

Ethics in education

by Ken Lenz

A Senate Task Force studying the University of Alberta's role in the teaching of ethics has been struck as a result of current controversy.

An ad-hoc committee struck earlier this year resolved that, "the critical issues facing society today are of overwhelming dimensions and will demand university graduates capable of making decisions of an ethical and moral nature."

It was the combination of this obvious conclusion and the general interest stimulated by discussions at a recent Senate meeting which prompted the committee's establishment.

Four people spoke on the topic of ethics at the meeting last Friday. Though there was general consensus on the premise of providing a foundation for the formation of ethics to students, there was much argument about the method of this education, whether it should be compulsory, at the risk of dictating values rather than merely providing students with the skills to make up their own minds.

According to Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench Tevie Miller, "complaints in ethical and professional conduct have tripled in the last three years."

Miller also said that most professional associations he ap-

proached said one of two things:

"Either they have approached the University to do something in these areas and have gotten little response or they would like the University to get into this area far more thoroughly than they are now."

Miller also noted that only three faculties - Engineering, Nursing and Law have mandatory courses in ethics.

Reverend Tom Leadbeater, who chaired the ad-hoc committee on ethics agrees that there should be more emphasis on ethical issues.

Says Leadbeater, "surely an important part of being an educated person is to comprehend the fundamental problems of human existence in all their complexity and to engage with life at a high level of awareness."

"The increase in the number of private and religious schools and colleges in North America is due in part to a parental concern for moral education and this will continue until such time as public education takes more seriously the responsibility to develop a sense of moral and social values and a commitment to live by them," he says.

But Philosophy professor Roger Shiner thinks that the University should limit their study of ethics to providing the skills

which enable students to make decisions with "a basis in reason and understanding... not just abstract emotion."

Shiner believes that values must "be translated in a neutrally impartial way," and the university already provides enough of this transmission through courses in the Humanities.

The most convincing argument for the establishment of compulsory courses in ethics was made by History student Richard Watts.

Watts referred to a case where a recently graduate Physics student wanted to apply his degree towards the construction of guidance systems for ICBM's.

Says Watts, "I pressed him to give the moral and ethical reasons behind his career choice. I wanted him to justify putting his University-acquired knowledge towards something which I personally find obscene."

"His main reasons were that his training would be best suited for missiles and that the US Defence industry would pay him the most money."

Watts emphasized, "the idea that the University was providing him with a responsibility along with his knowledge had never even occurred to him."

"The University was training this young man without giving him the opportunity to form ethics to complement his education."

Watts also feels that both the stanine marking system and the complexity of the University bureaucracy are fragmenting and demoralizing the student population.

"The stanine marking system pits students against their fellows instead of an absolute standard," he says.

"Some students refuse to



Richard Watts accuses present university marking system of demoralizing the student population.

photo Angela Wheelock

assist their classmates on the grounds that if they move up, someone on the bell curve is going to move down."

Watts continued, "isolated from their own institution and from each other students aren't motivated to form ethics or principles based on mutual cooperation or mutual responsibility."

He concluded, "if our univer-

sities don't step in and fill this responsibility (for the provision of resources to make ethical choices) somebody else will, and besides our universities, I don't think there is anybody else we can trust."

Senate Executive Officer Mary Tutman says the report will probably be completed by February of next year.

Disgruntled unemployed

Ottawa (CUP) - Economists call it the discouraged worker effect. The person who can not find work and has stopped looking, calls it giving up.

Either way, the unemployment statistics look better than they really are because students leave the work force.

Across Canada returning students experienced 13.7 per cent unemployment in August, not counting the discouraged worker effect, according to Statistics Canada. Canadian youth

unemployment reached an average of 19.4 per cent, ranging from 21.5 per cent in BC, to 8.7 per cent in Manitoba.

The federal government took a futile shot at addressing the crisis by funding a special conference on youth unemployment at St. John's in August. But the four day conference ended in total disarray, and a proposal to start a Young Canadian Action Congress did not get approval from delegates who came from around the country.

NOTICE to all Gateway Staff

Staff meeting for the express purpose of selecting the Production Editor for January 1984 - April 1984 will be held on Thursday, November 24, 1983, at 4:00 pm. in Room 282 SUB.

Voters' list for those persons eligible to vote :

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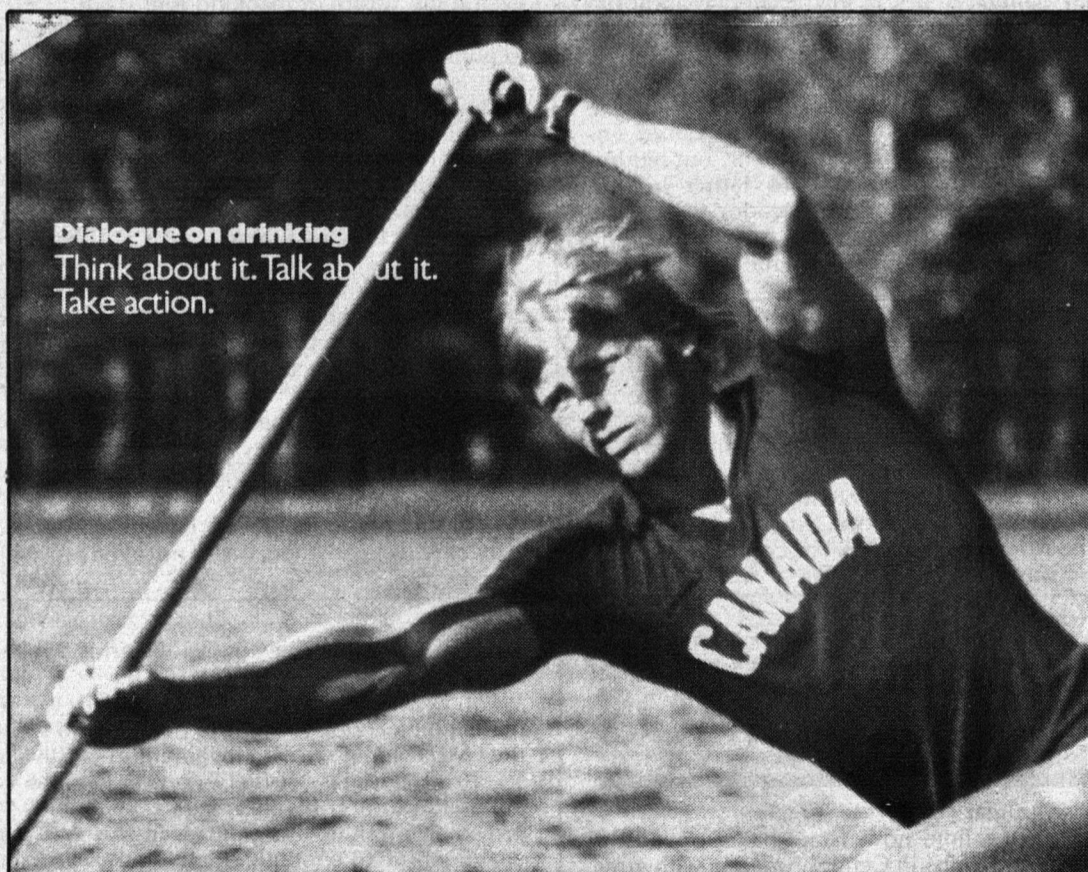
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Sandy Vickerson
Bonnie Zimmerman

Please attend this meeting.



Dialogue on drinking
Think about it. Talk about it.
Take action.

TAKE ACTION ON OVER-DRINKING.

"I like the taste of a cold beer on a hot day, but I certainly don't think you have to get the gang together with a couple of cases of beer just to celebrate the fact you've had a bit of exercise."

JOHN WOOD
OLYMPIC SILVER MEDALLIST

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