

Doing more than

COPING

by Terri Jackson

Assuming that you have been de-mystified by the two previous popular mechanics explanations of how this degree-mill works (or doesn't), today we explore how the machine can be repaired.

Imagine, the first universities were groups of students who got together and hired a professor to teach them what they wanted to know, and fired him when he couldn't or wouldn't do that. The machine has really broken down.

The first step for the restoration is to actually go to a GFC meeting. They're usually held on Monday afternoons, but phone the Gateway office (432-5168) to find out the date of the next meeting (why not volunteer to report on the meeting for Gateway while you're at it?).

Meetings are held in the GFC chambers of University Hall (the building with the lewd carving on the front—next to the P.E. building—otherwise known as the old SUB).

Walk in the imposing front doors, up the flight of stairs, turn left down a short hall-way and walk right through the forbidding solid wood doors in front of you.

This puts you in the plushly carpeted ante-chamber where you will find some secretaries sitting at their desks. You don't need their permission to be there or to go into the chamber—but you can give them a friendly smile.

The door to the left leads you to the public 'gallery' which is actually a row of chairs around the edge of the room. Have a chair and watch the proceedings.

The only no-nos are that you can't join in the discussions and you're not supposed to sit at the desks (which have electronic voting buttons on them—they're afraid you might be tempted).

I've gone into this much detail because the whole thing is intimidating—and because I used that as an excuse for three years before I finally ventured into a GFC meeting. But now you don't have that excuse—right?

At the GFC meeting you will notice a number of important things. You will notice that maybe only half of the 46 student reps are at the meeting, but all 24 administrators and most of the 48 profs are there.

You will notice two or three students who make you say "Wow—they're really persuasive talkers, skillful users of parliamentary procedure, thoughtful people."

But you'll see an equal number who make you want to crawl into the plush of the carpet, or pull out your pipe and pretend you're a professor. The whole council (fellow students included) titters when they are recognized to speak. Being on council is an ego-thing with them. They are obnoxious and ill-prepared.

And you'll notice that most of the student reps don't say or do anything at all except vote. But at least they've come to the meeting which is better than nothing.

You'll also notice that students have allies among the profs—surprising but true.

After you've gone to a meeting or two, phone up one of the GFC reps from your faculty—preferably one who actually attends council meetings—and arrange to have coffee with him or her between classes. (The Students' Union receptionist—432-4236—or the SU vice-president academic should be able to give you a home phone number.)

Over coffee talk with your rep about what you think is wrong with this place—and what you want to see done about it.

Once you've met a GFC rep in the flesh—and pick a good one, not a dud—you'll see that they are ordinary mortals trying to make the whole system a bit more humane and at the same time, like you, trying to finish a degree.

This fact established, volunteer to serve on a GFC committee. (It's not quite as simple as volunteering—your name is submitted to the nominations committee which then seeks ratification from the council.) But you don't have to be a member of GFC; all you have to do is indicate your willingness to serve.

Do that by phoning Pat Maertz (a member of the GFC secretariat) at 432-4965. Ask her what student positions are vacant (there will be lots, sadly enough) and for a capsule summary of what the committees which sound interesting do.

The shopping list of committees includes the committee on computer facilities and policy (tired of undergrads having last priority on the computer?), a committee on investigation of teaching (tired of the unimaginative use of mass lectures in every course?), a committee on admissions requirements (did you get screwed in trying to transfer credits from another school?), etc.

Whether you decide to work on a GFC committee or not, plan to run for a GFC seat next spring. Elections are in late March. The nomination process is easy. Your opposition will be slight—there are usually only ten contenders for every nine seats. And best of all,

the Students' Union will reimburse you for up to \$20 of your campaign expenses.

If you're able to say you've worked on a GFC committee this year, your chances are that much better.

But don't stop once you're elected. The next step is to pull the student delegation together—so that student reps stand together on vital student issues.

Here one caution is in order. Too many student reps have swallowed the line that every rep to GFC votes independently on the merit of proposals brought before the council.

By the time you've gone to two meetings you'll be able to see how much BS that is and in whose interest it is to keep students believing that.

On issues that affect the interests of profs—like tenure or student evaluation or teacher competence—the profs and administrators close ranks; the voting blocs are almost solid.

Independence of reps is a myth invented to keep students divided. Students have common interests which are different from those of administrators or faculty members and we must get ourselves together to protect those interests.

That means getting together between GFC meetings and sorting out student positions. It means that the Law rep must condescend to talk to the Arts rep.

It means a whole lot more, but the first priority is simply to fill those 46 seats with intelligent, conscientious people and the rest will be much simpler. (By the way, the very fact that you've bothered to read this far qualifies you as intelligent and conscientious.)

There's an even tougher task than improving student representation of GFC—that's representation at the faculty and department level.

After our pseudo-student-revolt of 1968, many departments and faculties set up the machinery for student representation. But they were smart—not really wanting a student voice in decision-making at those levels, they set up all sorts of impossible requirements for the election of representatives.

They are impossible, because they require that reps be elected by a faculty or department undergrad association (made up of a certain percentage of enrolment); associations which in most faculties are dying or already dead.

The fatal diseases were lack of participation and lack of money. Of these two, the easier to solve is the lack of money. In every SU budget there is provision for a per-student grant to any faculty association which requests it.

To revitalize your faculty association, get some of your friends and classmates together and go to talk with the SU vice-president academic, Patrick Delaney, about getting started.

Some faculties are lucky enough to have fairly stable associations—such as engineering and commerce. If you're in one of those faculties with a healthy faculty association, get involved in it to ensure that it is protecting students' interests in the faculty with the same zeal it organizes dances and beerbusts.

The last way to change things around here is simply to make a lot of noise. A fine example of this tactic was last year's fight to keep the Business Administration and Commerce building out of the arts court.

It was masterminded by one gutsy student and a small group he was able to fire up. This group submitted briefs to the relevant campus committees, got Students' Council to sponsor a referendum on the building, and wrote letters to the editor of *The Gateway* about the building.

I'm only sorry that the campaign didn't have the desired outcome—but it was one hell of a try.

Which brings us to a bit of philosophy about student activism—what it can achieve and whether it's worth the effort. Critics will quite rightly argue that what I have equipped students for in these three articles is only incrementalism: fight one fight here, another there; maybe you make changes in the registration system, but you don't alter the fundamental direction of the university.

My only reply is: Yes, it is incrementalism—but look around you any day in CAB cafeteria and judge for yourself what the chances are for student revolution here.

But if we can only accomplish incremental change, is it worth it? Wouldn't it be easier just to blindly get that degree and get out of this place?

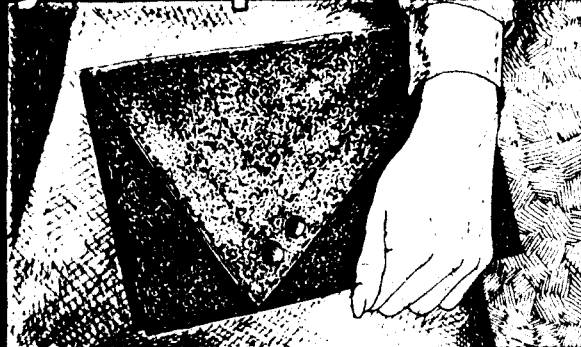
Sure, it would be easier. But maybe the unquestioned exercise of power over people's lives bothers you like it does me—a power that the university has had for too long.

Maybe you see some advantage in demonstrating to a few of the people in CAB cafeteria that with a bit of determination they can have some control over their own lives and future.

Maybe you would like going through life knowing that people you went to university which will always remember you as being gutsy.

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