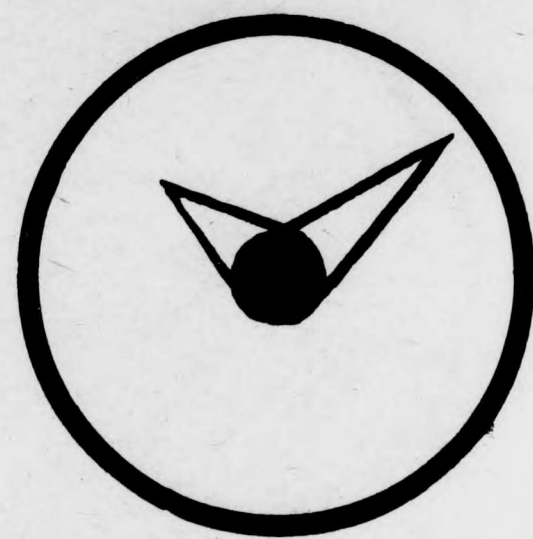


by Kenneth Eble

Kenneth Eble is chairman of the English department at the University of Utah. An outspoken critic of American education tradition, he is the author of a *Perfect Education* (Collier, New York), from which this article is adapted.

This article first appeared in the 15 November 68 issue of *THE CHEVRON*, the student newspaper of the University of Waterloo.



A time and a place for learning. What would a person have if he had his heart's desire?

First, I think, the time should **not** follow hard upon public school education. The effects of twelve years of formal education need to wear off somewhat.

The continuity of learning in some subjects, such as a foreign language or mathematics, should be sacrificed for the gaining of wider experiences of other kinds.

The entrant should have had some battering against the world, partly just to be exposed to less desirable alternatives than further learning, but also to contribute to the world's menial tasks — something like a price of admission.

Roughly speaking, he should have done enough useful work to make it economically feasible for him to remain largely idle for a number of years. For many, such experiences in the world has usefully broken in upon the enclosed world that may have defined their family experience. The world is a less expensive, if not more understanding place than college to begin to assume a life of one's own, and the college could benefit from not having to cope with the effects of first separation from home and family.

The world would have confronted the student with the need to know many things and the frustration of not being able to find them out.

It might even have aroused idealism sufficient to encourage the youth to attempt something other than that which is forced upon him by necessity, opportunity or drift.

The school would be a residential college, in the sense that it would provide a place of residence, not force a place of confinement.

Its isolation would be that of any enterprise that requires quiet, communing, and freedom. However, such isolation would not be such as to deny easy access to the world.

Ideally, it might be a bit of greenery and space set down in some area other than the blighted area of a large city. Or it could as easily be removed from the city, although then it must create an excitement of its own or give ready access to some great metropolitan area.

Space and shelter would guide one aspect of its architectural design. As places of instruction and study, its buildings would give the distinct sense of being enclosed, being sheltered. They would provide places within that could be drawn around one's shoulders.

Yet that cloistering should be so designed that, moving outside, one would feel

that sense of space as providing freedom to move, to stretch, to let the eye roam and the mind expand.

In their total order, they should not dominate the individual either by their magnitude or by their fastidiousness of arrangement.

If the setting is urban, then nature has to be brought in, not with fake mountains or babbling brooks, but with honest courts of grass and trees and shrubbery, suited to its urban existence. If the setting is rural, then buildings should be placed with respect for geologic time and geographic place — wind and water, sun and rain.

The calendar would be regulated by the surrounding climate by the seasons in the country and by the movement of life, which is only partly seasonal, in the city.

And within the calendar, the work itself would seek to make the most of the long stretches of winter, the early twilights, the rainy season. There would be flexible schedules for certain tasks, with some allowances for human failings. There would be a close relationship between what was to be learned and the time necessary to such learning.

There would be no regular march through evenly spaced hours, but fixed and regular times for studies that profit from such hours and varying times and places for those that need variable hours.

Students would be guided in using the scraps of time that our rough schedule not only permits but countenances — the fifteen minutes to drill on a language, the ten-minute walk that shapes a composition, the before-dinner lull filled with discourse.

My university would be one you walk into.

It would have some kind of wall around it, and lots of inviting green grass, and enough architecture of a traditional kind to conceal the fact that it was just built yesterday, and the gates would be open wide — not wide enough for automobiles, but sufficient for humans.

Permitting the automobile has not only caused problems and increased noise, it has supported the idea of the service-station university where young men get pumped full of intellectual gas and get greased for a smooth passage through life.

So my university is a walk-in place.

Having taken the effort to walk in, the student just might decide to stick around awhile.

Once there, the student certainly wouldn't begin, as American universities now have him do, with registration. What a dispiriting introduction to college life!

The only useful function it serves is to eliminate those who can't find their way through the process.