

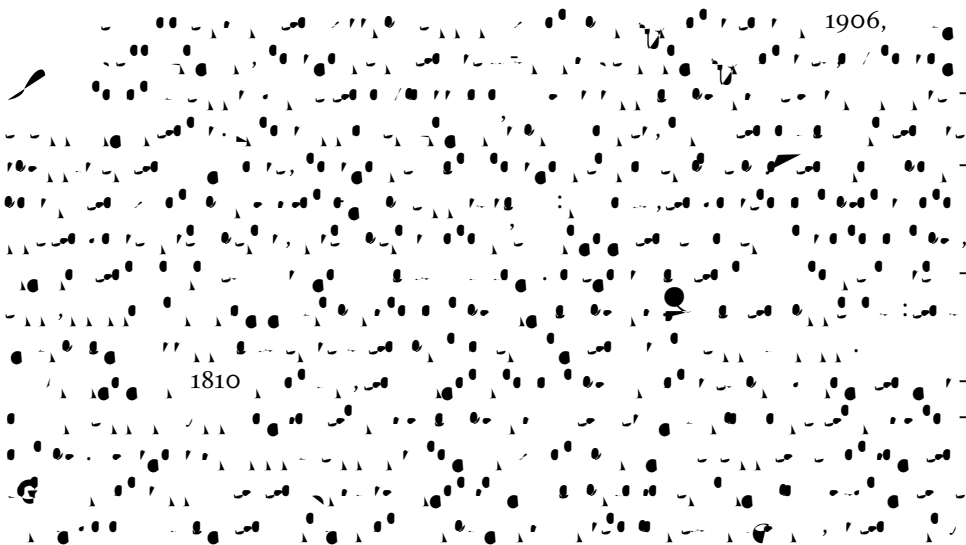
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Emily J. Levine

As a design innovation, the modern university is an institution that unites the advancement of knowledge through research with its dissemination through teaching. Its inception in Germany in the first decade of the nineteenth century inspired an American adaptation that merged the German version with the English undergraduate college to produce a new bundle that would be emulated the world over. The historical view reveals cycles of sustaining innovation in which academic entrepreneurs supplemented the research-teaching synthesis with institutions devoted to one task or the other. Despite these disruptive efforts and continuing evidence of inefficiency, however, the original institutional hybrid remains the dominant model. This essay argues that the university's persistence is best understood as fulfilling a deeper need in American political culture.

“The existence of the university ... is a metaphysical necessity.”

Jacob Burckhardt¹



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China: Duke Kunshan University,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 68–82, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/establishing-research-focused-liberal-arts-college-china-duke-kunshan-university>; Wen-hsin Yeh, “Chinese Universities on the Global Stage: Perspectives from the Recent Past,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 83–97, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/chinese-universities-global-stage-perspectives-recent-past>; and Mianheng Jiang, “The Liberal Arts in a Chinese Tech University: ShanghaiTech,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 98–105, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/liberal-arts-chinese-tech-university-shanghaitech>. For a narrative that expertly translates the German-American relationship into the next Sino-American chapter, see William C. Kirby, *Creating the Modern University from Germany to America to China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2022).

- ³ Beginning with the Truman Report, we can track a decadal cycle diagnosis of this central tension and a proposed solution to it. The President’s Commission on Higher Education, *Higher Education for American Democracy: A Report* (New York, 1947), 16. One particularly entertaining report from the 1990s analyzed nearly sixty quantitative studies on the relationship between research and teaching, and offered a meta-analysis of their synthesis: “We must conclude that the common belief that research and teaching are inextricably entwined is an enduring myth. At best, research and teaching are very loosely coupled.” After poring over dozens of regression models and statistical analyses, John Hattie and H. W. Marsh advance their bold policy claim, “We advocate that a desirable aim of a university would be to devise strategies to enhance the relationship between teaching and research, and all should be pleased when they increase the relationship positively beyond zero.” “The Relationship between Research and Teaching: A Meta-Analysis,” *Review of Educational Research* 66 (4) (1996): 507–542, here, 533.
- ⁴ The classic example for standardizing on the wrong design has been the Qwerty keyboard. Although in recent years scholars have expressed reservations about that example, the concept persists. Paul A. David, “Clio and the Economics of QWERTY,” *American Economic Review* 75 (1985): 332–337. See also James Mahoney, “Path Dependence in Historical Sociology,” *Theory and Society* 29 (4) (2000): 507–548.
- ⁵ G.K. Chesterton, *Collected Works* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 157.
- ⁶ Wilhelm von Humboldt to Caroline Dacheröden, August 18, 1809, in *Wilhelm und Caroline von Humboldt in Ihren Briefen* [Wilhelm and Caroline von Humboldt in Their Letters], ed. Anna von Sydow (Osnabrück, Germany: Zeller, 1968), 223. Also, the “academic revolution” is a term used by Randall Collins to describe this period. See Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 644–645.
- ⁷ Wilhelm von Humboldt, “On the Spirit and the Organisational Framework of Intellectual Institutions in Berlin,” *Minerva* 8 (1970): 243.
- ⁸ For a helpful exposition of the Humboldtian ideals, see Mitchell Ash, “Bachelor of What, Master of Whom? The Humboldt Myth and Historical Transformations of Higher Education in German-Speaking Europe and the U.S.,” *European Journal of Education* 41 (2) (2006): 245–267.
- ⁹ Sylvia Paletschek, “The Invention of Humboldt and the Impact of National Socialism: The German University Idea in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” in *Science in the Third Reich*, ed. Margit Szöllösi-Janze (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 37–58.

- ¹⁰ Emily J. Levine and Mitchell L. Stevens, “Negotiating the Academic Social Contract,” *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 54 (1) (2022): 2–7. We also coedited the special issue, “Hard Bargains: Truman Commission Report at 75.”
- ¹¹ For a more generous reading that places the history of the “idea” of the university earlier in the nineteenth century, see Adam Nelson, *Capital of Mind: The Idea of a Modern American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024); and John Henry Newman, *The Idea of the University*, ed. Frank Turner (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 3.
- ¹² For the phrase “competitive emulation,” see Emily J. Levine, “Baltimore Teaches, Göttingen Learns,” *American Historical Review* (2016): 780–823; and Emily J. Levine, *Allies and Rivals: German-American Exchange and the Rise of the Modern Research University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 4. For transatlantic and especially German-American academic relations, see also Thomas Adam and Charlotte A. Lerg, “Diplomacy on Campus: The Political Dimensions of Academic Exchange in the North Atlantic,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 13 (4) (2015): 299–310; Philipp Löser and Christoph Strupp, eds., *Universität der Gelehrten— Universität der Experten: Adaptionen deutscher Wissenschaft in den USA des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* [University of Scholars—University of Experts: Adaptations of German Science in the Nineteenth Century USA] (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005); Stefan Paulus, *Vorbild USA? Amerikanisierung von Universität und Wissenschaft in Westdeutschland 1945–1976* [The United States as a Role Model?: Americanization of Universities and Science in West Germany 1945–1976] (München: Oldenbourg, 2010); and Anja Werner, *The Transatlantic World of Higher Education* (New York: Berghahn, 2013).
- ¹³ Hugh Hawkins, “University Identity: The Teaching and Research Functions,” in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860–1920*, ed. Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 285–312.
- ¹⁴ On the diplomatic uses of emphasizing German academy supremacy, see Charlotte Lerg, *Universitätsdiplomatie: Wissenschaft und Prestige in den transatlantischen Beziehungen 1890–1920*

- and Abraham Flexner, "A Proposal to Establish an American University," memorandum, November 1922, Flexner Papers, Library of Congress.
- ³⁵ Abraham Flexner, "A Modern University," *Atlantic Monthly* 136 (1925): 530–541.
- ³⁶ Abraham Flexner, *Universities: American, English, German* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 217.
- ³⁷ Abraham Flexner, "Symposium on the Outlook for Higher Education in the United States," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 60 (5) (1930), Box 33, Flexner Papers, Library of Congress.
- ³⁸ Elisabeth Crawford, *Nationalism and Internationalism in Science, 1880–1939: Four Studies of the Nobel Population* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5, 110, 111.
- ³⁹ Charles McClelland, *Berlin, the Mother of All Research Universities: 1860–1918* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington, 2016), 13.
- ⁴⁰ Justin J. W. Powell and Jennifer Dusdal, "Science Production in Germany, France, Bel-