

forum5

point

Poisoning the well

I never made it through the Worth Report on educational planning. Before this I've always said that a bit apologetically, thinking that until I had read it, I'd better not venture to say anything about it.

But having read the briefs submitted by various campus groups to the Cabinet Committee on Education (from which we've printed excerpts in today's centre section), I feel more confident that the "excuse" I always gave for not finishing the report is a genuine and defensible reason.

My difficulty in reading the Report was that I insistently assumed that such an impressive document must make sense. It wasn't possible that after having spent nearly \$500,000 and four years in preparing the Report that its writer(s?) could make such elementary errors in logic as it seemed to me were being made.

So I kept trying--trying to reconcile the report's humanistic "self-actualization" with its advocacy of depersonalized techno-teaching; I tried to believe Dr. Worth's assurances that the report was designed to reach "tens of thousands of Albertans," in spite of the five syllable words which took over the text a few pages later. For every four pages of forward progress, I had to read one page backward to see if I was misunderstanding the apparent contradictions, or if indeed they were double-talk born of double-think.

I managed twenty-six pages. But now I make no apologies--for two reasons:

First, the report just is contradictory, not to mention apparently unresearched, assertive and written in the worst of social-science jargon, replete with made-up terms like "second-phase-industrial society."

As an undergrad I often scorned the rigmarole of the footnote process--admittedly because most of what I said was never very new or contentious--lots of people had said it before, so why go to all the trouble?

But what the Worth Commission says is contentious and there's a likelihood that the provincial government may act on its recommendations. When they claim that the ideal size of the university is between 20,000 and 25,000, they'd better tell us who says so--and why. When they say that the technology for computer assisted instruction is at hand, they'd better tell the profs in computer science where this technology is coming from--and tell us all how much it will cost.

For term papers documentation and research may not be all that crucial--but for a governmental report recommending changes as sweeping as those of the Worth report, they are absolutely necessary.

Secondly, even if I had read the report, it seems its writers have already anticipated what I might have said about it, and already convinced other readers not to listen to me.

When I was a debator we used to call this technique "poisoning the well." It works like this--first, you present your own arguments--then you say "now my opponent will tell you different, but he's a notorious liar." No matter how reasoned the second speaker's arguments may be, the suggestion that he's probably lying destroys his chances of persuading you.

From my reading of these briefs, I sense that this is precisely the tactic used in the Worth Report. It manages to paint defenders of any part of the present university system as elitist, lazy and self-serving individuals, who, like the notorious liar, must not be trusted in anything they say about the report.

I've never been more than a reluctant lover of the university, but I resent both as a student and as an Albertan this attempt to stifle one important source of comment on the Commission's report, the University.

Terri Jackson

Letters to the editor on any topic are welcome, but they must be signed. Keep them short (about 200 words) unless you wish to make a complex argument. Letters should not exceed 800 words.

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GATEWAY

letters



lights out

Recently I attended a showing of a fine film entitled "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis" at the Klondike Cinema. Since I felt that film is a valid art form when it is at its best I was more than a little upset when near the end of the movie the management felt moved to drop the curtain and bring up the house lights before the movie was totally finished, thus disturbing the final effect of the movie which the director had so lovingly crafted and rendering it incomplete. The possibility of reading any credits there might have been vanished. Being somewhat disturbed by this callous attitude I approached the management to make what I felt was a legitimate complaint. I was not alone in my feelings and was joined by a number of others of a like mind. Having stated my case that she was rendering both the artist and his audience a disservice by presenting less than the total work I was met by a display of unbridled righteousness which I decided to ignore thinking perhaps that she had regarded my complaint as a direct attack on her competence as a theatre manager by a mere person possessed of no more than a Messianic gleam in his eye and a shaggy appearance. This was affirmed when others following me were rewarded by a calmer exterior. Thinking the injustice to have been corrected I was dismayed to find the problem continuing to flourish a few days later. Since the manager seems more than reluctant to run her theatre along some semblance of respect for the artists whose films are being offered to the public perhaps an overwhelming abundance of complaints is the only answer. If there are any others who are disturbed by this tendency to shortchange the relationship between art and audience I hope they will take the time to confront the manager with her incompetence and make a complaint to this effect.

J. Alan Munro
Grad. Studies

legacy

I am writing this open letter as a last desperate effort to save the university from the new Business Administration building. The building will attach to the Tory Building, destroying the unity of form and materials of that building and will intrude into the green area in front of the Arts Building, taking even more of the open space still left on the campus and destroying a line of fine old elm trees. The university administrator is absolutely determined to go ahead with the building, with the certain result that one more element will be

added to the terrible clutter of the ugliest campus in Canada.

Of course the university has a few attractive spots and buildings. For example, the new law, humanities and fine arts buildings are most attractive and the new landscaping on the campus is uniformly excellent. Yet the new medical building may be the ugliest building of all and its chief competitors include the new engineering building, the new biological sciences building, the new Central Academic Building and the new Students' Union Housing Building. Whatever these buildings are like inside, they are ugly abominations outside where most students, staff and public see them. The whole effect of the university is absolutely terrible. And now a new Business Administration building will add to that effect.

I urge the Students' Union, the Academic and Non-Academic staff associations, the Board of Governors, the University Senate, the Government, and the public to act quickly and strongly to stop the university now before it makes yet another blunder. We must at least insist that an independent inquiry be made of the Business Administration building. Beyond that, we should ask that an effort be made in restorative architecture and landscaping if we do not succeed, we will curse ourselves and leave generations to come with an appalling legacy of monumental ugliness.

Richard Baird
Political Science

Lambert

In a recent issue of your newspaper, a front page story highlighted it's report on the candidates' forum of October 5 with a statement of mine in quotes relative to abortion on demand. This subject was much to the fore in the early questioning despite the fact that it is quite a non-issue at other meetings.

I am not claiming that I was misquoted. I think the sense of what I did say became distorted when all that I said was not quoted. Since the expression I used seemed to offend some of the audience, I withdrew the remarks. That others were offended when they read the Gateway story I am aware. It was not my intention to be offensive to anyone - my choice of language was unfortunate though I have read the same expression in a widely read syndicated column in the Edmonton Journal. If I have offended I apologize.

This does not alter my view that too much time and concern is being spent on the matter of abortion on demand. To me it would be much better to concentrate on the circumstances leading up to the need for an abortion. More attention to education on birth control methods and their proper use is needed. So is a moral re-education on permissiveness and promiscuity for both sexes. That is the thesis I was trying to convey.

Marcel Lambert

a sleeper

An open letter to B. B. Peel, Librarian to the University:

There is a grave problem concerning the welfare of students using the Cameron

Library which I feel should be brought to your notice. Whilst in the Library, I have noticed that many poor students have nowhere to sleep but in their study carrels. Surely in these enlightened times it should prove possible to provide proper sleeping accommodation for these unfortunates. Perhaps one of the many library offices could be furnished with divans, or it might even be feasible to install bunk beds on the uppermost library shelves.

Such a provision would also serve to free the carrels for the very considerable number of students, including my humble self, who wish to use the library for study.

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Jesus

The editorial "Counterpoint" last week on the subject of evangelistic literature both missed the point and begged the question. It deserves some sort of academic reply, and since the "Jesus People" sort are not very academic in their interests perhaps I can do it for them.

It is true that literature is a bad substitute for personal communication, especially when the matter communicated is of such fundamental significance as religious questions, and especially when such literature has poor content or is insensitive to the variety and characters of the individuals for whom it is intended. If your editorial writer had any point to make at all, it was surely this one. Whether the recent inundation of the campus by a "Jesus People Newspaper" was an offensive example inpoint is surely a matter of broad opinion, however, and I for one have seen a lot worse.

The parting shot by the editorial writer was a fine piece of pro-motherhood-and-the-flag work. The suggestion that "the spiritual experience" be brought "back into our own heads... where it really belongs" is one whose general value may be judged by the very manifest level of piety, love and moral concern shown by the assorted 15,000 heads on this campus.

As for begging the question, it is a mark of something we believe to be true (as distinct from that which merely satisfies us personally) that we hold it and express it with universal intent, as valid for others also. I, and most other Christians, happen to think our religion is true, not merely comforting, and it is on that basis we propagate it and have done so for almost two thousand years. To suggest that we put it "back in our heads" rather than talk about it is to assume at the outset that it cannot be true. Have you tried learning physics or philosophy that way?

Walter R. Thorson
Chemistry

Tony Chan

Would the person who wrote the letter about the death of Tony Chan please get in touch with the Gateway. We need to know who you are before we can print the letter.