

features

Harkening back to his first years at York, Jansen recalls, "When York first started, it began with something called general education. It was one of the first few universities that didn't tell you the first day you came to its doorstep you need to know what you are doing. It said, 'do these general things and then decide what you are going to do with the rest of your life.'" In comparison Jansen sees today's student coming to university because a diploma is going to get them a better job.

Stewart echoes Jansen's sentiments about the more lively atmosphere at York in its formative years. "I really enjoyed the more turbulent times. A lot of people found it very anti-academic and anti-knowledge, and found the standards go way down. But I found a lot of their arguments made real sense; anti-materialistic and anti-sham."

"I still haven't got used to people not questioning," Stewart says, adding, "Now everyone questions your marking, not what you are taught, or your way of presenting it. Hardly anyone challenges your assignments anymore. Back then the campus was more exciting and more fun."

A comparison of courses offered in the Calumet College tutorials in 1971 to those offered in 1985-86 confirm, to a degree, both Jansen's and Stewart's remarks. In '70-'71, courses included "Magic and Politics," "Cultural Revolutionaries," "The Urban Scene Through Music," "Cartoonists as Critics," and "Witchcraft Beliefs." Fifteen years later the same college is offering two courses entitled "The World of Business," four courses called "Personal Computers," and "Computer Roles in Education." The most radical course offered is "The Box in the Corner; History, Development, and Criticism of Television."

According to Deborah Hobson, "Students are very discipline-oriented as far as subject selection goes. They're more traditional now, worried about things like putting together a dossier and being employable. We think we can't be experimental." Hobson is critical of this attitude, stating, "What I think's wrong here is that this is an erroneous perception of what education should be."

Hobson also voices another concern, this one about the York campus in particular. She thinks the college should be utilized more as a forum for making students socially aware. "The college system works for people who get involved," Hobson states, adding that the same is true for faculty members as well, most of whom spend, she says, only two or three days a week on campus. Hobson sees this as one of York's biggest problems. "What are we going to do when a lot of the faculty members don't see their academic life as being physically located on this campus. It's a major problem we have. If you want to have a vibrant intellectual community, you've got to have people around exchanging ideas and inter-connecting."

Most of this problem can be attributed to the physical location of the campus, probably the most commonly heard criticism of York. The recent growth of the area surrounding the university does not really solve the problem entirely as most of the faculty lives downtown. "They're not going to live around here," Hobson says. A potentially bigger problem, according to Hobson, is that in a significant number of fields, the York library is not sufficient for research purposes. Insofar as that I am a research scholar, my life is at the Robarts library. If I wasn't a College Master I'd never be up here from April to September."

On the positive side, Hobson is quick to point out the open nature of York University as compared to the other Toronto university. "York started out as a reaction against U of T, apart from what was going in the '60s. U of T was always a traditional place so we, from the beginning, were trying to be more open. The personal thing is something York has always honored in the sense that there is no comparison between attitude to a generational difference as 'we are . . . were very young then, and it's the kind of people who were attracted to building a university; people who were not so bound by formality.'"

Stewart also expresses an overall satisfaction with the way in which York has developed over its first 25 years. "I feel really good about this place. This really is an active place. Before it was empty. It would always hit you at odd times. Now it's never empty. You come in at 7:00 a.m. and there are a whole bunch of people." Stewart adds, "It's a much more vibrant, moving place than it used to be in that sense, and that is partly due to the fact that there are so many more people. The students seem to work a lot harder these days, although some still don't know to spell, and that puts me off."

Sheldon Levy, the man in charge of York's central analysis, sees a distinct evolution of the university's confidence both internally and externally. It has left the days of the early '70s and enrolment isn't a problem anymore. The biggest problem, says Levy, is how to remain accessible to all the students who want to come to York. "The University does not have to worry now that it is going to disappear," Levy says. "We're no longer on the outside looking in. Our attitude is to work with the other universities as a whole to make the system improve, and as a result, York will improve as well."

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