

LETTER TO STUDENTS

An Open Letter to Students at UPEI. Oct. 2/79

Dear Students:

October has crept up to us once more and yes, the academic year is well under way. For the freshman attending university each day should still be a novelty, a new experience with an array of inviting challenges. For others, the daily trek to campus may by now be what going to the barn each morning means to the farmer - a way of life. In any case, attending UPEI is a unique experience for every student. Yet the fact remains that in spite of the many differences we demonstrate as a student body, freshman or senior, resident or day student, jock or anti-jock, everyone of us is similar in that we are all students of the university.

I was helping a friend a few days ago with an essay and we were directing our thoughts towards J.S. Mill's On Liberty. To make a rather long story short, we were discussing Mill's idea of the human being in view of experience.

Basically, Mill says that we as humans have a moral obligation to make ourselves familiar with the experiences of those around us in order to diffuse from experience certain elements that we can apply to our own self development. The point is very simple: it is up to the individual to become familiar with his or her surroundings, a fundamental condition in the liberty of a human being.

Education too is a liberating experience and yes, we as students (anyone who has paid fees at UPEI or has had them paid on their behalf) must be aware of the experiences of our fellow students. The obligation is on the student to check out the views and experiences of other students and in doing so, pull together a community of ideas designed to provide a better understanding of himself as a student and individual at university. J.S. Mill would go so far as saying that as a student, you have a moral responsibility to keep in touch with other students - your liberty as a person is dependent on your doing so.

But, how can such a converging of ideas be possible at UPEI? I mean, the Business students rarely come in contact with the Arts students; Science students have their own building and the education faculty is off in a corner of its own. Very simply, the mere geography of the campus makes the communicating of ideas among students difficult to begin with. Then, of course, there are other considerations; for example, busy schedules and extra-curricular activities - these are just a few.

Well, two years ago the students at the University of Rhode Island were faced with the same odds but decided that enough was enough. They proceeded to shut the university down for three days and brought every component of the school into the gymnasium to ask themselves the question - Why am I at university? The results may have caused Mill to turn over in his grave. Finally, students were

able to draw upon the experiences of their fellow classmates from every sector of the university. Furthermore, members of the faculty and administration, though more or less observers, were astonished by the many questions brought forth by the student population. Generally, the university was instilled with new life - a catharsis of sorts, made possible by the students finally having the issue of university and the student out in the open. The real winner at Rhode Island was the student.

Students at UPEI can and should undertake the same kind of exercise, not necessarily because Rhode Island did but rather because we are all students of the university and have a moral obligation to examine ourselves from time to time in that capacity. So, let's get together and sincerely ask the question - why am I at university? For example, what is university in the first place? Am I here to

get a job, to broaden my knowledge, to kill time, or perhaps to meet different people? Really, the student deserves an answer to such questions; however it is our responsibility to find them. And, if you're the type who has things figured out, others would be anxious to hear why. Then again, you might find out you're not as smart as you once thought. Obviously, this could be a learning situation for everyone.

Presently, a committee of concerned students, motivated by Mill's type of thinking, known as Students for Symposium '79, are dedicated to the concept of getting the students from every branch of UPEI together to analyze themselves in the university setting. Early November is their target date for conducting an event that should have been held years ago.

For me, asking the question Why am I at university? always raises more questions than it answers. But that, of course, is essential to education that serves to liberate the human mind.

Each time I do so, I feel I have in some ways justified and have gained a better understanding of why I am spending four years of my life on the northern end of University Avenue in Charlottetown, P.E.I. As a committee, we need your support as it is essential to the idea that we meet as a group of students, everyone from trumpet players to computer scientists and poets in between. In this case, the students would be at the centre of events, take the stage and learn from each other. So, give it some thought and yes, you will hear from us in the near future.

Sincerely,
Mark Ledwell
Student for
Symposium '79



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