# International Correspondence Schools



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# *"Education for Success": The International Correspondence Schools of Scranton, Pennsylvania*

> The dignity of labor is a fiction. To the intelligent and the educated belong the dignity—to labor remains the burden.
>
> —J. C. Bayles, American Institute of Mining, 1885

FOR THE PAST TWENTY YEARS OR SO, the left has generally dominated the historiography of working-class Americans and the labor movement. With varying degrees of subtlety, left-leaning authors have generally asserted that a two-class system—labor on the one hand, capitalists on the other—dominated America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the pace of industrialization increased, the two sides grew further apart and increasingly belligerent in their attitudes towards one another. Capitalists determined to bring workers to their knees through strikebreaking, court injunctions, and resort to the military. Inside the factory itself, owners systematically de-skilled workers through technological advances and employed Frederick W. Taylor's scientific management principles to strip workers of their knowledge and counter what they perceived to be workers' control of the manufacturing process. The velvet glove on this iron fist was, as more than one writer has noted, "corporate welfare" which promised—but did not necessarily deliver—lower hours, higher wages, better health benefits, and economic mobility to reliable, pliable workers. Attacked on all fronts, "workers' only hope of securing what they wanted in life," in the words of David Montgomery and

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echoed by others, "was through concerted action."[1]

Revisionist historians of education have, in large measure, sided with their labor-history colleagues and insisted that public and private education have had as their primary goals the nurturing of a passive, obedient working class and a domineering, technologically sophisticated capitalist class. David Noble asserts that education was important only insofar as it served management's purpose of keeping the working class subservient. Similarly, Michael Katz insists that education existed mainly "to shape behavior and attitudes, alleviate social problems, and reinforce a social structure under stress."[2]

While these insights have considerable truth to them, they all, ironically, ignore a huge number of working-class men and women at their nexus. Between 1890 and 1940, well over four million workers, unhappy with their working-class status—perhaps disillusioned by unfulfilled union promises, notorious union defeats, and bleak prospects for promotion and social mobility—turned to education, specifically correspondence education, to "secur[e] what they wanted in life." These men and women, acting individually, were not so concerned with the "which-side-are-you-on, labor or capital?" dichotomy, asserted by labor historians, but "which side of the desk are you on?" which an advertisement for the International

[1] The quote is from Montgomery's *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge, 1989), 2. The list of works detailing labor's struggles is too long to be listed here in its entirety, but representative works include Henry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York, 1974); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class* (New York, 1984); Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia, 1980); Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, 1976); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Working and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 1983); Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Worker City, Company Town: Iron and Cotton-Worker Protest in Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1855-84* (Urbana, 1978); and, Steven J. Ross, *Workers on the Edge: Work, Leisure, and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788-1890* (New York, 1985). On de-skilling and the "expropriation of workers' knowledge," see especially David Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York, 1977). These authors make it clear that they would agree with Montgomery's assertion.

[2] Noble, *America by Design*, 300 ff; Michael B. Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, 1982), 378. See also, Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, 1968), and *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America* (expanded ed.; New York, 1973). On p. 225 of *The Fall of the House of Labor*, Montgomery asserts that education did not become important to individual employees until the 1920s. ICS's record clearly contradicts this.

Correspondence Schools asked prospective students in 1905.[3]

Workers who enrolled in correspondence schools sought a type of learning that would give them immediate socioeconomic mobility; they desired to enter the upper echelons of skilled occupations or, more often, enter white-collar work without engaging in traditional apprenticeships or extended formal education. Educational reform efforts of the past, such as mechanics' institutes, lyceums, land-grant colleges, the relatively recent manual training, and the establishment of technical institutes like Pratt and Drexel, as well as free night schools like the Cooper Union, had failed to elevate the socioeconomic status of workers. In part this was because some had no intention of doing so, as was the case with mechanics' institutes, lyceums, and manual training, or, as with the land-grant schools and the technical institutes, they failed to attract wage earners to their programs in significant numbers. Furthermore, all of these reforms rested on three long-held concepts: that there was dignity in manual labor; that education should impart "useful knowledge," understood as the idea that manual laborers needed higher education in order to dignify their labor; and, that a primary goal of education was moral uplift.[4]

By the 1880s, wage earners overwhelmingly rejected these concepts, and manual labor in almost any form, whether "dignified" by education or not, began to lose its appeal to younger workers. As apprenticeship died in the second half of the nineteenth century and as unions worked to constrict the number of entrants to the skilled trades, many young men—and women—sought to obtain office jobs, to the consternation of contemporaries. However, no one should have been surprised.

[3] It is extremely ironic that this advertisement ran in the *American Federationist,* the main publication of the American Federation of Labor, whose interests were, ostensibly, the blue-collar workers. See *American Federationist* 12 (1905), 9.

[4] Those who founded mechanics' institutes and associations during the early republic did so to raise the already-low status of mechanics through education. The same may be said of lyceums, begun at approximately the same time. See Gary J. Kornblith, "From Artisans to Businessmen: Master Mechanics in New England, 1789-1850," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1983, and James D. Watkinson, "Useful Knowledge? Concepts, Values, and Access in American Education, 1776-1840," *History of Education Quarterly* 30 (1990), 3. One of Justin Morrill's goals in establishing land-grant colleges was to return mechanics and farmers to their "rightful" place in society alongside the educated, elite professionals. See Earle Ross, *Democracy's College* (Ames, Iowa, 1942). On technical institutes and the Cooper Union, see Joseph F. Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties: From Self-Help to Adult Education, 1750-1990* (Stanford, 1994), chap. 7, and Watkinson, "Educating the Million: Education, Institutions, and the Working Class, 1789-1920," Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1995, chap. 3.

In the 1870s and 1880s, a young man who could write a clear hand, had a passable grasp of English syntax, spelling, and punctuation, and could do basic arithmetic and simple bookkeeping had a good chance of landing a job as a clerk. As Stuart Blumin has noted, the benefits were not inconsiderable. First, he could perceive himself to be rising in class status; he was a sophisticated office worker, obviously a cut above the "greasy mechanic." This was plain for all to see by the clerk's dress as well as his physical location in the firm, close to headquarters and away from the grime of the factory floor, ensconced in a well-lit office or sales room.[5] The other incentive to this type of work was pay. A clerk's or draftsman's pay compared favorably with that of a master mechanic or foreman through the 1870s and 1880s, and was well above that of operatives, apprentices or helpers, and journeymen.[6]

Moralistic educators and editors were appalled by the choices of these young men who "ought" to have gone into the trades. In 1875, *Iron Age* magazine chided fathers for equating apprenticeship with "peonage." Henry Sprague, New York City's commissioner of education, objected to the white-collar pretensions of his students, stating, "Now our boys who come out of the public schools become office boys, cash boys, or mediocre clerks. . . . This system develops a lot of incompetent young men with the ambition to be something better than their fathers . . ."[7] The editors of *Scientific American* noted the same trend and, perhaps to cajole its readers and the youth of America into the trades, suggested in stark Darwinian terms, that those who chose office work were effeminate:

> We regret [to] observe that there is a disposition among the youth of America to shun the shop and look to the store or office for occupation. . . . Work of the kind suitable for women has nearly always sufficient recruits from the weaker sex without requiring the addition of men. . . . In times of commercial

[5] Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge, 1989), especially chap. 8.

[6] Ibid. For instance, the pay records of the North Jersey Street Railway Company show clerks were often as well paid as—and in some cases better paid than—firemen and engineers. (These records are in the collection of Harold E. Cox, Forty Fort, Pennsylvania. I am grateful to him for allowing me to examine them.) For a survey of the emergence and appeal of clerical work, see Ileen Devault, *Sons and Daughters of Labor: Class and Clerical Work in Turn-of-the-Century Pittsburgh* (Ithaca, 1990).

[7] *Iron Age* 15 (1875), 6; *New York Times,* Oct. 16, 1875. According to Michael Katz, Sprague's comment suggests that many working-class youths escaped the public-school indoctrination and brainwashing.

> depression the struggle that ends in the survival of the fittest or suppression of the weakest goes fiercely on in all departments of labor, but in the line of genteel labor only is manhood vanquished.[8]

The complaints and warnings of editors and educators notwithstanding, young men and women continued to try to avoid manual labor.[9]

The desire to avoid the admittedly grimy, hard work of the shop was no doubt furthered by reading inexpensive success novels, very popular from the late 1850s until the turn of the century. William T. Adams, under the pen name of "Oliver Optic," wrote stories about boys who had been cast adrift and forced to make their own way in an adult world. But work, especially factory labor, played no part in the lives of Optic's characters. Indeed, "work itself . . . receeded to the vanishing point."[10]

Horatio Alger, a protégé of Adams, was even more successful writing for boys. From the 1870s to the 1890s, Alger penned stories in which boys with "luck and pluck" came to fame and fortune, obviating the need to earn their bread by the sweat of their brows. Like Optic's characters, Alger's boys found themselves in an adult world, one that was perhaps more familiar to his readers, the city streets. Like Optic's boys, however, Alger's heroes were never manual laborers. Instead, they were denizens of the street trades, hawking newspapers or shining shoes, and when their big breaks came, they went into office work, not into the skilled trades. Alger and Adams intuitively recognized that in fiction—as in life itself—manual labor had little, if any, intrinsic appeal. Factory life, even skilled work, was dull and grimy, and no amount of fictional window dressing could change that. In reality, though, one needed education to avoid the factory, and few in America could afford the cost and extended time of traditional schooling.

[8] Many periodicals noted with alarm the growing allure of office work in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and suggested this was a prime cause of the "shortage" of skilled labor. Editors with little real understanding of the job market urged that boys and young men go into manual labor and factories rather than "genteel labor" where "manhood [was] vanquished." *Scientific American* 8 (1885), 16.

[9] It should be noted here that vocational education at the secondary-school level was some forty years in the future in the 1870s and 1880s. Once begun, however, students overwhelmingly rejected industrial education, opting instead for commercial courses which they, and presumably their parents, believed would lead to middle-class, white-collar employment. Even if the feminization of clerical work led to its loss of status and pay, the fact remains that students and parents believed otherwise and acted in accordance with those beliefs. For a study of vocational education and its rationale, see Harvey Kantor, *Learning to Earn: School, Work, and Vocational Reform in California, 1880-1930* (Madison, 1988).

[10] Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America: 1850-1920* (Chicago, 1978), 137.

In the 1890s, proprietary correspondence schools began to offer a different sort of education, one geared to giving students only what they needed and wanted, often with considerable efficiency and success. Perhaps most important, correspondence schools did not dwell upon or promise to enhance the "dignity of labor," a fiction to many workers. The advertisements for correspondence schools offered no paeans to the "noble workman." In many cases, the schools offered students a way to avoid manual labor altogether, to place themselves behind a desk rather than in front of an assembly line. While some then—and now—may have viewed these workers as caving in to capitalist demands and enlisting in the system, it is unlikely that many correspondence school students viewed themselves that way.

In light of the correspondence schools' disdain for the ideology espoused by the dominant middle-class education reformers and by union leaders, their successes were notable as well as unforeseen by most of those same reformers. Schools such as the Union Correspondence Schools of New York, which had "far more students on its rolls than Columbia University" within a short time after opening, "sprung up like magic" in the final decade of the nineteenth century.[11] By far the largest single educational institution in America's history was the first of these proprietary correspondence schools, the International Correspondence Schools (ICS) of Scranton, Pennsylvania, founded in 1891 and still operating today.

ICS began in the pages of the *Colliery Engineer and Metal Miner,* a journal published in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. Owing to an inordinate number of mining accidents, the state of Pennsylvania passed a law requiring miners and inspectors to pass examinations on mine safety. With their jobs threatened by the new laws, miners demanded information this subject. T. J. Foster of the *Colliery Engineer* began to publish an education column on mining methods and mining machinery. The column only increased the demand for knowledge in the Pennsylvania mining districts, so in 1891 Foster prepared correspondence courses in coal mining. Within eight years, over 190,000 students had enrolled in courses. Instruction was offered in forty other engineering trades, in addition to ornamental design, commercial

[11] "American Industrial Education: What Shall It Be," *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, Commissioner of Education,* 1 (1901), 223.

education, and "English Branches." Foster and ICS had discovered the mass market for practical education.[12]

The success and profitability of the company can be traced in its physical growth from the two rooms in the Coal Exchange Building in Scranton, which housed the "School of Mines" in 1891, to two multistory buildings, costing in excess of $250,000, in 1899. By the first decade of the twentieth century, over 100,000 new students per year were enrolling in ICS courses; by 1910, a million cumulative enrollments had been achieved; and, by 1930, four million. By World War II, ICS's reputation was such that it was given the War Department contract to develop the department's training manuals.[13]

The tremendous success of ICS was the result of demand, an excellent product, a superb organization, prescient marketing and advertising, as well as a few happy coincidences. ICS's managers became adept at using available resources and new technologies to their best advantage. For instance, without a well-developed mail and parcel post system, no correspondence system could have succeeded. By the time that ICS began selling its correspondence courses, the United States Post Office had eleven major mail distribution centers, stretching from Boston and New York to St. Paul and Fort Worth. These centers handled nearly eight billion pieces of mail annually over 140,000 miles of rail lines. Additionally, the U.S. Post Office instituted its rural free delivery system (RFD) in 1891. By 1916 three million people were served by RFD. ICS made the mailing process even easier by sending self-addressed envelopes to their students along with their books and instruction papers. And, although the U.S. Post Office did not begin its parcel post service until 1913, ICS's textbooks could be delivered by any one of the four independent parcel delivery companies.[14] Thus, ICS was able to get its product almost anywhere in the country in good time very early in its existence, something of paramount importance given the volume of materials ICS would generate for its students.

ICS also offered its students a chance to enroll for courses on the installment plan, a marketing innovation begun by Singer to sell sewing

[12] *International Correspondence Schools,* 1899 circular from ICS archives, Scranton, Pennsylvania, 4.

[13] *The I.C.S. System of Instruction by Mail* (Scranton, 1905), 4; War Department manuals from the ICS archives.

[14] Marshall Cushing, *The Story of Our Own Post Office* (Boston, 1893), 47-67; Daniel Roper, *The United States Post Office* (New York, 1917), 1001-10.

machines in the 1850s.[15] Courses could be paid for in advance or on the truly modern "sixty-days-same-as-cash" basis. Most students, though, opted for paying in three-, five-, or ten-dollar monthly installments. The installment plan was extremely important to most students, because some of the ICS courses were expensive. For instance, in 1906, the "Complete Architecture" course cost $110 if paid in advance. The price rose to $122 on the ten-dollar plan, $130 on the five-dollar plan, and $135 on the three-dollar plan.[16] These varied payment plans allowed people like Lee Moffitt of Fort Leavenworth to take the "Surveying and Mapping" course, which cost $38.70, on a corporal's salary.[17]

Most important, however, was the overall ICS educational philosophy. The proprietors of ICS realized that "practical men with small education [we]re in the majority," and hence directed all of their initial efforts to this group. Once fully under way, the self-described mission of the school was to provide *"practical men with a technical education,* and *technical men with a practical education."*[18] The school echoed the sentiments of Edison, who stated that he "did not like the 'practical' electrician, because he does not know enough about the nature of the case to be intrusted to him, and on the other hand, he [did] not fancy the theoretical electrician, simply because he [was] 'too helpless.' "[19]

Indeed, ICS's success owed much to its understanding the market and its prospective students—and having few illusions about either. In language that would be echoed seven years later by educators at the first National University Extension Conference, ICS proclaimed in 1908:

> Our courses are all prepared from a utilitarian standpoint; that is, it is always kept in view that the reason the student is taking one of our courses is that he desires to put the knowledge obtained into immediate practical use. We are not aiming to train the mind, but to give the student such information regarding the principles, theory, and practice as he can use with the position he is aiming to fill.[20]

[15] Alfred Chandler, *The Visible Hand* (Cambridge, 1977), 303.
[16] "General Price List in Effect Beginning August 1, 1906," ICS archives.
[17] Uncatalogued correspondence, ICS archives.
[18] *The I.C.S. System,* 12, emphasis in the original.
[19] *Electrical World* 1 (1883), 20.
[20] *The I.C.S. System,* vi.

In short, ICS stressed promotion and upward economic mobility, not the ephemeral moral uplift favored by the majority of nineteenth-century education reformers. ICS's success proves that working men and women thought along the same lines.

To achieve this goal, ICS did not instruct its students by standard textbooks, which, it contended, often contained considerable amounts of extraneous material and "demand[ed] too great a knowledge of mathematics and other subjects." Rather, ICS created its own specially prepared, leather-bound "Instruction and Question Papers" (themselves a major selling point and marketing tool), which gave exactly the information a pupil needed, and questioned him only on that material.[21] Because the only real requirement for study was that the student be able to read and write English well enough for the school to communicate with him, or her, the language employed in the texts was simple and the illustrations profuse.

The range of subjects and courses offered by ICS to its students by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century was truly staggering. From its opening day, when it offered only a general course in mining, ICS grew by 1907 to thirty-one schools offering over 370 separate courses. By taking a full complement of courses, a student could earn a diploma, if he so desired. On the other hand, if one wanted to take only a course in penmanship, that too was possible. Regardless of what the student chose, upon completion of each course subdivision, he or she received a certificate of completion. These, presumably, would be positive proof to employers of progress, a rung on the ladder of success. In an era when credentials were becoming increasingly important, this was also an intelligent marketing tool.[22] When phonographs became the rage in America, ICS offered language courses at a cost of $100. Although the price was steep, the student received twenty-five language records, four textbooks, and an "Edison Standard Phonograph." Simply having a phonograph in the home stood as testament to the student's upward mobility.[23]

Taking advantage of the impulse toward governmental reform brought about by the Pendleton Act, ICS offered preparation courses for civil service

[21] Ibid., v.

[22] Even though the degrees offered were obviously not comparable to those of Sibley (at Cornell) and Lawrence (at Harvard), they were recognized by most companies. Even today, ICS is accredited in some regions of the country, and its AA degree accepted at some four-year institutions.

[23] "General Price List, 1906." One could also buy the phonograph cabinet marketed by ICS.

exams. Indeed, ICS's expansion and popularity was no doubt helped by the growth of testing in the United States, for a wide variety of occupations. Between 1890 and 1920, many states began to require that practitioners of certain occupations pass licensing exams. Accountants, barbers, beauticians, embalmers, engineers, insurance brokers, miners, nurses, pharmacists, realtors, teachers, veterinarians, all faced licensing exams in any number of states. ICS and, later, other proprietary schools offered courses that provided not only training for a particular profession but courses which would allow one to pass the profession's licensing exam.[24]

Reflecting the influence of scientific management, ICS was, in essence, a Taylorite educational factory. At the same time, ironically, it offered its students a way out of the Taylorite factory in which many of them toiled daily. As Taylor, in his *Principles of Scientific Management,* had broken down to its component parts "Schmidt's" task of hauling pig iron to a railway car, ICS likewise subdivided its educational offerings. In the ICS catalog of courses, the letter E, for instance, stood for Electrical; EA for Electrical Engineering; EAA for Complete Electrical Engineering; EAB for Electrical Engineering, Part 1; EAC for Electrical Engineering, Part 2; EG for Telephone Engineering; and EH for Telegraph Engineering. Furthermore, ICS writers, lettered men hired by the company for the task, cranked out the company's own textbooks, the "Instruction Papers," employing assembly-line techniques. Scores of women sitting five abreast at desks checked the students' work in assembly-line fashion. It was then turned over to instructors and principals who checked it over yet again. Deficient work was returned to the student and the process began over again.[25]

For students, however, the system was not nearly as heartless as a Taylorite factory. If a student was having trouble with a course, a special instructor was assigned to communicate with the student directly. Also, when a student enrolled, he or she filled out a card for the Students' Aid Department, which asked, among other things, what course the student was taking, what position he wanted upon completion of the course, what other positions he thought he could fill, and the lowest salary he would accept. The card was

[24] *The I.C.S. System,* xvii. On licensing requirements in the states, see *Occupational Licensing Legislation in the States* (Chicago, 1952).

[25] Ibid., 6-7.

kept on file by ICS and used as a part of ICS's job referral service.[26]

The level of difficulty of courses in the ICS system of instruction ran the gamut from simple to extremely complex. Indeed, ICS salesmen were instructed to warn prospective purchasers of the electrical engineering course that they had to have "a good knowledge of Mathematics, Mechanics, and the Elementary Principles of Electricity."[27] ICS's advanced engineering texts were academically rigorous enough that many colleges and universities bought them for their students, faculty, and libraries. However, the strength of the ICS system lay in its ability to introduce, in relatively simple language, subjects that its students may have thought were beyond their intellectual reach and then build gradually to mastery of fields like electrical or chemical engineering. In essence, ICS and other correspondence schools attempted to demystify industrial technology and science, to bring them down from their pedestals at the same time that Americans were barraged by and frightened by technological advances and yearned to understand and embrace them.[28]

To accomplish this simplification, writers of ICS textbooks often started, literally, from zero. In this regard, they were different from almost all self-help efforts that had preceded them. A comparison between the techniques of drawing instruction by *Scientific American* and ICS is instructive. Although the two courses shared many of the same illustrations—ICS may well have played fast and loose with the copyright laws—there were many differences. The major difference was that for the editors of *Scientific American,* it was not a "special object to qualify our readers in the shortest possible time to become mechanical draughtsmen."[29] That, of course, was *exactly* the object of the ICS course. Although both courses started with the simplest of lessons, such as "How to Hold a Pencil," and "How to Draw a Straight Line with a Straight Edge," *Scientific American* soon sped off into drawing geometrical figures, while ICS spent time explaining simple terms

[26] Student Aid Card, facsimile in ICS archives. Unfortunately, ICS destroyed its entire file of these cards, thus obliterating a great part of its institutional history.

[27] "General Price List, 1906."

[28] On the rise of professionalism in science and the increasing difficulties for laymen, see George W. Daniels, *Science in America: A Social History* (New York, 1971). On the problem of understanding modern technology, see Alexandra Oleson and John Voss, eds., *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America* (Baltimore, 1979), as well as Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge,* especially chaps. 7-9.

[29] *Scientific American Supplement* 1 (1876), 8.

such as "drawing" and "line."[30] Furthermore, instead of leaping immediately to geometric drawings, ICS first instructed students on proper lettering techniques. This improved the students' small-motor skills, making complex drawings easier to execute when the time came.

The lessons in the *Scientific American Supplement* quickly moved to concepts, such as equilateral triangles, tangencies, and bisecting arcs, while ICS, in its elementary drawing courses, explained the concept of zero and numerals. In fact, in all of its introductory courses, ICS assumed that its students had little or no numeracy, and ninety-six percent of all of its students began their studies with arithmetic. *Scientific American* made no such assumption. Hence, a reader could find this sentence in *Scientific American*'s Lesson 11: "Since the radius is perpendicular to the tangent at its extremity, the points of tangency are readily found by drawing a diameter perpendicular to the direction of the light."[31] That sort of language was found only in ICS's most advanced courses. The simplicity and stress on building a comprehensive base of knowledge before moving on made ICS very attractive to those who had little formal education.

Employers appreciated ICS, and in some ways this was yet another incentive to become a student, especially in an age of limited apprenticeships. ICS established a contract system with many large corporations, granting their employees courses at a twenty-percent discount. By 1906 ICS had institutional instruction contracts with 164 railroads, including some of the largest: Union Pacific, Southern Pacific, and Southern.[32] Railroads, steel companies, and coal-mining concerns often referred students to ICS, or other correspondence schools, and used the completion of courses as a basis for promotion. Additionally, the correspondence education offered by ICS provided a way to train employees without meddling from the trade union's walking delegates. Railroad companies could, if they wished, send their students to Scranton to train on ICS's dummy cars. Reflecting true Taylorite goals, the job of training young workers was taken from older shop hands who might use the opportunity to encourage apprentices to "soldiering"; i.e., slower, more easily attainable work levels. Although promotion, and even hiring in some cases, was based on completion of courses, ICS and other correspondence schools did not overtly challenge the power of the unions on

[30] Ibid., 4, "Lesson 2," 53-54; *Drawing*, I.C.S. Reference Library (Scranton, 1905), Introduction.
[31] *Scientific American Supplement* 1 (1876), 346.
[32] "General Price List, 1906," Appendix.

the floor, for all educational work was generally done away from the factory. Thus, those young workers who perceived union rules and shop practices as impediments to advancement could take advantage of ICS's offerings and the premium their own employers placed on training and education. Students themselves, if they felt the need, could justify this "collusion with the bosses" by assuring themselves that they were improving themselves and bolstering their own socioeconomic positions on their own initiative.[33]

Who were the ICS students? As one glances through the list of ICS students, the number of people who took advantage of this opportunity is quite remarkable and was without parallel in the years 1890-1920. The diversity of job and education levels of ICS students is apparent and arresting: dentists took courses in electricity, perhaps to utilize or service their new equipment; nuns took courses in drawing, perhaps better to instruct their parochial-school students in penmanship or drawing. In addition to the engineers and firemen, miners and car tenders, a great number of people who called themselves common laborers took advantage of ICS, hoping to enter the trades or the office at advanced levels.[34] The average age of the students at ICS was approximately twenty-six; almost all were working full time and probably had been for at least ten years. From a sampling of ICS students in two representative cities, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and Richmond, Virginia, between 1900 and 1905, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions regarding students' attitudes toward work and mobility within the workplace and their motives for taking the courses they elected.[35]

Those workers who had steady, reasonably well paying positions generally took courses designed to expand their knowledge of their jobs, in the hope of raising their chances for promotion, while bolstering their present position in an office or business, or increasing their own business potential. Thus, O.G. Bloom, a railroad engineer from Wilkes-Barre, enrolled in a course on

[33] It is also possible that ICS collaborated covertly with employers in their efforts to circumvent the unions. Also on the student aid card were the possibly awkward questions, "Have you ever been discharged?" "What for?" and "Are you a member of a Labor Union?" "Incorrect" answers to these questions may have spelled trouble for an ICS student.

[34] See *Register of the I.C.S.* (Scranton, 1908). One of the top engineers at the Ford Motor Company took drafting, as well as pattern-, foundry-, and machine-shop practice. See Olivier Zunz, *Making America Corporate* (Chicago, 1990), 87.

[35] Names and courses were derived from *Register of the I.C.S.;* occupational information was gathered from the Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and Richmond, Virginia, city directories.

air brakes in 1900 and electrical power and light in 1902, perhaps to expand his employment possibilities in street railways; machinists William Wood of Wilkes-Barre and Edward Atkins of Richmond enrolled in courses on mechanical drawing; Charles Long, a painter, took a course on lettering and sign painting, while George L. Kay, a carpenter, took a course in architectural drawing. Those engaged in clerical pursuits tended to enroll in courses that would enhance their standings within their offices or that might allow them to move to professions. Hence, time clerk Thomas Brett took bookkeeping, while John Reith (bookkeeper, or son of) and Philip Ryan (clerk) pursued courses in bookkeeping and business forms. Others, like Jonathan Curran, sought to enter the professions by taking complete courses in architecture, and Maude Jacobs (clerk) worked to become a teacher, one of the few professions open to women at the time.

It is significant that, with only three possible exceptions, all the people who identified themselves in city directories as laborers took courses that, they believed, would allow them either to move immediately into the white-collar world or start as journeymen in trades. The preferred study among this sample of laborers was mechanical drawing, or the draftsman's course, which might lead to office positions.[36] Others chose the complete coal-mining or the short coal-mining course, perhaps in the hope of eventually obtaining a foreman's or supervisory position in one of the many local mines. There are, of course, always cases that appear to be anomalies, or at least exercises in whimsy. For example, James Burruss, the principal of the Leigh School in Richmond, took the course in railroad engineering. He may well have been pursuing a hobby, but the course no doubt contributed to his appointment as the director of manual training for Richmond.

The success of Burruss, a well-educated Richmonder, might suggest a skewing toward the educated of the ICS success story. However, many others from the table achieved their goals. For instance, E. L. Hogan, a Richmond peddlar in 1901, took the ICS electrical power and light course in 1901 and was a working electrician by 1905. Philip Ryan was a clerk in 1903, but, perhaps by virtue of his course in bookkeeping and bookkeeping forms at ICS, became a bookkeeper for the American Tobacco Company. Thomas Jones, a Wilkes-Barre bookkeeper, moved to bookkeeper-assistant

[36] On the appeal of clerical work and the education and socialization necessary to attain it, see the chapter entitled "The Collar Line" in Zunz, *Making America Corporate,* as well as Devault, *Sons and Daughters of Labor,* passim.

manager and then to manager after taking the bookkeeping course from ICS. In perhaps two of the most spectacular jumps, Thomas Edwards moved from day laborer in 1900 to miner in 1901 after taking the complete coal-mining course, while Richmonder George Tolman went from money lender in 1902 to architect in 1903 on the basis of his ICS course on ornamental design.

The most notable feature one sees while perusing the list of the ICS "student body" is the dearth of immigrants, even in heavily ethnic cities, whether large or small. This is noteworthy insofar as the 1890 census of the fifty cities with populations greater than 50,000 shows that immigrants comprised the majority of those engaged in mechanical and manufacturing pursuits. Yet, in the 1905 list of students from Chicago, only a dozen or so Slavic names appear, and Chicago had a larger Polish population than Warsaw. Only twelve Italian or east European names appear out of the nearly 1,200 students from New York City. In small towns, the pattern is repeated. In Pittston, Pennsylvania, a town that was (and still is) overwhelmingly Italian, only two of the seventy names on ICS rolls reflect Italian background. In Wilkes-Barre and Plymouth, Pennsylvania, both heavily settled by Welsh and eastern European miners, few ICS students' names reflect those heritages. Although the managers of ICS claimed that their students had only to have a fair grasp of written English, the language barrier may well have proved too great for most first- and some second-generation immigrants to handle. Thus, native-born workers, or workers of Anglo heritage, were the main source of ICS's revenue and comprised the majority of its students, lending some credence to the jeremiads of the time that claimed that the foreign-born were taking the skilled jobs.[37] Native-born workers who could ill afford the costs of extended schooling used ICS—and other correspondence schools—to enter the white-collar world or achieve promotion to management in their blue-collar surroundings.

ICS played to these desires with an aggressive advertising campaign, stressing the social and economic benefits of upward mobility, of becoming white-collar. In 1902 ICS declared, "Prepare for responsibility—it tells on

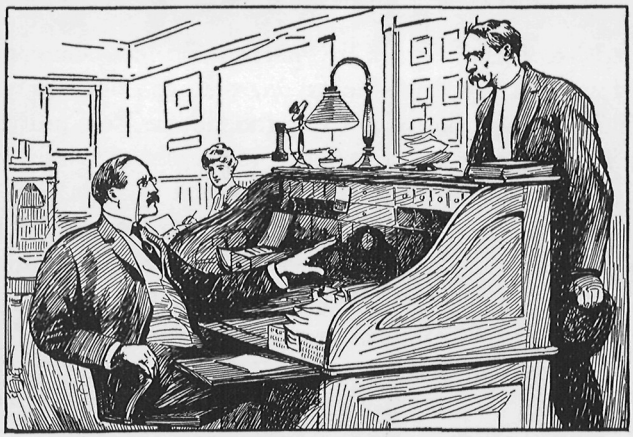
[37] *The I.C.S. System of Instruction by Mail,* passim; further support for this contention comes from Roy Rosenzweig's study of Worcester, Massachusetts, *Eight Hours for What We Will,* which showed that the majority of workers in that city were of Scandinavian extraction. In the ICS register, almost none of the names of Worcester students reflect this heritage. *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1909, Special Reports: Occupations* (Washington, D.C., 1904), passim.

pay day. No matter what position in your trade or profession you want, we can train you for it." As time went on, the ads became more blunt, disdaining blue-collar work and asserting the supremacy of head work over hand work, while comparing most workers to beasts of burden. Hence, an August 1903 advertisement proclaimed, "Brains are Trumps." In September 1904 a full-page ad urged, "Don't Carry a Yoke," exhorting workers to write to ICS "if your work seems drudgery—if you feel like a man in a yoke." In the same year, ICS offered workers a chance to move from " 'Man' to Manager." Perhaps the most blatant appeal to workers' sense of "place" was framed in the aforementioned September 1905 advertisement that asked rhetorically, "Which Side of the Desk Are You On?" (fig.1). The ad went on to note: "The man before the desk works with his hands and is paid for his *labor,*" while "the man behind the desk works with his head and is paid for his *knowledge.*" The effects of the text were heightened by the graphics, which depict a rather gaunt worker appearing hat in hand before the hale, hearty, obviously well-to-do manager behind the desk. It is significant that none of these advertisements suggested that workers educate themselves only to be better workers; all suggested a rise in class and status.[38]

Those who responded to the ads received further reinforcement from the Alger-esque pamphlet they were sent. Entitled "1,001 Success Stories," it purported to give personal testimony on the efficacy of an ICS education.[39] No doubt some enrolled with modest hopes for simple job improvement, but many of those who responded to such aggressive advertising envisioned fattened pay envelopes and eventually placing themselves on the "right side" of the desk. Middle-class education reformers, whose main desire was to restore dignity to manual labor through a well-rounded, scientific and liberal education, were blindsided by the ICS advertising approach, which offered workers a way out of manual labor. They were stunned by workers' demand for ICS courses, not to mention the schools' tremendous success.

ICS supplemented its course offerings and advertising with a range of publications to inspire and guide students and to advise their employers. In 1910, the company's "Encouragement Department" began publishing

[38] *American Federationist* 9 (1902), 5; 9 (1903), 8; 11 (1904), 9; 11 (1904), 11; 12 (1905), 9.
[39] *The I.C.S. System,* passim.



# ON WHICH SIDE OF THE DESK ARE YOU?

The man before the desk works with his hands and is paid for his *labor.*
The man behind the desk works with his head and is paid for his *knowledge.* It is merely a question of KNOWING HOW.

The first step in "knowing how" is simply a matter of cutting out, filling in, and mailing us the Coupon shown below.

In return we show you how to improve your position or to secure a more congenial occupation and better salary, without loss of time, without neglecting your present work or obligating yourself to pay more than you can comfortably afford.

No textbooks to buy—no requirements beyond the ability to read and write, and the ambition to succeed.

Thousands of men, and women too, in nearly every trade and profession date the beginning of their *success* to the day they *filled in this coupon.* Why not you?

**IT COSTS NOTHING TO FIND OUT.**

**Cut This Out** and receive free—"1001 Stories of Success" and "The Story of McHale."

**Cut It Out** and receive free—"1001 Stories of Success"

**International Correspondence Schools,**
**Box 844, SCRANTON, PA.**

Please send me your booklet, "1001 Stories of Success," and explain how I can qualify for the position before which I have marked X

| | |
|---|---|
| Advertising Writer | Electrician |
| Show Card Writer | Elec. Railway Supt. |
| Window Trimmer | Elec. Lighting Supt. |
| Bookkeeper | Mech. Engineer |
| Stenographer | Civil Engineer |
| Mech. Draughtsman | Surveyor |
| Architectural " | Mining Engineer |
| Architect | Structural Engineer |
| Newspaper Illustrator | Building Contractor |
| Wall Paper Designer | Foreman Plumber |
| Civil Service | Gas Engineer |
| Chemist | Stationary " |
| Commercial Law | Textile Mill Supt. |

Name_____

Street and No._____

City_____ State_____

**Cut It Out** and receive free—"The Story of McHale"

Fig. 1. "On Which Side of the Desk Are You?" *American Federationist* 12 (1905), 9.

*Ambition: A Journal of Inspiration to Self-Help.* The self-stated goal of the journal was to "spur 'laggards' in their studies." In addition, throughout the 1910s and 1920s, ICS produced a series of "handbooks" for every conceivable occupation. These were designed to help students and graduates during and after their coursework. *The ICS Stenographer's and Correspondent's Handbook* began with a section entitled "Advice to Beginners" which offered, among other things, hints on how to find a position and how to write letters of application for jobs. In an age that had just witnessed—and was scandalized by—the publication of Crane's *Maggie* and Dreiser's *Sister Carrie,* ICS handbooks warned of the temptations of Gotham and how to avoid them:

> The young stranger in a large city cannot be too careful about his boarding place. He should try to get into some good private home, or where he will associate with cultured people. He should avoid the boarding houses with the "sporty" crowds, for such an association is more than likely to harm him.[40]

It is important to note, however, that ICS's desire for its students to associate with a cultured crowd was not at all reflective of antebellum impulses for uplift through culture. Rather, ICS managers desired that students and graduates give themselves the greatest opportunity to present a good appearance to present and prospective employers. The National Manpower Council noted that since the turn of the century and as late as 1954, most large companies looked not necessarily for skills, although they were certainly highly valued, but "motivation and attitudes of young workers [which] receive more attention than any other quality for employment."[41] ICS wanted its students to put their best foot forward and attempted to inculcate middle-class morals to go along with middle-class pay.

For employers, ICS published *Trained Men,* "a clearinghouse of information pointing out the part that education plays in the solution of organizational problems," all the while promoting ICS as the true solution. By 1920 the company had established a lecture bureau, which sent speakers to any plant to extol the virtues of education and, in particular, the ICS system. Indeed, with its massive sales staff, aggressive advertising and marketing, and the horizontal configuration of the company, ICS was a

[40] *The I.C.S. Stenographer's and Correspondent's Handbook* (Scranton, 1910), 17.

[41] National Manpower Council, *A Policy for Skilled Manpower: A Statement by the Council with Facts and Issues Prepared by the Research Staff* (New York, 1954), 97.

model of modern business quite worthy of emulation.[42]

ICS's form of correspondence education had much to recommend it to people from almost all segments of the population and philosophical bents. It fulfilled the Progressive desire for efficiency, for the short courses were geared to impart only the information that workers needed and demanded. Taylorites appreciated that this type of education gave management more control of hiring, firing, and promotion, at the same time that it gave them a better educated workforce. The cost of this education was within the financial reach of most Americans, and it was democratic, although not necessarily in a Deweyite sense. John Dewey had redefined democratic education as a broad exercise and equated it with the ability to participate in a wide range of educative and political activities. ICS intended for its students to follow a very narrow educational track to achieve specific objectives. But Dewey also stated that if a man was "without the resources of personal skill, without control of the tools of achievement, he must inevitably lend himself to carrying out the directions and ideas of others."[43] ICS courses allowed students a chance to control their own destinies, their own directions. Hence, although ICS could and did offer its students courses that embraced the latest technology, the school functioned much more on the periphery of corporate and educational America, and was tied more closely to its clients' aspirations for success. These educational goals gave ICS an entirely different cast from any other school.

Still, this approach fit well with the spirit of American initiative and individualism, for each worker was responsible for self-improvement through his or her own efforts. Workers themselves appreciated this type of education because it often paid immediate dividends, certainly more so than other educational opportunities. Further, in contrast to almost all nineteenth-century educational schemes, it offered a chance at true economic and social mobility, rather than simple moral uplift. In addition, this type of education was often all that was available, especially in small towns and rural areas. And workers voted with their pocketbooks. The number of people

[42] In addition to forming its own publishing company, first Collier Engineering, then International Textbooks, ICS sold its own drawing instruments and supplies through another subsidiary, T. S. Company. When the company was swamped with typewriters made by Victor, ICS bought that company.

[43] Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, 1991), 165, quoting Dewey, *Ethics*, 392.

who took advantage of this "ad hoc" education seemed to justify the opinion of one member of the Society for the Promotion of Engineering Education who proclaimed the correspondence school "the most important development of modern educational methods."[44]

Soon ICS was not alone. By 1925-26, an estimated 350 proprietary correspondence schools were operating in the United States, a tremendous growth from the handful that had existed at the turn of the century. To be sure, a good number of these schools were fly-by-night operations which did more harm than good and were drawn merely by the tremendous profits to be made.[45] The proliferation of correspondence schools for increasing numbers of students reflects the desire of so many for education that was otherwise unavailable in either the private or public sector. The cumulative enrollment at the International Correspondence Schools, the largest in the country, was over 2,500,000 by 1925, and had grown at a rate of nearly 100,000 per year since 1900. The number of students enrolled in all proprietary correspondence schools was nearly two million in 1924 alone, roughly four times the number enrolled in all of the colleges, universities, and professional schools in the nation. These figures should have given pause to any education reformer, for they demonstrated that correspondence education was at once efficient, optimal, and in demand.

And who was taking correspondence courses in the 1920s? The correspondence student of the 1920s was not too different from the student of the 1890s. In his pioneering study of private correspondence schools, John Noffsinger drew a picture of the typical correspondence student:

> He is a young man 26 years old, away from formal schooling for ten years, probably married and living in a town of less than 100,000 population in a state with superior educational facilities. He is engaged in a business or industry or in some semi-skilled occupation and has gone far enough to appreciate the fact that the unskilled worker in every line is handicapped.[46]

Even those who enrolled in correspondence courses offered by state

[44] "American Industrial Education," 234.

[45] John S. Noffsinger, *Correspondence Schools, Lyceums, Chautauquas* (New York, 1926), 16. The profits *were* potentially tremendous. Noffsinger noted that the 127 schools that he surveyed were taking in $70,000,000 in tuition, or "as much as is spent to maintain the public schools of 14 of the smaller states of the union."

[46] Ibid., 59.

universities fit this mold, as did those who enrolled in both day and night classes offered by the YMCA.[47]

The reasons are not too hard to decipher. The educational experiences of the correspondence students of the 1920s mirrored those of their fathers and grandfathers. As late as 1920, only one American in 116 completed college, less than one in five had finished high school, and only one in three had gone beyond grade school.[48] Of those enrolling in private correspondence courses, sixty-two percent had less than a high school education, thirty-four percent less than grade school.[49] Thus, while correspondence school students in the 1920s may have had above-average educations, the skyrocketing enrollment is an indication that most felt their educations were inadequate in an era and environment which increasingly demanded credentials of some sort for a chance at upward mobility.[50]

As the number of schools grew, so did the course offerings, which ranged from the serious to the silly. In 1925 one could sign up for an astonishing array of courses: aeronautics or cartooning; bookkeeping or detective training; internal combustion engine or wrestling; theology or vaudeville; telegraphy or ventriloquism. Additionally, for those who wanted to get in on what some saw as "the scam," one school offered a course in "mail order."[51] Most who enrolled in correspondence courses, though, took serious subjects. And as was the case with the university correspondence students, the majority enrolled "to increase their efficiency in their present work," or "in hope of advancement in position and salary."[52] This represents a slight change from the early years of correspondence schools, when many enrolled in courses in order to get *out* of "their present work." Furthermore, in 1925 Noffsinger saw a much greater correlation between occupation and course taken than seems to have been the case twenty years earlier: "Real estate

[47] Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education *Bulletin No. 10* (Washington, D.C., 1920), 16.

[48] Noffsinger, *Correspondence Schools,* 59ff.

[49] *Bulletin No. 10,* 16. Almost the same percentage obtained in the University of Wisconsin's correspondence school. There, 29 percent had only elementary educations, and 30 percent had taken "all or part of a high-school course." In Massachusetts, it was 34 percent and 49 percent respectively.

[50] Although more finished high school in 1920 than in 1900, there seemed to be less value attached to the high school diploma. Indeed, by the end of the decade, attending high school was the norm for many children. *Manual Training Magazine* 20 (1918), 65, noted, somewhat cryptically, in 1918 that the war had shown the real value of the "college man."

[51] Noffsinger, *Correspondence Schools,* 30-32.

[52] *Bulletin No. 10,* 16.

courses drew at least 90% of their students from the business group, business administration and accountancy between 60% and 80% from the same group, and technical, drafting and foremanship courses between 60% and 95% from the industry group."[53] Most students at ICS wanted to get into better work, which increasingly meant white-collar, middle-class positions. ICS and other proprietary schools noted this trend and offered more white-collar–oriented courses. Still, over the years, correspondence schools found themselves increasingly drawing students from within the occupations they chose to study. In addition, because almost all courses offered some certificate upon completion and, as noted earlier, some like ICS offered full diplomas, this trend appears to reflect an increasingly competitive workplace in which credentials meant considerably more than had been the case in 1900.

Another trend that persisted from the turn of the century to the time of Noffsinger's study was the high "mortality rate," as it was called, in correspondence study.[54] Very few who began long courses, such as engineering, finished them—less than five percent in fact. No doubt the long technical courses, especially those of reputable institutions like ICS and the American School of Chicago, though simplified, were still quite demanding, requiring a lot of time and considerable effort on the part of the student. Most students, therefore, ignored any pretensions to extended higher technical education and opted for short business and technical courses, which gave them exactly the knowledge they wanted in the shortest time possible, along with a certificate that might be a ticket to advancement and better pay. Almost none of the correspondence schools expressed an interest in producing better, more skilled factory operatives, a key goal of many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century education reformers.[55]

Traditional institutions and their leaders were not blind to the success of ICS and the other correspondence schools. Some were perceptive enough to realize that these successes "measured the failure of the established educational agencies . . . to meet the needs, or at least the demands of the

[53] Noffsinger, *Correspondence Schools,* 56.

[54] This does not seem to have been the case for some university correspondence students. Those who remained in their courses, however, tended overwhelmingly to be schoolteachers. See *Bulletin No. 10,* passim.

[55] Better-educated factory workers was admittedly the goal of those who designed the Smith-Hughes Act, which funded vocational education in secondary schools. See Kantor, *Learning to Earn,* passim; and, Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge,* chap. 7.

people."[56] In the 1890s many colleges and universities, especially land-grant schools, began to experiment with various forms of correspondence and extension education. The degree to which they were successful depended greatly on how closely these institutions copied ICS's methods and philosophy.

In the early 1890s, ICS received some competition in practical education in its own back yard. Pennsylvania State College, later Penn State University, located about 150 miles from Scranton, began to dabble in extension education. Initially this venture took the form merely of sending professors to lecture the farmers of the state at fairs, farmers' institutes, and meetings of agricultural societies. Owing to demand, the college soon established a formal extension service in the School of Agriculture, which offered a practical home-study course with directed readings. Books were supplied at reduced cost by the college and exams were given—but only if requested by the student. With a nod to antecedents and perhaps with a desire for an air of refinement, college officials dubbed the program the "Chautauqua Course of Home Reading in Agriculture."[57] By 1897, those in charge of the service opted to follow ICS's model and sent out their own printed lessons to supplement and explain the assigned texts. Also like ICS, student work was monitored. In 1898 the college officially changed the name of this service to "Correspondence Courses in Agriculture." By 1899 over 3,000 students had enrolled in various courses offered by Penn State, and by 1908, over thirty-one correspondence courses were offered under the headings of general agriculture, dairy husbandry, animal husbandry, and horticulture.[58] These were modest numbers, to be sure, especially when matched against those of ICS. But alongside ICS's students, Penn State's enrollment indicates a continuing growth of interest in education, at least in Pennsylvania, as well as a lack of access to education through traditional channels. However, Penn State's early success in correspondence education may well be due only to the fact that ICS and other correspondence schools offered little or no instruction in agriculture.

Penn State was not unique. Its experiences were duplicated across much of the nation. For instance, the University of Wisconsin, another pioneer in practical higher education, experienced triumphs and failures in extension

[56] Wayland Fuller Dunaway, *History of the Pennsylvania State College* (Lancaster, 1946), 390.
[57] Ibid., 390-400.
[58] Ibid., 404.

and correspondence education similar to those at Penn State. As with Penn State, extension and correspondence education at Wisconsin began with agriculture. Initially, however, educators and lawmakers were skeptical. Legislators funded these projects—and college officials acquiesced in their establishment—only out of fear of the founding of a rival state agricultural college, and not out of any great love for extension education. The university persevered, however, and in 1906 Wisconsin hired William H. Lighty to organize and superintend a correspondence department. The following year Louis Reber, a graduate and a member of the faculty of Penn State, was recruited by Wisconsin to help run its extension programs. These two men were responsible for creating one of the most innovative and far-reaching public extension and correspondence departments in the country. Although hopes of social uplift certainly drove these men and their program, like ICS they refused to allow dogma to cloud their vision. Students would get exactly what they wanted and needed. And although Wisconsin president Van Hise was anxious that there be " 'no mute inglorious Milton' in Wisconsin," Reber was much more focused on the practical. He was interested solely in

> literally carrying the University to the homes of the people . . . to give them what they need—be it the last word in expert advice; courses of study carrying University credit; or easy lessons in cooking and sewing. University Extension in Wisconsin endeavors to interpret the phraseology of the expert and offers the benefits of research to the household and the workshops . . .[59]

Thus, Wisconsin offered its less-educated, working-class students the benefits of advanced university research but in courses without ornamentation or theory.

Reber reviewed Wisconsin's past failures in extension and correspondence schooling and decided, insightfully, that university academicians would probably not be the best instructors for his students. A successful correspondence education, like that offered by ICS, would have to "include courses of practically every grade." Reber knew that Wisconsin's established faculty would be less than willing to cast their academic pearls before the Wisconsin masses and went so far as to discourage the regular faculty's participation in extension schooling, insisting that there was a "danger that

[59] Merle Curti and Vernon Carstensen, *The University of Wisconsin: 1848-1925* (2 vols., Madison, 1949), 2:718.

the influence of the old academic spirit may operate to make vocational correspondence study as applied to industrial workers ineffective and practically valueless." The historians of the University of Wisconsin described its extension and correspondence schools as being "consciously patterned after the proprietary correspondence schools."[60]

It was because Reber and Lighty adopted these attitudes, and ignored any sociopolitical posturing, that the schools succeeded, although not on the same scale as ICS. Perhaps because he had witnessed ICS's tremendous success in his own home state, Reber adopted almost all of ICS's methodology. He sought to offer the widest range of study possible and succeeded; thirty-five departments offered over 200 courses.[61]

Like others involved in correspondence education, Reber, too, noted the high mortality rate among students. Determined to cut this rate, Reber again drew on ICS's success pattern and developed a corp of itinerant teachers who met groups of correspondence students regularly to give guidance and assistance as needed. This was especially beneficial to those involved in industrial education, and manufacturers, recognizing the benefits, often assisted the university by providing classrooms and giving employees time to attend classes. As was the case with ICS's students, manufacturers often paid students' fees or subsidized their educations.

From special texts to roving promoters and instructors to taking instruction into the workplace, Reber assiduously copied ICS's proven methods with impressive results. Over 4,000 students had enrolled by 1910; by 1916 more than 25,000 students took correspondence or extension courses from Wisconsin. Before Reber retired in 1926, well over 100,000 students had received educations from the correspondence and extension services of the University of Wisconsin.[62] ICS paved the way, and schools such as Wisconsin, and most importantly their students, profited from the example.

Because of ICS and the proprietary correspondence schools, as well as the

[60] Ibid., 1:711-13. Reber and Lighty were also aware of the money that was flowing out of Wisconsin to proprietary correspondence schools. Between 1896 and 1903, over 1,000 students in Wisconsin *finished* courses with ICS. If ICS's figures are reasonably accurate, that number reflects only 12 percent of those who paid for courses. See *The ICS System*. The university was anxious to keep those dollars at home.

[61] Curti and Carstensen, *Wisconsin*, 2:563-64.

[62] Ibid., 567-68.

land-grant schools that borrowed their methods, the practical mechanic, the general workingman, the underemployed and the ill-employed had some recourse to job-specific education not readily available in the workplace or in traditional education venues. For those who enrolled, correspondence schools were invaluable. More importantly, perhaps, the majority of working-class correspondence-school students took courses to lift them *out* of the working class. Few, if any, were interested in becoming better educated, uplifted operatives, which seemed to be the goal of most middle-class reformers. Rather, most were interested solely in climbing to higher socioeconomic rungs, and they were not necessarily willing to put their trust in union solidarity or wait for the unions to fulfill their promises. Hence, they turned to ICS and other correspondence or extension courses; little else was available, organized, efficacious, or appeared to offer upward mobility.

The merits of good correspondence schools were universally acknowledged at the time. The appeal to workers of all stripes was certainly evidenced by the numbers who enrolled. Tuition was rarely a problem because correspondence schools allowed their students to pay on the installment plan. Correspondence education was also often the most efficient way of getting ahead educationally, for one's program could be tailored exactly to one's needs. Nothing was extraneous.

Expanding opportunities for formal schooling in the twentieth century eventually doomed correspondence schools to much smaller roles in education. Beginning in the 1920s, many more American teenagers began attending and completing high school, receiving the education they might previously have obtained later in life through the mail. The rise of the junior college and, later, community colleges also cut into ICS and other correspondence schools' client base by offering higher, technical, and "semiprofessional" education to students in their own home towns, often at costs competitive with correspondence schools and with the added attraction of immediate teacher contact. The GI Bill, which allowed thousands of veterans who previously could not have attended *any* institution of higher education to attend college, also hurt correspondence enrollment. The AA and BA/BS degrees offered by two- and four-year schools had considerably more cachet than any certificate offered by ICS and others. By the 1950s all of these factors caused ICS and other correspondence schools to lose most of their appeal and their students.

Although ICS still operates today, it does so on a much-reduced scale, offering only one-tenth of the courses it did in the early 1900s. Moreover,

instead of providing courses that might lead a student to the upper echelons of his or her chosen field immediately, today ICS mainly offers entry-level education to service-industry jobs. The names of the courses reflect the change: "Electrical Engineering" has been retitled "Electrical Engineering Technology," and the "Complete English Branches," which might have landed a student a teaching job in 1910, has been changed to "Teacher Aide."[63] But although the goals and offerings of ICS have changed considerably in its 100 years, its importance cannot be underestimated. In its heyday the International Correspondence Schools and its imitators offered many working men and women their only chance at "education for success."

*Richmond, Virginia* JAMES D. WATKINSON

The author wishes to thank Joseph F. Kett of the University of Virginia, Harold Cox of Wilkes University, and the outside readers for their comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this article.

[63] The literature on junior colleges, community colleges, and the impact of the GI Bill is long and need not be listed here; it is well summarized in Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge,* chap. 12.

Although ICS's offerings are considerably reduced today, the school has kept many of the strategies that contributed to its spectacular early success. As with earlier courses that offered "free" typewriters and phonographs with courses, today's students get computers and software, cameras, and mechanics' tools when they enroll. One can still pay for a course in installments. Additionally, advertising remains abundant and aggressive, as any viewer of cable television knows, and print advertising still contains the "success testimonials" touted since the school's inception. I am grateful to Ian Quimby for bringing a recent ICS brochure to my attention.