

# Some notes for an anecdotal history of Canadian universities

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In these complex and troubled times for Canadian universities it is encouraging to realize that our predecessors faced the same problems. Though their proposed solutions may not strike us today as apt, an appreciation of the fact that these issues have been the objects of previous analysis is a healthy antidote to the tendency, found even among academics, to regard all major current issues as essentially new.

The following items, arranged in simple chronological order, are taken from the early meetings of the Conference of Canadian Universities, founded in 1911, and the forerunner of the present Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

## *On Federal Aid to Universities*

At the First Conference of Canadian Universities held at McGill on 6 June 1911, there was some discussion of proposals emanating from the Canadian Government for the establishment of an officers' training corps in the universities. This resulted in unanimous approval of the following resolution :

"This Conference is of the opinion that in consideration of the immense services that may be rendered by the Universities in training officers for the Military service of the country in connection with the officers' training corps, the Federal Government should assume the entire responsibility required to carry out the scheme."

## *On extending the University Year*

During World War I the Conference devoted some attention to the question of extending the university year. In 1915, the Second Conference struck a Committee on the Length of Session. This Committee conducted a survey among the member institutions and reported the results at the Third Conference in 1916.

Among the recorded responses to the question, Should the university year be lengthened ? is the following from U.B.C. :

"Yes. It is not in accordance with the modern idea of use of physical plant and equipment to have it lying idle for five months in the year. Students who have to work during

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the vacation may be paying a heavy penalty. I have often wondered whether brilliant students who have made their way through college on their own earnings and who develop degenerative diseases in their early fifties may not be paying for overwork in young manhood and womanhood."

Leaving aside the remark about the causes of degenerative diseases, this response anticipated the major argument of those who favoured retaining the 30-week academic year then in practice — students needed the long vacation to enable them to earn money to return to university. Among the members only Dalhousie and McGill joined U.B.C. in favour of extending the year. After some debate the Conference went on record as supporting maintenance at the status quo.

#### *On a Matter of Student Discipline*

The Eighth Conference of Canadian Universities, in 1922, heard an account from Dean Fox of Western of a case of a young lady recently expelled from a University for theft who was subsequently admitted in good faith by another University where her previous exploits were unknown. He moved the following resolution, which was adopted by the delegates,

"That this Conference agree to the establishment of some sort of informal yet binding agreement by which each University will inform fully all the other Universities of the circumstances surrounding the expulsion of any student for a serious offense."

"Serious" is not defined. Nor is it clear how the resolution was implemented.

#### *On the Co-ordination of Graduate Education*

The Eighth Conference also saw considerable discussion of graduate education in Canada. Dean Brock of U.B.C. presented a paper in which he proposed the founding of a National Graduate School in some central location in Canada, such as Ottawa. Clearly, this was premature. During the ensuing debate, the Chairman posed the question :

"Is it the judgment of this Conference that a scheme of co-operation in Graduate work is feasible?"

President Falconer of Toronto, acting as spokesman for the meeting replied, No.

#### *On Rising University Costs*

The Eighteenth Conference of Canadian Universities, meeting at McGill in May, 1939, heard a paper by Vice-Principal W.E. McNeill of Queen's on the subject, "The Increasing Costs of Education." According to Dr. McNeill,

"The main reason for the higher cost of education, so difficult for most students to meet, is the higher teaching and administrative costs. Universities as well as governments are spending on a scale unknown in simpler days. Canada not only has too many or too

grand railroads and steamships and hotels but too expensive universities. Their budgets have kept pace with the opulent spending of the time. . . .

"Administrative offices and officers have increased; so have typewriters and typists and multigraphs. Big business methods have invaded education. Salaries have increased two and a half times in 30 years. Courses of instruction within departments have developed enormously. . . . New courses of instruction, new departments, new schools, new faculties develop as universities compete for public favour. . . ."