

# York U in the New Wave '80s

**Bruce Gates**

New Year's, 1989. Almost through another decade and the world's still spinning: 1984 didn't happen—at least not in Canada—and instead of finding Big Brother in the workplace, one finds the university.

It's new wave education for the new wave student. Forced to find a job because of the soaring tuitions that caused university enrolment to plummet in the early '80s, the new wave student now finds himself taking courses while he works. It's the new option made available to the average student when the ministry of colleges and universities discovered that the recently balanced provincial budget had put fees out of sight for most.

The new wave student makes his way from the office to the lunchroom-cum-classroom for his one-hour lecture and seminar on Efficient Energy Planning 356. This is the third and last course of his applied scientific theory cycle. With the abolition of degrees in 1985, when York University and Seneca College combined programs, the semester system changed to cycles. He'll need five cycles for a degree equivalent, and one course in each cycle must involve application of academic theory. Hence course 356.

As he sits at the table in the office cafeteria awaiting the professor, his mind wanders. He recalls something he found in an old 1980 *Excalibur* during research for an assignment on the story of York, which he wrote for a Modern History of Education course. It was a quote from York's past president, H. Ian Macdonald:

"We're presently looking at the idea of taking the university to the workplace," he said.

"That's the kind of thing universities should do."

It finally came true. As some universities found themselves left with the prospect of having to close because government restraint forced them to raise needed money through self-defeating tuition increases, taking classes to the student turned out to be an attractive option. So did twinning programs with community colleges, which had siphoned off a large number of students in the early '70s. It was exactly the kind of academic marriage needed to save both institutions from their internecine struggle for Basic Income Units. York found the idea worked successfully in the early '80s when it worked out a co-operative Early Childhood Care program with Seneca College. Now the co-operative approach has gone ahead with a vengeance, marrying the practical experience of the college with the research resources and academic theory of the university. Such twinning has resulted in a whole new outlook on education for the new wave student. Now he can choose from such hybrid joint courses as Applying Marx to the Marketplace, and Slipping Freud into Consumer-Products.

Our new wave student sitting in the lunchroom-cum-classroom checks his mini-calendar to see if he has the prerequisites for these courses. The first one requires political science, economics and a background in class struggle; the other one requires introductory psychoanalysis, knowledge of Wilson Bryan-Key and advertising, and a dirty mind.

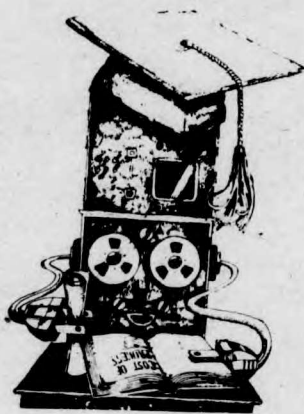
What a dilemma: if he takes applied Marxism, he'll be the only one in his class; if he chooses Freud and advertising, it means

taking a course in Air Brush Technology nighttime at Seneca, and a biology half-course on the human anatomy at York. He could do it by using his two-way television at home by simply dialing the campus and asking to be plugged into the lectures, but Mork and Mindy reruns conflict with the classes' scheduled air time.

Decisions, decisions. But that's part of life in the New Society. A

*Long before the year 2,000, the entire antiquated structure of degrees, majors and credits will be a shambles. No two students will move along exactly the same educational track....The forces sweeping us toward super-industrialism can no longer be channeled by these bankrupt industrial-era methods.*

Alvin Toffler  
Future Shock, 1970



*I don't accept the prophecy of gloom that universities will have a lean time in the 1980s or that they will decline... (but) over the long haul, radical changes in their way of thinking will be required... We are in for some interesting times.*

H. Ian Macdonald, 1980

futurist from the past, Alvin Toffler, called it the Third Wave way back in 1980. Our new wave student is part of this new age—the super-industrial society that no longer caters to Mass Man. It's individualism all the way now, which is why our new wave student is studying and working at the same time. His courses are designed around him; they're work-oriented or geared to his own interests. The highly-flexible five-cycle format will allow him, after his fifth cycle is successfully completed, to do post-grad research at the York campus. Or, if he'd rather do it at night, he can at Atkinson College, which is now larger than the day school.

The new wave student eyes his combination micro-computer/digital watch. It's five past noon. The professor is late, but since the dawn of the super-industrial age, the nine-to-five job has become obsolete, and time is no longer of the essence in most of the work force. Jobs are flexible, thanks to the computer, and leisure time has become the norm. Our student is a word processor for the giant media conglomerate, Thomson International, which recently bought a chain of used bookstores and a newspaper front office from York vice-president John Becker.

The professor finally arrives. She's dressed in the quilted, double-knit acrylic, peacock-colored accoutrements that have become the hallmark of 1980s men's and women's fashion. It's 1940 chic with 1980s technology: no wasted material, no unnecessary frills, and so very functional. Since all new office buildings are now designed with energy conservation in mind; clothing must provide the ultimate in creature comfort and vanity.

As the new wave student slips

out his mini-electronic memory data bank and begins to record the new information from the professor for later correlation with the stored data on his home TV computer terminal, he daydreams about earlier life at the York campus. Before it was ploughed under for an experimental farm for poplar trees for biomass energy production, the athletic field used to rent and rumble under the weight of the football and rugby teams. The Ice Palace is now what it was always meant to be: cold storage for a local meat-packing plant. And the Ross Building, where students used to straggle glassy-eyed down its endless grey-on-grey corridors, is now a Think Tank for futurists, Tarot card readers, and crystal ball gazers. Our new wave student wonders why they hadn't thought of it earlier. Maybe then Canada would have had the foresight in the early '80s to discontinue its exports of oil and gas so there wouldn't be temporary black-outs here now. Ah well. At least he doesn't have to commute.

Well whatdoyaknow! Lecture's over already. Must have dozed off, but his mini-electronic memory data bank has picked up the information he'll need. Now it's back to the old grind until tomorrow's class, this time on How to Survive an Energy Crisis. As our new wave student slips out of the lunchroom-cum-classroom and down the corridor to the Information Synthesis Centre at giant Thomson International, his mind races back to simpler times when students gathered, en masse, at Steeles and Keele for classes and pubs, or simply met with friends in Central Square and traded notes on lectures.

Wonder how they ever managed at university in the '70s?

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