Professional Preparation
Concerns of the Normal College
of the American Gymnastic
Union (1866-1919)

EARLE F. ZEIGLER
The University of Western Ontario

This investigation involved an examination of selected professional preparation concerns
of the Normal College of the American Gymnastic Union from 1866 to 1919. Initially, the
stage was set by brief consideration of (1) social development after the Civil War, (2)
 improvements in general education, (3) advancement in physical education and sport, and
(4) what was happening in teacher preparation. Then the professional preparation
concerns, regarded as persistent historical problems of professional preparation in the
United States no matter which institution is being examined in any time frame, were traced
for the Normal College in each of the two time periods (1866-1889 and 1890-1919) as
follows: (1) admission requirements, (2) curriculum - aims and methods, (3) curriculum
- length of course and types of degrees, (4) curriculum - specific courses and trends, (5)
graduate study, (6) professional societies and periodicals (in-service training aids), and (7)
staff evolution. In each of the areas considered, there was progress from year to year, from
decade to decade, and from period to period. Occasional setbacks occurred, but this was
understandable because “progress is never a straight-line affair.” Turner historian,
Heinrich Metzner’s words rang true: “since the days of its beginning, when the ambitious
and inspired young men, imbued with the spirit of progress and freedom, transplanted
the ideals of Jahn to American soil, this organization has cleared its own path, and, in spite of
numerous internal and external conflicts, has never lost sight of the ultimate goal.” It can be
stated safely that there is continuing and abundant evidence that the Turners never had an
easy time keeping the School/College functioning down through the years. One can only
conclude that full credit should be given to a great many German-Americans in this regard.
These men and women of another age believed deeply in the value and importance of
developmental physical activity for people of all ages with a religious fervor that is rarely
present in professionals today. Somehow we must find it within us - as did these
German-Americans of the 19th and early 20th century-to unite our profession again as we
renew our efforts for the seemingly unending struggle ahead.