

Letters to the Editor

Address letters to the Editor, EXCALIBUR, York University. Those typed (double-spaced) are appreciated. Letters must be signed for legal reasons. A pseudonym will be used if you have a good reason.



Runaround creates frustration

This week I have had to ask myself two questions: a) Is inefficiency becoming a hallmark of York's administration, or b) Are York's secretarial staff plain stupid?

This article is not meant to be an accusation, but a request for information, and it is specifically aimed at the director of student programs.

This does not mean that I am questioning the efficiency and intelligence of the staff of student programs alone; efficiency and intelligence and/or stupidity are not localized phenomena at York! But, in the light of certain annoying episodes which occurred over the past two weeks, and in which I was the loser timewise, and very, very nearly patience-wise, I would like to focus my attention on that holy office of student programs.

Already in

It all began with my desire to record a course in which I was already enrolled, as an ungraded option. Way back around March/April, when I pre-registered at Glendon, I remember having had a chat with a worthwhile dean about my ungraded option. It was to be either psychology or social science. His advice to me was to wait until the fall when I had attended several classes, before I finally decided on one of the two.

Now that I am six months wiser, I would assume that even this dean himself was not fully acquainted with the technicalities of the ungraded options, since this option (I have been reliably informed by student programs) has to be a subject that could not form a major in another department.

But it seems that this ignorance about ungraded options is still shared by other worthwhile personages.

Sixth course

One geography professor and course director a week ago explained to me that he believed the ungraded option to be an extra course, that is, a sixth course; but suggested that he would prefer if I did not choose his geography course as my ungraded option; however, I'd better find out from student programs what it is all about. Above all, my noble advisor and I, upon joint consideration, decided that ungraded options were indicated on one's study timetable by simply writing "UC" somewhere nearest the subject in question! Et voila, problem solved!

Doubts nagged me all week. Too many people who I think should have known about such technicalities knew as much as I did. So I decided to approach that fountain of all wisdom — the office of student programs.

Not sufficient

There I discovered that my advisor's "UC" hadn't sufficed, that I was registered in the course as a graded course, and further, that the process of having this changed involved collecting a "drop graded card" and an "Add Ungraded Card" from the division concerned.

Then the fiasco began. Following are the activities, to the best of my knowledge, that had to be engaged in before I actually obtained the computer cards.

FIRST DAY:

a) Checked with a secretary in the division concerned in Winters College, re cards. Am directed to another secretary, in Founders College.

b) Secretary in Founders out. Probably out at lunch. Cannot wait.

SECOND DAY:

c) Secretary in Founders out again. Am assured she is at lunch. I wait. Secretary arrives. (She is dead on time! Score 10!) Secretary does not know what these add and drop cards are, if I want to remain in the course. Makes a call to another colleague. I try to help by furnishing details as concisely and as accurately as possible. Hurray! Colleague better informed. I am directed back to Winters College! (It is another secretary this time.)

d) Arrive Winters College. I gather this is the better informed colleague. I explain my mission

again, after waiting another 10 minutes to see her! Secretary discovers that she is not so well informed. Solicits information from student programs. Information supplied. I am directed back to Founders College! (I am pacing the floor by this time.)

e) Arrive Founders. Embarrassed secretary apologizes. She says "I'm sorry," I want to retort, "So am I." Did not retort "So am I." I finally get my cards. Wait! The professor has to sign them. Didn't student programs tell me that he has to sign them? No. Luckily he is in, or it might have meant an appointment.

f) Down a flight of stairs. Professor signs cards. Apologizes.

I don't know how I did not lose my cool, and I'm proud I didn't. But I feel that it is more constructive to find the source of the problem than to attack those caught up in the bureaucracy of it all.

Didn't know

I inquired of both secretary and professor where they thought the problem lay. The secretary admitted that to the best of her knowledge no communication reached her concerning the handling of ungraded courses. She knew about dropping courses and taking on new ones; but she confessed ignorance about what to do in a case like mine. I believed her. She didn't look particularly dumb to me, and her punctuality attested to her efficiency.

The professor felt that lack of proper communication between student programs and secretaries was at the base of the problem.

My case is not unique. I guess many other students have come

up, in the past two weeks, with similar occurrences of total chaos.

My partial sympathy is extended to the secretaries, for I was once a secretary, and I know the feeling when the angry public comes dashing in and the secretary doesn't quite know what to do because the big wheels up there somewhere don't communicate too often!

Little time

But I am no longer a secretary! I am a student, with precious little time to waste hopping from building to building, office to office, secretary to secretary, hoping that somebody knows more than I do.

I think perhaps that students have been too passive in the face of such alarming inefficiency.

To mask inefficiency by all sorts of jargonized garbage like "Chaos is part of university life" is to perpetuate inefficiency. I am not here talking about personal and individual chaos. I am referring to organizational inefficiency.

Either that, or the secretaries maybe are dumb! But as I said earlier, I didn't think the particular secretary in question was dumb, and I have no reason to suspect that the others may be less gifted!

Not accusing

But this article is not meant to be an accusation, and I invite the director of student programs to give us students who have to tolerate this back-tracking and triplication of physical effort, some indication as to where the source of

all this general ignorance of course technicalities lies.

I am here assuming that students are not supposed to be knowledgeable about such technicalities, and we only become knowledgeable in these matters through contact with the secretaries for the different departments and divisions.

This also raises another question as regards the secretaries themselves. Perhaps they are not fully aware that a couple of thousand students depend on their knowledgeability, and their role in the university is a vital one.

If adequate communication is not being afforded them, then they cease functioning as useful members of the staff.

Perhaps it might be in their own interest as well as the students who depend on them, to demand that information is supplied them, to ensure optimum levels of efficiency.

4 questions

Furthermore, I discard totally any attempt to excuse this widespread ignorance, by the novelty of the exercise (all this stuff about ungraded options). I feel that the problem lies in one or all of the following questions:

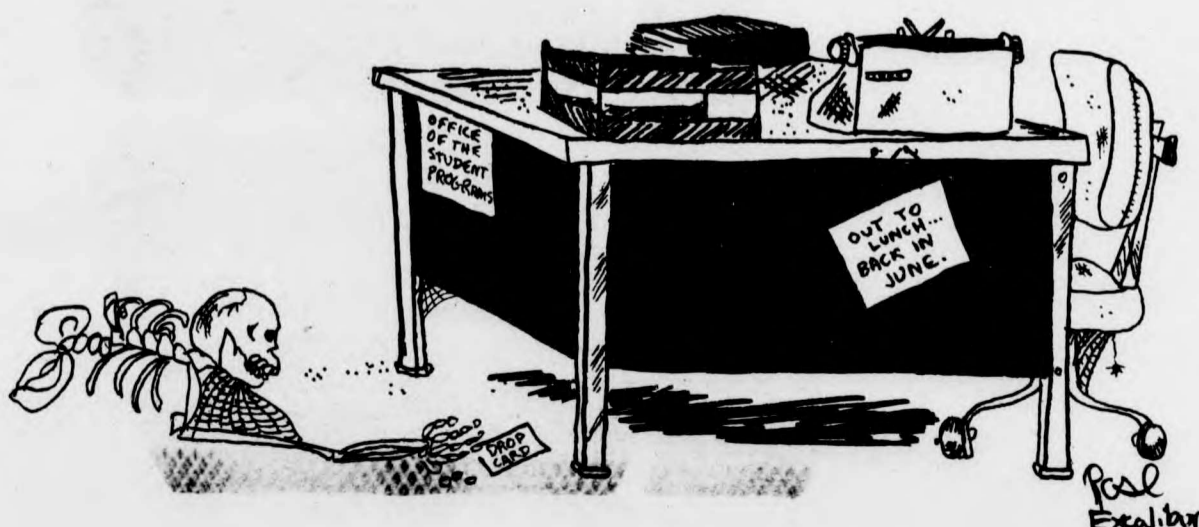
1. Is it that student programs themselves do not know what they are all about?

2. Is it a question of a shortage of secretarial and clerical staff which would make the usual modes of inter-departmental communication well nigh impossible?

Just dumb?

3. Could it be that proper communication has been circulated, clearly and efficiently, in this respect, and that some secretaries (it might look like the majority!) and faculty members (majority too?) have simply not armed themselves with this information?

4. Or, that despite my sympathetic feelings toward them, York secretaries are plain dumb? Perhaps the director of student programs might have additional suggestions.



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