

CYSF course survey next week for counter-calendar

Got a beef about your courses? All next week you can formulate those criticisms in a course evaluation project sponsored by Council of the York Student Federation.

The \$7,500 project is designed to seriously evaluate the courses, teaching, readings and tutorials offered by the faculty of arts. The tabulated results will form the basis of a counter-calendar for next year.

Students will distribute and collect the questionnaire in first, second, and third year classes. The faculty of arts has 6,200 students.

There are 28 questions with choices of answers "negative" and "affirmative" on a scale of one to five. Attached is a blank sheet for opinions. The questions will be computer tabulated, and the opinion sheets will eventually go to the department evaluated.

Rick Marshall and Kevin Anstey, second year law students, are handling the administration work for the project. They run a company called Jobtrak, and have between 75 to 80 jobs on a two day basis for students interested in distributing and collecting the forms. The pay rate is \$1.75 an hour. Application forms are available in Room 121

Vanier College. In addition, a full-time secretary at \$100 a week for two weeks is needed.

Marshall and Anstey have a

contract with CYSF to publish 6,000 copies of the 350 page counter-calendar before pre-registration on March 15.

Alternative to residence in Calumet and Vanier forms

Up to now, residence life at York meant living in a high-rise tower of bedrooms. Now Calumet and Vanier colleges have come on the scene with an alternative, communal farms.

Black Dog Farm at Stouffville is home for eight members of the Calumet Conspiracy. The conspiracy, which does not exist, is the name of Calumet's college council. Calumet doesn't have its own building and operates out of temporary quarters in Atkinson College. Actually, only 27 Calumet students live in residence, on the ninth floor of the Stong tower.

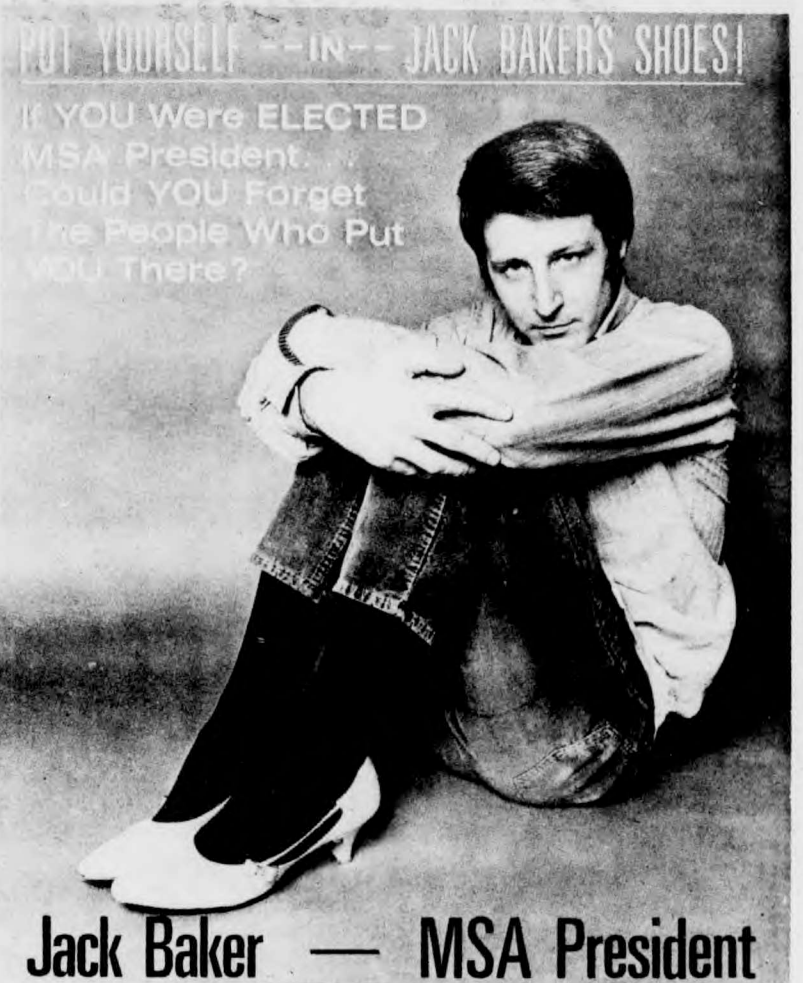
Calumet has leased the farm, and pays \$100 of the \$275 monthly rent. The farm residents split the other expenses. The farm is on 20 acres of land, with a swimming pond and a trout stream. The black dog who left his name as a legacy has since run

off, but three other dogs and an abundance of puppies have taken his place.

Tutorial leader Jack Hobbs has organized a food co-operative with other farms in the area, so that staple items, like honey, oats, flour and salt are cheaply acquired.

Sprouting from the Calumet example is the newly leased Vanier farm at Sutton, 65 miles outside Toronto. The monthly rental rate for the farm is \$225. According to organizers Chuck Brand and Dennis Long, only Vanier college students are eligible for occupancy.

Transportation is the main problem. Right now, with the uncertain weather, Calumet farm people are often stranded in Toronto. But participants feel the advantages of the communal living experiment outweigh any of the inconveniences.



Jack Baker — MSA President

Jack Baker and Mike McConnell, American homosexuals now fighting for their right to marry, will speak on Same-Sex marriages tomorrow at 7:30 pm, Room D of Curtis Lecture Hall.

Controversial Stong proposal sees new learning methods

By CARLA SULLIVAN

"We're not throwing out all the traditional ways of learning; we're not saying there will be no classes or formal essays or anything like that," said Stong master Virginia Rock. She's the chief proponent of the controversial Stong proposal which is a new approach to learning, an approach characterized not so much by what is learned as how it is learned.

"The university has vast sources of knowledge to offer and some very exciting things going on — it would be ridiculous to say 'we throw all this out.' But I do feel some students acquire valid educational experience outside the classroom."

"For instance, the activity a student puts into producing a play — if he gets credit in a technical course, he ought to get the same recognition for what he does on his own."

The Stong proposal outlines a program under which such experience is recognized. One hundred Stong College students, 25 from each undergraduate level, would design their own academic programs and graduate not with a degree but with a dossier of their work. Each must accumulate five credits a year, but work will be ungraded and no specific courses required. Emphasis is placed instead upon independent study, each student working closely with an advisor to define his own academic needs and map out a program geared to them.

"Normally," the proposal reads, "courses will be created by students and teachers together" — individual work projects as well as the more traditional classes.

Bureaucracy

Last November the subcommittee on academic planning recommended that the senate academic policy and planning committee not approve the Stong Proposal. Their objections, says Rock, focuses on the difficulty of evaluating the program. "Without a set curriculum or grades, it seems too vague," she said.

But perhaps the strength of the program lies in this very lack of definition. What Rock calls the most crucial element of the Stong experiment — is the skill students acquire through structuring their own education. In effect, Stong students will be learning to learn, learning to structure experience not only at York but

presumably "on the outside" as well. Miss Rock recognizes a very real need for that skill:

"An employer I know asks his applicants 'if you could have this job, what would you want to do with it?' Nine out of ten applicants answer 'Uh... I don't know.'"

If current programs — however well-defined and evaluated — are inspiring in people no more than this "job-market mentality", perhaps those people would benefit from less evaluation. More, perhaps, they would benefit from learning to define their own needs — learning to recognize and effectively choose between many options — while still within the relative shelter of the university.

The Stong College experiment is designed to teach just that. Rock emphasizes, "The student's program will not necessarily differ in curriculum or content. But he will be challenged to assume responsibility for it."

New learning

To this end, the proposal stresses ways of learning other than progression through predefined, hierarchially arranged subjects. Stong students are not isolated from the rest of York. Rock remarks that if a student spots a course in the faculty of law, for example, that seems of value to his program, he would be encouraged to take it. But the decision should rest on his own perception of what his program demands and more, on what he feels he can handle: "It's ridiculous for a first-year student to come to York and be told 'No, you may not take a second or third year course in your first year.' Students bring a body of knowledge with them to the university — they are not blank slates."

And even more vital is the flexibility the proposal offers for independent study — student development of courses geared directly to individual interests and plans. Essentially, students "do" rather than study about "doing" — and produce plays or design costumes, work with retarded children or write a novel. "The possibilities are endless," Rock says, in a time when a BA alone is virtually worthless, she adds,

"This kind of background — real interaction with people and real experience at tasks — is probably of some value to prospective employers."

Flaws

She readily admits that the program

may have flaws but she does not believe it is unworkable, even given the fact that most students have spent some 13 years in the more traditional school system. She agrees that difficulties may arise and are perhaps more an indictment of widespread educational practises than of the program. Similar programs have succeeded elsewhere, notably Hampshire College in Massachusetts and Antioch College in Ohio.

Moreover, she says, "It's a self-perpetuating myth that you can't have change at the top. There are changes already."

But Rock emphasizes that the advisor's role in the program is crucial. In an almost totally unstructured situation, it is easy for even the most highly motivated student to flounder. To prevent that, close interaction between student, teacher, and advisor is of paramount importance.

And, Rock reiterates, the program is not for everyone. High marks, for example, are not necessarily criteria for admittance. Once in, the student is expected to produce; he is subject to standards perhaps even more stringent than those imposed in the University at large. But fulfillment of those standards will be taken for granted. The sort of student who is admitted to the program, she summarizes, has not sought high marks as an end in themselves. He is interested in learning — a task, an idea. Grades become incidental.

Critics of the program have charged that

because it is so small, and perhaps because selection of students is arbitrary, it is elitist. Miss Rock protests vehemently.

Not elitist

"I dislike the word elitist intensely. Along with that goes certain assumptions about 'the privileged few', and this gets tied up with economic status and class status and so on."

"If you define elitist as a certain group of people doing a certain thing that others can't do then yes, it is elitist. But that is not saying that a person of a certain income-level is not eligible."

"One person objected to the program as being simply a perpetuation of middle-class opportunities, and that it still would not basically change things because some people who might have the potential and creativity to participate would never get into the University in the first place. I think this is a very great danger, and I think it's very important for people who do not have the income and no possible way of acquiring it to have the opportunity to study with student loans or grants."

"But to talk about the 'privileged few' — you know, 'wow, you don't have to worry about grades or anything' — well, they may be worrying about a lot of other things."

She said the Stong experiment might be viewed as a kind of pilot-study which, if successful, could be implemented on a larger scale:

No octopus

"As a small college, we're not really in a position to design programs for the university as a whole. But there are some students for whom enough options like these simply do not exist, and they are dropping out altogether. "One boy told me, two months before he was to graduate, that what he really wanted to do was write. He'd taken the writing course we offered. And he left."

"I can't really see us, like a giant octopus, reaching out to enfold the whole university! But if some aspects of the program seem valuable, perhaps they can be incorporated into York's structure."

Rock concludes, "We have to do some very careful thinking about what education really means. In the past, I think, it has been far too narrowly defined. Perhaps it is time now to think, 'education for what?' or 'education to what end?'"



Stong master Virginia Rock.