

Editorial

Ever since the late 60's-early 70's era, the enrollment boom in universities has declined. The last of the post-war baby boom are completing their education, and unemployment figures have increased, causing more students to seek job training in community colleges and trade schools. Universities, therefore, are struggling to remain at the level of operation of just seven or eight years ago and UPEI is certainly no exception. Faculty members have been ingenious in their schemes devised to keep UPEI open. The Department of Business Administration succeeded in a daring escape from under the wing of the Faculty of Arts and gained the prestigious name of School of Business Administration. The reverse was about to happen to the Faculty of Education, but a classic case of "if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" became evident during the vote on Business, and any further mention of a change in status for Education ceased. Now appearing on Senate's agenda is the latest scheme in the "How to keep a university alive" series: The Academic Planning Committee (APC) has before Senate a recommendation that a core curriculum be established at UPEI.

The APC proposes that to graduate in future years each student will have to take two courses each of: Mathematics, Humanities, Social Sciences, English, and Science. In many ways this is the most ridiculous scheme yet cooked up by Senate committees. A core curriculum will lead students to a lower average and encourage them to take "bird" courses, not to mention the time and money wasted by those who have serious difficulties in a specific area.

When examining the question in a positive light, the compulsory study of two courses from each subject area will increase enrollment in some of the smaller classes, thereby offering greater job security to professors. [In a complete aside, and perhaps material for another editorial, it is astounding to imagine that professors at UPEI could ever consider voting themselves a raise of up to 25% (this would have set the annual salary for a full-fledged professor close to 52,000), when it means some of them may be fired because there is not enough money to pay them. With tuition steadily increasing, employment figures down, cuts in government funding, and the post-war baby boom petered out, UPEI cannot afford to have given professors a raise. On the other hand, however, it has seen fit to partially fund a seven million dollar sports complex. Remember how we got stuck with the bill for the Planetarium?

With the establishment of a core curriculum, however, the university will probably find it necessary to set up a two-tier system of courses. More students of varying mental capabilities will be taking Mathematics for example. Introductory courses, therefore, will have to be divided into general and advanced classes for those students who intend to be Math majors. Needless to say, this system will be an added expense for the university. Professors may have to teach extra courses because the President has it in his mind not to hire any new professors. Worse yet, the number of courses available to fourth year majors will be pared to a bare minimum so that extra first and second year courses may be taught, similar to the actions of the Political Science Department this year.

There can be no dispute that core courses provide a good all-round education. Writing in Maclean's magazine almost two years ago, Dr. David Suzuki, a genetics specialist who may primarily be known for introducing the Canadian public to both the wonders and the horrendous consequences of science, blamed our education system for dividing Western society into two segments: scientists and humanists. Each group is quite ignorant of the other's importance. Suzuki was

annoyed that those responsible for developing the weapons which may eventually destroy mankind often know very little of philosophy and religion; meanwhile, the other section of society is blissfully unaware of the importance and effect of science in today's world. Ideally, a core curriculum for the intellectuals of society is the best way to gain a general knowledge of other disciplines, so that we may work toward a better understanding of each other.

On the other hand, however, one or two courses in physics will not necessarily give the student an instant awareness of the vastness of science. Many will grow to hate classes that are mandatory because they often may not comprehend the subject taught. A good number of our professors will have to simplify their teaching methods so that students in general courses will be able to understand the subject material. Since most people are not capable of understanding all disciplines equally, a core curriculum will lower a student's marks in some courses. This is a hazard that many wish to avoid, because low marks do not guarantee a job. Unfortunately, if a core curriculum were to be established at UPEI, a good number of students would enroll in "bird" courses, solely to maintain a high average.

Another drawback to the scheme of a core curriculum becomes evident upon examining the plight of those students who wish to specialize in some area within their major. Those studying Accounting, for example, may have to spend an extra year at university in order to complete all the necessary courses. Because the cost of another year may be too great a burden to bear, many students will be forced away to other universities.

Most importantly, however, a core curriculum would curb the freedom of choosing courses that students fought so hard to acquire. It should be the duty of high schools to provide a good general background of most disciplines, and to instill a curiosity for all knowledge. Ideally, marks are irrelevant in the pursuit of a general education, so that by the time people reach university, they should surely realize the personal benefits of a diversity in studies.

Ultimately, the APC's decision to establish a core program for university students hurts. It means they have no faith in our ability to decide what is best for your own personal growth and understanding of the world we live in. It also means that the responsibility for our future will once again rest on the generalization that now has polluted our environment and threatened our total annihilation with nuclear energy. But perhaps they are telling us to become aware of the sometimes disastrous consequences of man's actions before it is too late to correct what we have done.

Have a funny week and be strong.

