

Liberal Arts Outdated?

by Berton Robinson

Memorandum to a college undergraduate in a liberal arts program: If you expect your liberal arts degree to be of any use in getting a job after you graduate, you had better plan your program with the thought of getting a job in mind.

A liberal arts degree is of itself no credential to lead to employment. The idea that it ever was such a thing is a myth.

Fifty years ago, a stock joke concerned a father who took his son to a friend to help the son get a job. When the friend asked "What can he do?" the father replied "Do? He can't do anything. He just graduated from college."

Which does not speak well for the liberal arts degree as qualification for employment a half-century ago.

Traditionally, of course, the liberal arts degree program has concerned itself with what was known as "educating the whole person" and "education for living."

But what we have tended to overlook is that a great part of living consists in earning the wherewithal with which to live, and that even a liberal arts education should include the opportunity to acquire, if not a marketable skill, then at least a foundation on which to build a marketable skill.

According to a survey by the

Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, a large fraction of employers are unwilling to hire graduates with a general liberal arts education. They are, however, ready to hire liberal arts graduates with business-related courses or co-operative work experience.

The College Placement Council lists some courses as desirable. These include verbal or written communications, principles of management, business economics, principles of accounting, introduction to data processing, human relations, and theory of organization.

More specific courses noted by the council include marketing concepts, retailing, finance, sales management, fundamentals of risk and insurance, and statistical analysis.

The Western College Placement Association says in a recent report that only a single course in accounting or administration is a plus for the liberal arts graduate looking for a job in business or industry or government.

This attitude of employers toward the liberal arts graduate presents a great many students with a serious problem.

Often students enter university

without any clear decision about what they want to do. Without such objectives, they flounder around and eventually graduate with a liberal arts degree that does not even indicate an interest in any marketable skill.

Better and earlier career planning, with at least some kind of demonstrated interest by the end of the first year, appears to be necessary for students.

Nearly all of the numerous reports that have recently appeared on employment of liberal arts graduates have stressed the value of work programs. Hitherto, such programs have been largely limited to technical and professional studies.

A great many educators believe that business and industry, which turn to our educational institutions for employees, do not bear their full share of the responsibility for education. Generous as business and industry are with donations, they should also co-operate with universities in work experience programs to help students make choices and find out what options are open to them.

Business and industry have little to lose in such co-operation and stand ultimately to gain a great deal.

The liberal arts program has changed a good deal in the past half-century. It has become much more liberal, so liberal, many think, as to have ever-decreasing practical or even liberal value. Yet it is still by a wide margin the program chosen by most undergraduate students.

Some choose it, of course, as preparatory to professional or technical training. But many others choose it because they have no defined goals.

Perhaps the liberal arts program is due for yet another change. Perhaps universities should recognize that educating the whole man includes helping him to choose a career and giving him at least the foundation on which he can build a marketable skill in a society dominated, whether we like it or not, by business, industry and government.

The universities themselves have made the changes of the past half-century in the liberal arts program.

They will have to take the lead in any such change as is now proposed.

Unless business, industry, and government follow the leadership which one may hope the universities will give, they will be remiss in discharging their obligations to the society that supports them as well as the universities.

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Societies

by Ann Smiley

As Internal Affairs is one of the priorities of the Vice-President, I will be trying to improve communication with the many clubs and societies on the Dalhousie campus. Through its recently established committee to examine support services offered to major societies in particular, the Student Union is searching for the optimal way to use Student Union facilities and funds.

In order to use the facilities and name of Dalhousie, a student group must be recognized by the Student Union. A constitution and list of officers must be submitted annually before March 15 to maintain recognition. This not only allows the Student Union to keep track of groups for room use and grants, but also makes it much easier for interested students to locate these groups. Campus clubs include departmental associations, recreational clubs, international organizations, religious groups, political clubs and cultural groups.

University clubs and societies have access to Student Union facilities and services for arranging functions. Rooms can be booked through the Operations Office, and food, liquor, and technical services and advertising services are available. Groups should make use of C.K.D.U. and the Dalhousie Gazette as well as the poster service to publicize events and activities. Some funding is available to student organizations through the Grants budget. Applications should be directed to the Grants Committee.

Last fall, a special event was held to provide a forum and information session for societies. If there is sufficient interest, another such day-long conference will be arranged. Any suggestions for topics of interest for this year's event should be forwarded to my office.

I would be pleased to meet with any clubs and societies, and will attempt to improve communication both between the Student Union and campus groups, and among the groups themselves.