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# Accidental Agent of Change: George Ticknor's Study Abroad in 1815 Germany

*Leslie Bobon*

## Abstract

The historian Herbst (1965) posited that “scholarship . . . like most human endeavors, [is] given [its] distinguishing character by the specific time and place in which [it is] pursued” (p. vii). The distinguishing character of U.S. higher education at the turn of the nineteenth century was transition. Indeed, in the early 1800s, U.S. educators were struggling to determine the future of higher education in the United States, igniting discussions and disagreements concerning everything from the purpose of education, to curriculum and pedagogy, and to student life (Herbst, 1965). Yet, answers did not appear to be forthcoming from within the young nation’s colleges, encouraging a growing trend to seek answers abroad. Early academicians looked to German universities as models of ideal higher education institutions (Gore, 2005). To import ideas that would shape U.S. higher education, U.S. academicians sent young scholars to Germany. One of the first scholars to study abroad was George Ticknor. This paper examines Ticknor’s study-abroad observations and personal quest for knowledge, highlighting the elements of the philosophy of education, curriculum and pedagogy, and student life in nineteenth century German higher education. The author argues that early study-abroad students in Germany, such as George Ticknor, brought home profound observations which influenced the institutions of nineteenth century U.S. higher education.

**Keywords:** George Ticknor, study abroad, German higher education, nineteenth century U.S. higher education

At the turn of the nineteenth century, U.S. higher education was preparing for transition. The country and its needs were outgrowing the educational system of the time (Hofstadter, 1952). Academicians and some of the general population questioned the applicability of the classical liberal arts curriculum that had been in place since the foundation of Harvard in 1636. Questions arose about how to approach education as well as its accessibility. Unrest marked students' everyday life; they yearned for freedom from controlling faculty and administrators. Answers did not appear to be forthcoming from within the young nation's colleges, encouraging a growing trend to seek answers abroad. Gore (2005) suggested that "early [U.S.] educators and administrators looked to Europe, and particularly to Germany, for models as they shaped all their institutions of higher learning" (p. 35). In fact, the nineteenth century marked a trend of U.S. student migration, as almost 9,000 U.S. students pursued foreign study in German universities (Herbst, 1965). U.S. academicians were anxious to pursue the opportunity to send young scholars to Germany and thus import ideas that would shape U.S. higher education.

One such young scholar was George Ticknor. Tired of an uninspiring life as a lawyer and thirsty yet for scholarship, George Ticknor left his law practice to study abroad in a country considered exceptional for its higher education: Germany (Ticknor, Hillard, & Ticknor, 1876). Of his life as a lawyer and his subsequent departure for Germany, Ticknor explained,

But I tired of the life, and my father understood it; for I was very frank with him, and told him – what he knew very well – that I was more occupied with Greek and Latin than with law-books . . . I therefore gave up my office, and turned all my attention and effort to learning what I could of the German language, and German universities, to which my thoughts and wishes had been already turned as the best places for education. (p. 11)

Much credit goes to young U.S. scholars, such as George Ticknor, for importing insights from German universities to serve as a model for U.S. higher education in the nineteenth century. When George Ticknor decided to study in Germany in the early 1800s, he was filled with hopes of what he would personally gain abroad, but like most travelers, was unaware of the wide range of experiences that he would encounter. This paper examines Ticknor's study-abroad observations and personal quest for knowledge, highlighting the elements of the philosophy of education, curriculum and pedagogy, and student life in nineteenth century German higher education. In fact, some of Ticknor's most poignant observations about the philosophy of education, curriculum and pedagogy, and student life foreshadowed the transitions that higher education in the U.S. would soon thereafter experience. These profound changes can be attributed to the influence of Germany's great universities and the accounts of the first U.S. students who studied there.

### **The Turn of the Nineteenth Century: U.S. Higher Education in Transition**

The historian Herbst (1965) posited that "scholarship . . . like most human endeavors, [is] given [its] distinguishing character by the specific time and

place in which [it is] pursued” (p. vii). The distinguishing character of U.S. higher education at the turn of the nineteenth century was transition. Indeed, U.S. educators were struggling to determine the future of higher education in the United States, igniting discussions and disagreements concerning everything from the purpose of education, to curriculum and pedagogy, and to student life.

An element of U.S. higher education in transition in the early 1800s was the type of student, and consequently, the purpose of higher education. An important mission of colonial colleges was to prepare clergy (Herbst, 1965). Although many colleges continued to be religiously-based at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the period between 1760 (and intensified by the Revolution) through the Civil War witnessed a move toward secularization. The nineteenth century marked the height of this change of purpose when future lawyers, merchants, physicians, and teachers, needing to run burgeoning communities, outnumbered divinity students (Hofstadter, 1952). A changing student body and changing needs of the country brought into question the purpose of higher education.

Another element of higher education that generated heated debate was the traditional liberal arts curriculum (Herbst, 1965). From the founding of the first colleges, adherence to the classics of Latin and Greek was valued (Winterer, 1998). Even so, there were some U.S. classical scholars, beginning in 1820, who were among the first professors to take the lead from German universities to study the classics in new ways, to “make the ancient Mediterranean relevant to nineteenth-century America” (p. 112). However, most U.S. colleges defended the traditional adherence to grammar study and recitation. For example, a defense of the liberal arts curriculum was presented by Yale President Jeremiah Day and Professor James Kingsley (1828) in the Yale Report of 1828, in response to opinion that the study of dead languages should be dropped from the curriculum. Day and Kingsley (1828) insisted the purpose of a college was to “lay the foundation of a superior education” by way of the liberal arts curriculum, which they described as the “discipline and furniture of the mind” (p. 278). In other words, a liberal arts curriculum strengthened the mind and stored it with information. Indeed, many universities had no intention to separate from the liberal arts curriculum, as the faculty believed it met their needs to train liberal minds to think (Herbst, 1965). In addition, Day and Kingsley (1828) argued that students should follow the same curriculum because their “prescribed course contains those subjects only which ought to be understood by every one [sic] who aims at a thorough education” (p. 283). Yet, the country’s needs were beginning to vary. Vocational and professional skills were not addressed in the liberal arts curriculum. The new colleges in the West, for example, needed to focus on practical skills to build the frontier (Geiger, 2000). Therefore, college faculty members were actively discussing if and how values and needs were reflected in the curriculum.

Closely related to the curriculum was the pedagogy. Many U.S. teaching methods were monotonous: customarily the instructor read from a book or commented on a passage. The students were typically required to recite passages

every time they attended class (Herbst, 1965). Jackson (2000) summed up the Harvard classroom experience at this time as “lifeless and uninspiring curriculum that failed to address the needs of either the pre-professionals or the scholastically inclined” (p. 52). Indeed, many scholars were beginning to see the prescribed liberal arts curriculum and pedagogy as unfulfilling and impractical antiquities.

Finally, student life at the turn of the nineteenth century proved stifling. College staff acted in loco parentis. Thus, all of students’ daily activities were accounted for: studying, eating, sleeping, attending chapel, attending classes. Basically, “college life resembled that of soldiers in their barracks” (Herbst, 1965, p. 27). What had worked for the young U.S. colleges for almost 200 years was becoming less relevant. The time was ripening for U.S. higher education to make changes. Increasingly, the reputation of Germany’s universities encouraged scholars to look toward Germany for what they could not find in U.S. higher education.

### **Our Brave Scholar: George Ticknor**

George Ticknor was born in Boston in 1791. Although his family was “neither rich nor poor” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 1), by most standards, Ticknor was a member of the middle class of Boston, securing many privileges in his early life. Ticknor’s father was a Dartmouth graduate and became the principal of a school in Boston and later a grocer before he retired. George Ticknor also attended Dartmouth and was afterwards admitted to the bar. As Hillard noted about Ticknor, after a year of a successful law practice, young Ticknor decided that his life as “a lawyer would not satisfy his most simple ideas of usefulness or happiness. He therefore gave up his office, and turned his thoughts to plans of study and travel which should prepare him for the greater advantages of Europe” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 23). In a letter to a friend, young Ticknor declared his motives for abandoning law and pursuing study in Europe: “The whole tour in Europe I consider a sacrifice of enjoyment to improvement. I value it only in proportion to the great means and inducements it will afford me to study – not men, but books” (p. 23). It is important to note that when George Ticknor decided to study abroad, he sought advice about traveling and received it from some of the most influential men in the country: Thomas Jefferson, President Adams, Yale professors Day and Kingsley, and many other influential men of business and letters (Ticknor et al., 1876). From these experiences, including a comfortable childhood with educated parents, a Dartmouth education, a successful but short law career, and the company of the most prominent and influential people in the country, one could say George Ticknor was privileged and in a position to pursue his dreams.

While still in Boston, Ticknor sought a German teacher and a few German textbooks (both of which were very difficult to find) and studied the German language the summer and autumn of 1814 to prepare for his upcoming travel. Afterwards, with letters of introduction in hand from influential people in the area, including President Adams, Ticknor embarked upon a three-month journey to Washington, D.C. and Virginia to meet “persons very interesting and

important in public affairs” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 12). The information he sought from these important people was whom to meet and how to approach his travels in Europe and his study in Germany. Thus, on April 16, 1815, 23-year-old George Ticknor left Boston and its promises of a stable life to travel in Europe and study at the University of Göttingen (Ticknor et al., 1876). After traveling for months in England and the Netherlands, he arrived in Göttingen on August 4, 1815, feeling like “a pilgrim who had reached the shrine of his faith” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 70). George Ticknor was anticipating a promising personal journey.

### **Through George Ticknor’s Eyes: Three Elements of Higher Education**

These aforementioned elements of U.S. higher education, philosophy of education, curriculum and pedagogy, and student life, so vehemently discussed in the academy at the turn of the nineteenth century, found their way into George Ticknor’s memoirs of his study abroad in Germany. Ticknor’s memoir was compiled by his family and his biographer, George Hillard. The memoir utilizes Ticknor’s letters while abroad, his later recollections of his life, and Hillard’s commentary. Hillard (1876) admits that although a memoir of someone “prepared largely by the immediate relatives of its subject . . . is apt to be colored by their affection and sympathy,” (p. iii) “the compilers of this work have striven to make it a truthful sketch” (p. iv). Therefore, quotes that were previously dropped from his memoir, but found elsewhere, were included in order to accurately represent Ticknor’s adventures in Germany.

### **Philosophy of Education**

How the German universities approached education proved one of Ticknor’s favorite topics. German universities were famous for three concepts that guided their educational philosophy: *Lernfreiheit*, *Lehrfreiheit*, and *Wissenschaft*, or roughly freedom to learn, freedom to teach, and science and scholarship (or research) (Anderson, 2004, p. 55; Herbst, 1965). German higher education instilled a sense of scholarship for the sake of learning as well as “a commitment to scholarship as a profession” (Herbst, 1965, p. 19). Walz (1936) concluded that in German universities,

Academic freedom applied to professors and students alike. For the students it meant that they were free to choose their studies and that they were masters of their own lives. For the professors it meant that they were secure in their positions and that they were free to teach what they believed to be the truth. Neither the church nor the State nor outmoded tradition nor political parties were to interfere with their studies and investigations . . . Academic freedom, more than any other factor made the German universities the center of progressive thought in investigations of every kind. (p. 51)

Likewise, Flexner (1930) proclaimed the German universities’ unique freedom in this fashion: “The new University [of Berlin] was intended primarily to develop knowledge, secondarily and perhaps as a concession, to train the professional and the official classes” (p. 312). Thus, the idea of academic freedom was paramount to the spirit and identity of German higher education.

These ideals were new to Ticknor and his fascination with this philosophy permeated his journals. When trying to describe how the Germans approached scholarship, he explained, “In England the man of letters must be more or less a practical man; in Germany, he is necessarily as pure a theorist or idealist as the Greeks were” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 99). Ticknor further tried to capture the essence of academic freedom as:

An extreme freedom, and, as I should call it, latitudinarianism in thinking, speaking, writing, and teaching on all subjects . . . a more perfect freedom, and in most cases a more perfect use and indulgence of it, cannot be imagined than is now to be found in Germany. (p. 99)

This philosophy toward education delighted Ticknor, offering him a scholastic opportunity he had not found at home. Yet, often the idea of academic freedom for German students morphed into a voice for political concerns in addition to university education. The U.S. scholars, therefore, may have imported a different version of these ideals than the German version (McClelland, 1980). Nevertheless, the idea of academic freedom for George Ticknor proved a liberating and fulfilling aspect of his journey.

### **Curriculum and Pedagogy**

Concerning curriculum and pedagogy, Germany was the site of a revolution in classical scholarship that had begun in the late 18th century. German scholars sought to connect the Greek spirit with the modern world through literature, art, and philosophy. Thus, criticisms of the classical language teaching in the U.S. had some roots in the changes in classical teaching in German higher education at the end of the eighteenth century (Winterer, 1998).

Another German curricular innovation included the development of a strong partnership of scholarship and research, or *Wissenschaft*. Wilhelm Humboldt is often credited with the concept of the link between teaching and research (Anderson, 2004). In fact, Herbst (1965) said of this time that U.S. graduates believed that premier “professional training in the more specialized scholarly and scientific disciplines was not to be obtained from U.S. college . . . but was reserved for those privileged to drink at the fountain of German scholarship” (p. 3). Ticknor’s numerous details about the curriculum, the professors, and their pedagogy illustrate his appreciation for the sheer numbers of staff and variety of courses.

For instance, Ticknor was struck by the number of faculty: “There are nearly forty, appointed and paid by the government, and there are, besides, as many more men of science and letters, who live here for the purpose of lecturing and instruction” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 76). Forty professors and just as many instructors must have seemed numerous compared to the small faculty numbers at the turn of the nineteenth century in U.S. colleges. Ticknor’s own institution, Dartmouth College, employed only four professors in the early 1800s (Fiegen, 2012). In contrast, the large number of professors at Göttingen made possible a comparably high number of classes for the offering: “At least seventy or eighty different courses of lectures . . . are going on at the same time” (Ticknor et al.,

Table 1

*Ticknor's Monday, Wednesday, and Friday Daily Schedule*

Time	Activity
5:00 a.m. – 7:30 a.m.	Greek (study)
8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	German (lesson with Prof. Benecke)
9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Prof. Eichhorn's lecture on first three Evangelists
10:15 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Greek (study)
12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Dinner
1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	Nap
1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	Read passages for Dr. Blumenbach's class
3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Natural History class (Dr. Blumenbach)
4:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Walk
5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.	Recite Greek with Dr. Schultze
6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.	Fencing with U.S. friend Everett
7:00 p.m. – 9:45 p.m.	Read German
10:00 p.m.	Bed "sleep the sleep that knows no waking" (p. 80)

*Note.* Adapted from Ticknor et al. (1876).

1876, p. 76). The plethora of disciplines and number of class choices were major differences that fed Ticknor's hunger for scholarship.

On a daily basis, Ticknor took full advantage of the opportunity to learn from great teachers and choose among his interests for coursework. In a letter home to his father, he described his schedule for three days of the week. Three more days were devoted to practically the same activities except for slightly different times. As shown in Table 1, Ticknor displayed a tireless quest to gain scholarship.

Ticknor's schedule shows not only his dedication to his studies, but his interest in the scholarship of his professors, whom he sometimes sought for private tutoring. Ticknor expressed his admiration for the expertise of his professors in his writings. He described to his father his amazement of the scholarship of his Greek tutor, Dr. Schultze,

Everyday [sic] I am filled with new astonishment at the variety and accuracy, the minuteness and readiness, of his learning . . . Dr. Schultze is hardly older than I am . . . It never entered into my imagination to conceive that any expense of time or talent could make a man so accomplished in this forgotten language as he is. (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 73)

The excitement with which Ticknor described his German professors' pedagogical methods contrasts sharply with his disappointment in the Dartmouth instructors: "The instructors [at Dartmouth] generally were not as good teachers as my father had been, and I knew it; so I took no great interest in study" (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 7). Ticknor's biographer, Hillard, commented on how different his new teachers were from his old:

At home he had had teachers, that is, he had had men who knew somewhat more than he did, to whom he recited his lessons, who corrected his mistakes and allowed him to learn. But at Göttingen he was made to understand the difference between reciting to a man and being taught by him. (p. 72)

For example, his lessons in Greek at Göttingen were not simply recitations out of context, but lessons by a Greek scholar who had “learned Greek thoroughly . . . [and] the art of teaching it” (p. 72). A journal entry Ticknor wrote just weeks after starting classes concerned his natural history professor, Blumenbach:

He is now nearly or quite seventy years old, has been professor here above forty years . . . He has an astonishingly wide and intimate familiarity with his subject, and a happy humor in communicating his instruction, which makes doubly amusing what is, itself, the most interesting of all studies. His jokes, however, are never frivolous; they are always connected with some important fact or doctrine which they are intended to impress; and when we come out of his lecture-room, after having laughed half the time we were there, we are sure to have learnt twice as much, and to remember it twice as well, as if we had never laughed at all. (p. 80)

Yet, Ticknor’s German professors also proved quite colorful. In one paragraph, Ticknor admired the great philologist Christian Wolf: “I know of few living for whom I have so great a veneration as for Wolf. In genius he surpasses, perhaps, nearly all the philologists who have lived, and in learning and acuteness is behind very few” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 106). A couple of paragraphs later, he took a different tone: “But the more I admire him as a scholar, the more I dislike him as a man . . . he disgraced himself by his political conduct when the French were in Halle; and he has sunk from all respect by his vices in old age” (p. 106). Dropped out of his memoir within that phrase was, “In his [Wolf’s] youth he was addicted to the most vulgar debauchery – at Halle he was in the scandalous coterie of Bahrdt” (Tyack, 1967, p. 59). Contrasted with the four rather strict professors at his alma mater, some of Ticknor’s German professors must have seemed quite extraordinary.

Ticknor’s affinity for learning language was a critical part of his personal journey. Even so, Ticknor must have been an extraordinary scholar to learn a language as quickly as he did, and at a level proficient enough for academic coursework. Ticknor assumed that his study of German before he left Boston, along with six weeks of further study in the language would prepare him to function in his academic classes. He arrived in Göttingen in late August and predicted he would be ready to pursue classes in the German language by October:

My first object, of course, will be German . . . taught me by Prof. Benecke. . . Besides him, however, I intend to procure some scholar who will come to my chambers and read and speak with me. In this way, by October I think I shall be able to attend the lectures profitably. (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 76)

One could question if he was able to learn academic language so quickly considering today’s linguists claim academic language takes five to seven years of study to develop (Cummins, 1984). Later in November, he acknowledged the

difficulty of acquiring another language: “I was struggling with the language, and of course was cut off from half the means and opportunities the University could afford” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 79). Again, learning language was one of the most important goals for his academic experience.

The University’s famed library also fortified the curriculum and nourished Ticknor’s passion for learning. The library had over 200,000 volumes, rich in literature. Unlike libraries in the U.S., students could check out as many books as desired and return them when they wished. Compared to home, this library was like a dream come true. He once commented about Harvard’s library to his biographer, “When I went away, I thought it was a large library; when I came back, it seemed a closetful of books” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 72). The enormity of the Göttingen library often saddened him as it was a reminder of time lost. He saw his contemporaries around him, the same age and of comparable intelligence, but far superior in knowledge given their resources (Ticknor et al., 1876).

### **Student Life**

Concerning student life, German university students were considered men responsible for themselves and no longer school boys needing advice about conducting their lives. This liberating German philosophy was reflected in their living situations, their scholastic endeavors, and their social lives. For example, absent were dorms to serve their needs for room and board. The students took means at inns or in their rented rooms or with the landlord’s family. For the students’ scholastic choices, they chose from the many classes that best suited their professional goals, gradually specializing at the more advanced levels where the coursework was prescribed (Herbst, 1965). When a student felt ready to exit the university, he would consult with his professors and jointly agree that the student would sit for a final comprehensive exam to evaluate his knowledge (Herbst, 1965).

Compared to the regimented life in U.S. colleges, these models presented a very different scenario for Ticknor. However, while Ticknor used his time to focus on his studies (indeed, many of his letters to his father opened with how well his studies were proceeding), he did find a bit of time to dedicate to other distractions. For example, he and his friend joined a literary club, as he describes to his father: “Everett and myself have been taken into the only club in Göttingen. . . . Its name is ‘The Literary Club,’ and like all literary clubs that ever survived the frosts of the first winter, its chief occupation is to eat suppers” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 85). This club consisted of professors and students of their choosing. Ticknor believed he and Everett were included as a curiosity; nevertheless, he was grateful for the distraction (Ticknor et al., 1876).

Besides literary clubs, students engaged in other student groups, the nature of which received great attention from Ticknor in his journal. This aspect of student life left him more astonished than delighted. Groups, which ranged from Landsmannschaften (groups of students), honor clubs, orders, and various other associations, protected their own against disrespect from others (Anderson,

2004). Landsmannschaften formed when compatriots from the various German provinces congregated as a support system away from home (Anderson, 2004, p. 71).

Ticknor noted that these typically secret associations of students bonded together in a “captious rule of honor” to form “irresistible influence” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 89) over other students or townspeople by settling disputes among their members and defending themselves against any discrepancy committed by a townsperson. Landsmannschaften often initiated civil disruption, ranging from boycotting local merchants to dueling to the death (Ticknor et al., 1876). The accounts recorded by Ticknor were quite spectacular. Ticknor’s words revealed surprise and shock as he described the hold these groups had on the town: “The great power their combination gave them proved tyranny in injudicious hands, and the members were obliged to fight duels where no offence was really given, and the citizens were punished where no injustice or fraud had been practiced” (p. 90). Ticknor admitted that although the duels were so frequent “they were absolutely a nuisance” (p. 90), the weapons and armor employed did not produce fatalities.

Ticknor noted that dueling was not the only way the members of Landsmannschaften settled perceived injustices. Whenever a dispute between members or a townsperson offended a member, “the punishment was by ‘verschüss’ or non-intercourse” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 90). Thus, if a shopkeeper cheated a member, his shop would be boycotted; or if a landlord treated a member unkindly, he would be snubbed. According to Ticknor, these boycotts were so severe that the tradesman would go out of business: “In short, whatever might be the occupation of the offender, it was gone” (p. 90). Ticknor recounts another story, albeit tragic, that illustrates how the Landsmannschaften had complete power over the townspeople:

A baker, who had done nothing worse than sue a student for his regular bill, was put into ‘verschüss’ and, after striving in vain to live independently of the students in a town supported entirely by them, found himself so much in debt, that in despair shot himself. (p. 91)

Ticknor’s stories of student crime and punishment were less tragic but also shocking. One student who had been verbally rude to another member, “was put under the ban of the Empire, and, after braving the whole University some weeks . . . went to Leipsic [sic], but found himself received there with the same injuries, and was finally obliged to change his name and go to Jena” (Ticknor, 1876, p. 91). Ticknor reported that these groups were “in defiance of the laws of the University, and have often been broken up by the government” (p. 90), but would not be deterred and re-groomed with new names.

### **Early Study Abroad Students: Agents of Change?**

Although some historians acknowledge the influence of German universities, they question the idea that U.S. colleges simply adopted the German models. Diehl (1978) argued that the literature “greatly exaggerates the influence of its first students in the making of the institutions of [U.S.] higher education”

(p. 2). Diehl also noted that German scholarship was not easily imported, especially during the first half of the nineteenth century: “Despite the migration of dozens of able and intelligent U.S. students to German universities and repeated exposure to the new classical scholarship, this scholarship did not survive the return journey to America” (p. 102).

However, is it coincidental that study abroad accounts, such as George Ticknor’s, examined many elements of German higher education that soon after transformed the same in U.S. higher education? Herbst (1965) posited that “it was from blueprints drawn after the German academic pattern, transported across the ocean by these scholars and many of their compatriots, that the ground was prepared for a successful reorganization of [U.S.] institutions of higher education” (p. x). Indeed, the influences of the German higher education system on the U.S. system proved numerous. Walz (1936) emphasized the influence of the German ideal of a public education for all on the U.S. system. Pedagogical styles, such as lectures and seminars, were explored. The seminar, where the professor and students met to discuss problems and solutions, was considered the “training ground for original scholarship” (p. 53). German universities were the first to combine teaching and research to create the “very model of the modern university” (McClelland, 1980). Therefore, the first U.S. graduate schools were said to be modeled after German universities with “their stress on research, their ideal of academic freedom, and their concept of service to the state” (Hofstadter, 1952, p. 61). Veysey (1965) stated that U.S. academics “who embraced the ideal of scientific research . . . acknowledge[d] an intellectual debt to an explicitly German style of educational experience” (p. 126). Lessons learned from Germany about research are credited with serving as models for graduate education, especially at the end of the nineteenth century (Herbst, 1965). One can certainly argue that the German university had a major role in shaping U.S. higher education at this time and the early study-abroad students, such as George Ticknor, were instrumental by relaying their experiences.

### Conclusion

By the turn of the twentieth century, the great migration of U.S. students to Germany was dwindling. In 1904, an educator in the *Journal of Education* rejoiced in the change of tide but acknowledged that German universities in the nineteenth century led in “erudition and scientific investigation” (Marvin, 1904, p. 273). By this time, U.S. universities had attended the lessons of German higher education and many believed that nothing more was to be gained from a foreign education (Herbst, 1936). A pride in U.S. higher education had developed, bringing forth a claim that U.S. universities were advancing more rapidly than German universities: “Despite all our imperfections one cannot but admire the great upward strides which the [U.S.] system of education has been making during the last few decades. [U.S.] educational institutions are the best equipped in the world” (Marvin, 1904, p. 273). The great migration of U.S. students to Germany was coming to an end.

In 1815, Ticknor could not fulfill his passion for scholarship through the

U.S. higher education system. He lamented the lack of opportunity at home: “I was idle in college, and learnt little” (Ticknor et al., 1876, p. 7). For a scholar such as George Ticknor in the beginning of the nineteenth century, higher education in Germany promised an opportunity that he could find no where else. Indeed, U.S. “students found in Germany what their own country was still lacking, the most advanced scientific methods, independence of thought and investigation, love and unselfish devotion to science and learning” (Walz, 1936, p. 52). In fact, some of the most discussed concerns in nineteenth century U.S. higher education were prevalent in Ticknor’s memoirs: philosophy of education, curriculum and pedagogy, and student life.

Perhaps many young scholars went abroad to seek new models and ideas for higher education at home. Yet for some travelers, their intent was not to transform higher education, but rather personal transformation. In the case of George Ticknor, his desire to study abroad was driven more by his personal thirst for scholarship and less by potential contributions to the transformation of U.S. higher education. Hofstadter (1952) cited Ticknor as one of the “great architects of the [U.S.] university” (p. 62). Indeed, Ticknor remained in education all of his life, namely as a Spanish scholar at Harvard University (Hofstadter, 1952). His journey to Germany began as a personal journey which was not intended to transform U.S. higher education. Yet, George Ticknor proved an accidental agent of change; his well-documented accounts undoubtedly contributed to the admiration of German higher education and the dynamic transformation of the U.S. system soon thereafter.

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