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Preparing for the Politics of Life: An Expansion of the Political Dimensions of College Women's Literary Societies

[Michael S. Hevel](#)

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Michael Hevel is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education, 107 Graduate Education Building, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701; e-mail: hevel@uark.edu. He thanks Christine Ogren, Linda Kerber, DeeAnn Grove, Karissa Haugeberg, and the anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts.

Enhanced Article Feedback

One week before the 1908 U.S. presidential election, the women of the Hesperian Literary Society at the State University of Iowa (SUI, now the University of Iowa) presented “a unique program” in the form of a mock political rally. Imagining that they lived in a town where women had “been honored by the legislature with the ballot,” the “Hep” members divided into clubs that supported various candidates and causes. Several women formed the Utopian Club, which promoted William Jennings Bryan's presidential candidacy, while the members who comprised the Women's Culture Club supported

William Howard Taft. Heps who pretended to belong to the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) argued for prohibition. Portraying the era's political dynamism, other Heps represented anarchists, socialists, and independents. A woman from each group spoke in support of her cause in front of a crowd that included "a lot of" college men. SUI senior and Hep member Lone Mulnix described the rally in a letter to her parents: "[T]he speeches were of course very ridiculous. The reasons why each was the best were very feminine and would hardly convince a *man*." She explained that the Utopian Club representative "argued for Bryan because he was the best looking." The Heps ended their program by setting loose a toy mouse, causing the actors to scream and scatter. Finding the fictitious rally "awfully funny," Mulnix noted that the Hep women "acted their parts to perfection" and that the college men "seemed to appreciate it immensely."¹

After the lively program, one of the men in attendance, William Carberry, a prominent member of SUI's all-male Zetagathian Literary Society who had "delighted" Mulnix on a number of occasions by escorting her to a variety of events, asked Mulnix if he could walk her to her boarding house. SUI seniors had recently elected Carberry class president. Mulnix told her parents that during the walk Carberry "offered me anything I want in the way of class committee chairman." He encouraged Mulnix to chair the senior breakfast committee, a highly prized position among the women on campus. In an effort to build a coalition to ensure his election, Carberry had courted the women of the Octave Thanet Literary Society, who insisted on receiving control of the breakfast committee in exchange for their votes. When the coalition fell through but Carberry was still elected president, he offered the position to Mulnix, one of his strongest supporters and fiercest campaigners. Mulnix expressed concern about the responsibilities of this high-profile position, but decided that "it ought not to be so bad" because she could delegate responsibilities to her committee members. Mulnix confessed to her parents, "I felt pretty highly elated to think that he gave me first choice apparently over sorority girls and all."²

Lone Mulnix's account of this night illustrates how Progressive-era college women at coeducational universities could use their literary societies to socialize themselves to politics in a culture that had long oppressed and would continue to restrain women's political activity. Political scientists studying political socialization—the ways in which people learn how to exercise their political agency and participate in society—have long identified the late adolescent years as a formative time and educational institutions as a formative space in which political traits form that persist throughout adulthood.³ For Mulnix and her peers, their literary societies served as effective agents of political socialization in their college years. These women engaged political issues, became involved in campus politics, and fostered relationships with men through literary societies. Yet their experiences were constrained by enduring social customs and legal restraints that privileged men over women. The Heps demonstrated a thorough awareness of the political landscape for the upcoming presidential contest, but, in front of an audience of men, they discussed the candidates' physical characteristics rather than their policy platforms. College women campaigned for their male peers in campus elections and college men felt indebted to them for their electoral victories, but the distribution of the electoral "spoils" remained a male prerogative and the rewards offered to women carried strong overtones of domesticity. And while college women welcomed opportunities for personal, and potentially romantic, interactions with college men, they had little control in determining their partner or selecting their activities.

Indeed, many of Mulnix's activities associated with her literary society membership fit squarely within a broadened conceptualization of politics advocated by feminist political theorists, political scientists, and

historians over the last four decades. These scholars' arguments expanded on the second-wave feminist mantra that "the personal is political" and broke down an enduring dichotomy in which the public sphere, purportedly populated and controlled by men, was considered political, and the private sphere, purportedly populated and controlled by women, was considered apolitical. Instead, these scholars demonstrated that the development of Western political thought and institutions had originated in men's domination over women and women's relegation to domestic spaces; that husbands' unlimited access to their wives' bodies and monies had overt and covert political implications; and that laws and public policies intruded into the most private of matters, including women's abilities to receive wages for their labor, select marriage partners, dissolve those contracts, and make reproductive choices.⁴

Complementing the scholarship of their political science colleagues, women's historians began to identify women's political activity long before women could vote or hold elected office. Historians found that women often used all-female clubs and organizations to mediate their political activities before they were guaranteed the right to vote with the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Stretching back to the colonial period, the political activity of women's clubs peaked during the Progressive Era (1890–1920). Women, often with great success, used their organizations to advance political agendas by focusing on issues that they could connect to domestic concerns, such as education, child labor, temperance, and woman suffrage.⁵ The combined work of these scholars has created a more complex and nuanced understanding of politics—that women have worked against seemingly insurmountable obstacles to achieve political representation and that politics pervade even the most domestic or private of spaces. While this expansion did not insist that all relationships were *only* political in nature, it cast a fresh and critical light upon many elements of the social order and revealed political aspects of and power differentials within familial and romantic relationships.

In comparison to this now mainstream broader conceptualization of politics, the scholarship on college student literary societies has offered a narrow narrative about the political nature of these early student organizations. Focusing primarily on men's experiences at eastern colleges before the Civil War, historians have long argued that student literary societies offered educational experiences that either supplemented or surpassed the formal curriculum. Regarding their political nature, however, these historians focused almost exclusively on the prominent role of debate within these societies.⁶ More recently, historians have demonstrated the importance of women's literary societies over a longer period of time and at a variety of institutions, but they continue the tradition of limiting the political nature of these organizations to their debates. Mary Kelley argues that literary societies at seminaries and academies developed women students' "reasoning and rhetorical faculties" by encouraging women "to read critically, to write lucidly, and to speak persuasively." While noting that these organizations competed for members, argued in favor of women's intellectual equality with men, encouraged their members to "influence" society, and confronted "the most explosive issues" in their writings and debate, Kelley does not explicitly label these activities as political. In both single-sex and coeducational literary societies at four coeducational land-grant universities in the 1870s and 1880s, Andrea Radke-Moss claims, "Debates gave women students the advantage of finding their own political voice." But the only intrasociety political activity Radke-Moss notes is members of single-sex literary societies voting on whether to become coeducational organizations. Christine Ogren demonstrates that at state normal schools men and women students, typically poorer than their peers at colleges, used literary societies to "become conversant with the high culture of the well-educated" in

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focusing the political role of these societies to the “social issues and progressive reforms” students explored in their debates.⁷

Perhaps this narrow understanding of the political nature of literary societies has endured because historians have been more interested in these organizations’ contributions to students en masse, rather than how individual students experienced such organizations. Considerations of the influence of literary society membership on individuals have been limited to brief mentions in biographies of white men who went on to become accomplished public figures. These biographers, similar to other historians, note that literary society debates prepared these men to become successful public speakers.⁸ But microhistory, narrow in scope but sharp in focus, is well suited to both complicate and enhance historical understandings of the political nature of literary societies.⁹

Ione Mulnix's experiences in the Hesperian Literary Society at the State University of Iowa, at the turn of the twentieth century, encourage a broader appreciation of the political dimensions of literary societies. Mulnix, the only child of a physician and a housewife from a small Iowa town, was one of a growing number of white middle-class women who attended college to prepare for a brief career before marrying and becoming a stay-at-home mother. The many surviving letters written to her parents during her college years reveal that her most meaningful involvement at SUI was as a member of the Hesperian Literary Society. Confirming earlier historians’ accounts that college women considered the pressing issues of their day and honed public speaking skills through debates, Mulnix's letters also reveal a more complex political nature of literary societies. College women learned political skills through intrasociety conflicts, and their literary societies membership facilitated college women using these skills in campus political contests. In addition, their literary society was the primary venue through which college women negotiated the politics of courtship. For Progressive-era college women, at least at one university in the Midwest, their literary societies served as an effective feature of the extracurriculum through which they prepared for the politics of life.

Literary Society Politics

In September 1904, sixteen-year-old Ione Mulnix (see Figure 1) enrolled at SUI, an institution experiencing dramatic growth and rapid change. The university's student population increased from 1,560 in Mulnix's first year to 2,473 in her last. The student body was overwhelmingly white; fewer than ten African-American students enrolled each year. When President George MacLean assumed office in 1899, the university consisted of six “departments”; when he left in 1911 it comprised nine “colleges.” In the two decades before Mulnix arrived on campus, the SUI students shifted their attitudes from piety to materialism and their focus from academics to social pursuits. The student population became more affluent as the Iowa economy improved and fewer wealthy families sent their children to eastern colleges. Intercollegiate athletics, especially football, united the growing student body. Many students came to campus hoping to find a spouse, and mandatory chapel became voluntary before being abolished altogether. SUI literary societies, the oldest student organizations on campus, began to share the extracurricular stage as fraternities, sororities, and other student clubs developed. Yet nearly half of SUI students belonged to a literary society, and the membership of the Hesperian Literary Society was more than double that of the largest SUI sorority in Mulnix's freshman year. In their literary societies, students planned public programs, which enabled them to demonstrate and

refine public speaking skills, foster their musical abilities, and offer theatrical performances. Each men's society allied with a women's society; these brother and sister organizations shared a "society hall" in one of the university buildings.¹⁰



Figure 1.

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lone Mulnix when she entered the State University of Iowa as a subfreshman (left) and five years later as she prepared to graduate (right). Upon arriving on campus in 1904, Mulnix immediately joined the Hesperian Literary Society. Through her literary society membership, Mulnix learned political skills, became involved in campus politics, considered political issues in debates, and negotiated the sexual politics of her era. Source: Lone Mulnix Photographs, 1905, 1909, Lone Mulnix Papers, Iowa Women's Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA.

SUI women could participate in a wide range of organizations and events on campus during Mulnix's college years, though their opportunities were more limited in comparison to those available to their male counterparts. While literary societies, fraternities, and sororities were segregated by sex, college women could join many coeducational organizations, usually organized around an academic subject such as the Die Germania Club. Yet women usually comprised a minority of the members and seldom served in the highest leadership positions in coeducational organizations. Moreover, the women's basketball teams played interclass games, while men's football, baseball, and track and field participated in intercollegiate contests.¹¹

Mulnix entered college as many Iowa women were celebrating two political accomplishments. First, Iowa women commemorated their first decade of partial suffrage. In 1894, the state legislature granted Iowa women "the vote in school and municipal referenda where bond issues or tax increases were at stake," although they could still not vote for candidates running for office. Second, not only did Iowa women enjoy greater (though incomplete) enfranchisement than most American women, but one of their own served in a nationally prominent political role. Carrie Chapman Catt, who moved to Iowa at age seven in 1866, earned a degree from the State Agricultural College in Ames in 1880, and served for several years as a reporter for a newspaper in Mason City, finished her term as president of the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1904, having replaced Susan B. Anthony in 1900. Most Iowa women, however, like their contemporaries in other states, channeled most of their political energies through women's clubs. By 1903, nearly three hundred women's clubs had affiliated with the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs. Many of these organizations engaged political topics during their meetings, canvassed their communities to garner support for their causes, lobbied state legislators for reforms, and confronted local politicians with their concerns.¹²

Within a cultural milieu that emphasized women's clubs to middle- and upper-class Iowa women, Mulnix seriously considered which society to join when she arrived on campus. By 1900, the collegiate

department had six literary societies, divided evenly into single-sex organizations: the Zetagathian, Irving Institute, and Philomathean for men and the Erodelphian, Hesperian, and Octave Thanet for women. Mulnix perceived class distinctions between the three women's societies in her first weeks at SUI. Regarding the newest society, Octave Thanet, Mulnix wrote, "They are nice girls but they, well to be plain spoken, are rather slow.... They aren't my style." On the opposite end of the spectrum, Mulnix found the Erodelphians "cold" and "aristocratic." Sorority women comprised most of their membership, and Mulnix had a negative opinion of these more exclusive organizations. Mulnix fell "into a Hep crowd from the start," finding "a fine crowd of girls." Hesperian women seemed "to be the medium class and ... mostly Y.W.[C.A.] girls." "I looked around as much as I cared to before I joined," Mulnix wrote her parents; she accepted the Hesperians' invitation, paid \$3, and became a Hep pledge.¹³

Mulnix found many political struggles within her literary society. A month after she pledged Hesperia, she expressed her fears about her upcoming initiation at a Hep program to her parents: "They initiate into everything here and they are something fierce, too." Returning members designed these initiations to demonstrate their power over the neophytes. After playing "a few jokes" on the pledges, the Hep members wrote "H" in charcoal on the pledges' left cheeks, put dunce caps on their heads, and forced them to march to the front of the society hall after all the guests, primarily Zet men, had been seated. The pledges began the program by singing the "Hep Song." When the audience requested an encore, the pledges gently retaliated by performing a parody of the "Hep Song." Hep's newest members melodically suggested that the days of their initiators controlling the society were limited, singing, "We've reached initiation time, and to its follies we resign; Here shines undimmed the future stars, as all old Heps must be aware." This parody "brought down the house," especially the Zet men, and the pledges garnered a lengthy applause. Mulnix wrote, "[T]he old Heps hardly knew what to think when we got up and went back so we thought we got even with them."¹⁴

The pledges' resistance playfully foretold the potential for sharper contests within Hep, contests that Mulnix and her peers would soon experience. Through these struggles, they developed various political skills.¹⁵ To the extent that a strong public speaking ability and comfort in front of crowds were essential political skills, Hep fostered both. During her years at SUI, Mulnix read selections, gave papers, and participated in debates during Hep programs. Mulnix took her public speaking seriously. She often read selections she had previously prepared and presented to friendly, less formal audiences; she often wrote to her parents seeking advice for her debates. Even when Mulnix lost a debate, Heps praised her improving public speaking ability. Noting that one Hep member said she gave "the best speech" during a debate her junior year, Mulnix told her parents, "They spoke of how I just said things right off without hesitating. You know I have never spoken off hand before. I am pretty proud of that." With the general public invited to most Hep programs and Zet men typically attending in large numbers, Mulnix and her fellow Heps spoke in front of both men and women when they participated in Hep programs.¹⁶

Hep members learned parliamentary procedure to participate in the society's business meetings. During Mulnix's first years in Hep, the members' adherence to parliamentary procedure weakened. Mulnix complained these meetings "have been run ... carelessly lately" in the spring of her junior year. She purchased *Robert's Rules of Order* and told her parents, "I am going to post up as much as I can [about parliamentary procedure] and then set a good example for the others." Soon Mulnix was leading the members in regular "parliamentary drill[s]." Such adherence to parliamentary procedure

allowed literary society women to participate in class meetings, joint meetings with the Zet men, and other student organizations, while also preparing them for involvement in women's club after graduation.¹⁷

In addition, Hep women created opportunities for members to practice their organizational skills and to demonstrate their potential as leaders. During her first year, Mulnix served on the society's decorating committee. As a sophomore, she was responsible for taking tickets at the society's annual dramatic performance, the "Freshman Hep Farce." The next year Heps appointed Mulnix and two other members to plan that year's farce. In the week leading up to the performance, Mulnix attended practice every night to "drill the 'Freshie' Heps." Although many of these early roles were menial, they served as a proving ground for motivated college women. The Heps rewarded their members who succeeded at these responsibilities with subsequent leadership positions of increased prominence and importance.

Mulnix must have impressed her peers because in her final two years she held multiple leadership roles of increasing prestige and authority. At the start of her junior year in 1907, Mulnix served on three Hep committees. Two of these committees were temporary; the Heps charged one with improving the society's bulletin board and the other to get "some money out of the Zets for the piano." The Heps also selected Mulnix as chair of the social committee, and for the Spring term that academic year elected her vice president. Her responsibilities included planning Hep programs and substituting in the president's absence. Mulnix found the vice presidency consuming "a good deal of time" because she had "to pick out the people who need[ed] appearances" for the programs. Nonetheless, she was soon responsible for two more committees. Despite Mulnix's election to vice president for the Spring of 1908 and leadership on various committees, the Heps selected another student for president for the following Fall term. The Heps eventually recognized Mulnix's contributions and leadership skills by electing her to the society's highest position for Winter term her senior year. Her three-month presidency served as the culmination of Mulnix's leadership within the society.¹⁸

Mulnix's path to the presidency coincided with her growing sense of confidence, a large measure of which was the result of her literary society experiences. Mulnix arrived to campus like many new students: timid, uncertain, and shy. But midway through her college career she demonstrated increased confidence. In the Spring of 1907, the Heps met to vote on new members, and some Heps "blackballed" one SUI woman. A Hep member who was friends with the excluded student complained to Mulnix that the members should have spoken up if they "didn't know the girl proposed" for membership. Mulnix "foolishly" commented that she did not know all the women put forward for membership. The young woman retorted, "Well why don't you know them? You've had plenty of time to get acquainted with them in!!! It's your business to know them!!!" Mulnix coolly said, "Oh, not necessarily." Mulnix "surprised" herself with her firm response. She told her parents, "You know how embarrassed I would have been several years ago. Well, I am very glad to know that I can spunk up when the occasion demands instead of taking everything." Although this comment was a relatively private exchange, Mulnix was soon demonstrating "spunk" at Hep business meetings. Mulnix described her increasingly prominent role to her parents: "It seems as though I talk more [in Hep business meetings] than any other two persons put together. But some one [*sic*] has to and when no one else does, I do." When Hep President Glenn Ogden was scheduled to perform in a program during Mulnix's vice presidency, Mulnix occupied the president's chair for the first time. Ogden addressed

Mulnix as “Miss President” (although Mulnix noted she should have said “Miss Chairwoman”) and Mulnix “recognized her most dignifiedly.” Mulnix “then announced the music and then made the usual little closing speech” to end the program. Confident in temporarily fulfilling the role, Mulnix may have convinced several Heps that night she should serve as president.¹⁹

Being elected Hep president required political acumen, and Mulnix began demonstrating a particularly impressive amount in her senior year, best revealed by her and her allies’ frequent struggles with a group of Heps who lived together in a boarding house. When Mulnix considered moving into this “Hep House” as a junior, Hep member Florence Mingus warned that the group was “clicky,” “jealous,” and “so spoony.” Mulnix, who took Mingus’s advice and did not move in, found herself continually at odds with these members during her senior year. Several Erodolphian women proposed the six literary societies combine efforts to present one spring play instead of the typical three plays. The Hep House residents supported the proposal, but Mulnix and her allies opposed it. The two sides debated the venture at the next business meeting. Mulnix’s side initially won when a majority voted against the proposal, but the Hep House residents attempted to circumvent the vote by having President Ora King, who lived in Hep House, appoint a committee for the play. In the parliamentary procedure battle that followed, King became so confused she had to ask Mulnix for guidance. When the president made another procedural mistake, Mulnix identified the opportunity. “Here was our chance,” she wrote. “So our girl then made her motion as we had first planned and it carried beautifully.” The Heps voted Ella Grissel, an ally of Mulnix’s who was also opposed to the joint play (and would later become Mulnix’s sister-in-law), chair of the play committee.²⁰

Mulnix won the presidency in large part by exploiting the divisions within the society created by the Hep House residents. The same women who blocked the joint play soon became concerned that King had been giving her housemates “more than their share” of the society’s honors and opportunities. Several Zet men began referring to the Hep House residents and its dominating influence as “Tammany Hall,” asking Mulnix and her allies why they “didn’t squelch it.” Frustrated with Hep House residents’ control over the society and perhaps both motivated and slightly embarrassed by the Zets’ comments, several Heps “formed an idea that there ... [would] be no more presidents from Hep house.” Mulnix argued, “They simply run things their way and we have decided that is it time for it to stop. We can’t do anything unless we organize for they are organized, so we have formed a ring too.” The ring “held a secret meeting” to slate candidates for the year’s remaining two elections, which included nominating Mulnix as president for the next term.²¹ Mulnix and her allies usurped the society’s public political process, replacing it with secret meetings and closed-door decisions similar to the political machines of their era.

Even as Mulnix revealed to her parents the “little ring” and her upcoming nomination, she realized that “electioneering” for personal gain breached the boundaries of acceptable political behavior for women. Mulnix justified her actions on multiple grounds. First, she noted the widespread discontent with the Hep House residents. When they were informed of the ring’s plan, sisters and Hep members Louise and Florence Mingus became “tickled over it because they have wanted the [Hep] house smashed for several years.” Mulnix also attributed her presidential nomination to other members of the ring. When the group gathered to select nominees, Mulnix claimed that one prominent member “has had me in mind for the next term all year—so she suggested me.” Mulnix also left the active campaigning to her allies. She expressed regret about resorting to such overt political methods to get elected: “I am sorry it

had to come about in this way—sorry that if I was to be pres[ident]—I had to know about it before hand. But I couldn't help it. I was forced into the deal almost.”²² Mulnix and her allies used conventional political skills, more socially acceptable when employed by men, to end the Hep House residents' dominance over the literary society and placed Mulnix in the Hep president's chair.

lone Mulnix found the Hesperian Literary Society a contested political environment. Tensions between new and older members, between popular and less popular members, and between officers and general members revealed themselves in many of the society's activities. Motivated members worked hard to gain the respect of their peers that allowed them to become society officers, and members often competed overtly and covertly for these positions. Within the society itself, individuals and groups of women could have vastly different goals and aspirations. As these members worked to gain support for their aims, they engaged in political struggles. Through these experiences, Mulnix and her contemporaries learned valuable and varied political skills; their literary society also provided these women with an outlet to use these skills in broader campus political contests.

Campus Electioneering and Society Debates

Enfranchised on campus before enfranchised in their country, literary society women transferred the political skills learned within their societies to maximize their limited power in campus politics. Mulnix recognized that her fellow students applied professional politicians' methods in their own campaigns for elected positions on campus, telling her parents, “Well the literary societies get out regular tickets like the Republicans and democrates [sic].” Brother and sister societies nominated candidates for various campus leadership positions, while shifting coalitions of literary societies, fraternities and sororities, and other student groups determined the outcomes of campus elections. During Mulnix's sophomore year, the Zets and Heps combined efforts with the Philo men and Octave women to win every class office except secretary. The fraternity men joined this coalition the following month to elect a yearbook editorial board composed of Zets.²³

SUI students divided class offices between the sexes. Women typically filled the vice president and secretary positions, while men served as class president, treasurer, and class representative. In October 1907, Mulnix found her name on the class officer ballot when the “Hep-Zet ticket” nominated Mulnix for junior class vice president. With the support of the Philos and Octaves, Mulnix received twenty-three more votes than her competitor, reporting to her parents, “your humble servant is vice president of the class.” Carberry's appointment of Mulnix as chairman of a campus-wide committee the next year demonstrates that the class president appointed both men and women students to serve on various campus committees.²⁴

In their quest for SUI's most prestigious student positions, college men recognized the importance of securing literary society women's votes and valued literary society women's campaign work. During Mulnix's senior year, her Zet classmates struggled to determine their candidate for class president. Going into “the caucus” with the Heps to select the nominee, the Zets had divided into “two factions.” But two Zets, Robert Jones and Clement Loehr, surprised both sides when they managed to secure the nomination for their friend William Carberry “by talking to the girls” and winning their votes. Many Zets expressed their dismay at an electoral victory that was primarily the result of women's votes.

Worrying “that a split in our own party may do us like the Iowa [R]epublicans,” Mulnix demonstrated her awareness of state politics as she explained that while most Zets liked Carberry, many disliked his political handlers Jones and Loehr. Although she considered the political maneuvering that secured Carberry's nomination “an underhanded trick,” Mulnix decided “to work for him with all my might.” Hep women publicly campaigned for candidates, and Mulnix found election day “pretty strenuous” as she “electioneered” all day. The Philos and Octaves decided to support the Irvings' candidates, but, by garnering the votes of Catholic students, Carberry won the class presidency by seventeen votes. His ticket also claimed the class representative while the Irvings' slate secured the remaining three class offices.²⁵

Even though college women participated in campus politics and served in elected offices, their roles were less significant and more constrained than those they found within their all-female literary societies. Not only did men enjoy one more class officer position than did women, the two available to women came with less prestige and carried few responsibilities. Mulnix considered her nomination and election as junior class vice president a “nice...honor” “as there is practically no work.” She worried “should [she] have to preside over the class” in the president's absence, perhaps the vice president's only responsibility. And while college men might reward college women for their electoral support with prominent appointments, they presumed men's superiority over women's in the political realm. During joint society programs, the president of the men's society sat in the president's chair on stage and presided over the event while the president of the women's society served as vice president and did not have a prominent seat. At one such program when Mulnix was Hep president, the Zets “decided to have a mock business meeting.” Some mischievous Zets “levied a fine” on their president. He stepped down to manage his defense while Mulnix assumed the president's chair and responsibility to conduct the proceedings. She soon realized that the men had devised this situation at least in part to demonstrate their superior political skills and to test hers: “They fired one thing after another at me till I didn't know who was talking or what they were saying.” The temporarily deposed president agreed to the fine “in order to simplify matters.” Mulnix admitted, “This relieved me wonderfully.”²⁶ Her relief reveals that even the most politically skilled women on campus felt unable or unwilling to manage, or match, men's political skills, and that college men were eager to mark themselves as politically superior.

Any perceived disparity between the genders in terms of political skills did not stop literary society women from exploring political issues in a particularly public manner. Soon after joining Hep, Mulnix learned that SUI literary societies were the primary feature of the extracurriculum that promoted students' awareness of political issues and their persuasive argumentation through debating. Women debaters learned the same skills and were governed by the same rules as their male counterparts, but the distinctions in debate topics further reflected the limitations of women's “appropriate” political activity. Men usually debated national or international political issues, often considering diplomacy, military actions, or the adoption of a feature of a foreign political system in the United States (e.g., the model of referendum and initiative in Switzerland). Women were more likely to argue issues closer to home, literally and figuratively. Women considered campus concerns, education, state politics, or issues that had domestic overtones, such as a Constitutional Amendment to give the federal government control over divorce laws or the effectiveness of consumer leagues to reduce child labor.²⁷

The political issues Mulnix considered most thoroughly were the ones she personally debated. Mulnix's

first debate occurred in the Winter of her freshman year. Scheduled to debate on vaccination, Mulnix worried, "I wouldn't care but I have the wrong side of it—that it is inadvisable—and I can't get any points on it." She asked her physician father, "Won't you please look it up a little—think of the objections you meet and if you know of any big man saying anything against it, please send me the article." Mulnix's worries abated when she managed to switch sides. Receiving two of the three judges' votes, she won the debate. In later years Mulnix debated educational issues that remain politically contested (see Figure 2). She argued that "coeducational institutions" were "preferable to women's schools" and that large universities were preferable to small colleges.²⁸ In their preparation for debates, Mulnix and other Heps learned both sides of an issue and attempted to predict which "points" would most likely sway the audience and the judges' opinions. Sometimes women were in a position to support their personal political stances; sometimes they learned more about an issue by representing a side that they personally opposed. Either way, women explored new issues, considered the political decision-making process, and prepared to engage publicly with the controversies of their era.



Figure 2.

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This Hesperian Literary Society poster announced the upcoming debate of lone Mulnix and three other members over the issue of coeducation. Debates served as a central feature of both men's and women's literary society programs. While both men and women debaters learned the skills of public speaking and persuasion, the topics they engaged differed between the sexes. Men usually considered issues of national or international politics; women tended to debate issues of state politics, education, or those with domestic overtones.

Source: Hesperian Literary Society Box 2, Records of the Hesperian Literary Society, University Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA.

Mulnix and her fellow Heps also encountered many political issues by attending "Zet" programs and campus debates between the men's societies. Eight months before the Heps held their fictitious political rally, Mulnix attended a Zet program that consisted of "a mock Republican National Convention." Zet men dressed up as Republican leaders, including Iowa's U.S. Senator Jonathan Dolliver and Governor Albert Cummins. The Zets nominated Secretary of War William Howard Taft, who "was padded to perfection with white trousers & black coat," for president and Governor Cummins for vice president. After Mulnix opened a Zet program with a piano performance one March, she stayed and listened to four college men debate women's suffrage. In January 1909, Mulnix attended the University Championship Debate, a contest between the best debaters of the men's societies. Considering the benefits of a federal income tax for Americans who annually earned more than \$5,000 (more than \$120,000 in 2010 dollars), Mulnix watched the Zet team defeat the men from the law school before losing in the final round to the Irving men.²⁹

Hep women transferred their skills in argumentation learned through debates to support and advance

their personal political beliefs. For Mulnix, this centered on her ardent belief in prohibition, by far the issue that she was most passionate about while at SUI.³⁰ She likely arrived at SUI supporting prohibition since her mother belonged to the WCTU, but Mulnix did not begin advocating on its behalf until 1907. Having attended and participated in debates for over two years, Mulnix became increasingly confident in advocating for her own political positions. She recounted a temperance lecture in March 1908 to her parents: "Of course his talk didn't hit me much but I tho't he hit those who needed it for there are girls here who go down [the] street & other places with fellows who ... [are] staggering." When another Hep member complained that the lecturer "might have said more for the girls' benefit," Mulnix responded, "But that is his business—to save men Anyway it's the men here that need the fixing more than the girls." As Mulnix demonstrated increasing romantic interest in one Zet member, her mother wanted to know if she had "sounded" the college man "on the drink question." Mulnix had already "spoke[n] ... pretty freely on the subject," informing the young man that her mother "was very radical on the temperance question and ... belonged to the WCTU." The Zet "seemed to agree" with Mulnix's temperance beliefs, telling her that he never knew his father to have gone into a saloon.³¹

But Mulnix did not escape her college years without encountering students who drank alcohol. She used these incidents as opportunities to advocate her political beliefs to others. After watching the Erodolphian's Freshman Farce in her junior year, Mulnix went to a restaurant with another Hep and two Zets. Three fraternity men sat near Mulnix and her friends. One of the fraternity men was drunk and "leaned his head on his arm on the table & began to babble." Soon the waiter helped the sober fraternity men to drag the drunken student into the kitchen. Mulnix heard "some commotion out there & ... could just imagine that the fellow was vomiting." Disgusted by this incident, Mulnix "delivered a temperance lecture all the way home."³²

Participating in and listening to debates prepared women literary society members to advocate for the political issues they found most important. Literary societies provided college women opportunities to explore national political issues, develop leadership abilities, and engage in campus political activities. Women developed political skills that enabled them to demonstrate their expanding knowledge of the political world and emulate the adult world beyond campus. In turn, college women used their literary societies to create opportunities to interact with college men and to strengthen their otherwise weak position in the realm of campus courtship.

Literary Societies and the Politics of Courtship

By the time lone Mulnix arrived at SUI in 1904, literary societies had already provided a generation of students at coeducational universities their primary opportunity to socially interact with the opposite sex. Both opponents and proponents of coeducation centered their concerns on the mingling of the sexes. Opponents believed that women would distract men from learning and that men would teach women the vices of manhood; supporters believed that separate educational institutions repressed young people and fostered lustful desires while a "natural," albeit controlled, intermingling of the sexes would provide students opportunities to create companionate marriages. Literary society events, with their overarching educational purpose and the regular presence of professors and members of the public, provided the original opportunity for socially acceptable heterosexual interactions on many campuses, including SUI. Although extreme restrictions on the intermingling of the sexes relaxed over

time, formal features of the extracurriculum and their related events continued to provide the acceptable opportunities for interactions between men and women students at the turn of the twentieth century.³³

In the midst of these relaxing campus regulations, the primary form of courtship transitioned from “calling” to “dating.” Historian Beth Bailey argues that women lost much power as a result of this transition. Calling had consisted of a young man visiting a young woman at her home and conversing in the parlor chaperoned, at least initially, by her mother. In order for a man to call, a young woman needed to extend him an invitation. Once he received an invitation and made a call, a complex set of female-created rules governed his visit. In contrast, dating entailed a man taking a woman to some form of public entertainment. By shifting the location of courtship from private to public spaces, women could no longer take initiative or control. Instead of arranging activities with heterosexual partners they desired, many young women faced the unattractive choice of a date with an undesirable man or no date at all. Dating also relied on men's money, even if a woman had more money than the man who initiated the date. While many men complained about the expense of this new form of courtship, they actually purchased power, controlling their female companions' options and obligations, and “codified women's inequality.”³⁴

Given the literary societies' role in providing courtship opportunities and the constrictions dating imposed on women, lone Mulnix's experiences reveal that college women used their literary society to navigate and negotiate relationships with college men into the early twentieth century. College women transferred the political skills that they mastered through formal society activities to problems in their personal lives. The manner in which Mulnix and her peers designed their literary society activities to foster heterosexual relationships demonstrates their sophisticated understanding of the politics of courtship.³⁵

Nearly all of Mulnix's interactions and relationships with men were mediated through her literary society. Members of brother and sister societies regularly attended one another's programs and held joint programs several times a semester. Literary society programs were not necessarily designed to foster opportunities for dating, so members created special events that encouraged courtship. Hep women regularly planned large parties for the entire Zet membership, and the Zets returned the favor with their own parties to entertain the Heps. In addition to official society parties, smaller groups of Hep women and Zet men regularly arranged more intimate gatherings.³⁶

As dictated by the emerging dating system, Zet men had near total control over courtship. They determined if Hep women received a date to these events, and, if so, who their companion would be. Zet men regularly asked Hep women to attend Zet programs, Hep programs, their respective society parties, campus debates between men's literary societies, nonliterary society events on campus, and community entertainments. Whether asked to attend an event or to be escorted home, Hep women were expected to accept the first invitation offered by a Zet, regardless of their feelings toward the man or if they preferred a later suitor. Mulnix never mentioned turning down an invitation and accepting a later invitation to the same event, or reneging on an accepted invitation. After accepting an invitation, Mulnix “hated like everything” to turn down any subsequent invitations from more desirable college men. If a Hep woman did not have a date to accompany her to these activities, a Zet man regularly offered to walk her home. Not all college men, however, embraced the responsibility to ask college women for their company. Sometimes the Zets relied upon “scratch-lists” to ensure that a majority of

Heps received dates. Finding their use “a good plan,” Mulnix described the scratch-list method: “Each boy has to scratch a girl's name whether they want that one or not. Of course the first ones have their choice.”³⁷ Scratch lists motivated shy, awkward young men to ask Heps to attend events, appeasing relations between the two societies while maintaining Zet men's control over courtship.

Not surprisingly, the male-dominated dating system privileged men's satisfaction over women's. Mulnix's accounts demonstrate her own mixed interest in her Zet escorts. As a result of a scratch list her freshman year, Mulnix received an invitation from “a good student ... but ... rather bashful ... boy ... clear from Montana.” In order to attend a Zet dinner celebrating a recent debate victory in 1907, Mulnix accepted an invitation from a Zet man whom she “didn't care much about.” For a Zet party that same year she “[g]ot a green freshie for a supper partner and the poor fellow stumbled ... & fell down.”³⁸ At other times Mulnix was pleased with her Zet escorts. Mulnix received several invitations from the “quite good looking” Louis Phelps her freshman year.³⁹ Mulnix was particularly happy when William Carberry, who two years later would appoint her chair of the senior breakfast committee, “urged” her to join him ice skating in January 1907. “Now wasn't that nice,” she wrote, “Especially since Mr. Carberry is a Zet, a prominent football man, member of the nicest Frat, and won the Freshman oratorical contest last year.”⁴⁰

Constrained by social expectations, Hep women found themselves with far less power than Zet men in creating preferred heterosexual pairings. Yet Hep women used their literary society to maximize their control over courtship and developed strategies to increase the likelihood of satisfying heterosexual experiences. First, they had more power as a group than they had as individuals. Hep women generally did not have the power to choose their dates, but, collectively, they could choose to participate in the Zet activities or invite the Zet membership to their events. This also worked for the informal parties that smaller groups of Heps planned. These groups of women could invite a similarly sized group of men of their choosing, enabling them to invite specific men whom they desired. When more women than men planned to attend a party she helped organize in 1907, Mulnix and her fellow planners “fussed around and got another man.”⁴¹

On rare occasions Hep women were responsible for asking Zet men to attend events. The time surrounding each leap year, typically occurring at least once during a woman's time at college, served to reverse the traditional dating roles. In late January 1908, the Heps employed a “scratch-list” for a society party. Given “free tickets” by the men's societies a month later, Hep “girls were to take the [Zet] boys” to a Zet-Philo “leap-year debate.” With little experience asking men out, Hep women were vulnerable in this situation. Mulnix asked Frank Thomas—whose absence in Mulnix's earlier letters suggests he rarely if ever asked Mulnix to events—“but he already had an invitation so of course couldn't go.” Even as an increasingly confident junior, this rejection “discouraged” Mulnix and she “didn't try again.”⁴²

Hep women learned how to create dates with men they desired, which proved more successful than the leap-year role reversal in providing desirable male companionship. Mulnix became increasingly adept at recognizing these opportunities over the course of her college career. At a Hep-Zet party in December 1907, Louis Phelps confessed to Mulnix that “he had missed when they drew for supper partners so he had none.” Recognizing an opportunity to spend time with a man she liked, Mulnix “kindly offered to go with him and we did.” Hep women realized that if they approached a Zet man to discuss an upcoming event, it often prompted the man to extend to her an invitation. Mulnix described

the “funny ... way” Vincent Starzinger asked to take her to an upcoming Hep party in February 1907: “I saw him up in the library and since we were giving special invitations to the non-dancers I went over & spoke to him.... And then he asked to take me.” Mulnix claimed to be “surprised but pleased” with this invitation, but she confessed, “The girls roasted me about just going right after an invitation and succeeding so well.” By that May she confidently reported home about a special program given by the graduating Heps and a college man whom she had become particularly interested in: “[I] told the man about it so of course he asked to go with me.”⁴³

Finally, Hep women reduced men's power over courtship by creating enjoyable all-women's activities for those members who did not receive men's attention. In the 1906–1907 academic year, fewer men expressed interest in Mulnix than they did in the preceding years or in the years that would follow. Telling her parents that “none of them [the Zets] take me home any more [*sic*],” Mulnix increasingly mentioned enjoying “a Dutch treat” with other Heps. A Dutch treat occurred when a group of Heps who had not received invitations from Zets to attend an event or to be walked home went to a restaurant or ice cream parlor, with each Hep covering her own expenses.⁴⁴ While most Heps preferred a date with a man over a Dutch treat with women, they nonetheless enjoyed their time together.

With most of their ability to navigate the power differential in dating associated with their literary society, Heps moved quickly against any members who threatened the society's reputation. No incident during Mulnix's years galvanized Heps behind a single course of action as much as the Cecil Heinsius affair (see Figure 3). Heinsius and Mulnix both joined Hep in the Fall of 1904. Two years later, however, Heps worried that Heinsius's increasingly poor reputation would ruin the reputation of their society. Mulnix explained to her parents that Heinsius “was pretty attractive and consequently popular and it turned her head so she didn't know where to stop.” Heps learned that over the summer Heinsius had traveled across the state to visit two different men, staying in the same house of at least one of them, an action that transgressed the socially acceptable behavior of the era. During one of these visits, Heinsius bleached her hair, a move that embarrassed her fellow Heps. “She makes me so mad with her peroxide hair,” Mulnix wrote. The Heps planned on “appointing a committee to wait upon Cecil and tell her that we disapprove of her action and if she do[es]n't change we would rather she would be out of the society.” The Heps hoped this would “make her mad so she would leave.” At the first business meeting in January 1907, members “dropped Cecil Heinsius from our roll.” Mulnix explained, “Of course the excuse is back taxes and dues but we have just been waiting for the chance for a long time. We will ask her, also, to give up her pin as we don't want people to see our pin on her.” Unable to expel a member for promiscuous activity they could not prove, Heps used other tactics to convey their disapproval and remove her membership.⁴⁵



Figure 3.

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This photograph of the Hesperian Literary Society in 1905 includes freshmen Cecil Heinsius (left) and Ione Mulnix (right). The Heps used their literary society to promote heterosexual relationships, especially with members of their brother society, the Zetagathians. In part

because their literary society served as their primary conduit for interacting socially with college men, the Heps enforced rigid boundaries of their members' romantic or sexual behaviors. During Heinsius's junior year, the Heps believed she had breached these boundaries. They used both overt and covert political tactics to remove Heinsius from membership in an effort to punish her and maintain their society's reputation. Source: *The Hawkeye Junior Annual of the Class of 1906* (Iowa City, 1905).

On a more personal level, there was perhaps no issue that required Mulnix's emerging political savvy more than how she dealt with dancing. One of the key markers of the disappearing pious SUI student was the increasing prominence of dancing on campus and its importance in the courtship process. The earliest SUI students refrained from dancing, by the 1890s the most socially prominent SUI women "went to dancing school." Even a decade later, however, Mulnix's parents, particularly her devout Methodist mother, opposed dancing. Adhering either to their personal or familial religious and moral beliefs, some Zet men and Hep women—although probably a higher proportion of women—chose not to dance at SUI. But enough literary society members approved of dancing for it to be the central feature of Hep-Zet parties.⁴⁶

Refusing to dance cost Mulnix in the realm of courtship. She was unavailable to attend the local dances at which many college men and women socialized. For Hep-Zet parties, many Zets preferred to escort Heps who danced, guaranteeing the young men partners for several dances that evening. When a young man who had shown interest in Mulnix asked her roommate to a dance in 1907, the best she could do was to consider the invitation "a delicate compliment to me to ask my roommate since I don't dance." She was resigned to reports from her dancing friends as to where she stood with many young men. After one suitor escorted her friend to a dance, Mulnix wrote that "she said they talked about me a good deal and he acted just like a pleased child all the time they did it." But the role of bystander carried less power, empowerment, and enjoyment than that of participant.⁴⁷

Mulnix worked to overcome her weakened position in three ways. First, she devised a practice during dances that allowed heterosexual interactions but did not damage her reputation with fellow nondancers or her parents. When a man asked Mulnix to dance while attending a Hep or Zet party, Mulnix offered to "dance her way." This involved "sitting out" the dance and talking to the man for the duration of the song. This technique allowed her to accept rather than refuse invitations and facilitated one-on-one interaction with men. Second, she often served on the planning committee for the parties. Having responsibilities during these parties made her feel less ostracized. At a party in 1908, she "had a good time—maybe because I had something to do for I had to look after things a little." Finally, as her authority in the literary society grew, Mulnix attempted to lessen the prominence of dancing at literary society parties. Serving on an entertainment committee for a Hep-Zet party in her junior year, she planned to stop the music for an hour and half to have "every-one go & play games together." The result would provide a more equal access to Zet men for her and her nondancing peers. At the appointed time, however, many revelers resisted her plan. With less than an hour devoted to playing games, Mulnix conceded, "I felt failure written all over me" because "my little plan didn't work well." Nevertheless, during her term as Hep president, she wrote home, "We are going to give a party for the Zets in a week which *won't* be a dance. It is the first time in four years." Mulnix's letters do not reveal

whether she instigated the dance-free party, but, knowing that she refrained from dancing and given her prominent position, that this event occurred during her presidential term likely surprised few literary society members.⁴⁸

However, with “her way” of dancing becoming less personally satisfying and her efforts to deemphasize dancing being intermittent and unsuccessful, Mulnix eventually decided to dance. But before she did so, Mulnix worked to mitigate her parents’ potential disappointment. Her letters home increasingly conveyed a desire to dance in her junior and senior years. Complaining that “the temptation to dance was stronger than it ever has been before” at a party in April 1907, Mulnix told her parents, “I could have had at least five partners and three urged real hard. When I mentioned principle however they didn't urge anymore.” Mulnix “didn't give in,” but by her senior year she began pressuring her parents to agree to some acceptable form of dancing. Applying her political skills to the dance issue—giving her parents little time to respond, anticipating and addressing potential objections, and indicating her strong preference—on a Tuesday Mulnix sent this query:

Oh say—I wanted to ask you what you think about my going to a Hep dance Sat. afternoon. It will be just the Hep girls—no boys—& I think it will be lots of fun. I don't object to dancing with girls do you Mama? The only harm I can see is getting to know how & then wanting to dance other times. But I think I am safe there because I couldn't want to any worse than I have I guess.... What do you think Mother?⁴⁹

It is unclear whether she chose to dance this time, but in her final letter home before her parents traveled to attend her graduation in June 1909, Mulnix admitted she “shocked and disappointed all my friends” by dancing. But this was a savvy overstatement, designed to lessen her parents’ negative reactions by admitting to the behavior and then justifying herself. First, Mulnix noted that she “managed to go pretty well” at a “girl dance” the Hep juniors threw for the seniors several days earlier. The next Monday the Zets and Heps took a picnic “up the river at a little park” that included a dance hall. Mulnix claimed “I have said for about 2 years that if ever I wanted to dance it is when I see that ‘Little Dutch Hall.’” Because women outnumbered men at the picnic, a large group of Heps danced together. Mulnix joined them. “I didn't think much about the consequences till finally Carl Hollman asked me for a dance,” she wrote. “Of course I couldn't say I couldn't for he had seen me.” As she had done many times before, Mulnix offered to dance “her way” and sit the song out with him. Hollman offered a compromise: “he would do half my way if I would do the other half his” and dance with him. Mulnix conferred with her friends and received conflicting advice. Admitting she was “in a don't care mood and wanted to try it,” she “gave in.” After dancing half a song with Hollman, she accepted one more Zet man's invitation to dance before dancing “the rest of the evening with the girls.”

Like a skilled debater assigned an unpopular position, Mulnix tried to make her parental judges sympathetic to her decision by alleviating their primary concern: the potential for physical impropriety from dancing. Describing her dance with Hollman, Mulnix argued, “Really if every fellow were as nice as he is—dancing would be alright—for he scarcely touched me. I could hardly feel his arms at all and our heads weren't any closer than in ordinary conversation.”⁵⁰ In her last month at SUI, equipped with debating and political skills learned in her literary society, Mulnix managed to fulfill her desires, mark

her growing independence, and mitigate her parents' displeasure. Indeed, Mulnix and her fellow Heps drew upon sophisticated political experiences fostered by their literary society to navigate the complexities of courtship.

Prepared for the Politics of Life

Lone Mulnix's archival records consist only of letters written to her parents while a college student, and minimal biographical information exists about her later life. After graduating from SUI in June 1909, she seemingly led a typical life of a middle-class midwestern woman. She taught music at the elementary school in her hometown for two years before marrying Walter Grissel, the brother of a Hep member, and moving to Cedar Rapids. Living there the remainder of her life, just thirty miles north of her alma mater, Mulnix Grissel devoted most of her attention to raising three children. She also became active in various women's clubs, including the Shakespeare Club, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the American Association of University Women. If the activities of the Cedar Rapids' Shakespeare Club resembled those of the similarly named organization in Osage, Iowa, the women focused, like the Heps at SUI, on "cultural education, the discussion of political issues, and direct involvement in promoting political and social causes." In addition, Mulnix Grissel would have participated in a dramatic transformation of the DAR, as the influential organization changed from a typical progressive women's organization before World War I—promoting American history, leading war relief efforts, working with immigrants, and fighting child labor—to one of a notable conservative bent in the 1920s and 1930s—supporting anti-Communist campaigns, high levels of military spending, and nativist attitudes.⁵¹

Along with millions of other American women, Lone Mulnix Grissel gained the right to vote through the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. While "the vast majority of American women were uninitiated into formal political activities—voting, campaigning, stumping," this was not true for her.⁵² As a student and in the years following her graduation, Lone Mulnix Grissel, like every other person who lived then and now, encountered the politics of life: causes to support or oppose, organizations to join or create, employment to seek or to quit, relationships to begin or end, votes to cast or not, children to have or not, sexual advances to make or refuse, and people to love or hate. But in every political environment she found herself, Mulnix Grissel, unlike the majority of men and women who did not attend college and the smaller number who attended but did not join a literary society, could draw upon years of political experiences fostered by the Hesperian Literary Society. While college students would turn to other outlets to learn political skills as the influence of literary societies began to wane before disappearing altogether, for the college women of her generation—at least at one coeducation university in the middle of the United States—their literary societies proved a powerful feature of higher education that prepared them for the politics of life.

1 "Hesperian Program," *Daily Iowan* (Iowa City, IA), 25 October 1908, 1; Lone Mulnix to Sally Mulnix and James Mulnix (hereafter cited as "IM to SM and JM"), 27 October 1908, Lone Mulnix Papers, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA (hereafter cited as "Mulnix MSS").

2 IM to SM and JM, 27 October 1908, Mulnix MSS; for brief descriptions of the senior class

breakfast, see "Class Breakfast Tickets," *Daily Iowan* (Iowa City, IA), 3 June 1909, 3; and "Class Breakfast," *Daily Iowan* (Iowa City, IA), 15 June 1909, 1.

- 3 On political socialization, see M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Niemi, *The Political Character of Adolescence: The Influence of Families and Schools* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974); David O. Sears, "Whither Political Socialization Research? The Question of Persistence," in *Political Socialization, Citizenship Education, and Democracy*, ed. Orit Ichilov (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990), 69–97; Virginia Sapiro, "Not Your Parents' Political Socialization: Introduction for a New Generation," *Annual Review of Political Science* 7 (June 2004): 1–23; J. Celeste Lay, *A Midwestern Mosaic: Immigration and Political Socialization in Rural America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 1–10.
- 4 The most powerful argument that the development of political structures in western civilization originated with men's sexual domination over women is Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1988). For surveys of feminist critiques of and contributions to political science, see, for example, Virginia Sapiro, "When Are Interests Interesting? The Problem of Political Representation of Women," *American Political Science Review* 75, no. 3 (September 1981): 701–16; Susan J. Carroll and Linda M. G. Zerilli, "Feminist Challenges to Political Science," in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*, ed. Ada W. Finifter (Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 1993): 55–76.
- 5 The classic accounts of the political purposes of women's clubs are Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868–1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980); Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991). For a regional variation of women's clubs, see Sandra L. Haarsager, *Organized Womanhood: Cultural Politics in the Pacific Northwest, 1840–1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Glenda Gilmore demonstrates the heightened political role of southern African-American women after whites revoked African-American men's voting rights in North Carolina at the turn of the twentieth century. African-American women, through women's groups, became politically active in efforts to improve their communities, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), chaps. 6 and 7. Gilmore is one of few historians who connects women's extracurricular involvement to their later political activity by detailing the campus chapters of the WCTU at Black seminaries and colleges in the South, see *Gender and Jim Crow*, 50–55. Daniel Horowitz explores both the in-class and out-of-class experiences that sensitized Betty Friedan (then known as Bettye Goldstein) to political issues at Smith College some three decades after Mulnix's graduation, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), chap. 2. For women's political involvement situated within the broader developments of the Progressive Era, see Shelton Stomquist's, *Re-inventing "The People": The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern*

Liberalism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006) ix, 45–46, 64–67, 100–2, 107–30, 158–62.

- 6 Frederick Rudolph attributes the development of literary societies at eastern men's colleges “to the general atmosphere of colonial political debate.” Rudolph finds that within these societies college men debated “the exciting political issues of the day.” Rudolph is one of few historians who acknowledge the possibility of internal society politics, noting that fraternities contributed to the demise of the literary societies by introducing “new political complications into literary-society elections.” James McLachlan asserts that the debates of Princeton's two literary societies served “as the capstone of the informal curriculum” in the early nineteenth century. Regarding the influence of these debates on the average Princeton man, McLachlan claims “they pushed him outward, upon the public stage.” Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 137–45, quotations on 138, 145; James McLachlan, “The Choice of Hercules: American Student Societies in the Early 19th Century,” in *The University and Society*, vol. 2, ed. Lawrence Stone (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 449–94, quotation on 483. For the political topics of literary society debates, see Thomas S. Harding, *College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States, 1815–1876* (New York: Pageant Press, 1971).
- 7 Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), chap. 4, quotations on 118, 129–30; Andrea Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch: Women and Coeducation in the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), chap. 3, quotation on 80; Christine A. Ogren, *The American State Normal School: “An Instrument of Great Good”* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 108–19, quotations on 114, 116. Kolan Thomas Morelock details men's and women's literary societies at two colleges in Lexington, Kentucky in the late nineteenth century and describes how the men's societies' oratorical contests served as a prominent community activity, but does not consider the political skills that such activities might have fostered, *Taking the Town: Collegiate and Community Culture in the Bluegrass, 1880–1917* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), chaps. 3 and 4. Historians of higher education have suggested that early college women learned skills and participated in activities that prepared them for later participation in politics, though their treatment of this preparation has been brief. See most explicitly Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Education Women* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 105–7; Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780–1840* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 112–13.
- 8 For example, Jonathan Messerli notes Horace Mann and his fellow students joined one of Brown University's two literary societies in the early nineteenth century for two reasons: the social opportunities and “the sheer joy which came from debating.” Although Mann rose from the society's second librarian, the “lowliest position in the hierarchy of [society] officers,” to its official lecturer, the “highest honor the brethren bestowed,” Messerli does not describe any internal political struggles that coincided with Mann's ascension within his society. Jonathan Messerli, *Horace Mann: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1972), 44–48, quotations on 45, 46.

On the influence of literary society membership on Woodrow Wilson and William Jennings Bryan, see, respectively, Henry Wilkinson Bragdon, *Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1967), 30–34, 43–45; Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of Williams Jennings Bryan* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 10–13.

- 9 In contrasting biography with microhistory, Jill Lepore writes, “If biography is largely founded on a belief in the singularity and significance of an individual's contribution to history, microhistory is founded upon almost the opposite assumption: however singular a person's life may be, the value of examining it lies in how it serves as an allegory for the culture as a whole,” “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001): 133. Matti Peltonen considers how microhistory informs the larger historiography, arguing that it allows historians to “show the way in concrete detail how actual entities, personal experiences, or events can relate the micro with the macro,” “Clues Margins, and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research,” *History and Theory* 40, no. 3 (2001): 349. Historians of early modern Europe have been the best known practitioners of microhistory, see most notably Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John Tedeschi and Annde Tedeschi (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
- 10 Office of the Registrar, “University of Iowa Enrollment Chart, 1856–1942,” available online at <http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/Archives/faq/enroll1856-1942.htm>; Stow Persons, *The University of Iowa in the Twentieth Century: An Institutional History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990), chap. 1; Richard Melvin Breaux, “‘We Must Fight Race Prejudice Even More Vigorously in the North’: Black Higher Education in America's Heartland, 1900–1940” (PhD Dissertation, University of Iowa, 2003), 93–101, 162–73; James Edward Gilson, “Changing Student Lifestyle at the University of Iowa, 1880–1900” (PhD Dissertation, University of Iowa, 1980); Michael S. Hevel, “Public Displays of Student Learning: The Role of Literary Societies in Early Iowa Higher Education,” *Annals of Iowa* 70 (Winter 2011): 1–35; Helen E. Lavender, “A History of the Erodolphian and Hesperian Societies of the State University of Iowa with a Brief Résumé of the Octave Thanet, Whitby, Athena, and Hamlin Garland Societies” (Master's Thesis, State University of Iowa, 1937); Clifford Powell, L. O. Smith, and I. N. Brant, *History and Alumni Register of Irving Institute of the State University of Iowa* (Iowa City: Irving Institute of the State University of Iowa, 1908); Theodore A. Wanerus, *History of the Zetagathian Society of the State University of Iowa*, (Iowa City: Zetagathian Society, 1911). SU's literary societies lost their prominence in campus life following World War I. Due primarily to students' shifting interests and the usurpation of much of their activities, including journalism, dramatics, and public speaking, into the formal curriculum, all of SU's literary societies became defunct by the early 1930s.
- 11 Historians have developed an increasingly complex portrait of the campus climate that college women found at coeducational institutions. College women who attended institutions that began as men's colleges before becoming coeducational faced the greatest hostility, while women who

comprised the majority of students at state normal schools found the least. Those women who enrolled at institutions that began as coeducation but enrolled greater numbers of men, such as SUI, found middling levels of opposition to their presence on campus. Perhaps the most well-known account of college men's hostility toward women students in this era is Lynn Gordon's discussion of the University of California—Berkeley. Lynn D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), chap. 2. See also Charlotte Williams Conable, *Women at Cornell: The Myth of Equal Education* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977). For women students' full-fledged involvement at coeducational state normal schools, see Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, chaps. 4 and 5. College women who attended state land-grant institutions seem to have experienced a medium level of hostility similar to SUI women, see Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*.

- 12 Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 248; Louise R. Noun, *Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman-Suffrage Movement in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1969), chap. 10; Hazel P. Buffum, "Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs: The Federation Grows," *Palimpsest* 34 (May 1953): 209–56. For examples of the political activities of women's clubs in Iowa around the turn of the twentieth century, see Karen M. Mason, "Women's Clubs in Iowa: An Introduction," *Annals of Iowa* 56 (1997): 1–11; Christine Pawley, "'Not Wholly Self Culture': The Shakespearean Women's Club, Osage, Iowa, 1892–1920," *Annals of Iowa* 56 (1997): 12–45; Francesca Morgan, "'Regions Remote from Revolutionary Scenes': Regionalism, Nationalism, and the Iowa Daughters of the American Revolution, 1890–1930," *Annals of Iowa* 56 (1997): 46–79.
- 13 IM to SM and JM, Early October 1904, Mulnix MSS. For a description of a society reception designed to recruit new students, see "Irvings and Eros Entertain Freshmen," *Daily Iowan* (Iowa City, IA), 30 September 1908, 1.
- 14 IM to SM and JM, 14 November 1904, Mulnix MSS.
- 15 By naming these skills and characteristics "political," I do not suggest that these skills are *only* useful to political ends. Rather, I argue that they empower individuals to maximize their potential political impact.
- 16 IM to SM and JM, Late November 1907, Mulnix MSS.
- 17 IM to SM and JM, 18 March 1908, 27 April 1908, Mulnix MSS. According to Anne Firor Scott, "Every [women's] group, however small, had its constitution and by-laws, and hewed to the line of *Robert's Rules of Order*," *Natural Allies*, 81.
- 18 IM to SM and JM, 28 March 1905, 21 March 1906, 22 March 1907, 8 April 1907, 18, 30 March 1908, 9, 27 April 1908, 6 June 1908, 14 December 1908, Mulnix MSS.

- 19 IM to SM and JM, 4 March 1907, 18 March 1908, 27 April 1908, Mulnix MSS.
- 20 IM to SM and JM, November 1907, 25 November 1908, Mulnix MSS. The independent play that the Heps and Zets presented seems to have been quite successful, "Hep-Zet Play to Be Repeated," *Daily lowan* (Iowa City, IA), 7 May 1909, 1.
- 21 IM to SM and JM, 25 November 1908, Mulnix MSS.
- 22 IM to SM and JM, 25 November 1908, Mulnix MSS.
- 23 IM to SM and JM, 8 October 1906, Mulnix MSS.
- 24 IM to SM and JM, 8 October 1906, 12 October 1907, Mulnix MSS.
- 25 IM to SM and JM, 7 October 10, 1908, Mulnix MSS; "Carberry Chosen Senior President," *Daily lowan* (Iowa City, IA), 13 October 1908, 1. Indeed, Carberry's election was the Zets and Heps sole bright spot in campus elections that year, having lost the junior and sophomore class elections. "Much Politics in Class Elections," *Daily lowan* (Iowa City, IA), 29 September 1908, 1; "Carl Loos Elected Sophomore President," *Daily lowan* (Iowa City, IA), 4 October 1908.
- 26 IM to SM and JM, 12 October 1907; 8 March 1909, Mulnix MSS.
- 27 The best distinctions between the debate topics are the surviving literary society posters that announced upcoming programs, see Hesperian Program Poster Collection, Hesperian Literary Society Papers, UIA; Zetagathian Program Poster Collection, Zetagathian Literary Society Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University Libraries, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA (hereafter cites as "UIA"). See also Hevel, "Public Displays of Student Learning," 13–14.
- 28 IM to SM and JM, 22, 31 January 1905, Early February 1905, November 1907, Mulnix MSS; "Hesperian Program," *Daily lowan* (Iowa City, IA), 14 October 1908, 1.
- 29 IM to SM and JM, 30 March 1908, Mulnix MSS; Program Poster for May 8 (no year), Zetagathian Program Poster Collection, Zetagathian Literary Society Papers, UIUA.
- 30 Mulnix's lack of mentioning any controversies within Hep regarding women's alcohol use indicates that the literary society served as a space that supported prohibitionist women. Mulnix never noticed the presence of alcohol or mentioned imbibing college men or women at any of the Hep and Zet parties she attended.
- 31 IM to SM and JM, 30 March 1908, 22 March 1907, Mulnix MSS.
- 32 IM to SM and JM, 17, 22 March 1907, 30 March 1908, 24 April 1907, Mulnix MSS.

- 33 Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, chap. 4; Gilson, "Changing Student Lifestyle," 188–89; Hevel, "Public Displays of Student Learning," 24–25.
- 34 Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), chap. 1; quotation on 23–24. An excellent recent exploration on campus dating and sexual behavior is found in Nicholas L. Syrett, *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 165–81, 186–92.
- 35 Although several historians have documented same-sex romantic relationship between early college women, mostly at eastern women's colleges, Mulnix's romantic attentions were centered on college men. On the prominence of women's intense and often romantic same-sex relationships at college, see Nancy Sahli "Smashing: Women's Relationships Before the Fall," *Chrysalis* 8 (Summer 1979): 17–27; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from their Nineteenth Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 65–68, 75, 166–67, 190–93, 282, 315–16. On the presence of these relationships at southern women's institutions, see Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), chap. 7. On the presence but lower prominence of these relationships at western coeducational universities, see Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 132–40.
- 36 For examples of joint programs, see IM to SM and JM, 7 October 1908, 14 December 1908, 8 March 1909, 25 May 1909, Mulnix MSS. For examples of society parties, see IM to SM and JM, 12 November 1906, 24 January 1907, 4 February 1907, 8, 16 April 1907, Late November 1907, 8 March 1909, Mulnix MSS. For examples of smaller, informal gatherings, see IM to SM and JM, 11 February 1907, 24 April 1900, 8 May 1909, Mulnix MSS.
- 37 IM to SM and JM, Late November 1904, Mulnix MSS.
- 38 IM to SM and JM, Late November 1904, Early December 1907, 25 February 1907, Mulnix MSS.
- 39 IM to SM and JM, 26 October 1904, 5 January 1905, Late May 1905, Mulnix MSS.
- 40 IM to SM and JM, 5 January 1905, 13 January 1907, Mulnix MSS.
- 41 IM to SM and JM, 11 February 1907, Mulnix MSS.
- 42 IM to SM and JM, 29 January 1908, 9 March 1908, Mulnix MSS. On the nature of the "leap-year role reversal," see Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 114–15.
- 43 IM to SM and JM, Early December 1907, 4 February 1907, 15 May 1907, Mulnix MSS.

- 44 See IM to SM and JM, 17 March 1907, 8 October 1906, 6 January 1907, Mulnix MSS.
- 45 Less than three months after Hep dropped her, Mulnix reported to her parents that the Dean of Women had expelled Heinsius from SUI after the young woman “was found in a man's room ... by his landlady.” IM to SM and JM, 8 October 1906, 28 September 1906, 6 January 1907, 17, 22 March 1907, Mulnix MSS. Heinsius's student record notes that she “accepted official advice to withdraw from the University” in the Spring of 1907. Cecil Mercedes Heinsius student file, Office of the Registrar, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA.
- 46 On the emergence of dancing at SUI, see Gilson, *Changing Student Lifestyle*, 187, 200, 204–5, 210, 215–19, 222–23, 230, 237, 241, 248.
- 47 IM to SM and JM, 5 April 1906, November 1907, 4 March 1907, Mulnix MSS.
- 48 IM to SM and JM, Early December 1907, 29 January 1908, 31 January 1909, Mulnix MSS.
- 49 IM to SM and JM, 3 November 1908, Mulnix MSS.
- 50 IM to SM and JM, 2 June 1909, Mulnix MSS. The picnic that Mulnix danced at seems to have been announced in the student newspaper, “Hep Zet Picnic,” *Daily Iowan* (Iowa City, IA), 27 May 1909, 3.
- 51 Pawley, “Not Wholly Self Culture,” 29; Morgan, “Regions Remote.”
- 52 Catherine E. Rymph, “‘Keeping the Political Fires Burning’: Republican Women's Clubs and Female Political Culture in Small-Town Iowa, 1928–1938,” *Annals of Iowa* 56 (1997): 105.

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