This document comments on the history of higher education and the effects of government on the establishment of junior colleges. When the junior college became part of the educational system in the early 1900s, efforts were made to define its function in response to the Office of Education’s emphasis on information-gathering and accreditation. A combination of forces, including the early rise of the private 2-year college, higher education traditions, the work and attitudes of accrediting agencies, the operational definition utilized by the Office of Education, and the impact of recent Federal legislation, all contributed to the acceptance of the junior college as an institution in and of American higher education. (RN)
FEDERAL INFLUENCE ON THE
JUNIOR COLLEGE
SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

By
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Since its earliest days the junior college has been an institution in transition. Springing from not one but several sources, assuming multiple forms of organization, reaching at times for goals not altogether clear either to society at large or its own leadership—all these have threatened the building of a stable and enduring collegiate institution. (1) The result has been a continuing search for identity which has not yet ended.

The plight of the junior college is indicative of the condition of higher education in the United States, that is, a social institution permanently in flux. In the beginning those tiny colonial colleges represented strenuous efforts to duplicate the models of Oxford and Cambridge. They were only partially successful. Influences from Scottish universities helped destroy an absolute allegiance to English norms. Much more pervasive, of course, was the impact of the new social and physical environment. European academic strains planted in the soil of North America immediately lost their purity. A new culture in a new land forced the colleges to adapt and thus survive.

Between the Revolution and the Civil War lay the great age of the American College. But by the end of the 19th century growth in higher education had been matched by diversity. Joining the ranks of the New England hilltop colleges were universities, both public and private, technical institutes, land-grant colleges, institutions for Negroes, colleges for women, denominational colleges, and the first
junior college prototypes.

Following its establishment, the United States Office of Education gathered, studied, and distributed information and statistics about the nation's institutions of higher education. In order to count colleges, however, the Office of Education had to determine what they were as well as where they were.

U. S. Commissioner of Education John Eaton once commented that the term superior education was used in the United States--and the federal Office of Education--to generally and vaguely describe all grades of instruction above that given in high schools, academies, normal schools, and schools of commerce. In its early years, the Office of Education listed as a part of superior or higher education any institution legally authorized to grant a bachelor's or professional degree and which actually had students enrolled in a collegiate program.(2) In its first report based on these broad-gauged criteria, the Office listed 369 colleges and universities.

Recognized for many years as inadequate, the Office in 1910 tightened its requirements. To be listed by the Office, a higher education institution had to offer a degree and a minimum of two years of standard college work, maintain definite admissions standards, and enroll at least 20 college students.

Paralleling this move toward tougher survey standards, higher education specialist Kendric Charles Babcock initiated an attempt to rate the quality of American colleges. Responding to the requests of many graduate schools for information about the effectiveness of undergraduate institutions, he conducted an extensive investigation. Based on the evidence available Babcock prepared an initial ranking of
344 institutions. Although tentative and not authorized for publication, this report was somehow leaked to the press. The ensuing uproar was sufficient in intensity to command the attention of many congressmen and the President of the United States. In February, 1913, President William Howard Taft ordered the Office of Education to suppress this report.

This effort by Babcock had the effect of removing the Office of Education from direct participation in any official accreditation of colleges and universities. On the other hand, while open to criticism, Babcock's work did direct the attention of leaders in higher education to the basic issues of definitions and standards. Into the breach opened by the withdrawal of the Office moved state, regional, and professional accrediting agencies. (3) The accreditation movement, spurred in part by activities at the Office, did produce attempts to make explicit the characteristics of educational institutions and establish standards. (4)

Some Early Efforts to Define the Junior College

Lack of evidence concerning junior college origins eliminates precise analysis of early institutional characteristics. A rational judgment, however, is that between the Civil War and the Spanish-American conflict, although the junior college movement had not officially begun, some liberal arts colleges awarded degrees so infrequently and had so few upperclass students that they might well have been called junior colleges. (5) Nevertheless, junior college growth had advanced far enough by the end of the first two decades of the 20th century to permit identification of four major types of two-year institutions: the junior
college or lower division of the university undergraduate college; the normal school accredited for two years of college work; the public high school extended to include two years of higher education; the small liberal arts college reducing its four-year program to two years. (6)

The universities of Chicago, California, and Washington divided the four-year curriculum into two specific parts. The first two years of collegiate work supplemented the program of the high school and provided general education in preparation for advanced work in the upper division. A certificate or degree was awarded to students completing the lower division work and provided a ticket for admission to upper level programs.

By 1919 teacher training or normal schools in at least 10 states had received authority to offer the first two years of collegiate work. Those in Wisconsin persisted into the 1960's.

The public two-year institutions, by the 1920's, were attracting more attention than any other kind of junior college. This type of institution was the public high school extended upward. At this stage in their development, however, as many as three out of four junior colleges were still privately-controlled. For the most part these were church-related colleges which offered a college preparatory program and work of the freshman and sophomore years.

As the number of junior colleges increased, so did their variations. At the 1920 national junior college conference, for example, one speaker extolled the virtues of military schools. An institution properly structured along lines of a "sane military organization," it was argued, was the best of all possible solutions to many of the problems of the junior college. (7)

In addition to the older forms of organization, two-year
institutions were established as separate entities, apart from either the high school or university. Some institutions established extensions or branch junior colleges. A few institutions with specialized curricular offerings--technical, business, and commercial education, for example--also moved during the 1920's into the mainstream of the two-year college movement. (8)

During the economic depression of the 1930's, a number of states recognized the need to provide higher education for jobless yet able high school graduates. They were confronted, too, by a growing number of unemployed teachers and scholars. Under terms of an agreement with the national government, funds were made available to several states and communities to establish and maintain emergency junior colleges. These federally-supported institutions of higher education sprang up virtually overnight. In 1935, they enrolled about 15,000 students. If not the earliest, these temporary colleges were forerunners of the community colleges which arose after World War II. (9)

The variety of organizational patterns prevented formation of a single and complete image of the junior college. Compounding this lack of uniformity was the profusion of differing institutional characteristics. Among the more notable of these were the locus of control (private or public), length of program (one or two years), courses offered, and certificates, diplomas, titles and degrees. (10)

As early as 1912 the Office of Education was aware of this problem. On duty was a higher education specialist (Babcock) who was authorized to report on, among other matters, academic standards in American colleges and universities. (11) He found this responsibility a tiresome chore. In a discussion of standards in four- and two-year
institutions he lamented that, despite constant efforts, the word college remained as hard to define as the word gentleman. (12) 

Floyd M. McDowell discovered that in the few years following Babcock's jeremiad, numerous state universities, legislatures, and departments of education had wrestled with this difficult issue. Church boards, teacher and college associations, and regional accrediting agencies also had made first attempts to recognize and establish standards for junior colleges. (13) The Office of Education was not formally a party to most of these efforts. However, Commissioners of Education P.P. Claxton and J.J. Tigert and staff members Babcock, Samuel Capen, and George Zook (all known junior college sympathizers) were vital links between the Office of Education, accreditation agencies, and junior colleges. (14) 

By 1920, the North Central Association and the Southern Association had sketched official portraits of junior colleges; so had at least one church body. (15) Definition and standardization were in the wind. It may well be that part of the underlying reason for calling in 1920 a meeting of junior college leaders—which led directly to the founding of the American Association of Junior Colleges—was the deep concern of the Office of Education for higher education standards and the close ties of Claxton and Zook with the accrediting movement. What is certain is that the issue of academic standards was in the minds of many persons attending the 1920 and 1921 national junior college meetings. The first constitution of the American Association of Junior Colleges declared that the prime objective of the Association was to define the junior college. Creation of college criteria was accepted and encouraged as a major task of the organization; of six standing
committees one was delegated authority to deal with standards. (16)

Like the Office of Education, the American Association of Junior Colleges never became an accrediting agency. It preferred to work with and through existing organizations. The Association, however, has maintained a close watch over the activities of accrediting agencies and, on occasion, issued model standards. (17)

High School or College?

The Office of Education, the American Association of Junior Colleges, and accrediting and other education associations together have a lengthy record of serious efforts to determine what a junior college is—and should be. The kinds of answers given have been, at heart, judgments on a fundamental issue: Is the junior college a part of secondary or higher education?

Genesis of the Issue

One can find the seeds of conflict being sown during the time of Henry Tappan, William Folwell, and Henry Barnard. These leaders in higher education in the 19th century viewed the first two years of collegiate work as preparation for the advanced and specialized courses of the university. In general, their proposals sought to push down the first two years of college work into or at least onto the public high school. Modeled after the German system of education, students would enter the university from the equivalent of the gymnasium or 14th grade.

There is evidence that various high schools reached for this goal in the late 1800's. And, in 1901, Joliet High School in Illinois extended upward to become the first public junior college still in operation in the 1970's. (18) By 1925 Koos reported that public junior
colleges were housed almost exclusively in the same buildings as their high school counterparts; a later study revealed that the greatest proportion of the teaching staff in public colleges came from the ranks of successful high school teachers. (19)

Dramatic junior college growth in the early years, however, was not in the public sector. Among the first junior colleges were Bradley Polytechnic Institute and Lewis Institute—both in Illinois, both established under the prodding of William Rainey Harper, both private. McDowell’s study showed that approximately 70 percent of all junior colleges were privately-controlled. These institutions dominated the field until about 1920. Even after losing the enrollment race at that time they continued to outnumber public junior colleges until after World War II. (20)

Here, then, was one immediate contributor to conflict—the theory of the junior college as an extension of the high school, the reality of the junior college as a one- or two-year institution of higher education.

Reorganization of American Education

By 1900 the university and the public high school had introduced new forms of organization into American education. In the next three decades the junior high school and the junior college offered additional structural options. How should the ladder of education be constructed? What should be the major rungs? The 6-4-4 versus 6-3-3-2 debate had begun. (21)

William Rainey Harper set the stage for this debate. (22) The freshman and sophomore years, he said, were a continuation of secondary education, a continuation in terms of subject matter and instructional

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methods. Only at the end of the sophomore years had the student ended his preparation for advanced studies, only then were university subjects and methodology profitable.

How could institutions be organized to recognize this assumption? Harper moved simultaneously in several directions. One technique was to divide the four undergraduate years into a senior college and a junior college, each two years in length. This he did at Chicago. Other universities followed suit. Another organizational pattern was the high school expanding its work to include the full range of the secondary programs. This meant adding a 13th and 14th grade atop the usual 12 year structure. Harper predicted that in a very few years high schools all over the country would be doing college work. (23)

At the same time, President Harper was keenly aware of the struggles of the small college. Weaknesses in these institutions constituted one of the most serious problems facing American education, he said. At least 200 four-year institutions ought to become junior colleges. (24) Some did. Often they formed an alliance with a benevolent university nearby.

Ranking among the foremost advocates of the junior college as an institution of higher education were U.S. Commissioner of Education P.P. Claxton and Walter C. Eells, professor of education at Stanford University and first executive secretary of the American Association of Junior Colleges. Claxton was greatly concerned with the plight of the small American college and inefficiency in institutional management. To these problems he saw the junior college as an appropriate, practical solution. He felt no great benefit could accrue to higher education than unstable four-year institutions trimming their programs and forming
strong two-year colleges. The two-year colleges, he suggested, should have the same admissions requirements as a standard college. Work of a lower grade should be labeled clearly. A degree of some type should be granted. (25) At a crucial time, therefore, the opinion of the federal Commissioner of Education was on the side of making the junior college a collegiate institution offering a program two years in length.

A later advocate, Walter Eells, if not completely adopting Claxton's position, did agree that the junior college was not simply the high school extended. Secondary or general education may be its bailiwick but this admission does not make the junior college a high school. The two-year college should be a separate and unique step in the ladder of education—unmistakably above the high school, distinctly below the university specializations. The junior college, in short, has its own identity. (26)

Claxton and Eells were outnumbered by educational leaders who supported the merger of the upper high school and lower college years. A prominent spokesman for this group was Leonard V. Koos, professor of education at the University of Chicago. (27) Koos had been a careful student of the emerging junior high school; he also became an authority on the junior college. His studies had given him insight into the nature of the secondary school, its curriculum and organizational structure. He was convinced that students, schools, and colleges and universities would benefit from the division of the elementary-secondary-junior college sequence into three units: the 6-4-4 plan.

Koos was joined in this opinion by a host of junior college supporters including George Zook, James Wood, Frederick Eby, William Proctor, John Harbeson, and John Sexton. The latter two wrote a book optimistically
describing the final four years in 6-4-4 as the new American college. (28)

At the Office of Education Commissioner William J. Cooper came out vigorously for 6-4-4. In fact, Cooper struck at the heart of Claxton's argument. The chances of survival for an independent two-year college, he argued, were not good. The junior college is strongest when merged with the high school. (29) Cooper was joined by Office higher education specialists Arthur Klein and Fred Kelly and secondary school specialist Carl Jessen, all of whom viewed the public junior college as an extension of the high school. (30)

Although supported by hours of discussion and scores of articles, the dream of 6-4-4, by and large, remained just a dream. The first public school system to try it was Pasadena, California, in the 1920's. When the movement reached its zenith, immediately before World War II, Koos found only 10 plans in operation in all of the United States. (31) After the war, the issue of 6-4-4 was not raised. Those programs still extant soon closed. (32) Neither junior college leaders nor Office of Education officials debated in those terms again. The junior college, in theory as well as practice, was moving into the realm of higher education.

Impact of Accreditation

While the junior college movement exhibited a number of institutional patterns of control the predominant form in its early stages of development was the private, two-year college. Universities, state departments of education, and regional accrediting associations could not foresee what directions the junior college might take—or if it would survive. They described the junior college as it was and helped it build its identity in terms with which they were familiar.
They knew the high school, a program four years in length. They knew the standard liberal arts college, a program four years in length. What was a junior college? The very earliest answers to that question helped frame the dimensions of two-year college development.

Moves in Wisconsin, Missouri, Illinois and Virginia added strength to a particular definition of the junior college—that it was an institution with a two-year program offering typical freshman and sophomore liberal arts courses. In one state, following completion of the second year of normal school college program, students were admitted directly to junior standing at the state university. In Missouri, the state university issued detailed regulations for the many junior colleges affiliated with it. In essence, these regulations specifically required the two-year colleges to duplicate the work of the freshman and sophomore years at the university. The University of Chicago developed close ties with several institutions in Illinois. These small junior colleges served primarily as feeders to the University. In Virginia, the state department of education and the association of girl’s schools and colleges both adopted standards calling for a two-year college parallel course in the junior college. (33)

The earliest regional associations to establish junior college standards followed those initial and tentative blueprints rather precisely. A junior college must offer a program two years in length based on the work of an accredited four-year high school, the North Central Association stated. Entering students must present 14 units of high school credits. The junior college must be organized on a collegiate—not a high school—basis; it must have library and laboratory facilities sufficient to support the work of the first two years as they
would be conducted in a four-year institution. Other accrediting agencies tailored their junior college specifications to match very closely those of the North Central Association.

Doak Campbell, long-time secretary of the American Association of Junior Colleges and an early leader in junior college affairs, assessed the dominating influence of accrediting agencies on the two-year college movement in this way: the primary work of the junior college, decreed by the accreditors, was the duplication of the first two years of a four-year liberal arts college program. And while associations had discussions about the two-year institutions as an extension of the high school, when discussion had ended and action began, the junior college was identified as—and instructed to be—an institution of higher education.

Answers at the Office of Education

Campbell's conclusions about the attitudes and actions of accreditation agencies could be applied to the U.S. Office of Education equally as well (despite certain notable exceptions to the rule). In all its published lists, directories, statistical reports, and information summaries, the Office of Education classified junior colleges as institutions of higher education. And, though opinions about its nature differed sharply through the years, when major decisions concerning Office policy or operations were made, junior colleges were treated as colleges. Authority to deal with two-year institutions was always delegated to the division of higher education—as opposed to divisions dealing with secondary education, school systems, or vocational and technical education.
When U.S. Commissioner of Education John Studebaker proposed his post-World War II reorganization of the Office of Education he specified that the position of junior college specialist be included in the division of higher education. Junior college specialists have always served in Office units dealing with higher education. For the Office of Education, the junior college has been, in operational terms, a collegiate institution, not a high school.

Consensus—and Why

The high-school-or-college controversy raged especially strong between the two world wars. Before that period the arguments were forming. Since the late 1940's the issue has been simmering quietly as accrediting associations and state legislatures have moved to clarify the junior college role. Recent federal legislation has reinforced the concept of the two-year college as an institution of higher education.

Thus, a combination of forces—the early rise of the private two-year college with higher education traditions, the work and attitudes of accrediting agencies, the operational definition utilized by the Office of Education, the impact of recent federal legislation—all these helped form this judgment: the junior college, in the 1970's, is an institution in and of American higher education.
Notes


3. Despite its sometimes naive faith in institutions to report accurately on their own status, incomplete data, and a willingness to accept violations of its own standards, the Office of Education did disseminate information on large numbers of collegiate institutions in the 19th and early 20th century. Furthermore, Office efforts to collect and classify this information contained the seeds of the voluntary accreditation movement. See Zook and Haggerty, Principles of Accrediting Higher Institutions, p. 19.

4. Two volumes give extensive treatment to the growth and development of the accreditation movement in the United States; the part played by the Office of Education is reviewed in each. The older work is Zook and Haggerty, Principles of Accrediting Higher Institutions; the more recent is a comprehensive reference work, Lloyd E. Blauch (ed.), Accreditation in Higher Education (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1959).


21. There were many other combinations of elementary-secondary and early collegiate education. Most of them were modifications of these two plans: 6-4-4 indicating the essential unity of 14 years of schooling; 6-3-3-2 signifying a separation between high school and college work.


30. Editorial comments in the Office of Education Biennial Survey of Education during the 1920's and much of the 1930's reinforced the concept of the junior college as extended high school. The 6-4-4 plan was frequently encouraged. The official journal of the Office of Education also gave its support as, for example, in this editorial: "High School or Junior College--Which?", School Life, IX (November, 1923), 58.


39. With the demise of the division of higher education in 1964, this responsibility was assumed by a bureau of higher education.


41. Whether the first junior college specialist would be placed in the division of higher education or the division of secondary education was a concern of AAJC, see letter to John W. Studebaker from Jesse P. Bogue, February 2, 1948, Container No. 169, "Office of Education--Higher Education Division," Accession No. 63-A-23, Federal Records Center, Alexandria, Va. An interesting sideline to this discussion is that Eells, in making a proposal in 1936 that the Office of Education appoint a junior college specialist, weighed secondary and higher education and found both wanting; he suggested that the specialist not be classified in either field but operate as a link between the two, see "Suggestions Submitted by Dr. Walter C. Eells, May 14 (1936)," mimeographed, in Box 205, "Junior Colleges (Historical)," Record Group 12, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

42. See, for example, the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963 (P. L. 88-204) which specifically allocated to public two-year institutions 22 percent of all funds appropriated as grants; the Vocational Education Act of 1963 (as amended by P. L. 90-576); and the Higher Education Act of 1965 (P. L. 89-325).