

Letters to the Editor

Address letters to the Editor, EXCALIBUR, York University. Those typed (double-spaced) are appreciated. Letters must be signed for legal reasons. A pseudonym will be used if you have a good reason.

Is Foreign Literature on way out at York

This university has had a Foreign Literature Department teaching the Spanish, Russian and German Literature for three years. It has operated with a skeleton staff. The administration seems to have made in those three years only the minimum financial investment.

It has been expected from this department to attract an adequate number of good students without being able to offer a thorough training in the study of these literatures. Since the student body has not increased as expected, an investigating committee, made up of outside professors, has looked into the problem. It has now given its report to the administration.

The gist of this report is as follows:

1. The Foreign Literature Department is to be dissolved.

2. A new department of Hispanic and Italian Literature is to be established starting with the school year 1971-1972.

3. "Due to the limitations of the staff" (to speak in the words of the report) there will be established a 'restricted' programme of German and Russian Literature and Culture courses under the auspices of the humanities department.

These are so far only recommendations made by said committee to the administration. They are not necessarily going to be put into effect. The purpose of this letter is not to 'attack' the ad-

ministration in any way, or to 'demand' certain actions. We wish merely to plead the students' case and to suggest a course of action that we feel would be of the greatest benefit to the actual and potential student body in foreign literature.

It seems to us that so far the university has been trying to put the cart before the horse. If a university shows interest in a certain field of study and tries to attract a student body, both qualitative and quantitative, surely it must make the initial commitment. Surely if must hire an adequate staff to provide an extensive and intensive programme within that field of study, before it can expect serious students to go to that university. Without a good programme, no good student will come.

For example, the University of Waterloo, which started operation in 1958, had built up within the short space of 10 years a huge German Literature Department. The university, as well as its neighbour and rival, Waterloo Lutheran University, are operating with a home base of perhaps 80,000 people culled from the population of the twin cities: Kitchener-Waterloo. Now they attract students from all over Ontario and Canada. Originally they had to commit themselves to hire a full staff and to provide full facilities before they had a large student body. Their investment has paid off handsomely.

Does the administration seriously believe that in a city of 2.5 million people

there is no potential student body to feed the foreign literature departments of two universities?

We think that the administration has in the short time of three years not really given our Foreign Literature Department an honest chance to develop such a student body.

We are aware, of course, of certain internal problems but surely it is not the proper way to solve these problems by dissolving the department entirely? Further, if the administration is going to be willing to build up a Hispanic-Italian literature department from the beginning, without any student body so far in Italian Literature, then why is it not willing to do the same for the Russian and German Literatures? (Assuming, that the administration is going to put into effect the committee's recommendations.)

There are many potential university students with an educational background in German language and a growing number of high-school students with interest in Russian.

If this university should have decided that its field of primary interest lies in the fields of the exact and the social sciences, then it should be entirely honest about this fact. It would then be unfair to the career of professors in the field of Foreign literature and to the students in the study of German and Russian, not to make clear at the outset there is, in effect, no future for them here!

William Nevels
Henry Brendel

Task Force upset at editorializing

Sir:

The task force thanks you for reprinting our brief to the CYSF. Needless to say there is considerable suspicion of the task force, presupposing that it will merely propagandize a predetermined position. By making our brief available, the York Community can judge the study as we have conceived it and our seriousness. If the study is to have any merit, it is essential that the task force has the co-operation of the York Community. We were, therefore, most distressed that EXCALIBUR chose to editorialize on the task force by superimposing the "struggle for Canada" (fist holding maple leaf) symbol on our brief.

Secondly, you omitted what in our opinion was an important footnote. The first occurrence of 'number' is footnoted thus: In this brief, we are using the expression 'numbers' to refer to the proportion of teaching staff at York whose country of origin and acculturation is Canada/or a foreign country, and the proportion of teaching staff whose country of postgraduate academic training is Canada/or a foreign country. The task force will focus on the significance of "numbers" by examining the causes and effects, both institutional and national, of the present composition of teaching-staff at York on various levels of the university.

Task Force
on Canadian education
at York University

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