



# OF PIONEERS AND LATECOMERS – AN EXAMINATION OF THE PROCESS BEHIND THE INITIAL ADMISSION OF WOMEN TO THE UNIVERSITIES OF ZURICH AND BASEL

What Factors Influenced the Process of the Initial  
Admission of Women to the Universities of Zurich and  
Basel and How Do the Two Compare?

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Image on title page: “Medical Coffee Party” – caricature of Swiss female students from Unknown Author, Bierzeitung Zürcher Studenten (ca. 1900), Untitled, from Universität Zürich (5.2.08), “Studio: Kaffeekranz und Bierfest“ via <https://www.175jahre.uzh.ch/ausstellungen/gruenschnabel-weisskittel/objekte/Kneipe.html> (accessed 7.12.22)

## Introduction



1 – Dr. Nadeshda Suslova (1843-1918) (Unknown Author, undated)

The issue of women's admission to universities became of increasing importance over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century world-wide. Switzerland – in some ways surprisingly, considering its otherwise rather conservative history concerning women's rights – was one of the pioneers of women's admission to universities, particularly in Europe where it was third only to France and Great Britain in enabling the enrollment of women.<sup>1</sup> Although considering Switzerland was one of the most liberal states during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially so after the constitution of 1848,<sup>2</sup> this might not be surprising after all.

The University of Zurich in particular, was the first university in Switzerland to officially matriculate a woman, Nadeshda Suslova, in 1867. The University of Basel, on the other hand, was the last university in Switzerland's German-speaking region to admit women. Numerous women asked for admission from 1872 on and when Meta von Salis requested to be enrolled in 1885, she was rejected with the explanation that women would be excluded from the university under all circumstances.<sup>3</sup> In 1889, Eduard Frey requested for his daughter, Emilie Frey, to be admitted at the university. Following this request, in 1890, the university was forced by Basel's government to admit women as students.<sup>4</sup>

In this essay, the process behind the admission of the first women at these two universities – stood at opposite ends of a spectrum in terms of both time and ideology – will be investigated in order to answer the 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?*

The factors investigated include the respective universities' history, their administration, opinions of faculty members and their stance on foreign female students.

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<sup>1</sup> Wild, Ella (1928), "Einleitung". In: Schweizerischer Verband der Akademikerinnen (SVA) (ed.), "Das Frauenstudium an den Schweizer Hochschulen", p. 4-8.

<sup>2</sup> Neumann, Daniela (1987), "Studentinnen aus dem Russischen Reich in der Schweiz (1867-1914)", p. 93-94.

<sup>3</sup> Bieder, Martha (1928), "Universität Basel.". In: SVA (ed.), "Das Frauenstudium an den Schweizer Hochschulen", p. 206-207.

<sup>4</sup> Universität Basel (undated), "Anfänge des Frauenstudiums: 1860er bis 1920er" via <https://uniGeschichte.unibas.ch/akteure/frauenstudium/anfaenge-des-frauenstudiums> (accessed 6.12.22).

# University History

## *Zurich*

The University of Zurich was founded in 1833 under a liberal government. It was made up of previous institutions of higher education that had been heavily influenced by the Swiss reformation during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Its liberal origins might have played a role when the question of women's enrollment at the university became of importance.

Women were allowed to attend lectures as listeners since the foundation of the university,<sup>6</sup> although some sources indicate the time of their admission as such to be 1840,<sup>7</sup> which is still considerably early. Hardly any information can be found about the process behind this admission. However, there does not seem to have been any large controversy around the issue. It is possible that due to women already having constituted a presence at the university, the question of their admission as regular students seemed less grave to faculty and students. In a way, the first barrier – women's *presence* at the university – had already been broken.

## *Basel*

The University of Basel had a much more conservative background than that of Zurich. It was founded in 1460 through papal privileges, making it the oldest university of Switzerland. Although it had catholic roots, it became reformed during the Swiss reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the university became a so-called "Family University"<sup>9</sup>, meaning that very few families occupied and controlled the chairs of the university. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with increasing numbers of foreign professors being hired, this structure transformed into something closer to a "Network University", where practices such as academic patronage

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<sup>5</sup> Brändli, Sebastian (28.1.2013), "Universität Zürich". In: Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz (HLS) via <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/010977/2013-01-28/> (accessed 17.10.22).

<sup>6</sup> Stump, Doris (1988), "Zugelassen und ausgegrenzt". In: Verein Feministische Wissenschaft Schweiz (VFWS) (ed.), "Ebenso Neu Als Kühn, 120 Jahr Frauenstudium an der Universität Zürich", p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Brändli, (28.1.2013), "Universität Zürich". In: HLS via <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/010977/2013-01-28/> (accessed 17.10.22).

<sup>8</sup> Kreis, Georg (28.1.2013), "Universität Basel". In: HLS via <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/010971/2013-01-28/> (accessed 5.10.22).

<sup>9</sup> Translated from German "Familienuniversität".

were common.<sup>10</sup> It was such practices that caused the University of Basel to remain small in numbers and elitist until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the issue of women's enrollment became of importance at the university. This elitist mindset was anything but favorable for women. Historian Martha Bieder, who obtained her doctorate in Basel in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>11</sup> writes: "[...][at a university] proud of its history, [...] serving a particular social class and full of distrust against the popularization of science [...] the first people not considered [worthy of attending the university] who asked for admission were women."<sup>12</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that this conservative and traditional background played a rather large role in delaying women's admission in Basel so much in comparison to Zurich, where liberal influences had long had the upper hand.

## Administration

### *Zurich*

The University of Zurich, although founded by the state, was mostly independent of state institutions. While it had been supported by various state institutions in the years after its foundation, it was never completely subjected to said institutions and remained able to independently make decisions about its students.<sup>13</sup> It was partially due to this independence that the process of women's admission as students developed so smoothly. When Nadeshda Suslova first came to the university as a listener in 1865, the university's Senate decided to postpone the decision about women's admission. It was the university's – not the canton's – administration, specifically the university's President Otto Fritzsche,<sup>14</sup> who ultimately made

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<sup>10</sup> Universität Basel (undated), "Die Basler "Familienuniversität"" via <https://unigeschichte.unibas.ch/aufbrueche-und-krisen/der-streit-um-die-privilegien-im-17-jh/familienuniversitaet-ein-typus> (accessed 5.10.2022).

<sup>11</sup> Unknown Author (1968) "Dr. Martha Bieder zum 70. Geburtstag". In: Fachblatt für schweizerisches Heim- und Anstaltswesen, Issue 39, 6: "Im Spiegel gesehen : Antworten auf eine Umfrage" (June 1968) via <https://www.e-periodica.ch/digbib/view?pid=cuv-004:1968:39::1130#243>.

<sup>12</sup> Translated from German: "[...][an einer] auf ihre Geschichte stolze Universität, [...] einer bestimmten sozialen Schicht dienend und voll Misstrauen gegen eine Popularisierung der Wissenschaft [...] Die ersten bisher Vernachlässigten, die sich meldeten, sind eben die Frauen gewesen" From: Bieder (1928), "Universität Basel.". In: SVA (ed.), "Das Frauenstudium an den Schweizer Hochschulen", p. 217-218.

<sup>13</sup> Brändli, (28.1.2013), "Universität Zürich". In: HLS via <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/010977/2013-01-28/> (accessed 17.10.22).

<sup>14</sup> Universität Zürich (7.7.2022), "Bisherige Rektorin und Rektoren der Universität Zürich" via <https://www.uzh.ch/de/about/portrait/history/presidents.html> (accessed 6.10.22).



2 – "Dark Side – Zurich Female Students' Pub", Caricature of women studying at the University of Zurich – an example of the general public opinion on women's admission. (Unknown Author, 1872)

the decision to officially matriculate Suslova in 1867.<sup>15</sup> The university's regulations at the time did not specifying anything about women's admission, which gave Fritzsche free reign to make the decision and thereby set a precedent on which later admissions would be based. What granted the

university its independence on this issue was that the admission of students at the time was regulated not through law, but through regulations that were issued by the university itself.<sup>16</sup> While the President did consult Zurich's Director of Education before making his decision,<sup>17</sup> he was not obligated to act according to his opinion. In a way, women's enrollment in Zurich depended only on Fritzsche's opinion on the matter.

The university's independence also meant that it was not entangled in local politics. Historian Franziska Rogger Kappeler goes as far as to say that "[otherwise] female students would hardly have been allowed to enroll at the university so pragmatically".<sup>18</sup> Public opinion on women's enrollment at the university was largely negative and despite a liberal dominance in the canton's parliament, there was still a considerable amount of conservative voices.<sup>19</sup> This means that the process of the legalization of women's admission might have been slowed down significantly by democratic processes such as public debate had the government been more involved in the decision making.

<sup>15</sup> Bankowski-Züllig, Monika (1988), "Nadezda Prokof'evna Suslova (1843-1918) – die Wegbereiterin". In: VFWS (ed.), "Ebenso Neu Als Kühn, 120 Jahr Frauenstudium an der Universität Zürich", p. 122.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> "[sonst] wäre den Frauen wohl kaum der Zutritt zur Universität pragmatisch erlaubt worden." From: Rogger Kappeler, Franziska (2011), "Über Grenzen gestossen, nicht gezogen – Zur Grenzüberschreitenden Mobilität der russischen Pionierinnen des schweizerischen Frauenstudiums". In: Hesse, Christian and Maurer, Tina (ed.), "Von Bologna zu 'Bologna', Akademische Mobilität und ihre Grenzen", p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> Stump (1988), "Zugelassen und ausgegrenzt". In: (VFWS) (ed.), "Ebenso Neu Als Kühn, 120 Jahr Frauenstudium an der Universität Zürich", p. 17-18 and Illi, Martin (24.08.2017), "Zürich (Kanton) – Der Zürcher Staat im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert" via HLS <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/007381/2017-08-24/#HDERZFCrcherStaatim19.und20.Jahrhundert> (accessed 7.12.22).

## *Basel*

The University of Basel, contrary to the University of Zurich, was not independent of state institutions at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although it had enjoyed complete independence of the government in its early years due to having been founded through papal privileges, its roots in Catholicism caused the university's legal independence to be revoked after the Swiss reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1818 the university was completely subjected to cantonal authorities.<sup>20</sup> In addition to this, students' admission – in contrast to the University of Zurich – was handled not through university regulations, but through university law, which was voted on by the canton's Parliament<sup>21, 22</sup>

However, contrary to the University of Zurich, this was, in some ways, an advantage to the first women who wanted to study at the University of Basel. Due to its conservative ideology, most of the university's administration was predominantly against the idea of women's enrollment,<sup>23</sup> so much so that the university was ultimately forced to accept women as students by the cantonal government in 1890.<sup>24</sup> The government at the time was mostly made up of the so-called "Radical Party", which was in favor of the popularization of science and therefore women's admission to the university.<sup>25</sup> In fact, it can be argued that the *legalization* of women's admission, much like in Zurich, can in some measure be attributed to a single person. While this was Fritzsche in Zurich, it was the Minister of Education, Dr. Richard Zutt, in Basel. He had a positive view on women's enrollment,<sup>26</sup> and it was partially his influence that seems to have "inspired" the Governing Council<sup>27</sup> of Basel to vote in favor of temporarily changing §31 of Basel's university law to also include the acceptance of women as students.<sup>28</sup>

However, while the government's power over the University of Basel's decisions in this matter was favorable to women at the time, it also brought some disadvantages. The change in §31 made in 1890, for example, was only temporary because it was made by the

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<sup>20</sup> Kreis (28.1.2013), "Universität Basel". In: HLS via <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/010971/2013-01-28/> (accessed 5.10.22).

<sup>21</sup> Translated from German "Grosser Rat".

<sup>22</sup> See for example Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18 "Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904", Beschluss des Grossen Rates from February 11<sup>th</sup> 1904.

<sup>23</sup> See more details in the section "Opinion of Faculty Members".

<sup>24</sup> Bieder (1928), "Universität Basel.". In: SVA (ed.), "Das Frauenstudium an den Schweizer Hochschulen", p. 215.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208 and 218.

<sup>26</sup> Letter by Richard Zutt to University of Basel's Regency on February 14<sup>th</sup> 1890, Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18 "Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904".

<sup>27</sup> Translated from German "Regierungsrat".

<sup>28</sup> Bieder (1928), "Universität Basel.". In: SVA (ed.), "Das Frauenstudium an den Schweizer Hochschulen", p. 214.

canton's Governing Council. Making this change permanent took much longer – until 1904 – due to the complicated process of creating new laws. Not only was the law dealt with in Basel's Parliament twice, as it was initially rejected for revision in 1903,<sup>29</sup> but there had to be communication between all levels of administration, including the different internal administrative bodies of the university, the Department of Education, the canton's Governing Council and the Parliament itself.<sup>30</sup> The process of developing and passing the law was ultimately incredibly long-winded and forms a stark contrast to the quick and simple admission of women at the University of Zurich.

## Opinions of Faculty Members

### *Zurich*

Although the final decision about the acceptance of women was ultimately taken by the university's President, the general political climate at the university and the opinions of faculty members certainly had an influence on this decision. Faculty members were members in the university's Senate, which was responsible for electing the President.<sup>31</sup> It can be assumed then, that the President represented their interests.

Additional insight on their opinions is given by a letter by the Senate to Zurich's Director of Education written in 1865, when female listeners Alexandrovna Kniashina and Nadeshda Suslova first expressed their desire to complete a degree to the university. The Senate's concerns voiced in this letter included worries about the mingling of young male and female students. These worries, however, were countered, in this same letter, by the opinion that this should not be of concern to lecturers, as it was an issue to be handled privately by the students. Most importantly, the Senate expressed the most apprehension about women potentially "being permitted to complete a degree at the University without belonging to its

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<sup>29</sup> Beschluss des Grossen Rates from February 11<sup>th</sup> 1904 and letter by the University of Basel's Curate to the university's Regency from June 10<sup>th</sup> 1903, Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18 "Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904".

<sup>30</sup> Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18 "Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904", see for example: Letter by Curate of University of Basel to Regency of university on December 15<sup>th</sup> 1900.

<sup>31</sup> Universität Zürich (3.9.21), "Senat" via <https://www.uzh.ch/de/about/management/senat.html> (accessed 7.10.22).



academic cooperative and without being subject to its laws.”<sup>32</sup> The Senate was of the opinion that the only way to avoid this problem would be to matriculate women at the university.<sup>33</sup> This letter demonstrates both the faculty members’ open-mindedness despite some initial – and, considering social traditions of the time, unsurprising – worries, and their incredibly pragmatic way of thinking.

It is precisely this pragmatism, in addition to the general liberal political climate of the time, that likely partially caused their open-mindedness in the first place. Lecturers at the university would benefit greatly if they taught a greater number of students – no matter their gender. Not only were they paid according to the number of students attending their lectures, but a greater number of students meant more materials were needed and this increase in materials oftentimes also brought with it an *upgrade* in said materials.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to monetary and material benefits, there also seems to have been a friendly rivalry between the university of Berne and Zurich, the two biggest universities in Switzerland at the time. In this competition, the number of students was one of the decisive factors, as quantity meant quality for universities.<sup>35</sup> It is therefore also possible that the faculty members’ feelings of pride played a role in their open attitude towards the acceptance of female students.

### *Basel*

Similarly to Zurich, it was not the faculty members in Basel who made the final decision about women’s acceptance at the university, but they did still have a considerable amount of influence. In Basel, this influence was caused by the communication between the different levels of administration.

Although Emilie Frey’s father had made his request for his daughter’s admission at the university directly to the Department of Education, the latter forwarded the issue to the

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<sup>32</sup> Translated from German: “die Erlaubnis haben, ein Fachstudium zu verfolgen, ohne der akademischen Genossenschaft [zuzugehören] und ohne auf die Gesetze derselben verpflichtet zu sein.” From: Letter by the Senate of the University of Zurich to the Director of Education of Zurich on January 12<sup>th</sup> 1865, Public Archives of Zurich, File U 94.2.15 “Frauenstudium 1864-1879”.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Rogger Kappeler (2011), “Über Grenzen gestossen, nicht gezogen – Zur Grenzüberschreitenden Mobilität der russischen Pionierinnen des schweizerischen Frauenstudiums”. In: Hesse and Maurer (ed.), “Von Bologna zu 'Bologna', Akademische Mobilität und ihre Grenzen”, p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

university's administration, the Curate.<sup>36</sup> The Curate, in turn, asked the university's different faculties for their opinions. While the faculties of law and theology declared that they did not feel concerned with the issue as not enough women wanted to study degrees in their realm of responsibility,<sup>37</sup> both the faculty of medicine and that of philosophy delivered extensive reports on their standings.

The faculty of medicine, for one, not only asked its own faculty members for their opinions, but also sought observations and thoughts by those medical faculties in Switzerland that had already accepted women as students. While there were some positive sentiments expressed in these reports, they were mostly neutral or negative. The biggest point of contention seemed to be insufficiency in the previous education of the women admitted, although these concerns were mostly targeted at women from foreign countries such as Russia. Similar concerns about foreign women – or “dubious elements”,<sup>38</sup> as one lecturer called them – were expressed by members of the faculty of medicine at the University of Basel. Members were afraid that the university would be unable to reject foreign women if they opened their doors to Swiss women due to various international treaties (a fear which later turned out to be unfounded<sup>39</sup>). Some also expressed that there were already enough universities in Switzerland accepting women and that, therefore, there was no need for the University of Basel to do the same. However, the faculty's opinions were in no way only disapproving. One sentiment expressed, for example, was that the university should not lag behind if all other Swiss universities were to admit women. In a vote, the rejection of women's studies was accepted by the faculty only by a close call of 6 votes against 5.<sup>40</sup>

The faculty of philosophy, in turn, asked each of its members for their opinion in writing. The concerns expressed were mostly the same as those voiced by the faculty of medicine. Fear of foreign women, apprehension about women's previous education, which

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<sup>36</sup> Letter by Richard Zutt (Minister of Education of Basel) to the University of Basel's Regency on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1890, Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18 “Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904”.

<sup>37</sup> Bieder (1928), “Universität Basel.”. In: SVA (ed.), “Das Frauenstudium an den Schweizer Hochschulen”, p. 212.

<sup>38</sup> Translated from German “zweifelhafte Elemente” From: Letter by the faculty of medicine of the University of Basel to the Regency of the University of Basel on November 24<sup>th</sup> 1889, Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18 “Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904”.

<sup>39</sup> Bieder (1928), “Universität Basel.”. In: SVA (ed.), “Das Frauenstudium an den Schweizer Hochschulen”, p. 212.

<sup>40</sup> Letter by the faculty of medicine of the University of Basel to the Regency of the University of Basel on November 24<sup>th</sup> 1889, Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18 “Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904”.

was not equivalent to men's at the time, and a fear of "indecentencies"<sup>41</sup> between men and women, especially considering the university's "narrow hallways and lecture halls".<sup>42</sup> Here too, however, attitudes were not completely negative. Counting all opinions, there were 11 faculty members completely against women's enrollment, 7 members either "conditionally or unconditionally"<sup>43</sup> in favor and 5 members without an opinion on the issue.<sup>44</sup>

The influence of these extensive surveys can be seen in the Governing Council's decision about women's matriculation. The university's Curate, after careful consideration of the surveys, decided to support a *conditional* version of women's admission. It communicated this opinion to the Department of Education, which ended up agreeing with the Curate.<sup>45</sup> The Department of Education, in turn, had considerable influence on the canton's Governing Council. Hence, faculty members' opinion very likely indirectly affected the canton's later decision on women's enrollment, particularly concerning the very strict acceptance criteria for women.

In comparison to the University of Zurich, the University of Basel's faculty members likely had less influence on the final decision about women's admission as they were further removed from the organ of administration that ended up making it – and which ultimately acted against the will of most lecturers. Faculty members in Zurich were given much more leverage over the issue due to the organization of the university's administration.

## Stance on Foreign Female Students

While the universities' stance on foreign female students might, at first glance, not seem immediately relevant to the overall issue of the initial admission of women, it did certainly

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<sup>41</sup> Translated from German "Unziemlichkeiten" From: Letter by Prof. Dr. Bücher to University of Basel's Regency on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1890, Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18, "Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904".

<sup>42</sup> Translated from German "erachten solche bei der Enge unserer Gänge und Hörsäle wenigstens nicht für ausgeschlossen." From: Letter by Prof. Dr. Bücher to University of Basel's Regency on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1890, Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18, "Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904".

<sup>43</sup> Translated from German "teils bedingt, teils unbedingt" From: Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Letter by Prof. Dr. Bücher to University of Basel's Regency on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1890, Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18, "Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904".

<sup>45</sup> Letter by Richard Zutt (Minister of Education of Basel) to the University of Basel's Regency on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1890, Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18 "Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904".

play a major role. This is mainly because the great majority of women who studied in Switzerland in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were not Swiss, but foreigners.<sup>46</sup> At the University of Zurich, in fact, it was foreign women who first applied for admission, and they continued to constitute the majority of female students up until 1914.<sup>47</sup> Most foreign female students came from Russia. A majority were members of the Russian opposition and had come to Switzerland as political refugees after they were forced out of Russian universities by a decree issued in 1864 that denied women access to universities (where they had been able to attend as listeners since 1859).<sup>48</sup> Such people making up the main crowd of women wanting to enroll – and therefore the different attitudes towards them – had great influence on the general process of women’s admission at both the University of Zurich and the University of Basel.

### *Zurich*

The University of Zurich seems to have adopted a similarly liberal attitude towards foreign students as the general Swiss politics of the time did towards political refugees.<sup>49</sup> There were, for example, no concerns expressed about the nationalities of Suslova and Kniashina in the letter by the Senate to Zurich’s Director of Education.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, the University of Zurich already employed a relatively large number of foreign professors, Germans to be precise, most of them political refugees themselves.<sup>51</sup> It can be argued that their personal backgrounds caused them to be accepting of foreign students and that they were able to exert their influence in favor of said students. However, the opposite may have been true as well. Historian Franziska Rogger Kappeler argues that political refugees are not automatically liberal due to their backgrounds and may, in some cases, even harbor a kind of hostility towards new refugees – either insisting on their rights as “refugees who had come first”<sup>52</sup> or

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<sup>46</sup> Universität Basel (undated), “Anfänge des Frauenstudiums: 1860er bis 1920er” via <https://unigeschichte.unibas.ch/akteure/frauenstudium/anfaenge-des-frauenstudiums> (accessed 6.12.22).

<sup>47</sup> Neumann (1987), “Studentinnen aus dem Russischen Reich in der Schweiz (1867-1914)”, p. 9 and Flury, Carmen (2017) “Von Zahlen erzählen, Prozesse der Wissenstransformation am Beispiel der Studierendenstatistik in den Jahresberichten der Universität Zürich, 1833 – 1933”, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Bankowski-Züllig, (1988), “Zürich – das russische Mekka”. In: VFWS (ed.), “Ebenso Neu Als Kühn, 120 Jahr Frauenstudium an der Universität Zürich”, p. 128.

<sup>49</sup> Neumann (1987), “Studentinnen aus dem Russischen Reich in der Schweiz (1867-1914)”, p. 93-94.

<sup>50</sup> See section “Opinions of Faculty Members - Zurich”.

<sup>51</sup> Rogger Kappeler (2011), “Über Grenzen gestossen, nicht gezogen – Zur Grenzüberschreitenden Mobilität der russischen Pionierinnen des schweizerischen Frauenstudiums”. In: Hesse and Maurer (ed.), “Von Bologna zu 'Bologna', Akademische Mobilität und ihre Grenzen”, p. 76.

<sup>52</sup> Translated from German: “Zuerst-Dagewesene“ From: Ibid.

overly afraid of “the foreign”<sup>53</sup> in their want for integration. According to Kappeler, the reasons for these professors’ acceptance had more to do with the personal gains mentioned in the previous section<sup>54</sup> and the fact that a university’s prestige was oftentimes also measured by its percentage of foreign students.<sup>55</sup>

Overall, the admission criteria of the university for students from outside the canton of Zurich, including those from foreign countries, were very lax. While aspiring students from the canton of Zurich were required to provide both a Matura (Swiss high-school diploma) and a proof of residency of the canton of Zurich, foreign students were only obligated to provide the latter.<sup>56</sup> This open attitude proved to be a problem later on, as many foreign women came to study at the university with insufficient previous education, which threatened to lower the levels of the lectures.<sup>57</sup> General opinion about foreign female students slowly shifted from positive or neutral to negative as more and more Russian women enrolled and, in 1870, 6 Swiss female students even wrote a petition for the acceptance criteria for foreign women to be made stricter, afraid they themselves would be increasingly ostracized.<sup>58</sup> This process, however, proved to be long-winded and complicated and only in 1873, after the President had been given temporary permission in 1872 to reject women under the age of 18, was a new regulation put in place. It required all foreigners to also provide the equivalent of a Matura.<sup>59</sup> However, at this point, the damage to foreign women’s reputation as students had already been done, no matter what their levels of previous education were.

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<sup>53</sup> Translated from German: “Fremdes” From: Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Section “Opinions of Faculty Members – Zurich”

<sup>55</sup> Wecker, Regina (1990), “Basel und die Russinnen”. In: Historisches Seminar Basel (HSB) (ed.), “100 Jahre Frauen an der Uni Basel”, p. 87

<sup>56</sup> Forrer-Gutknecht, Else (1928) “Zur Geschichte des Frauenstudiums an der Universität Zürich”. In: SVA (ed.), “Das Frauenstudium an den Schweizer Hochschulen”, p. 24.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>58</sup> Petition by Marie Voegtlin and 5 other female students, Public Archives of Zurich, File U 94.2.15 “Frauenstudium 1864-1879”.

<sup>59</sup> Forrer-Gutknecht, Else (1928) “Zur Geschichte des Frauenstudiums an der Universität Zürich”. In: SVA (ed.), “Das Frauenstudium an den Schweizer Hochschulen”, p. 26.

## Basel



3 – 3 "E-man-cipation of Women" – Caricature that demonstrates the fear of the "hyper emancipation" of women. (Postheiri)

It is undeniable that the University of Basel, and Basel's government, were biased against foreign women. Historian Regina Wecker even argues that Emilie Frey's father's citizenship of Basel played a crucial role in the eventual acceptance of his request for his daughter's enrollment by Basel's Governing Council.<sup>60</sup> In contrast to Zurich, the issue of women's admission to the university came up at a time when Switzerland's liberal attitude towards immigration and settlement of foreigners started to shift considerably into

a much more rejecting stance, as people started to express apprehension about the "over-foreignization"<sup>61</sup> of Switzerland. The University of Basel and Basel's government were no exception to this.<sup>62</sup> Foreign, mostly eastern European, women were rejected and labeled as "hyper emancipated" as the Swiss population became increasingly concerned about their communist and socialist ideals.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to this general mistrust of foreigners, the University of Basel's faculty members showed great concern about other Swiss universities' (including that of Zurich) bad experiences with foreign female students caused by their lack of previous education. In the opinions of the other Swiss universities about women's enrollment obtained by the medical faculty,<sup>64</sup> for example, the greatest criticism expressed was precisely about this issue. Lecturers in Basel were afraid there would be an influx of foreign women if they opened their doors to women, which would, in their eyes, lead to the negative consequences observed at the other universities (e.g. lowered levels of lectures).<sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>61</sup> Translated from German: "Überfremdung" From: Universität Basel (undated), "Schon früh verspätet: Frauenstudium in Basel" via <https://www.unibas.ch/de/Aktuell/Uni-Nova/Uni-Nova-114/Uni-Nova-114-Frauenstudium.html> (accessed 10.10.22).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Wecker (1990), "Basel und die Russinnen". In: HSB (ed.), "100 Jahre Frauen an der Uni Basel", p. 88.

<sup>64</sup> See section "Opinions of Faculty Members – Basel"

<sup>65</sup> Letter by Prof. Dr. Bücher to University of Basel's Regency on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1890, Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18, "Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904".

All these fears ultimately led to the very strict acceptance criteria for women at the university. The law enabling the enrollment of women only allowed foreign women who had obtained all of their previous education in the canton of Basel to be admitted,<sup>66</sup> de facto excluding them altogether. Only in 1914, 24 years after the initial admission of women, were the regulations changed to permit foreign women to study at the university if they could provide their country's equivalent to the Matura.

While the fear of foreign women was obviously a significant factor in delaying women's admission in Basel, one still has to consider that foreign *men* were never excluded from the university. Wecker argues that this can be explained by the men at the time being afraid eastern European "hyper emancipated" women would "corrupt" Swiss women with their way of thinking and thereby seeing them as a threat to domestic order.<sup>67</sup> Other possible reasons for the acceptance of foreign men only, could be the tradition-oriented university being reluctant to change its ways or, most obviously, biases against women as a whole.

The University of Basel's stance on foreigners illustrates the importance *timing* had in women's admission. In comparison to the liberal climate in which foreign women first appeared at the University of Zurich, Basel was confronted with the issue of women's enrollment at a time of increasing political unrest concerning foreigners. Additionally, Basel was provided with hindsight on the effects that foreign women had had on other universities and was therefore considerably more apprehensive than the University of Zurich, which was treading completely new waters.

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<sup>66</sup> Decision of the Governing Council of Basel-Stadt on March 7<sup>th</sup> 1890, Public Archives of Basel, File Erziehungsakten X 18 "Frauenstudium, Hospitantinnen 1889-1904".

<sup>67</sup> Wecker (1990), "Basel und die Russinnen". In: HSB (ed.), "100 Jahre Frauen an der Uni Basel", p. 88.

## Conclusion

Numerous factors influenced the process of women's admission to the universities of Basel and Zurich. While these factors may not necessarily have been of the same importance, each of them shaped the universities' path to the acceptance of women in its own manner.

While the University of Zurich's history resulted in a generally open and liberal climate, that of the University of Basel caused a conservative, rather elitist and traditionalist ideology to develop, which was detrimental to the process of women's enrollment.

The universities' administration was arguably the most important factor in paving the way for women's admission. Zurich's university was able to make the decision in favor of women's matriculation independently, while Basel ended up being forced to comply with its cantonal government's decision. 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.

At both universities the faculty members had a considerable amount of influence on the final decision. In Zurich this influence was greater due to their administrative proximity to the university's President, who ultimately made the decision to matriculate women, in accordance with faculty members' advice. In Basel, too, faculty members impacted the final decision. Their influence was lessened by the hierarchical superiority and distance of the decision-maker (the Governing Council) and the opinion of the Minister of Education who was closer to the Governing Council and opposed the faculty members' opinion.

Lastly, the universities' differing stances on foreign female students led to drastically different developments not only in women's admission but also in the criteria for said admission. Zurich, in a time of liberal policies and attitudes towards foreigners, was open towards foreign female students, which later proved to be a problem due to their lack of previous education. Basel was provided with hindsight and hence was greatly influenced by other universities' bad experiences, which, along with general shifting attitudes towards foreigners in Switzerland, resulted in a fear of foreign female students. It was this fear that was responsible for the eventual acceptance criteria of the University of Basel factually excluding foreign women.

In conclusion it can be said that all of these factors and, most importantly, their differences at the two universities, were what ultimately led to the development of the University of Zurich as a pioneer in women's admission, and Basel as a latecomer in the issue.



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## Images

Image on title page – Unknown Author, Bierzeitung Zürcher Studenten (ca. 1900), Untitled, from Universität Zürich (5.2.08), "Studio: Kaffeekranz und Bierfest" via <https://www.175jahre.uzh.ch/ausstellungen/gruenschnabel-weisskittel/objekte/Kneipe.html> (accessed 7.12.22) (*Unknown Author, Comic Newspaper of Male Students of Zurich (ca. 1900), Untitled, from University of Zurich (5.2.08), "Studio: Coffee Party and Beer Festival"*)

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Figure 3 – Postheiri (21.8.1868) "Ehmann-cipation der Frauen", via <https://unigeschichte.unibas.ch/fakultaeten-und-faecher/theologische-fakultaet/kleines-siegel-der-theologen-1> (accessed 7.12.22) (*Postheiri (satirical newspaper from the 19<sup>th</sup> century) (21.8.1868) "E-man-cipation of Women"*)