

In recent years, higher education has been the object of searching scrutiny in almost all Canadian Provinces. In the spate of reports which has followed, the university's role in continuing education has been a common theme. This article examines the problems typically encountered by those responsible for this university function and proposes some remedies.

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## University Continuing Education: Shaping the Future

During the last three years, university systems in three Canadian provinces were the object of review, the vehicle in each case a Royal Commission.<sup>1</sup>

That these reviews were undertaken hints at a degree of anxiety in the mind of government and public, an attitude replacing the acceptance and support which characterized the previous decade. They suggest, moreover, the need for reassurance in the public mind of the efficiency — and the effectiveness — of universities and of their relevance in a period characterized by basic shifts in society and thus of society's requirements. In general tone, they are remarkably similar. In a particular matter, they articulate an almost identical view: that higher education should be made more accessible, more flexible, and its outreach in public service more substantial.

In Alberta, the first of the provinces to table a report, the process of implementing recommendations has begun. Latterly, there has been instituted a review of legislation concerning adult education. This, of course, has significance for Alberta universities. For over sixty years, almost since the inception of the Province in 1905, The University of Alberta — and, in more recent years, The University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, and Athabasca University — have been leading contributors in the field of adult education (or, as it is contemporarily termed, continuing education, recurrent education, or further education). Indeed, as Henry Marshall Tory, the visionary founding President of The University of Alberta, observed in his first Convocation address:

I consider that the extension of the activities of the University on such lines as will make its benefits reach directly or indirectly the mass of the people, carrying its ideals of refinement and culture into their homes and its latent spiritual and more moral power into their minds and hearts, is a work second to none.

And again this prophecy, apt to the times:

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<sup>1</sup>Commission on Post-Secondary Education in Ontario, Report of the Commission, *The Learning Society* (Toronto: Ministry of Government Services, 1972). Commission on Educational Planning, Report of the Commission, *A Choice of Futures*, Walter H. Worth, Commissioner (Edmonton, Alta.: L. S. Wall, Queen's Printer, 1972). Task Force on Post-Secondary Education in Manitoba, Report of the Task Force, *Post-Secondary Education in Manitoba* (Winnipeg, Man.: Queen's Printer, circa 1973).

Many of [the citizens of Alberta] will never see the place, much less have an opportunity of attending, or having their children attend, its classes. Yet we want the citizens of the province to feel that the university belongs to them, that it exists to serve them. The time may come when the existence of a university will depend upon the public's assurance that its thinking and research are of vital importance to the community. The job of the extension department is to find out from the people what the university can do for them beyond the class-room and the laboratory.<sup>2</sup>

Given the heightened interest of government in non-traditional education, its intention to review the legislation relevant to it, and the leadership role of the university in the provision of opportunities for adult learning, it will be useful to set out some problem areas to which the intended legislation, and university administration, might address itself.

With notable exceptions,<sup>3</sup> university institutions have not enthusiastically embraced continuing education as a function or even viewed it as one appropriate to the university. The misgivings of the university are real and centre around four areas of complication: that the intellectual component of the university will somehow become compromised; that the university may be metamorphized from an institution characterized by objectivity to one dominated by the subjective; that university expertise itself may be compromised by value commitments; and that the very autonomy of the institution may be threatened.<sup>4</sup> In North American universities, evidences of this non-commitment to the extension function are to be seen in the dominance of lip service over firm support in the placement of the function within the institutional hierarchy and in the degree of financial support which is afforded it. Specific evidence of the significance of the public service function within the university is to be observed in the workings of the institutional reward system which militates against the extension function. That system almost invariably gives first attention to the individual's research contribution; well down the scale as a criterion for reward is that of teaching; and at the bottom of the scale — almost out of sight — is effort invested in the extension function.

Closer to home, another evidence of the lack of clear institutional support for the continuing education function is to be surmised from the legislative act establishing the university. The University Act, prior to 1966, made explicit and detailed reference in Section 66 to a Department of Extension at the University of Alberta, the only provincial university at that time. With the current Universities Act of 1966, however, reference to the public service responsibilities of the universities is restricted to this bland inclusion among the duties of the Board of Governors:

15. (2) It is the duty and function of each university to contribute to the educational and cultural advancement of the people of Alberta at large...

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<sup>2</sup>E. A. Corbett, "But, is it education?" *Queen's Quarterly* (Winter, 1941).

<sup>3</sup>In Canada, for example, Sir George Williams University developed as a university out of its work in continuing education and St. Francis Xavier University played a remarkable role in self-help, citizen education during the depression years of the 1930s.

<sup>4</sup>John S. Brubacher, "The Theory of Higher Education," *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. XLI, No. 2 (February, 1970), p. 104.

It may well be so that the matter was thus framed in anticipation that each of the institutions to which the Act applied might wish its own scheme of organization for continuing education. Yet it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the latter reference represents a substantial diminution of emphasis on the continuing education function, a stance which may well have weakened the effectiveness of the institution in this role.

It is, of course, not intended to deprecate support of research or campus teaching. These functions remain central to the university's thrust; they are the heart of its mission. What is asserted is that the purpose of a comprehensive university, particularly as it enters an era of cataclysmic change, is the tri-fold function of teaching, research, and service.

Another dual problem is equally serious and becoming more so: the inadequacy of financial support afforded the continuing education function and the want of a clear rationale for that support. By way of illustration, during the decade of the 1960's, a period of prodigious growth at The University of Alberta, the application of funds to the continuing education function lagged far behind that provided schools and faculties, as is evident from Table 1.

The largest part of the aggregate fund support provided continuing education is for the non-credit course work of Alberta institutions and is extended through non-formula grants. What has seemed to be a problem to those responsible for negotiating those grants is the basis for their formulation and the rationale for their allocation among a mixed body of claimants. Since the process is obscure, reasonable lobbying for increased support (the existence of which no university administrator denies) is inhibited. The inevitable growth in the continuing education function makes it imperative that the rationale for its financial support be made explicit.

Related to this is the problem of ensuring equal access by citizens to the continuing education services from university institutions. The single most important feature of continuing education financing within Alberta universities is its "Robin Hood" character — taking from the rich and giving to the poor. Out of budget necessity, the revenue from "profitable" courses is used to subsidize less profitable courses — including those which may well be the more significant pieces of education. The requirement in budget administration in continuing education is that excess revenue derived from, say, a course in business management, be used to help subsidize another in rural sociology or religion.

The budget format, typically, of the continuing education division is that of the maximum net deficit, i.e., the difference between planned expenses and revenue to be earned. In the case of The University of Alberta in 1972-73, for example, the total expense of the Department of Extension was \$1,340,000, total revenue was \$709,000, and net deficit was \$631,000. Obviously, this method of financing places inordinate emphasis on financial management, often to the detriment of the provision of educational opportunity appropriate to citizen need. The pressure, understandably, is to serve those who can most readily pay and for whom the costs of providing

TABLE I  
NET EXPENSE OF FACULTIES AND SCHOOLS, THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA,  
1958-59 TO 1972-73, BIENNIALLY (Expressed in Index Figures)

Faculty/School	1958-59	1960-61	1962-63	1964-65	1966-67	1968-69	1970-71	1972-73
Graduate Studies	100	164	310	3,448	8,486	13,560	17,677	17,564
Business Administration and Commerce	100	141	256	386	590	998	1,713	2,226
Rehabilitation Medicine	100	125	138	352	483	903	1,596	2,115
Arts and Science	100	178	293					
Arts				484	572	888	1,304	1,547
Science				453	571	862	1,242	1,283
Household Economics	100	174	214	278	533	853	1,324	1,535
Law	100	132	181	215	355	623	951	1,146
Pharmacy	100	132	180	256	359	602	791	956
Nursing	100	132	129	161	249	467	783	948
Education	100	148	220	325	377	542	837	945
Physical Education	100	169	259	359	402	540	787	901
Medicine	100	151	209	247	366	514	720	868
Dentistry	100	127	211	286	379	581	697	800
Engineering	100	153	201	243	294	452	603	682
Agriculture	100	127	159	210	238	337	457	534
Summer Session*	100	138	175	236	275	355	473	478**
Extension*	100	123	161	179	228	311	401	469
Evening Credit*	100	170	237	395	263	437	695	417**

Source: Financial Statements, The University of Alberta

\*Considered as Schools for the purpose of this Table.

\*\*As of 1972-73, a third Department, Spring Session, was separated from Summer Session and Evening Credit and its net expense is not included in this Table.

a program are the least. Thus, the middle and upper income groups are the beneficiaries. And since programs held on the campus are less costly than those held off the campus, the pressure is real to reduce the service to rural Albertans. There is still another aspect of funding of the continuing education function which offends the citizen's sense of equity: continuing education students typically pay tuition fees at a higher rate than do their intramural counterparts. Education is education; and it is difficult to distinguish the justice of this arrangement. Some equalization in fee structure is clearly demanded.

The present economy of the continuing education enterprise is dysfunctional and serves the people of the Province badly. Perfectly legitimate demands for service, made by those outside of the cities or by those who are not sufficiently well-to-do to pay the necessary tuition fees, are often not met — a state of affairs which is clearly unjust. By whatever mechanism, it deserves immediate remedy.

A concern of a quite different kind is the vulnerability of the continuing education office to administrative whim in consequence of its organizational placement in the institution. At The University of Alberta and The University of Calgary, the continuing education offices operate on the periphery of the institutions. This is so despite the clear need of the continuing education personnel to work in the closest conjunction with departments and faculties in the provision of learning opportunities to citizens. As the principal academic body, the General Faculties Council of each carries the responsibility for educational policy. Yet only tangentially does each Council concern itself with the philosophy, purpose, organization, methodology, operation, or evaluation of continuing education. The grounds, presumably, are that since much of it is non-credit it does not represent a significant commitment of the university. The demarcation between credit and non-credit offerings, at least at the undergraduate level, which this neglect seems to suggest, is artificial and of doubtful validity in educational terms. As a matter of operational policy, the hiving off of non-credit work tends often not to work either to the advantage of the learner or to reasonable economy.<sup>5</sup>

Where, a relatively few years ago, the university departments of continuing education were clearly the principal agencies in this area, today new forces — among them community colleges — are in the field in a substantial way. It is appropriate, therefore, to consider what relationships among them might be most productive.

Cooperation in this area, as in other areas of education, is required. Yet cooperation is not to be legislated; it is as much a state of mind, a matter of will, as anything else. It is worth noting that there exist now informal mechanisms for cooperation and coordination which generally work very well indeed. They include, for example, the Standing Committee on Continuing

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<sup>5</sup>In contrast, the modest continuing education program of the University of Lethbridge emanates from its various departments and flows through the procedures of the General Faculties Council.

Education of the Universities Coordinating Council (through which the four Universities' continuing education functions relate to one another), such organizations as the Edmonton Association for Continuing Education and Recreation, the Calgary Directors of Continuing Education, and the Alberta Association for Continuing Education. The character of cooperation between the continuing education divisions of the Alberta universities has been of a very high standard indeed, with demonstrable benefit to Alberta. Programs developed at one institution are readily shared with another and, frequently, programs are planned jointly by the institutions to serve a province-wide clientele. In a variety of ways, expanded service and useful economies are combined.

The charge is frequently made, usually by those not inhibited by the facts, that because continuing education is served by a variety of agencies and that since they occasionally work in the same subject area, "overlapping and duplication" — the stock phrase — is rampant. This is no more the case, typically, than that the existence of a variety of retail grocery outlets in a community evidences redundancy in effort. This so-called duplication is an illusion. A range of courses, though identical in title, will invariably reflect the unique skills and insights of the instructor. More than that, the economics of program presentation prevents unreasonable competition. There is, nonetheless, a place for voluntary councils of the kind already existing for the facilitation of coordination and for the exchange of mutually advantageous information.

In one important area, academics responsible for the provision by the university of continuing education have been considerably less than diligent: that is in the development of a useful and extensive research base. Fundamental information — both descriptive and factual — is lacking. Statistical data, characterizing program and clientele, is virtually non-existent. Much of what exists is of doubtful validity. In twenty years, no serious analysis at a national level of continuing education in the Canadian university has been undertaken. If continuing education, in response to what appear to be clear societal demands, is to move forward, then as rapidly as possible research requires initiation and support on a continuing basis. Such questions as these invite reply: Who is now served by university continuing education programs? Who *should* be served by them? What are the socio-economic-educational characteristics of the clientele? As a population, how are they distributed? What kinds of continuing education do they require? What mechanisms for the delivery of continuing education are appropriate? What institutional policies should apply in their provision? What boundaries, if any, should be descriptive of the extent of the university's output in continuing education? Action of two kinds is required: the identification of and the assignment of priorities to the kinds of information required; and the determination of those mechanisms through which the research function in continuing education is to be performed.

A problem area which has emerged in recent years and promises to become more pressing is that of field support of programs of continuing education — with packages of learning resources. Since 1913 and 1917,

respectively, the Department of Extension, The University of Alberta, has developed two strong resource depositories in the Extension Library and the Educational Media Division. Each has afforded important, if little heralded, learning opportunities on an individual or group basis to Albertans over many years. Latterly, and particularly over the last two decades, as the character of the program offerings of that Department has changed, each of these two pockets of resources has become very much more significant as a back-up to instruction offered in the field outside of the major cities.

If, as is predicted by the literature of higher education, "non-traditional education" is to develop rapidly, there will be required of higher education institutions flexibility in the provision of learning opportunities, adaptation to the requirements of the learner, and service to an expanded clientele. The ability of university institutions to offer programs in areas off the campus and remote from a library will be handicapped if access to the support of the educational media — books, films, filmstrips, videotapes, audiotapes — continues to be frustrated. As a matter of course, each institution should be able to deploy these resources in support of field programs with ease. The link between effective functioning in the field and the availability of such resources is clearly demonstrated at the University of Lethbridge which offers off-campus credit instruction in sixteen centres. There, it is reported, the lack of adequate library facilities to undergird these classes constitutes a significant limiting factor.

In short, if non-traditional education, as an increasingly important aspect of higher education, is to expand, as all evidence suggests it will, and if it is adequately to serve Albertans outside of the major cities, it is imperative that a learning resources base be built immediately to support field programs.<sup>6</sup>

A further handicap to the development of opportunities in continuing education at the volume which would appear to be required is the inadequate size of the body of professionally trained personnel. Continuing education has latterly been developed elsewhere as an area of graduate study. Still, the numbers of those with professional training available to the province is small. In addition to the professional capacities required within universities and other institutions offering programs of continuing education, there is the need to develop programs of in-service training at a sub-professional or informal level for those who will work in the field, perhaps on a voluntary basis, through their own organizations.

Yet there is nowhere in the Province a facility for the provision of that training, either professional or informal. This is a serious lack. It needs to be determined — and very soon — what is needed in the way of training in the field and by what mechanisms it might best be accomplished.

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<sup>6</sup>A possible modus operandi is proposed in the Report *The Development of a Learning Resources Centre as a Base for the Expansion of Continuing Education in Alberta* by the Advisory Committee to the Department of Extension, The University of Alberta, on learning Resources (Edmonton: Department of Extension, June, 1973).

What role should be played by government in continuing education? While there are examples in and out of Canada of direct government operation of continuing education programming, there is sound philosophic reason for one to be opposed to it. More pragmatically, those who have observed the field of continuing education over time will confirm that the execution of continuing education at its best requires thorough training on the part of the professional coupled to the quality of resourcefulness and heavily underscored by a capacity for the creative. These are characteristics which tend not to flourish in the bureaucratic framework. Personal drive, sensitivity and imagination, that is to say, are more important than the rule book. It is strategically important to universities that the field of continuing education does not become the object of a large regulatory bureaucracy. Government will certainly require change. But it should not be achieved by ukase, but rather induced by persuasion coupled to financial and other inducements as, for example, support for imaginative experiments from the proposed Innovative Projects Development Fund.

It would be unfortunate and quite misleading were these observations to be construed merely as a catalogue of complaints. University extension offices in Alberta can demonstrate a notable record of achievement. Through their programs, many thousands of Albertans have been provided educational experiences of significance.<sup>7</sup> Their innovations in continuing education have had an important secondary impact on the intramural life of the university. Radio Station CKUA, the Banff School of Fine Arts (out of which sprang The University of Alberta's Department of Art and Design, the Department of Music, the Department of Drama), the Evening Credit program, the M.A. Program in Community Development, the Petroleum Industry Training Service, to name just a few examples, all grew out of extension work. What is worth noting, too, is the enthusiastic support of the Alberta public. In the last ten years, various organizations external to government have provided nearly three-quarters of a million dollars of grant support to the Department of Extension of The University of Alberta alone in support of its program.

That this character of development has been possible is due, in large part, to the high degree of freedom afforded in the administration of the universities' extension operation; that freedom is a sine qua non to the development of effective work in this field.

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To summarize, universities should be induced to accept and to recognize continuing education as a necessary part of its service to society through changes in its reward system — and perhaps through legislation. Perhaps most important, the goals of institutions of higher education in their continuing education responsibility need to be more clearly specified in light of the changing needs of society. The rationale or basis of financial

<sup>7</sup>In this connection, it is useful to remember that they pay substantial fees for the privilege and that their numbers increase annually. This "test of the market place" is significant.

support to the continuing education function needs to be made more explicit; and more searching consideration should be given to the volume of fund support necessary to achieve its goals. In order that these goals might more readily be achieved, the organizational framework through which continuing education is to be conducted within the institution should be clarified and made explicit. Through some kind of instrumentality, institutions should be enabled to support their learning projects in the field with all necessary learning resources. Voluntary structures for inter-institutional collaboration and cooperation should continue and financial support should be afforded their operation. Some mechanism needs to be devised to encourage the regular provision of needed research. Attention should be given to the needs of preparing those who are to undertake the task of continuing education, professional and lay assistants alike. And, finally, consideration should be given to ways and means of ensuring that citizens of the Province, regardless of their means or their location, should have equal access to the continuing education opportunities provided by their institutions.

These problems are real and important. But beyond a review by government of legislation affecting continuing education and in preparation by universities for it, is the need for a searching, institution-wide study of the function. The point at issue is not merely the remedy of current problems or the "extension of extension", so to speak, but rather a broad inquiry by the institution, jointly with the community, into how, employing all of its resources, the university can best meet its public service responsibilities. This is the current undertaking of a Task Force of the Senate of The University of Alberta.

If, as the evidence would suggest, the partnership between university and society is a requirement of the times, the study is timely and well warranted.