campus for the week in gendered dormitories. The class was divided into 24 sections of similar majors; nine sections for Arts and Sciences, ten in technology, and five groups in agriculture. Each section was assigned to a room of their own, where group members could gather when not occupied in activities. And each section was shepherd by a

primary and an assistant faculty member who were interested in working with freshmen to ensure their success.

To address the transition from high school to college, students listened to lectures on study skills and daily task management, college student responsibilities and customs, and the academic structure of the university. In addition to library instruction, first-year students were tested through research problems to determine their actual library skills. To enable the university to identify them and to understand their capabilities and limitations, freshmen had their faces photographed, their bodies subjected to physicals and to competitive recreation, and their minds probed for achievement in English, psychology, mathematics, and chemistry. And to keep them happy and involved in appropriate ways, they went to a movie at the local theater, participated in a song fest and a stunt night, enjoyed a dance, worshipped at vespers, and met as a class to begin organizing as members of student government. And of course, they attended the Y's Freshman Reception held the first Friday of the term (Creamer, 1924).

Prof. Walter J. Creamer, assistant dean (1925-28) and future head of the electrical engineering department (1945-61), reporting on Maine's second Freshman Week, wrote that the aim of the program was to help new students to understand the difference in collegiate methods of instruction—selecting “important details from the mass of accumulated information on a given subject...rather than the learning of small assignments under direct supervision, as in high school.” He further enumerated extra-curricular activities, social life, and freedom from parental guidance as threats to the success of first-year students. “He [sic] must learn college discipline, class discipline, and self discipline; and the greatest of these is self discipline” (Creamer, 1924, p. 1-2). Creamer noted that the second year program at Maine rectified the mistakes of its predecessor and addressed all of the elements identified as freshmen problems.

The concept of a Freshman Week diffused quickly to other colleges and universities. In Maine's neighboring state, the faculty of the University of New Hampshire (UNH) adopted the idea of Freshman Week four months after Maine's inauguration of its new orientation program (Henderson, 1923). In a special notice to freshmen, President Hetzel announced in August of 1924 the required program under the threat of "[imperiling] his admission to the University" (p. 1). UNH (1924) followed the blueprint drawn by Maine almost to a tee, even to the point of requiring students to stay on campus for the duration regardless of where they intended to live during the academic year.

However, the size of the institution, not surprisingly, made some difference in the degree of adoption of Maine's format. When Clarence Cook Little assumed the presidency of the University of Michigan in 1927, he implemented almost the same program. Yet, Earnest H. Wilkins, dean of arts and sciences at the University of Chicago (and future president of Oberlin), at the end of the fall term 1924, reported that his institution adapted the program to its own needs. Chicago's program adhered to most of Maine's, but with an enrollment of over 9,000 students, had to be modified. Women students not living at home were housed in one of the University halls and "the University Commons, the men's club, and [the] social hall for women were kept open throughout" the six day period (Wilkins, 1924). In advance, students were sent an eight-page leaflet of "Instructions and Suggestions for First-Year College Students" to help them select courses for registration. Deans of the various schools and colleges, armed with background information about the skills and needs of each student, met their new charges at registration and were able to interview and advise them in a meaningful way. Although it followed Maine's lead in many of its orientation processes, Chicago did not place as much emphasis on establishing the small group intimacy. The YMCA, the YWCA, and the Federation

of University Women sponsored receptions and sight-seeing tours, but most social activities at best only reduced the group by gender and interest in participation.

An interesting sidelight to the adoption and promotion of the Freshman Week programs relates to the publicity that Chicago's program received as a result of Wilkins' 1924 article in *The School Review*, touting the innovation, yet crediting Maine for its leadership. Wilkins' article appeared in December and Maine proclaimed its inventor status in a special correspondence report in *School and Society* in January, 1925, bragging of the adoptions by Vermont, UNH and Tufts within the first year of existence (Gannett, 1925).

At some of the institutions at which the YMCA was particularly active, the associations endeavored to ensure their centrality of influence in various ways when Freshman Week was adopted and threatened to displace their long-established role in the informal orientation of new students. In 1924, the YM-YWCAs played prominent roles during the University of Minnesota's pre-term examination period. At the Y Building, freshmen could enjoy musical get-togethers every noon, become acquainted with the Y officers during evening open house periods, participate in a Tuesday night comedy and vaudeville program, could meet for tours of the campus by Y members, and meet other students at the traditional reception on Friday evening (University of Minnesota YMCA, 1924).

Two years later, the University of Minnesota offered its first Freshman Week to its 2,800 new students in 1926. Speeches by various student leaders and a plethora of evening activities filled the times during which students were not in examinations. The YMCA ensured its place with orienting new students by offering one of three entertainments one evening during the week; the YMCA held its vaudeville program opposite a chamber music program and a presentation of Booth Tarkington's *Seventeen* by the university drama club. The traditional reception changed to a combined YM-YWCA mixer that year. And finally, the Y invited

selected freshmen class leaders to join the seventh annual Edgewood Conference for campus leaders that the Y sponsored at Lake Minnetonka—no doubt a pre-cursor to its Freshman Camp established in 1930 (University of Minnesota YMCA, 1926a, 1926b, 1930). By 1942, the only evidence of the Y's participation in Freshman Week's events consisted of an annual hike and picnic (at a cost of 25¢ for each freshman) on Thursday afternoon. Evident during the week though were activities sponsored by a gaggle of student groups, including other religious organizations (University of Minnesota Freshman Week, 1942).

The specific transitioning of the locus of control of the freshman services from the YMCA to the administration is evident when the content of the 1925 and 1926 Bucknell University Freshman Week programs are compared with its 1936 program. Indeed, the Y associations played a major role in Bucknell's first programs, but became less involved as the years went on. In the first two years of the program, freshmen first reported on arrival to the YM-YWCA's Information Bureau where name tags were issued. Later that day, they were informally welcomed at the Y associations' evening reception with singing led and speeches given by deans and professors (Bucknell University, 1925, 1926). In 1936 however, freshmen arriving in Lewisburg by train were met by University Guides and told to report immediately to the Registrar's Office. After being welcomed by acting President Arnaud Marts in their first class assembly in a university auditorium, the women proceeded to an informal social hour in a dormitory while the men gathered at the Christian Association Lounge (Bucknell University, 1936).

Every afternoon of the Bucknell Freshman Weeks of 1925 and 1926, the YMCA and YWCA supervised recreation and hikes for the new students. On two additional evenings, the Christian Associations sponsored activities, either a corn roast or a stunt night and then held vespers on Sunday evening. In comparison, the Freshman Week Committee of 1936, composed

of the dean of the college, the dean of women, six faculty members, the registrar, the university physician, the director of physical education and the paid secretary of the Bucknell Christian Associations. The two limited recreation periods were sponsored by the Student Committee, comprised of 11 Christian Association members and four Student-Faculty Congress representatives. The Christian Associations' former exclusive involvement was reduced to the Student Christian Association Dinner on Sunday at 12:45 p.m.

During the decade following its first Freshman Week, Bucknell's program evolved to a decidedly academic orientation. In 1936, departments held conference programs to orient freshmen to their new majors. Students could attend addresses by faculty members on Saturday morning and Monday morning and spend some time in informal discussions with the faculty afterwards. Placement examinations, physical examinations, including an auditory test, and university-sponsored lectures stretched across the week with no alternatives offered between required events. In comparison, the 1925 and 1926 schedules included general college skills and information pertinent to the freshmen experience. Few gaps in the schedule prevented the new students from having too much time to experience homesickness or loneliness.

Not all institutions jumped on the bandwagon right away. Thomas Arkle Clark (1927), dean of men at Illinois and former YMCA student leader in reviewing Henry J. Doermann's (1926) *The Orientation of College Freshmen* worried that the program outlined was too mechanical in its orientation, rather than focused on motivating freshmen to seek "direction and advice" (p. 70). The University of Illinois did not implement its Freshman Week until 1931. The program for new Illini students followed the Maine formula, creating small groups according to the colleges to which the freshmen were accepted. The very active YM & YWCAs played a prominent role in the program by altering the traditional reception to an entertainment and dance on Tuesday evening of the week (Shumway, 1932).

## Conclusions

The longevity and scope of the YMCA and to some lesser degree the YWCA campus assistance for new students is, in itself, an extraordinary story of four decades of student-initiated, operated, and sustained service. Clearly, the student associations were guided both by the College Secretary and his staff employed by the national YMCA office, but each succeeding year of student officers sacrificed time, energy, and resources to extend a welcoming hand and offer a bit of advice to the incoming class. And many of the associations did so without local guidance from within their institutions. However, as the post-World War I enrollments escalated, the scope of their work grew too large. At best, many of the associations could still “man” their employment and housing bureaus, could operate freshmen camps for a select number of promising first-year students, but meeting trains and conveying students to campus and footing the bill for receptions for the entire freshmen class grew out of proportion to their resources.

Yet at the same time, the HEIs began to recognize the real need to understand their students and the promise of psychological testing appeared on the horizon. Dean of Columbia University, H. E. Hawkes (1930), in a retrospective of the previous 25 years, questioned the responsibility of the institution not to only serve the ablest students but also its responsibility to guide the extra-curriculum, which especially within some athletic activities had reached the stage of the uncontrollable. Hawkes was voicing the same questions that undoubtedly were keeping administrators in many institutions through the late 1920s awake at night. The students on their campuses were no longer homogenous, were arriving with great expectations, and often without proper preparation. To adequately control the sheer numbers would have been a logistical nightmare for some administrators. To sort the multitudes with an eye toward helping them to succeed and not become a statistic of attrition meant finding adequate answers.

Simultaneously, graduate course work in the administration of higher education began to gain ground at several universities: Clark University, under the long-term avocation of G. Stanley Hall (Goodchild, 1996), Columbia's Teachers College, Harvard, and George Peabody College, to name a few (Miller, 1930). The time for a systematic administration of the collegiate enterprise had come and formal preparation could now be obtained. Although it would not be until 1937 when the Student Personnel professionals developed a consciousness of kind with their united statement of the Personnel Point of View, administrators started in the early 1920s to accept their responsibilities for student life beyond the intimate space of the classroom. A decade or more passed before most colleges and universities took complete control over official student life, directing and managing activities and services. But the absorption began dramatically with student orientation, with Freshman Week.

This absorption or annexation of control of orientation changed the relationship of the institution to the student. One might say that *in loco parentis* changed from a primarily punitive and correctional epistemology to one that was at least emerging as supportive and developmental. However, by annexing the responsibilities assumed by the YMCA, the institutions were also relegating students to a lesser role. For four decades, this one group managed to teach succeeding classes to serve their peers, to socialize and acclimatize the new students to the culture of the campus in healthy ways, and to learn the art of administration and management in all their endeavors.

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