Thought and Action: John Dewey at the University of Michigan

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Foreword

The Diag has been a fixture on the campus landscape since the earliest days of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Every day thousands traverse its path. Most of us are probably preoccupied with the events of the moment and do not take the time to think about who else may have walked these same steps over the years. Nearly everyone in any way connected with the U-M has done so, including many world-renowned scholars and teachers. Between classes and meetings, visits to the library, and other parts of his daily schedule, the distinguished philosopher and educator John Dewey strolled the campus for most of the years from 1884 to 1894. While in Ann Arbor, Dewey, a member of the faculty in the Philosophy Department at the U-M, did much of his formative and path-breaking work in ethics and educational philosophy, and on the inter-relationships of education, democracy and culture, themes developed more fully during his subsequent appointments at the University of Chicago and Columbia University.

This bulletin is a joint effort on the part of the School of Education and the Bentley Historical Library to call attention to one of the most important scholars ever associated with the university. Brian Williams, associate archivist at the Bentley Library, examined all the Dewey material in the U-M archives, housed at the Bentley, and read countless primary and secondary sources on Dewey’s ideas and career. Brian has unearthed some fascinating new facts about Dewey’s early academic work at Michigan and he has provided a useful overview of a period in Dewey’s life often ignored by other writers. I thank Brian for taking on this work and for reclaiming an important part of the university’s intellectual history. I also thank Professor Cecil Miskel, dean of the School of Education, who proposed the idea for this publication and supported the research involved. Read this bulletin and come to know better a significant presence on this campus in the late nineteenth century. Then, when walking the Diag, pause—and consider those scholarly groundbreakers like Dewey, who traveled this same footpath, set their own pace and took off in new directions.

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Introduction

“It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that for a generation no major issue was clarified until Dewey had spoken,” wrote famed historian Henry Steele Commager of the well-known philosopher and educator John Dewey.1 During his lifetime, Dewey wrote on a variety of topics, most notably democracy, education, philosophy, psychology, and religion. Generations of scholars have thoroughly explored, carefully interpreted, and frequently reinterpreted Dewey’s ideas. A prolific writer, Dewey left behind a body of work comprised of forty books and nearly 800 articles that appeared in more than 150 different journals.2 His influence is readily apparent in the more than 4,000 articles and books published about his life and work.3 The majority of these publications have focused on Dewey’s career after 1894 as a professor at the University of Chicago and later at Columbia University where he retained professor emeritus status until his death in 1952 at age ninety-two. The period that by and large has received the least attention is the decade from 1884 to 1894, which save for one year, was when Dewey was a faculty member at the University of Michigan.

The aim of this essay is to illuminate the important period during which Dewey served on the faculty at the University of Michigan, to note his myriad contributions to Michigan, and to a lesser extent, to study Michigan’s influences on Dewey. Perhaps by highlighting this underrepresented era in Dewey’s life, greater context and meaning can be added to his subsequent achievements. In 1929, shortly after his seventieth birthday, Dewey expressed the importance of his time at Michigan to the formation of his educational philosophy, writing, “[I]t was in Ann Arbor that I began my teaching activities. It was there that my serious interest in education was aroused. I have never ceased to be grateful that my first connection was with a state university in the middle-west. I learned there something of the deep significance of the relation between educational institutions and the social communities which they serve."4

As for Dewey’s philosophy of instrumentalism, later associated with pragmatism, it has been noted that “it may not be too much to claim that the University of Michigan was one of the cradles of the new philosophy which later became more distinctively identified with the University of Chicago.”5 While Dewey gained greater fame with many of his ideas after leaving the University of Michigan, many of these seeds were sown, if not germinated, at Michigan. The context of the university was the milieu in which Dewey’s early philosophical ideas were developed, as he came to embrace the possibility of reform through education and struggled to reconcile idealist philosophy within the confines of Protestant theology and scientific progress. When Dewey left Michigan, he would adapt the reform impulse of his philosophy to the broader canvas of society and the progressive reform movements of the early twentieth century.
Dewey, Philosophy Instructor

John Dewey arrived in Ann Arbor during the fall of 1884 as a twenty-four-year-old philosophy instructor deeply rooted in philosophical idealism. The University of Michigan was in the middle of James B. Angell’s presidency, the longest in Michigan’s history, which spanned from 1871 to 1909. During Angell’s presidency, the university embarked upon a progressive era of expansion and educational reform, adapting the university to meet the needs of a changing society. The admission of women had begun in 1870, and Angell built upon it as part of his effort to foster a more democratic atmosphere in which experimentation and diversity of thought were possible. It was a period when leadership in higher education was beginning a gradual shift to the public universities “of which Michigan was the acknowledged model.” The seminar method of teaching, introduced earlier at Michigan, was increasingly employed as a means of instruction, and students were offered a wider selection of elective courses to choose from and greater voice and freedom within the curriculum. The classical curriculum was giving way to the scientific curriculum, and chapel services, which previously had been mandatory, became voluntary, a nod to an
increasingly secular society. Admission requirements were changing as well. Students from accredited high schools were now allowed to enroll on the strength of their diplomas rather than through the traditional formal entrance examinations, a move that dramatically altered the means by which students gained access to education. A graduate school was also established at the University of Michigan during this time, which put advanced study and independent research on a more solid footing.\textsuperscript{7}

In 1891, in the midst of Dewey’s tenure at Michigan, Angell offered a retrospective of his twenty years as president. Enrollment had grown to 2,420 students, more than double the number when his presidency began. For a brief period that enrollment made Michigan the largest university in the nation. Four hundred and forty-five of the students were women, and slightly over half of the students came from outside Michigan, representing forty-four states and twelve foreign countries. In this same period Angell noted, the faculty and instructional staff increased from 36 members to 130, and course offerings correspondingly expanded from 57 courses to 378. The number of accredited high schools had grown from 5 to 82, and Angell called the connection with public schools one of the university’s greatest achievements.\textsuperscript{8}

Even before he arrived at Michigan, Dewey was familiar with President Angell. Angell had been a friend of the Dewey family while he was president of the University of Vermont, in Dewey’s hometown of Burlington, from 1866 until assuming the Michigan presidency. Born October 20, 1859, and raised in the Congregational church, Dewey completed high school in Burlington in 1875. He enrolled at the University of Vermont, graduating in 1879. Following graduation he embarked on a brief teaching career at the high school in Oil City, Pennsylvania. But his true interest was philosophy, and in 1881, he left Pennsylvania after arranging for a year of private study with his philosophy instructor at the University of Vermont. This period of study prompted Dewey to enroll as a graduate student in the philosophy department at Johns Hopkins University in 1882.\textsuperscript{9}

During his time at Johns Hopkins, Dewey’s philosophy began to gain a sharper focus.\textsuperscript{10} While working on his doctoral dissertation on Kant’s psychology, he came under the influence of several preeminent philosophers, including one of his instructors, George Sylvester Morris. Morris was one of the leading American interpreters of German idealist philosophy, and he would make a lasting impression on Dewey. He would later arrange for Dewey’s first college-level teaching position at the University of Michigan.\textsuperscript{11}

Morris had come to the University of Michigan in 1870 as head of the Department of Modern Languages and Literature. In 1878, he began a period of splitting his teaching duties between Ann Arbor and Baltimore because Johns Hopkins provided him with the opportunity to teach philosophy, his true passion. He resigned the modern language professorship in 1879 and spent a year away from Michigan before being offered a professorship in philosophy there in 1881. He accepted the professorship with the condition that he be allowed to continue teaching one semester each year at Johns Hopkins.

When Morris began teaching philosophy at Michigan, the department was under the direction of Benjamin Franklin Cocker. Cocker’s position was typical of an era when appointments in philosophy were held by men trained solely in theology. These men traditionally taught courses under the rubric of mental and moral philosophy and searched for spiritual truth rather than scientific truth. After a career in business, Cocker turned to preaching before earning an appointment in philosophy in 1869. Until Morris was appointed, no one who held the chair was trained in philosophy; instruction was “on a distinctly lower plain.”\textsuperscript{12} Such an assessment isn’t entirely fair of Cocker, however. His *Handbook of Philosophy*, a compilation of notes of lectures delivered in 1878-79, outlines an early course in psychology, which although steeped in moral philosophy and suffering from a disjointed presentation, at least acknowledged through references...
nature when he wrote, “I hope my work with you will be of such a character that you may not have to regret the appointment.” Acknowledging their earlier acquaintance he included the personal comment, “I appreciate your good wishes, and esteem it an honor to have been remembered by you for so many years.”

Together, Dewey and Morris overhauled the Department of Philosophy, making it one of the leading centers of German scientific philosophy. They also established the modern foundations of psychology instruction at Michigan. In the developing field of psychology, with its emphasis on individual experience, Dewey was beginning to see the potential that such an area of study held for forming the scientific basis for a philosophy in which truth and experience could be applied to reason. Dewey’s initial courses reflected this orientation. During his first semester at Michigan, he offered the following courses: “Empirical Psychology,” “Special Topics in Psychology (Physiological, Comparative and Morbid Psychology),” and “Psychology and Philosophy; with special reference to the History of

an awareness of the latest findings of Wilhelm Wundt and other pioneers in the newly founded field of experimental psychology. Religion would still have a role in philosophy, but it would now fit into the larger context of the Darwinian revolution occurring within science.

The philosophy Morris taught centered on German idealism, particularly the absolutism of G. W. F. Hegel. Morris labored to establish the spiritual nature of the universe between thought and being while also acknowledging the discoveries of science and the results of experience. Shortly after Cocker’s death in 1883, Morris was made chairman of the Department of Philosophy. He began full-time teaching at the University of Michigan during the second semester of the 1884–85 academic year. Among the first actions taken by Morris was arranging to hire his former pupil John Dewey in July 1884 for a one-year appointment as an instructor in philosophy at a salary of $900. In his acceptance letter to President Angell, Dewey expressed gratitude and demonstrated his unassuming nature.
Dewey's first semester was successful, as evidenced in a letter from Morris to President Angell in January 1885. Morris, writing from Baltimore, stated, "I was very much gratified to get so favorable a report from you in regard to Mr. Dewey and his work. I felt confident, before his appointment, that, if allowed a fair trial, he would make a solid success." At this time Morris was still awaiting final approval of his appointment as head of philosophy. His letter also included, "if the policy finally adopted by the Regents should be to make me the sole responsible head of the Department . . . I should desire and insist on the retention of Dewey as my assistant."

Dewey earned reappointment as instructor for a second year in 1885, and in June 1886 he was promoted to assistant professor of philosophy at a salary of $1,600.

The promotion and subsequent increase in salary enabled Dewey to complete plans for his marriage to Harriet Alice Chipman in July 1886. Chipman had entered the University of Michigan in 1880 as a nondegree student. She later enrolled as a regular student and graduated as a member of the class of 1886. Raised in Fenton, Michigan, Chipman was a free thinker and is credited by one of her daughters, Jane Dewey, as "largely responsible for the early widening of Dewey's philosophic interests from the commentative and classical to the field of contemporary life."

When an alumnae survey asked Chipman to comment on lasting impressions of her college days, she responded that it was the "gradual transforming of the heroic, co-ed period into a more commonplace but perhaps more generally useful time of general social service."
Ethics of Democracy

In 1888, Dewey published the essay “Ethics of Democracy” in the University of Michigan Philosophical Papers series. It was written as a critique of Sir Henry Maine’s attack on democracy in Popular Government, and in it, Dewey began to apply the organic concept of the individual to the broader context of society and systems of government. If society and the individual are organic to each other, Dewey ventured, “then the individual is society concentrated.” He went on to conclude that the ethical idea of democracy is “the idea of a personality.” In the essay, Dewey spoke of industrial equality in a nascent attempt to apply philosophical and psychological constructs at the broadest level, something he would accomplish more effectively by 1916 when he united his democratic ideals with his educational philosophy in Democracy and Education.30 “Ethics of Democracy” also suggests an intellectual link to his Michigan colleague and friend Henry Carter Adams. At the time the essay appeared, Adams was teaching a political economy seminar on industrial society, and his earlier writings and lectures on democracy, labor, and socialism presaged many of Dewey’s comments.31

Newly married and recently promoted, Dewey experienced no letdown in scholarly productivity. He continued to labor with psychological concepts, publishing several articles in an effort to establish a philosophical standpoint within psychology. During this time he also introduced a lecture course on experimental psychology. His first book, the introductory college-level text Psychology, appeared in 1887. The book reported on the latest physiological research in psychology and attempted to relate these findings to philosophy. Assailed in some quarters by critics who felt it failed to distinguish where physiology and psychology ended and philosophy began, it was nonetheless an important step as Dewey began to grapple with concepts of mental development and self-awareness against a larger ethical framework. These ideas would become significant as his educational philosophy gained form. Psychology also succeeded in gaining a wider audience and establishing Dewey’s reputation beyond the University of Michigan. Despite the criticism, the book was revised in several editions and would remain a standard text at Michigan for the next decade.32 Although psychology was not officially established as a separate department at Michigan until 1929, Dewey is largely responsible for creating the department’s foundation.

University Samovar Club, 1885-86. John Dewey and his future wife, Harriet Alice Chipman, were founding members of the University Samovar Club, which met in the mid-1880s to discuss the works of Tolstoy and Turgenev and to drink hot chocolate made in the Samovar. Chipman is seated second from the left, while Dewey is absent from the photo. Sociology pioneer Charles H. Cooley is seated to the left of Chipman. Elsie Jones (later Mrs. Charles H. Cooley) is standing in the center. (Photographs Vertical File, Bentley Historical Library.)
Focus on Ethics

Now in full charge of the philosophy department at Michigan, Dewey had a freer hand in shaping the department. He was still active in religious organizations but was gradually shifting to a more secular worldview. His writings appeared less frequently in theological journals as he began to publish in journals affiliated with the burgeoning Ethical Culture movement. His article “Ethics in the University of Michigan,” published in the Ethical Record in 1889, clearly established the fact that ethics would be the new focus of the department under his direction. In the article, Dewey fleshed out the courses that would be taught. (This work would ultimately result in his book Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics in 1891.) In “Ethics in the University of Michigan,” Dewey wrote that the ethical development of individual personality would be examined against the theories of hedonism, utilitarianism, Kantism, and evolution. Subsequent courses would explore personality against the obligations and demands of the ethical world defined as family, nation, society, school, and church. How the individual personality becomes aware of moral distinctions and freedom of action would be the subject of the more advanced lectures in the department. After describing the courses and their content, Dewey apologized for the limited number of courses, noting that “with but two instructors it is impossible to do much special work in ethics.”

Soon the number of philosophy instructors grew, as Dewey began to surround himself with the men who would later make up the nucleus of the “Chicago School,” the philosophy department at the resurrected University of Chicago. Dewey hired James Hayden Tufts as an instructor in 1889. Tufts would later describe Michigan during this era as “undoubtedly the most active center of research west of the Alleghenies.” He handled most of the introductory courses in psychology, freeing Dewey to teach advanced courses such as political philosophy, which focused on the ethics of social relations, and advanced logic, the theory of the scientific method. A major innovation was the introduction of a course on physiological psychology, which incorporated laboratory work with lectures for the first time. The laboratory work was conducted in the newly equipped physiological laboratory in the University of Michigan Medical School.

Tufts received an offer from the University of Chicago and resigned his position at Michigan in 1891. To replace Tufts, Dewey hired George Herbert Mead and Alfred H. Lloyd. The addition of two new members energized the department, and a separate laboratory for experimental psychology was established. Working with Mead and Lloyd, Dewey achieved a synthesis that began to unite the divergent elements of philos-

Dewey Leaves for Minnesota

With Morris firmly entrenched as chairman of the Department of Philosophy, Dewey accepted an offer from the University of Minnesota to take charge of their philosophy department. Despite a significantly lower enrollment, Minnesota held the promise of a growing institution, an opportunity to head a department, and perhaps most significantly, a sizable increase in pay to $2,400. At their March 1888 meeting, the University of Michigan Board of Regents accepted Dewey’s resignation effective October 1, 1888. The annual report for that year acknowledged Dewey’s departure and confirmed the wisdom of Minnesota’s decision, noting, “He has shown by his ability, learning, and skill as a teacher that his promotion to a full chair is well merited . . . our best wishes follow him to his new field.” W. S. Hough was appointed to fill the junior professorship vacated by Dewey.

When George Morris died unexpectedly of pneumonia in March 1889, the University of Michigan enticed Dewey to return and take over for his former mentor. In April 1889 Dewey accepted the chairmanship of the Department of Philosophy, to begin his new duties on October 1, although at a salary of $2,200, a drop in pay from Minnesota. Hough once again replaced Dewey, this time at Minnesota.

Dewey’s letter accepting the professorship of philosophy following the death of George S. Morris. (James B. Angell Papers, Bentley Historical Library.)
In a presentation before the Philosophical Society in 1893, Dewey delivered a paper on “Ethics and Politics” that outlined the essence of his theory. Through analysis of conduct, he arrived at two correlative factors: “agent of action” and “sphere, or conditions of action.” He outlined three points in which agent and sphere of action interacted. “The moulding of habits, beliefs, predispositions and dominant ideas through the process of education, conscious and unconscious,” Dewey explained in his first point, “makes the individual agent reflect his particular situation.” In his second point, he argued “the demands which the conditions of action make, the requirements made of the individual in the family, the neighborhood, the vocation or occupation adopted . . . intrinsically affect conduct.” In his final point he stressed that “action of the environment is required to carry an idea to execution.” Through an analysis of conduct, Dewey insisted that ethics and politics did not differ in their subject matter but rather through their approach.

The new theory was more fully articulated in 1894 in The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus. Dewey stated that this new book, prepared for the guidance of his students, was “in no sense a second edition” of Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics. It was a clear departure, “a thorough psychological examination of the process of active experience, and a derivation from this analysis of the chief ethical types and crises—a task, so far as I know, not previously attempted.” In The Study of Ethics, Dewey wrote, “It is the essence of habit to be instrumental, a means for accomplishing ends.” The philosophy of “instrumentalism,” as Dewey named it, could now be applied to social institutions as ideas became instruments for adapting and improving the environment. Education naturally fit into the concept as he decreed the “pedagogical theory which has mechanized our schools—that all children are to recite the history, the geography, the arithmetic lesson in the same way.” He saw salvation by observing, “It is only the abstraction, the textbook, which is the same. The truth to each child is this abstract fact assimilated into his own interests and habits, and proceeding from them vitalized—free.”

**Involvement with Education**

Although Dewey was not formally affiliated with the pedagogical department, which held the departmental designation of the Science and the Art of Teaching, he was deeply interested in educational issues. He took an active role in high school accreditation visits and helped to found the Michigan Schoolmasters’ Club, an organization that united college-level instructors with their high school counterparts. The fact that Michigan was the first American college or university to create a permanent chair in education, in 1879, was not lost on Dewey. He would later make note of that point in his book The School and Society, published five years after he left Michigan. Dewey lamented the fact that few universities were seriously attempting to unite theory and practice, and he included Michigan among those universities. It was a question that Burke Aaron Hinsdale, the second chairman of the Science and the Art of Teaching, had alluded to in 1889 when he wondered, “Why should an institution that exists for the sake of investigating the arts and sciences leave its own peculiar art neglected and despised?”

There is sufficient evidence to suggest there was a sense of unity among Dewey and the two men who held the newly created post of Chair of the Science and the Art of Teaching, William H. Payne from 1879 to 1888, and Burke Aaron Hinsdale from 1888 to 1900. All three men were closely involved in the accreditation inspections of secondary schools, and all were active participants in the Michigan Schoolmasters’ Club as well as the Philosophical Society. In many ways Dewey was mining from the same educational theorists as Payne and Hinsdale. While a number of the initial pedagogical offerings were practical, focusing on methods of instruction and school supervision, the curriculum was expanding to include the history and philosophy of education. During the 1882-83 academic year, Payne began offering a seminar course on the history and philosophy of education that centered on a critical study of Herbert Spencer’s Education,
School Accreditation

During the 1870-71 academic year, the University of Michigan broke with tradition and became the first institution to implement the revolutionary practice of admitting students from accredited high schools by means of their diplomas rather than by an entrance examination. The “Michigan plan,” as it came to be known, was motivated in part by the fact that the university lacked a preparatory department and sought to strengthen cooperation between secondary schools and the university, the same idea later embraced by Dewey and his colleagues in the Michigan Schoolmasters’ Club. High schools that desired to become “diploma schools” petitioned the university and arranged for an accreditation inspection. The inspections were usually conducted by members of the university faculty who took note of the quality and level of instruction, the teaching corps, facilities, and equipment. The number of accredited schools steadily increased from an initial five, as the system was extended to schools outside the state.

The Michigan plan was not without its detractors. Harvard University president Charles W. Eliot in his annual report for 1873-74 expressed his skepticism of the Michigan system, stating, “That the University should have been so willing to try so unpromising an experiment proves that the lack of connection between the secondary and higher instruction in Michigan must have been painfully felt.” A spirited controversy ensued between President Eliot and Charles K. Adams, professor of history at the University of Michigan and a staunch proponent of the Michigan plan. Their debate took place in the pages of the Nation with Eliot declaring that the Michigan plan was a partial surrender of the authority of the university and an innovation of injurious tendency.47

Although Dewey did not participate in the debate between Adams and Eliot, he likely would have sided with Adams had he been at Michigan during that time. In an 1891 article Dewey expressed some contempt for Eliot and his derision of Michigan and education in “the West.” Dewey’s remarks were based on a public talk given by Eliot in which he stated that “the West is indebted to Harvard for three great educational gifts”—the elective system, the elimination of Greek and Latin from entrance requirements, and individualized instruction in seminars and laboratories. Dewey sarcastically took exception with Eliot’s assertion that more accessible entrance requirements and seminars were the original accomplishments of Harvard, adding that “We of the University of Michigan, at least, are not accustomed to think of ourselves entirely as recipients, however tardy the colleges of the East may be in receiving our generous gifts.” Dewey further argued, “The conception that the
University is only the culmination of the common school education belongs to the West;—may we not add, with proper modesty . . . to the University of Michigan?” To Dewey, these educational concepts were the very ideal of the democratic idea of education: “higher education, as well as the three R’s, is of and for the people, and not for some cultivated classes.”

The fact that Dewey was active as a member of the inspection program that visited high schools could also be taken as implicit support of the Michigan plan. In his years at Michigan, he participated in at least eight inspection visits. The surviving reports are typical of those made by other faculty members inspecting high schools, but Dewey’s reports are flavored by his experience as a high school teacher and are suggestive of his future writing on education and schools. In June 1888, he inspected the high school in Ypsilanti, Michigan, visiting several classes and observing the instruction and the response of the students. His observations of the instruction in Greek are particularly insightful: “Mr. Hopkins’ methods are somewhat slow and at times tedious, and he spends much time on points rather finer than the average high school teacher devotes himself to; but the slowness does not arise from any lack of interest as he is personally enthusiastic about his subjects. While the class’s attention would at times be held better by less detailed attention to minutiae, I am bound to say that I thought Mr. Hopkins’ work if judged by results was more than ordinarily effective. The students upon the whole, were accurate and thorough in their work.”

By 1892, when Dewey visited the high school in Corunna, Michigan, the number of accredited schools had grown to more than ninety and inspections had become more standardized. Inspectors were provided with printed forms on which to record such information as courses and textbooks used, duration of class sessions, teaching staff and their backgrounds, and information on facilities and equipment. Although the space for comments on the form was limited, Dewey’s report on Corunna noted that there were two teachers, one he rated “medium or below” and the other “fair.” He went on to record that the school was “rather demoralized” and “altogether too large for two teachers.” He discussed his findings with members of the school board and related his impression of the superintendent as “straight forward and well meaning but not very energetic.” Observations made by Dewey during these inspection visits become significant when viewed in the context of the importance he placed on schools and education as instruments of change.
The Michigan Schoolmasters’ Club

Dewey’s philosophy, particularly his work in psychology, led him to take greater interest in education and its impact on the development of the individual. This interest in education made him acutely aware of the importance of secondary education, and more specifically its relation to higher education. His interest naturally led him to a group of like-minded individuals, and on February 27, 1886, nineteen educators gathered at the Cook Hotel in Ann Arbor to “consider the feasibility of organizing and maintaining a teachers club.” The group included faculty members from the University of Michigan and the Michigan State Normal School in Ypsilanti, as well as secondary school teachers and superintendents from throughout the state.

The minutes of that preliminary meeting record that “after discussion of the aims and scope the prospective club should have,” a committee, which included Dewey, was commissioned to formulate articles of association. The aim, as Dewey’s committee defined it, was “to secure an opportunity to discuss matters that pertain to our common work, with particular reference to high school and collegiate training.” The articles went on to add, “we do not wish to antagonize any existing association; but simply to obtain a larger opportunity to discuss such topics . . . left untouched by associations that now exist.”

The Schoolmasters’ Club provided Dewey with an important new forum for discussing his developing concepts of education. He also served as the organization’s vice president in 1887 and 1888. At the first official meeting on May 1, 1886, Dewey was one of five speakers and presented the paper “Psychology in High Schools from the Standpoint of the College.” He argued that psychology should be taught in high schools as a bond between other studies and a means of making the mind more open to new ideas as well as for the student’s own self-awareness by calling attention to “the fact that he himself exists” and “is worthy of study.” From the college standpoint, students taught psychology in high school would be better prepared and more receptive to ideas of higher learning. Most important, Dewey discussed how he felt psychology should be taught. He suggested that the role of the teacher should be “largely one of awakening, of stimulation” allowing the student to “realize the material in himself.” He advocated teaching psychology in relation to literature, asking, “why should it be impossible to take some literary classic, and read it with especial attention to its psychological features—its treatment of perception, or imagination, of discursive thought, of impulses of choices?” Such a reading would concurrently introduce aesthetic awareness and an appreciation of style. Also of interest at that meeting is the discussion following Dewey’s presentation in which William Payne lodged his protest against “the idea which is now held in certain localities, that the young mind can only be strengthened by original investigation in any subject. Certain things have been already learned, and a pupil’s mind may grow by a study of the facts that have been given him.” Certainly Payne wasn’t yet ready for the progressive educational reform Dewey would later advocate.
When Dewey returned in 1936 to address the Michigan Schoolmasters’ Club on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, the organization had grown to 2,100 members. He paused to take stock of education and continued his call for reform. He had, however, remained rooted to the philosophy he had developed at Michigan nearly fifty years earlier, stating, “A philosophy of education, a name that stands for the search for unifying aims and methods in education, is, in reality, a branch of the theory of social ideals and the institutions by which the ideals may be realized.”

Dewey as a Teacher

Throughout his lifetime Dewey was known as a rather shy and unassuming man. His manner won him praise in the classroom. In 1890, an anonymous writer for the student newspaper the Chronicle, described Dewey as “modest and retiring” but noted that his “method of instruction is excellent” and he “is one of the most popular, most satisfactory class room lecturers in the University.” The writer went on to praise Dewey’s “easy, earnest and unconscious manner before a class” and the “utter lack of any spirit of pedantry.” In his classroom, Dewey fostered a sense of equality with his students and was praised for placing a “higher premium upon a single attempt at original, intelligent thought than upon the parrot-like repetition of whole volumes of other men’s thoughts.”

William Warner Bishop, a former student and later librarian of the University of Michigan, writing over fifty years after being a student under Dewey, favorably recalled, “He was by far the ablest lecturer under whom I have studied; never dictating, he was clear and unmistakable in expression. You could get the whole of his talk, in contrast to the very little one often received from speakers who were more fluent.”

Naturally there were also contrasting views. An anonymous author in the student annual the Oracle offered some “specimen definitions” from the “Sophster’s New Dictionary.” One of the definitions read “Dew(e)y.- Adj. Cold, impersonal, psychological, sphinx-like, anomalous and petrifying to flunkers.” Student publications contain several sarcastic jabs at Dewey and the deep and heavy nature of some of his courses. His courses in psychology prompted a twelve-line poem in the Michigan Argonaut about “a girl who died Taking Dewey’s Psychology.”

The four surviving charter members of the Michigan Schoolmasters’ Club in 1936 at the 50th anniversary of the Club’s founding. From left, John Dewey, Levi D. Wines, Benjamin L. D’Ooge, and Joseph H. Drake. (Michigan Schoolmasters’ Club Publications, Bentley Historical Library.)

Dewey left behind a remarkable written record of his courses and their content in his textbooks, printed syllabi, and in his numerous articles. In "Why Study Philosophy?" he answered the question by stating that the study of philosophy allowed for the transformation of ideas "from assumptions which control us into tools of inquiry and action." Philosophy also provided "an intellectual inventory" that would "enable us to master our past instead of being mastered by it." To Dewey, the philosopher "works out his ideas by expressing them, by trying them on others" and making the ideas influence the actions of others.

The notebooks of Charles Horton Cooley are more suggestive of philosophical ideas influencing the actions of others. Cooley graduated from Michigan in 1887 and returned as a graduate student attending Dewey's lectures on his way to earning a Ph.D. in 1894. Cooley would go on to establish sociology as a discipline at Michigan, but the roots of sociology extend to the courses of Henry Carter Adams and Dewey. Cooley's notes on "Political Philosophy" reflect Dewey's continued emphasis on society as an organism and indicate the introduction of some sociological principles. "Social evolution is the process of organization," Cooley recorded. How far social organization is realized "is the test of evolution." The lectures proceeded through systems of organization—ethical, economic, and political—and delved into philosophic socialism: "selfishness is the unexpressed preface of socialism." Cooley's lecture notes are filled with references to group dynamics, the nature of consciousness, and the relation of the individual to society through law, self-interest, and will. Cooley recorded Dewey as stating, "individuality means progress because it means continued diversity."
Dewey and Graduate Study

The fact that students such as Cooley were able to take Dewey’s courses as graduate students was in large measure the result of Dewey’s appointment in 1892 to a committee to study graduate work. This committee was charged with exploring how graduate work could be elevated and given greater structure and coordination. A separate program of graduate study had long been envisioned at Michigan, but the only result had been a haphazard offering of graduate study that lacked a clear definition of what constituted graduate work, distinguishing it little from undergraduate work. Advanced degrees were awarded but had been diminished by the fact that many were presented as a matter of course rather than by examination. The introduction of the credit system in 1878 gave some regulation to the awarding of advanced degrees, but the main requirement for a master’s degree was the preparation of a thesis that involved little faculty supervision, and doctoral degrees were often bestowed more for diligence than for scholarship.

After reviewing descriptions of recommended graduate courses from the faculty, Dewey’s committee considered creating a distinctly separate school with its own faculty and facilities devoted to graduate study; the committee abandoned the idea due to the prohibitive cost and lack of resources. Instead, the committee proposed the establishment of a graduate department using existing faculty and resources within the College of Literature, Science and the Arts. The graduate department would be overseen by an administrative council consisting of the dean as chairman and nine additional members. The administrative council would handle admission, registration, examinations, and the coordination of course and degree requirements. The committee’s report was presented to the faculty in March 1892. Along with the recommendations, the committee noted that the library facilities were inadequate for graduate work and urged the Regents to petition the state legislature for funds for the “purchase of books needed to carry on the work of investigation and original research.”

The library’s holdings at the time of the report were given as 82,347 volumes, 15,930 pamphlets, 226 maps, and 331 periodical subscriptions.

After much deliberation the core of the committee’s report was adopted, resulting in the establishment of a graduate school within the College of Literature, Science and the Arts. The first announcements appeared in the summer of 1892. The administrative council was made up of President Angell as chairman, and the heads of each department. The council drew up requirements for doctoral degrees, including what was expected of the dissertation. Dissertations were required to be printed, and recommendations on paper, typography, and layout were given. The council also eliminated the requirement of a thesis for the master’s degree, determining that the writing of a thesis left too little time to conduct research of any scientific value. Graduate work now required one major and two minors and it was left to each department to outline the graduate courses and marshal the necessary resources.

Philosophy courses had already been set up to allow for advanced work that was easily adapted to graduate work. The levels of instruction as given in 1890 were described by Dewey in an article about the Department of Philosophy: “Elementary courses are conducted mainly by text-book and recitations; the Intermediate courses by lectures and assigned readings, reports and essay-writing. The Advanced courses are pursued by class discussions, conversations” and on the “basis of work done independently by the student.” After the establishment of the graduate school, doctoral candidates in philosophy were required to become familiar with the outlines of the history of philosophy and the main issues in ethics and psychology. They then had to select a major field of concentration and two minor fields.

In a description of graduate work in philosophy, Dewey provided a detailed list of the topics and philosophers that would be covered and called attention to courses in other departments that paralleled work in philosophy. The description gives interesting insight into how Dewey saw the interdisciplinary relationship between philosophy and other departments. Of particular note was the implied support he was giving to offerings in education: “the history of philosophy generally falls in either with work in history, or with some field of ancient and modern literature . . . Courses in Political Science, Political Economy, Constitutional and Comparative Law . . . are appropriate accompaniments to the subject of Ethics. Work in Psychology may be taken collaterally with Biology, Physiology or Histology. It also forms a natural combination with the study of education.”

The Science and the Art of Teaching graduate offerings similarly noted that the “closest affiliations . . . are with the philosophical studies. Here the closest connections are, in philosophy, with Psychology, Logic, and Ethics.”

Dewey’s colleague from the political economy department, Henry Carter Adams, delighted in the new graduate school, viewing it as a revolution that would define the institution’s character and establish Michigan as a true university. He also saw the graduate school as a broader experiment in social values, “recognizing that the University of Michigan is at present the most prominent representative of popular education, it is not too much to say that far-reaching social and political results are bound up in this experiment of a graduate school.” The establishment of a graduate school at Michigan was proof that popular education, unlike privately endowed
schools, was “more delicately adjusted to the intellectual needs of the nation, and in closer sympathy with the social aspirations of the people.”

In prose nearly identical to Dewey’s, Adams wrote, “Education is not a thing that stands alone, to be judged by the polish of its machinery; it is part of the organic life of the people, and it is most effective when it reflects most perfectly the spirit of the times.” To be sure, he added, “Education must be progressive.” Being the practical economist, Adams also was cognizant of the fact that the success of the graduate school was dependent upon the willingness of the state to fund it, noting, “people will never consent to pay taxes for schools of the highest grade or for the endowment of research.” It was up to the university to justify the tax support. To Adams, the creation of a graduate school was a major step toward fulfilling public expectations.

Fred Newton Scott and Journalism

One of Dewey’s less heralded contributions to Michigan was his collaboration with Fred Newton Scott, who was responsible for creating the first college course in journalism and who went on to found the distinctive Department of Rhetoric at Michigan in 1903. Scott matriculated to the University of Michigan in 1880, and before graduating in 1884, he helped found the student newspaper the Michigan Argonaut and was a member of the Philosophical Society. Scott impressed Dewey as a “clever writer as well as a thorough student.” Following graduation, Scott worked as a newspaper editor before returning to Ann Arbor and earning a Ph.D. in 1889 and an appointment as an instructor in English.

Scott was only one year Dewey’s junior, and in him Dewey found philosophic agreement and reinforcement of his ideas. Each man wrote a complimentary biographical piece on the other, Scott publishing a biography on Dewey in the Castilian, and Dewey publishing a piece on Scott in the Oracle. In the biography of Scott, Dewey noted Scott’s interest in psychology and philosophy, “considered as helps to literary interpretation.” It was for those reasons that Dewey invited Scott to teach the philosophy department’s offering on aesthetics. The two also cooperatively taught a seminar on aesthetics. Scott’s course was subtitled “Philosophy of the Beautiful.” Its relation to philosophy and psychology was spelled out by defining aesthetics as “the element of ease or freedom in all movement of intelligence.” How aesthetics was experienced, “whether in art, politics, science or religion” was the outcome of two factors: how the individual organized or “idealized facts,” and “the complex of facts, organized or unorganized, in which the individual exercises his function” and experiences beauty. Scott would extend his lectures on aesthetics to students from the University Musical Society and would be joined by Dewey, who lectured on the relation of psychology to music. Scott also shared Dewey’s interest in the relation of secondary education to colleges and became active in the Michigan Schoolmasters’ Club, exploring how composition and English could be taught more effectively. He was also a frequent participant in the high school accreditation inspections. Scott’s and Dewey’s commonality would show through in other ways as well. In 1891, the two men together would serve as the advisory board for the Inlander a new student literary monthly. The aim of the Inlander, as stated in the inaugural issue, was not to limit its articles “to subjects having only local color, nor limit the range of its contributions to University life.” Dewey used the new journal as a forum for social commentary, contributing several articles and an unsigned column called “The Angle of Reflection.” In his first “Angle of Reflection” column, Dewey elaborated on the purpose of the Inlander while also offering comment on women’s suffrage. The subject of his column was the creation of an academy of female writers by the New York publication the Critic, and the fact that “no Michigan poetess or authoress seems to have received votes.” Dewey advanced several possible reasons for the exclusion of Michigan writers, one of the reasons being that the Midwest “does not seem as yet to count (either by work or voting in the Critic) in the literary world.” Therefore, the purpose of the Inlander was “to express and to encourage the articulate voicing of that part of the vast dumb Inland to which it belongs.” Dewey sought to cultivate a literary sense consisting of “the free perception and natural reporting of the currents of life which are actually in movement.” The latter statement foreshadowed Dewey’s brief and abortive foray into journalism. Emboldened perhaps by the freedom to comment on social issues in the Inlander, his columns had grown more speculative, and he began to think in terms of a wider audience.

Staff of the Inlander with faculty advisors John Dewey (second from right, front row) and Fred Newton Scott (right, front row). (John Dewey Papers, Bentley Historical Library.)
Thought News

In the spring of 1892, announcements for a new publication, Thought News, began appearing around Ann Arbor. Thought News was the brainchild of Dewey and Franklin Ford, a newspaper man previously affiliated with Bradstreet’s commercial publications in New York who had migrated to Ann Arbor. Ford had hit upon the idea of information as a commodity that could be scientifically and systematically organized. He conceived of a newspaper that would make intelligence or “thought” readily available, and ultimately sold for profit. Ford found a sympathetic audience in Dewey, and Dewey found a potential vehicle for applying philosophical ideas to interpret the movement of the currents of life.

Ford’s brother, Corydon Lovine Ford, rather philosophically described how the two brothers had come to meet Dewey: “Professor Dewey of Philosophy, saved with me on the schools and welcomed the proposition of a new economy in the State through the organization of intelligence—he was searching for the State when my brother and I found him.” Dewey wrote to Henry Carter Adams in 1889 explaining that Franklin Ford’s idea “is not that of simply ‘telling’ the truth—the idea of the independent newspaper—but of finding out what the truth is.” Dewey also enclosed a two-page memorandum that attempted to explain further Ford’s concept. By early 1892, the idea had evolved to the point that a launch date of April 1892 could be set.

Advertisements for the new publication promised a “journal which shall not go beyond the fact; which shall report thought rather than dress it up in the garments of the past”; and will use philosophic ideas as “tools in interpreting the movement of thought; which shall treat questions of science, letters, state, school and church as parts of one moving life of man.” The advertisement went on to state that “immediate responsibility for its conduct will be in the hands of John Dewey.” Newspapers took note of Dewey’s fantastic new idea and Thought News was the subject of several articles as they tried to determine whether it was a new rival or a true revolution.

Sensationalized stories in the newspapers forced Dewey to respond to accusations that “he proposes to get out an ‘extra’ every time he has a new thought.” Dewey was interviewed by the Detroit Tribune and dispelled notions that he was planning a revolution. He admitted that, “at the University we are more or less shut off in our study of psychology and ethics by the facts themselves.” The attempt was to introduce “a little newspaper business” into philosophy. Dewey explained, “we would get their facts and the outside inquirers would get our theory and methods—the benefit of system and interpretation.” But despite the media attention and advertisements, not a single issue of Thought News was ever printed. Dewey would later describe the project as “over-enthusiastic,” noting, “the idea was advanced for those days, but it was too advanced for the maturity of those whose had the idea in mind.”

Ad for Thought News from the Inlander Vol. II, No. 7, April 1892.
Even though Dewey remained at Michigan for two years after the Thought News episode, it seems a fitting epilogue to his time at Michigan. On one hand it suggests the jelling of his philosophy and an eagerness for change and reform. But it also indicated that he was in search of a laboratory in which to put his theories into practice. Thought News found Dewey ready for a larger stage on which to put reform ideas into action.

In 1894, William Rainey Harper and the University of Chicago provided the larger stage for Dewey and a laboratory in which he could test his theories. Well endowed with private funds, the University of Chicago was able to offer salaries far higher than Michigan could. It was a fact President Angell had addressed in 1892 when he lobbied for raises in faculty salaries noting, “some universities west of us are paying salaries much higher than ours,” and adding “we are constantly in danger of losing some of our most valuable men.” Yet it was more than the salary that attracted Dewey to Chicago. The University of Chicago promised the opportunity to develop and operate a demonstration school; University Laboratory School opened in 1896, giving Dewey his important testing ground. In Democracy and Education he would later call education “the laboratory in which philosophic distinctions become concrete and tested.” It would not be until 1924, thirty years after Dewey left, that a demonstration school would open its doors on Michigan’s campus.

At Chicago, Dewey would eventually be joined by several Michigan colleagues, including George Herbert Mead and Albert H. Lloyd, and former students Frank Addison Manny and James Rowland Angell. When William James of Harvard University wrote to Dewey in March 1903 praising what he saw as an emerging “new school of thought” in Chicago, Dewey responded, “We have all been at work at it for about twelve years. Lloyd and Mead were at it in Ann Arbor ten years ago.” Dewey’s response to James, acknowledging the work done in Ann Arbor, underscores the importance of the University of Michigan to the development of his philosophy. Michigan provided the opportunity and environment for Dewey to cultivate his ideas that later grew to maturity in Chicago.

Endnotes

4John Dewey to James B. Edmonson, October 26, 1929, “Minutes of the Faculty, 1928-30,” Box 1, University of Michigan School of Education Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Bentley Historical Library).
7Peckham, The Making of the University of Michigan, 62-84.
8President’s Report to the Board of Regents for the Year Ending Sept. 30, 1891 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, 1891), 9, 24-27, 30.
11Shaw, Encyclopedic Survey, 670.
13Proceedings of the Board of Regents of the University of Michigan from January 1881 to January 1886 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Courier Book and Job Printing, 1886), 482.
14John Dewey to James B. Angell, July 19, 1884, Box 2, James B. Angell Papers, Bentley Historical Library.
15Calendar of the University of Michigan for 1884-85, 50-51.
“Executive Board Minutes, 1892-1948 [microfilm], Box 3, Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies Records, Bentley Historical Library.


Ibid., p. 34.


Ibid., 313-314, 317.


Castalian, Vol. 6, 1891: 24-29.

Oracle, Vol. 25, 1892: [3-6].

Ibid.


Inlander, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1891: [i].

Responding to a letter from the director of the Michigan Historical Collections (predecessor of the Bentley Historical Library) soliciting manuscript material for the archives, Dewey responded that he had “never preserved any mss [manuscripts] at any time.” He noted some of his writings while at Michigan stating, “I helped found the publication ‘The Inlander’ with Prof. F.N. Scott, and wrote under the caption ‘The Angle of Reflection’ but have no copies.” John Dewey to L. G. Vander Velde, December 14, 1939, John Dewey Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

Inlander, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1891: 35.


John Dewey to Henry Carter Adams, April 29, 1889, Henry Carter Adams Papers, Box 2, Bentley Historical Library.


Annual Report of the President to the Board of Regents, 1892: 22.
