

Arthurs speaks out on reforms

By JAMES FLAGAL

EXCALIBUR: What were the main problems within the college system that you wanted to address with these reforms?

ARTHURS: On the college side, I really felt that the colleges were being underutilized. The surveys taken for the Hare Commission showed a very low rate of participation, surprisingly even by residents, but most assuredly by non-residents . . . I think colleges are generally places which students pass through if they happen to have some reason to pass through them. And generally whatever relations people do have are almost exclusively in terms of athletics, social life, and obviously residences. But in terms of organizing student's intellectual experiences, they haven't done that.

So, there's sort of a qualitative and quantitative aspect to this. The quantitative aspect being the non-appearance of significant numbers of students and let me (also) say faculty, because colleges were supposed to be communities which embraced both. And the qualitative problems, which are truer in some colleges than in others, but looking at the whole thing overall, some qualitative problems which I believed needed to be addressed as well.

EXCALIBUR: What about with student government?

ARTHURS: On the student government side, I have somewhat different concerns. If I had any sense at all, I would simply say that the more confused, weak, and internally divisive structure existed, the better it would be for the administration and the

tion relative to the central student government which represents some but not all of the student constituencies.

You have these trust funds which I think are rather odd, but are sensible devices to sort out a conflict at the moment which it occurred. (At the moment the CYSF administers trust funds with Bethune, Calumet and Osgoode) so, it was a compromise arrangement. But they don't represent a kind of sound, ongoing basis for the development of student activities or programmes. So, I would really like to see some logic, some coherence in the structure.

I think in fairness to the students in this university, there should be a place that can speak authoritatively for all the students of the university, no more than (situation in which there is) one voice for graduate or undergraduate, so that university-wide concerns can be authoritatively addressed. It doesn't mean that college and faculty governments are any less important, they simply have different interests, and they should get on with their jobs and speak to problems which concern them.

EXCALIBUR: How do you envision the marriage between the faculties and the colleges?

ARTHURS: I think that what will happen is that a great deal of creativity will be unleashed on both the faculty side and the college side . . . People will come to understand that the student's experience (both formal and informal academic programmes) at the University should be integrated. But as I always say, that a Science student who is interested in music should be able to pursue that interest. But that

sitting down at lunch with leading scientists—that's how you begin to address those difficult issues. So I think there's a great possibility there for a great deal of creative work in collaboration between the Deans and Masters, and their respective supporters.

EXCALIBUR: What about in the case of the Faculty of Arts, how will that relationship work when it is supposed to be divided up among five colleges?

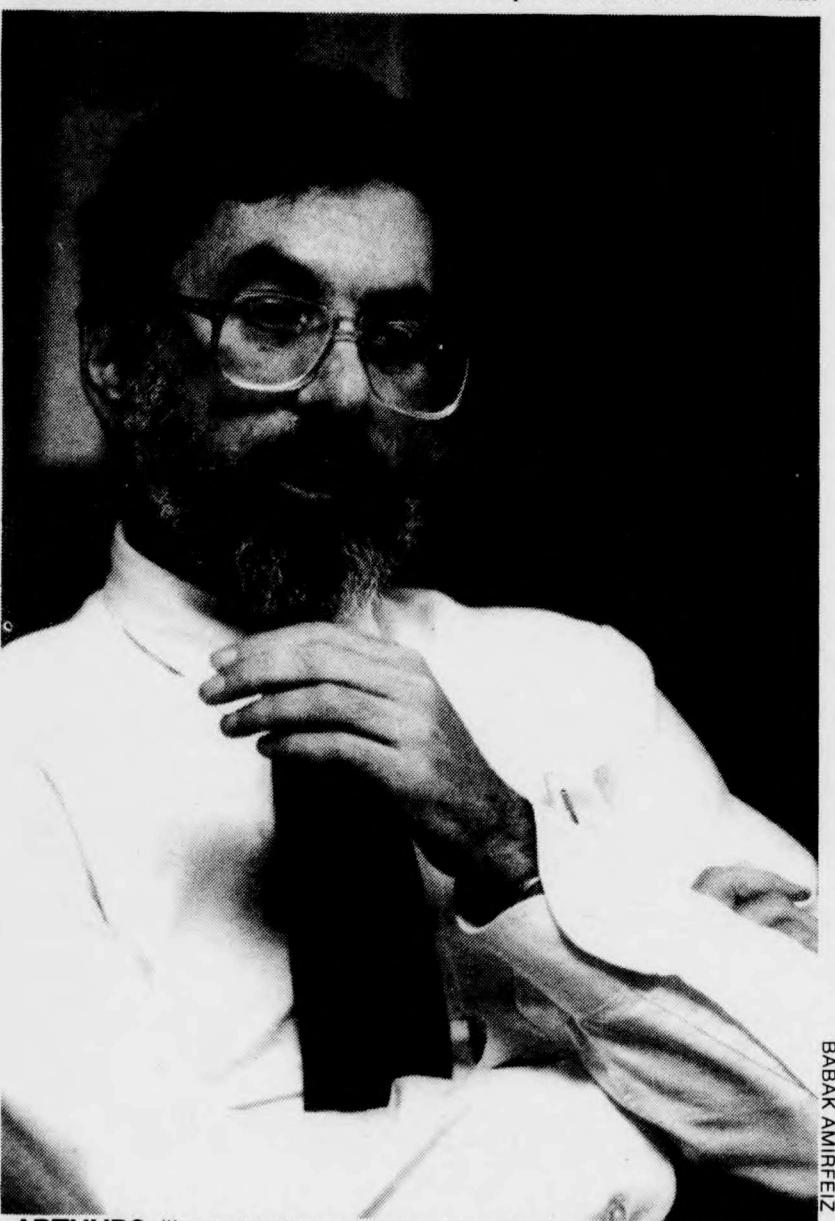
ARTHURS: At the moment, the Faculty of Arts is spread across seven colleges intermingled with nominal numbers of Science and Fine Arts. I think a slight consolidation of its activities will enable some focus to be achieved. And I am very optimistic about it. For example, in advising this year a big collaborative effort was made on first-year advising involving the Faculty of Arts and college Masters, and for its first year it was extremely successful. I think developing systems such as advising systems are beautifully accomplished by this collaborative effort.

EXCALIBUR: In a feature published in last week's Excalibur called "Facing Change" the author explains the importance of departmental organizations and that if Arts colleges do take on themes which are too broad then the whole process of reform could break down. How do you feel about encouraging the colleges to have a closer tie with the specific departments within Arts?

ARTHURS: I wouldn't be surprised to see departmental collaboration in this exercise. In fact there's many cases where the departments may well turn out to be very important, that they may be the faculty's agent with respect to a particular theme. There's a couple of problems I see in basing this arrangement exclusively on departments. The first is the simple arrangement exclusively on departments. The first is the simple practical problem that not all departments will be college based. Many of them are already based in the Ross Building, and will be as well in the new academic building. So, the physical presence of the departments in the colleges won't occur and it's very difficult to actually translate their activities into college-based activities.

Second point. There's a very important tradition at York of interdisciplinary work, of people let's say in History and Sociology coming together to talk about Social History. And that is actually one of the very exciting aspects of York University. York is particularly advanced in bridging disciplines. I think that some of that flavour remains in the notion of a theme for colleges rather than having a strictly disciplinary organization. With that said, I think I can agree with your point, a lot of students relate to their departmental orientation. I hope that those activities will be given a home in the college and certainly talked about—though it wasn't a specific part of the proposal—and they will find a way to contribute in fleshing out the themes.

The theme is the container, it's not the contents. The themes will be broad, but not every possible interpretation at any given period of time will actually become operational. Which aspects will be a reflection of the personalities, the interests, the input of both students and faculty members to the evolution of what I hope will be an organic approach to the (college) system. So, for example, let's take the theme of multiculturalism. First, we may start off with it being based in literature, but there's an obvious role for Sociology, and specific roles for History, Linguistics. I mean there are a number of different themes for which people from different areas can be brought into discussion. The ethnic clubs, for example, could be based in (such a) college.



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university. I think that that would be a short-sighted view for me to take. But there isn't any logical coherence, what you have now is the accumulation of historical accidents which people responded to as those circumstances seemed to dictate. You have a system whose key elements are college governments when the colleges themselves have radically shifted from the centre of activity. You have an ambiguous situ-

Science student who does want to learn more about the background of Science and the great figures of Science, or those activities that can't be easily encompassed by a formal programme should get informal exposure.

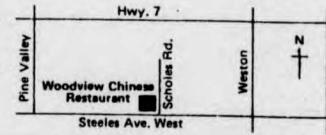
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