1915–1920

An Association for the Faculty

When the American Association of University Professors was founded in January 1915, higher education bore little resemblance to the system that exists in this country today. The degrees awarded each year by America's colleges and universities numbered in the tens of thousands rather than in the millions, and the student body was overwhelmingly white, male, and drawn from the social elite. Faculty members did not widely enjoy due-process protections; on the contrary, colleges and universities often operated under governments "of men and not of laws," to quote from the AAUP's first investigative report. Lacking tenure, the majority of faculty members at the time served on what would now be regarded as contingent appointments.

The creation of the AAUP was preceded by an incident that had come to epitomize the perils of this state of affairs: the dismissal in 1900 of Stanford University economist Edward Ross at the behest of Jane Lathrop Stanford, the widow of the university's railroad-magnate founder, after Ross had criticized railroad monopolies and the use of immigrant labor. The Ross case reminded faculty members that their professional autonomy was dependent on the whims of those who ran the institutions that employed them.

More proximate to the AAUP's founding was the work undertaken in 1914 by the Joint Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure, also known as the "committee of nine." This committee, which included three representatives each from the American Economic Association, the American Sociological Society, and the American Political Science Association and was headed by Columbia University economics professor Edwin R. A. Seligman, was charged with examining academic freedom issues and investigating individual cases. The difficulties of undertaking this work through separate disciplinary societies made apparent the need for a more broadly conceived faculty association.

It was against this backdrop, and in the context of a larger movement toward the consolidation of professional identity through representative national organizations, that the AAUP was established. John Dewey, Arthur O. Lovejoy, and the other professors who led the Association in its first years laid the foundation for a century of work in defense of academic freedom, shared governance, and other principles that have come to define the academic profession.

1915

The AAUP is founded at an organizational meeting held at the Chemists' Club in New York City on January 1 and 2. At the meeting, John Dewey, a professor of education and psychology at Columbia University, takes office as the first president, and Arthur O. Lovejoy, a philosophy professor at Johns Hopkins University, becomes the first secretary. Dewey appoints Edwin R. A. Seligman, the economist who had led the joint "committee of nine," to chair a new committee charged with considering questions of academic freedom and tenure—a body that soon evolves into Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure.

John Dewey

Arthur O. Lovejoy

Edwin R. A. Seligman

The University of Utah campus (left) and an item in the *New York Evening Post* that prompted Lovejoy to propose the first investigation

In March 1915, seventeen faculty members at the University of Utah resign in protest after the appointments of four of their colleagues are abruptly terminated by the president and board of trustees. A month later, the AAUP, at Lovejoy's urging, launches an investigation into violations of principles of academic freedom and tenure at Utah—the first of five investigations that the new Association will undertake in its first year as it puts its principles into practice.

A list of "charter members" published in May 1915 includes the names of more than nine hundred professors from sixty-one institutions. Membership is by nomination and election.

Scott Nearing, an economics professor at the University of Pennsylvania, came under fire from conservative alumni for his public opposition to child labor. Nearing became the subject of the AAUP's fourth investigation after the board of trustees—overruling the recommendation of the dean, department chair, and faculty—chose not to renew his appointment.

In December, the AAUP publishes the inaugural volume of the *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*. Included in the *Bulletin* is the document now known as the 1915 *Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure*, the AAUP's foundational statement on the rights and the corresponding obligations of members of the academic profession.

1916

The AAUP adopts a resolution to create Committee T on the Place and Function of Faculties in University Government and Administration. This committee (now the Committee on College and University Governance) becomes central to the Association's effort to promote a strong faculty role in the governance of higher education institutions.

Distribution of Members (Upper Numbers Refer to Institutions)

Geographical distribution of AAUP members in early 1916

1917 *The United States enters World War I.*

The annual meeting votes to establish Committee W on the Status of Women in College and University Faculties "to report upon . . . the appointment of women to the higher academic positions; upon the opportunities for advancement now offered and that should be offered to women of ability and scholarship in the various fields of college and university teaching; and upon all other problems involved in the determination of the present or the desirable status of women in college and university faculties."

Women's suffragists march in New York City in 1917.

1918 *World War I ends.*

1919

Writing in his president's message that economic circumstances in the United States following World War I had made it impossible "that this, the only general professional society of university teachers, should any longer ignore the economic side of the teacher's calling," Arthur O. Lovejoy announces the creation of the Committee on the Economic Condition of the Profession.

1920 *The Nineteenth Amendment is ratified, giving women the right to vote.*

> Once appointed, the scholar has professional functions to perform in which the appointing authorities have neither competency nor moral right to intervene. The responsibility of the university teacher is primarily to the public itself, and to the judgment of his own profession.
>
> —1915 *DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND ACADEMIC TENURE*