

Honorary degrees becoming rather worthless

We've just been put through the agony of awarding six more honorary degrees. While it's still fresh in your minds we'd like to point out the folly of such endeavours.

There are some 5,000 people here — some working hard, some not — to get degrees. They work for four, sometimes five and even more years to get a degree. And on the day they graduate, chances are someone who's a friend of the Chancellor or donated money will be right up there on the stage — on the stage, yet — getting an honorary Doctor of Laws degree.

Do they deserve to have their virtues exalted in full public view while the most the graduate can hope for is a quick hand shake from the president?

Our feature story on pages 14 and 15 examines this in close detail and we suggest you read it. It's not that long, and provides some interesting figures on just who gets honorary degrees.

It is quite apparent, for example, that the provincial Minister of Education gets a degree simply because he holds that position. He needn't have improved the educational process (the present minister, Lorne McGuigan, actually has cut back on the number of teachers in schools), nor need he have proven that he has contributed significantly to society.

All he needs to do is get elected and then appointed to cabinet by the premier.

The Premier, naturally, is first in line to get a degree. If there were an election this fall and Bob Higgins became Premier, you can bet your bottom dollar he'd be getting a degree next May.

The Lieutenant Governor gets one automatically too — for no other reason than the fact that by some strange twist of fate, he has taken that position.

Somewhere along the line the provincial Chief Justice comes up. This was the year, apparently; Chief Justice Hughes picked up his degree this week.

What of other university presidents? You can rest assured that President Anderson will get several honorary degrees from those beloved "sister universities" he likes to talk about. We can almost guarantee that he will get one next summer from some place or other. St. Thomas is the natural place to start. Then there's always Dalhousie.

And because our president gets degrees in this fashion, so must we also honor the presidents of our "sister" universities.

People who have donated large

sums of money to this university seem to almost "buy" their honorary degrees. Even the anticipation of funding can lead some beautiful blunders. (The Harriet Irving Library was so named because the university thought they could get some money — a lot of money — from ol' K. C. Irving. But the ploy didn't work. One honorary degree later, the Irving folks have still contributed on any significant scale.)

Last but definitely not least, our Chancellor seems to be able to award honorary degrees almost at will. John Junor picked up his degree this week simply because he works for the Beaverbrook Newspapers, a chain owned by Sir Max. (Perhaps he offers the degrees in place of salary

increases — who knows??)

Clearly, the priorities for allotting these degrees are way out of whack. When a "pecking order" gets established — official or unofficial — then we're in trouble. And there's definitely a pecking order at this university.

As students we work too hard and too long to graduate and see these people get degrees simply because they happen to be friends of some person, or because they got lucky in the back country and became premier or education minister.

Our honorary degrees are being bought, folks, and the administration at this university — as well as our elected student representatives — seem terribly content to let it stay that way.



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