"A World to Suit Themselves": Student-Constructed Narratives and the Hidden History of College Life

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Digital Object Identifier: https://doi.org/10.13023/ETD.2017.208

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"A WORLD TO SUIT THEMSELVES": STUDENT-CONSTRUCTED NARRATIVES AND THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF COLLEGE LIFE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky

By

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2017

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"A WORLD TO SUIT THEMSELVES": STUDENT-CONSTRUCTED NARRATIVES AND THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF COLLEGE LIFE

An individual’s years in college are a time of trial and transformation. This dissertation examined college students’ self-created accounts of their time in college in order to identify students’ significant meaning-making activities during those years. Four primary areas of student life were investigated: the rules that students were expected to adhere to, the ways in which students and their class cohorts antagonized one another, hazing, and class competitions.

A comparative historical approach was used to analyze student-created accounts of college life in the years 1871-1941. Archival research at a geographically diverse sample of fourteen colleges and universities provided primary source materials created by students, including correspondence, diaries, photographs, and scrapbooks.

Collectively, these sources affirm that students derived their significant meaning-making experiences from their extracurricular activities. An additional dimension of the study proposed an extension of the work of sociologist Burton Clark on organizational sagas. An analysis of students’ self-reported experiences suggest that Clark’s notion of organizational sagas extends beyond the bounds of discrete institutions, reaching down to the level of individuals and upward to college students as a collective entity.

KEYWORDS: College, Student Life, Archival Research, Hazing, Organizational Saga

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“A WORLD TO SUIT THEMSELVES”:
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May the golden glow of days gone by warm our hearts
and illuminate the path ahead.

Fiat lux.
Acknowledgements

Though completing a dissertation is a solo endeavor, it is made easier—perhaps even made possible—by the support of many people over a long period of time. In my case, I was aided tremendously by the love and encouragement of friends and family. I owe a particular debt to my wife, Julie, for her patient tolerance of my fondness for visiting college campuses, and to my parents, whose hard work first put me on the path to go to college. Whatever success I enjoy is a tribute to them.

In the years that I spent researching and writing this dissertation, one activity that consistently provided me with a greater appreciation for student life and its challenges was teaching Education in American Culture—EPE 301—in the University of Kentucky’s College of Education. I was fortunate to have outstanding students; individually and collectively they challenged me to think about—and endeavor to become—the kind of teacher I wanted to be. During those years I shared an office with two individuals—Richard Roberts and Katherine Reynolds—who proved themselves valued colleagues and friends.

As a scholar, my doctoral studies were enhanced by the efforts of a number of individuals. The members of my committee—Drs. Neal Hutchens, Morris Grubbs, and Willis Jones—each lent me their advice and support, as did Dr. Richard Angelo. The greatest credit, of course, goes to my mentor and advisor, Dr. John Thelin, from whom I learned the finer points of how to be a good teacher, a thorough researcher, and a dedicated and thoughtful professional.

I received generous funding from several institutions as I carried out my research. My visit to the University of Michigan’s Bentley Historical Library was made possible through the award of their Bordin Gillette Researcher Travel Fellowship. A research grant from the Friends of the Princeton University Library funded my visit to that institution, and the Michigan Technological University Archives provided funding for me to make the trip to Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. Finally, the University of Kentucky’s Dissertation Enhancement Award allowed me to visit several institutions in New England. In the course of those trips, I had the pleasure of working with a number of dedicated and knowledgeable archivists, including Nanci Young at Smith College and Lindsay Hiltunen at Michigan Tech. The archivists and their assistants at the various institutions helped me to compile an incredible store of research, of which I have used only a fraction in the writing of this dissertation. I look forward to many more years of telling students’ tales.

I owe my thanks to one last group of individuals: all of the men and women whose letters, diaries, scrapbooks, and other accumulated tokens of their college years form the basis for this work. I came across materials that were clever, beautiful, insightful, and heart-breaking—occasionally they were all of those things simultaneously. I enjoyed seeing the world through their eyes and I hope that I have honored their stories and memories here.
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Chapter 1 – “A World to Suit Themselves”

The pastoral stillness that had settled over Northampton, Massachusetts in the pre-dawn hours of October 12, 1892 was broken by the shouts of dozens of young women. On that night, the normally serene campus of Smith College erupted in a din of explosions, screams, and...patriotic songs. This was no calamity befalling the young women who called the campus home—quite the opposite. A Smith student, writing two days after the incident, described the scene in a letter to her mother:

I must tell you about our spree last Tuesday night at 2 o’clock. In the first place Prexy made a speech at chapel Tues. morn. telling us that at 2 that night would occur the 400 anniversary of the discovery of America, and he wished us all to think of it. Of course he didn't mean it quite so literally but all we needed was an invitation and preparations were made at once for a “revelry by night”. Unbeknownst to any of the matrons, the alarm clocks were set off all over the campus at 1:45 and at 1:55 every room was ablaze with light. […] At 2 we were all leaning out the window waiting for the town clock. At the first stroke of the hour we from the Hubbard gave 2 long loud blasts from a horn to call the attention of the whole campus and then the whole place rang with “America” all four verses. After that was shouting clapping and fire crackers. Then we all adjourned to the parlor, and in our wrappers and bed slippers, by the light of three candles, no piano but only subdued humming, we danced the Virginia reel. It was a very funny and spooky sight, I must confess. At 2:30 the house was quiet and we were all in bed again.¹

Tucked away in the archives of this nation’s colleges and universities, stories such as the one above offer a world of insight into the hearts and minds of the individuals for whom such institutions exist: students. They give scholars a window into the people, places, and events of the past and offer the potential to better understand the students that populate our campuses today. Yet for an enterprise that is ostensibly for the students, historians of higher education have devoted comparatively little

¹ Gertrude Gane, Letter to her mother dated October 17, 1892. Gertrude Gane Correspondence and Photographs, Class of 1894, Box 1491a, Smith College Archives. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from student-created accounts are taken verbatim from their respective source materials. Errors, omitted words, misspellings, and peculiarities in spacing have been retained, as have the original punctuation and any added emphases such as underlining or capitalization. One of the aims of this dissertation is to present the student voice in its truest form, and the retention of the content of the original texts—and any imperfections they contain—is in service of that goal.
attention to what that enterprise looks like as seen from the perspective of the students themselves during their time on campus.

As an area of study, college student life has much to tell scholars, administrators, and practitioners. Yet those wishing to study such life as it existed in previous eras have confronted a problem: in contrast to the attention devoted to other parts of higher education—presidents, faculty, institutions and their policies—students and their points of view have long received a proportionally smaller share of scholars’ attentions. Historian Frederick Rudolph noted this phenomenon more than fifty years ago, opining in his essay “Neglect of Students as a Historical Tradition” that “college students constitute the most neglected, least understood element of the American academic community.”2 Part of that neglect stems from the transitory nature of the student population; history, the old saying goes, is written by the winners. But it might be more accurate to say that history is written by those around to tell it—and students do not remain part of the institutional sphere long enough to speak with a unified, coherent voice that adds their collective point of view in an ongoing and substantive way to any individual campus’s institutional history, let alone the history of higher education writ large. David Allmendinger’s oft-cited observation that “students are the most difficult members of the collegiate community to study” continues to hold true, especially the further back in time one goes.3 Though plenty of research has been done about students and what happens to them during their college years, less attention has been paid to what students themselves have had to say about their experiences as they appear in the materials, such as letters and scrapbooks, which they produced.


This neglect of students and their points of view has not gone unnoticed or unchallenged, however. Nearly a full century before Rudolph’s essay, Lyman Bagg, an 1869 graduate of Yale, sought to correct what he perceived as a lack of information about college students’ experiences. Building on the example of student-authored works about college life such as Ezekiel Belden’s *Sketches of Yale College by a member of that Institution* (1843) and Benjamin Hall’s *A Collection of College Words and Customs* (1856), Bagg aimed his book *Four Years at Yale* (1871) at college alumni and observers but also at a reading public whose collective interest in higher education often did not correspond to factual knowledge of its everyday workings, let alone an appreciation of what the day-to-day lives of students were like.4 Bagg wrote in the book’s preface:

The erroneous and absurd ideas which very many intelligent people, who have not chanced to experience it, entertain upon the subject of college life, have led me to believe that a minute account of affairs as they exist to-day at one of the chief American colleges would not be without value to the general public, nor without interest to the alumni and undergraduates of other colleges as well as of the one described. Hence, though not without some little diffidence, I venture to offer this compilation of facts, which no one has ever yet taken the trouble to group together, with the hope that it may be of service as a corrector of opinion and of interest as an aid to the memory.

Looking at things from the undergraduate in distinction from the official standpoint, I have given as little attention as possible to those matters which a formal historian would render prominent, and have gone into the smallest details in cases which he would take no notice of. I have accounted no fact too trivial or insignificant to be unworthy of record.5

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4 As Roger Geiger and Julie Ann Bubolz point out in a footnote in “College As It Was in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” in *The American College in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000), 297, footnote 2, *Four Years at Yale* drew inspiration from a then-emerging literary genre of accounts of college student life written by authors who were current or former college students. Among those works that Geiger and Bubolz mention in addition to *Four Years at Yale* are Ezekiel Porter Belden, *Sketches of Yale College by a member of that Institution* (New York: Saxton and Miles, 1843); David A. Wells and Samuel H. David, *Sketches of Williams College* (Williamstown, Mass.: 1847); Benjamin H. Hall, *A Collection of College Words and Customs* (Cambridge, Mass.: John Bartlett, 1856); and Charles A. Bristed, *Five Years in an English University* (New York: 1851). Geiger and Bubolz also mention George R. Cutting’s *Student Life at Amherst College: Its Organizations, Their Membership and History* (Amherst, Mass.: 1871). Published the same year as *Four Years at Yale*, it shares similar ambitions as Bagg’s book but is nowhere near as exhaustive in scope.

In the more than 700 pages that followed, Bagg chronicled in meticulous detail virtually every conceivable aspect of college life, inside and outside the classroom. Of particular note is Bagg’s attention to the minutiae of student life—his focus on the sorts of details that historians “would take no notice of.” Scholars have long pointed to Lyman Bagg’s *Four Years at Yale* as one of the most comprehensive accounts of student life ever published.⁶ Though it is now nearly 150 years old, Bagg’s epic represents the high water mark in the genre. The decades after *Four Years at Yale* saw the publication of many other notable book-length non-fiction chronicles of college life by former students; they included Henry D. Sheldon’s *Student Life and Customs* (1901), as well as reminiscences such as Patton and Field’s *Eight o’clock Chapel: A Study of New England College Life in the Eighties* (1927) and Henry Seidel Canby’s *Alma Mater* (1936), among others.⁷

Additionally, fictional accounts of students’ campus exploits, which enjoyed wide popularity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, add another dimension to the body of scholarship on student life. Written by college-educated authors drawing upon their own experiences as students, college novels such as *Stover at Yale* (1912),

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This Side of Paradise (1920), The Plastic Age (1924) and Not to Eat, Not for Love (1933) brought the exploits of college students to a public eager to live vicariously through the books’ protagonists.⁸

The second half of the twentieth century saw a number of notable scholarly efforts to cast light on college student life and its evolution. In the 1960s, Burton Clark and Martin Trow proposed a typology of college student subcultures, reasoning that students’ engagement with ideas and their institutions positioned them in one of four subcultures: Collegiate, Vocational, Academic, and Nonconformist. They acknowledged that these distinctions were somewhat arbitrary and imprecise, noting, “…an individual student may well participate in several of the subcultures available on his campus, though in most cases one will embody his dominant orientation” and “these types of subcultures are analytical categories; the actual subcultures that flourish on any given campus may well combine elements of more than one of these types.”⁹ Clark and Trow’s work contributed to a burgeoning body of research on college students’ experiences and the practical effects of those experiences on students’ development.¹⁰

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⁸ Owen Johnson, Stover at Yale (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1912); F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1920); Percy Marks, The Plastic Age (New York: Century Co., 1924); George A. Weller, Not to Eat, Not for Love (New York: Smith and Haas, 1933). See also David O. Levine’s The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) and Daniel Clark’s Creating the College Man: American Mass Magazines and Middle-Class Manhood, 1890-1915 (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010) for more on the general public’s interest in higher education at the turn of the twentieth century.


One of the best known works on student life among historians of higher education, Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz’s *Campus Life* (1987), employs a similar typology idea as Clark and Trow; it flows from the premise that collegiate student subcultures can be divided into three sub-types: college men and women, outsiders, and rebels. And, like Clark and Trow, one of the limiting factors of Horowitz’s work is a focus on broader cultural trends and shifts rather than a close critique of the student experience.

According to Horowitz,

…in attempting to capture undergraduate experience, I have chosen to use a wide-gauge net. I have been looking at commonalities across a wide range of institutions in different periods, rather than at the particularities of institutional settings in different moments. Because of this I pick up only large fish and thereby miss many subtleties and shadings. A better analogy comes from aerial photography. Although photographs taken at close range make all sorts of hills and valleys perceptible, from those at a distance only the broadest features of the landscape can be discerned. Knowing this does not invalidate the distant image; it merely points out its limitations.11

What one sees, then, is an opportunity for scholarship on college student life in previous eras that treads a middle ground between the narrow, detail-heavy approach of Lyman Bagg and the broad, reductive characterizations of Clark and Trow and Horowitz. The research presented here represents both a complement and counterpoint to the typology-focused work of those scholars. To borrow Horowitz’s analogy, I have endeavored to better envision the whole by piecing together a series of detailed pictures, looking, to paraphrase Bagg, for the sorts of details that historians may have failed to notice.

There is one additional anchor point in the history of higher education literature that I have used to guide my research. It comes from the same Frederick Rudolph essay cited earlier; in it, Rudolph suggests that it is students’ experiences outside of the

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classroom that best convey their feelings about their institutions and what is happening there. Wrote Rudolph:

The most sensitive barometer of what is going on at a college is the extracurriculum. It is the instrument of change, the instrument with which generations of students, who possess the college for but a few years, register their values, often fleetingly, yet perhaps indelibly. It is the agency that identifies their enthusiasms, their understanding of what a college should be, their preferences. It reveals their attitude toward the course of study; it records the demands of the curriculum, or the lack thereof. It is a measure of their growth. And because it is the particular province of lively, imaginative young men and women not immobilized by tradition, rank, authority, and custom, the extracurriculum is likely to respond more quickly than any other agency of the college to the fundamental, perhaps not yet even clearly expressed, movements in the world beyond the campus and to the developing expectations of society.12

Frederick Rudolph’s sentiments echo those of a long line of scholars and college administrators who came to realize that, for many students, academics were not the main attraction in college life. Woodrow Wilson, while president of Princeton, observed, “The work of the college…has become the merely formal and compulsory side of its life…a score of other things, lumped under the term ‘undergraduate activities,’ have become the vital, spontaneous, absorbing realities for nine out of every ten men who go to college.”13 Rudolph’s speculation about the value of the extracurriculum in the lives of college students provides a lens for scrutinizing students’ self-created accounts of their college years. The materials presented in the coming chapters make it possible to evaluate how students articulated their engagement with and affinity for the extracurriculum.


13 Woodrow W. Wilson, “What is a College For?” Scribner’s Magazine, Volume XLVI, November 1909, 574. Wilson’s distaste for the extracurriculum during his time at Princeton is well-chronicled.
Interpretive framework

The study that forms the basis for this dissertation covered seven decades, spanning the years 1871 to 1941. These years are significant; 1871 marked the publication of *Four Years at Yale*, while 1941 saw the United States enter World War II. This event proved to be the end of an era on college campuses; during and after the war, student life changed, reflecting the shifting moods and priorities playing out in American society. Using the works of Lyman Bagg, Helen Horowitz and Frederick Rudolph to triangulate the bounds of this dissertation, I utilize the work of sociologist Burton Clark to offer an interpretation of the historical materials it contains. A limitation of typologies such as those mentioned previously is that while they are useful for macro-level analyses, they have less to offer scholars examining individuals’ experiences. It is that void that I seek to address; I suggest in this dissertation that students’ self-created accounts of their college years constitute an underutilized resource for historians of higher education and propose a framework by which scholars might understand both the individual and collective expressions of college student life that those accounts contain.

In the 1970s Clark advanced the idea that organizations develop what he termed “organizational sagas.” That idea, applied to institutions of higher education, resulted in the development of “institutional sagas.” Based on case studies at Antioch College, Reed College, and Swarthmore College, Clark theorized that institutions create idealized conceptions of their own history and culture that become self-sustaining. He defined the organizational saga as “a collective understanding of unique accomplishment in a formally established group” and suggested that these sagas contain, “a sense of romance and mystery that turns a formal place into a deeply beloved institution.”

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According to Clark:

The institutional saga is a historically based, somewhat embellished understanding of a unique organizational development. It offers in the present a particular definition of the organization as a whole and suggests common characteristics of members. Its definitions are deeply internalized by many members, thereby becoming a part, even an unconscious part, of individual motive. A saga is, then, a mission made total across a system in space and time. It embraces the participants of a given day and links together successive waves of participants over major periods of time.

The most important characteristic and consequence of an organizational saga is the capturing of allegiance...Emotion is invested to the point where many participants significantly define themselves by the central theme of the organization. The organizational motif becomes individual motive, much more than a statement of purpose, a cogent theme, a doctrine of administration, or a logical set of ideas. Deep emotional investment binds participants as comrades in a cause. Indications of an organizational legend are pride and exaggeration; the most telling symptom is an intense sense of the unique. Men behave as if they knew a beautiful secret that no one outside the lucky few could ever share. An organizational saga turns an organization into a community, even a cult.15

Building upon and expanding Clark's concept of organizational sagas, I posit that students create their own sagas distinct from those created by institutions, and that such sagas, considered individually and collectively, enrich scholars' understanding of college students' meaning-making experiences and the roles they play in students' development. In chapter six I present this conceptual framework as one way to interpret the data in the intervening chapters. I assert that, looking at student life within the sphere of higher education, the creation of sagas happens on four levels: 1) Individuals, 2) Classes, 3) Institutions, and 4) College students as a collective population.16 Situating

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16 Though I draw upon the sociological work of Burton Clark, I do not presume to present here a work of sociology; rather, my work is historical in nature. I propose that Clark's organizational sagas offer some guidance for understanding students' accounts of their college years found in the archives of this nation's colleges and universities. Ultimately, my focus is a comparative historical analysis of student-created accounts and what they communicate about student life in a bygone era; my use of Clark's work on organizational sagas is one of many possible lenses with which to view the data found here beyond the historical analysis.
these distinct but coexisting, and sometimes overlapping, levels of sagas requires a more detailed explanation of how they fit together; each of the levels is described below.

**Level One – Individuals**

Individual sagas, like organizational sagas, reflect idealized conceptions of achievements, aspirations, and values. Rather than being shared collectively among individuals, the individual saga informs the outlook and actions only of the person in whose mind it is created. It is the mythologized telling of one’s own life, where oneself is the protagonist—and perhaps hero—of every story. An individual’s saga is constantly edited and added to through the course of day-to-day life. In this dissertation, I use the phrases “first-level sagas” and “individual sagas” interchangeably, with comparable nomenclature for the others levels of sagas described below.

**Level Two – Classes**

Just as individuals construct their own sagas, groups of individuals sharing a common cause develop them as well. In the period of time examined in this study, 1871-1941, class cohorts were a vital component of students’ college years, shaping nearly all aspects of their college experiences and providing the seeds for peer bonds that could persist for the remainder of their lives. Class sagas were created and fueled by the exploits of the members of a given class, as well as those members’ interactions with other classes. Each individual contributed to the class saga by virtue of their actions, personality, and allegiance to the other members.

**Level Three – Institutions**

Burton Clark’s work on organizational sagas has its most ready corollary in higher education at the institutional level. In fact, Clark used the phrase “institutional saga” to describe the phenomenon in the college settings he studied. But Clark
recognized that sagas were perpetuated by a number of different stakeholders within the college, including faculty, students, administrators, and alumni. I propose that Clark underplayed the vigor of student culture at the institutions he studied and the strength of student life as a broader influence within higher education; the collective will, beliefs, norms, and traditions of an institution’s student body, sustained and disseminated by successive, distinct class cohorts, constitute the basis for a distinct saga apart from that of the institution. These sagas are the sum total of student life at a given institution over the course of its existence.

Level Four – College Students as a Collective Entity

The phrase “college life” is not really a life at all—it is a collection of lives. It is the energy and creativity of youth writ large; it is a synecdoche for a time and place in which young men and women live their lives bound by rules, priorities, and rewards unlike those of the “real world.” The saga of college students as a collective entity is an expression of the other three levels of sagas proposed here. It is the energy that animates many of the behaviors that American society dismisses as “typical college kids.” But it is more than that—it is a reflection of higher education’s place in the popular imagination and its relation to other social constructs. It has evolved, having been rewritten continuously for the nearly four centuries that colleges have existed in this country. It is the mirror that reflects the enthusiasm, struggle, and unrestrained energy of the collegiate experience.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

This dissertation contributes to the historiography on college student life by examining student-created accounts of student life from the years 1871-1941. It looks beyond isolated anecdotes and broad generalizations to examine college life as it looked through the eyes of the men and women who inhabited this nation’s campuses.
Comparing accounts at more than a dozen institutions, this study picks up Lyman Bagg’s mission to chronicle the details of student life that historians may have missed. The focus of this dissertation is on activities and phenomena in college student life where there are materials that offer insights into both collective and individual meaning-making. To that end, the four primary areas examined in this dissertation are college rules, class dynamics and antagonism, hazing, and class competitions.17

Using a geographically diverse sample comprising different institutional types, this dissertation examines students’ self-created accounts of their college years in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to identify students’ significant meaning-making experiences during that era. It answers three interrelated research questions: First, what do the student-created archival sources suggest were students’ most significant meaning-making activities during their college years? Next, how do these student-created accounts evidence meaning-making and suggest the construction of multiple levels of sagas? Finally, what insights can students’ own accounts of their meaning-making experiences provide to present-day scholars, practitioners, administrators, and students?

Methodology

The data for this project was collected through visits to the archives of fourteen institutions across ten states: the University of Kentucky, Princeton University, the College of William and Mary, Michigan Technological University, the University of Michigan, Yale University, Ohio University, the University of Wyoming, the University of Michigan, Yale University, Ohio University, the University of Wyoming, the University of

17 Some of these activities occurred on a smaller scale; hazing, for example, also took place in conjunction with students joining Greek letter organizations. For clarity of scope, those activities are not considered here. The focus of this dissertation is on activities and experiences to which all or nearly all of an institution’s student population would have been exposed. More focused inquiries into student-created accounts of phenomena such as fraternity hazing merit their own expansive treatment and, as such, are mentioned here only where the comparison is instructive for understanding the experiences of the average student.
Vermont, Smith College, Mount Holyoke College, Amherst College, the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and Dartmouth College.18 Appendix A is a table listing each institution visited and select characteristics of those institutions during the years 1871-1941.

The institutions chosen for this study represent an attempt to construct a geographically diverse sample comprising a number of organizational types, including private colleges, land-grant universities, women’s colleges, and a technical school.

Student-created archival sources were identified, reviewed, and photographed for subsequent analysis at each institution, with particular attention given to scrapbooks and written materials (diaries and correspondence). Also examined were materials that helped to contextualize the eras and institutional settings in which students’ campus experiences unfolded—notably student newspapers, rule books, and ephemera such as posters and handbills.19 Because many of the materials that best reflect students’ perspectives from their college years have not been digitized, the only means to study them is by visiting archives in person. This makes an intensive study of the archives at one’s own institution feasible, but it can inhibit comparisons across institutions. To the

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18 A visit to one additional institution—the University of Texas at Austin—yielded materials beyond the bounds of this particular study; they have been reserved for future research.

19 In this dissertation, the phrases “student-created” and “student-constructed” are used to describe the accounts included here rather than “student-authored.” There are a couple of reasons for this. First, there are significant non-written archival resources that exist on student life; the contents of a scrapbook, for example, may not contain items that a student himself or herself authored—it may be a collection of programs, dance cards, menus, etc.—but the collection of items is created by the student. And that collection has a distinct meaning different than the sum of its constituent parts. So, while they have not “authored” that account, strictly speaking—that is, they are not the originators of the material—their actions have created tangible representations of their college experiences. Second, there is a creative decision, in both written and non-written media, about what to include and what to omit. The angle and subject matter of a photograph; the details included or excluded from a letter home; a scrap of paper or a piece of some object with unspoken meaning that was only known—will only ever be known—to the person who preserved it; the common denominator is that the inclusion of all of these materials is an act of creation. Because of that, the materials in this study are referred to as student-created or student-constructed.
extent that the time and financial resources available for graduate students allowed, I attempted to construct a sample that expanded the bounds of what scholars have undertaken to date with respect to this area of research. Because the nature of this work relies upon strong, highly organized archival collections in which students of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are well represented, the sample skews toward older, heavily residential institutions. With the exceptions of Smith College and Mount Holyoke College, which were women’s colleges, the student body was heavily or exclusively male at many of the institutions studied—or, more accurately, the populations consisted of white, Christian males, many of whom came from privileged financial circumstances. From a research standpoint, I see this as an invitation, rather than a limitation; I view this study as one piece of what will be a much larger body of work in the future, constructed via research applying the same methodology utilized here to other diverse student populations.

**Organization of the Study**

Highlighting student-constructed narratives is only part of the puzzle; weaving those narratives into scholars’ broader conceptions of American higher education’s history—conceptions that too often have focused on charismatic presidents, institutional intrigue, and the moneyed interests that shape higher education—demands that students become more than brief quotes and footnotes. In order to emphasize the student perspective, students’ accounts are quoted frequently, often at length, in this dissertation, as are complementary materials such as student newspapers. The reasons for this are two-fold: first, the gap in the historiography that this dissertation is aimed at addressing stems from the relative lack of students’ voices in the telling of the history of American higher education in general, and student life in particular; as such, it makes sense to emphasize their accounts as the unit of analysis. A second, related reason is
aimed at the half-measure that historians often employ if they do include students’ perspectives, which is to quote sparingly and, at times, out of context. Even when students’ accounts are used at length, it is often in service of a focused study on a single institution.20 Looking at the events of a student's life at a specific point in time is more instructive if those events are situated appropriately in the larger context of that student’s institution and era. To the maximum extent practical, source materials are quoted in sufficient length to preserve those materials’ original contexts. The richness and complexity of the lives of the individuals described herein emerge across the full span of the archival records from which their stories are drawn—including photographs, ephemera, and sources such as newspaper clippings, many of which are included in scrapbooks. Where they are instructive, descriptions and images of these items are included, as they add a dimension to the study of student life that is too often limited to scholars with the means and motivation to seek them out in situ in institutional archives. An additional measure I have taken to highlight the student voice is to reserve much of my analysis for the concluding chapter, choosing instead to let the materials found in students’ self-created accounts speak. Again, I take my inspiration from Lyman Bagg, who noted in the Preface of Four Years at Yale, “I have simply endeavored to place every scrap of evidence fairly before the reader, leaving him to decide for himself how much if it to use in making up his judgment.”21

The results of this study are divided into six chapters. The present chapter, one, outlines the rationale for this dissertation, the questions it sets out to answer, and the

20 This is not to say that deep explorations of single institutions are without value. On the contrary, these works can provide excellent historical context and analysis within the bounds of their respective scopes. Two notable examples are Carolyn B. Matalene and Katherine Chaddock Reynolds’ Carolina Voices: Two Hundred Years of Student Experiences (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2001) on student life at the University of South Carolina and Two Hundred Years of Student Life at Chapel Hill: Selected Letters and Diaries (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Center for the Study of the American South, Southern Research Report #4, Fall 1993).

21 Bagg, Four Years at Yale, iii.
resources employed in doing so. It also proposes a lens, based on the work of Burton Clark, for scholars to use in considering the people, places, and phenomena that constitute the long sweep of student culture of which today’s students are inheritors, contributors, and custodians. Chapter two contemplates the rationale and methods for integrating the student voice into studies of higher education’s history. It describes the archival materials used in this study, their relevance, and their potential for revealing how students derived meaning from their college experiences.

Collectively, chapters three, four, and five comprise a Lyman Bagg-inspired examination of student-created materials that show, through first-person accounts and complementary materials such as student newspapers, what student life looked like from the standpoint of students. Particular emphasis is given to students’ class cohort-based activities and interactions. Chapter three covers the rules that students were subject to during their time on campus. Using as points of reference the rule books that students received when they arrived on campus—many of which were subsequently preserved in students’ scrapbooks and memorabilia collections—this chapter scrutinizes the ways in which the rules that governed students’ conduct contributed to their acquisition of and acquiescence to the collective norms of their respective campuses’ student cultures. Chapter four, on class dynamics and antagonism, utilizes the diverse array of materials through which students expressed their affinities for their own class cohorts and, at times, scorn for their peers of different classes. It casts a critical eye on hazing, as well as episodes where students strayed from the campus and turned their energies to their towns—with destructive results. Chapter five contemplates the actions through which students expended the ardor and anxieties that marked their journeys through their years on campus: class competitions. Looking beyond facile explanations that dismiss these activities as brutish and superfluous to the educational mission, the student accounts presented in this chapter show that these phenomena were more complicated
in their meaning among students and more valuable for their participants than scholars of higher education’s history have previously recognized.

The concluding chapter, six, draws together the various threads of student life presented in the student-created accounts of the three preceding chapters. These phenomena and materials are considered against the backdrop of how they contribute on multiple levels to the creation and perpetuation of personal and collective sagas. It concludes with an explanation of the significance that studying student life has for higher education in the twenty-first century and its potential to inform the actions of administrators, faculty, campus staff, and students.

Looking Ahead

The title of this dissertation, “‘A World to Suit Themselves’: Student-Constructed Narratives and the Hidden History of College Life,” draws upon a line from Henry Seidel Canby’s *Alma Mater*. He refers to the world that college students create that is inside, but still separate from, the “real” world.22 Calling upon the voices of students from a bygone era, the chapters to follow will show that there was much more to that world than meets the eye.

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Chapter 2 – Finding the Student Voice

Why Student-Created Accounts Matter

In an endnote to their essay on published accounts of college life, “College As It Was in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” Roger Geiger and Julie Ann Bubolz issue the disclaimer that their essay does not consider student diaries; they write, “Not considered in this review are student diaries, since they were not written for the public.” Yet it is precisely this lack of intention to publish that makes student-created narratives invaluable for scholars. The scrapbooks, diaries and letters of students, meant only for their own eyes or the eyes of friends and family, reveal a side of higher education that is too often left to fade into memory and obscurity. The human side of student life—the joys and sorrows that defined the contours of students’ daily lives, are revealed in the words and pictures meant not to inform posterity but rather to communicate the immediacy of the times in which they were created. Identifying and interpreting these accounts, as is the case in this dissertation, is a way that historians can reorient the traditional top-down study of American higher education’s history to better utilize the perspectives that students add to our understanding of higher education’s roles and functions.

The materials that students created also suggest ways in which the construction of sagas took place on multiple levels. One sees in the respective writings and photographs of individuals the creation and refinement of personal identities. At the same time, class-based activities such as rushes compelled students to see themselves as members of their class cohorts. The materials that students created and preserved

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1 Geiger and Bubolz, “Mid-Nineteenth Century,” 298, endnote 5. Geiger and Bubolz employed a similar methodology as is used in this dissertation, in that they used student-authored accounts to describe nineteenth century college life. Their primary focus, however, was on accounts written with the intention of publication. Few of the accounts presented here would have been expected to be disseminated in such a manner.
relating to these activities demonstrate that students’ class cohorts were vehicles for collective identity formation. Archival holdings relating to institution-specific places and events that were designed to foster allegiance to Alma Mater show that students recognized themselves as belonging to an institution and, in their own ways, took that affiliation seriously.

Looking across institutions at student-created accounts of college, the collective saga of college students as a distinct entity is discernable; despite differences in time, geography, institutional type, and student body, records show that students exhibited behaviors and methods of meaning-making that transcended individual circumstances and suggest to modern scholars the presence of a communal identity rooted in the undergraduate experience. The works of scholars such as Helen Horowitz and Laurence Veysey, among others, have sketched the bounds of this transmission of student culture; the research presented here will look at that transmission from a novel perspective: that of the students.²

This chapter contemplates the potential that student-created accounts hold for inviting reconsiderations of existing scholarship, explores the possible approaches that scholars may take in using those resources, and identifies the specific media that are the foundation for the analyses found in chapters three through five.

**What Student-Created Accounts Add to Historical Scholarship on Student Life**

Because scholars have neither consistently added students’ perspectives to works on the history of higher education, nor have they accorded the few perspectives they do include the same importance as those of other constituencies, student-created accounts represent a curiously underutilized resource for researching higher education.

They are, in a sense, an “undiscovered country.” In their sparing use of these resources, scholars have sketched the coastline and ventured into the shallow inlets, but there is a vast wilderness yet to be fully surveyed.

One way in which scholars might profitably take on the mantle of archival explorers is to use those materials to reconsider existing scholarship on student life. For instance, in *Campus Life* Helen Horowitz identifies what she calls “the erosion of class feeling” as a consequence of the rise of fraternities. In Horowitz’s telling, class unity had been strong through the mid-nineteenth century, yet, “by 1851 such sentiment was anachronistic.” However, this was not the case; class sentiment remained strong at many institutions for nearly a century longer than Horowitz asserts—a fact borne out by several decades-worth of archival records from individuals at numerous institutions who proudly exhibited and celebrated their membership in their respective class cohorts.

Additionally, student-created accounts challenge the conventional wisdom with which contemporary scholars often view certain aspects of college student life. One example that continues to resonate in the twenty-first century is hazing. Given the negative, sometimes tragic consequences that hazing has produced in the modern era, it would be easy to conclude that its presence in previous eras was equally reprehensible. Yet what one sees recorded in the archival accounts is a more complex picture, where some students treated such behaviors as an expected, even valued, part of the college experience. These differing viewpoints are explored further in the section on hazing found in chapter four.

Lastly, student-created accounts help scholars describe and understand how students filled the substantial portions of their collegiate lives that were not spent in the classroom or engaged in study. Michael Moffatt, reflecting on the students he met

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3 Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 38.
during his anthropological study of dormitory life at Rutgers University, writes that, “…in the students’ view of things, not all of [the broadening of experience in college] happened through the formal curriculum. At least half of college was what went on outside the classroom, among the students, with no adults around.” Moffatt’s estimation of half likely undervalues the importance students gave to their non-academic efforts; for some, the percentage of college’s learning experiences that took place outside of the classroom was undoubtedly much higher. Though Moffatt was writing about students of the 1980s, the conclusion he drew from his interviews with students about learning beyond the formal curriculum holds up equally well for students of the 1880s. Regardless of era, the time that cements the social bonds that are so vital to the residential college experience comes not in the classroom, but in the hours when students are left to their own devices. And for a record of what transpires during those hours—the ones where there are, as Moffatt says, “no adults around,” we must rely on students to pull back the curtain.

**Approaching Research Through Student-Created Accounts**

Archival research on student life presents scholars with opportunities to pursue an array of historical leads. On the most elementary level, personal collections offer a window into the development that occurred during the years on campus of the individuals who created them. In the span of four years, ambitions, anxieties, and ideas were worked out and tested; the timid freshman grew into the brash sophomore, only to mature into the measured junior and the world-ready senior. And should a contemporary researcher find an especially robust collection, it may be possible to witness that process play out across the span of decades. Seeing what becomes of

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individuals in their post-college lives is one of the joys of doing archival research on college students. A researcher can immerse himself or herself in the ebbs and flows of a student’s years on campus and then step back to see how those years fit into the whole of a life. Reading the letters or the diary of a student, one sometimes see hints at the trajectory that that individual’s life would eventually take: an aptitude for debate that led to a career in law, or an appreciation for well-delivered lectures that led a student to later join the professoriate himself. Such archival collections present to scholars important tools for understanding how an individual’s time on campus fits in the scheme of personal development and serve as a reminder that while college is perpetually the province of the young, one’s years as a student are the doorway to a long post-collegiate life. Student-created archival collections such as the one pictured in figure 2.1 invite scholars to consider students’ college years as steps in a lifetime of experiences.

When looking at one student’s span of years at an institution, it is often possible to better contextualize those experiences by comparing them with the accounts of other students present on campus during those same years. Evaluating multiple accounts covering the same years at a given institution paints for researchers a clearer picture of not only the curriculum and the extracurriculum, but the prevailing social sentiments, politics, and shared beliefs of a place and time as well. In contrasting multiple students’
perspectives, historians can reconstruct social milieus—an important step in drawing conclusions about the actions and events of a previous era.

Another approach that researchers may take is to look at student life at the same institution across several years, decades or even centuries. Each college and university is its own collection of norms, customs, and shared ideals; its history is populated with people and events of outsized importance. Together, these provide the ingredients for the creation of the “sagas” of which Burton Clark wrote. One sees these reflected in the actions and, by extension, the writings and memorabilia, of successive cohorts of students. Charting student life at one institution over a long period of time can show how the collective will of students evolved, and how that will influenced the day-to-day experiences of those students, in turn. An example of this, where students at the University of Kentucky turned from enthusiastic supporters of a particular type of hazing to opponents in the span of a few short years, can be found in chapter four.

Beyond those approaches already presented, there is one other way to utilize students’ archival materials: for studying the impact of larger social phenomena on student life. A notable example of this that fits within the years covered in this dissertation is the effect that World War I had on colleges and universities. Campuses became hives of activity during the war years, as some male students were conscripted in the wake of the Selective Service Act and female students took on new duties in support of the war effort.\(^5\) This turn of events greatly affected students’ on-campus experiences, and that impact is perceptible across different institutions when one examines students’ accounts in the years before, during, and after the war. Students

\(^{5}\) As originally enacted on May 18, 1917, the Selective Service Act required men ages 21-30 to register for military service. The act was amended in August 1918 to expand that age range to 18-45, though the war’s end three months later blunted that requirement’s effect. See Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 22–29.
marked the country’s entry into the war and how that entry filtered down to their campuses and their individual lives. Figure 2.2 shows the Amherst College student newspaper from the day the U.S. entered the war, preserved by an Amherst student. Figure 2.3 shows a more personal example: a student committed to his scrapbook the draft notice he received in August 1917.

Figure 2.2. “WAR EXTRA!” A scrapbook containing the front page of The Amherst Student dated April 6, 1917—the day the U.S. declared war on Germany. William Britton Stitt Scrapbook, in Amherst Scrapbooks Collection, Series 1, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library.
Figure 2.3. Draft notice, dated August 1, 1917, and draft list from an unidentified newspaper. Cecil A. Norton Scrapbook Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives. The notice reads, in part, “You are hereby notified that pursuant to the act of Congress approved May 18, 1917, you are called for military service of the United States…” Its recipient, Cecil A. Norton, was ordered to report to the High School Building in Flint, Michigan for a physical on August 6, 1917.

The war influenced many aspects of American society, and life on the nation’s campuses was no exception. As part of the nation’s efforts to prepare troops for the war effort, colleges and universities hosted training detachments of the Student Army Training Corps (S.A.T.C.). Though the SATC lasted only a few short months before peace was declared, the men comprising those units documented their time in the Training Corps through a variety of media and memorabilia.⁶ They demonstrate that, at least for a period of time, the idle ease of campus life gave way to the nation’s collective

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⁶ See Levine, Culture of Aspiration, 26-32, for a succinct history of the SATC. Though its existence was brief, the SATC attracted large numbers of students and had an outsized impact on college campuses. According to Levine, “On October 1, 1918, more than 140,000 male students were sworn into the United States Army in simultaneous ceremonies at 525 colleges” (quote on 28).
efforts and anxieties over the war. A freshman at Dartmouth wrote home to his mother and shared the schedule he kept as a member of the SATC:

6.30   Reveille
6.50   Formation
7.00   Mess
7.50   Formation for drill
8.00   Drill begins
11.30 “   ends
12.50 Formation
1.00   Mess
2.00   Drill begins
4.30 “   ends
5.40   Formation + Evening Parade + Retreat
6.50   Formation
7.00   Mess
9.45   Call to Quarters
10.00 Taps – lights out⁷

The war did not spare the students who entered the fighting, and the student-created accounts of the late teens and early twenties show that students dealt with the loss of soldiers whom they knew as classmates. Tributes such as the one shown in figure 2.4 are a poignant reminder that not all of the students who left to fight returned home. The students who passed through the nation’s campuses in those years would continue to mark the absence of their classmates for years to come. Even at reunions half a century later, one finds references to remembrances and moments of silence for those who gave their lives in “The Great War.”

⁷ Clifford Orr, letter to his mother, fall 1918, Papers of Clifford Orr, MS-532, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.
The country rejoiced when the fighting ended in November 1918, and students marked the occasion as one of great excitement and relief. Figures 2.5 and 2.6 show how one University of Michigan student recorded the event in her scrapbook.

The fact that the war found its way into students’ lives and that the evidence of this is present in their archival materials is neither surprising nor novel; indeed, it was one of the most significant events of the twentieth century. Yet its presence in students’ accounts is significant because it portends a sea change in both American higher education and society as a whole. According to David Levine, “The events of World War I, most notably the establishment of the SATC, accelerated the emergence of a new privileged class in American society—the college-educated man. The college diploma became a key sign of economic status and social responsibility.”

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created accounts as a map to chart the course of social phenomena—in this case how the Great War and its aftermath changed students' lives, goals, and the social spheres they would go on to inhabit.

The materials used for this dissertation, which are described in the following section, expand the sources that historians have relied upon in writing about the lives of college students. One of the more frequently cited genres historians use as sources of information about students' years in college are autobiographies. Horowitz states in the Preface of *Campus Life*:

> Autobiographies are hardly raw data. They are contrived writings that attempt to create order out of their subjects' lives. As autobiographers reflect on their pasts, they seek to clarify and give meaning to their experiences. In writing about college, they seek patterns and governing principles, many of which spring from knowledge coming long after the events they describe. Moreover, some autobiographies are not accurate or honest. Although autobiographies are tainted sources, they remain indispensable to the student of undergraduate lives, for they are in many cases the only record that exists of what it has meant to be a student in the last 150 years.9

Apparent in Horowitz's description of autobiographies are the makings of individual-level sagas, wherein individuals construct stories about their own lives that aggrandize or reinterpret past events. Yet Horowitz's observation is incomplete; though they are valuable, autobiographies are far from the only records available in many cases. The issue is one of access; autobiographies are not the most reliable sources of information, but they are among the most widely available. This makes them a tempting option for scholars without the time or means to undertake deeper archival research. But to venture beyond autobiographies' reminiscences and their backward-looking interpretations that are distorted by the lenses of time and experience, it is necessary for scholars to venture into the archives of the institutions they mean to study. For the real story of college student life is not contained in the neatly organized pages of books;

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9 Horowitz, *Campus Life*, xiii. Surprisingly, Horowitz draws upon few accounts created by students during their college years.
rather, it is in the centuries of boxes carefully guarded and tended by archivists and special collections librarians. The lives and memories of generations of students reside in these collections, and they form the basis for this dissertation to show a different perspective of what student life was like.

The Types of Archival Materials Used

The chapters to follow rely on three primary types of student-created media to examine college student life from 1871-1941: scrapbooks, written sources (letters and diaries), and ephemera. Each of these contributes different perspectives to the activities this dissertation examines. Scrapbooks, filled with photographs and small memorabilia, add both a visual component and a catalog of students’ various activities, while letters and diaries convey the details of everyday life and offer glimpses into the hearts and minds of their authors. Ephemera, including programs, ticket stubs, rule books, and souvenirs, complement the other types of materials and hold important details that those materials may not have captured. Each of these media and representative examples are discussed below.

Scrapbooks

Among students’ efforts to record their experiences during their college years, scrapbooks stand out as highly personalized and creative products in which students used diverse types of media to create representations of their collegiate lives. Filled with all manner of photographs and souvenirs—most with hand-written captions to remind their creators of their significance—students’ scrapbooks committed fleeting experiences to pages that would serve as “aids to memory.” Figure 2.7 shows a particularly wide-ranging example from a student at the University of Vermont; among the items on a
single scrapbook page are several dance cards, an invitation, a candy wrapper, a garter belt, a basketball schedule, and a piece of a cane.\textsuperscript{10}

For researchers, potentially the most valuable items found in college students' scrapbooks are the photographs in which they captured their activities. Some, purchased from professional photographers who saw the potential for profit in taking pictures of college events, show large scale events such as football games, rushes, and parades. Others were taken by the students themselves, offering to modern eyes a window into the past to see students in their “natural habitats.” Figure 2.8 shows one

\textsuperscript{10} The collection shown in figure 2.7 is notable in its variety, though its contents are relatively conventional. Scrapbooks at other institutions visited for this dissertation held more curious items, including bars of soap (UMass-Amherst), cufflinks (Michigan), solid silver spoons (Amherst), a leather glove from a dress army uniform (Princeton), a piece of a church pew (Ohio), and a century-old pretzel (Dartmouth).
such instance—students at the University of Wyoming relaxing in their dorm room. Not only do photographs provide historians a point of reference with which to compare written accounts, they also tell stories in their own right. The photographs included in this dissertation were chosen to add clarity and context, even as many of them invite scrutiny and interpretation.11

![Figure 2.8. “Cheer up, Helen!!” Students at the University of Wyoming, late 1890s. Nettie V. Potts Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.](image)

Beyond the content, the arrangements of items within a scrapbook communicate something as well; they suggest what the student who created it thought was important. Take, for example, the box top pictured in Figure 2.9; its orientation in the scrapbook with the large label reading “perishable” right side up, rather than the address label,

points to the fact that this shipment of foodstuffs was important to its recipient.

Receiving boxes of food was a cause for celebration at Smith and other women’s colleges, as sharing these boxes was a social occasion that students looked forward to with great anticipation.12

Figure 2.9. "PERISHABLE." Mailing label. Mary Shea Memorabilia Album, 1919, Smith College Archives.

It should be noted that it is not always possible to tell when a scrapbook was constructed. In some instances, scrapbooks continue beyond individuals’ college years or contain additional information or insights suggesting that they may have been constructed after the completion of their creator’s time in college. This does not

adversely affect their utility for research, though it is important to keep in mind that in such instances these accounts may suffer from some of the same selective editing that one sees with autobiographies. Such post-college retrospectives represent a medium for creating first-level (personal) sagas that are richer and more complex than simple written accounts because they add layers of potential meaning and interpretation—both for their creators in the past and for scholars in the present.

Letters and Diaries

Students’ letters are among the most valuable resources for understanding student life because of their descriptive, and often insightful, prose. The words that were meant to convey to the friends and family members to which they were addressed the details of their authors’ lives now serve to convey those details to scholars who rely on them to reconstruct the portions of students’ lives to which the students themselves were the only witnesses. The letter cited at the outset of chapter one, for example, where students at Smith staged a late night birthday celebration for America, reveals events to which only students were privy. The scene that the letter describes, with students dancing by candlelight as they hummed quietly, would be lost to history were it not captured in that piece of correspondence. And that loss would be significant, because the events of that night tell us something of the character, humor, and creativity of those students. They show us individuals who did not let the fear of being chastised by college officials deter them from what was, by any measure, a clever and well-executed exercise of benign rebellion.

The letters cited throughout this dissertation add perspectives that only students could provide. They relate events to which students were the only witnesses, or they add students’ points of view to otherwise well-chronicled events (as is the case in chapter four, where a student’s letter describes his participation in a riot of several
hundred Princeton freshmen). An illustrative example is shown in Figure 2.10; dated October 1, 1876, the letter from a University of Michigan freshman to his mother includes a hand-drawn map of his new campus surroundings and includes one of the first references at UM to the then-nascent game of football, which was evolving from its rugby roots and was just starting to capture the interest of college men in the Midwest.

As with their letters, students’ diaries provide perspectives and interpretations that historians might otherwise miss. They can be exceptionally detailed accounts of the daily routines of students, punctuated by descriptions and interpretations of events of
great significance in the lives of their authors—events that sometimes also figure prominently in the history (and sagas) of their campuses and communities. Students' diaries are much less prevalent in archival collections than are their letters, but where they exist they add substantively to scholars' conceptions of student life. A typical diary, such as the one shown in figure 2.11, reveals where and with whom students lived and ate, the types of activities they engaged in, and the concerns of their daily lives. An entry from the diary shown below describing a cane rush at Amherst College is transcribed in chapter five.

Figure 2.11. Diary entry, November, 1883. Unidentified diary, Fall 1883, Amherst College Archives. The entry shown reads, in part, “Yesterday aft. Putnam, who rooms below me, got a parlor organ. He knows nothing about playing it + will torture the entire neighborhood. He says he expects to play it about 3 hours a day, 2 of which will be in the evening.”
Ephemera

More than their values as keepsakes for the individuals who collected them, the various items that students kept as tokens of their college years—such as programs and ticket stubs—are useful to scholars as pieces of information for studying and triangulating the accounts of student life found in other media. Collectively referred to here as *ephemera*, these articles provide tangible evidence of, and links to, past events. The class program shown in figure 2.12 is indicative of the types of material categorized as ephemera; given that these events were important to institutions as well as students, many of these materials were kept by the institutions themselves for their own records. Because of this, institutions maintain robust collections of ephemera; complementing individuals' collections, they are useful tools for charting the evolution of individual colleges' and universities' institutional sagas.

Figure 2.12. Class Day. Leather-bound program from Amherst College's Class Day, 1911. Upton Prentiss Lord scrapbook. Amherst College Archives.
Mixed Media

The types of materials described here do not exist in neatly separated units; often, these media are combined in ways that were significant to their respective creators. The diary shown in figure 2.13, for example, is a unique work—it is a diary of a Yale student’s life for the 1915-16 academic year, and that diary has, in turn, been disaggregated into distinct days and set down in a scrapbook with additional materials to complement the student’s words. The figure shows the scrapbook containing the diary pages with additional ephemera from a visit to New Haven by Wild West showman Buffalo Bill Cody. The day’s entry reads:

Col. Cody (Buffalo Bill) was here today to lecture with moving pictures of the last Indian battles at the Schubert. Dan knows him and took me over to the hotel and introduced me. We took him out to the Bowl in an auto for a little while. He told us some interesting incidents and gave us each a pass for two tickets to his lecture tonight. We went, taking Nick + Brian and enjoyed it a lot. Am very glad to have met him.13

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13 Diary of Paul Phenix, February 21, 1916. Yale University Archives. The bowl to which Phenix refers is Yale’s football stadium, the Yale Bowl, which had been completed less than two years prior. At a capacity of more than 70,000, it was an architectural novelty and a source of pride for Yale students.
Contemplating the Meaning and Uses of Student-Created Archival Sources

The processes by which the materials used in this study were created are important. The time and care that students took to produce and curate their scrapbooks and the items they contain were not incidental. Obtaining images, souvenirs, and clippings and arranging them in ways that preserved the personal meaning of these things for the students who produced them were exercises in care and intention. An especially important aspect of these collections is that they were not produced to be a public record of the events and sentiments they depict. The diary entries that were written, the letters that were mailed home, and the scrapbooks that were carefully tended were not made with the intention that researchers of a future era would use them as a chronicle of student life. Because of this, they offer a more genuine depiction of college life than works that were produced and edited for publication.

The recording and interpretation of events are always subject to some degree of editing in the hearts and minds of those who endeavor to remember them. The accounts included here are no different; in trying to piece together what college student life was like in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars’ perceptions are shaped by what the creators of these accounts omitted as much as by what they included. The details that were left out or subtly altered by the individuals who created these records—in service of those individuals’ efforts to shape the sagas they were creating in their own minds—would undoubtedly change our perceptions as we view them now with the benefit of hindsight. Because most of these collections were never intended for eyes beyond the privileged few with whom their creators chose to share them, there are many details whose inclusion or omission will forever remain a mystery. The significance of some of these things were only known by the person who created them. What is, to the eyes of a modern researcher, an inconsequential scrap of paper or the detritus of another era was, for someone, a reminder of a moment in time of great
personal significance. Therein lies one of the challenges for historians doing archival work: to attempt to interpret instances where experience is separated from context—to know that something was important to the person who created it but to realize that the explanation will likely remain unknown.

In Their Own Words: What the Archives Reveal about Students’ Meaning-Making

The first of the three research questions this dissertation set out to answer is, “What do the student-created archival sources suggest were students’ most significant meaning-making activities during their college years?” As the coming chapters will show, it was the events of the extracurriculum that students celebrated and recorded. Their accounts align with Frederick Rudolph’s observation cited in chapter one: the extracurriculum was where students’ wants and needs found expression. Their self-created accounts are populated with the trappings of college life—its class competitions, athletics contests, clubs, and all manner of student-devised amusements that filled their hours between classes. Each of these topics and the ways in which students recorded them could sustain its own book-length treatment backed with abundant archival sources. In the face of a several dissertations’ worth of data, I have chosen to focus primarily on one category of those extracurricular accounts where the construction of multiple levels of sagas is most readily apparent: those activities and phenomena relating to how class cohorts interacted amongst themselves and with each other. In pursuing that narrow focus, I leave unexplored many aspects of student life, not to mention an array of social factors within the campus walls and in American society that directly or indirectly affected students during their college years. The student-created accounts that form the basis of this dissertation reflect all of those factors, and they invite several more rounds of future research that will fully articulate them.
Considering the resources described in this chapter and their potential to aid scholars’ inquiries into college student life, what do these sources tell us with respect to the construction of multiple levels of sagas for students from 1871-1941? As a preface to the chapters that follow and a preview of the analysis in chapter six, I offer that students’ scrapbooks, writings, and ephemera show the existence of sagas on several levels and that those levels overlap. As students created sagas in which they were the protagonists, those sagas became intertwined with—and largely inextricable from—those that grew up around their class cohorts. These first two levels of sagas, in turn, became an aspect of their college or university’s ongoing institutional (third-level) saga. However, the nature of student life was such that the students and their institutions remained at odds. That is natural, because they worked towards different ends; institutions moved to perpetuate their own existence, and students sought to perpetuate student life—a life in which, from the students’ standpoint, the most important events happened outside of the classroom. This perpetuation, spanning eras and institutions, sustained the saga of college students as a collective entity—a saga which today’s students continue to write.

As is demonstrated in the coming chapters, students wrote about and otherwise recorded their class-based interactions in detail across a variety of media. This process of recollection and interpretation facilitated the construction class-level sagas, even as individual students continued to work out their own conceptions of college life and drew from those conceptions the building blocks of their own personal sagas. The accounts that follow invite readers to immerse themselves in the world of undergraduate life as it existed in another time.
Chapter 3 – The Rules of Engagement

Across the quiet reaches of the Common he went slowly, incredibly, toward these strange shapes in brick and stone. The evening mist had settled. They were things undefined and mysterious, things as real as things of his dreams. He passed on through the portals of Phelps Hall, hearing above his head for the first the echoes of his own footsteps against the resounding vault.

Behind him remained the city, suddenly hushed. He was on the campus, the Brick Row at his left; in the distance the crowded line of the fence, the fence where he later should sit in joyful conclave. Somewhere there in the great protecting embrace of these walls were the friends that should be his, that should pass with him through those wonderful years of happiness and good fellowship that were coming.

“And this is it—this is Yale,” he said reverently, with a little tightening of the breath.1

Just as the protagonist of Owen Johnson’s Stover at Yale was awed by his first glimpse of campus, so, too, were readers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries awed and intrigued by “things undefined and mysterious” about the colleges and universities that dotted the American landscape. The peculiar behavior of college students and the public’s perception of the college campus as a quasi-mythical place set apart from the “real world” made reports of the goings-on inside that sphere popular, especially in newspaper and magazine articles and in college-themed novels.2 For example, the Detroit Free Press published a description of student life at Yale in May 1896 that acquainted readers with many of that institution’s student customs. Most amusing is its description of the previous year’s freshman-sophomore baseball game, which featured a uniformed drum corps, half a dozen men in nightgowns, and “a gun corps of fifteen men, whose volley, fired when the first baseman was going to catch the ball, was, to say the least, alarming.” The gun corps was supplemented with ample

1 Johnson, Stover at Yale,12-13.

firecrackers, which were tossed at the feet of those on the field—an abuse that one suspects would have afflicted the catcher with particular severity, given his proximity to the ground.³

The public’s fascination with higher education, especially the tradition-rich environs of the East Coast’s elite institutions, led to articles in national publications as well. The May 1897 issue of *Scribner’s Magazine* featured a lengthy piece on Harvard, and another article on undergraduate life—this time at Princeton—followed in the magazine’s June 1897 issue.⁴ The stories included descriptions of the facets of undergraduate life that intrigued outsiders, aspiring students, and alumni alike.⁵ But whatever stories appeared in the popular press, they could not fully capture the fervor of the interactions among and between an institution’s respective cohorts of students.

The focus of this chapter is on the rules to which students were subjected during their time on campus, with a specific emphasis on those that affected freshmen. These rules were important in the construction of students’ sagas, especially their class-level sagas. Their collective identity, which developed in some measure to steel them against the physical and mental trials imposed by more seasoned students, was an expression of their individual characteristics. Every individual’s history and personality became part of the class mythos, their achievements or failings recorded in the ledger of popular sentiment among their peers as a net gain or loss to the class’s collective identity and standing. The ways in which those identities were forged is recorded in students’ words,


⁵ Though the bulk of articles in the national press focused on East Coast colleges, universities in the Midwest did not go unexamined. One notable example is an article on the University of Michigan entitled “Which College for the Boy?” that appeared in the October 19, 1907 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post.*
pictures, and memorabilia; they show us that the campus of a century ago was a place that challenged students to be true to themselves, to each other, and to Alma Mater.

The rules that governed students’ conduct are especially evident in the ephemera that they collected and are seen through the rule books that students retained among their mementos. Complemented with selected first-person accounts and additional primary sources, the sections to come utilize the prevalence of rules-related ephemera to reconstruct the experiences of students and their efforts to become citizens of the campus.

_READ and Heed_

“Put aside all prep school insignia when within 20 miles of Ann Arbor, and never wear them after reaching here.”6 Such was the advice given in a handbook produced by the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) for incoming freshmen at the University of Michigan in 1918. The transition from the preparatory academies and schoolhouses of youth to the campuses of young adulthood was a process fraught with uncertainty for new students. Popular magazines and newspapers fueled the imaginations of college-bound men and women, and tales from older siblings and peers helped create the mystique that surrounded campuses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were unique worlds with unique rules—rules that new college students were eager to learn and, usually, to obey, lest they incur the wrath of more senior students.

An important distinction with respect to the rules that governed students’ conduct is that there existed, in essence, two sets of rules. The first were rules explicitly issued by the institutions themselves concerning the conduct of students; such rules served to keep order, dictate behavior, and maintain (or at least attempt to maintain) the integrity of the academic mission. These rules are examined here only insofar as they relate

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directly to students’ interactions with one another. The other set of rules were those enacted and enforced by the students themselves. These rules were more informal—in some cases they may not have been written down—but they were, in many respects, more important to a student’s experience than an institution’s formal rules because they dictated the customs and behavior expected of an individual by one’s fellow students. It is these rules—the ones that were created and perpetuated by students themselves and that coexisted alongside the “official” edicts of the institution—that were of particular interest to students, as evidenced by their presence across different media in student-created archival materials. There were occasions in which these two codes of conduct intersected; college handbooks, for example, sometimes blurred the line between the dictates of the institution and the collective will of the student body in maintaining a hierarchical system of deference and privilege through which students rose incrementally in status from their freshman through their senior years. At the University of Vermont, for instance, this intersection was made plain in the YMCA-produced 1915-16 edition of The Vermont Hand Book:

It is the custom for the sophomores to draw up a set of rules for the freshmen to obey. From year to year these rules vary in form or otherwise. A few minor additions or subtractions are made. The rules do, however, represent something more than mere sophomore caprice; they are sanctioned by the entire University, faculty and undergraduate body. They are to be obeyed! And a freshman wantonly breaking any one of them is guilty of breaking a college custom.7

These publications, which were indispensable guides for many generations of students, are a logical point of departure for examining the rules that shaped students’ years at Alma Mater.

7 The Vermont Hand Book, 1915-1916, Robert F. Joyce scrapbook (1917), RG 81, Box 22a, University of Vermont Archives.
The Good Book

One of the primary ways in which new students gained familiarity with their respective campuses was through the use of handbooks, also referred to as rule books. These small publications usually were produced by campus associations such as the student government or the YMCA and served to help acclimatize novice students by laying out in unambiguous terms the cultural norms and behaviors which they would be expected to exhibit and respect. The importance of these publications and their role in student life is underscored by their routine inclusion in students’ scrapbooks and mementos. Their contents demonstrate the extent to which campus life was geared toward assimilation, conformity, and respect for a student hierarchy in which freshmen were subordinate in virtually all circumstances and seniors’ roles as leaders and arbiters of campus culture were unquestioned.

As demonstrated in the quote from a University of Michigan handbook at the beginning of this chapter, one of the first duties of a freshman was to break with one’s past. Paraphernalia associated with one’s prep school or hometown could distract from the task of embracing the campus as one’s new home; as such, many institutions had explicit rules discouraging, if not forbidding, the wearing of such items. The Michigan College of Mining and Technology’s freshman rule book was unequivocal as to how students would be viewed by their peers: “No M. C. M. & T. man will flaunt his allegiance to another school. Forget your High School glories and remove any and all insignia of same. What honor is recognized here, must be achieved here."8

It is worth noting, however, that although displaying past affiliations was frowned upon, one’s prep school pedigree—especially in the institutions of the Northeast—was an undeniable part of one’s identity and often the basis, at least initially, of peer group

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8 Freshman Bible, 1929-30, Michigan College of Mining and Technology. Michigan Technological University Archives.
formation and networking. It is not unusual to spot the banner of a prominent prep school such as Deerfield or Lawrenceville hanging on a wall in photographs of turn-of-the-century dorm rooms, but it was nonetheless considered poor form to flaunt such insignias on one's person.

Whatever inclinations freshmen may have had to trade on old glories, there was a danger of them veering too far in the other direction and being too eager to tout their new allegiance to Alma Mater. The University of Michigan proscribed this behavior as well, telling freshmen, “Don’t commit the unpardonable sin of plastering your suitcase with ‘Michigan’ seals and stickers. Our University needs no such cheap advertising, and you, if you but know it, are only betraying a ‘small town’ education.”  

Once freshmen had stowed their old letter sweaters they could turn their attentions to the myriad other rules that governed their day-to-day lives. Some were paradoxical—rules usually prohibited freshmen from smoking for all or part of the year, yet at some institutions they still would have been expected to carry matches or tobacco at all times for the use of upperclassmen. Other common rules, examined in more detail below, concerned where freshmen went, the services they were required to render, the behaviors they were expected to exhibit, and what they could and could not wear.

“Know Your Place and Keep It”

Freshmen venturing out onto the campus could expect to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors by following the paths that they blazed—figuratively, though not always literally. Freshmen were usually permitted to use the sidewalks—that is, unless upperclassmen were walking on them, in which case the freshman was required to yield and move aside. But even in the absence of other students, the use of the sidewalks

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9 Undated UM student handbook, Forman G. Brown scrapbook, 1918-20. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. The entire handbook is not present; in this instance only one page was included.
came with conditions. At Princeton, for instance, walking near certain buildings was not permitted; in fact, an entire street bordering campus was off limits. As the class of 1936 was instructed, “Freshmen may not walk directly in front of Nassau Hall or on Prospect St. or on McCosh Walk behind McCosh Hall.”¹⁰ Freshman at the Massachusetts Agricultural College faced another challenge—using the correct doors to the buildings they wished to enter; in one building it was the North door, while another was the East and West doors.¹¹ Freshmen nearly needed a compass to know the proper door to enter!

Faced with a circuitous walk using only designated sidewalks instead of shortcuts across the grass—also widely prohibited—a freshman might be tempted to stop for a rest. But this, too, proved problematic, for there were places on campus where freshmen could not stand still, let alone sit down. “Loitering”—a term whose meaning came to include not only standing but any method of locomotion short of walking at a brisk pace—could bring the errant freshman a reproach. But a particularly grievous offense would have been to sit in an area that was reserved for seniors. These were typically spaces in the heart of campus where seniors could see and be seen. If there was a “college fence,” as at Yale and Amherst, sitting upon it—or at least certain dedicated sections of it—was the exclusive right of seniors. At Princeton the area of privilege and prestige was the seating around the campus sun dial.

Freshmen who ventured from the campus might find fewer prohibitions on their movements, but even a trip to town called for navigating certain rules. Each campus-adjacent town had its own venues that were off limits to freshmen. In Princeton it was Renwick’s and, for many years, Chadwick’s Drug Store; Amherst freshmen knew to stay

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¹¹ “Senate Rules.” Allen S. Leland scrapbook, University of Massachusetts – Amherst Archives.
out of the Draper Rathskeller and Rahar’s Inn when they made the short trip to Northampton, while freshmen in Ann Arbor were permitted to go to the Majestic Theater—just not the first five rows, where the seating was reserved for sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Though one might be tempted to see such restrictions as an arbitrary exercise in power by upperclassmen, they did serve at least two important functions relating to class dynamics. First, they put freshmen in proximity to one another. With only a limited number of places they could go, freshmen tended to end up together in those places—a phenomenon that promoted class cohesion by helping freshmen get to know one another. Additionally, interclass separation helped reinforce intraclass unity among each respective cohort—a process that over the course of multiple years helped foster and strengthen deep and lasting attachments to fellow students.

**Service and Subservience**

On top of their academic work, freshmen could anticipate additional duties in the service of other classes. A frequent request would be to perform a song on demand for the amusement of upperclassmen. Beyond their entertainment value, committing school songs and cheers to memory helped freshmen learn about shared values and build bonds amongst themselves and with Alma Mater. Singing was an important expression of friendship and solidarity for college students, especially seniors, and it was an activity with its roots in the impromptu public performances that freshmen were expected to provide.12

The freshmen repertoire was not limited to songs; at some institutions they would be expected to memorize poems—usually ones less than flattering to their neophyte

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12 To date, the definitive history of singing’s role in college life is J. Lloyd Winstead’s *When Colleges Sang: The Story of Singing in American College Life* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013).
status. A scrapbook at the University of Michigan holds the verses that the men of the class of 1921 were directed to learn:

We are little Freshmen,
Young and verdant too.
And the Sophomores will teach us,
To be honist, kind and true.

What we do not know they’ll teach us,
What they teach us we will learn,
’Till the seats of our poor breaches
Will tingle, sting and burn.\(^{13}\)

While the songs and poems that could be elicited from freshmen were entertaining, they did not do much in helping accomplish the tedious work on which the day-to-day business of living the college life depended. This, too, often fell to freshmen. At the Massachusetts Agricultural College, for instance, it was decreed that, “Freshmen shall be required to do all necessary work connected with student activities.”\(^{14}\) This requirement was of sufficient importance that it is the only rule underlined in the list of rules given to freshmen. As freshmen learned, wood for bonfires did not gather itself, nor would the charred remnants of such occasions remove themselves on their own.

Taking care of the campus and its environs was a frequent freshman duty. At the University of Wyoming, it was the “privilege” of the freshmen to apply a fresh coat of paint each fall to the large “W” that adorned a hillside near the campus. They were also expected to clean and mark the football field prior to each home game.\(^{15}\) Beautifying the campus, albeit on a much smaller scale, was a job that fell to a hapless Dartmouth freshman in September 1918, as he detailed in a letter to his mother:

\(^{13}\) Cecil A. Norton scrapbook, 1916-18, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

\(^{14}\) “Senate Rules.” Allen S. Leland scrapbook, University of Massachusetts – Amherst Archives.

\(^{15}\) *Handbook of the Women’s Self Government Association, 1923-24*; Box 1, Josephine Irby scrapbook, Collection Number 10745, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
I have just come back from New Hampshire Hall where I went to call on Harold Green, but was rung in with about ten other unlucky Freshmen, to beat about all the rugs in the dormitory. Consequently, I am blistered up. This is the third time I have gone to call on Harold and have been detailed to work for lazy Sophomores. Hereafter I shall confine my calls to No. Mass., or to Wheeler, where I understand there are mainly a hundred Freshmen and only four Sophs.16

On the whole, freshmen could be conscripted for any number of menial tasks that the classes above them wished to have completed. Two common ones—noted, among other instances, in a list of rules for the University of Michigan’s class of 1921—were posting the mail for men of other classes and shining shoes upon request (sometimes with the owner’s feet still in them).17 The scrapbook of a Dartmouth freshman from the class of 1912 contains a list of rules typical of the day:

HEED, FRESHMAN!

TO THE

Dictates of your Superiors—The Renowned and Mighty Class of 1911—whose word to the trembling and unsophisticated freshman is Law!! Heed, that your childish manners may give place to the ways and actions of Men: Heed, that you may imbibe in your poor and feeble manner some of that LOYAL SPIRIT of OLD DARTMOUTH!

Fade away into oblivion on every possible occasion
Respect the upperclassmen
Each little high school pin, “Prep” numeral or letter counts as one Big black mark
Shout for all you’re worth whenever your little noise is requested
Hats turned up in front are Not Tolerated
March quickly when sent on errands
Enter into college sports with all the enthusiasm that you possess
Noticeable taste in bright socks and neckwear is indiscreet

Hats and coats should always be worn when out of doors
In crossing the campus stick to the paths
Nurses can be hired by the week or month
These rules will be enforced to the letter
Smoking out of doors is Prohibited

16 Clifford Orr, letter to his mother, September 22, 1918. Papers of Clifford Orr 1918-49, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1. Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.

Now, if these mandates have been read and absorbed, look—you ignorant and rustic freshman—with awe, respect and admiration upon that glorious and illustrious class of 1911\textsuperscript{18}

Freshmen who found themselves living in particular dormitories or who aspired to initiation into certain clubs or societies could expect even more rules to supplement those that covered the class as a whole. The following list, found in the same Dartmouth scrapbook as the preceding example, covered the freshmen living in Massachusetts Hall; it read in part:

Oh Freshie! Hearken unto these, the rules and mandates of thy Superiors!!

I. Upon entering or leaving hall give full name with Wah-Hoo-Wah appended.
II. Walk up and downstairs backwards.
III. Upon meeting Mass. Hall upperclassmen, remove hat and bow reverently.
IV. Upon meeting a brother initiate come to a halt and give the 1912 salute.
V. Upon meeting the janitors in the halls salaam deeply and repeat: “Most gracious sovereign, any humble service in thy behalf would please this menial serf.”
VI. Upon meeting chapter members in the halls, back to the right wall, bow reverently and recite clearly and distinctly: “Hear ye! Hear ye! Here I stand (full name), and unsophisticated, peagreen, humble and homesick freshman, from (town, county and state), who petitions pardon for existing.”
VII. Be prepared at any time to give all the college songs and cheers.\textsuperscript{19}

The reality that freshmen were routinely held in lower esteem than other classes was codified in the rules of most institutions. The wording might differ—at the University of Kentucky it was declared that “Freshmen shall at all times assume a respectful and deferential attitude toward upperclassmen,” while at the Michigan College of Mining and Technology freshmen were told, “Upper classmen are...to be given precedence in all

\textsuperscript{18} “HEED FRESHMAN!” Papers of Conrad E. Snow, 1905-1948. Box 1. Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.

\textsuperscript{19} These rules, for men living in Massachusetts Hall, appear to be from the Delta Alpha fraternity; it is not clear from the collection whether men unaffiliated with the fraternity lived in the dorm as well. Papers of Conrad E. Snow, 1905-1948. Box 1. Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.
things”—but the message was the same: know your place. The University of Michigan’s rule book, in fact, used those exact words, reminding freshmen: “Do not be a ‘butinsky.’ Be respectful to upperclassmen. Know your place and keep it.” Freshmen were reminded daily, in words and actions, that they were at the bottom of the collegiate food chain. Lest they be tempted to forget their station or attempt to disguise their “freshness,” campus traditions dictated that freshmen bear some physical tokens of their status; these often took the form of the clothing and accessories they were required to wear.

Looking Sharp

Clothing has, and has always had, a purpose beyond modesty and protection from the elements. One’s clothes communicate one’s station in life, and, perhaps, one’s occupation. Even absent any other context, a white lab coat or a pair of denim overalls suggest certain characteristics of their wearers and influence, fairly or unfairly, other’s perceptions of them. On the college campus of yesteryear, clothes unequivocally communicated hierarchical divisions and social positions. One could often ascertain, even from across the commons or the quadrangle, certain social distinctions about an individual based on the clothing he or she wore. Up close, one could discern even more information from subtle details such as club pins. The following section outlines some of the rules which governed what students, especially freshmen, wore and how those distinctive fashions influenced students’ experiences.

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20 “Senior Court Issues Drastic Regulations,” The Kentucky Kernel, October 17, 1919; Freshman Bible, 1929-30, Michigan College of Mining and Technology. Michigan Technological University Archives.

Beanies

At many institutions, the most recognizable marker of the college freshman in the latter half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries would have been the distinctive head gear that each of those students wore. Different institutions adopted their own styles and called them by different names; whether they were beanies, dinks, ducs, caps, hats, or toques, they adorned the heads of incoming freshmen well into the twentieth century. Symbolically, freshman caps were a physical manifestation of the adage to “know one’s place.” They reminded freshmen, and other students, of the rightful pecking order on campus. The freedom to dress as one pleased—a way in which one could express individualism—was a privilege. And this freedom was one of many that freshmen would earn only after emerging from their collective identity as campus newcomers, of which the freshman cap was the most visible symbol. Yet there was also a practical application for the caps that had to do with another student tradition, discussed in chapter four: male freshmen often had their hair forcibly cut or shaved off by older students relatively soon after their arrival on campus. A beanie offered some modest protection for tender scalps unaccustomed to the elements.

The attachment that students felt to their beanies is demonstrated in the frequency with which they appear in scrapbooks and other collections of memorabilia, especially in the early twentieth century. The presence of whole beanies is somewhat rare, however, given that a common aspect of the tradition of wearing them was their ritual destruction—usually in a bonfire—at some appointed time between November and February of a student’s freshman year (see figure 3.6 for an explicit reference to this practice in a student scrapbook). Cutting off a small part as a memento allowed the wearer to still participate in the discarding or destruction of the beanies that served as the symbolic relinquishment of the lowest rung of freshman status. The figures below
depict the presence of beanies in student-created archival collections; figures 3.1 and 3.2 show intact beanies, while figures 3.3 and 3.4 show portions of beanies.

Figure 3.1. Class of 1925 Beanie. Milton P. Starr Scrapbook, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives
Figure 3.2. Life at Amherst. William Britton Stitt Scrapbook, in Amherst Scrapbooks Collection, Series 1, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library.

Figure 3.3. Tip of the Hat. Cecil A. Norton Scrapbook Collection. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.
Figure 3.4. A souvenir. Upton Prentiss Lord Scrapbook, in Amherst Scrapbooks Collection, Series 1, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library. The caption reads, “Part of The cranial adornment in style Freshman Year. Cremated Feb. 21, 1908.”

Notable in figure 3.6 is an Amherst student’s inclusion of a caption in his scrapbook indicating that the remainder of his beanie was “Cremated Feb. 21, 1908.”

The day that follows, February 22nd, is significant in that it is George Washington’s birthday; it became a federal holiday in the late 1870s. For several decades, February 22nd was a day with special importance on many campuses, including Yale and Amherst, as it was the traditional day when freshmen were loosed from some of the constraints on their behavior and dress and granted permission to visit previously off-limits locations on
and around their respective towns and campuses. Other institutions, such as the
Massachusetts Agricultural College and the Michigan College of Mining and Technology,
granted such privileges slightly later in the year, on March 17th. The Universities of
Wyoming and Kentucky shifted the date the other way, bestowing privileges—such as
shedding the beanies—to freshmen earlier in the year at Homecoming or Thanksgiving,
both of which occurred in November.

It would be easy to chalk up the hats that freshmen wore as simply one more
indignity to which they were subjected. But doing so overlooks the role that they played
in facilitating bonds among the members of successive classes. While such symbols did
set freshmen apart from the other classes at an institution, they also served to identify
fellow freshmen to one another—an important point when students new to a campus
were still strangers to each other. As a handbook from the University of Wyoming noted,
“It is an honor to wear the brown and yellow, and the uniform cap makes each Freshman
known to his brother Freshman.”22 A handbook at the University of Vermont, in
providing day-by-day instructions for new students’ first week on campus, echoed and
expanded upon that same sentiment:

Early on Wednesday morning go down to the Syndicate Clothing Store in the
Y.M.C.A. building and buy your freshman cap. This green skull cap with its gold
button must be worn by every freshman every day except Sunday. It will cost
you fifty cents, but what it will bring you in return you can not estimate. It enables
you to recognize and get acquainted with the men in your class without delay.
And don’t fail to do that. Whenever you see a man wearing the royal headgear,
trot right up and introduce yourself. Nothing else will do so much toward getting
you in line with the rest of your class. The cap will prove at once to be the “tie
that binds” and after you shed it, you will find something much more lasting to
take its place.23

22 Handbook of the Women’s Self Government Association, 1923-24; Box 1, Josephine
Irby scrapbook, Collection Number 10745, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

23 The Vermont Hand Book, 1915-1916, Robert F. Joyce scrapbook (1917), RG 81, Box
22a, University of Vermont Archives.
In a similar spirit, amidst an ongoing debate about the merits of “dinks,” as the hats were called at Princeton, and whether the tradition of wearing them ought to continue, a freshman at that institution wrote a letter to the student newspaper in the fall of 1937 to voice his support for their continued use:

To the Editor of the Princetonian:

Sir: If the wearing of the black tie and dink were but a meaningless tradition, the sooner its abolishment were accomplished, the better.

That is not the case, however. The two remaining signs which distinguish us newcomers are the only methods by which identification of fellow class-members is possible, and therefore both should be worn by all Freshmen until Christmas time, by which time one should know the majority of the fellows on the Campus.

According to the Freshman Handbook, “It is customary for all Freshmen to speak to all other Freshmen.” This is the rule that should be enforced and heartily endorsed by the whole school. It is the one way to gain that Princeton feeling of unity early in the autumn....

Let’s have an announcement to that effect as soon as possible, by some one with authority; then let the Sophomores enforce this valuable rule. Each Freshman should and must speak to each other bedinked member of the student body.

Yours for more and better dinks, and even more friendliness.

Very sincerely yours,

J. D. ’41. AND PROUD OF IT. 24

The tradition of freshmen wearing beanies would continue in varied forms into the 1950s at some institutions such as Princeton, but the tradition would have a much more prosaic end in the early 1940s at others: wool rationing during the Second World War.

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24 Princeton University Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 379, Folder 10; clipping entitled “CALLS FOR DINKS AND CUB SOCIABILITY,” is from The Daily Princetonian, October 12, 1937.
Clothes Make the Man

Because clothing played such a significant role in student identity, student customs dictated many aspects of one’s sartorial choices. Hats were but one instance of this—and of concern to others besides freshmen. While the freshies had their dinks, other classes enjoyed their own adornments. A freshman at Dartmouth in the fall of 1918 wrote home to recount: “The seniors have begun to wear their hats. They are broad brim white felt ones, with a green 1D9 on front. We freshman continue to wear our little ones. Practically all of the upperclassmen wear white flannels all the time – and green sweaters and no hats.”25 A Dartmouth man of the era could look forward to three distinct phases of cranial decorations: the tiny dink of freshman year, sophomore and junior years of hat-free abandon, and the white felt crowns of the reigning seniors. The white flannels that the letter writer mentions were important as well, for they were de rigueur for young men well into the 1920s—and, as with other markers of masculinity and sophistication—off-limits to freshmen at many institutions, including Princeton and Massachusetts Agricultural College.26 The latter institution is notable in that its freshmen were also prohibited from wearing corduroy—a fabric that at the University of Kentucky was permissible only for seniors!

As if worries about wearing the correct materials were not enough, one had to be mindful of the color as well. The students of different institutions came to different conclusions about how—or even whether—freshmen should be allowed to display the colors of Alma Mater. Princeton freshmen were prohibited from wearing school colors—

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25 Clifford Orr, letter to his mother, undated. Papers of Clifford Orr 1918-49, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1. Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.

26 “Four Men Added to 1917 Senior Council,” The Daily Princetonian, October 11, 1916; Allen S. Leland scrapbook, University of Massachusetts – Amherst Archives.
in some years until Washington’s Birthday and in others for the entire year.27 Conversely, University of Kentucky freshmen were required to wear them—in the form of a blue and white ribbon in their button-holes—on days when the football team was playing.28

Curious Rules

In keeping with the great diversity of college student life and the ways in which it found unique expression at each institution, each college and university developed its own distinct, if sometimes bizarre, rules for student conduct. Freshmen at Princeton, for instance, found themselves prohibited from riding bicycles well into the twentieth century.29 A decade earlier, men at the University of Kentucky would have endured a bare upper lip for three years, for seniors were the only students permitted to wear mustaches. That institution’s student body also did not countenance pride in any other school; the student newspaper warned, “No student will be permitted to wear a sweater bearing the insignia of any institution other than the University of Kentucky.”30

The male freshmen at Massachusetts Agricultural College in the early 1920s were bound by rule to give the gift of song to the inhabitants of that campus’s women’s dormitory. Beginning with the first Thursday of the term and lasting a week, the freshmen serenaded the occupants of Adams Dormitory—every morning except Sunday—promptly at 6:30 a.m. Should the freshmen have been tempted to curse their daily chorus they would have been wise not to; alas, another rule: “No one shall indulge


28 “Read ‘Em and Weep,” The Kentucky Kernel, October 8, 1920.


in profanity under any provocation.” But what could the frustrated freshman do—perhaps clench his fists under his cloak in a bit of surreptitious rebellion? He would have no such luck—this, too, would have been against the rules, for no M.A.C. freshman could “walk about the campus with his hands in his pockets during first term.”

If one is to truly appreciate the extent to which these rules were a product of their time—and how much students’ everyday amusements have evolved—one need only look at the list of rules published in the *Daily Princetonian* in October 1916. Two in particular stand out: “Playing marbles is a privilege of the Juniors only” while “The spinning of tops is the privilege of Seniors only.”

**Breaking the Rules**

With all of the rules students were subjected to, it is no surprise that some individuals, whether through will or ignorance, ran afoul of them from time to time. The enforcement of such rules was typically carried out by the students themselves; Amherst’s Student Handbook, for instance, noted in its section on Student Customs that, “The authority for proposing and enforcing these customs is left in the hands of Scarab, the Senior Society.” Save for incidences of abject violence or hazing that inflicted grave personal injury, administrators generally took a hands-off approach to the norms and behaviors students perpetuated amongst themselves. There were some instances, however, where administrators did take a role in regulating student-initiated rules. The Michigan College of Mining and Technology’s *Freshman Bible*, for example, reminded students:

31 Allen S. Leland scrapbook, University of Massachusetts – Amherst Archives.


33 “Students’ Handbook of Amherst College, 1908-1909,” in Howard R. Bacon scrapbook (1912), in Amherst Scrapbooks Collection, Series 1, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library.

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You are new here. You will do well to observe and respect the traditions of the freshman class. The rules given below have been in effect for many years. The classes before you have obeyed them and will see to it that you do. Flagrant violators will be ordered to appear before the Senior Disciplin ary Counsel. Three such appearances are sufficient cause for a hearing before a tribunal consisting of members of the administrative staff of the college.\textsuperscript{34}

When left to the students, the enforcement of rules often took on a very public nature. When “corrective action” was carried out for the violation of a rule, part of that corrective process was demonstrating to other would-be rule breakers the consequences for non-compliance. By making enforcement of the rules a public spectacle, students could employ the fear of embarrassment in encouraging fellow students to uphold campus rules and customs.

The potential for this manner of enforcement was often present implicitly in the rules themselves, though students at some institutions made the threat explicit. The Massachusetts Agricultural College’s rules for the fall of 1918, echoing the same sentiment found in the M.C.M.&T. rules cited above, warned freshmen that “Certain customs concerning freshmen have been handed down from year to year, which the entering man will do well to observe if he would be free of the stigma of “freshness” and the danger of a pond party.”\textsuperscript{35} A “pond party” was an involuntary visit to the body of water in the middle of the M.A.C. campus; a photograph album from the era (Figures 3.5 and 3.6) shows that the pond party was not an idle threat; it was, however, based on the photographs, the sort of campus spectacle that drew a crowd.

\textsuperscript{34} Freshman Bible, 1929-30, Michigan College of Mining and Technology. Michigan Technological University Archives.

\textsuperscript{35} “Senate Rules.” Allen S. Leland scrapbook, University of Massachusetts-Amherst Archives.
Figures 3.5, 3.6. “Going! Going!! Gone !!!” A “pond party” at the Massachusetts Agricultural College. Class of 1909 Photo Album, University of Massachusetts-Amherst Archives.
Tossing non-compliant freshmen into a campus body of water was standard procedure at institutions that had such natural features. Students at campuses without ponds, lakes, or rivers in close proximity had to exercise creativity in coming up with other means to publicly shame rule-breakers. The diary of an unidentified female student at the University of Vermont from the fall of 1929 demonstrates one approach: “Signs such as ‘I am a frosh that broke a Vermont tradition’ appeared all over the campus today. Careful scrutiny revealed the fact that to each one was attached a humble + much subdued male freshman.”36

**The Outliers**

Of the institutions studied for this dissertation, two—the Michigan College of Mining and Technology (which had previously been the Michigan College of Mines and would later become Michigan Technological University) and Smith College—are notable in that their interclass dynamics with respect to freshman rules took on a different character than those at other institutions. These differences reflect a student body at each of those institutions that was markedly different from the others examined here.37

At the Michigan College of Mining and Technology (M.C.M.&T.), an almost entirely male institution on Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, the *Freshman Bible* prescribed and proscribed behaviors and expected standards of conduct.38 According to the 1929-30 edition of that handbook:

> The new student at M.C.M. & T. will soon learn that he is not hedged about by those parochial restrictions which form so large a part of the average college

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36 Diary of an unidentified female freshman; entry dated October 10, 1929, University of Vermont. Collection of the author.

37 The all-female student body of Mount Holyoke may have exhibited similar characteristics with respect to rules and the tenor of class relations, but the research conducted at that institution did not examine that issue in sufficient detail to include here.

38 The Michigan College of Mining and Technology did enroll a handful of women as “special students,” permitting them to attend classes though they could not earn degrees. From a student life standpoint, however, M.C.M.&T. was effectively a men’s college.
community. It is assumed that the freshman is a man capable of regulating his own conduct and affairs, and as such he is treated. He will not find here, as he does elsewhere, artificial barriers separating him from the rest of the student body. Scholarship is the only basis for preferment recognized either by the college or student body. […]

The definition of the word “Freshman” is scholastic only. The usual interpretation of the word signifying immaturity and unsophisticatedness that must be eradicated by appropriate disciplinary measures, is unknown at M. C. M. & T. […]

Freshmen should remember that the same things are expected of a gentleman at M. C. M. & T. that are expected anywhere else. The fact that you are living in a society made up almost entirely of men does not alter the circumstances. […]

Forget the way that they do things in other schools and get into the spirit of this college. Service and co-operation will make things better for all. No matter what your possessions or affiliations are don’t let the other fellow get a chance to say that you are snobbish.39

The unmistakable message to men new to campus was that they ought to put aside conceptions of what they thought college life was going to be like; M.C.M.&T. had its own norms and these were what mattered. This is, in some ways, counterintuitive—one might expect that the then-typical behaviors of male freshmen would manifest themselves to an outsized degree in a geographically isolated college that both invited and celebrated a rugged, physically able student body. But therein lies one possible explanation for the difference; a picture from the Michigan Technological University archives (Figure 3.7) hints at why the expectations for freshmen to integrate themselves into the student body were different at that institution. In contrast to the relatively relaxed and leisurely atmosphere of other institutions, especially those of the East Coast, the Michigan College of Mining and Technology prepared men to undertake a life of what could be dangerous, high-stakes work. These were men for whom cooperation, trust, and good judgment were paramount. They confronted situations and cultivated skills unheard of at institutions such as Amherst and Yale; as shown in figure 3.7, an

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39 Freshman Bible, 1929-30, Michigan College of Mining and Technology. Michigan Technological University Archives.
M.C.M.&T. man needed to know the physical dangers of his future vocation and how to handle them. The possibilities of an errant boulder taking a coworker’s leg off at the knee or a subterranean explosion blinding a fellow engineer were real and had to be prepared for. While the freshmen rule books preserved in the MTU archives show that there were class competitions, those same documents also suggest that the overall nature of those competitions and the interclass relationships had a noticeably different character than those at other institutions of the era. Class competitions at M.C.M.&T. are discussed further in chapter five.

Figure 3.7. Be Prepared. The caption on the back of the photograph reads, “First aid instruction under direction of U.S. Bureau of Mines.” Henry V. Snell Collection, Michigan Technological University Archives.
In contrast to the rough-and-tumble men of M.C.M.&T., the all-female student body of Smith College could expect a very different campus experience. The rules to which its students were expected to adhere were reflective of both the more collegial and nurturing character of the relationships that existed among and between Smith classes and the different expectations for behavior and decorum which women were subject to.

Similar to those that freshmen at other institutions received, young women arriving at Smith were given a copy of that institution’s student handbook. The Students’ Hand-Book of Smith College, 1915-16, preserved in the scrapbook of a 1919 Smith graduate, illustrates a marked difference in tone relative to other, similar books. Rather than ominous warnings or mandates to be ready for interclass skirmishes, the Smith Hand-Book’s section entitled “Don’ts for Freshmen” is made up of practical and good-natured recommendations rather than hard-and-fast “rules,” including:

“Don’t try to make friends. Be nice to everyone and friendships will make themselves.”

“Don’t think it’s silly to wear rubbers just because your family told you to wear them.”

“Don’t miss your class sings.”

“Don’t bring a silk umbrella. Buy a ninety-eight cent one with an ugly handle and it will return to you.”

“Begin well. A front row seat is almost always the best policy.”

“Don’t play with one girl exclusively. There are 1600 in college.”

“‘Miss’ is a term applied to heads of houses and members of the Faculty (unless married or of the other sex). Don’t apply it to upper classmen. They like to see you remember their first names.”

“Don’t fail to make some mistakes, or you won’t have any reminiscences—nor we any topical song.”

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40 Students’ Hand-Book of Smith College, 1915-16, Mary Shea memorabilia album (1919), Student Scrapbooks Collection, Smith College Archives. The quotation marks are in the original document and are retained here.
While the handbook encouraged Smith students to be kind to one another and extend the general courtesies of polite society, these social interactions existed within a milieu that placed very real constraints upon the conduct of women. A look beyond the student-driven rules to The Smith College General Regulations, which applied to all students, not just freshmen, helps give context to the world in which female college students of the early twentieth century lived; two notable examples include:

“Applications…for permission to attend entertainments in other places than Northampton, should be made to the Registrar…In the case of promenade concerts, the parents’ note of formal permission should be presented with the application.”

“Excursions and driving on Sunday are contrary to the established customs of the College.”

The freedom that male college students enjoyed stood in contrast to the experiences of female college students, whose years on campus were spent under rules that often made their college years an extension of the supervision they received at home. Only after several more decades would rules such as these lose their grip on the lives of female collegians.

The complexities of women’s societal roles and their evolution in the seven decades from 1871 to 1941, and how those changing roles manifested themselves in the on-campus experiences of college-going women, merit a much more extensive treatment than can be included in this dissertation. The example of Smith College cited here illustrates that the mechanisms by which students assimilated the collective values and behaviors of the campuses where they enrolled shared similarities regardless of the composition of an institution’s student body. But a full accounting of the ways in which female college students, especially those at all-female institutions such as Smith College and Mount Holyoke College, recorded and interpreted their college experiences, as

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41 Ibid. Quotation marks in original.
borne out in the archival materials preserved at those and other institutions, deserves in-depth exploration of its own in future research.42

As the examples at M.C.M.&T. and Smith College show, a student’s college experiences in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the product of a number of cultural factors, some of which found expression in novel ways based on institution-specific circumstances. The men of M.C.M.&T., for instance, cultivated among themselves a level of antagonism between classes that was, overall, less intense than the male populations at other institutions in this study. Competitive energies that may have lingered for the rest of a particular class’s time on campus, as they sometimes did at other institutions, were discouraged there. One reason for this was the vocational focus of M.C.M.&T., which stood in contrast to a number of East Coast institutions that emphasized social connections over career preparation. The men of M.C.M.&T. attenuated the intensity of their class competitions in service of fostering an institution-wide identity as a collection of future professionals who were preparing to enter exciting but potentially dangerous and physically demanding fields.

Smith College offered another departure from the class relations that characterized many institutions from the 1870s to the 1940s by virtue of its all-female student body. Save for the occasional basketball game or snowball fight, the physical confrontations such as rushes and sprees that played out amongst college males (described in the next chapter) were absent in women’s colleges. Like M.C.M.&T., the class dynamics at Smith acknowledged class pride and peer bonds between members of the same class, but those were generally subordinate to students’ conceptions of

42 The body of literature on female college students includes many exemplary works, though few of them dig deeply into the archival collections of student memorabilia that shed light on students’ day-to-day lives. An exception is Margaret A. Lowe’s Looking Good: College Women and Body Image, 1875-1930 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), which draws in part upon the diaries and letters of female collegians in its analysis of body image among college-going women.
themselves as members of the Smith College family. In a time where society still viewed women who sought higher education with wary eyes, the bonds of common purpose and shared struggle made the notion of rigid class distinctions seem trivial and counterproductive. For the men of M.C.M.&T. and the women of Smith, the student-created rules that governed their conduct arose from a desire to prioritize unity for all over acclaim or privilege for some.

The Role of Rules

The inclusion of rules spanning several institutions and time periods in this chapter is made possible by the sheer number of rules-related materials and specific references to college rules in the student-created accounts examined for this study. Their prevalence underscores the fact that students were cognizant of these rules, even if their energies were sometimes spent in circumventing them. It is easy to see why students kept these rules-related items as part of their mementos: the rules served as a point of departure; they were a roadmap, of sorts, for guiding the humble freshman to the lofty heights of senior status. They brought clarity and stability to uncertain circumstances; even if freshmen did not like the rules, they were at least a guidepost in an unfamiliar terrain where joining the herd was generally both compulsory and desirable.

Looking back at the rules that students—particularly freshmen—were subjected to in the era studied here, it would be easy to dismiss them as the needless harassment and subjugation of a group of newcomers who lacked the wherewithal to fight back. But as chapters four and five will show, a lack of fighting spirit was rarely a problem where freshmen were concerned. Rather, these rules can and should be seen as one of the means through which students began building their individual and collective sagas.
The actions that flowed from students’ collective belief in and adherence to the rules and behaviors that they themselves shaped and enforced, such as the wearing of beanies, are all predicated on a simple directive identified earlier in this chapter: to “know one’s place.” As the anthropologist Jules Henry noted, “Where every man is unique there is no society.”43 That the rules that students created looked similar across institutions and across different periods of time is not coincidental, because they all served the same end: to attempt to bend the individual will to the collective one; to harness the personal ambitions of the many—at least temporarily—to form a new, singular identity as a class. And students’ consistent inclusion of various rules-related materials in the accounts they created—from scrapbooks containing rule books and newspaper clippings to beanies and other badges of status—suggest that such rules played an important role in students’ meaning-making activities.

The value of examining these rules-related phenomena lies not just in what historians have typically done, which is to consider them as a phenomenon of group dynamics, but to examine them at the individual level as well. For it is there that one can begin to appreciate that these rules and their physical manifestations, such as beanies, did not merely exist in the abstract. The student-created accounts make clear that students placed meaning and value on the rules. Rather than simply seeing them a set of hoops through which they had to jump, students were active observers and arbiters of these rules and recognized, in their own ways, the potential they had as an impetus for growth. The plainest example of this is seen in the letter to the editor of the *Daily Princetonian* in support of beanies cited earlier in this chapter; there were some students who saw the bigger picture and recognized that actions such as wearing beanies were a

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means by which they could form the bonds that were such an important take-away from college in those days.

For scholars, this becomes clear only when one compares student-constructed narratives across a spectrum of institutions and at different points in time within individual institutions. The examples of college rules cited here, collected from a geographically diverse sample of institutions and a chronologically diverse sample of archival sources at those institutions, are one such attempt to assemble and compare such narratives. The next chapter continues that effort by examining what student-created accounts show with respect to how classes related to one another.
Chapter 4 – Class Relations and Rivalries: Taunts and Terror

As the preceding chapter demonstrated, students could expect their years on campus to be guided by rigidly enforced rules and incremental increases in status as they advanced from their freshman through their senior years. The roles that students played did not exist in a vacuum; those roles were dynamic, evolving constructs that shaped and were shaped by the students who inhabited them over years, decades and centuries. As new cohorts of students arrived on campus each fall, they brought with them a unique combination of backgrounds, talents, personalities, and tastes that were predictable only inasmuch as one could be sure that no two cohorts would ever be the same. It was these small, incremental annual additions to the campus body that renewed the essence of student culture at each institution and collectively across the spectrum of American higher education and became the means by which each of them both changed and remained constant.

In their station as the “new kids on the block,” freshmen were socialized into the communal life of their respective institutions. Though hazing, examined later in this chapter, did have a role in campus life, students of the past treated many of their class-based interactions as an expected—if not welcomed—part of the college experience. The antagonism that existed between classes—and the ways in which individuals resisted, accepted, or invited that antagonism—was a defining feature of many students’ college years. The materials that students collected and preserved reflect the importance of these behaviors as features of their college experiences. This chapter contemplates the ways in which class identities were expressed collectively and individually, and how that expression sometimes spilled beyond the bounds of the campus.¹

¹ Though some of the students’ behavior presented here and in the following chapter falls well beyond what would be considered acceptable on a present-day campus, the historical
Taunts: Sophomores Throw Down the Gauntlet

In looking at the ways that classes related to one another, the most distinctive—and sometimes destructive—dynamics took place between the freshman and sophomore classes. One of the common means by which freshmen and sophomores fueled the rivalries between their respective classes was through the use of proclamations—posters or handbills that celebrated the accomplishments of one class, impugned the integrity of an opposing class, or both. One author described the phenomenon at the College of New Jersey (later to become Princeton University):

Another custom the sophmores had was to paste “Proclamations” all over. These “procs” were big full sheet posters denouncing the opposite class in a rhetorical bombast of insinuating superlatives and adjectives exposing their past, present and future, all in green ink. They pasted these anywhere they could find a conspicuous place.

It was a difficult job to catch them at this, for they always picked out the darkest nights for the deed, and didn't confine their operations to the town alone, but pasted them anywhere within a radius of ten or twelve miles. One group went as far as the city of Trenton ten miles away and painted and plastered “Procs” all over the Battle Monument of George Washington.²

The right to post such proclamations was sometimes predicated on the outcome of an interclass contest such as a sporting event or, as discussed later in this chapter, a rush. They might also be used to issue an open challenge to a rival class to participate in such an event. The nature and tone of proclamations varied from one institution to

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² “When College Days Were Wild.” Unpublished, undated manuscript of Chas. H. La Tourette. Haxing and Horsing; 1878-1909; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 379, Folder 11; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Hazing is spelled “Haxing” in this archival collection at Princeton. Charles La Tourette was the editor and publisher of a local Princeton newspaper, The Princeton Packet, from 1917-1955.
another; though they did sometimes devolve into mean-spirited personal attacks, more often than not the insults or threats of violence were cartoonish in nature. At the University of Michigan, for instance, proclamations tended to have a humorously menacing, over-the-top feel to them. The sophomores of the class of 1906, for example, called out the class of 1907 for having “encroached upon our sacred rights,” having “been seen in our refreshment parlors,” and having “made goo goo eyes at the coeds”—accusations that elicited a reasoned, thoughtful reaction from ’06: “For this you deserve DEATH may your lot be fire and brimstone, hades without end” (see figure 4.1, next page).
Oh! Joy!
Freshman Blood!

When the pale moon steals through the mackerel skies over the cold and slimy walls of the Medic Building, where the mouldering dead within hanging by the ears, dance in high glee in anticipation of the coming to their ranks of the BABES OF 1907. Assemble, all ye VERDANT, PEA-GREEN, SUCKLINGS for your last communion on this green sphere, on Medic Green, at the hour of seven-thirty, Friday, October the ninth, in the year of our University LXVI.

1907.
YOU have encroached upon our sacred rights.
YOU have smoked on the campus.
YOU have been seen in our refreshment parlors.
YOU have enjoyed yourselves at the theatre from the first five rows.
YOU have made goo goo eyes at the co-eds.
YOU have trespassed on our game preserves at Ypsi. Etc., Etc.

For this you deserve DEATH may your lot be fire and brimstone, hades without end.

The following night lunch will be served to spectators:

**MENU**

FRESHMAN Noodle Soup.
Fried '07 Suckers and Bullheads.
Prime Rib of FRESH. Beef.
'07 Fricknasee of Liver.
FRESHMAN Brains (?) in season.
FRESH. Spuds, with eyes out.
Squash.
GREEN Peas.
Cabbage Heads.
LOBSTER Salad.
Tulip Jam for Co-eds.
Minced Pie.
FRESH. Buttermilk.

A cordial invitation is extended to all to partake of the Grand Freshman Barbecue.

Signed MICHIGAN, 1906.

Figure 4.1. “Oh! Joy! Freshman Blood!” Charles F. Campbell Scrapbooks. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.
The class of 1910—who were, if the class of 1909 is to be believed, a collection of “Sappy, Suckling Simpletons”—did not fare much better in the eyes of the class preceding them; the litany of their sins is preserved in another class proclamation in a different UM student’s scrapbook (see figures 4.2-4.3). Yet even those insults that the “Ossified Orangoutanges” of ’10 suffered were mild, compared to what the class of 1914 would level at their successors, the class of ’15. They were, in the words of ’14, “assinine, imbecilic sons of Satan” (Figure 4.4)!

Figure 4.2. “YE FRESHMAN ATTENTION.” Proclamation from the Class of 1909 to the Class of 1910; Donald Crandon Miller Scrapbooks, 1906-09. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.
Figure 4.3 (Detail of Figure 4.2). “FROSH.” Proclamation from the Class of 1909 to the Class of 1910; Donald Crandon Miller Scrapbooks, 1906-09. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.
The Freshmen Strike Back

Thought they were overwhelmingly the recipients of public opprobrium and private torment at the hands of other students, freshmen were not above turning the tables on their oppressors and dishing out a bit of scorn of their own accord. Often these took the form of the sorts of public proclamations that sophomores used, but they could also be more pointedly created by and directed toward individuals. A handwritten note deposited into a scrapbook at the University of Michigan offers one very personal
example; in this case, a freshman had a go at his unnamed sophomore tormentors over their inability to properly terrorize him, writing:

To the honorable sophomores—

You had better appoint a better guard as I went into my room this morning, opened the drawers in my bureau, got my clothes books etc and had a good night’s sleep,

Your most “humble” and “obedient”
   Frosh³

When freshmen did issue their own proclamations, they proved they could give as good as they got. Being “green”—inexperienced—was the root of many of the jokes and insults hurled at freshmen; in rebuking the class of ’93, the College of New Jersey class of 1894 turned that around on the sophomores in a clever rhyme:

A ’93 MAN TO HADES WENT
   SOME THINGS HE WISHED TO LEARN
   THEY SENT HIM BACK TO EARTH BECAUSE
   HE WAS TOO GREEN TO BURN.⁴

Elsewhere, when the University of Michigan’s class of 1926 called out the sophomores of ’25, they took a novel tack, charging that ’25 had failed in its duty to instill in them the traditions of UM: “So marked has been this failure that respected Seniors, Professors with years of service in University halls, yes, and even Alumni in touch with college affairs have noted the singular impotence of the present Sophomore Class.”⁵

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⁴ “Riled, Rattled, Rushed!” Proclamation by Class of 1894 about Class of 1893; circa 1890; Princeton University Class Records, Cabinet 7, Drawer 6, Folder 3; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Variations of “fresh” and “green” appear with great frequency in class proclamations. This explains the many uses of the word “verdant” and its related forms—it simultaneously encompassed connotations of “freshness” and greenness.

⁵ “YEA ’26 BE IT KNOWN!” Proclamation by Class of 1926 about Class of 1925. Milton P. Starr Scrapbook. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.
Shown in figure 4.5, the class of 1926 proclamation is noteworthy both for its narrative style and retrospective nature—a sort of parting shot to a class of soon-to-be juniors who would be leaving the day-to-day hostility of class rivalries behind them.

Figure 4.5. “YEA ’26 BE IT KNOWN!” Proclamation from the class of 1926 to the class of 1925. Milton P. Starr Scrapbook. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
It is perhaps not surprising that in the heat of interclass rivalries students sometimes failed to remember the degree to which their conduct reflected on their respective institutions. But it was not only administrators or town elders that took notice; as students matured, they generally demonstrated an increasing respect for and cognizance of the duty each student bore in upholding the name of their institution. The rebukes that juniors and seniors leveled at the lower classes could be every bit as stinging as those from the lips of a president or proctor—sometimes even more so. The public nature of posting proclamations, especially at an institution such as the College of New Jersey, where custom held that town and campus were equally fair venues for their posting, invited a level of public scrutiny that other interclass skirmishes did not. The editors of *The Daily Princetonian* in September 1892 were among those students who felt compelled to remind their compatriots that the bad conduct of a few men reflected poorly on all of them, as well as the institution; they wrote in an editorial:

It is customary, at this time of the year, for the lower classes to issue proclamations, which, to say the least, are not altogether expressive of mutual esteem and respect. However this may be, we have nothing to say against the custom itself—a custom by which may be expended, in a harmless way, much of that feeling of intense class rivalry which, at this time in the college course, is so characteristic; but we do decidedly and uncompromisingly object to any indecent allusions in the “procs.” To the minds of some it may seem that this subject does not come within our province; while we most deeply regret that events of the past demand it, we believe that we are endorsed in our observations by every gentleman in college. Let this word of caution be heeded. Let the “procs” contain nothing that will in any way detract from the honor and fair fame of our Alma Mater.  

The Purposes of Proclamations

One of the purposes of these proclamations, apart from the enjoyment students had in making and posting them, is suggested in the scrapbook of an Ohio University student, who wrote next to a copy of a proclamation, “Horrors!! The feeling of terror we

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freshmen had that first week” (see figure 4.6). Despite their hyperbole—few students would have considered the “frightful horrors of bloody torture and ignominious death” that such proclamations promised as a true danger—fear of the unknown is a powerful force. The mystique of the college campus, with its traditions and secrets handed down from class to class, has set the nerves of new freshmen on edge each fall for generations. Freshmen found in their shared fears a bond; the deep connection of confronting and overcoming those fears—of the unknown, of hazing, of humiliation—formed one basis by which individuals would move from seeing themselves as a collection of individuals to seeing themselves as a class. And part of the way in which those nascent bonds grew was in repeating the cycle anew the next fall, when the formerly-frightened freshmen had become the knowing sophomores who could now revel in using the memories of their own fear to instill it in a new crop of “freshies.”

Proclamations also served another function; they were, as the Daily Princetonian described them, a way of dispersing, in a more or less “harmless way, much of that feeling of intense class rivalry.” Simply put, not every day could be a cane rush or a riot; class members coming together to make and distribute proclamations provided a means of expression for the fervor of class rivalries that filled the time between interclass skirmishes, even as they sometimes played a role in inciting them.

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7 Gladys Blanche Fish Scrapbook Collection, 1914-19, Ohio University Archives.
8 Editorial, The Daily Princetonian, September 28, 1892.
No matter which class one belonged to, these proclamations were a part of the campus experience that students sought to remember—a fact attested to by their widespread presence in students’ scrapbooks and other collections of personal effects, as well as their preservation by institutions themselves. Princeton, in particular, is notable for its robust collection of proclamations, many of which were printed as broadsides measuring several square feet in size. An instance that underscores the
extent to which class proclamations were a memorable part of student life is seen in an unattributed proclamation directed at the Princeton class of 1900. It contained the following rhyme, entitled, “Nitty-Nit.”:

There once was a class, naughty-naught
By an influx of measles were caught,
Their infant diseases
By milk one appeases
But of manhood they all fall far short

They’ve filled the infirmary o’erflowing,
With their infantine gurgling and crowing;
For castoria they weep
Till their nurses can’t sleep,
In this way their manhood they’re showing.

To some as real men they appear,
But the actual truth is, I fear,
They really need skirts
Instead of their shirts,
In which they would scarce look so queer.⁹

It was a work of sufficient quality that it was preserved for the ages in a scrapbook by a member of the class whose integrity it impugned—the class of 1900!

**Terror**

Though the most dire threats of death and dismemberment were exaggerated in proclamations and in campus legend, a freshman’s fears of marauding sophomores were not unfounded. One of the strategies of self-preservation that freshmen often employed was simply to try to avoid the notice of older students. This tactic of being unobtrusive called for students to tread quickly and carefully, as a Princeton freshman wrote to his mother in the fall of 1910: “That letter that I wrote on Sunday and mailed on

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⁹ “Nitty Nit.” Unattributed class proclamation about the class of 1900; circa 1896. Scrapbook of Ralph H. Poole, 1900; dates not examined; Scrapbook Collection, Box 227, Box 228; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
Wed. I tried to mail Mon. and again on Tuesday, but I was so busy dodging Sophs that I could [not] get near a mail box until Wednesday.\textsuperscript{10}

Despite their efforts, freshmen could not always avoid their sophomore tormentors, especially when the latter group was intent on causing them trouble. Freshmen could try to counteract this by traveling in groups, though Michigan freshmen in the fall of 1917 found out how tricky that proposition could be, as detailed in a newspaper account following a night of organized sophomore “activities”:

If your glance encountered a mussed up figure, bareheaded and barelegged, with a dying gladiator expression, the chances are a hundred to one that it was some luckless frosh who wandered from the fold and was accordingly gobbled.

The sophs were at large—very much so—while the nocturnal wanderers of 1921 were largely in Porosknit and Munsing wear. Many a stray wearer of the gray cap was forced to roll up his trousers, don his coat and vest wrong side out and be towed about in the pellucid rays of the dying moon by a husky and obliging escort.

Thrilling escapes, marathons for that little old room on the third floor and wild bursts of speed for the tropic of Capricorn under a heavy barrage fire were witnessed by the campus spirits. Today if you see one of the verdants chewing Smith Brothers’ cough drops or carrying an atomizer, you know the why’s and wherefores.\textsuperscript{11}

Given that the Porosknit and Munsingwear mentioned in the article were popular brands of underwear in the early twentieth century, one can imagine the chaos that unfolded in Ann Arbor with scarcely-clad men crisscrossing the campus in frantic efforts to find the safety of their rooms!

At Amherst College, freshmen faced the task of trying to attract as little attention as possible in assembling as a group for the annual freshman class picture. As was the

\textsuperscript{10} Correspondence of Peter Carter Speers, Class of 1914; 1910-1914; Letter to his mother, October 3, 1910. Student Correspondence and Writings Collection, Box 12; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

\textsuperscript{11} Unattributed, undated newspaper clipping entitled, “Verdants Get a Touch of College.” Cecil A. Norton scrapbook, 1916-18, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. See figure 3.1 for an example of the gray cap referenced in the article.
case at many institutions, executing a successful picture was a point of pride for freshman classes at Amherst, as it had to be accomplished within the confines of specific parameters outlined in the Student Handbook: it had to be taken during the first week of the fall term, excluding “Sunday, legal holidays, from midnight to 6 a.m., and Tuesday evening from 7 to 10 p.m.” Furthermore, the picture had to take place on the steps of either of the two buildings designated for the purpose, had to be taken with a tripod, and for it to have been considered a success, “at least fifty (50) per cent of the class must be distinguishable in the negative.” Naturally, other students would try to disrupt or otherwise prevent the picture—not an especially difficult endeavor since the potential hours and locations were common knowledge. And yet the freshmen were honor-bound to try, attempting to attract as little attention as possible before rushing to assemble at the agreed upon moment. The class of 1909 tried their picture, but the disposition of that attempt can be inferred from a student’s scrapbook containing part of the camera. Shown in figure 4.7, the scrap of fabric that formed part of the camera assembly is set down on a scrapbook page with a caption that reads, “Part of camera with which ’09 tried their picture.” Whatever satisfaction there was for the freshmen in executing the picture, there seems to have been equal satisfaction for the other students in preventing it from occurring. These expressions of class strength and unity were fueled by pride and zeal that was sometimes difficult for students—and campuses—to contain.

12 Students’ Handbook of Amherst College, 1908-1909,” in Howard R. Bacon scrapbook (1912), in Amherst Scrapbooks Collection, Series 1, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library. Quoted text is on 47-48 of the handbook.
The Riot Act

Though students’ allegiances to Greek letter organizations and other campus entities slowly started to change interclass dynamics as the latter half of the nineteenth century progressed, class unity and pride were matters of supreme importance to college-going men and women between 1871 and 1941. Identifying themselves by the numerals denoting the years of their anticipated graduation, students cultivated a
collective class identity in which the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. Members of, for instance, the class of 1917, had identities and personalities that were distinct on their own; but as a group, “‘17” was something altogether different than simply an accumulation of each individual’s respective characteristics. One’s class was a team; a family; an ideal—it defined individual students’ relationships with every other person on campus and indeed, with the institution itself. A class that distinguished itself—for noble or ignoble reasons—became part of the collective memory of an institution and could live on for years, even decades, in the stories of students, alumni, professors, and townspeople. It is little wonder, then, that students internalized those stakes and brought them to bear in their class competitions.

The ardor that events such as rushes, sprees and athletic contests inspired could not always be confined to the field of competition, nor could they always be confined to campus. The annals of college history record all manner of student unrest, stretching all the way back to Anthony Wood’s eighteenth century account of a riot that occurred at Oxford University in 1354.13 Though, as in the case at Oxford, students have sometimes had to fight defensively in skirmishes with town officials and residents, the much more common scenario is for students to go on the offensive. Channeling their energies into boisterousness that frequently devolved into destructiveness, students were adept at keeping local police busy and residents nervous. Take, for instance, a description of events in 1885 at the College of New Jersey:

In the fall of that year the Freshman-Sophomore rush and fight that followed resulted in such a scandal that many of the participants were expelled or suspended from college. Their activities were not confined to the campus, for they again took to the Main street for a battle ground. Store windows and street lamps were broken, and then afterward as a special stunt they greased the railroad tracks of the branch line with soap and lard for a hundred yards at an up grade, and the train was held up for an hour or more till a load of sand was brought to put on the greasy tracks. The guilty ones in the affair were eventually

rounded up by Proctor Mat Goldie and his watchmen and fined $200 and expelled for a month. A lot of money for a little soap!14

It was a lot of money, indeed—about $5,400 in 2016 dollars. But the events at the College of New Jersey were not isolated; incidents at three different institutions—one in each of the first three decades of the twentieth century—demonstrate that such episodes were significant in their effects on the morale of the student body, not to mention to property and collective wellbeing of their local communities.

March 1908 saw a riot in Ann Arbor, Michigan reported to have involved about 2,000 students. Documented in clippings from an unidentified newspaper in a UM student’s scrapbook, the root cause of the riot appears to have been a disagreement between a student and the owner of Ann Arbor’s Star Theatre.15 Billed by the paper as “One of the Wildest Nights Ever Seen in Ann Arbor,” not even pleas from the UM president could disperse the crowd. Nor, as it happens, could the fire department, despite its attempts to subdue the students with a fire hose. Wet but undeterred, the students simply cut the hose and ran away with it!

The damage that the student mob inflicted on the theater was estimated at the time to be around $2,000. That destruction was not trivial; adjusted for inflation to 2016 dollars, the damages totaled over $54,000. The seriousness of the affair was demonstrated in the fact that for each of the 15 students arrested bail was set at $1,000—over $27,000 in 2016 dollars.16

14 “When College Days Were Wild.” Unpublished, undated manuscript of Chas. H. La Tourette. Haxing and Horsing; 1878-1909; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 379, Folder 11; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

15 Donald Crandon Miller Scrapbooks, 1906-09. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.

16 Though the scrapbook does not mention the series of events that followed the riot, the students were eventually released on the condition that they pay damages. See Street’s Pandex
A few short years after the events in Ann Arbor, the people of New Haven saw the enthusiasm of their own local student population on display. On the evening of November 2, 1915, a parade of some 2,000 onlookers in support of the Yale football team followed an unfortunate, if somewhat predictable, chain of events: the band played, speeches were made, and...a riot ensued. A student who was there described the scene in his diary:

"After the parade broke up it developed into a riot. They cut the trolley ropes and pulled the trolleys off the cars, and chased an interfering policeman into the coop, where he had to run for refuge. The mayor arrived on the scene and was greeted by shouts of "Puffed Rice," Rice being his name."

It was, on the whole, a less destructive conflagration than was the one at Michigan—only three students were arrested. The main victims seem to have been the conveyances belonging to the city and its residents. Echoing the observation in the diary account, an unattributed newspaper clipping included with the diary entry adds more detail. According to the clipping,

"The gathering was one of the biggest that has turned out at Yale in years and when it took possession of the street there was a general stoppage of traffic. Trolley cars that attempted to make their way through the human barricade were stopped by the expedient of pulling the trolley poles off the wire and in such cases the trolley ropes were cut allowing the poles to fly up in the air wildly and making it necessary for the conductors to get on top of the car and work strenuously to get them down again.

A new feature [of] the celebration was holding up of automobiles. Groups of some 40 or 50 men would assail an auto and stop it by main force, wheeling the machine backwards, and in some cases rocking the car to the rather dubious pleasure of the occupants."

(of the News (Chicago: The Pandex Company, 1908, p. 326) for additional details on the events of the case.

17 Diary and Scrapbook of Paul Phenix, Yale University Archives. The diary entry is dated November 2, 1915.

18 Ibid. The clipping is included with diary entries dated November 3 and 4, 1915.)
Antics such as those perpetrated by the men of Michigan in 1908 and Yale in 1915 likely caused exasperated administrators of the time to wonder, “What were they thinking?!” It is, after all, rare to find a detailed, thoughtfully considered first-person account of a riot by one of its participants. But a Princeton freshman provided just that—offering a rare insight into what is was like to be in the midst of students running wild. Writing to his family in November 1929, the student recounts in a letter the events that he had witnessed and participated in in conjunction with that year’s freshman-sophomore cane spree—an occasion that devolved into what he and others would characterize as a “riot.” In his letter, the student proclaims that the previous night’s unrest was “the best fun that I have ever had.” As chronicles of collegiate riots go, an account from “inside the mob” is especially illuminating:

Wednesday, November 13, 1929.

Dear Family-

Well, I had such an interesting evening last night that I think I will have to write you about. Last night the annual Freshman-Sophomore Cane Spree was scheduled to take place over in front of Witherspoon at 8:45 [...] 

The cane spree was most exciting, nearly 750 boys being present. The Freshman won the lightweight fall and a [Soph] took the middleweight bout. Following this second bout, old fruit was exchanged between the two classes. After the uproar was over, the heavyweight bout was staged and the Soph won, whereupon the Sophs charged the Freshmen. About a half of the freshmen left. A free-for-all ensued. Frank, the chief proctor, and two or three football men tried to stop the rumpus. Then everybody turned on them. We roughed them up for about fifteen minutes and then turned and headed for Nassau St. The riot was on! Somehow or other I found myself in the front rank of the mob, 500 or 600 strong, tearing down Nassau Street. We all piled into the first movie, stayed there for a minute, and then tore out for the other movie. Frank and the other proctors, Mike and Harry, and two policemen beat us there, so we did not get in.

Then we walked back up the street to the Balt and then to Renwick’s. At Renwick’s the Sophomores blocked the door and refused to let the Freshmen in. I almost got in only somebody threw some water out of the window on George and me, so we got out. After this, the mob stretched out across the street and refused to let any cars go by. This was great fun; every time a car came by we stopped it, hopped on the running board, and rocked the car for a while. At this point, two policemen tried to stop us, but they got pretty well roughed up and I succeeded in getting one of them’s hat. Some other fellow got his badge. We
stopped a few more cars, one of which contained the Governor. We happened to break a window in his car, and he got real griped but he did not say anything. Dean Heeremance drove by, and we called on him for a speech, whereat he rose and in a short good-natured speech told us to go ahead and have a good time.

By this time the two policemen had gotten pretty sore, I don’t see why, nobody was doing much to them, and they got in a Ford police car and drove through the mob fairly slowly. Everybody booed them so the driver lost his head and turned the car around and drove back real fast through the crowd in two swerves, injuring two boys and I don’t see yet how he missed hitting more. At this the boys really got sore and chased the car up the street, but the cops were yellow and did not show up again. We contented ourselves with pulling down the traffic signs. George and I got some beauties. Then we stoned the traffic booth at Nassau and Witherspoon Sts. and fairly well demolished it. Next we proceeded to overturn another Ford police car that was standing nearby and it did not look so well when we were through.

For the next ten or fifteen minutes we stood around and razzed Frank and Harry and kidded Mike about his red tie. Mike is a good egg. About this time somebody turns the hydrants on, and the boys did their best to hinder Frank and Harry from turning them off. The crowd kept on down to the end of Nassau Street where we woke everybody up in Miss Wine’s school. Continuing out the Trenton Road all the cars were stopped and street lights destroyed. When we reached Hun’s School we set fire to two big piles of leaves in the front yard and woke everybody up. The principal came out and began a reproving address which was quickly cut short.

The last stop was the Borough Courthouse or Police Station. There we broke all the windows and dared the cops to do something. They got scared and went inside. The bombardment continued until about 11:45 when Dean Gauss’ assistant came on the scenes and said that if we boys would retire, he would see to it that nobody would be reported. This suited everybody fine, so we all hollered that if Frank would smile and Harry would take his hat off (It seems that nobody had been able during the whole evening to swipe it), we would go home. Frank and Harry obliged and we left. It certainly was the best fun that I have ever had and I will always class among my best recollections of Princeton.

Doubtless this will all sound pretty rough to you all, but it was all done in the spirit of fun, and anybody that did not resist us and was nice about it got a cheer instead of a razz et al. I have only been able to give you the highspots about it and I will tell you more when I see you.

Sincerely,

Bob

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19 Cane Spree; 1962-1997; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 379, Folder 4; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. The letter is from Robert L. Clifford ’33 to his family.
Notable in the letter are the student’s word choices; he refers to the event as a “riot” and its participants as a “mob,” suggesting that he was well aware of the menacing, though not, in his estimation, malevolent nature of the participants’ activities. It was, after all, “done in the spirit of fun.” This account encapsulates the feeling that fellow Princeton attendee F. Scott Fitzgerald had articulated nearly a decade before as voiced by a character in his novel *This Side of Paradise*: “what we feel now is the sense of all the gorgeous youth that has rioted through here in two hundred years.” The riotous (and rioting) youth to which Fitzgerald and the author of the letter allude characterize the vibrancy and energy of the college experience in bygone eras—and the degree to which students could sometimes be oblivious to the consequences of their actions.

**Riots Reconsidered**

Henry Seidel Canby, recalling turn-of-the-century Yale, wrote, “I had entered a state within a state, and joined a faction of that state, the student body, aware really only of themselves, their own life, their own ideals.” This lack of awareness—or, more accurately, an intense, perhaps blinding devotion to and focus upon one’s class—is readily apparent in the riots described in the preceding section. Exuberant students could not always be contained by the ivy-covered confines of their campuses; aware, as Canby wrote, “only of themselves,” their frenzied energy was sometimes channeled into destructiveness with little regard for the moral or legal consequences. But to chalk these episodes up to simple mindless mayhem risks overlooking some of their significance. Though the Princeton student who described the riot of 1929 to his family in a letter notes several instances of unrepentant vandalism, the context in which he presents these episodes is important. Despite smashing all of the windows in the police station

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and terrorizing the governor in his car, he does not view his actions or those of his fellow students as intentionally mean-spirited or menacing; on the contrary, he writes, “It certainly was the best fun that I have ever had and I will always class among my best recollections of Princeton…Doubtless this will all sound pretty rough to you all, but it was all done in the spirit of fun…” 22 This is a context that historians frequently miss in making broad generalizations about student behavior or relying too heavily on secondary sources to describe it. And it is precisely the context one needs to attempt to understand the mindset and motivations of students nearly a century ago.

Like the Princeton student mentioned above, the student at Yale who recorded the 1915 riot in New Haven invites scholars to bear in mind the circumstances in which it took place. “It was quite a roughhouse last night but the papers exagerated it and the mayor lied about it in court. The judge gave the mayor a good call for his hot-headedness.” 23 Though the entry does not suggest the ways in which the papers exaggerated their reporting of events, nor does it specify what the mayor was thought to have lied about, it does serve to remind modern scholars that these events necessarily looked different to those who participated in them than they did to the public, law enforcement, or the owners of the property damaged or destroyed. That is not to suggest that the students acted appropriately; rather, the first-person accounts show us that in looking beyond broad generalizations, there is an explanation for some of these behaviors that at first glance seem to be without redeeming value. They were, in essence, time- and place-bound expressions of youthful vitality; though the destructive end results are the salient points historians have used to define these behaviors, the student-created accounts challenge that characterization by pointing to motives that bear

22 Robert L. Clifford letter dated November 13, 1929. Cane Spree; 1962-1997; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 379, Folder 4; Princeton University Archives.

more resemblance to ignorance than malevolence. Viewed as misspent energy rather
than malice, the actions of the students make sense as a natural extension of their
efforts to create identities for themselves and their peer groups that were marked by an
“us-versus-them, all-for-one” mentality.

Though they lacked the spectacle of large-scale combat, the less-direct methods
of confrontation, such as class proclamations, were an influential part of student culture
in their own right. At institutions where class proclamations were an established part of
student culture, students devoted significant amounts of time to composing, printing, and
posting those materials and naturally took a great deal of pride in them. It is little
wonder, then, that the fruits of those efforts would find their way into students’
scrapbooks and other collections of memorabilia. Additionally, instances such as the
presence of a proclamation impugning the Princeton class of 1900 in the scrapbook of a
member of that class suggests that students understood the gamesmanship involved
and held at least a grudging respect for a well-composed taunt. But proclamations were
memorable to students for another reason: they contributed to, and sometimes provided
an outlet for, the psychological stress of class competition. In the words of the editors of
the Daily Princetonian, they dispersed “in a harmless way, much of that feeling of
intense class rivalry.”24 Yet for new students they may not have seemed quite so
harmless. The caption accompanying a proclamation in the Ohio University student’s
scrapbook referenced earlier in this chapter recalled the “feeling of terror we freshmen
had that first week.”25 Like a menacing shadow in the dark revealed as harmless once
the lights are on, hindsight would surely have made the dire warnings and promises of
torment contained in some proclamations seem laughable. However, for the trembling


25 Gladys Blanche Fish Scrapbook Collection, 1914-19, Ohio University Archives. See
figure 4.6.
freshman new to campus, they would have made a lasting impression—an indelible reminder of how easily fears take on a life of their own.

Unfortunately for some students, their interactions with older students were not limited to the minor indignities of freshman rules or class proclamations. Hazing was a common phenomenon and had a complicated role in campus life. In its most benign forms it was whimsical and humorous, while its worst permutations were little more than thinly-veiled brutality passed off as “school spirit.” Yet in the middle there was a vast grey area where distinctions about what was or was not hazing are not easy discern. It was a phenomenon that vexed administrators and students alike, though the latter were instrumental in perpetuating its existence. Students’ accounts show that hazing was a behavior that defied easy categorization, with those who endured it sometimes emerging as its staunchest supporters.

Hazing, Part I: The Benign

Hazing, as it existed from the 1870s to the 1940s, was, in some ways, less remarkable in its day because its presence on campus was so pervasive that it was simply an accepted part of college life. Things that now appear to be hazing might have barely drawn the notice of students in that era. Some iterations of the rules described in chapter three, for instance, were a form of hazing. But they were hazing in its mildest form; being asked to sing a song or recite a poem on command was inconvenient, and perhaps embarrassing, but was more or less harmless. The rules for freshmen at the University of Vermont in 1923 are representative:

From the first Monday of College, until the following Saturday at 6 P.M., wear a shoe-string as a tie.

Also on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of that week, when an upperclassman or Sophomore yells: “Quack!”, do the Goose-Step for ten steps, with your arms stiff against your sides, and raising your legs rigidly to a great height.
On Thursday, Friday and Saturday, wear a coat inside out and carry your books tied with quarter-inch rope.26

Though not high fashion, shoe-string ties and inside-out jackets presented little opportunity for lasting harm. Freshmen at Princeton were subjected to similar minor indignities; on command, freshmen were expected to act out the directions given them; they included, “Roll down the hill and make a noise like a hoop,” “Wrestle with temptation,” “Strain yourself,” “Expand like the binomial theorem,” “scramble like an egg,” and “develop like a film.”27

Just as the rambunctiousness of student life spilled out from the campus, so too did the practice of hazing. In one instance at Princeton in the 1890s, hazing’s effects made it all the way to the hometown of one unfortunate freshman, courtesy of the postal service. The incident is preserved in a manuscript in that institution's archives:

Some nights later a group of hazers visited a freshman on the top floor of his dormitory, and after the freshman had entertained them with various stunts, they made him write a letter home to his father, who was a prominent minister. The letter they dictated to him read:

“Dear Father:

Have just come back from prayer meeting and am now playing poker and throwing dice with a party of sophomores, who are undoubtedly the finest men in college. I hope you are doing the same.

Your Loving Son,

Walter.”

They very kindly consented to mail it for him!28

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26 Class of 1925 Proclamation to Class of 1926, “Ye Spineless Hordes of Unnurtured Ingrates.” Lois Burbank scrapbook (1927), RG 81, Box 12, University of Vermont Archives.

27 “1909 Hazing Instructions Given By 1912 Sophomores to 1913 Freshmen September 1909.” Sidney Henry Horner; dates not examined; Scrapbook Collection, Box 273; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

28 “When College Days Were Wild.” Unpublished, undated manuscript of Chas. H. La Tourette. Hazing and Horsing; 1878-1909; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 379, Folder 11; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton
Collectively, these forms of hazing probably added more to the lives of college students than they detracted. In time they became fodder for funny stories and bemused recollections. But shoestring ties and silly walks were not the extent of what some students endured; for them, hazing was neither amusing nor fun. The incidents in the following section show the other end of the continuum, where hazing constituted a significant threat to students’ mental and physical wellbeing.

**Hazing, Part II: The Brutal**

If the frivolity of impromptu songs and unusual attire represent hazing in its mildest incarnation, there are other, uglier examples of its worst iterations. Physical and psychological torment at the hands of older classmates doubtlessly left some freshmen irreparably harmed by the experience. Not surprisingly, students rarely included accounts—whether they were the inflictors or the recipients of said abuse—in the materials they created.\(^29\) What one does find with respect to class-based hazing are third-person descriptions of such activities. Some of the most vivid accounts from the institutions studied here came from Princeton University, where the archives record over two and a half centuries of students’ conduct and misconduct. Two unlucky freshmen from the 1890s who thought themselves above the sordid world of hazing had their illusions dispelled in one such example:

> One cold night in November a small group sneaked into a dormatory where [two] “fresh” freshmen room together. One had made his boast that a relative of his was a Trustee and they wouldn’t dare haze him, and the other one was the son of a world famous musician, and equally “high hat.”

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\(^29\) There is ample evidence of materials designed to inspire the fear of hazing; much of it is tied to fraternities and secret societies. This is a provocative and promising avenue of scholarship, but one that is beyond the scope of this dissertation.
The one who had boasted of his prestige was stripped to his birthday suit and forced to crawl under a desk with his rear section protruding, and then they paddled him with a shingle till he yelled for mercy. But this wasn’t enough to satisfy them, so they made him sit in a wash bowl filled with cold water, handed him two toothpicks to use as oars, and told him to row for his life, keeping him at it till he was exhausted. If there had been a college crew in those days, that freshman certainly would have made the Varsity without any trouble!

When they finished with him they compelled the musician’s son to undress to his B.V.D.’s, and leading him from the room they took to the rear of the campus and made him climb a tree and sing “Nearer My God Too Thee.” Every time his voice faltered they’d throw stones through the tree and yell “keep singing!” His vocal efforts finally attracted a watchman, who led the shivering freshman to his room.30

Bragging about one’s indifference to hazing, or one’s immunity to it, attracted the notice of other students and could invite more—and more severe—hazing. It was often seen as bad form to offer resistance to hazing beyond a certain point; though freshmen certainly did their part to avoid it, there was a risk of alienation from one’s peers if an individual created the perception of being above or otherwise not subject to the practice of hazing. This phenomenon extended to retaliating against one’s tormentors, especially when that retaliation seemed to the rest of the student body to go too far. Though freshmen were limited in their methods for revenge, they did from time to time manage to repay their tormentors in kind with the sort of psychological distress of which they were so often on the receiving end. A quick-thinking (and quick-swimming) Princeton freshman taught some sophomores what was likely an unforgettable lesson on the dangers of hazing—a lesson so successful that it turned nearly the entire student body against him:

One of the most sensational escapades in college history occurred in 1885, when a group of sophomores one night kidnapped a freshman from his room and took him down to the railroad drawbridge that spanned the canal, and threw him in, not knowing whether he could swim or not. The freshman, fortunately, was a good swimmer, so he swam under water to the piling on the other side and came up behind the boards unseen by the sophomores. When he failed to appear on the surface after the lapse of a minute or so, they became alarmed thinking he

30 “College Days,” La Tourette, Princeton University Library.
had drowned, and quickly started to dive in and search for him. The freshman in
the meantime had sneaked out from the other side of the piling unobserved by
the frightened sophomores, and made his way across the field to the road a half
mile away and ran to his room.

The excited sophomores spent the rest of the night in a vain search for the
“body”, and the next day fully realizing the consequences of the act and the
tragedy they believed they were responsible for, and in spite of the fact that they
knew what the result would be, they nevertheless reported it to the authorities
and admitted their guilt.

A rescue squad was quickly formed to search for the victim with grappling
hooks, and an excited crowd of students and townspeople rushed to the scene of
the “drowning”. At this stage of the affair the freshman saw that the scare had
gone far enough to prove a lesson to the hazers, so he made his appearance on
the campus. This was the last time any freshman was ever thrown into the
canal, and the final blow to any such “rough house” hazing. The freshman for his
part in prolonging the scare, was immediately ignored by every student in college
outside of a few members of his own class.31

As the actions of that clever freshman show, the repercussions for resisting
hazing could prove as damaging as the hazing itself. Naturally, students preferred to be
left to their own devices in carrying out and regulating hazing; anything or anyone that
upset that balance, whether it was an administrator or another student, could incur their
wrath. The sad evidence for this is seen in an episode of student violence that took
place at Princeton in the late 1890s, wherein a sophomore was attacked by his
classmates. The victim was a member of the class of 1900; a newspaper account of the
incident is included in the scrapbook of another member of that class:

Byron Kyser Hunsberger, a young student, was lying unconscious in his bed this
morning from injuries received in a furious onslaught with snowballs made upon
him near the railroad station by the sophomores yesterday. […]

A strange thing about the case is that Hunsberger is not a freshman, but a
sophomore, but he is unpopular with some of his classmates, because he is
suspected of having given information to the faculty concerning some of their
misdeeds. Members of the junior class, too, show little sympathy for him in his
present distress, as it is declared that three of their number were recently
suspended in consequence of information given by him.

31 Ibid.
The nature of the young man's injuries is such that it seems impossible they could have been inflicted by missiles of plain snow, no matter how tightly packed, and it is believed that some of the snowballs simply served to conceal pieces of ice, if not stones.32

To be shunned or, worse, actively antagonized by one's classmates, was especially significant because class camaraderie was such a substantial part of the college experience in the late nineteenth century. Victims of hazing faced the added insult of being punished by their peers, or perhaps the entire student body, for upsetting the natural order that governed student life. But the bounds of this order were sometimes difficult to discern, as the following excerpt attests:

Only a handful of the freshmen had been at boarding school and what was known at Princeton as "hazing", designed to create a sense of unity among the new students was quickly apparent. Fortunately I had been put wise to this custom by an elderly Princetonian I met... I was glad of this because, although an Englishman, I did not get off lightly when faced with these traditions, nor did I wish to do so. Freshman had to wear black socks and small black caps, and to get off the pavement when passing sophomores or other more senior students. Occasionally a sock inspection was held as we left the dining hall and any freshman not clad according to the rules might be chased across the campus by older students and perhaps "debagged" into the bargain.

The culmination of hazing came after two months or so when freshmen had to pose on the steps of Whig Hall for the "Flour Picture" taken after ten minutes pelting by the sophomores with flour, eggs and other missiles. Of course we had been warned to wear old clothes, some of which were only fit for burning afterwards. Some of the freshmen resented the custom but most of us regarded it as good fun. The worst part was getting the flour out of our hair afterwards.33

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32 "Hazed By His Own Classmates." Undated, unattributed newspaper clipping. Scrapbook of Ralph H. Poole, Class of 1900. Princeton University Archives. An additional undated, unattributed article on the same page in the Poole scrapbook describes what appears to be another incident of hazing suffered by Hunsberger, where a sophomore was made to sing for several hours by three seniors. Though the article does not identify Hunsberger by name, it says that the sophomore in question, "...had become unpopular by reporting features of a previous hazing to faculty." The three seniors were suspended. Hunsberger persisted and went on to graduate with the class of 1900. Though one might be tempted to conclude from the stories presented here that Princeton students endured more hazing or that it was more prevalent or more severe at Princeton than at other institutions, that conclusion is not necessarily correct. Rather, the quality and quantity of accounts of these activities at Princeton speak to the strength of the archival materials housed there and the careful efforts of its students and observers to document all aspects of its student life.

33 Sir John Benn, "Thoughts at Eighty," 1984; Student Correspondence and Writings Collection, Box 1, Folder 3; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections.
Though the account above was written long after the author’s student days had ended, it is included here because it shows the same ambivalence that one finds in student-created accounts related to hazing. The author indicates that he did not wish to get off lightly with respect to hazing, and that the students “regarded it as good fun.” Herein lies a curious contradiction that challenges the conventional wisdom that hazing was a uniformly negative phenomenon: although it is clear from archival sources that hazing subjected students to an array of physical and mental abuses, there is some evidence to suggest that students’ views on matter are more complex than that. One area where this becomes apparent is in examining a popular form of hazing that took place at some institutions during the years covered in this study: the forcible cutting or shaving of male students’ hair.

Shear Madness

Of the many trials that freshmen students endured, few were as visible as having the hair shorn from their heads. At certain institutions, sophomores, or occasionally seniors, took it as their privilege to part freshmen from their hair. It was a practice that was ostensibly prohibited—and that prohibition was one that students happily ignored. The contrast between what administrators said and what students did is succinctly illustrated in the scrapbook of a University of Michigan student; it includes a clipping of a newspaper article that reads, in part:

The hair-cutting war is now on, and as usual the freshman toast master was the first victim...Yesterday afternoon he was seized by a party of five or six sophs while he was at baseball practice at the gymnasium. He was taken off to a quiet corner and held until the deed was done. No one seems to know who the sophomores were.

That was the signal for hostilities to begin. All yesterday afternoon and evening small crowds were wandering about and visiting the rooms of the freshmen...

Collections, Princeton University Library. "Debagging" is a British slang term for removing one's pants.
President Angell has given out this statement: “The faculty is emphatically opposed to the hair-cutting and should any of the participants be discovered the punishment of expulsion will be meted out.”

It would seem, based on the lock of hair in the scrapbook, that the threat of punishment did not dissuade any of the perpetrators from participating.

Figure 4.8. “HAIR-CUTTING COMMENCED.” Duncan H. Pierce scrapbook, 1904-1907; Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. The caption reads, “Hair from the Freshman Toast Master.”

A few years later, at the State University of Kentucky, the president of that institution, Henry Stites Barker, issued an appeal of his own in an attempt to stamp out hair cutting on his campus. Hazing had been pervasive at that institution in its early years and was firmly entrenched in its student culture by the time Barker assumed the presidency. Unlike many other institutions, it was seniors, rather than sophomores, who cut the hair of freshman men. At the outset of the fall semester in 1915 each male

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34 “HAIR-CUTTING COMMENCED.” Unattributed, undated article in Duncan H. Pierce scrapbook, 1904-1907. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.
senior received a letter from President Barker reiterating the institution’s prohibition against hazing and warning of dire consequences should that prohibition be ignored. In contrast to the tone of President Angell of Michigan, Barker attempted to appeal to his students’ integrity in ending the practice of hair cutting. In his estimation, his students were good at heart—a goodness that could be called upon and reasoned with. It was in that spirit that Barker wrote his letter to the senior class in the fall of 1915; in addition to the copy sent to each male senior it was also published in the student newspaper, *The Kentucky Kernel*. It read:

My Dear Young Friend:—

At the coming session of the University, you will be in the Senior class.

The object of this letter is to call your attention to the fact that the faculty has passed a stringent rule against hazing of any kind, and especially against that form of hazing which consists in cutting the Freshmen’s hair. I also wish to remind you that, last year, when certain young men in the dormitories were reinstated for the offense of hazing, it was done upon the promise that hereafter all sorts of hazing would be banished from the campus. That was the contract signed by all the students in the dormitories.

Frequently, when students have gotten into trouble in the University and been punished, they have appealed to me, as President of the University, on the grounds they did not know the existence of the law for the breach of which they were punished. Thus far, I have always helped them out of trouble, but having obligated myself to the faculty to carry out this rule, it will be my duty to see that the law against hazing is enforced next session.

I hope you will return to school in good health and spirits, and with the full determination to assist me in the enforcement of all lawful discipline on the campus and to uphold my hand in everything for the good of “State.”

I hope you will not consider this in any way, a threat, but that you will feel that it has come from my heart and for your benefit.

Hoping to see you soon on the campus, I am

HENRY S. BARKER.  

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The approach that Barker chose had its intended effect on the seniors—they did not cut the hair of any freshmen that fall. Yet his prohibition was met with resistance from an unexpected source: the freshmen. Some of them believed in the practice so strongly that they shaved their own heads. This stark example shows the hold that hazing culture had on some institutions—the idea of ending the practice prompted the individuals who suffered the most from its existence to attempt to keep it going.

An editorial that appeared in the Kernel the following week offers some insight into why students resisted the abolition of hair cutting at UK and, more importantly, speaks to the broader appeal of hazing activities in the hearts and minds of early twentieth-century college students. The editorial read:

Time was when it was the yearly custom for the mighty Senior to descend upon the timorous Freshman and ruthlessly part from him his crowning glory. During the latter part of each September the campus would resemble nothing so much as a barber shop floor.

This ancient and time-honored custom has been abolished. For which we are sorry.

The wholesale destruction of Freshman foliage possessed many advantages. First, it lowered the beginner’s estimate of his own importance and rendered his mind more receptive to the few bits of knowledge which he had overlooked while in high school, and must needs gather here. Second, it enabled the newcomers to "get together" thus inculcating a great amount of class spirit, and incidentally a large supply of college spirit. The University that possesses no class spirit will assuredly possess no college spirit. An attitude of indifference in class activities breeds a like attitude in University affairs.

Again, a Freshman who has felt the Seniors' power has an intense desire to "stick it" for three years so that he may become a "Lord of the campus," and make the cold chills run down the back of the first-year man.

Hair-cutting is an extremely light form of hazing, if it can be regarded as such. It assuredly works no physical harm. The worst that has been said of it is that it lowers the dignity of the victim. As for that, dignity should not possess a very exalted position in the Freshman make-up, nor indeed does the Freshman generally expect it to do so.36

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The commitment of the freshmen to ensure the survival of a campus tradition, even one as burdensome as hair cutting, was noble, if perhaps misguided. However, had they given it just a bit more time, human nature and college students’ propensity to disregard laws while obeying customs would have had time to run their course. Barker’s letter was specifically addressed to seniors, and it was this specificity that students exploited. Sophomores, reasoning that the letter had technically been addressed only to seniors, happily stepped into the void and revived the practice of hair cutting within a week and a half. Though four sophomores were expelled, the torch—or, more accurately, the clippers—had been passed.

Sophomores would continue to shave the heads of freshmen for several years. Yet with the change, student sentiment slowly began to shift. Just two years later, in September 1917, an editorial in the Kernel offered a mild rebuke to students that emphasized the notion that while hair cutting was relatively minor offense in its estimation, the students had been asked not to do it and that continuing the practice put the faculty in an untenable position. The editorial stated in part:

The shearing of freshman locks has begun. The Kernel wishes to remind the students that this is forbidden by the authorities of the University.

As a student, and frankly speaking, the editor of the Kernel has been inclined to look upon hair-cutting as an innocent expression of boyish predilection for mischief and fun. [...] In fact we do not believe the faculty looks upon hair-cutting as an enormous crime, but as hair-cutting is a form of hazing from which serious consequences have resulted in the past, it adopted the rule providing punishment for the offense.

The Kernel is in favor of the enforcement of law, federal, statuary and municipal; the Kernel is in favor of obedience to laws of this University. The faculty, thru its accredited head, has appealed to the students in a proper way not to thrust upon them, by breach of this law, the disagreeable duty of enforcing its provisions. The Kernel hopes, without in any sense undertaking the dictate, that the students of this University will see their way clear to co-operate in a frank
and manly way in this effort gradually to remove this annually recurring source of annoyance and embarrassment.37

While sophomores did not heed the call that fall, or in the years that immediately followed, the practice continued to lose its luster, until finally in 1923 the sophomores took it upon themselves to end the practice. According to the *Kernel*:

After years of effort by the faculty and the advanced classes of the University to put an end to what many considered the out-of-date custom on the part of the sophomores of humiliating freshmen by shaving their heads, the sophomores themselves have abolished the disagreeable practice. At a meeting of sophomores held in chapel Saturday morning, the class voted to put an end to all hazing by hair cutting. However, there is no relief for the sixty first year men who have already lost their locks.

While the sophs took matters into their own hands and to them is due the credit of giving the order, it has been hinted that upper classmen had been in serious consultation with them for some time with this end in view. The chief reason, as given by the sophomores for taking this step was not that they considered it so serious a means of hazing or found in it much to criticise, but that it was displeasing to the faculty and in direct conflict with a faculty ruling.38

Though the cutting of freshman students’ hair continued its fall out of favor as the twentieth century progressed, a final example demonstrates why blanket presumptions about hazing are problematic. Is hazing still hazing with its label removed and its actions recast as an officially-sanctioned activity? Hair cutting at the Michigan College of Mines and Technology begs that question. At that institution, hair cutting was regulated such that its location, hours of permissibility, and means of cutting were clearly spelled out in the college rule book. According to the *1929-30 Freshman Bible*, the terms under which hair cutting occurred were as follows:

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38 “Freshmen Will Retain Glossy Hair, Sophs Declare at Class Meet.” *The Kentucky Kernel*, September 28, 1923.
HAIR CUTTING REGULATIONS

The Seniors have adopted the following rules regarding hair cutting, which will be rigidly enforced and must be adhered to...

Rules

1. Clippers may be used, and these must not have any broken teeth.
2. Scissors having blunt points must be used.
3. **Sharp implements are barred.**
4. No classman shall enter street cars, private or fraternity houses, stores, etc., in order to catch an opposing classman.
5. There shall be no hair cutting in any college building.
6. No hair cutting shall be allowed between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.
7. All hair cutting must be carried on in the presence of Seniors.
8. Seniors and non-combatants will wear white arm bands,
9. Tufts of hair, labeled with name of previous owner, shall be hung on the gym bulletin board the next morning.39

In many respects, the spirit of the activity and its underlying goal—to single out and acculturate freshmen—was maintained. This was accomplished by displaying the hair as a trophy, of sorts, in a public space—in this instance, the gym bulletin board referenced in rule nine above. The singling out of freshmen was also maintained by ensuring that any loss of hair freshman suffered would be remain on display, for the *Freshman Bible* stipulated that “Under no circumstances is any Freshman allowed to get a haircut during the first week of rushes. Violation of this rule is punishable by appearance before the Senior Disciplinary Council. What you have left can be trimmed Sunday.”40

By all indications, hair cutting was not considered hazing at M.C.M.T. Even as the rules spelled out the terms for cutting hair, they specifically prohibited hazing: “Neither the faculty nor the student body will tolerate hazing of any kind. Even those harmless yet embarrassing indignities which are usually meted out to the freshman with

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40 Ibid.
the idea of “making a man out of him” are strongly discountenanced."41 But if an institution imposes rules of engagement, frames an activity as a competition, and removes the stigma of hazing, what does that activity become? Perhaps hazing is only a matter of context? Those question underpin many of the events of the next chapter on class competitions. Yet these distinctions were important, and they were ones that have long vexed college presidents who struggled with how to regulate students’ activities.

**Another Perspective**

Though students are the focus of this study, it is easier to appreciate their conceptions of hazing and hazing-like behaviors if one has points of comparison for how college administrators viewed those same activities. The University of Kentucky’s Henry Stites Barker demonstrated one approach, as discussed earlier in this chapter. His benevolent style assumed the best in students. One of the luminaries of higher education in the late nineteenth, Stanford University president David Starr Jordan, took a different tack as he confronted the issue of hazing on his own campus. Jordan was a pragmatist; he knew that there were limits on the effective authority that an institution could exert in the name of attempting to control students’ behavior. Policies that went too far in curbing the behavior of the worst students were, in his eyes, an affront to upstanding, right-minded students. Jordan wasted no time on trying to reform the incorrigibles—it was better, in his opinion, to simply remove them from campus. Wrote Jordan, "If the good a college does to a man is less than the mischief due to his presence, it is well to get rid of him. This consideration should, I think, be the basis of college discipline."42 Jordan understood better than most presidents of the era the

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41 Ibid.

extent to which the energies expended by faculty and administrators on discipline were in vain:

The best way to cure a student of petty vices and childish trickery is to make a man of him. Give him something real to do and he will not fritter his nervous strength away in conviviality or in degrading associations. But to forbid excesses and abuses, putting nothing in their places, cannot be very effective. Not long ago I had occasion to say: “If your college assume to stand in loco parentis, with rod in hand and spy-glasses on its nose, it will not do much in the way of moral training. The fear of punishment will not make young men moral or religious—least of all a punishment so easily evaded as the discipline of a college. If your college claims to be a reform school, your professors detective officers, and your president a chief of police, the student will give them plenty to do. A college cannot take the place of a parent. To claim that it does is mere pretense. You may win by inspiration, not by fear... “The petty restraints that may aid in the control of college sneaks and college snobs are an insult to college men and college women. It is for the training of men and women that colleges exist.”

President Jordan had a particular distaste for hazing, though for him the line between hazing and common college activities such as class rushes was a blurry one.

The form of rushing that he considered most pernicious was not the formalized annual contests such as flag rush, but rather the rush in its older, more brutish form which tended to simply be coordinated guerilla attacks of physical violence by members of one class or group against another. Of the former type of rushes Jordan was more tolerant—but not by much:

I am asked to say a word about hazing. This name is applied to a species of ruffianism which owes its continuance from year to year to the power of tradition rather than to any natural desire to do mean or cowardly things. It is difficult to deal with it effectively, for two reasons. The one is that it shades off by slight degrees into the mere practical joke, and the right to play such jokes is dear to the college man. More serious is the fact that hazing is a crime of the night. It is usually performed under conditions of secrecy, and the victim is not often willing to turn state’s evidence. With no secret police, and no desire to employ such instruments, the college authorities are usually powerless to detect the wrong-doer. A general remedy is to get rid not only of the men guilty of hazing, but also of the kind of men who are likely to take part in it. Usually a ruffian is known as such by his character as well as by his acts. If the ruffians are eliminated on general principles, the residue, being gentlemen, will act like gentlemen.

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43 Ibid., 404.
A form of hazing just now prevalent is the “rush.” This name is applied to a rough-and-tumble fight, more or less premeditated, between the freshmen and sophomores. The rush may be of two sorts, the one an unprovoked attack taking place on the staircases, in passage-ways, or in the class rooms, or on the streets at night; or it may be a sort of match game on the open field, resulting from a challenge from one class to the other. The first form of rush is intolerable, and could hardly take place more than once in a well-ordered institution. The second has some redeeming features, and is not without its defenders as a “manly sport.” It is, however, often dangerous in its violence, much more so than football and other orderly games. In all legitimate games there is some sort of time limit, and some rule as to fair play. Training of some kind is presupposed, and those of frail physique may keep away if they desire. But not so with the rush. Class spirit impels every young man to stand by his associates.

The rush, moreover, is likely to leave an aftermath of guerrilla warfare or of attempts at retaliation, and some cases of personal hazing can be distinctly traced to it. In general, any performance of college students which tends to loosen the bonds of personal courtesy has a bad effect. The rush in all its forms makes for rowdyism. Rowdyism is not the worst of vices, but it is a vice, and its influence is always and everywhere opposed to manliness.44

Jordan’s willingness to jettison students who merely possessed the capacity to commit hazing offenses would have thrown the great majority of students whose words and photographs are presented in these pages out of school. As the hair cutting at M.C.M.T. shows, hazing can be in the eye of the beholder. The accounts included in the next chapter suggest that President Jordan may have misunderstood the spirit of the better-organized rush activities; they were clearly a source of enjoyment and pride for many students. Nor was he necessarily accurate in his criticisms of the lack of fairness and sportsmanship; on paper, at least, rules to maintain relative levels of fairness, safety, and order did exist. But Jordan was correct in his observation that “Class spirit impels every young man to stand by his associates.” The tale of Byron Hunsberger is a reminder that few sins were as grievous in the realm of college life—or as difficult to live down—as having been seen, whether through action or inaction, to have betrayed one’s classmates. The call to stand by one’s associates was a powerful one, and as the next

44 Ibid., 407-08.
chapter shows, rarely was that call more urgently heeded than in competitions between classes.
Chapter 5 – The Heat of Battle: Class Competitions

Of the battles that unfolded between classes, few, if any, matched the intensity of a “rush.” In their earliest forms, rushes were simply brawls that erupted between classes—often with little or no discernible provocation. Henry Sheldon, writing in the era when rushes were still very much a part of campus life and student culture, described their evolution, writing that a rush:

…took place on leaving prayers at chapel where the freshmen came out first and the classes in the rear crowded them, pushing and rushing them until a fight arose. Sometimes it also occurred in other places. From this primitive free fight was developed in time an organized formal conflict or match game taking place on an open field under fixed conditions, and resulting from a challenge sent from one side to the other.\(^1\)

In time, rushes grew from disorganized chaos into what could charitably be called “better-organized chaos.” As Sheldon observed, in evolving from their origins as haphazard fisticuffs, rushes came to be oriented around members of opposing classes vying to lay claim to some symbolic object or physical space within some commonly agreed upon parameters of competition. Though the various iterations of rushes generally had rules of engagement, the heat of battle sometimes left their enforcement in doubt. Eventually, the violence of rushes would give way to other activities on many campuses, as nervous administrators and others concerned about the brutality of such contests looked to replace them with more “dignified” competitions.\(^2\)

Rushes were must-see spectacles that attracted the attention of a curious public, and it was not unusual for people to travel long distances from surrounding towns to witness them. Hanover, New Hampshire was one such place; a Dartmouth freshman wrote to his mother, “You should have seen the tourists that flocked into town for the

\(^1\) Sheldon, Student Life, 102.

\(^2\) See Simon J. Bronner, Campus Traditions: Folklore From the Old-Time College to the Modern Mega-University (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2012), 118-34, on the violence of rushes.
Fresh-Soph rush."³ But as exciting as they may have been for the public, rushes were even more thrilling for students. Whether a flag rush, bag rush, pole rush or cane rush, these competitions compelled students to fight—often literally—for one another and for the honor of their respective classes. It was generally understood, however, that these contests were matters of collective struggle rather than personal malice. Formally and informally, students were encouraged to leave hard feelings behind on the field of battle; the Michigan College of Mining and Technology, for instance, placed this gentle reminder in its freshman rule book: “Here you are considered as a man among men and the class fights are intended to form class organization. Do not make these class arguments personal.”⁴

The various rushes were occasions of tremendous importance for students. Steeped in meaning and destined to become part of campus lore, rushes challenged students to demonstrate their mettle to themselves, their fellow students, and to cheering crowds dotted with college officials and alumni. The importance of these events as rites of passage and as one of the key building blocks of class identity and peer bonding led students to celebrate and memorialize them with souvenirs and photographs, and to share the details of these events in their letters home. Collectively, these accounts illustrate that beneath the veneer of violence lay the foundations of duty, commitment, and love for one’s class and the fellows comprising it.

**Flag Rush**

Broadly speaking, rushes were contests that pitted one class against another. Though the term “rush” was common, the activities to which it referred varied by

³ Clifford Orr, letter to his mother, September 22, 1918. Papers of Clifford Orr 1918-49, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1. Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.

⁴ *Freshman Bible, 1929-30*, Michigan College of Mining and Technology. Michigan Technological University Archives.
institution. One of the most common rush iterations was a “flag rush,” also sometimes called a “pole rush,” owing to the fact that the flag for which the classes competed was affixed to the top of a pole. Among the many institutions where such contests took place, the University of Michigan stands out as one where students were especially enthusiastic in their participation and diligent in their recording of those events.

Two examples of flag rushes at UM—one in 1906 and another in 1916—demonstrate the scale of these competitions and the ways in which they typically unfolded. The 1906 rush is significant in that a student from the class of 1909 included in his scrapbook a news clipping of a detailed recap of the 1906 Flag Rush between the classes of 1909 and 1910, likely published in the University of Michigan's student newspaper, *The Michigan Daily*:

For the third year running the sophomores have triumphed in the annual rush. This one was a short but exciting contest lasting only six minutes. The freshmen fought desperately, but were crowded back so closely by the squads of sophomores that a small bunch of the '09 men were able to climb over their shoulders and gain the coveted banner.

The pole was planted twenty paces to the east of Freshman Oak by the University caretakers yesterday afternoon. It was crowned by an upright length of piping, which in turn held in place a cluster of incandescent lights. A reflector was placed above the bulbs to throw the light down upon the crowd around the pole. The pole was equipped near the top with crossbars which supported the referee’s seat. The banner was a piece of yellow and blue bunting about four feet square. It was tacked around the edges of the seat on the crossbars.

Referee Schulte was on the ground early making arrangements and explaining the rules to the “tenners.” At 7 o’clock he climbed up and tacked the banner in place and took his seat on the crossbars ready for the contest to begin.

Freshmen began to appear as early as 6 o’clock and by 7 they were formed in close array around the pole. There were in the neighborhood of four or five hundred 1910 men out in their oldest clothes to defend the banner.

The crowd of spectators was also upon the scene early. The steps of the new medical building, the trees, and sidewalks were jammed with excited onlookers. Members of the committee in charge and upperclassmen were kept busy for some time before the rush began keeping the curious ones back from the freshmen; but in general the crowd heeded the wishes of the committee very well. At the time the signal was given only a few upperclassmen and Lyndon, the
photographer, who was busily engaged in taking flashlights of the scene, were left within the diamond formed by the sidewalks around the Medic Green.

Bunches of upperclassmen kept the throngs of townspeople and their escorts amused before the rush by giving class yells and making funny remarks about everything in sight. The senior laws sang with great gusto and plenty of applause their peculiar class song, and the senior engineers replied from the Green. The senior lits, too, were on hand with vociferous yells for their class and their newly elected officers.

The small boys behaved well. The trees were loaded with those fortunate enough to obtain a foothold in such places of [vantage]; but the unlucky ones kept religiously to the edges of the crowd.

The whole scene was almost pandemonium during the moments immediately preceding the rush; the air was filled with yells of all kinds and nondescript advice to the freshmen. The “tenners” themselves added no small amount of noise to that made by the spectators. They were tightly squeezed together in concentric circles, each circle composed of men locked closely together; but that did not lessen their vocal power. The crowd jeered or cheered as suited their fancy at the moment. All was enthusiasm.

The commotion was so great that Referee Schulte perched above on the pole could not hear the library clock and had to be told when the half hour was at hand. As soon as he was informed he gave the signal and the rush began.

Almost before the sound of the referee’s revolver had died away, a number of sophomores dashed out from the crowd from the direction of the dental buildings and commenced to pull out freshmen from the crowd around the pole. The lines bent and swayed, but held well; but here and there the strength of the sophomores proved too great and the lines broke. They were closed up almost instantly but not until some unfortunate had departed on his way to the nearest tree or to the mud hole in the botanical gardens.

After a moment or two, while these squads of ’09 men were creating a diversion and drawing the attention of the freshmen to themselves, the crowd on the walk by the new medical building opened up abruptly to let through another large bunch of sophomores armed with pails of water. The freshmen on the southeast side of the mass were thoroughly drenched and then the ’09 fire department retired, making way for a huge, close-packed column of their classmates that had come around from the direction of the old medical building. The formation was square and well preserved. The sophomores, six abreast, were tightly locked together and the line moved slowly, but without a stop, into the mass of “tenners.”

The dazed freshmen had not yet recovered from their enforced shower bath and before they knew what was coming they were crushed in so close to the pole that a small squad of sophomores, who leaped up on top of the mass of struggling men, clambered easily over to the pole. Once there, the ’09 fellows were able to thwart all attempts to keep down the one of their number who “shinned” up the pole for the banner. As soon as the trophy was torn from its
fastenings it was passed over the crowd to the sophomores on the outside. The referee fired his gun several times to signify that the rush was over and that the class of '09 were victors.

A great deal of comment was made upon the manner in which the sophomores conducted the attack and the excellence of their formation. The very first words uttered by Referee Schulte when he slid to the ground were, "I never saw such organization in my life; it was perfect."

Not a foul was made by any of the participants. All the rules governing the rush were strictly observed. The water buckets were not thrown into the mass of freshmen as they were last year, and no serious injury occurred to anyone. No difficulty was experienced in keeping back the throng of spectators; they good-naturedly complied with the requests of the guards that they keep back to the sidewalks, and a space about fifty feet wide was kept clear around the contestants throughout the rush.5

What is perhaps most striking in the newspaper account of the rush is the coordination and precision of the sophomore class’s strategy. It is an important dimension of the story that adds complexity and context to photographic records of the event, which neither show nor suggest the precision with which the sophomores planned and executed their strategy to win the flag. The member of the class of 1909 in whose scrapbook the preceding article was preserved included two pictures of the event as well. One, shown in figure 5.1, demonstrates the scale of event and captures the moment described in the article when the sophomores succeeded in making it to the pole.

Students of the era recognized a value in these activities that transcended threats to their physical wellbeing; they were part of the process of becoming a member of the student body—a rite of initiation that would live on in their memories as a source of pride and perpetuate the nebulous but palpable phenomenon of “school spirit.” A commentary in The Michigan Daily, written in the wake of the same 1906 rush just described, underscores this idea:

The 1906 Rush is over. There is something of joy and something of sorrow in this fact, depending upon the point of view. Last night was the night to which freshmen have looked forward with much apprehension for two weeks. Now that
it is over, he has no doubt found that the rush was not so bad as had been painted. The rush is to most students the first red-letter event in his college career, and the one that he remembers more vividly than any other particular part of his undergraduate life at Michigan. Despite all of the hard knocks which most of the 1910 man fell heir to, it is safe to say that not one can be found today to lament his participation in it. The rush this year passed off more smoothly than any previous fresh-soph rush in the memory of the oldest head on the campus. A spirit of jolly good fellowship was everywhere evident among the jostling, cheering crowd that gathered to witness the big underclass struggle. The entire absence of violence is gratifying. A rush such as last night’s struggle is the sort that will do much for Michigan spirit by giving the newest students a favorable impression of the University.6

Pride and vivid memories notwithstanding, the sheer volume of individuals participating in rushes, the necessity of physical confrontation, and the potential for injury were undoubtedly—and legitimately—a danger for many participants. In contrast to the good-natured characterizations ascribed to the University of Michigan’s 1906 rush in the passage above, events there unfolded differently a decade later. The fall of 1916 saw a pole rush and a cane spree (a phenomenon discussed in the next section) in the space of an afternoon. The potential for injury was common knowledge—the list of rules published in The Michigan Daily for the pole rush included, “Hands in the air is signal for man down” and “When a man is down contest will stop immediately until one shot for resuming is fired.”7 Indeed, both the pictures and articles preserved in a UM student’s scrapbook show that that possibility came to pass; a newspaper clipping on the event proclaims “two severely injured” (figure 5.2; detail in figure 5.3). Figures 5.4 and 5.5 show a photograph of the event with two students who have their hands in the air signaling that a man is down.

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6 Undated, untitled newspaper article clipping from October 1906. The caption accompanying the article says, “‘Daily’ account,” indicating that the clipping is from The Michigan Daily. Donald Crandon Miller Scrapbooks, 1906-09. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.

Figure 5.2. “FRESHMEN TURN TABLES.” Carl Gunard Brandt Scrapbook. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.
Figure 5.3. 1916 Pole Rush (detail of photo in figure 5.2.). Carl Gunard Brandt Scrapbook. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives. Several students, including at the bottom right, have paint on their faces; one of the rules of the contest was, “Freshmen will wear green paint on their foreheads.”
Figure 5.4. “FROSH TO BATTLE SOPHS IN RUSH.” 1916 Pole Rush. Carl Gunard Brandt Scrapbook. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.

Figure 5.5. Man Down! Carl Gunard Brandt Scrapbook. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.
In addition to the newspaper clippings and photographs, there is a memento of the flag rush of 1906 that attests to the physical nature of these contests—a piece of fabric torn from the shirt of one of the participants. The article describing the event noted that the freshmen were in their “oldest clothes,” and the scrap in figure 5.6 shows why: clothes often did not survive these skirmishes intact. It was not unheard of for the participants in some rushes to come out of the affair without any clothing left on their bodies. Given the choice, students often favored class pride over modesty.

Flag rushes were by no means exclusive to the University Michigan; institutions across the country saw such rushes on their campuses. But their presence across so many collections of student memorabilia at UM, spanning several decades, is a testament to both the significance of these events as part of student life there and the enthusiasm with which Michigan students preserved their memories of them.
Cane Rush

Another variety of rush that enjoyed great popularity from the 1870s to the 1940s was the cane rush (or, as some institutions referred to it, “cane spree”). Typically, cane rushes were individual bouts of strength that saw freshman and sophomore men fighting to wrest a wooden cane from the grip of their opponent. At places such a Princeton, where the cane sprees were of supreme importance in the quest to secure a class’s honor and prestige, success in a bout could elevate a man to elite status among his peers and ensure that his name lived on in the mythology of the campus long after graduation.

As was the case at many institutions, the cane rushes at the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) had their origins in the attempts of sophomore men to forcibly part freshman men from their canes and walking sticks. These free-for-all battles, fought in the streets, eventually evolved and coalesced into a series of three bouts between men matched to be of roughly equal strength and agility. As one-on-one competitions of endurance, matches could last as long as the stamina of participants allowed; spectators in 1873 saw a cane spree between two determined opponents that was reported to have lasted a full two hours.8 The “spree” moniker that the activity took on is explained in one of the early histories of the activity written at Princeton: “In those days any special turbulence in a classroom was called a spree. If a class or the college armed with horns, and this they frequently did, and serenaded some member of the Faculty, it was known as a horn-spree. Thus these cane fights in campus parlance came to be known as the cane-spree.”9

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9 Ibid. Princeton University maintains a collection of canes in its archives, some of which were used in cane sprees.
From its earliest iterations, the cane spree took on near-legendary status at Princeton as a catalyst for student unrest. The 1929 riot cited in chapter four followed a cane spree. Just a few years later, in October 1934, events again showed that the cane spree had not lost its luster as an occasion for classes to wreak havoc. According to the *Daily Princetonian*:

Pandemonium broke loose immediately after the last bout. The rival hordes of Sophomores and Freshmen left the stands and surged onto the field, prepared to settle the issue to their own satisfaction. Witherspoon Green soon took on the appearance of a nudist camp as scores of contenders from each class were ignominiously stripped of their last stitch of clothing. Confusion reigned in the general free-for-all because of the inability to distinguish between members of the two classes. [...]  

Demolished bleachers and a trail of torn clothing were mute testimony of the classic encounter. However, there were but three minor injuries to mar the occasion.10  

Though Princeton’s cane sprees were the most chronicled of the era, other institutions held their own iterations of the event. The University of Michigan hosted a cane spree, yet unlike the sprees at Princeton, bouts were not limited to three sets of contestants. Coming on the heels of the flag rush, UM’s cane spree featured a sizable contingent of representatives from the freshman and sophomore classes. Figure 5.7 shows one such spree, where more than a dozen sets of students are engaged in battle. Closer inspection of the photograph (see figure 5.8 for an enlarged version) reveals what appear to be pieces of fabric covering the field—possibly remnants of the clothing from combatants in the just-completed flag rush.

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Figure 5.7. “Cane Spree 1915-1916.” Carl Gunard Brandt Scrapbook. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.

Figure 5.8. Caned and Able. (Detail of figure 5.7) – Carl Gunard Brandt Scrapbook. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.
At Amherst College, cane rushes hearkened back to the rushes of old—the sort that President Jordan of Stanford detested—that were effectively just occasions for physical conflict. But, as with so many of the activities presented here, there is more to the phenomenon than meets the eye. From the perspective of a freshman who participated in a cane rush in the fall of 1883, the contest seems less about violence and more about the spirited and generally honorable expenditure of competitive energy. The student described the incident in his diary:

We had a rush in the evening. I was at the XΦ rooms when Sutton came running in saying there would be a rush and to meet at 9:00 at High School House. Rossiter + some of the others lent Bulkley + me old clothes so we started out fixed. Arriving at Chase's house we found there about a dozen of '87. After a few more had come we started up the street—with a cane but no Sophs...Some '85 men told us we had better disperse now as we had carried the cane + '86 had not touched us. Going up by the Episcopal Church a great crowd, principally of '84 and '85 men, were collected by the shouting of some other men of their classes of the '86 and '87 cry + by a mock rush. At last Bulkley + McGill held up a cane + waved it. Being near I made a grab to have the honor of helping hold the cane at the beginning of the rush. Instantly the Sophs came on + the affair had begun. The first thing I remember is being held up against the Church fence by Perrine a fellow fully 6 ft. tall. How I got away I don't know but soon I was wrestling with a fellow, I think it was Gates. We both fell at the same time, he on top; then by an extra effort I got upon him, but after a minute he was on me again. Whether he let me up or whether I got on him again I have no recollection whatever for I only remember confused parts. Meanwhile, I believe the cane had been broken into 3 parts. Call, a six footer of our class was lying down with one large piece partly in his vest + Perrine, I believe, had hold of it also. I did some hand wrestling, throwing two or three Sophs. + being thrown in turn. Then I piled upon the cane. I held hold of Perrine when some Soph attempted to pull me out of the crowd. I tightened my grip on Perrine + let him pull + so he almost pulled off the only man of his side who had hold of the cane. Then I was knocked about a good deal + one great big fellow trying to throw me I grabbed him by the leg + we both went over together. After about 15 or 20 minutes of that I had to go out. I had eaten a very hearty supper + I felt half dead. Jones + McGill came + lay down while I was there + Bulkley almost fainted + had to be supported out by a XΦ. The Juniors looked on + pulled off all the Sophs inclined to sit too long on us + on one occasion stopped one fellow from striking another. There was such a crowd of '85s + '84s about that there was no circulation of air + it was stifling. Well after lying on the grass a few moments I felt so sick at my stomach that I had to go to the XΦ rooms + lie down, but Bulkley went in a second time. Soon after the rush ended, + the fellows came to the rooms and lionized me. At the close of the rush our fellows held 2 of the 3 pieces of the cane. There were no more than a dozen of our class actively engaged + from 20 to 30 Sophs...The
rush was only a friendly one, the Sophs. having voted last year to let us carry canes + confirming this vote on the day following this affair.¹¹

This student’s account demonstrates the gap between the perceptions of administrators such as Jordan and the actual experiences of students. Upperclassmen often exercised a supervisory role in these sorts of competitions; as the juniors in this episode show, students did engage in some level of self-policing. As discussed in chapter six, class identities were only one part of the college experience, and other associations that arose later in students’ college years, such as clubs and societies, made long-term enmity between individuals undesirable and counterproductive. Phenomena such as cane rush evolved as they reflected shifts in students’ and institutions’ attitudes toward physical confrontation between classes.

At the University of Vermont (UVM), the cane rush was combined with another contest that took place on many campuses: a tug-of-war between the freshman and sophomore classes. The UVM student handbook explained the rules for each contest to the new freshmen:

Saturday will be the most exciting day of the week for you. In the afternoon you will gather on the hill to March down to Miles & Perry’s store for your canes to be used in the famous Cane Rush. On returning to the back campus you will line up a certain distance from 1918, and at the sound of the pistol, the rush will begin. It lasts seven minutes. At the end of this time the pistol rings out again, and the class having the largest number of canes in its possession wins the event. Soon after this, the tug-of-war is scheduled. Each class enters five of its heaviest men. The one winning two out of three pulls is the winner. The rest of the day is yours to use as you please. All class scraps are suspended until the Friday of Thanksgiving week, when Proc Night, or, as we say now, Under Class Night, occurs. From then on, you are freed from the terrors of rushes, scraps and horseplay.¹²

¹¹ Unidentified diary, Fall 1883, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library. The entry cited here is dated September 14, 1883.

¹² The Vermont Hand Book, 1915-1916, Robert F. Joyce scrapbook (1917), RG 81, Box 22a, University of Vermont Archives.
Preserved in the scrapbook of a 1917 UVM graduate, photographs of the 1914 cane rush show that the activity took on a character at that institution different than at either UM or Princeton. The cane rush at UVM was a class-wide activity, with all men of the freshman class directed to bring canes to the event. Shown in figures 5.9 and 5.10, UVM’s cane rush permitted multiple individuals to battle for the same cane in what was surely a lively seven minutes of competition.

Figure 5.9. “Fall 1914 – as Sophomores.” Robert F. Joyce scrapbook (1917), RG 81, Box 22a, University of Vermont Archives.
Other Rushes

Though flag rushes and cane rushes were the two most common iterations of these activities at the institutions studied, there were others. Some, such as the Amherst College rush shown in figure 5.11, were simply contests to conquer a physical space, while at institutions such as Dartmouth the symbolic rush item was a football, rather than a flag or cane. But the more interesting varieties saw students trying to capture the clothing of other students—and sometimes the students themselves.

13 Underscoring the importance of these activities in students' lives and in the larger social sphere of a small town, the photographs of an Amherst College rush circa 1917 shown in figure 5.11 are in the scrapbook of a student at the Massachusetts Agricultural College—an institution located just a short walk from Amherst College. As their names make evident, Amherst College and the Massachusetts Agricultural College—later to become the University of Massachusetts-Amherst—are both located in Amherst, Massachusetts.
Figure 5.11. “Amherst College Freshman rush Sophs to see how many can get across ‘green’ in Amherst center.” 1917 Scrapbook of Paul W. Dempsey. Photo Albums (1897-1946) RG 130, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts-Amherst Libraries.
The male students of the Massachusetts Agricultural College engaged in an activity that, while not formally called a rush, bore all of its hallmarks. The “Night-Shirt Parade” was a class contest between freshmen and sophomores wherein the freshmen wore nightshirts which the sophomores attempted to claim as trophies. The contest, which took place on a campus sports field, awarded sophomores one point for each shirt removed from the body of a freshman, while the freshmen received one point for every shirt they managed to keep intact over the course of the seven minutes that the contest lasted. The Night-Shirt Parade included an additional points-generating system, however: each class had a roped-off area—a “pen”—into which they tried to push or carry members of the opposing class. Men who were “penned” could not reenter the contest and earned the capturing team two points. A souvenir from one of these contests, shown in figure 5.12, is preserved in a scrapbook of an M.A.C. student.

Figure 5.12. “T-h-i-r-t-y.” The pocket of a night-shirt from the Night-Shirt Parade between the classes of 1929 and 1930, November 10, 1926. Memory Book of Evelyn Sandstrom, Class of 1930. Photo Albums (1897-1946) RG 130, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts-Amherst Libraries.
The men of the Michigan College of Mining and Technology adopted their own take on the “capture-the-opponent” rush, with freshmen and sophomores vying to tie up as many members of the other class as possible in the span of ten minutes. The object, according to the rules of the contest, was, “To tie the hands and feet of the opposing classmen and transport same, when completely tied, to uniformed Seniors. Here the tie-up will be recorded and released, to return to the field of battle.”

As the pictures of the events included in this chapter show, there was a danger that was inherent in class competitions that relied on direct physical confrontation between individuals and groups. There was a feeling among the administrators of many colleges and universities that these types of class competitions were outdated relics of an era that they were eager to put behind them. As enrollments grew, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century, class competitions were not always adapted to compensate for the ever-growing numbers of students. This began to turn spectacles that institutions had tolerated in the past into occasions where the potential for injury or tragedy was too great to ignore.

**Tug of War**

As the twentieth century wore on, institutions were already looking for activities to supplant the brutishness and danger of rushes. One activity that seemed to promise the dignified struggle of class competition without the threat to life and limb was the tug of war. While the men of UVM could expend themselves in the cane rush and turn the struggle of the tug of war over to their five heaviest men, other institutions such as the University of Michigan and the University of Kentucky made the tug of war a focal point of class unity and collective struggle. On campuses such as UM, UK, and the Massachusetts Agricultural College, natural bodies of water provided a ready-made

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**14** Freshman Bible, 1929-30, Michigan College of Mining and Technology. Michigan Technological University Archives.
venue for tug-of-war events featuring scores of men pulling for each side. The shoreline around the water invited crowds to gather, which they did in great numbers. Pictures from tug-of war events at the University of Michigan (figures 5.13 and 5.14) show the banks lined with spectators.

Figure 5.13. “Fresh-Soph Tug-of-war May 17, Freshmen in river.” Donald Crandon Miller Scrapbooks. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives.
At the University of Kentucky, the tug-of-war offered roles for virtually the entire student body. Freshmen, under the oversight and tutelage of the juniors, faced off against the sophomores, who were under the auspices of the seniors. Rare for the era, a story in the student newspaper, *The Kentucky Kernel*, on the 1916 flag rush mentions a role for female students as well.

The men of both classes will hold meetings just before the big event and there is a rumor that a roll call of the men of both classes will be held at the pond and all men who are absent without a good excuse will probably be sorry. The young women of both classes will, of course, be on hand and decorate their brave warriors with the class colors. […]

Which ever side loses, the members will be required to go thru the pond. In case any student proves reluctant and refuses, he will be taken in hand by the upper-classmen.
The tug-of-war always proves a big attraction…witnessed by several thousand persons.\textsuperscript{15}

At the University of Kentucky, the tug of war was introduced by that institution’s president as a substitute for the much more violent flag rush—an activity that had produced numerous serious injuries but, luckily, no fatalities. In October 1915, the freshman class triumphed over the sophomores and celebrated their victory by parading the 800 feet of steel cable that had secured their victory through the streets of downtown Lexington. Such celebrations were not unusual—figure 5.15 shows the same phenomenon at the University of Michigan.

Figure 5.15. Victory! Harold Herman papers, 1917-1921. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Archives. An undated photograph shows students carrying the length of rope or cable used in the freshman-sophomore tug-of-war.

\textsuperscript{15} “Tug-of-War Will Be Held This Afternoon,” \textit{The Kentucky Kernel}, October 13, 1916, 5. By 1916 the University of Kentucky had been coeducational for many years. Yet even at coeducational institutions, student newspapers rarely mention what roles female students played, if any, in class competitions.
However, the luck that had held during the years of flag rush ran out; one of the reveling freshmen was thrown to the ground and sustained a fatal head injury when a cable car struck the length of cable the students were carrying.\textsuperscript{16}

Injuries, and occasionally deaths, were an unfortunate, and perhaps inevitable, outcome given the types of physical contests students engaged in and the number of them involved. The fall of 1915 was a particularly bad semester; less than four weeks before the fatal incident at the University of Kentucky, a freshman died during a rush at Princeton.\textsuperscript{17} Given these dangers, one wonders what their appeal was to students. Judging these events outside of the era in which they occurred, it would be tempting to conclude that these activities were merely exercises in mayhem and violence, and that their participants were either miscreants or frightened campus newcomers upon whom these tests of manhood were inflicted. But that conclusion would leave unacknowledged the role these activities played in fostering students' personal growth and attachment to their fellow students. Writing home in the fall of 1910, a student at Princeton relayed to his mother both trepidation and joy in being “hoarsed” and having participated in one of Princeton’s many rushes; he wrote:

Dear Mother:

Well I have been having a very busy time for the last few days. I have been hoarsed quite a little bit but have really enjoyed it.

Friday afternoon we had the big election rush... I was a little bit scared before I got in, but when it once started I enjoyed it more than anything I have done for some time. We were all packed together so tight that you could hardly breath (we all went in with our hands over our heads so we could use them). I was on the outside of a line and therefore right next to the sophmores and so had plenty of chance to use my hands. I was about the tenth person into the room and nearly had my clothes torn off getting in.

\textsuperscript{16} “Eldridge Griffith, Freshman, Killed When a Street Car Crashes Into Cable Borne in Parade.” \textit{The Kentucky Kernel}, October 21, 1915. University of Kentucky Archives.

\textsuperscript{17} “ABANDON RUSHES FOR REMAINDER OF THE YEAR,” \textit{The Daily Princetonian}, September 25, 1915. The cause of death in this case was thought to have been a heart attack.
After we had elected officers, we all had a perade and the sophmores tried to break it up and we had a marching free fight for about an hour. It was great.\textsuperscript{18}

The freshmen that fall were, it seems, robust in their capacity to give as good as they got. Writing again a few days later, the student tells his mother, “After the game we had a perade which the sophs tried to break up, but our fighting spirit was up and we pounded the poor sophs unmercifully. It certainly was great fun.”\textsuperscript{19}

In some respects, class competitions resembled class-based hazing in the way that they compelled participation from individuals by virtue of their class affiliation. One way to draw a distinction between class competitions and class-based hazing is that class competitions held out the possibility of honest struggle toward some agreed upon end. Whether the prize was privileges, bragging rights, or some physical object such as a flag or a cane, interclass contests generally took place within a sphere where all parties understood the bounds of the contest. Classes as a whole fought on more or less equal footing, especially during an activity such as a rush where the class of lower status—freshmen—could collectively oppose their foes. It was, in effect, a two-way street. Hazing, on the other hand, could be likened to a one-way street. Students in classes higher in the student hierarchy (usually sophomores) doled out harassment but only occasionally faced retaliation from those they tormented.

The intensity with which class competitions were fought were partly a response to, and partly the cause of, some of the hazing and hazing-like activities found on the campuses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hazing ranged from harmless shenanigans to abject cruelty, but it was a phenomenon that was built into the fabric of

\textsuperscript{18} Correspondence of Peter Carter Speers, Class of 1914; 1910-1914; Letter to his mother, September 28, 1910. Student Correspondence and Writings Collection, Box 12; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. "Hoarsing" was another word for hazing.

\textsuperscript{19} Correspondence of Peter Carter Speers, Class of 1914; 1910-1914. Letter to his mother, October 3, 1910.
Remembering the Thrill

The enthusiasm with which students approached class competitions is underscored by the accounts they created. The memorabilia that students saved to commemorate the class rivalries and competitions that they took part in reflect a tendency to keep pieces of the physical objects associated with these competitions; this is especially true with respect to the various rushes that took place on campuses between 1871 and 1941. Several of those collections have been included here; thus far the inclusion of student memorabilia relating to class competitions has served to complement students’ descriptions of those events. However, it is worth examining the inclusion of the memorabilia itself and the ways in which those items helped to facilitate students’ recollection and contextualization of those events. The variety of items included in scrapbooks show that these competitions and other expressions of class affinity and identity were an important part of students’ individual meaning-making processes. They provided tangible recognition of intangible phenomena: allegiance to one’s class and to Alma Mater—to membership in a group of individuals bound together by proximity, youth, and circumstance. Perhaps the best example of this is found in figure 5.16, which shows one student’s tribute to the Amherst College flag rush that occurred his freshman year. This scrapbook page is notable for its distinct types of memorabilia from the 1914 Amherst flag rush: a piece of the pole, two pieces of the padding from that pole, a piece of the flag, and a belt, the caption above which reads “Part of a Sophomore’s belt which I had in my hand when the whistle blew.”
As will be discussed in the concluding chapter, examples such as the one shown above challenge scholars to take seriously the importance of students’ participation in the extracurriculum and to look more closely at how students integrated those experiences into the broader scope of their “education.” What one finds is that the education that students received—the personal, social, and intellectual growth which college was thought to provide—was driven primarily by the extracurriculum, and that the materials students created in the process of interpreting and remembering these experiences bear that out.

Looking across institutions, one sees that class relations and rivalries, especially between the freshman and sophomore classes, generally took on a predictable
character. Antagonism between classes encouraged students to work together with members of their own respective class cohorts to prevail in the battles of wills and words that marked class relations from the 1870s to the 1940s. Just as individuals constructed their own identity through their interactions with others, so, too, did classes. Collectively, they defined themselves by their interactions with (and, importantly, their triumphs over) other classes. The final chapter will show how all of these interactions worked in concert to shape students’ conceptions and construction of multiple levels of sagas.
Chapter 6 – Students as Storytellers

The opening chapter of this dissertation identified three interrelated research questions that guided this study: What do the student-created archival sources suggest were students’ most significant meaning-making activities during their college years? How do these student-created accounts evidence meaning-making and suggest the construction of multiple levels of sagas? And, finally, what insights can students’ own accounts of their meaning-making experiences provide to present-day scholars, practitioners, administrators, and students? The answers to each, discussed in the pages to follow, contribute to an analysis intended to aid historians’ and higher education scholars’ efforts to better understand college student life in the years 1871-1941 and to draw from those experiences of past students new perspectives that can be put to use in the twenty-first century.

Meaning-Making and Student Life

The answer to the first of these questions was evident across the approximately 300 distinct student-created archival collections examined for this study, as well as in the complementary materials such as rule books, student newspapers, administrative records, and photographs reviewed along with them. As stated in chapter two, students’ self-created accounts demonstrate that their most significant meaning-making activities during their college years were the events of the extracurriculum. The accounts presented in chapters three through five are a reflection of that; in their words, photographs, and in the construction of memory-preserving materials such as scrapbooks, students registered the phenomena that defined their experiences and were deemed worthy of sharing or preserving. Overwhelmingly, these things were not academic in nature; for all of the emphasis that their respective institutions placed on the acquisition and demonstration of scholarly knowledge, the aspects of college that caught
students’ imaginations were not lectures and recitations, but rather the amusements that filled their hours between classes. This observation is not new; scholars, faculty and administrators have long noted students’ academic pursuits take a back seat to leisure, especially in the era studied here. Laurence Veysey wrote of college students at the turn of the twentieth century:

The student who was earnestly interested in the ideas of his professors was much rarer in 1900 than he would be several decades later, and the usual student of 1900 was much more belligerent in his unserious stance. On the walls of dormitory and fraternity rooms throughout the United States hung the motto that aptly summed up the common mood: “Don’t Let Your Studies Interfere with Your Education.”

Yet despite this long-standing acknowledgment that many students take their studies less seriously than their pursuit of pleasure, few have ventured to use students’ self-created accounts to investigate how that belief holds up across time and across institutions. What the accounts examined here show is that students’ most significant meaning-making activities during their college years, at least in the years 1871-1941, were not simply pleasurable diversions—they were activities in which individuals were actively engaged in the process of building relationships with other students. The vast majority of the accounts examined in this study demonstrate a recurrent theme: students recorded and celebrated their experiences where they felt connected to the other individuals with whom they shared the campus. They also marked occasions in which they felt connected to their institutions, though these were present to a lesser extent.

It is not surprising that students gravitated to the extracurriculum. The nature of academic achievement is solitary; the store of knowledge that one accumulates and the mental capacity to wield it cannot be given—it must be earned through individual effort. The extracurriculum offered both a respite from this effort and the chance to forge the sorts of personal bonds that long hours of study could neither offer nor replace. After all,

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1 Veysey, Emergence, 274.
scholarship could be had for the rest of one’s life, but enjoying the extracurriculum of one’s college years was a fleeting opportunity—a window that slammed shut after about four years, never to reopen. We see in students' writings, photographs, and other recollections a deliberate choice to embrace the immediacy of camaraderie rather than the long-term payoff of rigorous study.

Students’ focus on the extracurriculum is not evidenced by the absence of materials relating to their academic work. To the contrary, that focus is shown in the fact that students did include some items relating to the curriculum; it is the degree to which those things are deemphasized that is telling. In their collections of memorabilia, academic mementos are notable in their rarity. Only occasionally did students include a grade report or copies of entrance or exit exams. Academic experiences are present with slightly more frequency in written correspondence, but even then they tend to be passing observations on content, such as in one Mount Holyoke student’s letter to her mother, written as she prepared for her exams:

I have been studying nearly all day on Civil Government. Our textbook is Hinsdale’s “The American Government.” It is 422 pages long and is fearfully dry, and as the teacher has followed it very closely, it means that I have got to know practically everything in the whole book, which is quite a task for a person who doesn’t enjoy history any more than I do. I shall be glad when it is over, which will be very soon now.²

Though students did not include their curricular experiences in their accounts to nearly the same extent as the extracurriculum, the episodes they did include can be intriguing. A student at Yale wrote in his diary in 1915, “Taft reminisced today—telling us why he vetoed a certain bill when he was President.”³ The Taft to whom he refers is William Howard Taft, who was less than three years removed from being President of

² Edna L. Ferry, letter to her mother, dated January 25, 1905. Edna L. Ferry papers, Box 1. Mount Holyoke College Archives.

³ Diary entry dated October 18, 1915, Paul Phenix Diary, Yale University Archives. William Howard Taft was an 1878 graduate of Yale and taught at that institution from 1913-1921.
the United States and was teaching law courses at Yale in the years before he would become Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. These glimpses into students’ in-classroom experiences, though few, remind us that despite students’ enthusiasm for the extracurriculum, learning and scholarship did actually take place. These first-person recollections of students’ academic pursuits, though outside the scope of what is examined here, represent a promising avenue of future research.

In contrast to students’ sparing descriptions of the curriculum, their descriptions of the extracurriculum are robust; the same student who authored the letter on the previous page devoted much more space in her letters home describing the things that she was eating and the escapades of her and her fellow students rather than her studies. Students even found ways to incorporate the curriculum into the extracurriculum; at many institutions they celebrated the completion of their courses in advanced mathematics by burning or burying their textbooks (see figure 6.1 on the following page for an example of a program from one of these occasions at the University of Michigan in 1878).4

4 See Patton and Field, *Eight o’Clock Chapel*, 252-53, for a lengthier description of this phenomenon at the time of the event pictured in figure 6.1.
The activities that did captures students’ attentions, which in turn became the things that they recorded, reflect the incredible variety of diversions that existed in the extracurriculum. Activities that related to class identity were numerous and memorable—hence their inclusion as the basis for the preceding three chapters. Yet there were many more activities not included in those chapters that were also of
significance. Sporting events, for instance, contributed heavily to students' collections of ephemera, as scrapbooks were populated with ticket stubs, programs, and other souvenirs (see figure 6.2 below).

Figure 6.2. Block M. News clipping, ticket stub, and souvenir towel used to form “Block M” shown in the photograph. Carl Gunard Brandt scrapbook. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. The ticket stub identifies the game as the Penn vs. Michigan football game played November 18, 1918 at Ferry Field in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Each of the campuses visited for this study had, and continue to have, events and places of deep significance to the students and members of their respective institutional communities. These events play their own important roles in the construction of individual and collective sagas, serving as memorable occasions in which students’ bonds to one another and to their institutions are cemented. Examples abound, but two notable ones represented in the archival collections surveyed here are Lantern Night at the University of Michigan (figure 6.3) and Mountain Day at Smith College (figure 6.4).
Figure 6.3. Lantern Night program and news clipping (1927). Audrey L. Wright scrapbooks, 1922-1929. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Lantern Night is described in the news clipping shown here as, “…the most beautiful and spectacular of Michigan women’s activities.” The ceremony, featuring paper lanterns, flower-draped processions and singing, drew in excess of 2,000 women as participants or spectators.

Figure 6.4. “Mountain Day Oct 8.” Alice Batchelder Photograph Album, Smith College Archives. Mountain Day, begun in 1877 and continuing to the present, is a day each fall where the president announces a surprise cancellation of classes and Smith students are free to spend the day hiking and picnicking in the mountains near campus.
When students ventured off campus, they took advantage of the entertainments available to them in the towns and cities near their institutions. At campuses such as Princeton and Yale, students might venture as far as New York City or Boston, but even at more isolated campuses local playhouses and cinemas provided ample diversion. Students collected tickets stubs and programs as tokens of these shows; those in figure 6.6 feature souvenirs from three popular silent movies of 1922.

Figure 6.5. Mementos from 1922. Leah James scrapbook, Arthur W. and Leah James Scrapbooks, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William and Mary. The comment accompanying the souvenir from “To Have and To Hold” (top-left) reads, “A grand picture, even if mountains were shown at Jamestown.”

Considered collectively, the rushes, relaxations, and other trappings of the extracurriculum that the student-created archival sources examined in this study suggest were students’ most significant meaning-making activities provided students plenty of
opportunities to construct the various levels of sagas outlined in chapter one. A closer look at each of the levels shows how those materials bear out the creation and perpetuation of those various sagas.

**Discovering Sagas**

Recalling the scholarship on student life cited in chapter one, there were several works that guided this study. The granular view of student life offered by Lyman Bagg in *Four Years at Yale* and the big-picture, typology-based generalizations made by the likes of Clark and Trow and Helen Horowitz offer competing approaches for examining student life, and my aim has been to strike a balance between them. To that end, I have used the student’s perspective advanced by Bagg and the cross-institutional comparisons demonstrated by Horowitz, among others, in identifying and analyzing archival materials that offer insight into students’ meaning-making experiences during their college years. Affirming Frederick Rudolph’s observation about the value of the extracurriculum, the self-created accounts of college students in the years studied here, 1871-1941, emphasized their extracurricular exploits. I focused specifically on class cohort-based interactions, which illustrate both individual and collective meaning-making, emphasizing four categories of students’ experiences: college rules, class dynamics and antagonism, hazing, and class competitions.

Rather than simply retrieving these accounts from the dusty shelves of their respective archives for the purposes of cataloguing and comparing them, I endeavor to offer some explanation of their contents. As stated in the introductory chapter, the focus of this work is historical, not sociological. However, fields beyond history have much to offer in helping historians of higher education to conceive of and contextualize the phenomena which we study, and I employ Burton Clark’s work on organizational sagas to that end. I use Clark’s work to suggest a lens beyond the field of history with which
scholars might view the student-created accounts presented here, though this line of inquiry invites other scholars to bring their own specialties and experiences to bear in the use and interpretation of student-created archival materials. The analysis that follows is a point of departure for future research—a framework that is one of many possible avenues for the historical reconsideration of college student life and its role in shaping the past, present, and future of higher education.

Clark Reconsidered

The roots of the organizational sagas that enliven the campuses of this nation’s colleges and universities stem from a web of bonds between individuals. Clark wrote:

Those who have together persisted for some years in one formal place will have had, at a minimum, a thin stream of shared experiences into which neither they nor anyone else can ever step again. Sensing that flow of common fate, they find cause to elaborate a plausible account of uniqueness. The story helps rationalize for the individual his commitment of time and energy for years, perhaps for a lifetime, to a particular enterprise.5

Though in this instance Clark was referring more generally to organizations, rather than specifically to higher education, the “thin stream of shared experiences” to which Clark alludes perfectly captures the transitory nature of students’ years in college. They seek meaning for their own experiences, both within and apart from the institutional sphere, and it is from these individual components that higher-level sagas manifest.

According to Clark, sagas are built in two stages: initiation and fulfillment. The first, initiation, “takes place under widely varying conditions and occurs within a relatively short period of time,” while fulfillment, “converges on certain inescapable features of organization that are enduring and more predictable.”6 Initiation factors into the first two

5 Clark, “Belief and Loyalty,” 501. Subsequent to the 1970s, other researchers have built upon Burton Clark’s work on organizations and incorporated his concepts into their own work. William Tierney, in particular, expanded the relevance of Clark’s work to higher education, and Clark’s ideas continue to inform the efforts of scholars, such as Adrianna Kezar, who study organizational change and leadership in higher education.

6 Ibid., 503.
levels discussed in the subsequent section, while the third- and fourth-level sagas considered later presume that initiation has long since been completed and that the perpetuation of those sagas is ongoing.

Clark outlined three conditions in which organizational sagas are initiated: the new context, the revolutionary context, and the evolutionary context. The latter two concern change in ongoing organizations; of importance to this analysis, as it concerns the first two levels of sagas proposed here, is the “new” context. Clark used the “new” context in the sense of a new organization; however, I propose that the sagas found among college students in the era studied here arose from students’ new circumstances. The origins of these types of sagas follow in the forthcoming descriptions of first- and second-level sagas.

The fulfillment portion of organizational sagas, as conceived by Clark, occurs along predictable lines, carried out by a consistent set of organizational actors that form, “the components that are at the center of the development of a saga.” Clark identified faculty, the curriculum, students, alumni, and the “institutional idea” as actors in the fulfillment of institutional sagas. Returning to the four levels of sagas proposed in chapter one, what did these different levels looks like as they occurred in practice and how do the student life phenomena and the archival materials students used to describe them bear those levels out? The various levels of sagas proposed herein, restated below, provide a preface for answering those questions.

Level One – Individuals

Burton Clark hints at the role that sagas can play on a personal level, writing of individuals’ adherence to collective ideas that the “organizational motif becomes
individual motive.” But for each individual, identity formation and meaning-making are lifelong processes; the years that one is in college are only a small portion of a much longer continuum. Just as “the institutional saga is a historically based, somewhat embellished understanding of a unique organizational development,” we might think of one’s individual saga as a “somewhat embellished understanding of one’s unique personal development.” Individuals create, over the course of their lives, conceptions of their own beliefs and achievements and attach significance to people, events, and objects that depart from objective reality. These conceptions are exaggerated, idealized, and continually revised and edited. The individual saga is, as described in chapter one, “the mythologized telling of one’s own life.” For college students, their time on campus becomes a source for shaping their conceptions of who they are and who they want to be, and their experiences there provide ample opportunities to cast themselves in an array of roles.

One could reasonably argue that there could be an additional level between individuals and classes, as students generally formed peer groups within their own class cohorts or as part of other organizations of like-minded individuals such as literary societies, singing groups, Greek letter organizations, or sports teams. They may also have found a common bond with fellow residents of a dorm or patrons of a boarding house. These affiliations were important; for the narrow purposes of this study, I chose to categorize and analyze those small-group affiliations at the individual level, but in future research they would merit their own accounting and analyses.

Level Two – Classes

From the 1870s into the 1940s, one of the ways in which college students conceived of their place on campus was their membership in a class cohort. These

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8 Clark, The Distinctive College, 235.
cohorts were generally identified by their years of graduation; a freshman new to campus in the fall of 1890 would have been a member of the class of 1894. Students attached a great deal of pride to belonging to a class; being a member of “‘94” would have been the first identity a new freshman would have had; even before freshmen knew each other’s names, they had a collective identity denoted by two numerals.

Reflective of the evolution of higher education since the 1940s, the class identity that students once valued so highly has largely dissipated in the twenty-first century, replaced by allegiances to Greek organizations, clubs, social causes, or students’ desires to forge their own identities independent of affiliations with specific groups. But well into the twentieth century, students would profess pride in their class affiliation for decades following graduation, meeting at reunions to recount their collegiate exploits and renew the bonds of friendship. These class-based sagas are at the heart of the student activities that were explored in chapters three, four, and five.

Level Three – Institutions

The institutional saga that forms in a college or university—the one to which Burton Clark referred—centers on collective feelings by members of an institution that perpetuate and celebrate a shared, romanticized understanding of that institution. But at the institutional level there are groups of constituents that exist as entities in their own right—the student body, the faculty, and the administration are three important ones; they exist together but are separated from one another by their own interests and aims. The encompassing institutional saga is, upon closer inspection, an amalgam of the institution-level sagas of these different entities. Each of them creates and mythologizes its own actions relative to the institution, which is itself composed of these diverse stakeholder tribes. Among these, the student body is a saga unto itself, renewing itself each year but standing, perpetually, as a counterbalance to the institution and whatever
actions it might take in an attempt to rein in the actions of the student body or any of its members. The saga of the student body is one of subversion, opposition, and mischief; it is most readily seen in large-scale displays of resistance to institutional will such as pranks, riots, and strikes.

Level Four – College Students as a Collective Entity

Each year, colleges and universities welcome an incoming cohort at convocation—replacements for the students-turned-alumni who were ushered off the campus at the previous spring’s graduation. This annual cycle of renewal replenishes the ranks of the student body, ensuring that a new group steps in to carry on the business of being students. This renewal plays out on a grand scale; the group that society refers to collectively as “college students” is really a cast of characters who join or leave the ranks in a near-continuous procession. They are connected, regardless of their respective institutions, by a number of factors: their age, their energy, and their ambition, to name a few. Helen Horowitz observed: “As traditional college life created an adolescent peer culture, it linked students on any particular campus in a network of shared assumptions and joined them to their fellows in other institutions.”9 College students share among themselves a bond born out of their collective history; they are inheritors of a tradition of student life stretching back nearly four centuries. The saga of “the college student” is not the story of one person, but the sum total of all students.

Sagas: Expressions and Artifacts

The various levels of sagas proposed here do not exist in the abstract; they are observable phenomena with tangible expressions preserved in campus archives. The sagas described below refer primarily to students’ experiences in the years 1871 to 1941. These sagas necessarily look different on the campuses of the twenty-first century.

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9 Horowitz, Campus Life, 12.
century; yet there are aspects of the college experience that are common to both the
students of the era studied here and the students populating our campuses in 2017.

Individual Sagas

Students’ individual sagas neither began nor ended in college; indeed, they were
formed in their lives preceding college and continued afterward for their remaining years. But their time in college provided them with a near constant flow of opportunities with
which to define and refine their respective identities. The phenomena discussed in the
preceding chapters were far from the only things affecting students, but each was
important in its own right.

The rules that students created among themselves provided a scaffold upon
which individuals with disparate backgrounds and personalities could begin the process
of forming themselves into an entity with common goals and common standards. High
or low born, there was a camaraderie in the collective struggle and indignities of being a
freshman. Subjected to the mandates of higher ranking students, freshmen learned to
stick together, watch out for one another, and to share in the joys, terrors, and
embarrassments of their fellow classmates. To be certain, membership in one particular
class cohort did not blur or remove all social distinctions and biases, nor did it eliminate
competition between individuals for esteem and prominence within the class or inside
the larger institutional sphere. Once the trials of freshman year were past, students
jockeyed for position and competed with one another for club memberships, positions in
campus government, etc. For freshmen, however, class allegiance and struggle often
did have the effect—at least temporarily—of attenuating competition between class
members.

We see in class rules, then, students demonstrating to others, and, more
importantly, to themselves, the capacity to work within externally-imposed constraints.
In the context of personal sagas, students’ conformity to these rules provided an 
opportunity for students to cast themselves in the role of obedient apprentice. In their 
observance of the rules, they were also preparing for the time when they would be the 
onest enforcing the rules. What one rarely sees is students attempting to evade the rules 
imposed by their peers. Though these rules could be a source of embarrassment or 
consternation, there was a real social risk in being seen to rebel too strenuously, for it 
called into question an individual’s humility, as well as their commitment to the other 
members of their class. Students faced social penalties such as ostracism for being 
either too lax or too zealous in their observation of the rules; the middle ground, affecting 
an air of easygoing indifference, was the preferred approach. This held for academics 
as well—good scholarship and earning honors were acceptable, provided they appeared 
to come easily and without much commitment to their attainment. Class rules were a 
means by which individuals added to their respective sagas a sense of esteem for the 
rule of law.

Class cohort-based antagonism, discussed in chapter four, and class 
competitions, described in chapter five, compelled students—male students, 
specifically—to see themselves as combatants in a struggle. They found, in their fellow 
class members, individuals with whom they could confront challenges and fight for the 
respect and recognition of other members of the student body. It was in these arenas in 
which students could participate enthusiastically without fear of judgment. One’s 
personal exploits in the service of upholding class pride held great potential for students 
to fashion a personal saga in which they were champions of their class’s cause—heroes 
in the battle for campus acclaim.

Hazing, at least for the individuals at whom it was directed, burnished one’s 
capacity to endure tribulations and persist in the face of physical and mental distress. 
Overcoming these tests created in students a sense of resilience and a confidence in
themselves to stand tall in the face of difficulties. Like Hercules carrying out his labors, the protagonist of an individual saga saw in their persistence in the face of hazing a refusal to be broken. Without a doubt, some individuals did break, and therein lies one of the limitations of archival research on college students—overwhelmingly, the archives contain the stories of those who persisted, not those who could not or would not continue.

There is an important corollary to these phenomena—how they affected individuals once they were no longer freshmen. When students wielded power, rather than being subject to it, it spoke to a different dimension of their personal sagas. This transition was most pronounced when students rose from freshmen to sophomores. Rather than obedient novices, they became—in their own minds, at least—worldly and wise, tasked with the solemn obligation to instill in freshmen a respect for the proper order of student life. This perception of worldliness, rooted in having endured the trials of freshman year, helps to explain why sophomores were such enthusiastic participants in hazing. Freshmen were heirs to a cycle of subjugation that repeated itself annually, and the anxiety that that dynamic created led to sophomores eager to unleash a year’s worth of stress on a new crop of “freshies.” In its best iteration, this exercise of power produced in students’ individual sagas a sense of fairness, justice, and a respect for the responsible discharge of duties in overseeing subordinate classes. At its worst, it bred entitlement, cruelty, and a “might-makes-right” mentality that students carried into their post-collegiate lives.

The importance in individuals’ lives of rules created and enforced by students is strongly suggested in the presence of memorabilia such as rule books and beanies. The latter are an especially interesting case, as destroying the beanies was often a highly visible public declaration by freshmen that they had become sufficiently integrated into the student body that they no longer needed nor deserved to be singled out. To have
eschewed the public destruction of one’s beanie was to give up participation in an important ritual. Few students were willing to do this; even those students who wished to preserve a memento often kept only a swatch of cloth, or perhaps the brim or the button from the top of the beanie (see figures 3.3 and 3.4).

Similarly, the considerable presence of memorabilia in student-created accounts relating to class antagonism and class competitions indicate that while these were group activities, they did exert an influence in how students conceived of and recorded their personal experiences. Participating in a rush or spending the night papering the campus with proclamations were occasions from which individuals took away their own experiences apart from the other individuals participating. The archival materials show that students attached importance to both class interactions and their participation in them.

Class Sagas

Because of the class-based nature of the phenomena that were the subjects of chapters three, four, and five, class-level sagas are readily apparent when looking at the student-created accounts examined here. Each of the phenomena examined—rules, antagonism, competitions, and hazing—contributed to and were fueled by collective pride and a determination by a group of individuals to forge a new identity as a new entity: a class. The saga of a class is one in which individuals bring their time, talent, and efforts to bear in service of making a collective mark in campus lore. A class cohort that distinguished itself in class competitions, or contributed a collection of able and talented men to campus causes such the football team or a literary society, brought esteem to all members of the class. Class sagas flowed from the pride of the individuals belonging to the class and the respect accorded to that class by other members of the student body. They are also evident in the wistful remembrances of alumni, for whom
the class saga is a tale of camaraderie and mutual affection. The end of a class’s time on campus brought a keen awareness of these shared bonds; Lyman Bagg described the scene at Yale:

…in the gathering twilight, in front of or within Alumni Hall, where they met for the most part strangers, four years before, this class of a hundred men sadly form a parting ring, and grasping each other by the hand, with choking throat and tearful eye, speak the word, Farewell. It is an affecting occasion, even for the least sympathetic; and many a manly fellow, who never displayed emotion before, now sobs away his sorrow like a little child. It is the last scene of the active student life, the last time that the class meets with unbroken ranks. Individual classmates may all at various times be met with again, though this happens but rarely, but that intangible thing called “the class” of which each is a part, dies with Presentation Day.  

Students carried the memories of their classes, and the emotions they inspired, with them in their post-college years. Replying to a question about the outstanding memories of her college days, one respondent to a University of Michigan Alumnae Council survey wrote:

…the most deeply impressed upon my memory is the “Last Sing” of the June 1913 class, grouped in picturesque setting about Memorial Hall. I couldn’t sing the last verse of the “Yellow + the Blue”, for there was a lump in my throat that wouldn’t down. Without a sound the group broke up and vanished into the shadows, not weeping – but just too overcome by emotion to speak.”

The student-created accounts included in this dissertation overflow with photographs, descriptions, and memorabilia from class-related events. Programs from class banquets and souvenirs from class competitions form only part of the story, for some individuals also kept in their collections class-related items from their post-college years. Contrary to Lyman Bagg’s observation, “the class” did not die so much as change form; reunion announcements, alumni magazine clippings, wedding announcements and death notices were all well represented in the archives, as

10 Bagg, *Four Years at Yale*, 497.

individuals followed from afar the courses that the lives of their friends and acquaintances took in the decades after graduation. The class saga survives even the last graduate to pass away, continuing to live on as part of the saga of Alma Mater. The extensive inclusion of class-related media in students’ accounts, and the attention required to continue adding to those accounts over the course of a lifetime, show that students continued to contextualize their college experiences as members of their respective classes and valued their membership among their ranks.

Institution-level Sagas (The Student Body)

In applying his idea of organizational sagas to higher education, Burton Clark acknowledged that distinctions could exist between sub-units within an institution. In explaining decentralization within large campuses Clark observed: “We try to make certain components of the whole relatively self-contained and autonomous, to create a confederation of units each small enough and sufficiently limited in its concerns to develop its own mission, its own culture and community, and even its own saga to some degree.”

Yet Clark stopped short of articulating how this might look when one considers, for instance, the total student body of an institution. The collective will of all of the students in an institution at any given time has proven to be a potent force over the span of American higher education’s history. There exists, in each college and university, a spirit that defines the student body and orients its relationship to other constituencies within the institution, such as the faculty and administration. At some institutions, or in

12 Clark, “Belief and Loyalty,” 514.

13 Clark comes closer to sketching the bounds of a distinct student subculture in *The Distinctive College* (pp. 252-53), but does not venture a full explanation.

14 Clark consolidates faculty, administrators, and boards of trustees into what he calls the "personnel core" of an institution. Faculty interests and priorities, however, frequently diverge from those of administrators and boards of trustees.
certain eras, these relationships can be adversarial. The saga of the student body is a function of how students collectively react to pressure from those other groups who exercise power in the institution. The saga of the student body is the expression of the received wisdom passed from one class to the next, year over year. Students may, for example, traditionally skip classes on the day of an important sporting event. Or there may be a longstanding pattern of behavior among students of sitting in certain areas of the dining hall according to one’s class rank. These patterns of actions that are not formally codified, yet replicate themselves in successive classes over long periods of time, speak to the existence and perpetuation of a student body-level saga.

One area where these types of sagas manifest themselves in archival accounts are in instances of student unrest, such as the riots cited in chapter four. The saga of the student body is not always rational and responsible; sometimes it is self-serving, and at times it leads to expressions that are seemingly at odds with students' best interests.

College Students as a Collective Entity

The largest of the four levels comprises each of the three preceding levels; it is all of the individuals, in all of the classes, in all of the student bodies of this nation’s colleges and universities. In the period studied here, 1871-1941, this saga was one marked by significant change. As discussed in the following section, higher education and the world in which it existed were not static; new institutions and expanding access to higher education brought more—and more diverse—students to campus than at any point in the preceding two and a half centuries. As the twentieth century wore on, a college degree increasingly became the means to enter the middle class. Student life did what it has always done—it evolved. On the residential college campuses of the twenty-first century, which continue to stand apart from commuter schools, community colleges, and branch campuses, students maintain “the college life.” The saga of
college students as a collective entity has benefitted from this nation’s captivation with higher education and the things that happen within campus walls. Whether it is in the popularity of college novels a century ago or the public’s obsession with college sports today, the experience of going to college, and the fortunate individuals who have those experiences, remain a thing of fascination. The saga of students goes on—in Spring Break, in March Madness, and in myriad other ways in which the collective energy of millions of college students finds expression.

Acknowledging Limitations and Identifying Opportunities

Though the research presented here draws from a broad swath of sources across a long period of time, studies of this type have shortcomings that are important to acknowledge. One of the important limiting factors of this study is that narrowing the focus to what students themselves reported about college life necessitated deemphasizing substantial shifts that took place in the college-going population and in the nation as a whole during the period studied. Simply put, students did not write about those shifts, and in many cases were not aware of them. The years 1871 to 1941 were decades of tremendous change within the United States; World War I, Prohibition, and the Great Depression shaped the nation, as did social dynamics such as segregation and the evolution of women’s rights and roles. Likewise, higher education endured its own changes during these years, as land-grant colleges born out the Morrill Act opened the doors of higher education to more students than ever before.\footnote{According to Helen Horowitz, “In 1880 less than 2 percent of those between eighteen and twenty-one attended college; by 1890, 3 percent did so…By 1900, 4 percent of those between eighteen and twenty-one attended college; by 1920, 8 percent; by 1940, 16 percent…” (\textit{Campus Life}, 5-6). Horowitz’s numbers are drawn from U.S. Census Bureau data.} On campuses, the introduction of the elective system and the rise of the “research university” were only a couple of the seismic shifts rippling through higher education. Other scholars have chronicled these changes at length; as such, I chose instead to address the gap I
perceived in my reading of the literature by focusing on a small subset of higher education research: student-created accounts of college life. However, the voices used here to describe that life present only a small range of viewpoints. Overwhelmingly, the college students’ accounts in this research reflect higher education as seen through the eyes of white Protestant males whose families possessed the means and will to send their children to college. The systematic exclusion of students based on race, gender, and religion were ingrained in the fabric of higher education during these years, and the accounts included here do not adequately convey the injustice of those practices—first and foremost because the students at the institutions included in this study did not acknowledge or write about them to any significant degree. The stories of the students who did experience and write about those things are waiting to be told; the methodology used here would reveal a much different experience for students at, for example, the institutions created by the second Morrill Act to educate African Americans.

Just as I suggested in chapter one that students’ collections of materials created distinct meanings for those individuals beyond the sum of their parts, I also wish to make clear that the interpretations drawn from looking at the sum total of the collections analyzed here are my own. I have, undoubtedly, been influenced in my reading of individual accounts by an awareness of other sources from the same time period to which students would not have had access, as well as by my knowledge of social and educational trends which would only become clear several decades or more after the accounts included here were written. The picture of college life I have presented is, in some respects, idealized; it does not give a full accounting of the unsavory aspects of college life that existed in the time period I examined. Activities such as hazing and the cut-throat competition for selection to clubs and societies, not to mention the ugliness of the social ills of institutionalized racism and sexism, shaped the lives of students and
those individuals’ respective webs of social interactions. Those stories are of profound importance, and I look forward to telling them through my future research.

**Putting Research into Practice: The Past Shows the Way Forward**

The last of the three research questions I posed at the outset of this dissertation was: what insights can students’ meaning-making experiences in the era studied provide to present-day scholars, practitioners, administrators, and students? Phrased more pointedly, one might ask what the experiences of students a century or more ago have to do with the work at hand in the twenty-first century, but the underlying question—the one that historians consistently face from colleagues in other disciplines—is, “So what?” The importance of past events and their utility in informing analyses of ongoing issues are frequently lost on the present-focused scholars and administrators who inhabit many of the most important decision-making roles on our campuses. Yet this failure to draw upon the past and the lessons it holds can be remedied; it is up to historians of higher education to communicate the relevance and value of our work. Studying the college students of the past and how those individuals experienced campus life can provide context and direction on today’s campuses; in fact, as the following sections will show, those experiences have the potential to aid the work of number of individuals and groups on campus.

**Scholars**

Higher education, like any other large, complex entity, is a collection of moving parts whose exact interactions and mechanisms defy easy analysis. The actions of one group affect others, even those seemingly far removed; these connections can be hard to discern, necessitating that researchers of higher education understand the functions and problems of content areas above and beyond their own. Directly or indirectly, many of the topics that we research originate with or affect students. What may surprise some
scholars—and certainly some administrators—is that few of the problems of today’s campuses are endemic to 2017. Many of the issues that scholars are currently wrestling with—anxieties about cost, about the role of athletics, about the quality of teaching—are the same that scholars of 1917, or even 1717, confronted as well. One example presented here—hazing—continues to plague campuses nationwide. The “crisis” of hazing is well into its third century, still defying higher education’s best efforts to eradicate it but, unfortunately, far from a new phenomenon. Consulting the lessons of the past, and the hard-earned wisdom they offer, can help to shed light on the issues with which we in higher education now struggle.

Because many of us who are scholars are teachers as well, there is also an opportunity to incorporate students’ perspectives of college life into our classrooms. The affirmation of the extracurriculum’s importance shown in this study is not isolated to the period from 1871 to 1941; conversations with today’s students readily confirm that academics are, in the words of Owen Johnson, “the price to be paid for the privilege of passing four years in pleasant places with congenial companions.”16 However, there is potential to use that preoccupation the many students have as a point of departure for engaging students in a discussion about their individual goals and shared values. Much of the learning that takes place in college occurs outside of the classroom, covering things well beyond academics. How, then, might we better correlate students’ academic aspirations with their not-necessarily-misplaced focus on the other opportunities college life has to offer? Students have the answers—it is up to us to ask the right questions.

Practitioners

For the campus personnel whose day-to-day work focuses on students’ success, such as those in Student Affairs, it is imperative to understand the factors of

16 Johnson, Stover at Yale, 97.
engagement that resonate most effectively with students. The seven decades’ worth of student accounts that formed the basis of this study showed that the aspects of campus life that fostered bonds among students and between those students and their institutions were the aspects of the college experience that made the most profound and lasting impression: the extracurriculum. With this knowledge in mind, college personnel would be well-served to focus on programs and events that cultivate these positive feelings. Though students sometimes grumble about events such as convocation or initiatives aimed at helping them get to know their peers, these things can and do engage students and enrich the college experience.

Many of those same personnel also deal with matters of student discipline. Though complaining about “kids these days” is a time-honored tradition for every generation of adults, in truth our students exhibit the same propensity for youthful indiscretions and mischief that have always existed. The same energy that animated the students of Smith to throw firecrackers out of their windows and break into song at 2 a.m. back in October 1892 lives on in today’s students. Collegians have always been inclined to push the bounds of authority and are adept at finding creative ways to do so. Keeping this in mind might help to dial down the mindset that has taken hold at some universities to pathologize and punish even the most minor instances of student dissent.

There are, however, other aspects of student life that fall beyond simple indiscretion. The accounts presented in this dissertation are, on the whole, relatively light-hearted examples of college life; they reflect the aspects of the college experience that students chose to emphasize and sought to remember. Unfortunately, there exist many historical examples of the negative aspects of college life that today’s students experience. Though they were not consistently present in the accounts examined in the preceding chapters, violent hazing, peer pressure, alcohol abuse, and students’ lack of civility in town/gown relations all existed on the campuses of the past. They continue in
2017 to maintain their roles as factors that detract from students’ wellbeing and their ability to successfully earn their degrees. In these instances, history offers us a guide by showing what has not worked in trying to counter these problems.

Administrators

As the economic fortunes of higher education continue to shift, attracting and retaining students has become a matter of supreme importance. Institutions compete on curb appeal, hoping to woo prospective students. Administrators think that they know what students value—one need only look at the proliferation of luxury dorms, rock walls and media centers for evidence. Yet there sometimes exists a profound gulf between what institutions know about students and what they presume to know.

Once individuals have been enticed to enroll at an institution, student retention is a critical issue. Concerns for students’ success have been amplified in an era of shrinking state appropriations, as students who drop out may represent a loss of vital tuition dollars. Retention, then, takes on added urgency; the success of the students and the fiscal health of their institutions hinge on their remaining enrolled through the completion of their degree programs. The good news for administrators is that student life research holds a tool for helping to address these two related issues. Many students, it turns out, are just as interested in an institution that nurtures a sense of belonging and pride as they are in dormitories with memory foam mattresses and dining halls serving gourmet salads. The roots of this belonging and pride are in the student saga, and administrators can draw and keep students by tapping into and amplifying its presence. Creating a campus environment that celebrates tradition, honors heritage, and invites students to embrace their shared membership in that community can accomplish far more than a new campus juice bar. Student-focused historical research of the type presented here offers interested campus decision makers a means to identify
and share the unique aspects of their institutional and student sagas that appeal to students’ desires to be, as many institutions’ recruitment materials proclaim, “a part of something special.”

One of the many potential avenues for using this kind of research would be for an administrator such a Vice President of Student Affairs to use their institution’s history to foster dialogue between disparate groups of students. This could be accomplished by directing student affairs personnel to incorporate institution-specific programming geared toward emphasizing students’ collective identity in the same manner that class competitions used to in previous eras. For example, a freshman seminar class could include a project tasking students with working together to research a particular student tradition or activity and then encourage participation in that activity. First generation college students might benefit from a similar activity, as it could offer a way for them to better understand their new campus home and the underlying currents of cultural capital that animate the actions of peers who come to campus already well-versed in the norms of college life.

There is one other constituency that savvy administrators might use student life research to appeal to: alumni. Generic pleas for support are easy to ignore, but materials that appeal in a targeted way to an alumnus’s memories of specific aspects of the extracurriculum, such as participation in a certain campus tradition, might find a more receptive audience. Yet there is a danger here, as well. A dynamic sometimes occurs wherein an institution takes a student activity or tradition that grew organically among the students and co-opts it as a university-sponsored exercise in boosterism. The furtive, students-only bonfire staged at a secret off-campus location loses all of its mystique and most of its appeal when the institution steps in, advertising the event with approved-for-posting fliers and providing students to-and-from transportation and souvenir t-shirts courtesy of Office of Student Involvement. Any institutional efforts to use the activities
and symbols of student life in the service of recruiting and retaining students or appealing to alumni must be carefully calibrated not to cheapen the phenomena they invoke.

Students

An institution that cultivates an awareness and appreciation of its own history will find that its students are willing partners in exploring the past. Occasionally, this results in the exhumation of episodes that are painful or embarrassing chapters in the history of the institution. Rather than shy away from these episodes, institutions should use them as a means to engage students in thoughtful discussions about how institutional beliefs and values evolve, just as those of individuals do.

Making students aware of their institution’s history and giving them the opportunity to connect with it strengthens the institutional saga and invests students in the preservation of the campus, its physical spaces, and the various expressions of its culture. Encouraging students to be active producers and conservators of their individual and collective sagas helps to ensure that our campuses retain their status as places in which students can construct “a world to suit themselves.”

Concluding Thoughts: What is the Point of Higher Education?

The significance that students in the decades examined in this dissertation attached to the extracurriculum—a significance that continues to be exhibited in the values and actions of today’s students—begs a question: what is the point of higher education? In recent years, more than a few pundits and politicians have made the case that higher education’s purpose is to prepare individuals to enter the workforce—a utilitarian view of higher education that often rests on the misguided notion that only a handful of majors, such as business and engineering, merit the investment in time and
money that obtaining a college degree demands. There is certainly a case to be made that a college degree is now a prerequisite for the types of jobs that sustain a middle class standard of living, and plenty of students—especially those adults older than the traditional 18 to 21-year old age bracket—pursue degrees specifically toward that end. But that emphasis on earning a *credential* rather than receiving an *education* misses the value of the college experience. If we work from the premise that the point of higher education is to *learn*, then students are doing—and have long been doing—precisely that. But because so much of that learning is not the sort that can be quantified, tested, and measured against rubrics or return on investment, it can be easy to discount its worth.

Those fortunate enough to attend college in the traditional four-year, residential setting, as did the students depicted in this study, enjoy the most significant and lasting benefit of higher education: the emotional growth and socialization that comes from the sorts of shared meaning-making experiences that the college environment is designed to foster. Across the seven decades spanning 1871-1941, the student accounts included here underscore the fact that students focused their attention on the extracurriculum as their primary source of learning and development. Though the students who created the accounts that are featured in this dissertation are no longer with us, the materials that they left behind show us with clarity, humor, and poignancy what it was to be a college student in days gone by. Too often, the granularities and idiosyncrasies of higher education’s history are reduced to a smooth ribbon of generalities. But the story of higher education is really about the stories of individuals. When we call upon these voices of the past, they call back to us; they tell us what that made their respective campuses, and the lives that unfolded within their walls, significant and memorable. The individuals whose words, pictures and memorabilia are featured here are only a tiny
fraction of a much larger mosaic of student life. There are many tales yet to be told—we need only to provide them a willing ear.
Chapter 7 – Epilogue

The Promise and Peril of Technology in Archival Research on College Students

As with so many aspects of education these days, technology is a mixed blessing: it represents both opportunities for discovery and collaboration and the potential to alter—for the worse—the means by which researchers study student life. Technology allows archivists to share their respective institutional histories by digitizing physical media such as scrapbooks and newspapers. Yet even as that is taking place, contemporary students are increasingly turning to digital means to document their lives in meticulous detail across photo and information-sharing platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat—a positive development technologically, but a move that may limit the ability of future researchers to understand the students of this generation.

Today’s scholars have access to global repositories of journal articles, publication databases, and stores of information that would have been unthinkable only 25 years ago, let alone a century or more in the past. For institutions and their archivists, technology has provided a platform through which they can bring their collections to new audiences. A yearbook from 1900 that for over a century may only have been viewable in the hushed confines of a special collections reading room is now at the fingertips of any individual with a laptop and an internet connection. Finding aids once painstakingly copied and squirreled away in filing cabinets or multi-volume binders are now searchable with a smartphone. Many institutions have proactively used their archives to construct online resources that tell the history of their respective institutions and communities. The University of Kentucky’s “ExploreUK” website represents an ambitious approach, integrating Kentucky history with University resources that include, among other holdings, decades’ worth of student newspapers, yearbooks, and board of trustees’ meeting minutes. Elsewhere, the University of Vermont’s “Landscape Change Program” demonstrates the connection between
institutional archives and local communities by pairing historical photographs with modern-day reshoots of the same scenes—which the public is invited to submit—to document that state’s changing physical and environmental character. These are but two of the innovative ways that technology is shedding new light on the history of our institutions and the lives of the people who have passed through their campuses.

Using technology to increase access to the contents of institutional archives does more than merely satisfy the curiosity of history buffs or provide savvy student interns an outlet for their technological prowess. Greater access to and understanding of institutions’ histories provides today’s policy makers a way to move beyond the present-focused—and potentially myopic—consideration of phenomena like shared governance, student conduct, and town/gown relations, and instead conceive of those things as continuums in which the present is only one part of a larger dynamic. The challenge archivists and researchers of campus history face is to remind administrators of this fact and to provide specific and relevant perspectives that connect past and present; increasingly, technology provides the best means to accomplish that.

From a historical researcher’s perspective, technology has been a boon to the study of college student life. The scrap paper, copy cards, hand-copied inventories and pencils (no pens—never pens!) have had their duties usurped—thankfully—by the smartphone. What in a previous era would have been an afternoon of meticulous transcription is now accomplished with a few taps of a finger; a document can be photographed, turned into a PDF, and annotated in the time it used to take to write down box and folder information. Laptops, portable scanners, and digital cameras add further dimensions of convenience, making archival work more efficient and easier to track. Sharing that information with other researchers is also easier than ever through e-mail and online file sharing.

But while technology has smoothed the way for present-day historians to study the past, future researchers may find themselves drowning in a sea of digital data. Whatever
limitations in access and condition hard copy archival sources pose, they are at least self-contained and straightforward; their relationship to their creators and to the institutions housing them are generally clear. In 2017, students are not keeping hard-copy mementoes in the same way that students used to; increasingly, their lives are catalogued online. The rich trove of historical items available for studying student life from 1871-1941 won’t exist for this generation, because technology has changed the way that individuals keep their memories and construct their personal sagas. The tools that today’s students use to accomplish those ends will primarily be digital—and potentially unavailable to future researchers. Or, perhaps just as troubling, too much of it be available to future researchers—a vast field of digital chaff with no wheat to be found. In an era where film was a luxury, students were conscious and intentional in documenting their college years and the moments of meaning that filled them. Taking a photograph was a significant act. Today’s students may generate thousands, if not tens of thousands of photos, during their college years. How, then, do we ensure that this era of student life is not lost in a deluge of data?

I believe that our present state of technology calls for concerted institutional efforts to chronicle and preserve accounts of student life and, importantly, to make students an active part of that preservation. What might that look like? Perhaps it is institutions asking students to contribute their digital collections and recollections when they graduate. As historians and researchers, it is crucial that we to involve students in the collection process while they have the data available. We also have opportunities as teachers to help create the records that future scholars will rely upon when they study college student life of the early twenty-first century. Finding ways to actively engage students in thinking about, articulating, and recording their meaning-making experiences will ensure that student-created accounts of college life do not become a thing of the past.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>Public/Private</th>
<th>Gender of Student Body, 1871-1941</th>
<th>Decades When Archival Collections Examined Were Strongest</th>
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<td>1880-1910</td>
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<td>Male until 1918, then coeducational</td>
<td>1910-1940</td>
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<td>1769</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1900-1920</td>
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<td>Public</td>
<td>Male until 1890; coed after</td>
<td>1900-1920</td>
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<td>Public</td>
<td>Male, with some women enrolled as special (non-degree-seeking) students</td>
<td>1920-1940</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>1865</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1870-1915</td>
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</table>
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University of Kentucky – Graduate Certificate – College Teaching and Learning, 2014
University of Vermont – Master of Business Administration, 2004
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