

CRAZY IDEA

The college system, someone's crazy idea for a better kind of mass university, is examined by fourth year student Richard Levine. He has been at York since the first college was founded.

There is no real answer to the college system, and to whether it is working or not. The only guides for its continuation or demise lie in the students it produces, and in their feelings about their system.

Mr. Levine looks at the system, and gives his personal analysis of its virtues and problems.

college

number of specific activities carried out by the colleges. But this desire to point to thus-and-such a forum or discussion group as a justification for the college system can be misdirected. Dr. Conway explained why he did not consider "college activities" crucial to the colleges. "In a way, I'm more interested in improving the level of conversation in the dining halls, rather than in promoting activities."

For students who wish to identify with their college through their political action, this warning should be heeded: the faculty are grouped together in departments and faculties to make the decisions (ratified by the Senate) for course structure and content. John Adams, outgoing YSC president, gives the facts succinctly:

"The way the college system is now, colleges have no say in the curriculum, faculty hiring, examination standards . . . These decisions now come through the Faculty of Arts and Science. Therefore, York's decision-making process is not based on the college system. York is based on the more traditional concept of faculties. Students should have a say . . . in the subjects noted above . . . I would like to see more students become involved in faculty council, if they choose. These activities are more important than college activities: dances, coffee shops, etc. "This is why John calls the colleges '2



Dr. T.A. Hockin Winters

"I think there will always be a tension for the faculty between the colleges and the departments . . . There are some professional types, and some teaching types . . . the aim is to keep both plugged into the colleges."

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paper structure' in contrast to 'the real structure' of the university, namely, the departments.

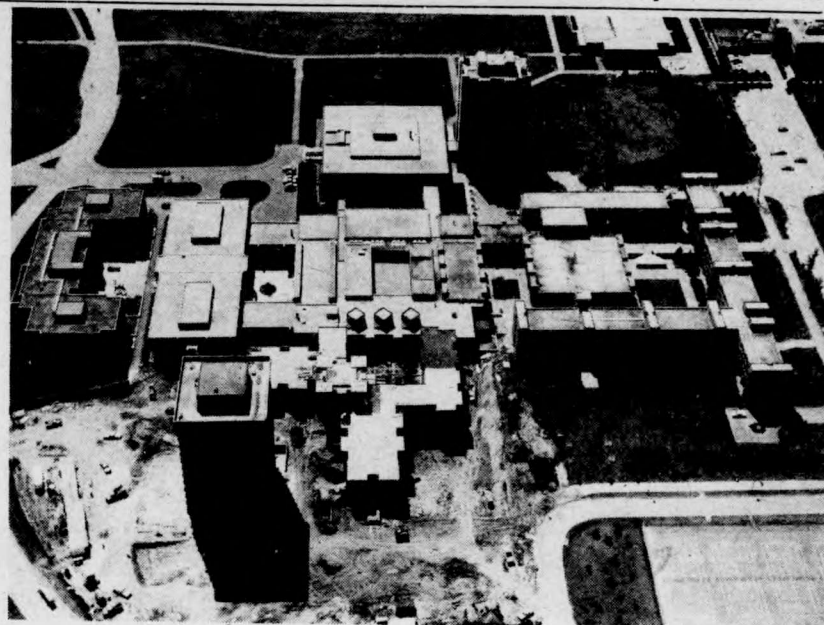
Unfortunately, by making his analysis in these terms, he rejects the web of informal college relationships we have been discussing. The Fellows of each college, for instance, who are so keen on undergraduate education, will not suddenly change their spots when discussing course structure and content. Should we discuss it with them over coffee and donuts, or over a pile of Xeroxed committee briefs in a formal course union meeting? Perhaps it's all a matter of taste.

John Adams, and others, the York Sunday Movement in particular, are typical of those who involve themselves in campus politics. Essentially, they do not deride the college experiment; they ignore it.

The final and most ill-defined question about the colleges is that of academic relevance. This phrase apparently means the desire to have formal academic courses under college direction, rather than under departmental direction.

This is the first year that a specific proposal for greater relevance has been made. The council of the faculty of arts and science, one month ago, passed a proposal to eliminate the first-year Modes course, and substitute a seminar-type course in the college. Each student will participate in a ten-student seminar with a Fellow of the college, on a topic of their choice. Says Dr. Hockin: "If the colleges were to be anything more than giant community centres, then academic relevance had to come. And I think it is important for students to know that the fellows are very enthusiastic about the whole idea of a college course." Dr. Tatham is conscious of the difficulties — preparation will be hasty — but the advocates are prepared to work hard. And there are other plans too. Dr. Conway would like to see each Fellow teach his specialty in the college, if possible. (These courses would be open to all students, of course.)

At Glendon, the situation is different: the Fellows of Glendon college are the entire faculty, and the departments are adjuncts of the college. One works within



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photo by Don Dawson in his airplane

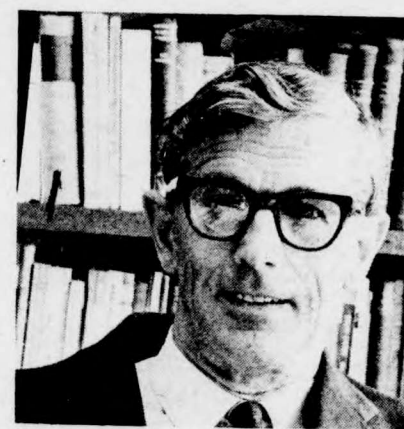
the college on every matter from course content to developing closer relations between faculty and students.

In the difference between York campus and Glendon lies the tremendous excitement of York as an experiment in organization. The York campus colleges will never have more than a limited formal academic role (in the sense of managing credit courses) in a large university where departments run the courses.

Two problems, therefore face us. The first is how to develop a liking for working within the small units (colleges) when most of our academic activities are held, by necessity, in the departmental buildings. Petrie, Farquharson, Humanities.

The second problem is how to develop a close relationship and engage in the activities with Fellows who will never be our teachers in a formal credit course.

If we succeed in solving these problems, the colleges will succeed.



Dr. George Tatham McLaughlin

"It's utter nonsense to talk about college identity. If in 100 years there's a special character about McLaughlin, then God bless it! But that's not my concern right now."

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from The Idea of a University (John Newman)

A university is, according to the usual designation, an Alma Mater, knowing

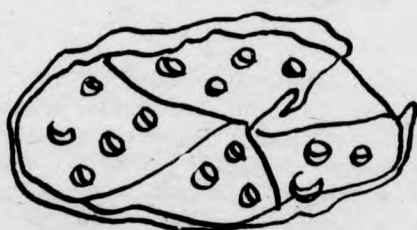
her children one by one, not a foundry, or a mint, or a treadmill.

from 'The new university' (Murray Ross)

But a college with 500 students if it is a part of a large university is one thing, and if considered as an independent unit is quite another. We in Canada can undoubtedly learn from the experience of Oxford and Cambridge, but we need not copy them. While we should have numerous small colleges, it is extremely unrealistic to think of the future of higher education in Canada in terms of only small, autonomous colleges. We need to protect and nourish the values of intimate teaching. But the social situation in which we find ourselves, and the changing functions of the universities requires us to develop a new concept of the university. We are, whether we like it or not, going to have large universities. What is important is that we be much more imaginative and creative about making our large universities "good universities", and that we spend less time being defensive about the problem of size.

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