

Canada Doesn't Need A Harvard

by Simon Rogers (The Ubysey)
(CUP)

Charges that Canadian universities are mediocre in the quality of education they offer are unfounded, say representatives from three British Columbia universities.

"For a country of our size and relative age, the quality of our system and some of our programs are absolutely first rate," said John Stubbs, president of Simon Fraser University.

Stubbs was responding to accusations made by Peter Godsoe, chairperson and chief executive officer of the Bank of Nova Scotia, that a lack of funding for programs and lax entrance requirements has made Canadian universities mediocre in comparison to their US and international counterparts.

Godsoe compared Canadian public universities to privately-funded giants like Harvard and Oxford, warning that if schools in Canada fail to create "centres of excellence," Canada will lose its brightest lights to these renowned Ivy League schools.

Stephen Crombie, the manager of media relations for the University of British Columbia disagrees with Godsoe's assessment of Canadian schools. "UBC has very high entrance standards, attracting students with high marks from within Canada and [around] the world. It does not follow that the level of education we provide is mediocre."

"Where we differ with some of our American counterparts such as Harvard or Stanford is in the graduate field," said George Pederson, newly appointed president of the Royal Roads University.

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) chairperson Alex Usher was taken aback by the criticism. "It is a bit farfetched to assume schools in as young a country as Canada can be expected

to excel in both undergraduate and graduate educational programs. A very definite trade-off has to be made."

Nonetheless, Canadian graduate schools attract a large number of international students, many coming from the US. Graduate students in research fields at UBC do 60 per cent of all the research conducted in British Columbia.

"If you look at the standard of graduate-level education as it is spread thinly across Canada, as a whole, you are bound to find it somewhat deficient in comparison to some of the strong grad programs offered in certain American schools," Crombie said.

"Many institutions in Canada, however, offer excellent graduate programs."

Andrew McElheran, BC director of CASA, says Canadian universities have a right to pride themselves on their accessibility as well as excellence. "To this end, we have been successful. The consequent benefits of having a financially accessible system are marked."

America's tradition of boasting prestigious and privately-funded institutions stands in contrast to Canada where universities are publicly funded and have more moderate tuition fees, according to UBC student councillor David Borins.

"I hope that Canada will continue to reject the kind of elitism presented by the American Ivy League schools," Borins said.

"Canadian universities provide an excellent education and an undergraduate program that educates people as critical thinkers. I have studied in Canada and in England. Canada's universities have a good reputation and command respect internationally and from people in the working world."



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(Press Release)

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