

Editorial

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN of Arts of a major Canadian university showed up recently in a half-page ad in our national newspaper. “Peace and security risks. Health care and hunger. Technology letting us turn issues on or off at will. Understanding between people across the globe has never been so complex. Yet the lens through which we seek clarity remains unchanged” proclaimed the Dean. This lens, according to him, is university arts, which “is in the business of asking the questions that make sense of change in our lives. Finding answers helps us create the adjustments in policy, governance, culture, and behaviour that keep us in step with the world When the world comes into focus, anything is possible.”¹

The sentence fragments are a characteristic sign of MarketingSpeak, and this little essay contains the sort of vague bombastic hype and empty promises one always finds expressed in that peculiar dialect. But shouldn't we be happy to see this ad, effusing expensively over something that needs nowadays all the good brand-consciousness it can get?

Not necessarily. Everyone in a university nowadays is aware that marketing considerations increasingly govern not just messages to the external world, but internal matters as well. Some of this influence is merely laughable—for example, the message sent by the Marketing Office of my university a few years ago, ordering everyone including us teachers not to use university trademarks anywhere without obtaining a licence from them, and then only with the little trademark symbol™. The university's trademarks include “Dalhousie University”™ and its Latin motto *ora et labora*™.² But other influences of marketing are not so harmlessly absurd and easily ignored. The Wal-Martization of universities brings enormous concern about consumer satisfaction, as expressed in student evaluations; because good evaluations can be produced by giving high grades and making the

¹ Ken Coates, Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Waterloo. Advertisement in *The Globe and Mail*, May 19, 2007

² Yes, I know that this is really aimed at cornering the university-branded t-shirt market; but the order was aimed at *everyone*. I doubt that a t-shirt recommending prayer and work in Latin would be a big seller, except perhaps to the Christian monks whose motto this originally was.

work easier, the result is grade inflation and dumbed-down feel-good lite instruction. It also entails overriding attention to bringing in the customers and reducing cost-per-product, and this means admitting scads of incapable and uninterested students and jamming them into huge classes. These and other deteriorations made my job as university professor considerably less satisfying than it used to be. So I'm not completely unhappy about my imminent forced departure. (One of the many charming ways that Nova Scotia lags behind the civilized world is its maintenance of a provincial law requiring retirement of academics at sixty-five.)

The part of my job I will miss—the part that has given me unmixed pride and satisfaction—is editing *The Dalhousie Review*. We have a long, distinguished history, and have managed—I think—to maintain high standards. We make no absurd claims about promoting peace and good health care, or counteracting hunger and security risks, or providing the tools for dealing with change. All we promise is good, enjoyable, instructive writing. With very few sentence fragments.

Despite my general cynicism about the state of academia, I'm proud of Dalhousie University for its continuing support of the *Review*.

A great pleasure of my job has been seeing the enormous amount of good writing we receive. I wish we had space to print much more of what's sent. I counteract my regret at having to reject so many excellent submissions by reading the happy email replies from authors we accept.

It has been a privilege and a joy to work with our associate editors—those who have been on staff for a while now, Anthony Stewart, Judith Thompson and Meghan Nieman, and those more recently added, Ian Colford, Sue Campbell, Krista Kesselring and Dean Irvine. All these people work hard for us without pay or remission from their ordinary duties in return. Our student assistants, most recently Vanessa Lent, have been a valuable source of reliable and intelligent help to our diligent, efficient, and smart Production and Office Manager/Typesetter/Jill-of-All-Trades, Jennifer Lambert.

I have no fears for the *Review's* future. Everyone around here is delighted that Anthony Stewart will be taking over as Editor. We're looking forward to a better-than-ever *Dalhousie Review*, and this is not an empty promise.

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