

OUR PUSH-BUTTON MINDS

MANNER, NOT MATTER

"The true function of a university is to seek truth as well as to train specialists. When we lose sight of this objective, the university becomes a mere sausage factory."

This was the emphatic reply of Dr. Harper, of education psychology, when asked to comment on the purpose of a university.

It is commonly claimed nowadays that many students emerge from university without having received an education in any real sense. If this criticism is just, said Dr. J. MacDonald, also in education psychology, the fault lies not with the students but with the universities.

A student's period of attendance at university should be that time in his life when, in thought at any rate, he is free to tear down the world around him and rebuild it in his own terms. In order to do this Harper

FREEDOM FOR REFLECTION

recommends that during their first year, all freshmen enroll in a one year general Arts and Science pattern in which they concentrate on liberal arts.

After this initial training of the mind, the student would be prepared to enter his profession and would end up being far more successful.

To prevent the current trend toward "push-button" minds, MacDonald made several recommendations. The student's greatest need is freedom—and how do universities supply this need?

The way to produce reflective and inquiring minds is certainly not to burden students with a tremendous weight of lectures and courses, or to teach in conformity with a single text.

MacDonald feels that the intellectual life on the Canadian campus is not so obvious a feature as it is on European campi because we are

FOLLY PRECEDES WISDOM

tied down with too many routine duties—classes, labs, seminars, and exams. The atmosphere of this place is one of rush, flurry, and speed.

In order to acquire maximum benefit from a university, students must have leisure time in quantity to use as they see fit. To provide for it, Harper suggests that the number of courses be cut to 12 lectures per week, and the remaining ones intensified.

"With fewer courses, the student would be encouraged to study and learn on his own, and the lecturer would not have to summarize all relevant material in a course. Original thinking seems to be a luxury that neither the instructor nor the student can afford."

Besides having extra time, a university student must be allowed the freedom to make his own mistakes. "That folly must precede wisdom is a good psychological, as well as a good philosophical, principle."

The model of the business corporation is one that carries prestige in North America. Any move by a university to follow this model for its

organization is a move toward over-technicalization.

"While any institution must operate within the framework of a set of rules, professors are not junior executives and students are not industrial trainees. A university in which they are so treated is a university in name only."

Academic independence within society is also essential for the proper operation of a university. In other words, a university should be completely free from direct, or indirect government pressures, since political expediency and truth seldom go hand in hand.

"It is my feeling that a university that is influenced in its thinking by the prevailing government policy is a poor university," says Harper.

Dr. MacDonald stresses that the argument stating that the increase in the number of professional faculties and schools is destroying the

IDEAL CO-EXISTENCE

universities is completely false. He can see no reason whatsoever why an intending engineer or teacher should not gain as much benefit from attendance at a university as an arts student.

In short: What is taught in university is not altogether unimportant; but much more important is the manner in which it is taught.

Dr. L. E. Gads, associate dean of Engineering, also emphasized the need for co-existence of faculties on an ideal campus: not the sort of political co-existence which would imply that the engineering and arts students would agree to stop stealing each other's queens, but a more fundamental kind.

"It means integrated training and education of diverse groups on the campus of an institution of learning, which is dedicated to the principle of universality."

Gads thinks that this integration should be carried down to the classroom level—for true education, out-

MUNDANE ACCUMULATION

side mundane accumulation of facts, occurs in mixed classes, with students of other faculties.

An education of this type would broaden a student's mind, and better prepare him for his role as a leader.

Contrary to Dr. Harper and Dr. MacDonald, Dr. Gads does not think that there is a trend toward over-emphasis of technical skills in our universities. He feels that conditions have remained at status quo throughout our brief history.

He agrees, however, that through co-existence, having the basic aim of letting the other side know how this side lives, breathes, and thinks, and to build character and mutual understanding through communal living, the purpose of a university education is fulfilled.

STUDENTS STRESS SPECIALIZATION

"No, the modern Canadian university is not too technical in its education programs," says Dr. D. E. Smith, Dean of Arts and Sciences.

In the faculty of Arts and Science, however, which contains the honors programs, some over-specialization may occur.

But of the 1762 students registered in the faculty, only 12-15 per cent are in honors programs. Each honors program is a four year course which provides for three option courses from the opposite field (i.e. science vs. arts). However, the degree of specialization varies from department to department.

Dean Smith feels that the student has a sufficient choice in the type of education (broad or specialized) in which he decides to register. Besides

EAGER BEAVER TYPES

the honors programs, there are the pass programs which specialize to a lesser degree, and finally, there are the general B.A. and general B.Sc. programs.

There is, therefore, no reason for one to become more technicalized than he desires.

On the contrary, many students even want a more specialized training than is presented by the honors programs. Smith continually runs into many of these eager beaver types. Take, for example, the would-be specialist of specialists, who gushing with even more brains than he is aware of, comes puffing and flushed (after two flights of stairs) into the Dean's office and mumbles excitedly, "I wanna register in Honors Basketweaving with none of those (ugg) science courses (whatever they are)."

The "budding genius" feels he is being forced into taking something which "won't do him any good, anyway."

"There is continual review," Smith, "of the various programs to see that they are not becoming too over-specialized." The Dean would actually prefer to see a more general education pattern taken by everyone but he feels that, in our present society, the trend toward specialization is inevitable.

With the large demand for skilled people with a university education, it is impossible to train the number of people needed without giving a good deal of attention to the practical purposes of education.

The present rate of progress of our civilization is such that a university can no longer be a community of "gentleman" scholars who have no purpose in life but to debate such aesthetic questions as "How does a fairy (sprite type) keep warm?"

Some departments actually encourage specialization because the students that go on to graduate studies are expected to have a considerable knowledge of their field before entering research. If one wants to get his master's degree in one year after graduation, he must possess both brilliance and knowledge.

Due to the magnitudinal advances in technology, a student, as the years progress, has to learn more and more in order to just keep up with current

ARDENT GRAD

discoveries. This is true of all departments and is exemplified in the fields of biology and chemistry.

In other words, to be considered a qualified scientist in a particular field, one must be thoroughly acquainted with all pertinent theories and data on the subject, as well as be engaged in active research.

In chemistry, for example, an ardent grad student may have to sweat for years over the reaction mechanisms of a complex ion such as dichlorotetraaquo-chromium (III), while several years ago it was only necessary to know that the ion existed.

Smith thinks that it is the fault of the individual, and not of the university, if he goes through school without acquiring breadth as well as depth to his education. The student with broader interests will have an inherent desire to acquire knowledge on all matters, and he therefore will tend to educate himself.

The university provides the opportunities for this self-education in

SOME SORT OF COMPROMISE

the form of debates, clubs, sports, and other extra-curricular activities. An active student will make full use of his summer to educate himself in all phases of life that he is excluded from in winter due to a heavy study program.

With this in mind, the Dean observes that under the existing circumstances, our university is working out the best possible programs for course arrangement. Since a university, as such, is a collection of different types of education at a higher level, the administration must reach some sort of compromise between the theoretical and technical aspects.

On the whole, the Dean would prefer to place greater emphasis on the general type of education, but he does not want use to lose sight of the necessity for specialization.

Stories by
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