

Book Reviews

John D. Dennison and Paul Gallagher.
CANADA'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS.
Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1986.
370 pp. \$16.95.

Considering the dearth of literature relating to the Canadian community college, this study by John Dennison (University of British Columbia) and Paul Gallagher (Vancouver Community College) has scored well on two grounds: it continues the narrative and analysis begun by Gordon Campbell in his 1971 work, while at the same time it is so comprehensive, thoughtful and well-written that it is destined to become the definitive text for those interested in the field. The book, divided into two sections, the first outlining **Origins and History**, the second **Issues for the Future**, promises in the **Introduction** to be "intentionally judgmental and, it is hoped, controversial. . . to provoke discussion and debate about the future" of the colleges. Indeed, this is not an idle threat, and the authors successfully attack many sacred cows. Both authors have been longstanding students and observers of the Canadian community college, one as a university professor who has conducted ongoing research in the college area, the other with significant experience as a college president in two provinces. The book is rooted in well-documented research and includes comprehensive chapter notes and bibliography.

The first section spells out how each province created a college structure to suit specific provincial needs. Emphasized, by the authors, are the theses that (a) educational planners and administrators tend to understand only their own province, and (b) universities, as effectively as they could, manipulated to ensure that their own positions were in no way compromised as a result of the advent of the colleges. This section also outlines the history of provincial relations with the Federal government,

and, in particular, how the Quebec government introduced the colleges as tools for social and political change. No doubt, based on his lengthy experience as an educator there, Gallagher's acute insights about Quebec make for interesting reading indeed, as does the later analysis of general education in the colleges. In the next two chapters, the characteristics of colleges that distinguish them from universities are reviewed to good effect, followed by a discussion on the establishment of provincial systems.

In Part II, the authors challenge much conventional wisdom, for example, seriously questioning whether there is any justification for the same kind of governance for community colleges as universities. This is a topic of immediate interest in Ontario, with the just announced government response to the recent Pitman study. They go on to assert that, for example:

- "Canada has not been on the cutting edge of post-secondary education, despite the massive public and private sums devoted to this endeavour."
- "The plain facts are that college teaching has not been rigorously and systematically evaluated and that few resources have been devoted to improving the quality of instruction."
- "It would be unrealistic not to admit that a portion of Canadian college staff members are doing little more than putting in time to retirement, even though they are still quite young."

Unfortunately, many of these statements are left hanging in the air, with insufficient supporting evidence, or without that essential following discussion in later chapters. The reader is left with some sense of frustration as to how these issues may be resolved.

The authors' global insights about the evolution of the community college in Canada are particularly provocative when they touch on the implications for the learning society. In their chapter on **Colleges as Institutions**, they assert a strong role for colleges as centres for the continuing education of adults, stressing the primacy of attention to the individual student and his/her personal learning objectives. The following chapters dealing with **Politics, Excellence** (section on **Research**) contain trenchant observations based on the experiences and biases of the authors. Gallagher's knowledge of and his personal involvement in the development of the Dawson College approach (collegiality and student parity), for example, have certainly influenced the discussion of the roles of the various constituencies. Two other comments serve to illustrate their constant ability to get to the heart of a matter with perceptive and concise penetration:

. "The CEGEPs have gained maturity but in the view of many observers they have grown old too quickly."

. "The single most damaging feature of the Canadian college movement has been the tendency for its members and others to evaluate these institutions on bases appropriate to other kinds of institutions."

One senses that the authors have tried to cover too much ground in their understandable efforts to be comprehensive. The book suffers to a certain degree from a relatively sparse use of examples. Also, although a handful of people are mentioned as being critical to the establishment of the colleges in the various provinces, few practitioners are singled out as having been instrumental in the development of the college movement, giving the work a certain arid and impersonal tone. They may have been simply reflecting the standard Canadian reluctance to identify heroic figures, which Americans tend to do with so much more panache, even when undeserved.

One weakness: One might have expected to have found here some discussion or outline of the variety of program characteristics or mix of colleges, variations between the systems, comparative breakdowns of Board composition, etc. Such data would have been more useful for the discerning reader to find among the Appendices than a map of college locations in Canada. The book, however, is immensely useful and calls out for early comments and response from Canadian practitioners to the many issues raised. Although blemished by some sweeping generalizations, it is otherwise encyclopaedic; it should become *must* reading. The book makes a major contribution to understanding the Canadian college movement, only now beginning to mature. Let us hope that it will not be another fifteen years before a definitive response is forthcoming.

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DEAR GRACE: A ROMANCE OF HISTORY.

Montreal, Quebec: Eden Press, 1986.

246 pp. \$24.95.

Dear Grace may be viewed as a book of discovery mainly about the life of William Clow Ritchie, a Canadian doctor who graduated from the School of Medicine, Queen's University in 1889 and, after taking post-graduate studies in Edinburgh, emigrated to Australia. The central part of the book consists of a collection of twenty-seven letters written by Little from Scotland and Australia between 1889 and 1894 to Grace Octavia Ritchie.