

Pocklington, Tom, & Tupper, Allan. (2002). *No place to learn: Why universities aren't working*. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press Pages: 220. Price: \$24.95 CAD.

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Most people probably take for granted that Canadian universities exist primarily to provide quality undergraduate instruction to young people in preparation for life and careers. Not so, argue Pocklington and Tupper in this provocative book. Our universities have established specialized research as their priority with a consequent neglect of teaching.

The authors claim that most undergraduates find themselves in crowded classrooms under the shaky tutelage of graduate students or non-permanent staff. Such instructors are swamped with marking and anxious to complete the research that may lead to permanent contracts. When tenured professors enter the classroom they prefer to teach senior courses that reflect their research interests rather than student needs. Moreover, their doctoral training does not prepare them for teaching nor for the reflective inquiry and largeness of vision that is required at this instructional level. Consequently, much of the teaching ranges from indifferent to abysmal in quality.

It wasn't always so, the authors tell us. Canadian universities were originally committed to teaching and learning about the human condition with an added element of vocationalism. The English and Scottish influences that shaped these traditions waned rapidly in the 1960s as the higher education system expanded and modernized. American professors flooded in and transformed our institutions along the lines of U.S. research universities. Today our collective agreements enshrine professorial advancement mechanisms that reward research rather than teaching. Promotion through the ranks requires research grants and great quantities of publications. The research itself is increasingly narrow and specialized and is often directed by commercial considerations. To succeed in such a system professors are obliged to avoid teaching as much as possible and to devote little effort to it when it is unavoidable.

In one of the more interesting sections of the book Pocklington and Tupper take aim at what they call the myth of mutual enrichment. This is

the idea that a professor's teaching is enriched by his/her research. While the authors acknowledge that this may happen at the graduate level, they deny its applicability to undergraduate teaching. Citing several studies and reports, including the Stuart Smith Commission (1991), they point out that research and teaching compete for scarce time and that universities are aware of this in assigning the heaviest teaching loads to non-permanent instructors. This is done usually to allow permanent staff more time for research. Career advancement, lucrative discoveries and institutional prestige are the driving forces behind research, not the enrichment of teaching. The argument is well made and is compelling and persuasive.

What is to be done? The authors want undergraduate teaching to become the priority of our universities. They propose that courses on teaching become part of all doctoral programs and that senior professors be obliged to teach general survey courses. They also want less emphasis on "frontier" or "discovery" research and a ban on commercial partnerships. They favour research that is reflective in nature, broad in scope and that takes into account the human condition. This type of research, they maintain, may lead our universities back to their original purpose, providing a quality undergraduate education.

It would be easy enough to attack this book on the ground of its methodology alone. While the authors make extensive use of the available literature on Canadian higher education, many of their assumptions are drawn from their own experiences and from a rather casual survey of colleagues at a small number of universities. Even so, the general contours of what they have to say ring true to anyone who has worked in the academy for some time. Many of the more strident assertions are undoubtedly exaggerated, but even they serve to remind us of the directions our universities are taking. In this sense the book fulfills the important function of stimulating debate on the nature and purpose of higher education. But it is not simply a polemic in the frivolous manner of Bercuson et al., *The Great Brain Robbery* (1984). The arguments are carefully reasoned and the authors write with passion and conviction about good teaching, reflective inquiry and other matters of importance. This is a book that deserves a wide readership and much discussion.

