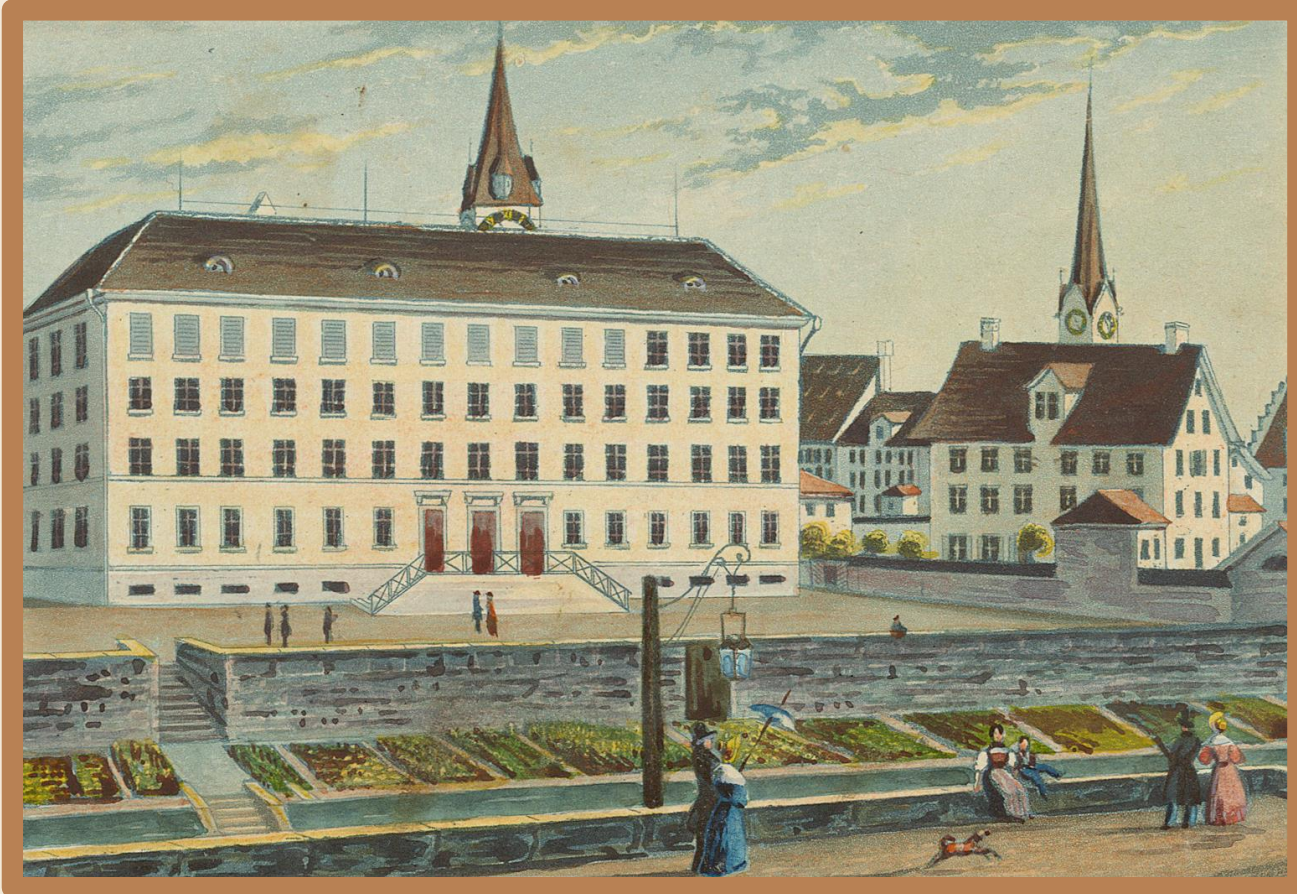


OF PIONEERS & LATECOMERS

An Examination of the Process Behind the Initial Admission of Women to the Universities of Zurich and Basel



Franz Schmid (1796-1851) "Die Hochschule = L'Université à Zurich." Zentralbibliothek Zürich via <https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-36086> (accessed 12.3.23)

Research Question & Method

In 1867, the University of Zurich became the first University in Switzerland to accept women as students. The University of Basel, on the other hand, was the last university in Switzerland to do so in 1890, respectively making the two universities a pioneer and a latecomer in the issue.

In my essay I attempt to find out what led to this development by answering the research question *What factors influenced the process of the initial admission of women to the universities of Zurich and Basel and how do the two compare?*

Through research using various secondary sources, and primary sources obtained by visiting the public archives of Zurich and Basel-City, I was able to identify and analyze four main factors.

University History

The University of Zurich, founded under a liberal government, formed a stark contrast to the University of Basel, which was the oldest university in Switzerland and had become an institution plagued by practices such as academic patronage by the mid 19th century. While the University of Zurich's history resulted in a generally open climate, that of Basel led a more conservative, traditionalist and elitist mindset to emerge, which was detrimental to the admission of women.

Administration

The universities' administration was arguably the most important factor in paving the way for women's admission.

The University of Zurich, which was mostly independent of state institutions, was able to make the decision in favor of women's matriculation completely independently.

The University of Basel, which was subjected to cantonal authorities, ended up being forced to comply with its cantonal government's decision to admit women.

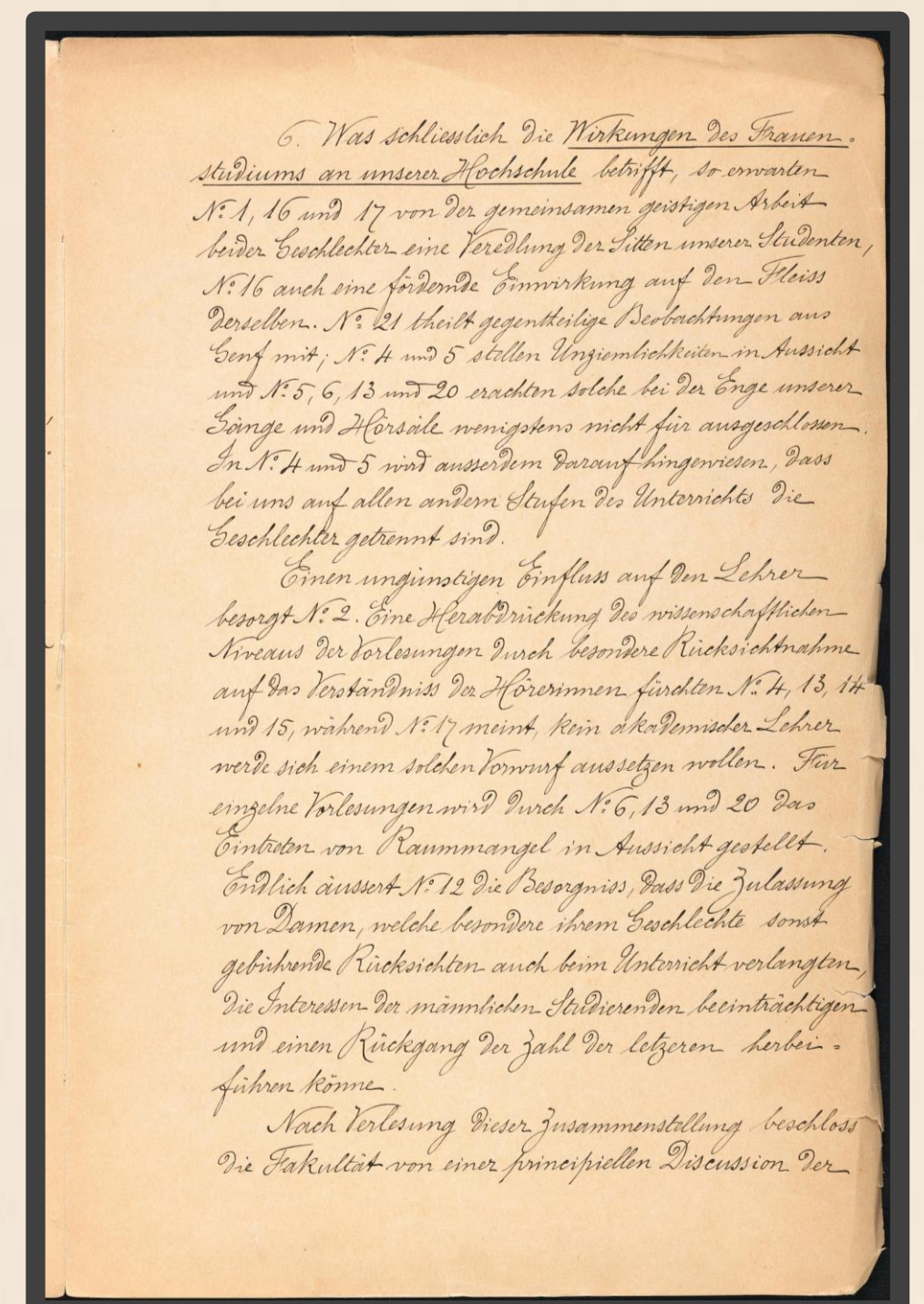
In both cases, had a different organ of administration been responsible with making the decision, women would likely have had to wait for their admission much longer.

Faculty Members' Opinions

At both universities, the faculty members' opinions had a considerable amount of influence on the final decision.

In Zurich, most lecturers saw many benefits in the acceptance of women. Their positive opinions likely had a relatively large amount of influence on the final decision due to their administrative proximity to the university's President, who made the final decision to matriculate women.

In Basel, too, faculty members impacted the final decision. They had more negative opinions than lecturers in Zurich, but their influence was lessened by the hierarchical superiority and distance of the final decision-maker (the Governing Council). However, their apprehensions about the admission of women (fears of "indecent" behavior between male and female students were prevalent) likely led to the strict acceptance criteria for women after their admission in 1890.



Public Archives of Basel-City, File Erziehung X 18 "Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904". Letter by Prof. Dr. K. Bücher from Nov. 22 1889

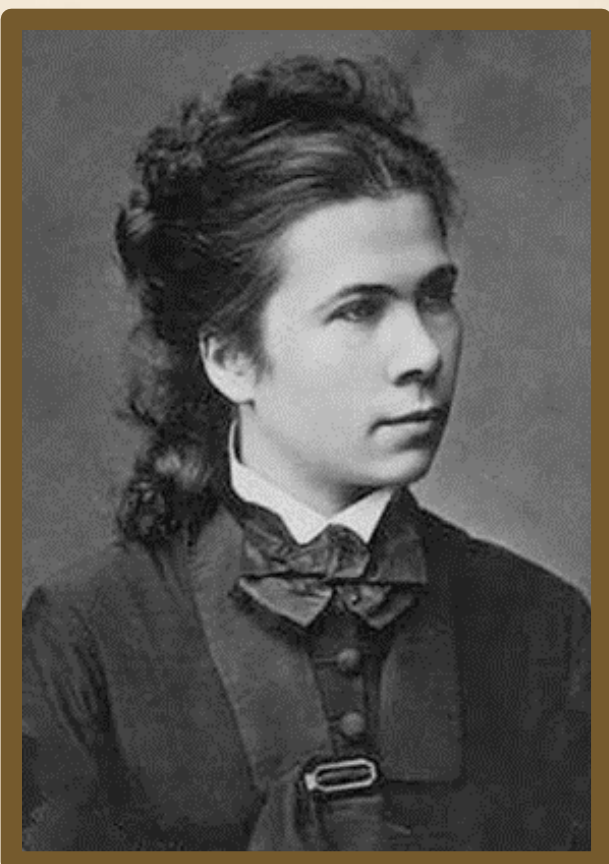
Excerpt from a letter by the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Basel about opinions on women's admission

Stance on Foreign Female Students

Most female students in Switzerland during the late 19th and early 20th century were not Swiss but foreigners, many of them political refugees from Russia. The different attitudes towards them therefore played a rather large role in the admission of women, especially at the University of Basel.

The University of Zurich, in a time of liberal policies and attitudes towards foreigners, was open towards foreign female students. This later proved to be a problem due to many of them lacking sufficient previous education, which threatened to lower the levels of lectures.

The University of Basel – in contrast to that of Zurich, which was treading completely new waters – was provided with hindsight and hence was greatly influenced by other universities' bad experiences. This, along with general attitudes towards foreigners in Switzerland having shifted to a more negative stance, resulted in a fear of foreign female students. This fear not only significantly delayed the acceptance of women in general but was also responsible for the eventual acceptance criteria of the University of Basel factually excluding foreign women.



Dr. Nadeshda Suslova – the first woman who studied at the University of Zurich

Unknown Author (undated), "Nadeshda Suslova (1843-1918)" via https://www.gleichstellung.uzh.ch/de/ueber_uns/geschichte/suslova.html (accessed 7.12.22)