

LECTURERS? YES OR NO

In this university there are frequent upbraids of the apathetic by the allegedly non-athletic. And most of us realize that we are to varying degrees, apathetic in our attitudes to study and to extra curricular activities. As proof of the generality, we have the regularly be-moaned student failure rate and the very limited support received by most university clubs and societies. The reasons for this general apathetic attitude seems obscure, but recently in "On Dit" it was suggested that the blame may be laid, in part at least, at the staff door. I regret to say that is apparently the case.

On the whole there is a singular lack of enthusiasm shown by students toward most of their lecture material. Who can blame them? The majority of lectures presented in the faculty would not fire anyone with enthusiasm. Presentation is often a thing of equation, derivation listings of prescriptions and descriptions, and the like—all delineated with dubious clarity, due to the prevalence of poor handwriting and dictation of some lecturers, large numbers of students find that their lecture notes must be re-written if they are to serve any useful purpose; the majority of students could not understand a lecture fully without pondering over their lecture notes for some considerable time. This occurs because on taking lectures the student is faced with two alternatives. One—listen to the lecturer and follow, if he can, his train of thought, taking only brief notes to be expanded on later. Two—write furiously every word the lecturer says and/or writes. In this second instance it is not possible to understand any but the simplest of lectures, and any explanations must be noted, not

listened to, as the student has little idea of what is being explained or the difference between salient points of the explanation and accompanying waffle.

The solution to this chaotic situation is surely obvious. Why not issue complete printed lecture notes? This would do away with recitals of proffs, etc. The lecturer merely need say from what facts the proof follows—what the proof means, its place and what it is used for could then be elaborated on. As things are, most students are left with very fuzzy ideas of what the proofs really mean, what the symbols that constitute it stand for, and in some cases why anybody ever bother to prove them anyway! This matter of understanding the meaning of symbols and proofs is especially important in the more theoretical or vague subjects—e.g., thermodynamics.

Speaking of symbols, what a pity it would be if the department adopted some standard set of symbols instead of the higgledy-poggedy elections offered selections offered by the staff new. With the present system of lecturing it is difficult enough to obtain a clear picture of a concept without complicating the matter by offering the same function in different guises in different, but connected, subjects.

No need to stop at symbol unification either, a bit of course unification would not go astray throughout the department (and connected science departments). There occurs useless repetition of subject matter, complicated by confusing deviations in derivations. This causes unnecessary muddling of ideas in addition to being a plain waste of time and effort on everybody's behalf.

"ANONYMOUS"

Then there's practical work. Many practicals are marred by lack of obvious purpose, poor programming in relation to relevant lectures, or malfunctioning or antique equipment. The usefulness of many practicals is reduced by long and tedious write-ups obscuring the points in view with verbosity. Practical designed to make points and to invite enquiry would be the thing. Projects of duration of several practical periods on less stereotyped subjects would surely give the senior students a chance to indulge in some original thought.

Also, if full reports are necessary why not adopt the LATEST accepted manner of report writing preferably the latest in vogue overseas. If any part of the community should be abreast of the latest is should be the University. Perhaps these things would change the attitude of students—that practicals are merely a necessary evil. As it is the large amount of time required in practical work is out of all proportion with the small benefits received from it. But possibly practical work is limited by available money.

Greater use could be made also of the homework tutorial problem. It has been said that ambitious students will do problems and seek their solution of their own accord but this argument is fallacious in that most would prefer to clarify their own knowledge of the subject rather than indulge in the time wasting search and solution of the problems. Not only this, good problems, corrected and returned with a printed solution show the student the way to a better approach to problems. Needless to say, the sooner the problems are returned the better. If they can't

be marked it doesn't matter if the solution is set out clearly.

In asking for these things I don't think I'm asking for the moon nor do I wish to be spoon-fed. I am not condemning lecturers wholesale as not all are guilty, in fact it is a fact that some lecturers adopt these methods already. (At the moment it is doubtful whether they gain anything by this as the student tends to spend his time unravelling his more confused lectures rather than in studying those which are clearly printed.)

The presentation of "real lectures" in conjunction with printed notes would give the student a clear idea of his subject. Many students at the moment complete a subject, sit for and pass the exams with very little idea of what it's all about. It is quite possible to pass exams at this University by mass cramming and parrot learning of lecture (if you'll pardon my misuse of the word) material and by learning of a few standard problems. You can often get a credit—even a distinction on this basis—and don't laugh, because it's been done. The exams are simply too easy—Not for the students in their present state though. Because most lectures are not presented clearly so few students understand them—hence the exams cannot test the student in his ingenuity and use of the principles he has learned—but merely ask for a recitation of those principals.

Few of us could talk sensibly about the theoretical sides of

our subjects as we never heard anybody else talk about it. All we ever hear are dictation of derivatives. Often you tend to wonder whether even the lecturer could. It all adds up to the fact that most lecturers could be replaced by test complete with a section on type problems and bibliography. Give a capable student one of these in each subject and he'd do just as well if not better in most.

But with the wholesale adoption of the printed notes and lecture-cum-talk, waste student time would be cut and the student being more knowledgeable in his subject would have both the time and more likely the inclination to even read an outside book on his subject, may be even critically. A complete understanding is the only thing that can engender such an enthusiasm. In such lectures there would be room for him to speak and set an example to the student of organized thought not the disorganized arrangement currently popular.

And so the University might produce a graduate, who, because he has to waste less time has had the time to enter the University non-faculty societies, and because his mind has been stimulated more skillfully he has become more enquiring and consequently more likely to be interested in such societies.

So it would see mlikely that this graduate could think and would be an engineer or scientist and not one of the exam-crammed technologists—for they are little else—forthcoming.

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