

Despite the problems, however, this remains a very useful study for graduate school instructors, administrators and students. Moses rightly describes the issue of gender barriers as “system-wide and systemic”, “a problem of social equity from the women’s and the community’s point of view, a community problem of wastage of intellectual resources, and poor pay-off of government investment” (p. 10). Her compendium of “suggestions and good practices” therefore is worth considering.

- 1 Paul Anisef and Norman Okihiro's *Loser's and Winners* (Toronto: Butterworth's, 1982) is an example.
- 2 Ontario seems to have studied the issue the most. For example, “The Status of Women Graduate Students” was issued by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) Committee on the Status of Women in May 1991. Carolyn Filteau has edited a good collection entitled *Women in Graduate Studies in Ontario* (1989). The most recent report was issued in January 1992, by the University of Toronto School of Graduate Studies Gender Issues Committee.
- 3 “A Statistical Glance at the Changing Status of Women in the Ontario Universities”, prepared by the COU Committee on the Status of Women, September 1990.
- 4 See, for example, Linda Carty, “Black women in academia: A statement from the periphery” in Himani Bannerji et al., *Unsettling Relations: The University as a Site of Feminist Struggles* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1991).

Smith, Stuart L. (commissioner). *Report on the Commission of Inquiry on Canadian University Education*. Ottawa: A.U.C.C., 1991, pp. 178. Price \$17.95 (Can.), \$18.95 (U.S.). Reviewed by R.J. Baker, University of Prince Edward Island.

The reports of commission of enquiry based on public hearings, written submissions, opinion surveys, and research reports etc., can be assessed as political documents, as responses to the dissatisfied self-interest groups who always appear at such hearings, as research, or as a set of recommendations, no matter how arrived at. In the last case, the assessment may simply be a measure of the fit between the prejudices, presuppositions and recommendations of the assessor and those of the Commission.

I would give the Smith Report an “A” as a political document, an “A+” with distinction for the degree to which this report will satisfy those who made

presentations about the under-valuing of teaching, an “F” or perhaps an “F-” as a research report and for the way it uses, or rather does not use, its own research, and a “B” for agreement with my prejudices. But then, I’ve become an increasingly soft marker.

The Smith Report was commissioned by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (that is, by the presidents, principals, and rectors of Canadian universities in the Association). According to the Foreword by Dr. K. George Pedersen, the Chairman of the Board of the AUCC in 1991, the one-man Commission was asked,

Are Canadians enrolled in this country’s universities obtaining the type and quality of education appropriate and necessary to prepare them for the 21st century? (i)

He goes on to say,

The mandate of the Commission was to examine the ability of university education to adapt rapidly to the needs of a Canada that is and will be increasingly dependent on the essential national resource of well-educated citizens. (i)

and that,

Dr. Stuart Smith, long associated with both the academic community and the world of public policy, was named as Commissioner of the year-long study...Currently President of RockCliffe Research and Technology, Inc., Dr. Smith is a former Professor of Psychiatry at McMaster University, Leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, and Chairman of the Science Council of Canada. (i)

The report (says Dr. Pedersen) “...represents an important contribution by Dr. Smith and his associates to the assessment of quality in the education being provided by Canadian universities today”(ii). As Mandy Rice-Davies said, “Well, he would, wouldn’t he!”

Except to say that “The Commission is persuaded that the ongoing hunt for international performance indicators is futile” (p. 124), and “..though impossible to prove, the Commission has received the general impression that most if not all Canadian universities, would, on balance, rank with the top half of U.S. universities, taken as a whole” (p. 15), the Report has little to say about the quality of *learning* at all. It has much to say about the quality of *teaching*, much of it contradicted by its own - unquoted - research. Much of the discussion of teaching is really about the *rewarding* of teaching.

But I would still give it an “A” as a political document. The Commission was set up by the AUCC and funded by the AUCC, the Richard Ivey Foundation, the Department of the Secretary of State, and by business and industry. It should satisfy its sponsors.

For the AUCC, the “Commission finds that Canada’s universities today are fundamentally healthy and are serving the country well” (p. 14). The presidents can hardly object to that.

For government, the Commission finds that “There is no evidence...that financial restraint has caused a serious decline in the quality of university graduates...” (p. 16). That should please finance ministers. It probably also pleases both the federal and provincial governments by recommending “that higher education remain a provincial responsibility” (p. 27), though provincial governments may have mixed feelings about the recommendation that they become responsible for the overhead costs of research sponsored by the granting councils. It does recommend increased funding from governments, but gradually and not excessively. It supports the general move towards higher tuition fees, but only “if an income-contingent repayment loan system is instituted” (p. 27). That might mollify students.

For business and industry, the Report recommends regular surveys of employers and graduates to monitor their satisfaction with the suitability of the graduates’ education to their employment (p. 144). Since that recommendation must be directed to both the universities and the employers, both may agree but have reservations about costs.

On the whole, though, the Report is a good political document, and that may make it more effective than a good piece of research. The lack of effect of research may be judged by the fact that not one of the 111 notes in this report is to an article in this journal. Two are to an issue of the *U.S. News and World Report*.

The self-interested groups, other than the presidents, should be very pleased with the uncritical attention paid to them. Throughout the Report, boxes, outlined with both a heavy black border and a lighter one, highlight double-spaced, italicised quotations. Inevitably one’s eyes are drawn to them, and they have an influence greater than the text.

The choice of quotations is significant. Presentations from student associations and faculty associations abound. Americans are favoured. Derek Bok gets three; of the 30 or so Canadian presidents who appeared before the Commission or wrote submissions, only one is quoted, but she is quoted twice. Two

quotations come from "letters" to the Commissioner, but they are not listed as written submissions, and there is no indication of their authors' expertise. The reader may well wonder about the expertise of many of those quoted. Is, for example, Mr. Michael Robb, the assistant editor of a University of Alberta magazine, able to demonstrate that the... "quality of undergraduate education in our larger universities has deteriorated rather badly..."(p. 32)? *Evidence?* As I write on student essays. The quotations, in the main, are there for political or rhetorical reasons rather than rational ones.

Looked at as a piece of research, the Report is very disappointing, particularly in the way it ignores, contradicts, or denigrates the research that Dr. Smith commissioned (Seven Reports, available from the AUCC.)

Dr. Smith says "Teaching is seriously undervalued at Canadian universities and nothing less than a total recommitment to it is required"(p. 63). That implies, as a letter to *University Affairs* (Feb. 1992, p.20) demonstrates, that teaching is bad. But the Commission's Research Report #6, *Telephone Survey of Arts and Science Undergraduates on their University Experience*, not quoted by Dr. Smith, tells a different story. The question: "Overall, how satisfied are you with the teaching you have had at your university?" Of the first and second year students, 0.8% (yes, zero point eight) were Very Dissatisfied and 2.8% were dissatisfied. For small universities, all four years, *NO* students were very dissatisfied, and only 1.3% were dissatisfied (p. 11). A small study done by the Commission's staff interviewed "twelve randomly selected, full-time, first or second year Arts and Science undergraduates..." at the University of Toronto and twelve at Trent. "...virtually all" students at both universities declared themselves to be satisfied; nine Trent students and one Toronto student chose the category "very satisfied." Dr. Smith does quote that, but then says, "Self-selection occurs..."(p. 56). If the research does not fit the conclusions arrived at first, ignore it or explain it away. It is conceivable that the students *should* have been dissatisfied, and if there were any measures of student learning in the Report, we might be able to connect the serious under-valuation of teaching with poor learning rather than with student satisfaction, but there is no measure of learning.

Similarly, Research Report #3, *Assessing the Quality of Teaching in Canadian Universities*, concludes that "Overall, the representatives of the universities considered research productivity to be the most important criterion, with teaching competence very close in importance" (Summary). Not quoted in the Report. The Report recommends that "student evaluations of teaching

should be applied universally” (p. 136). That implies that student evaluations are not used, at least not much, but Research Report #3, not quoted, says “All universities assess the quality of teaching and 94% use student rating questionnaires for this purpose” (summary).

To be fair to Dr. Smith, he also omits quotations from the depressing Research Report #5, *Survey of the Perception of Universities among Provincial Government Officials*. I could not have resisted quoting the senior government official who said, “Our approach is just to starve the buggers to death and hope they’ll react as we’d like” (p. 15).

One final example. Teaching loads were studied for Ottawa and Alberta, said to be typical universities. But Ottawa is bilingual, the figures given are for courses not hours, and administrators, etc. are included as faculty. Friends tell me that the Alberta data have been misunderstood.

Because this journal is concerned with research, I have concentrated on the Report’s use of research, and I urge anyone interested to get the Research Reports from the AUCC.

But what of the 63 recommendations? I agree with most of them. Those on accessibility, continuing education, distance education, research on higher education, the international dimension, attrition, cooperation - on the whole - would be hard to oppose. I have reservations about making the provinces responsible for the funding of research overhead, about a provincial board to rule on dismissals of tenured faculty, and of a national tracking system of all students. I disagree with the recommendation (#8) that the evaluation of faculty should be based on “research (or some other form of scholarship) or on teaching” (p. 135). Donald and Saroyan, Research Report #3 show that the most important factor defining good teaching is “Up to date subject matter” (p. 7). I would evaluate faculty on research or on scholarship and teaching. So-called “good” teachers who are out-of-date and unscholarly are dangerous; students learn from them. Bad teachers are deplorable, but at least students do not learn nonsense from them; they can’t teach.