

The Academic Assembly Line...

AN ALTERNATE PLAN

Everyone had been waiting for the evening to get off the ground but it never really did. Instead it had become one of those bull sessions which result occasionally when no one seems to possess the necessary drive to get a party launched. No one was complaining and to all outward appearances, everyone seemed quite content to shoot the breeze.

Inevitably the question was asked: "How's everything going at college?"

"Oh, same old grind, can't complain; OK I guess." (This has become my stock answer to this stock question.) At this point the conversation turned toward education in general and before it moved on, somebody said something which has stuck in my mind ever since.

"College is a place people go to when they can't make it on their own."

This sardonic comment struck me as having just enough truth in it so as to render it very unfunny. It serves to point up the basic fault in the whole education system — we are spoon fed. The move to academocracy and course unions suffers from the same disease: they merely want a new feeder and a differently shaped spoon.

The structures under which we now operate, the curriculum — lectures, assignments, exams — all serve the same purpose, burp-gulp-burp cycle. This is not a fascist plot as our left-wing friends would have us believe, but the natural extension of a high school system which also labours under some misconceptions about education. Education is not merely a cumulative process. Rather, it is primarily a developmental one.

by Alan Hall

Is there a problem? Of course there is. Is it not sufficiently pressing to merit guerilla tactics but too many people are content to function within the system, simply because it is convenient to do so.

How many students have tried to take courses and found that they had lecture conflicts? How many students have not been able to enter courses without taking prerequisites? I contend that lectures are not the most efficient medium for transmitting knowledge, merely the most expedient. The same criticisms apply to prerequisites: they too are conducive to expediency rather than efficiency. Let us attempt to provide an alternative program to avoid rather than resolve some of these problems.

In the first instance, access to our program, which we shall call the "independent program" shall be provided to all. To impose entrance qualifications would be to depend on the validity and effectiveness of prior educational systems and intelligence tests. (For the squeamish we could demand Senior Matriculation but I personally believe this is giving grade 12 more importance than it deserves.)

For a fee of about \$250 per year, our neophyte receives a library card, a student activities card, the use of such lab equipment as he requires and a tutor for each of five subjects of his choice. The course of study its pace, depth and range are entirely up to the student. There are no lectures, but lists of films and possible guest speakers will be available and if enough interest is evident, then they will be presented. The student may consult his tutor or not as he sees fit. There will be no assignments — whether the student accomplishes anything or not is entirely up to him; it's his time and money that he is wasting.

At the end of a three year period the student will appear before an examining board. If the course must have any meaning for anyone besides the student (and employers are notorious skeptics) then he needs his bit of paper. The examining board will ask the candidate why he thinks he merits a B. A. or B. Sc. or both. The candidate, if he is worth a damn at all, will produce any



research papers he has completed and generally describe what he has done with his three years. Such an "exit requirement" is not conducted like a rigorous cross examination but rather more like a job interview. If he merits a degree, he gets one — further rules are unnecessary.

This program would make demands upon a student but they would be the right kinds of demands. The situation forces the student to develop and rely upon his own resourcefulness. A mature and responsible individual cannot help but result.

Library books, research publication and periodicals are excellent sources of information and opinion which are largely ignored in the spoon-feed lecture system. Armed with this sort of information and the guidance, when needed, of his tutor there is no reason why a student cannot do sophisticated research in his undergraduate program.

At first glance, this seems idealistic but it is both a practical and an efficient system for the earning of a B.A. or B.Sc. degree. There are enough people who are capable of acting as tutors in the group comprised of fac-

ulty plus graduates to provide a student-tutor ratio of about 10:1. Since the independent scholar would not be the type of person who would be continually running to his tutor, the ratio would probably be a workable one.

It would be interesting to see the independent program offered next year. It would be interesting to see who would enrol. Those students would probably be bright, interested and unorthodox. They would never complain about their courses or their professors or their assignment and if that isn't unorthodox, what is?

How many people do you know who are going to college because they do not know what they want to do? Precisely. It is this lack of professionalism which shatters the freshman's image of college. It is a combination of poor lectures and dull material which make some courses tough. Clearly it is not your mentality which is being challenged, merely your endurance. Your mentality is being insulted. Be creative, join the independent program and exercise your creativity! What is creativity you ask? It is doing something without being told.

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