



## The Letter of Invitation to the Founding Conference of AAU

In January 1900, five university presidents from around the United States sent a letter to nine of their colleagues inviting them to a meeting in Chicago to discuss issues of common concern.

Weighing on their minds were three things: that the lack of consistency and standards in American higher education was hurting the reputations of the stronger institutions, that U.S. students were going to Europe to earn graduate degrees rather than staying home to attend U.S. institutions, and that European universities had little respect for U.S. academic degrees and, in some cases, were "dumbing down" graduate programs for American students.

Out of the resulting meeting that occurred at the University of Chicago on February 27-28, 1900, came creation of the Association of American Universities (AAU).

The letter of invitation from the five university presidents is reproduced below.

*The original document is in the AAU archive in the Special Collections of the Milton S. Eisenhower Library at The Johns Hopkins University.*

---

Harvard University  
Columbia University  
Johns Hopkins University  
The University of Chicago  
University of California

To President \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Sir:

In behalf of the Universities which we represent, we, the undersigned, beg to suggest that the time has arrived when the leading American Universities may properly consider the means of representing to foreign Universities the importance of revising their regulations governing the admission of American students to the examinations for the higher degrees.

We therefore extend to your University a cordial invitation to take part in a conference

to be held in Chicago, during the month of February, 1900, for the discussion of matters relating to this subject.

This invitation is prompted by a desire to secure in foreign Universities, where it is not already given, such credit as is legitimately due to the advanced work done in our Universities of high standing, and to protect the dignity of our Doctor's degrees. It seems to us, for instance, that European Universities should be discouraged from conferring the degree of Doctor of Philosophy on American students who are not prepared to take the degree from our own best Universities, and from granting degrees to Americans on lower terms than to their native students.

There is reason to believe that among other things the deliberations of such a conference as has been proposed will

- 1) result in a greater uniformity of the conditions under which students may become candidates for higher degrees in different American Universities, thereby solving the question of migration, which has become an important issue with the Federation of Graduate Clubs;
- 2) raise the opinion entertained abroad of our own Doctor's Degree;
- 3) raise the standard of our own weaker institutions.

This invitation is extended to the University of California, The University of Chicago, Clark University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University, Leland Stanford Junior University, University of Wisconsin, and Yale University.

The United States Commissioner of Education has been invited to take part in the conference. The Federation of Graduate Clubs has likewise been invited to send a delegate.

It is suggested that each University be represented by a delegation with a single vote, but that the delegation may consist of one member or several members, at the discretion of the University.

Particulars concerning the exact date and place of meeting will be sent later to those accepting the invitation.

An early reply is greatly desired. It is requested that replies be sent to the University of California, Berkeley, California.

Very respectfully yours,

Charles W. Eliot. (Harvard University)  
Seth Low. (Columbia University)  
Daniel C. Gilman. (Johns Hopkins University)  
William R. Harper. (The University of Chicago)  
Benjamin Ide Wheeler. (University of Calif.)

January, 1900.