

**After 20 years, York profs wonder:**

# How good a university?

This weekend, hundreds of alumni participated in York's 20th anniversary homecoming - one of many events being held to commemorate York's entrance into its third decade.

But just as this is a time for celebration, so is it a time to reflect on what York has achieved, on what it has become.

In this, one of many articles to be published through the year, EXCALIBUR ponders York's past, and considers its future.

## John Elias Jr.

"What we have at York is a cafeteria program."

This was York University Professor of Sociology John O'Neill's response, when asked how he would evaluate York as an institution of higher learning. He claims that York and other Canadian universities have become institutions of mediocrity, serving a mass student population instead of acting as a training ground for the academically elite.

His was one of many controversial opinions expressed about how York University has evolved as an academic institution in the past twenty years. While some see York evolving into a mediocre institution, attracting few scholars and teachers of merit, others are optimistic about its future.

O'Neill said the growth in students in the last twenty years, attracted by the financial rewards of obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree, has been responsible for turning elite learning institutions into places pondering a lower level of education to attract new students.

York, along with other Canadian universities, said O'Neill, has become a McDon-

ald's where "we do it all for you." The fault for creating this situation rests with the universities' faculties and administrations.

O'Neill said that universities have become "middle class asylums" where the individual's personal struggle to attain maturity is deterred. The path to knowledge, both an exhilarating and terrifying experience, is being annulled by the "practices of the modern, administrative, bureaucratic, therapeutic state."

"In the beginning," said O'Neill, "the faculty was young and energetic, good at everything... Twenty years later, the faculty is aging, giving up and seeking other sidelines."

O'Neill claims this degeneration in teaching and scholarly activity has led to a situation where teachers no longer honestly evaluate students on their scholarly merit. They are merely put on a conveyor belt that ends with a B.A. in the student's hand.

This decay can only be reversed if York begins a strong honours program and more scholarships are offered both at the undergraduate and graduate level.

O'Neill went on to say that

students and society as a whole must learn that there is no dishonour in having tried and failed. York's faculties must learn this lesson if the school is to become a true institution of higher learning and not simply a McDonald's operation.

Another strong believer in the triumph of academic excellence is Professor Isaac Bar-Lewaw who is in the Department of Hispanic and Latin American Literature and Civilization. He is a charming and flamboyant man who speaks twelve languages fluently and has a knowledge of eight more.

## Bar-Lewaw: York students "mediocre..."

Professor Bar-Lewaw often proclaimed in previous articles and interviews that Canadian universities were merely places to have a "good time" and where women came to find husbands.

But he now thinks students have become somewhat more serious. Students who previously campaigned for some kind of political utopia, are now mainly interested in finding a good job when they graduate. Students now have a serious attitude towards education.

While the students' attitudes have changed, the conditions in Canadian universities have not. York and other universities are turning out mediocre students in relation to the top universities in the world. We have an abundance of students and professors, but lack quality,

Bar-Lewaw said.

"We have excellent scholars, and we also have excellent teachers, although they haven't published," said Bar-Lewaw. "But unfortunately, we have faculty members who are good scholars nor good teachers and who have never given a lecture at an international forum, who are recognized by nobody except themselves, patting each other on the back."

"By the way," said Bar-Lewaw, "Every Canadian and non-Canadian university have these people, but it is a matter of proportion." In the case of Canadian universities this proportion happens to be extremely high, he suggested.

He said that it is hard to keep prominent scholars in Canadian universities, because the best are lured away to the United States, attracted by its money and facilities.

To prove his point, Bar-Lewaw pointed out that Canada has had only three Nobel prize winners since 1901, while the United States has had over one hundred. Countries like Holland, Denmark, and Switzerland, which are smaller than Canada, have won more Nobel prizes because their governments invest more money in higher learning than does Canada's.

Not only can we not breed Nobel prize winners but we won't even accept them if they throw themselves at our feet.

"Reliable sources will tell you that at one point in time Alexander Solzhenitsyn who then lived in Switzerland, considered coming to Canada if he could obtain a teaching

position," said Bar-Lewaw, "but none of the Canadian universities had an offer for him. So he finally settled in Vermont, U.S.A."

The reason why he was not offered a position was because he was too controversial, Bar-Lewaw explained.

While York is not a bad Canadian university, it is a very poor one in comparison to a top-rated university in the world.

"While we have great people recognized nationally and internationally, we also have people who hide behind the facade of the union, which protects everybody."

One person who vehemently disagrees with Bar-Lewaw's viewpoint is Professor Nicky Lary of York's Humanities department.

He criticizes Professor Bar-

## Lary: ...a diversified and imaginative curriculum

Lewaw for his non-involvement in university affairs and for his "failure to show on any kind of scale what an elite education should be."

According to Lary, York is a good, young university with a diversified and imaginative curriculum, where students can obtain a good education.

He thinks that if our top students went to England's Cambridge University, they would not be at a disadvantage. This is due to our flexible

See 'Mac', page 10.

## What to do with an empty Blue.



When you're smiling, call for Labatt's Blue.

AGYU Art Gallery of York University

## JOSEPH BEUYS

Graphic Works  
Videotape of the "Action"  
EURASION STAFF, 1968

Oct 20-Nov 14

ART GALLERY OF  
YORK UNIVERSITY

Ross Building N. 145  
Mon.-Fri. 10-4:30

## The York Connection

Peer  
Counselling  
Service

...help and support  
in working through life's  
problems.

i.e. Health care, Personal  
Problems, Sexuality,  
Drugs, etc.

McLaughlin College Rm. 026/027  
Phone 667-3509/3632