

U of Toronto psychology courses alienate students

TORONTO (CUP) — An organizational meeting last week of psychology students at the University of Toronto heard complaints about the impersonality of the first year course, the dominance of behavioural psychology, and the lack of a program in humanistic psychology.

The Wednesday meeting was organized by Laurie Miller, a student psychology curriculum committee member to gain support for Miller's plan to gain departmental approval for two new courses on humanistic and depth psychology.

Miller said that when he proposed the new courses Chairman A.N. Doob had ruled that it was not within the jurisdiction of the committee. The courses will have to be approved by a department meeting.

The curriculum committee has only two students out of eight members and it is merely an advisory body to the chairman.

Miller said "the way psychology

has been taught at the U of T has alienated many people". He explained that the department has an experimental orientation. It is mostly concerned manipulating phenomena to see how they affect people and animals.

"I know a number of people who have been alienated by first year psychology who were interested but just haven't wanted to go on," he said.

Miller said that "many questions are just not dealt with". The department teaches the theories of B.F. Skinner "very extensively" according to Miller. In this way the department leaves out or downplays the work of humanistic psychologists such as R.D. Laing and Carl Rogers. When Miller's request for the new courses came up he was told that there was no one in the department capable of teaching the courses.

"I think that since one of the basic principles of universities is academic freedom, academic issues should be examined from a variety of viewpoints", he said.

Miller said that many students want courses in humanistic psychology and social and applied psychology, "but the students are not in any real position to affect decisions within the department."

Though course unions have had little success in the past, Miller hopes that students can organize to gain changes within the department.

At the meeting, there were a number of complaints from first year students. One said that the first year course, which is entirely based on tapes with students progressing at their own rate, has led to a lack of human contact with either the teachers or other students.

Another complained that social psychology was understressed and

physiology over-emphasized. There was also some complaining about one particular professor who has answered questions by saying "you wouldn't understand".

There was also discussion, saying that the course load was too heavy and that there are too many required courses for upper years.

Miller said that in the case of one

new course in methodology planned for next year, he could not attend the meeting but submitted his comments in writing. They were never read to the committee and the chairman said he had not checked his box for them. The course was approved.

Though the department has given finances as a reason to not

teach the new courses, Miller thinks that priorities should be shifted. "This is so important that money should be taken away from existing courses".

"The main thing is that there are certain things that students want to learn. Humanistic psychology is not a unique course. It is offered at many places," he added.

Grading discrepancies protested

TORONTO (CUP) — "We are being unfair to students," was Scarborough principal Ralph Campbell's report to the U of T Academic Affairs Committee.

Campbell was protesting the marking system under which his report said — "Wide discrepancies lead to injustices to students. For example, and without criticism of either English or History, 20 percent of the students taking English courses at Scarborough received A's while 7.5 percent of those taking History courses received A's."

Campbell suggested in his letter a possible range of discrepancies which would be acceptable and that anything past those limits should be questioned.

The Campbell scale indicated three areas which might be questioned:

-A course with more than 25 students with a mean grade of less than 60 or more than 75;

-A grading pattern with less than five percent or more than 30 percent A's;

-A high incidence of F's.

Campbell submitted statistics from the 1972-73 year at Scarborough which showed that of 14,717 student-courses taught the average mark was 66.1.

This broke down into 16 percent A's, 36.3 percent B's, 26.5 percent C's, 11.8 percent D's and 9.1 percent F's.

Campbell pointed to the first year commerce course as "obviously a serious problem." He said of 1246 enrolled, three got A's and 6 failed with a mean of 49.8.

He used this example to urge a comparison about "teaching practices and student qualifications at Scarborough vis a vis St. George, the main U of T campus.

The commerce course, he said, has identical outlines and examinations across the three university campuses and final exams are corrected by professors on a

random basis so no professor corrects papers from his own students.

By virtue of the marking system Campbell was implying the problem rested somewhere either in the teaching of courses on the various campuses or the students.

Reports submitted to the Academic Affairs Committee showed there is no clear pattern, however, to grading schemes in the university.

For instance, in the Faculty of Medicine, tests are usually multiple choice exams which are machine-scored with new standardized and normalized scores produced for the instructors.

However, the actual grades in the Medical School are only Honor-Pass-Fail, a system which was reaffirmed last week following an attempt by some faculty members to bring back the old grading system.

The Medical School only released a partial listing of grade breakdowns for the committee, indicating how many got honors but only saying, "Very few students have failed."

The percentage of students getting honors in Medical School decreased from 24.7 percent of first year students to only 12.1 percent of the fourth year student during the 1972-73 academic year.

Faculty will alter course evaluation

KINGSTON (CUP) — Queen's three year old course evaluation program will be radically altered and made confidential, if the university faculty committee studying it get their way.

In a report to be presented before the Arts and Science faculty board, which is composed of both students and faculty, the Committee will propose the replacement of the published student course evaluations by course appraisals within the faculty departments. At present the course guide is centrally administered by students.

The Committee stressed that course evaluation is more important as a means of appraising and improving academic resources than as information to be used by students in choosing among various courses.

The Committee claimed that the public rating of courses tends to mislead students in their choices. In addition, they feared that it tends to embitter potentially good instructors.

For these reasons they felt that information obtained in student evaluations should be maintained strictly inside the department.

The Committee has also recommended that courses be rated by faculty members sitting in on their colleagues' courses.

The faculty committee finally recommends that guides to courses be set up by consulting professor's opinions of the courses they teach. However, this contradicts the original objectives of the present course guide — that of providing students with student assessments of the various courses and professors.

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