

ally all that good?

to pursue change out of fear of adjustment to consequences, and students as consumers are to influence the structure of

data do not tell the whole story. It will require a detailed of the faculty's curriculum. For it is likely that a significant of the faculty's overall program is redundant in the sense that departments offer courses which are the same substantive in their development. In their development, departments have competed against one another for students, and this competition is reflected in a costly and inefficient curriculum which is intellectually confusing to students and teachers alike. This is true with the social science departments where the corpus of the curriculum cuts across the disciplinary lines, that is, where the disciplines deal more arbitrarily than they do in professional and applied

being the case, the peculiarities of the social science departments in large measure have been neglected. Solutions to these difficulties may lie not in finding the funds for more academic staff, but in rationalizing a total program to meet the demand on these departments so that, in this way, persistences are corrected at the source as substantive reforms are sought to increase the quality of the educational services provided.

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Thorsell's image of the university as "factory-like" is appropriate, so is Thorsell's image of the "mixed market basket" where choice is made where student-consumers select alternative "products," where only the rules of the game plus timetabling seem to govern the "quality" of the relationship. I would not be old-fashioned but I believe that the "supermarkets" don't mix, and that universities are revealed to be in this regard, remedial action is necessary.

For fairness, the chairmen of the social science departments of the Faculty of Arts, with the support of many of their colleagues, have been working to address; and the dean of the Faculty of Arts and his associates have taken modest steps to introduce a new program. The chairmen have argued that the conditions are causing the quality of undergraduate education to decline; the faculty office has been unable to approve limited staff increases in many cases. But budgetary restrictions exist and there is no solution relative to the magnitude of the problem, for at least the following reasons.

The university's highly specialized curriculum plus its staff tenure system has lost most of the flexibility which is required to correct strains of those which have been noted. These cannot be transferred easily within the organization; factors of demand and therefore cannot be easily

(2) The consumers of educational services — the students — seem willing to accept instruction in large and very large classes. Many of them know no other way. I sometimes think that many students wish no other way, since most alternatives would place demands on students which are unknown in the context of the large class.

(3) The suppliers of educational services — the teachers — are often as willing as their students to leave matters as they stand. Instructing a very large class is supposed to be heavy work and often is; but just as often an instructor can take advantage of the anonymity of the large classroom and like many students avoid the responsibilities of the classroom.

(4) The administrators of educational services — chairmen, deans, vice-presidents, and presidents — are often preoccupied with routine chores of administration. Staff must be evaluated regularly, timetables must be set, budgets must be prepared and approved.

Like any large organization the university has a momentum toward its own perpetuation; it seems to find little time for critical assessment and creative change. Even the warning signs may not be heard for a lot of other noise keeps people busy dealing with the wrong things. It is hard to keep in effective pursuit of quality.

(5) Very little information (even of the kind contained here) is available to the general public or even to constituent groups within the university community. The provincial government must focus on the broad outline of educational expenditures; it may be interested in, but it has little time for, the details of the university's internal administration.

A statutory body such as the University of Alberta Senate (with a large number of public representatives) can look to the programs of a faculty such as Arts, but the Senate would be loath to wage a full-scale review of Arts or of any other unit of the university. Students through their Students' Union have surprisingly little to say about the quality of instructional services.

(6) The routines of the faculty work in many ways to further entrench the faculty's problem. A few years ago, for example, the departments of the faculty redesigned the curriculum to replace full-year courses with half-year courses. For many departments it was largely a mechanical exercise. Furthermore, there is little regard for curriculum overlap between and in some cases within departments.

In any event, the faculty's curriculum has expanded, at least in terms of its differentiation, and in the process it has become more and more difficult to see the forest for the trees. Thorsell's "matrix of our ideas" is much less likely to be perceived, by student and teacher alike, in today's Faculty of Arts.

Do we generate the problem?

It has been suggested that the faculty and its departments, the social science departments in particular, have functioned in many ways to generate

their problem by, for example, tending to avoid the refinement and creative revision of the curriculum *even while encouraging its expansion*. If some departments are subject to massive registration pressure, in large measure it is because these departments have added service course after service course to their programs, to attract more and more students.

The strategy consolidates a department's hold on its budget allocation (a bureaucratic problem) while at the same time it confuses the means to the achievement of educational goals (a problem of quality).

Furthermore, if the Faculty of Arts has a serious problem, it is largely because the faculty has been *permissive* with its departments, especially the social science departments, in allowing them to expand all over the place without requiring that they adhere to adequate standards. For a long time there has been no clear vision of *purpose* in the faculty; there has been no clear vision of *design* for its academic programs, of the *relationships* between its departments.

In other words, the Faculty of Arts has participated in the dilution of its own programs during a period of rapid change in the larger society.

Surely the faculty now is responsible for its own reform.

An Outline for Reform

Are there remedies? I would say, there are, although remedies in a situation such as this of necessity must be nothing less than drastic. One such remedy is to impose *general* quotas, meaning that many students would be denied access to courses and programs of an institution itself so heavily supported by public funds. The debate surrounding quotas in professional faculties has been intense; for the social science departments which are defined by so many as service departments, and for the Faculty of Arts generally, the very thought of quotas is almost imponderable.

Yet quotas of one type or another surely will have to be adopted to achieve even a modest resolution of the problem.

There is the possibility of *specific* quotas. These are quotas on class size, for example, where a department specifies limits for classes where such limits are determined according to educational objectives. Advanced undergraduate courses rely heavily on specialized library resources and require students to present written and oral research reports.

Having already seen that the average section size of senior courses is close to 40 in the 5 social science departments and approaches 60 in the Department of Sociology, it remains only to be said that much too often, if not simply a matter of routine, quality suffers in the wake of quantity. Quotas on class size, determined according to educational objectives, may be an absolute necessity.

Another possible remedy is to alter the organizational context of the social science departments as now constituted in the Faculty of Arts. There is a natural coherence to these departments which

suggests the innovation of a separate Faculty of Social Science. This remedy is suggested with some reservation since new bureaucracy alone could not be sufficient to regain the excellence of standards now deteriorating. If the university wished such a new faculty to continue to service impossibly large numbers of students, it would have to allocate much greater financial resources to the faculty, to permit a significant expansion of human resources, and to allow the technical means for coping with the burden of heavy enrolment without sacrificing the quality of the educational process.

Alternatively, preferably in my view, a new Faculty of Social Science could be given a mandate to develop *social science* at this university, as contrasted with the separate development of the social science disciplines and departments. Existing resources could be redeployed, for example, by reshaping those resources and by introducing new elements to form a series of social science programs language and culture, political and social thought, history and social change, social policy studies, research methodologies, etc.

These suggestions if ever enacted would require major adjustments by the academic staff. Departments as we know them now would become administrative units at most. The teaching program would be clustered along new lines. Students would plan their programs across several years because the university no longer would offer many courses each and every year a practice itself wasteful of creative resources even though it is in keeping with the image of the university as supermarket.

Everyone would gain by having to think and plan in the longer term, but students in particular would profit by having to organize coherent academic programs in advance of their studies. Academic counselling would become a critical responsibility of the academic staff; at present academic counselling is practiced very little in the Faculty of Arts. Perhaps in time the university would move to establish an intellectually coherent junior program for all B.A. students a program, in Thorsell's words, that would explore "the continuity of thought over time and the relation of ideas across disciplines."


A few years ago a close friend was denied a sabbatical leave. A number of departmental colleagues had their leave applications approved. The dean argued that with the approval of his application, the adequacy of the department's program no longer could be guaranteed. My friend accepted this judgement, though he did return a question how could the dean be assured of the adequacy of the department's program on the basis of the relatively few persons left behind to staff scores of courses having many thousands of students in them?

This question, posed several years ago, has yet to be answered. The dean of the Faculty of Arts may need to reach for help from the entire university community and beyond, if he is every to find it possible to draft a reply.

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