"City Blood Is No Better than Country Blood": The Populist Movement and Admissions Policies at Public Universities

Scott Gelber

The gubernatorial election of 1892 unnerved faculty members at Kansas State Agricultural College (KSAC). Voted into office by a "fusion" of Populists and Democrats, Governor Lorenzo Lewelling filled four vacant seats on the college's seven-member governing board, overturning a Republican Party majority for the first time in the college's history.[1] These new regents included radicals such as Edward Secrest, a farmer who pledged to "change the order of things" at KSAC, and Christian Balzac Hoffman, a miller, banker, and politician who had founded an ill-fated socialist colony in Topolobampo, Mexico.[2] Populist interest in KSAC intensified in 1897, when a different fusionist governing board promoted Professor Thomas E. Will to the college presidency.[3] Born on an Illinois farm, Will attended a normal school before proceeding to Harvard University, where he chaffed within "the citadel of a murderous economic system." When offered the chair of political economy at KSAC, Will had been lecturing, writing for reform periodicals, and serving as secretary of a Christian socialist organization called The Boston Union for Practical Progress. Although he never formally joined a Populist organization, Will shared the movement's

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Scott Gelber is assistant professor of education and assistant professor of history (by courtesy) at Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts.

[1]Julius T. Willard, *History of Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Science* (Manhattan, KS: Kansas State College Press, 1940), 95. KSAC evolved into Kansas State University.

[2]On Secrest, see *Industrialist*, 28 January 1893, 91; and April 1899, 253–55; E. Secrest to H. Kelley, 14 May 1893, "Correspondence 1893" file, box 1, Harrison Kelley Papers, Kansas State Historical Society. On Hoffman, see "Autobiography of C.B. Hoffman," file 16, box 2, Christian Balzac Hoffman Papers, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas; untitled typescript dated April 1898, file 1, box 1, Thomas Elmer Will Papers, Kansas State University Archives.

[3]James Carey, *Kansas State University: The Quest for Identity* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 71; Charles Correll, "Revolution and Counterrevolution," *Kansas Quarterly* 1 (Fall 1969): 91–93, 99.

commitment to erasing class distinctions in politics and education.[4] Following Will's inauguration, a Populist regent exulted that the masses had finally "scaled the gilded halls of the universities."[5]

Beginning with the Granges of the 1870s and culminating with the Farmers' Alliances of the 1880s and the People's Parties of the 1890s, American Populism responded to multiple challenges facing American farmers: debt, deflation, low crop prices, railroad monopolies, and political disempowerment.[6] Although the national Populist Party concentrated on combating financial exploitation, state-level Populists also attempted to reform public higher education.[7] Whereas the protean nature of Populism has generated substantial debate over which regions, leaders, and policies have represented its purest form, one fundamental attitude shaped the movement's orientation toward higher education—Populists believed that elite parasites exploited the labor of virtuous producers.[8] In the movement's southern and western epicenters, a mostly white subset of farmers and reformers believed that state colleges and universities (terms used interchangeably in this article) could be somehow higher and egalitarian at the same time.[9]

Populists primarily targeted agricultural and mechanical colleges supported by the Morrill Act of 1862, which directed institutions to serve "the industrial classes." The Populists' goals for these land grant colleges were neither unprecedented nor unique; the movement merely

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[4]J.D. Walters, *History of Kansas State Agricultural College* (Manhattan: Kansas State Agricultural College, 1909), 125–27; Thomas Will, "How I Became a Socialist," (1904), Pamphlets in American History, Microfilm Series S440; Joseph Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization*, vol. 3 (New York: Viking Press, 1949), 299–303.

[5]*Manhattan Republic*, 24 September 1897, 1.

[6]Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Populism also resonated with the millennialism and egalitarianism of evangelical Protestantism. Joseph W. Creech Jr., "Righteous Indignation: Religion and Populism in North Carolina, 1886–1906" (PhD dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2000); Peter Argersinger, "Pentecostal Politics in Kansas: Religion, The Farmers' Alliance, and the Gospel of Populism," in *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 64–79.

[7]While Populist advocacy for informal education and common schools has been well documented, this enthusiasm for higher education remains underappreciated. On Populism and common schools, see Theodore Mitchell, *Political Education in the Southern Farmers' Alliance, 1887–1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

[8]This definition includes Democrats and Republicans who formed "fusion" alliances with Populists. Michael Kazin has argued that Populism was "too elastic and promiscuous" to be defined by organizational membership. Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 3. Kazin's approach is appropriate for this study because more narrow definitions of the movement hinge on political and economic strategies that had little bearing on individuals' views of higher education.

[9]The accomplishments and pitfalls of these efforts are analyzed with greater detail in Scott Gelber, *The University and the People: Envisioning American Higher Education in an Era of Populist Revolt* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).

amplified a common strand of expectations for public higher education. Populist priorities overlapped with conventional demands for accessibility, utilitarianism, and expert service.[10] Yet the Populists' eagerness to sacrifice research and advanced study for the sake of accessible vocational training highlighted the difficult choices facing state university leaders.[11] In the language of Laurence Veysey, Populists embodied a "grassroots" understanding of democratic higher education that rivaled a "higher" focus on benefits derived from scientific research and advanced instruction.[12]

Even though Populist demands for utility and accessibility resembled the message preached by generations of reformers (including the presidents of many leading universities), faculty at land grant institutions had ample reason to brace for hostile interventions whenever Populists won control of legislatures or governing boards. Suspicious of a new class of agricultural professionals, some Populists complained that the curriculum of land grant programs provided little guidance about practical matters such as fertilization, virus prevention, or plant growth.[13] Populists also challenged the admissions policies of these colleges. A Populist editor, for example, insisted that land grant institutions offer higher education to the masses rather than cater to "thin-faced gentry."[14] These attitudes caused professors to worry that Populist trustees and administrators would slash state funding, strangle academic programs, and eviscerate entrance standards.

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[10]For a classic treatment, see Merle Curti and Vernon Carstensen, *University of Wisconsin: A History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1949). Also see John A. Douglass, *The Conditions for Admission: Access, Equity, and the Social Contract of Public Universities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[11]Whereas most land grant college presidents believed that the Morrill Act charged their institutions to include basic research and a broad array of academic courses, agrarian organizations tended to lobby for a narrow focus on mass vocational education. Coy F. Cross II, *Justin Smith Morrill: Father of the Land-Grant Colleges* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999); Roger L. Williams, *The Origins of Federal Support for Higher Education: George Atherton and the Land-Grant Movement* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991); Roger L. Geiger, "The Rise and Fall of Useful Knowledge," in *The American College in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000), 153–68.

[12]Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 70–72.

[13]Experiment stations directed by A&M colleges also struggled to win farmers' appreciation. Margaret Rossiter, *The Emergence of Agricultural Science: Justus Liebig and the Americans, 1840–1880* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975); Alan Marcus, *Agricultural Science and the Quest for Legitimacy: Farmers, Agricultural Colleges, and Experiment Stations, 1870–1890* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1985); Roy V. Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer: The Rise of Agricultural Extension to 1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

[14]*Country Life*, September 1890, 1.

Drawing on sources penned by these unsympathetic witnesses (and fed by their own anxieties about fascism and McCarthyism), historians writing during the mid-twentieth century reinforced this portrayal of Populist hostility toward higher education.[15] These interpretations were consistent with Richard Hofstadter's influential *Age of Reform*, which characterized the Populist Movement as irrational, bigoted, and anti-intellectual.[16] Whereas Hofstadter's criticism of Populism has been thoroughly revised by historians over the decades, his analysis has lingered within the history of higher education, where it has only just begun to be reconsidered.[17]

This article focuses on admissions policies and offers a more nuanced and more substantial treatment of the relationship between Populism and higher education. Prior accounts of admissions in the late nineteenth century have sensibly focused upon the tension between secondary school leaders who were mindful of their multiple constituencies and university administrators who were torn between desires for higher enrollments and higher standards. Alongside these actors, Populist leaders and newspaper editors provide a vivid proxy for the grassroots pressures that also fueled this conflict. As access to secondary schooling increased, Populist rants against college began to alternate with optimism about the empowerment of rural youth who attended land grant institutions. Concerns about severe rural-urban educational inequality (rather than mere hostility to higher education) fueled the Populist campaign for low entrance standards. Although motivated by a degree of demagogic anti-intellectualism, Populist leaders emphasized the obstacles faced by white rural students who attempted to meet admission standards calibrated to city high schools or

[15]Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University*, 15–16. Also see Alan Nevins, *The State Universities and Democracy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962); Edward D. Eddy Jr., *Colleges for Our Land and Time: The Land-Grant Idea in American Education* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956); Earle Dudley Ross, *Democracy's College: The Land-Grant Movement in the Formative Stage* (Ames: Iowa State College Press, 1942).

[16]Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York: Vintage, 1955). Also see Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1963).

[17]Classic revisions include Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) and Robert C. McMath Jr., *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975). For a more recent reaffirmation of Hofstadter's perspective on Populists and higher education, see Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862–1928* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 210. For the latest sympathetic interpretation of Populism, including a perceptive discussion of education, see Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 45–68. John Thelin also recognized that Populists sometimes endorsed state universities. John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 140.

private academies. Rather than tolerating the decrease in access that would occur between the imposition of new requirements and the growth of rural secondary education, Populists believed that land grant colleges should resist national standards until all of their constituents had access to adequate public high schools. In the meantime, Populists expected land grant institutions to maintain large remedial programs and permissive entrance examinations.

Brief, intermittent, and regional, the nature of Populist influence hampers precise analysis of the impact of these preferences—especially because demands for college access were not unique to movement supporters. Nevertheless, retelling the history of entrance requirements from the Populist perspective emphasizes the early politicization of admission standards. While there are many reasons to be grateful that Populist ideals never won full sway over state universities, it is also important to recognize that Populists competed for influence with academic elitists who promoted other, perhaps equally troublesome, visions of public higher education. This history also documents how advocates for disadvantaged white students challenged the rationale for ostensibly meritocratic admission policies at state universities.

Populism and "Selective" Admissions in the Late Nineteenth Century

Focusing on the period between 1887 and 1904, this article draws upon case studies of Kansas, Nebraska, and North Carolina, states where Populists gained the most authority over land grant colleges or universities. In 1887, leaders of the North Carolina Farmers' Alliance persuaded legislators to reassign the state's land grant funding from the University of North Carolina (UNC) to a newly chartered North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (NCCAMA).[18] Two years later, NCCAMA welcomed an inaugural class of 72 young white men, who divided their time equally between traditional academic recitations and hands-on practice in agriculture, horticulture, shop-work, and mechanical drawing.[19] In 1894, the Populist Party of North Carolina fused with the state's Republicans and won control of the next

[18]NCCAMA evolved into North Carolina State University.

[19]"Polk's Handwritten Account of the Farmers' Mass Convention and Galley Proofs of "Farmers' Mass Convention," 26 January 1887, file 88, box 6, Leonidas Lafayette Polk Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina; *Progressive Farmer*, 2 February 1887, 4 and 9 February 1887, 5; *Report of the President of the Board of Trustees of the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, 1896* (hereafter NCCAMA Report), 10; *Catalogue of the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, 1890* (hereafter NCCAMA Catalog), 2–3, 52–53.

two legislative sessions. Fusionists also appointed several new UNC trustees and a majority of the NCCAMA board from 1897 to 1899.[20]

As mentioned at the outset, a fusionist coalition (Democrats and Populists in this case) also took control of a state college in Kansas.[21] Coeducational and tuition-free, KSAC grew from an enrollment of 587 students at the start of fusionist rule in 1892 to nearly 800 in 1899, when Republican regents regained control.[22] In Nebraska, a fusionist regime of Populists and Democrats dominated the legislature for most of the 1890s, exercising control over the purse strings of the University of Nebraska (NU). Founded in 1872, NU's agricultural college had no students until 1874 and averaged tiny enrollments for years thereafter despite its rebranding as a more comprehensive "Industrial College." By 1897, enrollment in the Industrial College exceeded 300 students, roughly half the size of NU's College of Literature.[23] Between 1900 and 1904, well after the demise of the national Populist Party, Nebraska fusionists elected a majority of regents to NU's governing board and controlled the state's land grant program.[24]

These three states do not constitute a representative sample of American public higher education. Instead, they provide the most dramatic examples of Populist pressures that faced many land grant colleges and universities during the late nineteenth century. Other significant episodes include Governor "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman's transfer of land grant status from the University of South Carolina to Clemson Agricultural College, as well as short periods of Populist influence in Arkansas, Colorado, the Dakotas, and Washington State.[25]

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[20]Paul Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 243–49; *News and Observer*, 6 March 1895, 12 June 1897, and 8 September 1897.

[21]Kansas' two fusionist governors also appointed members to the University of Kansas board, though KU never fell under full fusionist control. Clifford S. Griffin, *The University of Kansas* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1974), 185–87.

[22]Kansas State Agricultural College, *Biennial Report of the State Agricultural College* (hereafter KSAC Report), 1892–1899; *College Symposium of the Kansas Agricultural College* (Topeka: Hall and O'Donald, 1891), 32; Kansas State Agricultural College Faculty Records, vol. D, 12 November 1897, 20, KSU archives; "The Reorganization of the Kansas State Agricultural College," file 9, Will Papers, KSU Archives; *Industrialist*, 4 January 1897, 15 July 1897, and 16 August 1897.

[23]University of Nebraska, *Biennial Report of the Board of Regents, 1897–98* (Hereafter NU Report), 59.

[24]Albert L. Biehn, "The Development of the University of Nebraska, 1871–1900" (MA thesis, University of Nebraska, 1934), 34; *Nebraska Independent*, 9 November 1899, 4 and 28 December 1899, 2; *People's Banner*, 2 November 1899, 4.

[25]Steve Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Michael McGiffert, *The Higher Learning in Colorado: A Historical Study, 1860–1940* (Denver: Sage Books, 1964); Cedric Cummins, *The University of South Dakota, 1862–1966* (Vermillion, SD: University of South Dakota Press, 1975); Louis G. Geiger, *University of the Northern Plains: A History of the University of*

At first glance, Populist protests against admission policies in these states can seem like pure demagoguery since entrance standards were relatively insignificant during the nineteenth century, when frail secondary school systems and parochial applicant pools constrained the requirements of even the oldest and most storied institutions.[26] Most schools also welcomed non-degree "special students," who attended part-time or could not meet admissions requirements.[27] In addition, colleges and universities routinely admitted applicants who failed entrance examinations in one or more subjects and then granted these students a limited period of time in which to become proficient. Even at an elite private institution such as Columbia University, nearly half of all admitted students were admitted with these "conditions" at the turn of the century.[28] In order to serve these borderline applicants, most colleges and universities operated preparatory departments that provided secondary-level instruction. At many institutions, enrollment in these departments matched or exceeded attendance in college courses.[29] Although colleges and universities increased the quantity and depth of required subjects in accordance with the growth of high school enrollments, secondary school principals successfully lobbied for greater flexibility alongside these rising examination standards.[30]

North Dakota, 1883–1958 (Grand Forks: University of North Dakota Press, 1958); Charles Gates, *The First Century at the University of Washington, 1861–1961* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1961).

[26]Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 171–74. For examples of the conventional wisdom about the ease of college admissions in the nineteenth century, see David O. Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915–1940* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 137, 211; Nicholas Lemann, *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999), 4.

[27]Roger L. Geiger, "The Era of Multipurpose Colleges in American Higher Education," in *The American College in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000), 128, 149.

[28]Harold Wechsler, *The Qualified Student: A History of Selective College Admissions in America* (New York: Wiley, 1977), 24, 121–22.

[29]*Proceedings and Addresses of the National Educational Association, 1889*, 374–75.

[30]Before the Civil War, the requirements typically included classics, basic mathematics, some philosophy, and perhaps elementary physics or astronomy. After the Civil War, universities added English grammar and composition, algebra, geometry, geography, history, and additional science. By 1890, most universities offered alternative degrees, such as the Bachelor of Letters or Bachelor of Science, which replaced classics requirements with modern subjects. Marc A. VanOverbeke, *The Standardization of American Schooling: Linking Secondary and Higher Education, 1870–1910* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 102–3; Edwin C. Broome, *A Historical and Critical Discussion of College Admission Requirements* (Princeton, NC: College Entrance Examination Board, 1963), 82; W.J. Chase and C.H. Thurber, "Tabular Statement of Entrance Requirements to Representative Colleges and Universities of the United States," *The School Review* 4 (June 1896): 341–412.

Starting with the University of Michigan (UM), public institutions of higher education also pioneered a new strategy for easing students' transition from local school systems. Impressed by the close relationship between German universities and *gymnasia*, President Henry S. Frieze directed professors to inspect Michigan high schools and certify those that offered adequate curricula. UM pledged to admit all students who had been endorsed by their principals and completed the college-preparatory track of approved high schools. Universities that adopted this "admission by certificate" system still allowed students who had not attended accredited schools or taken approved college-preparatory curriculum to enter by passing the traditional series of examinations. By the turn of the century, the admission by certificate system became the most common method of entrance to state universities.[31] In 1892, the National Education Association (NEA) spearheaded another effort to create a more uniform path to college. Chaired by Harvard University President Charles Eliot, the NEA's prestigious "Committee of Ten" promoted four options for high school curricula, each of which contained similar core subjects but varying kinds and quantities of foreign languages. The Committee also concluded that each course of study should require a full four years of high school.[32]

In contrast to twentieth-century standards, the entrance requirements proposed by UM or the NEA may appear quite modest. Yet from a Populist perspective, minimal requirements could still seem "selective," even discriminatory, if they ignored the extent of rural disadvantage. While public high schools operated in most large cities and towns, many rural counties still provided no free opportunities for college preparation. Throughout Nebraska, for instance, only one out of every three counties offered secondary-level classes during the 1890s.[33] As late as 1900, 82 percent of North Carolina's population was limited to ungraded common schools, which only operated for two to three months a year in rural districts (compared with an average of eight months in urban schools).[34] Modest compulsory education laws were rarely enforced with any vigor, in part because elected local

[31]George Edwin MacLean, "Present Standards of Higher Education in the United States," *United States Bureau of Education Bulletin*, no. 4 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913), 40–41.

[32]VanOverbeke, *The Standardization of American Schooling*, 120.

[33]James H. Canfield's Chancellor's Journal, 17 November 1893, James Hulme Canfield Papers, Office of the Chancellor, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries (hereafter Canfield Journal).

[34]*Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1898–1900*, 69; H. Leon Prather, Sr., *Resurgent Politics and Educational Progressivism in the New South, 1890–1913* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1979), 38–42.

officials were reluctant to meddle with the family norms of their constituents.[35]

Unless they could afford private education, rural students confronted an arduous road to college. Few rural students graduated from accredited high schools and gained automatic admission to higher education. Although proponents of the certificate system and the Committee of Ten intended to streamline the college pipeline, only a small number of rural schools offered the requisite number and level of courses. Even among students who attended accredited high schools, only 10 percent enrolled in the college-preparatory course sequence.[36] In Michigan, the birthplace of accreditation, many rural students could not pursue admission by certificate until after 1909, when the state forced all counties to build high schools or pay for students who attended schools in other counties.[37] Predictably, students also struggled to enter college by passing the traditional series of entrance examinations. Although long characterized as essentially open admissions schools, even land grant institutions such as NU, NCCAMA, and the University of Texas rejected roughly 25 percent of applicants during the 1890s.[38] While these applicants could gain conditional admission, they still faced daunting challenges. Willa Cather, who attended NU between 1891 and 1895, dramatized the "really heroic self-sacrifice" and independent study required of those rural youth who managed to thrive after gaining conditional admission. For example, Jim Burden of *My*

[35]William A. Link, *A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: Schooling, Society, and Reform in Rural Virginia, 1870–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 6, 53–54; Paul Theobald, *Call School: Rural Education in the Midwest to 1918* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), 119; James L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 10–13.

[36]Broome, *A Historical and Critical Discussion of College Admission Requirements*, 105–6. At the turn of the century, less than 50 percent of high school students studied Latin and only 5 percent studied Greek. The proportions taking courses in modern languages were no higher, with roughly 10 percent and 15 percent studying French and German, respectively. Mathematics requirements were within reach of more students, but still challenged the 50 percent of students who did not take algebra and the 75 percent who did not study geometry. National Educational Association, *Report of Committee on College Entrance Requirements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1899), 75.

[37]Jana Nidiffer and Jeffrey P. Bouman, "The Chasm Between Rhetoric and Reality: The Fate of the 'Democratic Ideal' When a Public University Becomes Elite," *Educational Policy* 15 (July 2001): 431–51.

[38]Faculty Meeting Minutes of the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, 6 January 1890 through 4 December 1893, box 2.4.1, Chancellors Office Papers, North Carolina State University Archives and Special Collections (hereafter NCCAMA Faculty Minutes); NCCAMA Report, 1896, 41; LaVon M. Gappa, "Chancellor James Hulme Canfield: His Impact on the University of Nebraska, 1891–1895" (PhD dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1985), 105; Marjean Snyder Mallard, "The Development of the University of Texas during the 1890s" (MA thesis, University of Texas, 1970), 14.

Antonia studied trigonometry during the summer before entering NU and learned Greek in the summer after his freshman year.[39]

In this context, it is not surprising that most administrators initially ignored the recommendations of the Committee of Ten.[40] The majority of public as well as private college presidents struggled to keep their institutions afloat and dreamed of large enrollments more than higher standards.[41] Many leaders of state universities also believed that the power of public opinion limited the extent of entrance requirements. Southern and western state universities felt particular pressure to maintain low admissions standards that were widely viewed as necessary features of their "democratic" missions. While some university presidents grudgingly deferred to these expectations, others eagerly embraced and promoted the ideal of broad access.[42]

In states where they came to power, Populists advanced to the vanguard of this longstanding campaign for mass enrollment. And yet the movement's advocacy was also informed by less conventional political concerns. Populists demanded that state universities maximize enrollments because they worried that a small number of graduates could monopolize intellectual capital and oppress the masses in the same fashion as monopolies of utilities, railroads, or manufacturing. The Farmers' Alliance believed that college-educated farmers would be able to lobby the state legislature more effectively than farmers without advanced training. Some members even proposed establishing their own "Alliance University" to groom rural children for the professions of law,

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[39]In *The Professor's House*, a student teaches himself Latin (including the entire *Aeneid*). Willa Cather, *My Antonia* (1918, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 249–50; Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (1925, New York: Vintage, 1990).

[40]VanOverbeke, *The Standardization of American Schooling*, 123.

[41]A minority of presidents, such as James H. Baker of the University of Colorado, stated that most young people would not benefit from college. Baker and other defenders of elite public higher education argued that the superior training provided to a small number of students trickled down to benefit all state residents. *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the National Educational Association, 1888*, 167; James H. Baker, "The Modern University and Democracy," in *Educational Aims and Civic Needs* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Company, 1913), 145. Also see Frederick Jackson Turner, "Pioneer Ideals and the State University" (1910), in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), 283; *Biennial Report of the Board of Curators of the University of the State of Missouri, 1892–93*, 22–24.

[42]McGiffert, *The Higher Learning in Colorado*, 34; Michael Dennis, *Lessons in Progress: State Universities and Progressivism in the New South, 1880–1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 4, 92–93; *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations, 1897*, 61. Also see James E. Pollard, *History of The Ohio State University: The Story of Its First Seventy-Five Years, 1873–1948* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1952), 37–39; Winton U. Solberg, *The University of Illinois, 1867–1894: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968), 232, 269.

medicine, and theology. The writer Hamlin Garland, a Populist sympathizer, illustrated this enthusiasm for accessible higher education in his novel *A Spoil of Office*, which portrayed a farmer who became a crusading politician after attending a state law school.[43] Leonidas L. Polk, a North Carolina agrarian leader, looked forward to the "glorious day" when rural youth "shall not be ashamed to hang their diplomas in their work shops, their machine shops, their art galleries, their laboratories, their school rooms, their counting rooms, and their farm houses."[44] Populists such as Polk hoped that land grant colleges would reduce status distinctions between the children of producers and children of the privileged.

Occasionally this fervor for rural college access inspired Populist support for the higher education of white farmers' daughters.[45] Asserting that elites exploited the labor of male and female farmers alike, Populists attempted to unify men and women of the "producing" classes. Indeed, women assumed leadership positions within the Farmers' Alliance and constituted upwards of one quarter of its membership. In the West, Populist women won election to offices such as school superintendent and register of deeds. Populist women were also active as editors, organizers, and lecturers.[46] Urging poor girls to prepare for "productive" womanhood, Governor "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman lobbied for coeducation at South Carolina College and the Citadel, while also endorsing a new state normal and industrial school for white women (Winthrop College).[47] In North Carolina, the state Farmers' Alliance resolved in favor of higher education "alike for males and females" and supported the creation of the North Carolina Normal and Industrial College for white women.[48]

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[43]Theodore Saloutos, *Farmers Movements in the South, 1865–1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 85–86, 209; Hamlin Garland, *A Spoil of Office* (Boston: Arena, 1892), 30.

[44]Polk cited in Stuart Noblin, *Leonidas Lafayette Polk: Agrarian Crusader* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), 171.

[45]*Jeffersonian*, 28 October 1897, 2; *Industrialist*, April 1899, 212; James E. Hansen II, *Democracy's College in the Centennial State: A History of Colorado State University* (Fort Collins: Colorado State University Press, 1977), 111.

[46]The movement's gravitation toward electoral politics over the course of the 1890s limited the avenues for women's participation. Southern Populists dissuaded national organizations from endorsing women's suffrage. Michael L. Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Maryjo Wagner, "Farms, Families, and Reform: Women in the Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party" (PhD dissertation, University of Oregon, 1986), 35–44.

[47]Daniel Walker Hollis, *University of South Carolina*, vol. 2 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1956), 170–71; Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy*, 117–19, 169, 182.

[48]*Proceedings of the North Carolina Farmers' State Alliance, 1890*, 35; *Prospectus of the Normal and Industrial School of North Carolina, 1892–1893*, 6. However, Populists did not lobby for coeducation at UNC. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, vol. 9, 18 February

Whereas Populism sometimes encouraged this advocacy for white farmers' daughters, most white Populists did not campaign for college access for the children of black farmers. Although some movement supporters hoped to build an interracial coalition, many white Populists remained reluctant to share political power and either ignored or endorsed racial discrimination. The Southern Farmers' Alliance excluded African Americans altogether. In North Carolina, Leonidas L. Polk suspected that African Americans were incapable of learning scientific agricultural methods and becoming independent farmers. After the Second Morrill Act of 1890 required North Carolina to either integrate NCCAMA or establish a black land grant college, white Populists opted for segregation. Most white Populists within the Great Plains also rejected the concept of social equality with their black allies. In Lawrence, Kansas, where some older Populists had participated in abolitionist campaigns, white Populists still do not appear to have campaigned explicitly on behalf of black students. Emphasizing a two-dimensional contest between corrupt elites and virtuous rural masses, white male Populists did not protest vigorously against racial discrimination.[49]

Populism and Remediation

Instead, white Populists were more concerned about the manner in which poverty and geography could decrease college access for the sons (and sometimes daughters) of white farmers. In general, Populists questioned whether American institutions rewarded privilege rather than merit. One Populist, for example, argued that monopolies put humble rural youth at the same disadvantage as a man wrestling a wild bear.[50] With regard to schooling, Populists doubted whether

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1897 and vol. 10, 14 February 1899, UNC Trustees Papers, UNC Archives. Yet Populists did occasionally advocate for women's access to faculty appointments and governing board seats. *Nebraska Independent*, 10 February 1898, 4 and 10 March 1898, 4; *Peoples Poniard*, 25 October 1895, 1; *Wealth Makers of the World*, 29 August 1895, 1; *Jeffersonian*, 28 Oct. 1897, 2; George T. Fairchild, "Populism in a State Educational Institution," *American Journal of Sociology* 3 (November 1897): 392–404.

[49]Joseph Gerteis, *Class and the Color Line: Interracial Class Coalition in the Knights of Labor and the Populist Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Gerald Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots and Bigotry in the "New South"* (1977, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Omar Hamid Ali, "Black Populism in the New South, 1886–1898" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2003); Frenise Logan, "The Movement in North Carolina to Establish a State Supported College for Negroes," *North Carolina Historical Review* 35 (April 1958): 167–70. Few records of black Populists have survived. There is no evidence that black Populists targeted access to higher education. They focused on anti-lynching campaigns, voting rights, and access to common schools.

[50]Russel Nye, *Midwestern Progressive Politics: A Historical Study of Its Origins and Development, 1870–1950* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), 136. Also see *Wealth Makers of the World*, 14 November 1895.

educational achievement reflected students' ability, regardless of whether they were rural or urban, rich or poor. "In what respect are the children of the poor equal to the children of the rich," asked Nebraska's *Alliance Independent*, "have they an equal opportunity to secure an education?"[51]

Alvin Johnson, a Populist organizer who was able to overcome these odds and thrive at the NU, observed that many of his rural classmates had been unable to do so. Johnson, who would later become a founding professor and president of the New School for Social Research in New York City, noted that rural students whose language had been "limited to the daily speech of the farm or the small town" were "terribly handicapped." Johnson recalled that many of his friends "who had perfectly good brains nevertheless were dismal failures as students."[52] To reduce these obstacles, Populists supported the construction of county high schools, public funding for school transportation, the elimination of high school fees charged to nonresident students, and new state taxes earmarked for poor districts.[53]

In the meantime, Populists argued that colleges should not discriminate against rural students who were unable to overcome these disadvantages. Populists became fervent supporters of preparatory programs designed to bridge the substantial gap between rural school systems and institutions of higher education.

In contrast, most professors begrudgingly tolerated preparatory departments. While they recognized that these programs facilitated the enrollment of additional students, professors regretted the manner in which preparatory departments impeded the growth of local high schools and distracted universities from their primary missions.[54] Land grant institutions also competed for prestige with eastern private universities that were dismantling remedial programs and focusing on advanced studies.[55] Professors and administrators often asserted that preparatory departments should be abolished because they tainted the very nature of higher education. President Edward Orton of the Ohio State University complained that remedial courses designed "to bring up the work of backwoods districts" violated the "sacred" purpose of the institution.[56] University of Tennessee President Charles Dabney

[51] *Alliance Independent*, 18 May 1893, 4. Also see *The Weekly Toiler*, 26 February 1890, 7.

[52] Alvin Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress* (New York: Viking, 1952), 79.

[53] Mitchell, *Political Education in the Southern Farmers' Alliance*, 124–27.

[54] *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the National Educational Association, 1886*, 290; Joseph L. Henderson, *Admission to College by Certificate* (New York: Teachers College, 1912), 73, 83.

[55] Nidiffer and Bouman, "The Chasm Between Rhetoric and Reality."

[56] Pollard, *History of the Ohio State University*, 43.

concluded that most preparatory students were "hopelessly backward" and floundered within a university setting that was not the "proper place for them to make up their lost opportunities."[57]

Encouraged by rising enrollments and growing numbers of accredited public secondary schools, many state universities terminated remedial programs during the 1880s and 1890s. For example, the University of Wisconsin cancelled its preparatory department in 1880 (though it maintained remediation in Greek), when 80 percent of the state's high schools were certified to send graduates directly to Madison.[58] UNC began rejecting applicants who lacked three years of high school Latin, algebra, and English in 1889, after transferring its land grant status to the NCCAMA. UNC President Kemp Plummer Battle stated that borderline students should henceforth pay for tutoring or attend another college that was "less exacting as to admission." Although UNC continued to allow students to enter with conditions in two subjects, the university rejected one-fifth of applicants and filled the majority of its classes with graduates of private academies (as late as 1903, only 16 percent of UNC freshman had attended public secondary schools).[59] It is widely understood that colleges and universities endeavored to close preparatory departments "as soon as possible," but it is less commonly noted that it was not self-evident when institutions should take this step.[60]

Drawing attention to the contentiousness of these decisions, Populists were concerned about whether the elimination of preparatory departments would disrupt educational opportunity for rural youth. Populists were also more likely to tolerate remedial education because they were less interested in the sanctity of higher education. For example, Nebraska's *Alliance Independent* stated that university professors were "simply teachers in other rooms from those occupied by the teachers in the graded schools."[61] When faced with proposals to abolish remedial courses at land grant institutions, therefore, many Populists preferred to err on the side of caution.[62]

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[57]Dennis, *Lessons in Progress*, 76, 92.

[58]VanOverbeke, *The Standardization of American Schooling*, 64–65; Wechsler, *The Qualified Student*, 6, 11, 21; Henderson, *Admission to College by Certificate*, 82.

[59]"To Teachers Preparing Students for the University," 1 October 1889, file 601, box 18, UNC Papers; President's Report, 27 February 1889, vol. S-8, UNC Trustees Papers; *Report of the President of the University of North Carolina, 1902*, 19–21; *Report of the President of the University of North Carolina, 1903*, 9–10.

[60]For a typical statement about preparatory departments, see Eldon L. Johnson, "Misconceptions about the Early Land-Grant Colleges," *Journal of Higher Education* 52 (July-August, 1981): 333–51.

[61]*Alliance Independent*, 8 September 1892, 3.

[62]Populists were not unanimous on this point. John K. Bettersworth, *People's University: The Centennial History of Mississippi State* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1980), 132–34.

While other schools were abolishing their preparatory departments, the fusionist administrators of KSAC enrolled increasing numbers of students in remedial courses. During Thomas E. Will's tenure as president (1897–1899), attendance in these courses increased by 65 percent. During the fall of 1898, KSAC's regents hired the college's first full-time instructor for preparatory courses after criticizing the previous administration for staffing remedial classes with graduate and advanced undergraduate students who taught "somewhat indifferently."[63] Noting the Populists' comfort with these courses and their relative disinterest in advanced instruction, the dean of the University of Kansas (KU) graduate school complained that the movement's ideal form of higher education was merely a "high school for the education of farmers boys."[64]

The Populists who monitored NU also believed that widespread remediation was consistent with the institution's mission. Although NU faculty had voted to close the university's preparatory department (known as the Latin School) in 1890, the board of regents overruled this decision after protests from the state Farmers' Alliance and representatives of rural counties.[65] Chancellor James H. Canfield, a popular figure among Nebraska Populists, remained sympathetic to the Latin School. Canfield argued that since 80 percent of Nebraskans lacked access to suitable high schools, remedial courses served as the primary pipeline for ordinary residents.[66] Canfield's successor, George MacLean, rejected this perspective and planned to close the Latin School. Proclaiming that his administration would focus on quality rather than quantity, MacLean explained that "there is always an aristocracy" in academia.[67] Unconvinced, the *Nebraska Independent*

[63] Attendance in the KSAC preparatory department increased from 67 in 1896–1897 to 110 in 1898–1899. KSAC Report, 1899–1900, 47; Meeting of the Board of Regents, 25 March 1898, vol. B, Kansas State Agricultural College Papers, KSU Archives.

[64] Griffin, *The University of Kansas*, 299–300.

[65] Record of the Proceedings of the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, 11 June 1890 and 12 June 1890, vol. 3, Record Group 01/01/02, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries (hereafter NU Regents Minutes); *Farmers Alliance*, 7 March 1891, 4; Report of the Committee Appointed by the General Faculty on Extensions of Courses of Study, 6 June 1893, file 86, box 11, Papers of the Board of Regents, University of Nebraska, 1869–1910, NU Archives (hereafter NU Regents Papers).

[66] *Hesperian*, 15 February 1894, 2–4; *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the National Educational Association, 1889*, 384; Gappa, "Chancellor James Hulme Canfield," 182. Canfield agreed to phase out the preparatory department when adequate secondary schooling was available in all towns of 5,000 or more residents. NU Report, 1893–1894, 14–19.

[67] Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 82; *Nebraskan*, 27 September 1895, 1; Robert Manley, *Centennial History of The University of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 127.

warned that this decision would "deprive thousands of sons of farmers of the opportunity to secure a higher education." The paper charged that ending preparatory courses was "a scheme to shut the 'hayseeds' out of the university." Populists remained dissatisfied despite MacLean's attempt to compromise by continuing remedial classes in a few subjects, advertising private tutors, and sponsoring a private secondary school in Lincoln.[68] During a decade in which public high school enrollment rose dramatically, Populists championed the case for nevertheless preserving the preparatory function of land grant colleges and universities.[69]

Populism and Entrance Requirements

In addition to generating support for preparatory departments, Populist concern for underserved white rural youth motivated the movement's advocacy for modest admission requirements at land grant programs. After struggling to attract students during their early years, land grant institutions eventually developed into respectable A&M divisions of flagship universities or separate state colleges.[70] Still, students applying to land grant programs traditionally faced lower admission standards. Often requiring only an eighth- or ninth-grade level of preparation, many state agricultural colleges maintained an intermediate status between secondary and higher education.[71] When UNC first received land grant funding, state law required the university to exempt agriculture and mechanic arts students from its standard entrance requirements.[72]

Therefore, Populist leader Leonidas L. Polk followed precedent when he argued that NCCAMA must continue to recognize "the disadvantages under which the farmer's boy labors in the struggle for

[68] *Nebraska Independent*, 13 May 1897, 20 May 1897, 10 June 1897, 17 June 1897, 2 September 1897, 23 September 1897, and 30 September 1897. MacLean's plan to phase out remediation hit a roadblock when the Nebraska Supreme Court overturned an 1897 law that had forbidden public high schools from charging tuition to nonresident students. In the absence of free secondary schooling for most rural students, NU's regents refused to dismantle the Latin School. NU Report, 1896–1898, 8; J. Dickinson to G. MacLean, 7 February 1898, file 101, box 13, NU Regents Papers; NU Regents Minutes, vol. 4, 3 August 1897.

[69] Preparatory enrollments crept upward during the 1890s. Roger L. Geiger, "The Crisis of the Old Order: The Colleges in the 1890s," *The American College in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000), 266.

[70] On the early struggles of the land grant colleges, see Johnson, "Misconceptions about the Early Land-Grant Colleges," 336–42.

[71] *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations, 1896*, 19.

[72] Christopher Allen, "The Land Grant Act of 1862 and the Founding of NCCAMA" (MA thesis, North Carolina State University, 1984), 32.

education." Polk envisioned that NCCAMA would remain within the reach of "any farmer's boy who has obtained the rudiments of a common school education."[73] NCCAMA originally admitted all white men over 14 years of age who could demonstrate upstanding moral character and comprehension of "ordinary English," "simple arithmetic," and "a fair knowledge of geography and state history."[74] This policy situated NCCAMA within the bottom tier of land grant colleges in terms of admission standards.[75] Along with most colleges in the nation, NCCAMA also issued conditional acceptances to applicants who failed one or two entrance examinations and required professors to provide remedial tutoring. In the event of "some unusual circumstance or promise in the applicant," NCCAMA trustees even authorized the enrollment of students who had failed three or more exams.[76] However, North Carolina Populists never obtained full control over the institution, and President Alexander Holladay resisted pressure from those who wanted to peg NCCAMA's standards to the level of "the whole mass of the people."[77] In 1899, after a newly elected Democratic governor ended the brief fusionist majority on the NCCAMA board, the college added an algebra requirement and closed its preparatory department, even though large portions of North Carolina remained without access to free high schools. Afterwards, NCCAMA denied admission to significant numbers of applicants.[78]

During their administration of KSAC, Populists' desire to align admissions requirements with rural school districts also clashed with the ambitions of some academic leaders. Similar to their counterparts in North Carolina, Kansas Populists tolerated high requirements at KU while insisting upon relatively low standards at the state agricultural college. On the eve of the fusionist takeover of KSAC, the college had raised its entrance examination to a level just slightly beyond the common schools of the state. KSAC also accepted all applicants who could present a diploma from a recognized grammar school. These

[73] *Progressive Farmer*, 24 November 1886, 3.

[74] NCCAMA Catalog, 1890, 39–40.

[75] During this period, 83 percent of NCCAMA's peer institutions required applicants to their college-level divisions to know algebra, 43 percent required geometry, and 39 percent required English proficiency at a high school level. *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations, 1896*, 19.

[76] NCCAMA Faculty Minutes, 30 December 1889, 27 January 1890, 10 February 1890, and 27 October 1891; NCCAMA Report, 1890, 4; NCCAMA Trustees Minutes, 17 June 1891 and 3 December 1891.

[77] NCCAMA Report, 1896, 12–13.

[78] NCCAMA also raised the minimum age limit to 16 and launched an admission by certificate policy. NCCAMA Trustee Minutes, 2 August 1899; NCCAMA Faculty Minutes, 5 March 1900.

requirements were significantly lower than KU's standards and even lower than the standards of most other state agricultural colleges. Yet KSAC's fusionist governing board refused to substantially increase these requirements during the next seven years.[79] In 1894, KSAC's regents rejected the Committee of Ten's guidelines for college entrance standards, despite a personal request from Harvard University President Charles Eliot. Earning commendations from Kansas' Populist editors, the regents responded that they were obligated to keep KSAC within reach of all graduates of the state's public school system.[80] President Thomas Will agreed that KSAC should cultivate the "latent possibilities" of all citizens, instead of only enrolling "favored individuals and classes."[81] The Republican *Manhattan Nationalist* protested that any student who completed the seventh grade could enter KSAC. "Elevate the standard regardless of the numbers attending," the paper urged. The *Nationalist* also believed that the college's modest requirements had been enforced more strictly before the start of the fusionist era. The paper claimed that forty to sixty applicants had failed each examination during the several years preceding 1897, whereas virtually all students passed the 1897 test.[82]

After Republicans swept the statewide elections of 1899 and ended the fusionist majority on KSAC's governing board, they looked forward to raising the college's entrance requirements. Frustrated with the number of unprepared students attending his chemistry courses, Professor Julius T. Willard hoped that the new Republican majority would once again encourage the college to reject weak applicants. Despite the drop in enrollment that might accompany an increase in admission requirements, Willard believed that "the confidence of the people can be retained and regained so that the better class will come in to make up for what must be shaken off for low grade work."[83] KSAC students petitioned the board of regents in June to maintain the college's current standards. The petition, endorsed by a vote of 396 to 24, repeated Populist concerns about the fate of

[79]KSAC Report, 1891–1892, 7; *Catalogue of the Kansas State Agricultural College*, 1891–1892 through 1897–1898; *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations, 1896*, 19, n64.

[80]*Industrialist*, 23 June 1894, 163, and October 1898, 558–62; *Manhattan Republic*, 10 September 1897.

[81]*Industrialist*, July 1898, 443–49.

[82]*Manhattan Nationalist*, 7 October 1897, 21 October 1898, and 18 November 1898.

[83]J.T. Willard to G. Fairchild, 4 May 1899 and 15 May 1899, Kansas State College History in Letters, 1897–1899, Collected and Arranged by J.T. Willard, Kansas State University Archives and Special Collections.

rural students with limited academic opportunities.[84] The Populist *Manhattan Republic* sought to remind the new board members that KSAC had a special land grant mission. The newspaper explained that KSAC was "not a professional men's college, but a farmers' and mechanics' college" and needed to stay "in close touch with the country people of the state."[85] Nevertheless, the Republican board raised admission requirements by adding examinations in English composition, bookkeeping, physiology, and algebra.[86] The *Student Herald* editorialized that these new standards were challenging for "even the strongest students" from rural areas. Echoing Populist efforts to increase funding for rural secondary schools, the newspaper argued that it was premature to raise the college's standards. "We believe in reform," they stated, "but we do not think it should be applied at the wrong end."[87]

In Nebraska, Populists were pleased with Chancellor Canfield's support for relatively low admissions requirements at the state university. Although NU had initially maintained lower standards at the "Industrial College" that housed its land grant program, the university raised the college's entrance requirements to the equivalent of its liberal arts college in 1885.[88] These requirements were similar to NU's peer institutions—applicants either presented diplomas from accredited high schools or passed examinations in common school branches, plus algebra, geometry, history, and foreign languages.[89] Nebraska Populists did not demand that NU reverse this decision, but they did expect the university to adopt a sympathetic posture toward rural youth. Canfield agreed that the gates to the university should not be guarded "with locks that respond only to golden keys." In his letter accepting NU's presidency, Canfield announced his intention to have the university "minister to the needs of the greatest number" instead of attempting to reach an academic "ideal" far removed from the level of the typical rural school system. Canfield promised that the university would open its doors to all graduates of "a good country school."[90]

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[84]KSAC Regents Minutes, 6 June 1899, 272, vol. B; *Industrialist*, July 1899, 468. *Manhattan Republic*, 2 June 1899; *Student Herald*, 1 June 1899, 2.

[85]*Manhattan Republic*, 2 June 1899.

[86]KSAC Report, 1899–1900, 41; *Industrialist*, July 1899; Julius T. Willard, *History of Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Science* (Manhattan: Kansas State College Press, 1940), 124.

[87]*Student Herald*, 28 September 1899, 31.

[88]The Industrial College required fewer English and foreign language credits, but more science credits. *The University of Nebraska, The Industrial College: A Brief Historical Sketch* (Lincoln: 1892), 12–13; NU Regents Minutes, vol. 4, 11 April 1900.

[89]NU Report, 1887–1888, 10–11.

[90]Gappa, "Chancellor James Hulme Canfield," 43, 45; *Nebraska State Journal*, 12 July 1891; Manley, *Centennial History of The University of Nebraska*, 114–16.

According to Alvin Johnson, Canfield lived up to these promises. When Johnson first inquired about attending NU, Canfield advised him to strengthen his powers of memorization by reading a page of history and a page of fiction every morning. "Read a page of each very carefully," the chancellor suggested, and "in the evening, after your farm work, reproduce these two pages from memory." Johnson dutifully complied, using *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as his work of fiction. When Johnson arrived late to NU after the harvest season, Canfield warned that he would struggle to catch up, but concluded, "if you want to try it, the chancellor has no right to forbid you."[91] Nearly sixty years later, Johnson recalled that Canfield had "focused his great human intelligence upon me when I was an ill equipped boy from the farm, and jammed me past all the reasonable restrictions imposed to exclude such a boy as I was."[92]

Canfield also instructed faculty to err on the side of sympathy when they evaluated university entrance examinations. He permitted examiners to conduct oral interviews of applicants who had not completed their tests during the allotted time. Canfield asked examiners to consider the "rust" that students accumulated over the course of the summer, or during the years between leaving school and applying to university. "The standard of the university is to be maintained rather by the quality of the work which we do here," Canfield told the examiners, "than by our criticism of the work which has been done elsewhere." While the chancellor agreed that NU should have a rigorous course of study, he urged examiners to "let our entrance gates turn rather easily."[93] Faced with a tight budget and an office crowded with prospective students, however, Canfield was compelled to reject NU's least qualified applicants.[94]

Canfield's permissive philosophy still unnerved many professors. While the chancellor advocated for academic accessibility, the majority of the faculty requested an increase in the amount of Latin required of applicants to the university's classical course.[95] Canfield also clashed with President Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia University. At the 1894 annual meeting of the NEA, Canfield challenged Butler's recommendation that all professional schools should require applicants to possess a bachelor's degree. Canfield argued that the NU

[91]Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 47, 77.

[92]A. Johnson to Don Mauricio Hochschild, 4 April 1946, file 41a, box 2, Alvin Johnson Papers, Yale University Library.

[93]Canfield to Examiners, 8 September 1892, James H. Canfield Correspondence, NU Archives.

[94]*Canfield Journal*, 2 January 1892 and 4 January 1892; Gappa, "Chancellor James Hulme Canfield," 105.

[95]*Canfield Journal*, 10 July 1891; "Recommendations of the General Faculty for Curricular and Calendar Changes," 9 April 1895, file 92, box 12, NU Regents Papers.

Law School opted to accept students directly from high school in order to "keep American education in touch with American people." He concluded that the nation had not yet "reached the time when there is a very numerous class in this country with sufficient time and means at command to do the work proposed by Dr. Butler."[96]

After Canfield left Nebraska and assumed the presidency of the Ohio State University, the *Nebraska Independent* worried that his successor's approach toward entrance requirements would be closer to the traditional preferences of most NU faculty. The newspaper was concerned that Chancellor George MacLean might raise admission standards beyond the level of the average rural school system. "City blood is no better than country blood," proclaimed the *Independent*, while warning that high requirements would be considered tantamount to "discrimination" against rural students. Asserting that any student who was capable of doing college work should be enrolled even if other students were far more advanced, the *Independent* opposed any gravitation toward more selective admission standards.[97]

In 1900, when an alliance of two Populists, a reform Democrat and a pro-silver Republican took control of the NU governing board, MacLean gratefully accepted an invitation to become president of the University of Iowa. After hiring Chancellor E. Benjamin Andrews, whose critique of social inequality endeared him to the new trustees, the fusionist board demonstrated that it would consent to increasing standards under certain circumstances.[98] Comforted by the growth of Nebraska's public school system, the recent prohibition of tuition payments at high schools, and the establishment of an accessible university-managed agricultural high school, fusionist trustees ultimately approved a faculty request to raise the high school credit requirements to fourteen yearlong units—the emerging entrance standard for American universities.[99] Nevertheless, the regents cautioned university faculty that professors were not authorized to

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[96]*Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the National Educational Association, 1894*, 623–24.

[97]*Nebraska Independent*, 20 May 1897, 10 June 1897, 17 June 1897, 2 September 1897, 23 September 1897, 30 September 1897, 29 December 1898, and 26 January 1899.

[98]On Andrews, see James E. Hansen, "Gallant, Stalwart Bennie: Elisha Benjamin Andrews (1844–1917), An Educator's Odyssey" (PhD dissertation, University of Denver, 1969).

[99]Manley, *Centennial History of The University of Nebraska*, 91, 171; Report of the School of Agriculture, 9 April 1898, NU Regents Papers, file 102, box 13; NU Regents Minutes, vol. 4, 11 April 1900; NU Report, 1899–1900, 19. On the 14-unit requirement, see Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *Private Power for the Public Good: A History of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 95.

raise entrance requirements without formal authorization from the board.[100]

Conclusion

Populists epitomized Veysey's description of the "grassroots" priorities that encouraged state universities to idealize accessibility. Although motivated by a degree of demagogic anti-intellectualism, the movement's resistance to admissions requirements also reflected a more principled concern with the inequalities between rural and urban schools. For brief periods in several states, Populists became the loudest participants in an ongoing debate over the extent to which public colleges and universities should accommodate disadvantaged students. Populists sided with those academic leaders who believed that it was unjust to calibrate admissions standards to the level of city high schools and private academies. For better or worse, the movement supported policies that acknowledged the uneven capacity of school districts and blurred the distinctions between preparatory and higher education.

While one might assume that the Populists' permissive stance toward entrance requirements would have reduced retention rates, the results seem to be mixed. Graduation rates at all institutions of higher education were relatively low during the nineteenth century—at some land grant colleges as few as 10 percent of entering freshman classes graduated in four years.[101] During its first years of operation, NCCAMA saw half of its students leave between the freshman and sophomore years, a rate that was not unusual compared with similar institutions.[102] Freshman attrition also remained unremarkable during the fusionist era of KSAC. Nor did the agricultural college retain substantially more students after 1899, when the new Republican board of regents increased admission standards.[103] Similarly, attrition at NU did not spike during the era of fusionist permissiveness. However, retention rates did increase after NU raised its entrance standards in 1900.[104] These numbers suggest that the movement may have retarded efforts to screen out unprepared applicants. Regardless, Populists did not seem troubled by this trade-off, or at least they were loath to suggest

[100]NU Regents Minutes, vol. 4, 9 April 1901.
[101]Eddy, *Colleges for Our Land and Time*, 67.
[102]NCCAMA Report, 1893, 39–40; NCCAMA Faculty Minutes, June 3, 1895.
[103]KSAC Reports, 1883–1884 through 1903–1904.
[104]The proportion of freshmen leaving the college of literature had been 30 percent during the late 1880s and remained at 32 percent among students entering in 1900. *Biannual Report of the Nebraska State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1886–88*, 8; *Biannual Report of the Nebraska State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1900–02*, 44–45.

that underprepared rural students were incapable of succeeding in college.

Yet the Populist movement never fully rejected the standards of higher education by boycotting universities or attacking their graduation requirements. While they hoped that increased enrollment would dilute the prestige of college degrees, Populists did not abandon the emerging physical and human infrastructure of public higher education, nor did they seek to eliminate diplomas. Apparently, many Populists believed that colleges and universities could provide advanced civic and vocational training that was worthy of special recognition. These Populists seemed to accept that even major increases in enrollment would merely reduce, rather than eliminate, the exclusivity of higher education (the Populist movement preceded the substantial institutional stratification that would further complicate this dynamic in the twentieth century). Undaunted, Populists challenged the notion of academic meritocracy and argued that state universities should attempt to compensate for unequal access to high-quality secondary schooling.