

FREE SPEECH

With York's good intentions gone are we headed for crash landing?

Student complains of inhuman conveyor belt mentality

What is happening to York University? Twenty years ago, when York was still a blue-eyed baby, healthy and promising, it was to be all wisdom-searching, freedom, open concepts, nonconformity, and real liberal arts. The student was not to be urged into specific directions, but was to be encouraged to follow his intellectual curiosity in whichever direction it led him. He would be relatively free from the competition of grades and completely free from the tethering of 'superior' opinions. What happened to those noble intentions of those first years?

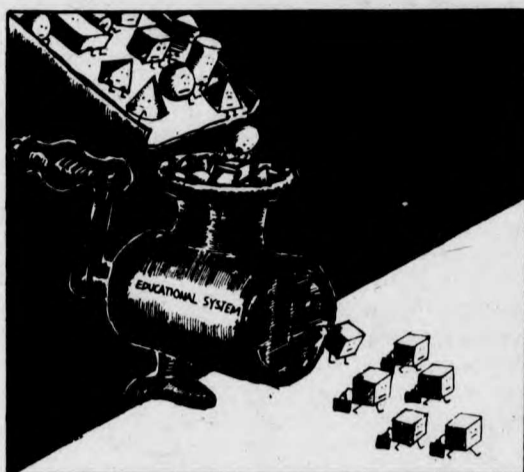
Of course, we must always allow a certain amount of room for dreams to come to earth, but it seems we have been deliberately piloted to a crash landing.

I can understand that because of enrollment and funding, we cannot have the medical school and the additional faculties we were to have had by this time, but the least we can do is strive for excellence as best we can in the departments we do have.

Emphasis has shifted

The sad thing is that over the past twenty years, the emphasis in post-secondary education has shifted to career-oriented programmes that put you on a conveyor belt, the only purpose of which is to move the student to a position in a specific field. "My son, seek wisdom..." has become, "My son, seek to learn whatever you have to learn to get a high-paying job." Are we learning to see with our own eyes or are we learning to conform? Do we process the data or does the data process us?

Over the past few years, our once unique Humanities Department has had dozens of quality courses thrown out. Many more will follow, no doubt, when they discontinue the first year required Humanities. (If anything, it should be the Natural Science that is dropped, since York is still more of an arts than a science institution.) Actually, I wouldn't be surprised to see all first year requirements eliminated soon, in an effort to have the students specialize as soon as possible.



Many of the open-minded, or interdisciplinary courses in all departments are being dropped. You cannot even pick up a Psychology or a Sociology without first going through the imbecile first year 'core' course! In Fine Arts, individual creativity is not nearly as important as particular and fashionable themes, and certain styles and techniques are pushed, according to the tastes of the instructors. Some of the greatest books and essays are no longer found on any reading list; indeed, some of the greatest thinkers are being ignored altogether. What you wish to learn is no longer important, only what you are destined to learn simply by enrolling in a certain programme!

Even sciences falling behind

The general trend seems to be that liberal arts, especially 'useless' programmes such as philosophy, religion, and humanities, should all be swept aside for the sake of the 'sciences of progress'. But recently at York, even the sciences seem to be falling behind. We no longer hear about the tremendous discoveries here in genetics.

When they start closing universities, will York be among the first to go? Perhaps the sooner we go, the better it will be; wouldn't it be better to go out like a martyr before mediocrity and careerism devour us completely?

But where do we lay the blame? Is it the cutbacks? Certainly that is part of it, but the very lack of interest in the recent 'no cutbacks' week points at a larger problem. It seems that most of us are unwilling to stand a little bit of rain in order to voice our disapproval of education cutbacks. But they tell me they had to cancel the Moot Court symposium that same day (for which six speakers were lined up), because it appeared that nobody was going to attend it. Not only was it out of the rain, but it was right on campus! What accounts for this incredible lack of concern? I realize that there are plenty of Camero-driving, rich-parent-supported Economics majors who just want to party all the time, but surely there must be a remnant that still cares about the quality of their education? Didn't students formerly get upset over much less significant issues?

Speeding up the conveyor belt

Maybe I am mistaken. Most of the students I come into contact with are just interested in speeding up the conveyor belt in whatever way and with as little effort as possible. The eternal question more and more is: "What are you going to do when you get your B.A.?"

Twenty years ago, they tell me, sheep were grazing in the fields of the new university. Today, they are still grazing, quiet and submissive, in their respective fields. There is an old rumour that generations ago the sheep ate the green grass of wisdom, but now they eat feed that is prepared for them. There are fewer and fewer interdisciplinary sheep and pure-bred liberal arts sheep. Rarely do the sheep bleat as the landowners place them on wool-producing or meat-producing conveyor belts.

Are we narrow-mindedly welcoming this system that eats and digests us and flushes us into the economic labyrinth?

Wes Wikkertnk is a 5th year York student. The opinions expressed in this article are his and do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff and editors of Excalbur.

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