

Frankfurter-3

These papers are reproductions of some handed to me by Justice Felix Frankfurter during an interview I had with him November 25, 1955. He gave me permission to reproduce them, but asked that he be consulted what would be made of them before publication.

The correspondence was loaned Mrs. Stern by Felix Frankfurter and was with practically no omissions discovered in the following files:

D - Felix Frankfurter

D - Weed, Lewis H.

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Baltimore, Md.

November 9, 1934.

Mr. Abraham Flexner,
The Institute for Advanced Study,
Princeton, New Jersey.

My dear Mr. Flexner:-

At the time of the meeting last month, I was much disturbed by your statement of the Institute's activities regarding mathematics in the New York Public Schools. I delayed writing to you until I had the minutes of the meeting; these came to me some days ago and I find that my original impression is confirmed by your report. Is not the Institute treading on dangerous ground in extending its facilities to teachers of mathematics in secondary schools? Are we not invading the precious time of our staff by bringing into the Institute teachers who at best will not be research-material or at least will not have opportunities for research? Should the Institute be at all concerned with "a new market" for its young workers? Is it really our responsibility "to look at the entire educational system as a whole"? Should not the Institute be devoting its entire energies to higher studies without regard to other defects in the training of youth in the lower schools? And as we add other schools to our School of Mathematics are we to prepare for the opening of our facilities to the teachers in these other branches of learning in our high schools? Is not the logical end of such an entering wedge of activities within the secondary schools the development within the Institute of Teacher's Training Courses, of courses of an ad hoc character? Should we as Trustees not now appreciate the dangers of such a diversion of our energies from our

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exalted primary purpose even though the need for modernization of teaching of high school mathematics may be great?

I am thus putting down most frankly some of my worries about this new venture of the Institute. It may be that the time and energies of our excellent staff may not be devoted in any large measure to these new activities -- but I must confess a true worry about the development.

Very sincerely,

(signed) LEWIS H. WEED.

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THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

Princeton, N. J.

November 10, 1934.

Dear Dr. Weed:

I was delighted with your letter this morning and am only sorry that you did not speak out at the meeting. That is what meetings are for. Despite the explanation which I am going to make to you, I want you to bring the subject up at the next meeting of the Board, because I do not want the point which you raise to be confined to you and me. It ought to be something in which the entire Board is interested.

Now as to the facts; we are not "extending the facilities of the Institute to teachers of mathematics in the secondary schools". We are not doing anything for them that we would not be doing anyhow. In fact, we are not asking ourselves where these men are to teach — whether in colleges, universities, research institutes, secondary schools, or anywhere else. We are engaged in one task only — that of giving the faculty every possible opportunity for research, and giving a carefully chosen body of workers, who have shown their mettle, an opportunity to catch up with them and to inspire one another. Now, of course, all of these men are not going to turn out to be first-rate research workers. A few of them will doubtless find favorable positions in universities and will be worthy of them. Others will perhaps do their best in colleges. What about the remainder? While we are not undertaking the responsibility of finding a post for anybody, I should like to create a demand for modern mathematicians, precisely as the physicists have created a demand for physicists. As the situation now stands, secondary-school mathematics

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is obsolete. That makes it very difficult for the colleges, and second-rate work in the colleges makes it difficult for the graduate schools, and ultimately for us.

Physicists and biologists of modern training have been turned out in such volume that in large cities like New York the teaching of science is probably better than it is in most colleges, especially in most small colleges. It is infinitely to the interest not only of the Institute but of all centers of mathematics, like Harvard, Chicago, and Brown University, that secondary-school mathematics should be reorganized. When that is accomplished college mathematics will be better, university mathematics will be better, graduate school mathematics will be better, and the Institute mathematics work can be better; and the way to accomplish this result is not consciously to endeavor to train a type of person for secondary-school work -- a thing which has never entered our minds -- but to make sure that everybody who comes here goes away with a substantial training in mathematics, regardless of where he is ultimately going to land. I hope that some of them will land in the high schools, especially those who are not among the best endowed, just as has been the case in science and is beginning to be the case in history.

Don't fear that there will be any teachers' training course of an ad hoc character, or that the energies of the staff will be diverted from the primary and single purpose for which the Institute was created. No member of the staff is thinking of high schools. That is a point which has occurred to me as I survey American education as a whole. The staff are not even thinking of developing professors in Harvard University. They are thinking of mathematics and letting everything else take care of itself,

Dr. Weed

November 10, 1934

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as they should, and I am doing nothing to divert them from the one purpose for which the Institute was started.

Despite this explanation I do wish that you would bring the subject up at the next meeting of the Board, for if you do not I shall read your letter to the Board, because there was evidently some ambiguity about my statement, or I left room for misunderstanding, which ought to be cleared up, not only for the benefit of the Board but for the benefit of the Institute.

I confess I am delighted that you have felt free to write me at such length and with such candor. This sort of thing is what makes a Trustee worth while.

With all good wishes,

Ever sincerely,

(signed) A. F.

Dr. Lewis H. Weed
School of Medicine
The Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, Maryland

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THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Baltimore, Md.

November 21, 1934.

Mr. Abraham Flexner,
The Institute for Advanced Study,
Princeton, New Jersey.

My dear Mr. Flexner:-

I am sure that you and I see eye to eye as to the real purposes and aims of the Institute: your welcome letter of November 10 reassures me of this unity of vision and relieves me of many of my doubts and perplexities. Reading your letter and the minutes of the meeting together removes all the ambiguities of the original report and I am glad to be set straight as to the Institute's relations to the New York High Schools.

But I still wonder whether we are right in taking any steps "to create a demand for modern mathematicians". I willingly concede the desirability of modernizing the teaching of mathematics in high schools, colleges and universities; but I question seriously the benefits of any direct attack by the Institute upon this problem. As I visualize our proper function in this process, the Institute, by the character of its research and of its teaching, will influence in a potent way teaching and research in the graduate schools of universities: young men will go forth from the Institute carrying the inspiration of modern mathematics to their own universities and colleges. And these young men in their turn as teachers will send out their students, into the higher and lower branches of teaching so that gradually mathematics will be

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taught everywhere throughout our educational system by men who have had some sort of stimulus from the Institute.

Such an indirect attack upon the problem of modernization of the teaching of mathematics seems in my mind to be much more in keeping with the Institute's purpose than any direct attempt to interest Superintendents of Education in our work and in our students. Should we try to sell our product to these superintendents even though we may feel that in this transaction we are aiding the high schools in improving their mathematics? Can we avoid immediately or eventually a quid pro quo? What if the superintendents said they would take our students provided we gave these same students certain additional courses or opportunities for study? Would we be strong enough to resist the superintendent's pressure or the pressure from those students who needed the jobs? Could we refuse to accept high school teachers of mathematics who in the opinion of their superintendents need the stimulus and viewpoint of the Institute? And when word has gone forth that our students easily procure posts in high schools, are we not in the Institute going to be assailed by large numbers of student-candidates who protesting love for mathematics come to us with the sole purpose of getting a permanent job in a high school?

Both you and I would of course answer these questions in the same way for I think we both see clearly the purposes of the Institute. My worry here is that we are offering an entering wedge which may in the future subject the Institute to difficult problems — problems which in the nature of our independence should not be ours at all. Invitations to visit the Institute extended to superintendents of schools are after all to be classed as mild, legitimate efforts at advertising both our work

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and our product: these invitations (or even letters dispatched to the superintendents) should be avoided.

The problem of our students who do not measure up to research-standards in mathematics is not one which should concern either the instructional or administrative staff of the Institute. Of course the executive officers will be happy to assist students in procuring suitable posts, but this activity should be of the students' initiative and not of ours. The poor student is after all a mistake on our part: he represents a distinct intellectual and financial loss to the Institute, just as a poor student here represents similar loss to the medical school. But I tremble to think that the Institute's poorest students under our present system of selection and fellowship-aid should only be of high school caliber. Should we not be more rigid in our selection?

These then are some of my worries which your letter did not wholly remove. Your suggestion of open discussion of the matter at the next meeting of the Trustees is perhaps sound but it seems to me that the question involved is possibly so technical as not to interest the whole Board. I did not speak at the last meeting as I feared I had misunderstood your report; I believe also that mature consideration of a project before criticism is better than a spontaneous outburst. My fear still is that we are permitting an entering wedge: no damage has yet been done but the development of the present policy would lead to intellectual activities of a lower order than those upon which the Institute has quite rightly embarked.

Very sincerely,

(signed) LEWIS H. WEED.

THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

Princeton, New Jersey.

November 25, 1934.

Dear Weed:

Many thanks for your kind letter of November 21. I think you misunderstand my phrase, "to create a demand for modern mathematicians". If you will examine into the part which was played by Dr. Welch, Dr. Mall, Dr. Abel, and Dr. Osler in the modernizing of medical education, then you will see what is in our minds. In writing and speaking and in personal contacts these men spent years enlightening universities and medical schools as to the meaning of modern medicine.

The Institute faculty has not given a moment's time or thought to doing this and will not do so. Knowing these superintendents through previous contacts, I have simply tried to point out to them the importance of bringing high school mathematicians into touch with modern mathematical teaching. The independence of the School of Mathematics is in no wise a factor, for, as far as its teaching and research go, it is an autonomous concern with which I do not interfere even if I had the desire to do so. Nor is there any danger that we are going to be assailed by large numbers who don't love mathematics but who do want a job, for applicants are scrutinized on the basis of their previous performance, and, if anyone were indiscreet enough to intimate any other motive, I think I know what Professor Veblen and his associates would say.

I have taken care in speaking to superintendents of schools here and in Washington to say that I am absolutely indifferent whether they get their mathematicians from Princeton, from Harvard, Chicago, or from any other institution which trains modern mathematicians. I am profoundly inter-

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Dr. Weed

November 23, 1934

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ested in modernizing the teaching of the subject which will inevitably, if it succeeds, provide posts for persons whose training belongs to this era and not to a past era. It may interest you to know that one of the persons who received an appointment in the New York City Schools began in one of the huge high schools by teaching the regulation number of classes. After a few weeks the principal of the school had his eyes opened, relieved her of two classes, in order that she might conduct a seminar for all the other teachers of mathematics in the school, seventeen or eighteen in number. Thus in one of the great high schools in New York City a seed has been planted. I cannot for the life of me see how a thing of that sort can be any more prejudicial to the Institute than it was prejudicial to the Hopkins when Dr. Councilman left Dr. Welch to go to Harvard, Simon left Dr. Welch to modernize pathology, first, at Philadelphia, secondly, at the Rockefeller Institute. The point, however, is an interesting one and, as I said to you at the Wilmer Dinner, I hope very much that at the next meeting of the Board when you and Veblen are present, you will raise it, however tentatively, in order to hear what Veblen has to say on the subject. I think the Board will be very greatly interested, and I think, if there is any danger, it would be wholesome to let Professor Veblen have from you an expression in advance that the level of the Institute's work may be lowered by what seems to me a sound way of improving secondary mathematics, college mathematics, graduate school mathematics, and ultimately Institute mathematics.

In conclusion, let me say that I am more than delighted to have you comment so freely and candidly upon a point which gives you concern. That, in my judgment, is the sort of thing that makes a good trustee.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

(signed) A. F.

Dr. Lewis H. Weed

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Baltimore, Md.

November 26, 1934.

Mr. Abraham Flexner,
The Institute for Advanced Study,
Princeton, New Jersey.

My dear Mr. Flexner:-

Thank you very much indeed for your letter of
November 23. It seems to me that our discussion can best be
carried on in a personal conference. If you think that such a
personal conference would be of any benefit, I would be glad to
come to Princeton some Saturday early in December.

Very sincerely,

(signed) LEWIS H. WEED.

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THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

Princeton, New Jersey.

November 30, 1934.

Dear Weed:

On returning from Washington and Baltimore I find yours of November 26th. I am going to turn the correspondence over to Professor Veblen and get his independent judgment, for I still think questions of this sort ought to be ventilated before the entire Board, since they do involve large questions of policy.

Always sincerely,

(signed) A. F.

Dr. Lewis H. Weed
School of Medicine
The Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, Maryland

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THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Baltimore, Md.

December 6, 1934.

Mr. Abraham Flexner,
The Institute for Advanced Study,
Princeton, New Jersey.

My dear Mr. Flexner:-

Your letter of November 30 came to me some days ago. I am of course delighted that you consider the correspondence regarding high school mathematics important enough to refer to Professor Veblen. I had thought that we could discuss the matter between us in better fashion than at the meeting of the Board of Trustees, but I am thoroughly willing to present such thoughts as I have to the other members of the Board. It is not the immediate danger that I fear but a future pitfall.

Very sincerely,

(signed) LEWIS H. WEED.

December 12, 1934.

Dear Doctor Flexner:

I looked over your correspondence with Dr. Weed some days ago, with a good deal of interest. I appreciate his misgivings, and think it is a good thing that members of the Board should have such misgivings. For my own part, however, I am not at all worried.

Your action last spring led to the placing of five people connected with our mathematical group (in the broad sense, including people attached to the University as well as to the Institute) in positions where they are likely to be very useful. It has made everyone here much happier because it has appreciably relieved the congestion of unemployed mathematicians.

Princeton has become and will remain for a long time to come a congregating place for post-doctoral students of mathematics. Every one of us feels it to be a part of his problem to help these men and women to find jobs when they are ready for them. The sort of thing which you initiated last spring seems to me to be an important help in this problem.

I cannot see that it implies anything at all with regard to our scientific work. Certainly it has no influence whatever on mine. My work consists in going ahead with my own investigations, and talking about them from time to time in my seminar. Besides that, I talk with students about their work when it is sufficiently close to my own for such conversa-

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Dr. Abraham Flexner - 2

December 12, 1934

tions to be mutually profitable. If a student who had secondary teaching in view came here, he would profit by my work if, and only if, he satisfied the conditions which I have just described.

I think it would be a very good thing if Dr. Weed could find the time to pay us a visit here and see things in process. What I have said seems perfectly obvious to me, but I realize that unless one has approximately the same point of view, the language may have some quite different meaning.

Yours sincerely,

(signed) OSWALD VEBLEN

Dr. Abraham Flexner
20 Nassua Street
Princeton, N. J.

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THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

Princeton, New Jersey.

December 14, 1934.

My dear Dr. Weed:

Dr. Flexner showed the correspondence regarding the Institute and high school mathematical posts to Professor Veblen, who has written him a letter, copy of which I enclose. Dr. Flexner would be writing to you himself, but he is laid up with a cold and is not at the office today.

Sincerely yours,

(signed) ESTHER S. BAILEY.

Dr. Lewis H. Weed
The Johns Hopkins University
School of Medicine
Baltimore, Maryland

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THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Baltimore, Md.

December 15, 1934.

Mrs. Esther S. Bailey,
The Institute for Advanced Study,
Princeton, N. J.

My dear Mrs. Bailey:-

Thank you very much for your note of yesterday
enclosing a copy of Professor Veblen's letter. I have read it
with great interest and appreciation.

I am sorry that Mr. Flexner is laid up with a
cold. I hope that he will not be confined for a long period.

Very sincerely,

(signed) LEWIS H. WEED.

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

BALTIMORE MD

LEWIS H. WEED, M.D., DIRECTOR

January 16, 1935.

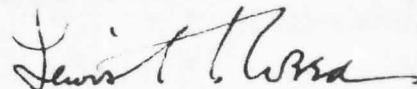
Professor Felix Frankfurter,
harvard Law School,
Cambridge, Mass.

My dear Mr. Frankfurter:-

As I promised, I am sending you herewith copies
of my correspondence with Abraham Flexner relating to the problem
of high school mathematics. I have included in this batch of
letters the notes which indicate the final termination of our corre-
spondence.

It was a great pleasure to have an opportunity
of becoming acquainted with you and I hope that we shall both be able
to maintain our attitude of trustees thoroughly interested in the well-
being of the Institute.

Very sincerely,



January 26, 1935

My dear Dr. Need:

You were most kind to send me your correspondence with Dr. Flemer. I have read it with very great interest indeed, for I think you raise major questions of educational policy for the realization of purposes such as those pursued by the Institute for Advanced Study. May I associate myself with your analysis of the problem, and more particularly with the views set forth in your letter of November twenty first.

Very sincerely yours,

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Dr. Lewis Hill Need

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

BALTIMORE, MD.

LEWIS H. WEED, M.D., DIRECTOR

January 29, 1935.

Professor Felix Frankfurter,
Harvard Law School,
Cambridge, Mass.

My dear Mr. Frankfurter:-

What a great treat you gave me with the Flexner-Frankfurter correspondence! Both series of letters stirred me in extraordinary fashion: I have had much satisfaction in seeing you demolish the Flexnerian positions, both in the advanced trenches and in the supporting lines. As you know, I should quarrel with you regarding fixed stipends in the various classes of professors, but that is a minor issue compared to the iniquities of personal bargaining with newly invited professors.

Your attitude in the Marschak episode is thoroughly sound and of great service to the Institute. I can only hope that you have prevented the invitation for this inspection-tour.

You have made me feel very much happier about the Institute and its conduct. I believe so thoroughly in the expressed high aim of the undertaking that I shudder at the evidences of repeated deviation from the essential purpose. Perhaps we can go on stirring things up without being ejected, for since the meeting I have had a cordial letter from the Director, thanking me for bringing up the question of high school mathematics and asking me to come to Princeton for inspection of the Institute's work. A different attitude from that shown in the last letters of my series!

Very sincerely,

Lewis H. Weed.

February 6, 1935

Dear Dr. Weed:

Alas, the aftermath of the last meeting of the Board of the Institute did not turn out as pleasantly for me as, happily, it did for you.

The enclosed correspondence speaks for itself. I need hardly tell you how sorry I am that events should have taken the turn they have, for, of course, I feel as you do about the importance of the aims of the Institute for America's cultural life. It was because of this conviction that I finally yielded to Flexner's importunities to go on the Board. But why he should have supposed that I went on the Board merely for the pleasure of being on it, I can't for the life of me imagine.

Very sincerely yours,

Dr. Lewis H. Reed

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

BALTIMORE, MD.

LEWIS H. WEED, M.D., DIRECTOR

February 13, 1935.

Professor Felix Frankfurter,
Harvard Law School,
Cambridge, Mass.

My dear Mr. Frankfurter:-

I am more shocked than I can tell you at the new batch of your correspondence with Abraham Flexner. The letters terminate abruptly with many indicated next-steps to the Committee on Nominations, and I eagerly await news of these further developments. Meanwhile, the correspondence has set me to thinking. What is our function as Trustees? Are we university people recruited on that Board merely to lend a certain dignity (!) and academic atmosphere, or are we really there to uphold standards of scholarship and university procedure? My interest in the avowed high purposes of the Institute is fundamental as I have always felt a pressing need in America for such an association of scholars, where advance of knowledge could proceed without the hampering of graduate teaching and of financial worries. Now I am forced to ask myself whether that Board of Trustees has any function, any privileges, any duties except those of compliance. Are independence of thought, independence of action not within the prerogatives of Trustees? I assume however that the matter is not yet settled: much should happen before and during our spring meeting.

I cannot tell you how sorry I am at even the suggestion that you may leave the Board. Your strong intellectual independence, your knowledge of university thinking, your insistence upon the highest levels of scholarship -- these personal attributes of yours are needed,

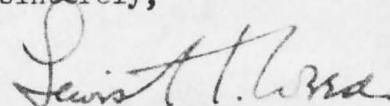
Mr. Frankfurter,

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and needed most emphatically. The Institute is not yet firmly under way: true leadership must be had if that small Institute is to set the example so urgently needed in American scholarship. I want you there on the Board.

Very sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lewis H. Howe". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Lewis H. Howe".

February 19, 1935

My dear Dr. Weed:

I should be an arrant pretender did I deny that your very generous words went to the heart. But I am sure that it is no less true that your letter brought me exhilaration because of the perspective in which you place the raison d'être of the Institute for American scholarship and the relation of an independent Board of Trustees to the realization of the purposes of the Institute.

There are no further developments to report except that I have sent the documents both to President Aydelotte and Mr. Stewart, the two members of the Committee on Nominations with whom I have had prior relations. I was to have had a talk with Aydelotte up here but he had to postpone the meeting. I do not see that there is anything for me to do apart from submitting the record to Aydelotte and Stewart. Or is there?

Do believe how grateful I am to have discovered that you are so deeply concerned to "uphold standards of scholarship and University procedure."

Very sincerely yours,

Dr. Lewis H. Weed

P.S. In the light of events the terms upon which Flexner invited me to go on the Board and on which I came on, and not without interest and so I am enclosing a copy of this correspondence.

May 14, 1935

My dear Dr. Weed:

That the dead past should bury its dead is good sense, but indifference to false epithets promotes neither wisdom nor truth. I have every good wish for the success of the Institute for Advanced Study, and so do not like to rattle old bones. But on the other hand I do think it is right that my former associates on the Board should not be under misapprehension as to the exact circumstances of my retirement from the Board.

I am sure that so far as it lay in President Aydelotte's power he has adequately summarized the documentary history. But inasmuch as I have been credibly informed that some members of the Board at least have received quite an erroneous impression regarding these circumstances, I naturally turn to the experience of my profession in wishing to have the other Trustees see the full text of the documents which followed the last meeting of the Board that I went to.

I therefore enclose these documents and leave them to tell their own story.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Lewis H. Weed