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possible

Pick a college • Any

by Richard Levine

York has always had an obsession with the college system, especially with its possible failure. Even three years ago with Founders just built, the Vanier residence incomplete, Winters a hole in the ground and McLaughlin a bare football field, there were strange dissatisfied rumours that the college system had failed.

This article is about the colleges. It's not a judgement about their success or failure and it's not a condemnation of other systems. It's about our system, what it is doing now and what are its interesting problems.

In 1962, when it was decided that York University would not always remain the size of Glendon College but would become a large multi-faceted university with a tremendous campus, two important decisions were made. The first was to initiate the general education program with its inter-disciplinary approach, relative free-

Dr. John Conway
Founders

"In assessing the success or failure of the college so far, you must remember that we've been developing the college system in an age of a revolution in sexual mores, in an age of crisis of authority, over everything from the family to the Papacy, and in an age of crisis over the university curriculum and who controls it."

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dom, and art-science entente. The second was to adopt the college system.

Dr. Tatham, Master of McLaughlin College, crystallizes the issue: "I think the only way of running a university that has to be large is to organize many colleges. A student can come to a small place and then branch out."

There are obvious advantages to a large university: a well-developed arts and science curriculum, a large library, labs and research.

On the other hand there's the old argument that large universities mass-produce B.A.'s and student burgesses as well as result in a chronic overcrowding of facilities.

The college system is meant to overcome these disadvantages. "Colleges create intimate communities", cry the college system advocates. But this is an abstract phrase. Is it really valid? Does it work? Let's examine the system in detail.

Physically a college at York is a large building containing a dining hall, common rooms, study halls, classrooms, locker rooms and coat racks and faculty offices. There is one Master for each college, one Senior Tutor for each residence and approximately 40 Fellows and 1000 students per college. (This is the ideal figure for student enrolment, however since the university population must continue to grow even though the building program has slowed down, the colleges will inevitably have to expand).

College activities are theoretically the bonds holding together the so-called 'intimate community'. These activities include the coffee shops, the councils and the newspapers — all of which are definitely college-oriented. On the other hand, activities such as the Vanier Pottery Club and Radio York are completely open and give rise to the largely irrelevant response: "Oh, colleges don't mean anything to me. I go to any coffee shop or dance or club that I want."

Counteracting this apathetic attitude you'll find the college sympathizers, namely the members of the college councils. I asked president Murray Ross what he'd do if he were on the student council of one of the colleges. He leaned back in his chair, smiled broadly and said that he would "go into the dining hall and talk to students. I'd see if they were interested in serving on a committee and I'd get their names. I'd have 200 students working in committees in every college." Perhaps Dr. Ross is over-optimistic about the joys of working on council. Nevertheless he raises an important point: the question of participation and communication.

One of the most notable problems is the failure of the college papers to reach their readers. Neither the Fountain, Voodoo nor Mac 69 publish a list of upcoming college events. Don Long, Fountain editor, suggests that even the college councils don't know these things. But the problem has insidious effects; for example, the unread collection of scrappy posters that litter the college walls.

And the problem goes deeper. Dr. Fowle, Master of Vanier College, says that the Voodoo has never interviewed

Dr. C.D. Fowle
Vanier

"What discourages me is the reluctance of people to seize opportunities. Students are not in the habit of making decisions, because decisions have always been made for them."

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him on college matters, the appointment of new fellows, and the like. In fact the college papers seem to dwell exclusively on YSC politics and the ubiquitous movie and record reviews. This was the tragedy of the SEER. In its enthusiasm it abdicated its role as a house organ of Winters College.

Another problem is York's geographical dilemma. Who the hell cares about staying around the college when all you think of is getting a lift home to Etobicoke or Agincourt. It's great fun to speculate on how the TTC schedule has retarded college growth. However the situation appears to be improving. TTC buses now run into the campus every ten minutes, from five pm to seven pm. Monday to Friday.

Come to think of it, though, this improved schedule is no incentive to staying beyond seven.

The university also tries to help: at 9.45 and 10.45 pm every weekday the Glendon bus leaves from the north doors of the library, goes down Keele to Lawrence and across Lawrence to Glendon. The bus will let off passengers at TTC stops.

Still on the brighter side, there are indications that the colleges are attempting to alleviate the alienation of non-resident and freshman students. Currently in Winters, for example, there is a program wherein a Fellow commits himself to dinner with about ten students (mostly non-resident students). The dinners are financed by the college and are held nightly. Dr. Hockin, Master of Winters, says that 80 percent of these dinners have been successful. He had initially hoped for the success of at least half. In addition Winters also sponsors college sleep-ins and reading weekends to attract day trippers. The coffee houses also are indicative of college individuality. 013, Winters Coffee

House sponsors events such as the current showing of the six-part National Film Board series, Lewis Mumford on the City, and Founders Cock and Bull recently held a rock and roll revival (university as a haven for cultural movements). No-one who works in the shops do it for the measly 50 cents an hour. It's to meet people, specifically the other members of the college.

However, it's a commonly held but false assumption that the colleges are designed solely with the student in mind.

Let me sketch the details.

The university is divided into Faculties (Law, Administrative Studies, Arts and Science) and the Arts and Science faculty is in turn divided into departments (English, Geography, Math etc.) each of which will eventually be designated to a particular building on campus. Being a member of a particular department has definite advantages — nearness to important equipment and to colleagues in one's own field. However, being a Fellow in a college (and this is not the same as being "an honorary member of the college" as one freshman calmly told me) allows the faculty member to associate with Fellows of other disciplines as well as with undergraduates. It gives them a chance to "get plugged into undergraduate education" as Dr. Hockin puts it. Fellows of the College, who are basically faculty members invited to join a college by the college master, can be extremely influential in strengthening or weakening the college system. They can do this through informal discussion with undergrads as well as by serving on college committees. At present each college has about 20 Fellows. However, this figure will rise with each year to a maximum of 40 to 50 Fellows per college.

As previously mentioned, each college is headed by a college master. All agree that it's up to the students to run their college and they expressed a strong desire to meet the students in the college. But, says Dr. Fowle, "A lot of students in this college don't know who I am and couldn't care. I appreciate their reasons of course, but it makes things more difficult."

The situation is unfortunate, for it nurtures the feeling that there is an impersonal authority 'somewhere up there' — precisely the type of attitude that produces alienation. Dr. Fowle tells an example to illustrate his position. Several Vanier councillors decided that their common room was always messy with card players and their garbage, and decided to move the common room furniture into the Social and Debates room to lure away the card players. The earnest councillors replaced the common room furniture with the heavy pieces formerly in the social and debates room. A few days later, says Dr. Fowle, several students he had never met before marched into his office and complained that card players had invaded their social and debates room. "They thought I was like the school principal and would give an order to have the janitors clean up things and replace the furniture."

The college system and what it does for students is all too often measured by the