



View from the top: as York builds more colleges the plot thickens.

Photo by TIM CLARK

The college system: more bureaucracy

The College System

From the '69 York Calendar

One of the distinguishing features of York University is that it is developing a "College System".

Faced with the fact that the University must, by sheer weight of projected student enrolment, become a large multifaculty university, York's planners decided that, if the basic ideal of closest possible relationship between teacher and student was to be achieved, one of the ways would be to build the University on the basis of smaller units — that is, colleges.

Every freshman enrolling in the University is assigned to a college. During their undergraduate years, students are associated, for much of their formal work and extra-curricular activities, with their college.

Each college has its own dining hall, seminar and small lecture rooms, Junior Common Room, and residence. The residence is divided into houses, each of which have their own common rooms and recreational facilities. Approximately 20 to 25 per cent of students have the combined advantages of a small college and the intellectual vigour and excitement of a large University.

Much of the academic instruction is led by members of the faculties who are Fellows of the various colleges. Moreover, each college has its own Master, Dons, and tutors.

The University's 20-year Master Plan calls for the completion of 12 colleges in three clusters of four colleges each. The cluster-system makes it possible to serve four dining halls from one kitchen with two serveries.

Membership in the colleges is deliberately designed to ensure a cross-section of the student body in each college. Thus, while each college will develop a character which may differ from the others in minor ways, no basic academic or social differences will mark the various colleges.

This slightly revised article was written two years ago by Excalibur's Mike Blumenthal and Bob Waller. Unfortunately, their criticisms of the York structure then hold equally true today.

By MIKE BLUMENTHAL
and BOB WALLER

The past president of York University, Murray G. Ross, was the principle promoter of the college system as a balance between the advantages of the traditional British college (e.g. Oxford) and the contemporary U.S. multiversity (e.g. Columbia).

The British college is renowned for its intimate atmosphere and usually a low student-teacher ratio. On the other hand, the U.S. multiversity, because of its physical size, has the advantages of great financial resources, vast research facilities and professors with international reputations.

The British college is an anachronism in an advanced technological society. In an age of mass production and consumption it is inefficient in filling the quotas of a hungry society. Also, it is accessible only to the children of the very rich and the very powerful.

The multiversity grew out of the demand from a highly industrialized capitalist society to train its youth to be productive in the economic sphere. This need was filled by sprawling campuses, which were essentially education factories or degree mills, operated along lines similar to a modern corporation.

The failure of the multiversity has been manifested most obviously in widespread student alienation and subsequent growing student revolution to change the situation.

Through the college system the York administration hopes to solve the problem of student alienation. By limiting the number of students in each college to approximately 1,300 and by making the college the centre of cultural, athletic, academic and administrative affairs for the students, the administration hopes to induce the student to identify with his college and the other members of it.

Two years ago they hoped to make the colleges, to a minimal degree, academically relevant by instituting one college course in first year.

But the college system came under attack. Students, faculty, and even administration admitted that the college system has not solved the problem of student alienation at York.

The proponents of the plan appealed to the students' patience, saying that it was only a matter of time until each college will have produced a tradition which can be recognized as unique and with which the students will be able to identify.

In other words: "Let us gird our loins," and with a conscious effort the system will work.

There is much heated discussion over the problems of the college system. What we wish to do is to outline some of the basic problems and pose some of the questions that we will face this year.

The first question to be asked is whether the college is a separate, discreet unit. Are the academic, cultural and social spheres relevant to the college unit, and if so, to what

extent can the college offer a full set of alternatives?

The college is greatly divorced from York's academic sphere. Except for a few college courses in first year, there are no courses directly linked (by bureaucracy or perspective) to the college itself. The student will most frequently find himself in a lecture hall or classroom outside his or her college among students of all other York colleges.

Nor are the students social and cultural spheres really encompassed in his or her college. Many students belong to clubs in other colleges (usually situated there because of space allocation), spend time in other college common rooms.

In other words, to date every college has failed in its bid to become an obvious social or cultural center for the students who have been assigned to it.

The second question is whether the present forms of hierarchical governing structures are alienating.

Each college has its own bureaucracy, including a student council. These structures tend to keep students bored and consequently passive and unaware. They do not encourage active participation in decision-making despite the number of committees open to student representation. Students realize that the power never evolves to the committee level but is maintained in the hands of the administrators on top.

The student council, though it makes some claims to representivity is guilty of this, too. Although student bureaucrats are constantly looking for students to do various joe-jobs they would rather not do themselves, the members of the college realize their real power resides merely in a once-a-year election in which it is mainly the office-seekers who do the talking.

The situation is compounded by a powerful university-wide bureaucracy directly controlled by the board of governors, the president and the senate. Only the senate has student representation — and only one of the 15 student members (Glendon's) is elected.

Obviously, there is a great deal of duplication of work and expense between the dual bureaucracies — not to mention increased alienation of the people the bureaucracies are supposed to serve.

The college system vis-a-vis government, although only partly to blame, has not promoted democracy or active participation in decision-making and must be seen as one of the prime agents of alienation at York and also one of the severe hindrances to the success of the college system.

Another very important question is whether a university which has instituted a college system, but which maintains the same uncritical course content and individualistic, oppressive middle class culture is really less alienating. This is especially relevant when it has been shown by sociologists that the roots of our alienation relate directly to the content of our education and our culture.

The question then is: Can this university prevent dehumanization without a critical evaluation of its academic content and its culture?

For instance, a student taking political science is told to ignore the concepts of

power and class in favor of the myths of pluralism and income distribution. The student in sociology is taught about family and labor relations in ways that do not relate to his own oppression or that of the working class. The scientist or engineer who wants to create things that will serve people and ease their material hardships is smothered and perverted by a scientific establishment almost completely controlled by the West's ruling elites.

This situation yields much the same results as psych services' headshrinkers — rather than encouraging discussion and action to change a system which is too often irrational and immoral, the emphasis is on molding you to fit into the status quo.

This is one of the grossest sins that the rulers of York have perpetrated on the student body.

The last question to be asked is whether the extra financial cost of maintaining a college system is worthwhile. It costs an annual 20 per cent more to finance — what with duplication of services, including committees, bureaucrats and classrooms.

It would be nice to publish exact figures on what it costs to run York. Unfortunately, the financial books are closed to students and faculty, not to mention the community at large.

Not only does this university waste more money than others in Ontario (sorry, it's only an educated guess), but its source of revenue is the same — the community at large, especially the working classes.

The lower income groups pay a higher proportion of taxes (Carter Commission) and yet receive the least amount of services (CUS Means Survey, 1965). By costing more — mainly because of the college system — York places an even greater burden on the shoulders of the working class.

Rather than being a service to the community, York is a liability — it takes away resources, but does not return them.

The question of "why a college system" still demands an answer. Those of you who have been at York realize that alienation here is as strong as at any university and has not been solved by the college system.

What the college system has done is to serve the interests of the administration. York could serve the community, the Canadian people — but to do so would require a restructured university; one which, to begin with, would spread real decision-making power equally among students, faculty and staff and not between central bureaucracy and college bureaucracies.

What the college system has done at York is to set up tremendous bureaucratic barriers to a true service university. The college system has succeeded in dividing the force which should be the vanguard in restructuring the university — the students.

This is obvious in the continuing and bitter petty hassles between the college councils and the Council of the York Student Federation. As long as the students fight among themselves, the administration knows that they will never feel the full critical gaze of an awakened aware student body.

Unite and fight bureaucracy. You (we) have nothing to lose but your (our) paper chains.