

December 16, 1931

Dear Professor Veblen;

Many thanks for your very kind letter of December 15. I have no doubt that you are right, that there are several very able men in every one of the fields, and that having selected a field we shall somehow find the man. I am sure that you are right, that one man is not enough. He is only the nucleus. The Princeton mathematical set is unquestionably under modern conditions the correct conception.

Finally, I hardly know what to say as to "the dead hand", as you call it. President Gilman used to say that every generation needed a new start. However, this will have no effect at all upon what I do. I should not be surprised if fifty years hence the Institute were less important than it is at this moment, partly because other institutions will, I hope, have improved, partly because it may itself sag, but the point is of no importance, since we shall act precisely as if the thing could be kept at maximum efficiency.

Whenever you know your California address, let me have it.

In the last event, you could send me an air letter or telegram from California to my office, and, even if I had left, it would be forwarded to me.

You have been so kind and so helpful that - will you believe

Professor Veblen December 16, 1931 2

it - you even haunt my dreams, for the other evening, while I was probably sleeping soundly, I had a conference with you, though the next morning I was unable to recover any part of it.

With all good wishes and profound appreciation, I am

Very sincerely yours,

Professor Oswald Veblen
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

ABRAHAM FLEXNER

AF:BSB

December 16, 1931

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

PRINCETON NEW JERSEY

Department of
MATHEMATICS

December 15, 1931.

Dr. Abraham Flexner
The Institute for Advanced Study
100 East 42nd Street
New York, N. Y.

Dear Dr. Flexner:

I am very much obliged to you for letting me see your confidential report which I return to you herewith. As you already know, I find myself in complete agreement with your program. The only points I can think of to criticize are perhaps not really points of difference.

You intimate that you would not go ahead in a particular field if you were not able to get "the right man". My belief is that in most fields, there are sufficiently many good men so that you can surely get a man of the right sort. For example in mathematics, if you cannot secure the man whom you have picked out and whom I agree is the best first choice, there are a number of others who are surely as good and who may, in fact, be better.

As I think I wrote last summer, it seems to me that The Johns Hopkins would have held out longer if departments had not so often been built around one man. I am inclined to think that you will accomplish more by getting a strong group than by means of outstanding individuals. Of course I mean that you ought to get the most outstanding individuals that you can, but not make too much depend upon any one such person.

Another possible point of difference is that I would not be so afraid as you some times seem to be of "the dead hand". Your program is experimental only in its details. The general idea is perfectly conservative and is regarded as sound by every competent judge. Therefore I don't see why you should not make your arrangements as permanent as you know how to make them. I have heard this talk about not tying the hands of future generations from so many of the people whom I know you would disagree with, that I hope you do not mean it to apply to anything except rather unimportant parts of your program.

I hope to see you again and hear more about your program out in California.

Yours sincerely,

Oswald Veblen

December 9, 1931

Dear Professor Veblen:

Let me thank you most heartily for your great kindness to me yesterday. I had meant to bring with me a confidential report submitted to the Trustees at their last meeting. I wonder if you could find time to glance through it and make any suggestions that occur to you. You can write on the margin or the back or dictate or treat it in any way that is easiest for you before returning it to me.

With all good wishes,

Very sincerely yours,

ABRAHAM FLEXNER

Professor Oswald Veblen
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

AF:ESB

November 28, 1931

Dear Professor Veblen;

I have been going forward with thinking and interviewing since I last saw you, and I have now reached the point where I would like to see you again sometime at your convenience. Are you likely to be coming to New York within the next few weeks? If not, I shall take a day, if you permit, and go to Princeton to have a conference with you.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Professor Oswald Veblen
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

ABRAHAM FLEXNER

AF:ESB

Magnetawan,
via Burks Falls,
Ontario, Canada
July 16, 1931

Dear Professor Veblen:

Many thanks for your kind letter. Please write me whenever the spirit moves you. I am brooding over your previous letter and many others dealing with the same subject.

One of the points that has been worrying me you touch upon, namely, the length of the university terms. Our present American arrangement, a short term until Christmas, a short interval, a long siege until the middle of May or the first of June with a short Easter vacation, is not good, certainly not in the graduate realm. Our difficulty is, however, climatic, for the American summer is a poor one for working, though I have myself almost invariably spent part of my summer in work - but then I go two hundred miles north of Toronto in search of a decent climate. Perhaps, we shall have to do some experimenting before we hit upon the ideal arrangement. Certain it is that at the level at which we are considering matters men ought to have large gobs of leisure - both students and staff at not infrequent intervals.

I shall see you in the fall - and I hope to hear from you before then - but in any case I shall have a second memorandum for you and your associates to play upon by the time I return to New York, say, the middle of September.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Professor Oswald Veblen
Brooklin
Hancock County
Maine

ABRAHAM FLEXNER

AF:ESB

June 25, 1931

Dear Professor Veblen:

How can I thank you sufficiently for the pains you have taken to write me so fully and in your own hand? / I have merely glanced through your memorandum, for since my return from Europe I have been almost absolutely overwhelmed with calls and current correspondence, and I have also had to go West to see my oldest brother who has been desperately ill. Your memorandum is one of many which I shall take to Canada with me next week and which I shall read and reflect upon with the greatest care. / I don't want to comment on it now, for I am trying to keep my mind from crystallizing until I have read others from various sources. / I see, though I am sure less clearly than you do, the difficulties inherent in any form of management. We cannot in this country adopt either the German or the English system in its entirety. I wonder if we cannot evolve something new, namely, a board consisting of (1) a few men of affairs who would be interested in financing the institution, (2) a group of scholars holding important posts in other institutions, (3) a similar group of professors in the Institute itself. Would not three such groups check and stimulate one another?

I should propose to put the director on a par with the professors as to salary, social position, and everything else. He could thus be made to feel his place as an academic individual, not a public or executive personage. An arrangement of this sort could be tried experimentally, that is embodied in by-laws, easily subject to change in favor of something more workable.

As I wish the institution always to be small, the influence of the academic groups should be decisive.

Turn this over in your mind, and drop me a line upon this or any other idea that occurs to you. I

I am leaving for Canada July 1 to remain away until the middle of September. My address will be Magnetawan, via Burcks Falls, Ontario, Canada. I shall certainly see you for further conference before any steps are taken in the early autumn.

With all good wishes and very profound appreciation,

Sincerely yours,

ABRAHAM FLEXNER

58 Battle Road

Princeton N.J.

27 Jan. 1931

Dear Dr. Flesner:-

It will be a pleasure
to see you next Monday. Would you care
to meet four or five of my colleagues at
lunch or dinner or in the evening after
dinner? If so, please let me know
when would be most convenient? The
afternoon or evening would be slightly better
for me as I shall probably have Prof.
Ehrenfest of Leiden to show around in the
morning.

Yours sincerely,

Oswald Veblen.

December 26, 1930

Professor Oswald Veblen
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

My dear Professor Veblen:

Your very kind letter of the
to Mr. Flexner
twenty-third/ has been received while he
is out of the city. I shall bring it to
his attention upon his return next month,
and I am sure he will communicate with
you promptly.

Very truly yours,

ESTHER S. BAILEY

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON NEW JERSEY

W. Veblen

23 Dec. 1930

Department of
MATHEMATICS

Dear Mr. Flexner: -

I have just finished reading your book. It makes me wish all the more that you would set up your University-in-the-strict-sense here in Princeton. The communal background for it would be good, and if you do not try to build everything complete at first, the presence of another group of scholars would make the gaps in your group less important. But, of course, what chiefly interests me is that it would strengthen our efforts to make this university also, to some extent, a seat of learning.

Don't you think it would be amusing to see the two experiments going on side by side.

your sincerely,

Oswald Veblen

Brooklin,
Hancock Co.,
Maine.

Dear Dr. Flexner:-

As I said when you requested me to write you something about the plans for your new Institute, ~~my difficulty is that~~ I can do little but register what must seem like fulsome approval of ~~what your plans~~ ~~you have already in mind~~. The essential point is that the Institute is to be devoted in a single-minded way to scholarship. If you can resist all temptations to do the other good things that might be attempted, your adventure will be a success.

It is the multiplicity of its purposes that makes an American University such an unhappy place for a scholar. Instead of being a haven within which one can seek to develop his ideas in the company of other like-minded people, it is a kind of market place where all kinds of enterprises are exploited and where the particular enterprises of scholarship is generally on the defensive. Even after reading your book I doubt whether you really know much of an ~~university~~ ^{university} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~not~~ ^{not} ~~up~~ ^{up} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~air~~ ^{air}.

A good deal of the trouble is due, I think, to our form of organization, which puts the legal power in the hands of Trustees and the actual power in those of a President and his administrative staff and the professional alumni. ~~Afterwards~~ I used to

explaining and defending the obvious to a lot of people who should never be obliged to consider

^{lowered} But since my experience at Oxford I am convinced that ~~it is very~~ ^{the ultimate legal power is very important.} In
~~the matter of the position~~ ^{both at close quarters, I very much prefer the}
~~of~~ ^{organization of an Oxford College with} ~~all powers and~~
~~property right~~ ^{as} ~~vested in the Fellows.~~ ^{President (or}
~~Warden, or what not), the undergraduates, the outside~~
~~world, the ambitious and pushing people of all sorts,~~
~~are concerned about the point of view of the dons.~~
~~Here, on the other hand all these people~~ ^{are very little}
~~concerned about the views of the professors on academic~~
~~questions (they may be interested in their opinion about~~
~~Russia!) but are acutely sensitive to those of the trustees~~
~~and prominent alumni. As a result the scholarly work~~
~~is almost always~~ ^{felt itself} ~~a weak minority. An~~ ^{an} ~~insecure and~~
~~distracted~~ ^{minority.}

It will be said of course that the faculty should
 not be burdened with ~~the~~ financial and administrative
~~problems.~~ But in practice the details are handled by
 administrative officers just as in any American university.
 The difference is that these ^{administrative} ~~people~~ look up to, instead of
 down on, the dons. In fact, the financial management of
 an Oxford college is ^{generally sounder} ~~more efficient~~ than that of an American
 one, ^{for} ~~the reason being simply that~~ the dons are personally
^{and continually} ~~concerned about~~ the security of the college resources whereas
 a board of trustees is only sentimentally and sporadically
 attentive.

So I am inclined to think that ^{as it seems very to guarantee} ~~the~~ ^{would be to have}
~~the~~ ^{the} success and permanence of your institution ~~is that~~
~~that~~ ^{should} be ruled by the scholars who are its members.

"B"

Faculty ^{government is very} ~~should~~ ~~imply~~ a conservative. ~~For~~

if the control is in the hands of a faculty, Each suggested change runs into interminable discussion, delay, whittling down, and ^{compromise,} ~~plain inertia & useless~~

~~the Bridgman~~ ~~discussion~~ discussion). But in the mean

time most of the ^{faculty} ~~faculty~~ ~~go~~ go on with ^{their work,} ~~no~~ ~~important~~ say, try to make your ~~initial~~ ^{organizational} ~~organizational~~ ~~scheme~~ as

conservative as possible. The temptation is to say to yourself: "My initial ideas may be impractical, but we regard them as tentative and be ready to change if experience shows ~~it~~ change to be desirable."

~~But~~ ~~that~~ ~~a~~ ~~Conservative~~ ^{is a university} ~~life of organization~~ ^{is} ~~is~~ ^{desirable} ~~in~~ ~~and~~ ~~of~~ ~~itself~~. ^{Every if you have a faculty} ~~(faculty control will do it)~~

^{guard} ~~guard~~ ~~against~~ ~~the~~ ~~situation~~ ~~kind~~ ~~of~~ ~~organization~~ ~~which~~ ~~will~~ ~~permit~~ ~~the~~ ~~next~~ ~~director~~ ~~to~~ ~~say~~ "Let us take stock... evaluate... light of experience" ~~you know that is~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~better~~ ~~than~~ ~~ideas~~ and then proceed with the usual "reorganization" and vulgarization.

without the fear that some outside will infect every for the very best. Even if you do not have faculty control, I hope you will make your organization as

Of course, ~~desiring that~~ ^{may} this ~~will~~ ~~not~~ be hard to bring about....

"B" >

I think the salaries should be much higher than the present scale. The highest ~~professional salary~~ ^{that} I have heard ~~of~~ ^{of} was \$20,000 plus a house. This was refused by the physicist to whom it was offered.

~~The question of ^{the age of} retiring retirement and the amount of Retiring allowances should be ^{more liberal} thought out in advance.~~
To lose one half or two thirds of one's salary at the age of 68 or 70 must be a severe blow to a man who has been receiving but little more than he needs to live on. (Shall he exile himself to California or can he find a sufficiently small apartment and hang on to his house?)

I favor a departmental organization. Each department should be large enough to perpetuate a tradition. The decline of Johns Hopkins was due in part to the fact that most of its departments were one-man affairs. In a mathematics department I would suggest having at least three ^{members of the permanent staff} in each of three age groups, 0-35, 35-45, 45-∞. A laboratory department would presumably be smaller. Also ^{or dealing with} a less composite subject.

"A"
 set to 4

I don't favor ~~but having~~ ^{until} a big library, ^{rather} but a group of collections of such books as are required by the various departments and individuals. A ~~centrally controlled~~ unified library is a ~~travelling~~ troublesome monster.

"A"

~~It is~~ I favor a ^{definitely ~~fixed~~} "chain"
to each of which a fixed salary ~~is~~ is attached. While
these are considerable advantages in its flexibility, the
usual method of paying each man what he can squeeze
out of the authorities is ~~not a very~~ ^{an ungratifying} undignified one.

I should like ^{it if} ~~to see~~ the buildings of the Institute
could be in a modern architectural style; ~~rather~~
~~rather~~ ~~purpose~~. But the Institute itself, ~~it is to~~
~~not to~~, must be ~~largely~~ for the most part an
imitation of the Universities of Europe and the colleges
of Oxford and Cambridge. So it is not illogical
to use this architecture also as a starting point.

~~Progress~~
I like the amenities of an ~~an~~ English Oxford
college, particularly the high table. I don't see why
it could not be imitated. Even under American
conditions I believe there would be a large enough
nucleus of bachelors who would prefer to eat three
regularly and the married ones would come once or
twice a week if the meals were good and sufficiently
cheap (why not 2 or 3 free meals a week?) ~~Also~~

Much could be said for making the nucleus
of the Institute an ~~all~~ imitation of an Oxford
college. ~~If so, the way to do it would be~~ college's

5
take as a pattern would be All Souls. The ~~College~~ would be primarily a residence for the faculty. If students are admitted they should come in gradually and as "Junior Members," ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~Office~~ ^{Office} ~~There~~ ^{There} should also be a sufficient number of College houses and apartments for married members. But the use of all these facilities should be voluntary. It would not be a violation of this provision to let the rooms be free to members of the faculty or assigned in order of seniority, although this would make some of this being used.

~~to let the Number of students admitted to the Institute? ~~perhaps~~ be small at first and then be gradually increased by the faculty if they want more.~~ My experience is that it is desirable to have a large audience (20-50) in a lecture, but a small number ^(3 or 4) of students whose reading or research or supervises. Perhaps the ^{best} method would be leave attendance at lectures open to as many as each professor was willing to admit and restrict the number of Junior Members of the Institute.

The location of your Institute should be such that your group of scholars should be ~~just~~ one of several cultural groups. ~~Your group~~ should never be too large. Otherwise a scope would be given for

"organization" and the failures we know so well. If money for too large an Institute should be available, let there be 2, 3, ... ~~or~~ institutes, ~~&~~ all separate! But if there is just one Institute for Advanced Study² ~~is~~ isolated in a community devoted chiefly to business it will be in danger of not being able to maintain itself.

So I come back to the suggestion that Princeton is in "the vicinity of Newark", a suggestion which is ~~it~~ by no means disinterested. For it would be a great advantage to me and others of my sort to ~~have~~ be near to the ~~site~~ ~~of~~ a group of men that I expect ~~to~~ ~~bring~~ you together together.

~~I am sending you a terrible lot of advice, but you brought it on yourself!~~

~~Yours sincerely~~ ..

I seem to be very verbose, but it is a fascinating subject.

Fellows or Associates of N.R.F.

- (1) The A. shall be a dignified position with large salary
- (2) Salary paid entirely by N.R.F. for period of appointment, the A. to continue ^{as a Prof. in the Univ.}
- (3) The contrivance of the Univ. to consist in assuming responsibility for future of the A. The trustee of Fund to see that the Univ. is likely to have other unexpected expenses in connection with the A. to be provided with funds for an assistant and for material equipment. The latter is liable to be a large amount in case of laboratory services.
- (5) The A. to be allowed to give advanced lectures or seminars.

July 7, 1930

Dear Professor Veblen:

Returning to New York for a few days from Europe before going to Canada for the summer, I find your very kind note of June 10. I cannot tell you how deeply I appreciate your interest and cooperation, but there is an amusing side to your little note. You say, "I realize now what you were thinking about when you wrote to me last January." It seems incredible, but the fact is that this whole development has taken place since the first of March. My letter in January was due to the fact that I was getting ready for publication the Rhodes Lectures on Universities.

I do hope that the most cordial and sympathetic relations will be established between the proposed Institute and the scholars of Princeton.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

ABRAHAM FLEXNER

Professor Oswald Veblen
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

AF:ESB

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

PRINCETON NEW JERSEY

*Act.
June 14
E.S.E.*
Oswald Veblen
June 10, 1930.

Department of
MATHEMATICS

Dr. Abraham Flexner,
150 East 72nd Street,
New York, N. Y.

Dear Dr. Flexner:

I was very much pleased and interested to read in the Sunday newspaper that you are really going to establish a seat of learning somewhere in this neighborhood. I realize now what you were thinking about when you wrote to me last January.

I wish it could be arranged somehow or other that your Institute could locate itself in the borough or township of Princeton so that you could use some of the facilities of the University and we could have the benefit of your presence.

Yours sincerely,

Oswald Veblen

Oswald Veblen.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON NEW JERSEY

January 29, 1930.

Department of
MATHEMATICS

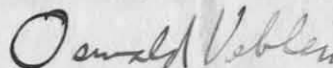
Mr. Abraham Flexner,
150 East 72nd Street,
New York City, N. Y.

Dear Dr. Flexner:

I hope that someone will set up a sure enough seat of learning. I insist on the word "seat" rather than "institution". When it is done it will of course get the same mixed reception that all other academic enterprises receive. But I think we are now far enough along in civilization to be able to make it a success.

With many thanks for your kind letter,

Yours sincerely,



Oswald Veblen.

January 27, 1930

Dear Professor Veblen:

Thank you very much for your kind note.

I agree with you absolutely.

And now I should like to ask another question. What would American scholars and scientists do if some fellow or some foundation set up a "sure enough" institution of learning? Is it necessary to carry the mill-stone of the college about the neck of the graduate school?

With all good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

ABRAHAM FLEXNER

Professor Oswald Veblen
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

AF:ESB

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

PRINCETON NEW JERSEY

January 24, 1930.

Department of
MATHEMATICS

Mr. Abraham Flexner,
150 East 72nd Street,
New York City, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Flexner:

The thing reported in the New York Times was an extemporaneous speech at the dinner of the American Mathematical Society at Bethlehem and I have no notes on it of any sort. I was asked to speak about the National Research Fellowships, the Research Professorships which have been established recently, and related symptoms of the tendency to treat scientific research as a distinct enterprise and not merely a by-product. In the course of these remarks I quoted the epigram of a young English mathematician (M. H. A. Newman of St. John's College, Cambridge): "The difference between Cambridge and Princeton is that Cambridge is a seat of learning whereas Princeton is an educational institution". I think the distinction is a just one and that any other American University could be substituted for Princeton without essential change.

Here in Princeton the scientific fund which we owe largely to you and your colleagues on the General Education Board, is having an influence in the right direction, and I think our new mathematical building which is going to be devoted entirely to research and advanced instruction will also help considerably. I think my mathematical institute which has not yet found favor may turn out to be one of the next steps. Anyhow it seems to me to fit in with the concept of a seat of learning.

With thanks for your kind letter,

Yours sincerely,

Oswald Veblen

Oswald Veblen.

January 21, 1930

Dear Professor Veblen:

In the paper which you read before the American Mathematical Society you are reported in The Times as having said that "America still lacks a genuine seat of learning and that American academic work is inferior in quality to the best abroad". There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that both statements are correct. I hope very much that you were accurately quoted.

Do you happen to possess copies of the paper which you read in which this statement was made? If so, I should appreciate very highly the opportunity to read them.

With warm regards,

Very sincerely yours,

ABRAHAM FLEXNER

Professor Oswald Veblen
58 Battle Road
Princeton, New Jersey

AF:ESB