

# Short term needs, long term disaster

By Lois Corbett  
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FREDERICTON — Institutions of higher education in Canada are dramatically changing under the pressures of government and administrations. The dilemmas they face are essentially moral, and some wonder if institutions can carry the weight.

George Pederson, president of the financially beleaguered University of B.C., believes today's universities try to white-wash the public. He says too often public relations efforts of the universities "have not always satisfied the most stringent of ethical standards."

Pederson, addressing the first ever joint conference of Canadian and American university officials in Toronto last fall claims he hears all about "colleges and universities that are 'world class' or 'great' or 'outstanding' or something as equally glorify-

ing", but he can't see them.

"Can you imagine how refreshing it might be to have a university president stand up at an annual convocation exercise and suggest that his or her institution suffered from some inadequacies and that serious attention must be directed to them."

Universities are expected to serve as the conscience of society believes Pederson, and to seek truth and knowledge. But they too often neglect to tell the truth about themselves, he says.

Telling the truth about their shortcomings is not financially feasible to any institution that depends on the government carrot. As a result, the education system pursues the elusive government-orientated goal of skill training, at the expense of the broader, less defined goals of a liberal arts education.

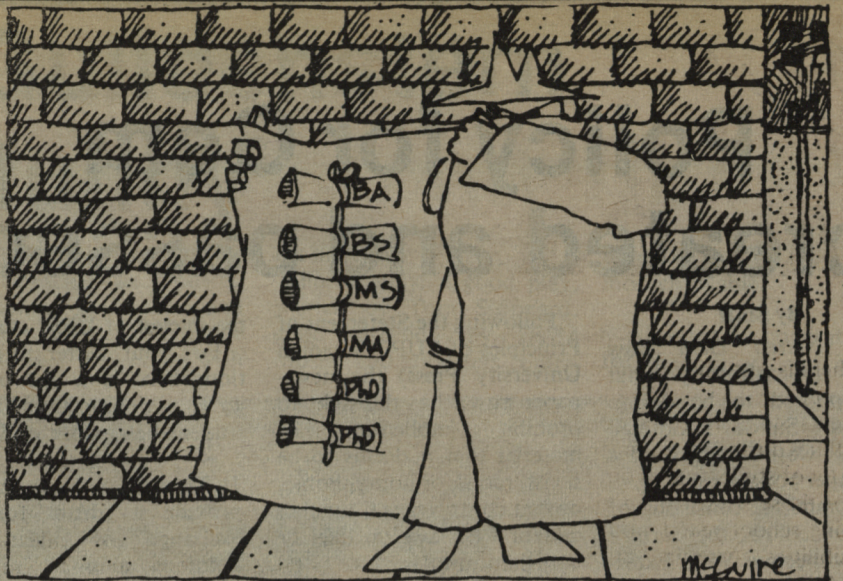
"Today's scramble to have colleges and universities train skilled professionals is both a short-term necessity and a

long-term disaster," says Norman Wagner, President of the University of Calgary. Wagner says universities must ask themselves if the education they provide is simply an expense, or an investment. He feels if the education students receive at university cannot last a lifetime, the institution fails at its task.

But he says those who should demand the qualities of truth and knowledge from the universities, the students, are doing nothing, except preparing themselves for the "world after I graduate."

According to a recent article in "University Affairs", the monthly newsletter of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, students are ready for "the cold, hard world out there." While the article admits some would call today's students cautious and conservative, the author believes they are "just being realistic."

The students' dean at the



University of Calgary tells the story of two students' injuries — one fractured a skull and the other broke both arms when they fell through a ceiling while trying to alter their marks.

At many other Canadian institutions, administrations have announced crackdowns and harsher penalties for students who cheat.

However the grades are made, and however the jobs are found educational institutions are not fulfilling the

broad, general roles most presidents claim they should have.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission recently announced it wants the region's universities to produce graduates instilled with the knowledge of "the importance of technological advancement."

In Quebec, six existing colleges are to be converted into institutions specializing in the dominant technology of their local business community.

Ontario education minister Bette Stephenson recently struck a commission aimed at increasing specialization in the province's post secondary system, and the western provinces — already driving students away through tuition increases and enrolment quotas — will likely join the specialization boat in the near future.

In B.C., education funding has gone from bad to worse and led to the closure of an entire liberal arts college in the province's Interior.

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BY DERRICK WEBBER



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