

of Harris and Shields on the modernist leanings of certain faculty, and their insistence that such heresies were changing McMaster into a godless place with an heretical, or at best a confused and doubting, student body, were, in reality, wrongly conceived. Did they perhaps have some validity, some substance? On the surface, at least, he convinced himself that such doubts were groundless. There was no reason why McMaster need go down that treacherous path; nor was there any concrete evidence that students had been led astray by their academic experience there. In any case, on October 17, 1927, the proposal to move to Hamilton was formally accepted and “the way was now clear, after six years of chequered negotiations and lengthy consultation for the relocation of the university.”

The die was cast and the justification for Whidden’s convictions, or the validity of the basis for his inner disquiet would soon be put to the test, the outcome of which will be described in Volume II of Professor Johnston’s history of McMaster. There is every reason to await its publication with keen anticipation.

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*A Commitment to Excellence.* Report of a Task Force on Graduate Studies and Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Kingston, Queen’s University, 1975, pp. 104.

In 1974, the Canada Council established a Commission on Graduate Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences and one of the first actions of the Commission was to request eight universities to set up task forces to study some of the questions it had been invited to examine. At Queen’s University seven faculty members and one graduate student constituted such a group and this is their report.

It contains nine chapters. Four of them cover topics which all studies of graduate work touch upon: the purposes of graduate education, the design and structure of graduate programs, the financing of graduate students, and basic research within the university. Two others deal specifically with the role of the Canada Council – one in graduate education and the other as a sponsor of university research. There are 48 recommendations interspersed throughout the volume which might have been more usefully collected at the beginning or the end of the report.

The text itself really contains very little that has not been said before in a number of recent publications, in particular the 1972 report of the AUCC (Bonneau-Corry) Commission *Quest for the Optimum* (to which, however, the report makes no reference) and what is said is often disappointing.

Despite the claim that “graduate education and research seem to have lost sight of the purposes for which they are growing,” there is little to enlighten the reader on this point. The brief discussion on the purposes of graduate education omits many of the reasons why graduate work is prosecuted (or was even started) in Canada. Could it be because some of these reasons would show that universities, like other man-made institutions, have feet of clay? – or that they are not fashioned on Humboldt’s ideal? The authors make much of their view that there should be the “firmest resistance to efforts at ‘vocationalizing’ the Ph.D..”

Yet they constantly reiterate that one of the purposes of the Ph.D. is to educate students for teaching and research. Surely teaching and research are themselves vocations as is admitted in recommendation 3 which talks about “job opportunities for persons with Ph.D.’s” and “the kinds of jobs obtained.” Also, despite all the stress on education and teaching, the report makes no mention of the need for graduate work in Education (or even Higher Education) itself.

The masters degree receives short shrift. Although at Queen’s from 1889 to 1917 the M.A. was not regarded as a graduate degree, it has occupied a rather special place in most Canadian universities (as contrasted, say, to U.S. universities). Much useful research is done by students at this level and many excellent research “jobs” are being excellently performed by graduates with masters degrees. If the authors are as concerned about the needs of graduate students as they exhort the faculty and administration to be, these activities deserve more attention than “removal from the encompassing arms of the Canada Council.” For that matter the whole question of the financing of graduate students probably deserves more attention than five pages in a 99 page text of this sort.

Few will disagree with most of the recommendations to the Canada Council. Many of them simply involve tinkering with the machinery; there is a rather strange one (No. 20) which seems to say that university fees vary from place to place in Canada but not the cost of living; some involve an increased bureaucracy (which seldom improves excellence) whereas existing organizations like the Canadian Association of Graduate Schools could well collect some of the data advocated. After all, as the authors point out, “excellence in graduate education lies with the universities themselves.”

But this brings us to some broader issues. The authors assume that the present state of graduate education is “unsatisfactory.” One of the reasons advanced is that “graduate schools have been hastily pasted onto an existing undergraduate organization.” Yet consider the case of Ontario alone. In 1971, 80 per cent of the doctoral enrolments were at five universities where graduate schools had existed for at least ten years, at three of them for almost a quarter of a century or longer – hardly “hasty pasting.” (Queen’s was not one of the five.) Some of the other reasons are equally tenuous.

The other assumption, implicit in the title of the report, that Canadian universities are *not* committed to excellence is also unsupported. If it is true, then the millions of dollars spent by the National Research Council since 1917, the Canada Council since 1957 and such programs as the Ontario Fellowship-Scholarship scheme since 1963 have been wasted. Why ask for more? Perhaps more money will result in increased “production” but is quantity synonymous with excellence?

The report was hastily put together “within the astonishingly brief period of four months” and hence many of the omissions are understandable. Some may be intentional in order to provoke debate on graduate work. If so, the report should achieve its purpose.

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