

# UNIVERSITY NEWSBEAT

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## "Slaying the mystical university dragons"

by H. Ian Macdonald, President of York University

The following article by York President H. Ian Macdonald originally appeared in the *Globe and Mail* on July 21, 1981

During the past few weeks, the media has devoted much time and space to colorful convocation ceremonies at universities across the country, and the messages of distinguished honorary graduands given departing students.

I was delighted that, to date this year, I have not seen the traditional newspaper cartoon depicting one of those graduates, still wearing cap and gown and with sheepskin clutched in hand, standing in an unemployment insurance line. Nor have I heard or read remarks about how many, if not most of them, will be driving taxis for the rest of their lives.

Old myths die hard, but this one—that a university degree is tantamount to a guarantee of unemployment—has clung to life with particular tenacity. Eventually, of course, the facts will out. When Statistics Canada published a report earlier this year that showed university graduates have the lowest level of unemployment of any educational group in Canada at 2.4 percent (college certificate-holders are next lowest at four percent), the media and the public began to take notice.

We had been trying to tell them so for years. We knew that, since university grads were usually applying for more highly specialized positions, it would often take them longer to find an appropriate job than it would those seeking more generalized work. However, it was evident that once they did find employment they not only started at a higher rate of pay but their chances of upward mobility within their field were increased compared to those without university training.

As a single example of the myth of chronic unemployment for university graduates, I can quote statistics recently provided by York University's dean of the Faculty of Education—and nowhere has the myth been more persistent than in the area of teacher-training: of the 160 graduates of our 1980 Faculty of Education, 130 (or 81.3 percent) responded to a survey regarding their employment status and only five (or 3.8 percent) had failed to find suitable employment.

Perhaps this is the time, having apparently slain one mythical dragon, that we should be taking on another: that universities have over-expanded and should go through a shrinkage phase.

This proposed healthy gearing-down (being brutally forced by persistent government under-funding) is seen as inevitable, even desirable, in some conventional wisdom because: (1) the baby boom has "boomed out" and there is, therefore, less need for university places for students; (2) fewer secondary school graduates are opting for university education (this is a remainder of Myth One and assumes students see no employment benefits from attending university); and (3) the country does not need a surplus of over-educated and under-employed (again refer to Myth One) citizens wandering about.

These are all erroneous (if persistent) assumptions based on

either incorrect or incomplete information. The baby boom is over, but the fact is (despite earlier inaccurate government forecasts) that total enrolment in universities continues to grow, though not as quickly as during the 1960s when the system was forced by government into rapid expansion to meet the demand for spaces.

In Ontario, across the university system, applications from high school students increased by 10 percent this year. Add to those numbers the continuing question of accessibility, a question that becomes more pertinent every time the economy takes a down-swing and every time universities are compelled to raise their fees. How

We are not having trouble selling our product; we are having difficulty providing it because of inadequate government financing. The results of attempting to maintain our standards and provide our services while persistently receiving grants well below the level of inflation over a period of years are dramatically becoming obvious: most universities across Canada are either already deeply in debt or rapidly moving to that position as reserves run dry.

I am certainly not opposed to a continuing process of review of our systems, a continuing process of fine (or even medium) tuning to eliminate redundancies and focus excellence among universities.

nation.

"Public spokesmen who should know better have been suggesting that we require fewer persons with a university education because we require more technically trained people. In fact, these groups are complementary and we require more of both. Strategic planning for the Ontario economy must involve a mix of enhanced research and development, professional training, technical skills and general education.

"It is vital that the need for urgent development and expansion of the human resource capabilities of Ontario and Canada be recognized and acted upon before critical manpower shortages occur in the mid-1980s and beyond. As a country in the process of becoming a medium- and high-technology society, we are critically in need of indigenous entrepreneurs, innovative managers, and leaders in the application of science and technology."

I do not believe that governments are unaware that the place to find the solutions to many of the problems that beset our society is within the university—not only through production of highly educated people to meet the challenge of the future but through the research potential of institutions of higher learning. And there lies a second bitter irony. The federal Government, in recent years, has

been taking steps to increase its support of research in a number of scientific and sociological areas. The question is now becoming whether the universities, starved for operating funds to the point of near collapse, will be able to accept that financial aid and carry out the required research.

For example, one of York University's particular areas of strength and excellence is in biological research. Ranked in terms of the dollar value of grants received from federal sources in the years 1976 to 1979, York placed first among 22 major universities in Canada. It is obvious we have the potential to do a job. But our overcrowding (due almost directly to under-funding) has forced our scientists to perform their research in hallways and converted washrooms. On the one hand, we are told to do more; on the other hand, we are told we will get less to do it with.

To those who would quietly acquiesce to the dismantling of our university system, once the envy of the world, let me quote from C.P. Snow, an Honorary Graduand of York University: "The world's greatest need is an appetite for the future. The sense of the future is behind all good policies. Unless we have it, we can give nothing either wise or decent to the world."

Or to ourselves.

### University grads have the lowest level of unemployment of any educational group in Canada.

many students who deserve and would benefit from higher education are not applying because, for social and/or financial reasons, they simply cannot afford to apply?

Even if the argument were valid that fewer Grade 13 graduates were continuing on to university (and it is not), how can universities ignore new pressures from other sectors of the community for access to our lecture halls?

The phenomenon of part-time students is one example. There has been a tremendous growth in part-time and mature student enrolment in recent years. At York University alone, the enrolment of part-time and mature students has almost doubled since 1977 and, at our Glendon campus, the percentage of these students as part of our total enrolment has risen from 18.5 percent to 27.8 percent in the past five years.

(Glendon provides another good example of accessibility. It is the only campus in Toronto where post-secondary education is available in French. Toronto has a francophone population of about 50,000. Montreal, with an English population of 600,000, has two large anglophone universities with places available each year for about 6,600 incoming undergraduates. Glendon has an annual intake of about 385 freshman students and caters to francophone students and others interested in furthering their education in a second language. It is obvious that accessibility for an English-speaking student to university in Montreal is about 1.5 times better than for a francophone student in Toronto.)

The problem of universities across Canada is not lack of demand for enrolment. At York, we can only accept one of four qualified applications for our Faculty of Administrative Studies. That becomes one of 10 applicants at Osgoode Hall Law School. In fact, it appears that this year we will be turning away qualified applicants in every one of our faculties.

However, a wholesale shrinking of the system merely to bring it within the dollar figures that governments seem willing to supply is a destructive process and ignores the consequences of accepting such an inevitability.

There is also a bitter irony involved in pursuing such an objective and it was cited in York's brief to the Committee to Review the Objectives and Funding of Ontario Universities: "Current conventional public wisdom holds that there will be an inevitable 'shrinkage' in universities and, moreover, that there should be because of a potential reduction in the numbers of Grade 13 students in the system."

"In our opinion, this is precisely the opposite of what is required or what should occur. The future of Ontario, its economy and society, depends directly on the quality of its human resources and on the availability of 'knowledge workers' as never before. We urgently require not less, but more investment in education if Ontario is to compete in the world economy and recapture its traditional place in the life of the

## Lottery benefits kids' day camp

For \$1, you can find your place in the sun.

How?

Buy a lottery ticket from the York Youth Connection. Two prizes will be awarded in a draw at York on October 1 at noon: the first prize is a trip for two to Trinidad and Tobago, which includes air fare and accommodation; the second prize is air fare for two to Jamaica.

Both trips must be taken before December 14, 1981.

Tickets are available in the York Bookstore and in Room S802 Ross Building. They will also be available in Central Square on September 17,

at the York Youth Connection booth from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The York Youth Connection is a volunteer group of York University community members and members from the neighbouring Jane-Finch community. The group operates a summer day camp on the York campus for children between the ages of 10 and 16. The camp provides the children with a multimedia and sports program, plus a three-day camping trip to the Rockwood Conservation Area.

All proceeds from the draw will go to support the camp and its activities.

## It's time to apply for Rhodes Scholarships

Applications for the 1982 Rhodes Scholarships may be made until October 26, 1981. Eleven of the scholarships will be awarded to Canadians, entitling the winners to study at Oxford University in England for two (and possible three) years commencing in September 1982. The value of each scholarship is approximately 6000 pounds per annum.

Canadians, preferably in their third or fourth year of university work, who are unmarried and between 18 and 24 years of age are eligible for the scholarships. Applications forms and particulars may be obtained from the Faculty of Graduate Studies, N920 Ross Building, or by writing to: J.M. Farley, Esq., P.O. Box 451,

Toronto-Dominion Centre, Toronto M5K 1M5.

Applicants are not required to write an examination. Selection is made by provincial committees after personal interviews and on the basis of the candidate's record. Although scholastic ability is of importance, such factors as character, qualities of leaderships and interest in outdoor sports are carefully considered. Some definite quality of distinction, whether in intellect or character or a combination of these, is the essential requirement.

The Rhodes Scholarships, established in 1904 under the Will of Cecil Rhodes, are the best known of international scholarships. They have been the model for many similar awards in Canada, the

United States and elsewhere. Rhodes Scholars proceed to Oxford where unique opportunities exist for general undergraduate studies and for advanced work in both the humanities and the sciences. The present stipend is approximately sufficient to pay all expenses and to enable the scholar to take advantage of excellent opportunities for travel in Britain and on the continent of Europe during the three lengthy vacations of the Oxford academic year.

Over 600 Canadians have now held Rhodes Scholarships. Many of these scholars on returning to Canada have had distinguished careers and made significant contributions to the public life in this country.