

natural enemy in the process of faculty collective bargaining, he may be treading unfortunately close to anachronism. Yet even if the details of Cameron's "elitist" liberal education could not be fully implemented, there is real strength to be seen in his proposals for a collegiate "home" for undergraduate students. He overcomes the almost immediate "yes. . .but. . .resources" response to such a desideratum by the rather intriguing suggestion that academic departments could fill the purpose when formal colleges are not available.

While Cameron's principal concern is with the undergraduate program, he does give some attention to what he considers to be a basically sound North American approach to graduate studies. His criticism is directed toward the much attacked but little altered graduate thesis, which he feels might be usefully altered to the French model. "The intention of such a system is to make sure that the student can work systematically in some central, important area of discipline." (p. 61) A similar question is raised of our wholesale use of the Ph.D. degree as virtually the only cap-stone of academic specialization. "The Doctor of Philosophy degree could. . .be a distinction awarded, perhaps rarely, as the D. Litt. is, and to those, who already in the middle of their careers as teachers, are moved to creative or scholarly work that deserves this kind of distinction." (p. 62) Cameron's points are founded not on elitism but on an assessment of the actual qualities that the programs should be producing, and deserve serious scrutiny on that basis.

Cameron's final words about his book are as follows: "it is a piece of harmless vanity in me to hope, not that these words. . .will be long remembered, but that what has been said may pass anonymously into the flood of talk about universities and in that way make some differences to how things are done and to the look of things" (p. 88). If this is his goal, he has succeeded well. We are provided not with blueprints for reforms, but with a renewed sense of what a university should and can be.

Alexander Gregor
Department of Educational Foundations
University of Manitoba

Oswald Hall and Richard Carlton, *Basic Skills at School and Work: The Study of Albertain, Ontario*, Toronto, Ontario Economic Council, 1977. 326 pp.

Hall and Carlton's research monograph *Basic Skills at School and Work* merits considerable attention. It is an important work, in part, because it is a community study which examines the interrelationships of those major sectors (various school systems, teachers, students, employees and employers) concerned with basic skills in English and Mathematics. Although the definition of basic skills may be considered problematic, they "concentrate upon the 'fit' between skill proficiencies and the situational demands of both employment and academic settings". Even though the generalizability of a community study may be questionable, to investigate the complex social organization encompassing basic skills may require this approach.

Methodologically, the monograph is a good example of "triangulation" as both multiple data sources and multiple data collection techniques are employed. These include secondary

data from the government, schools and community; systematic interviews with teachers, administrators and students at elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools; on-the-spot observations in classrooms; interviews with employers; questionnaires to 1400 students who had left the secondary school system, followed by intensive, structured interviews of a subsample of these who were employees or students in a post-secondary system. Although some quantitative analyses are reported (not without problems), the major appeal to this reviewer is the rich, qualitative data which are described. There seems to be an almost “perfect mix” of interview excerpts and interpretations.

Albertown is an anonymous urban community of 50,000 to 75,000 population in southern Ontario, with substantial industrial and commercial bases. It has maintained ties with the agricultural hinterland. Both high birth rates and immigration have resulted in a situation where the “provision of services became the dominant form of employment expansion” (p. 15). Albertown has both separate and public school systems, a College of Applied Arts and Technology, and a university.

In their analysis of the elementary sector, Hall and Carlton under-score the importance of the complex environment in which the school is found (i.e., the family, neighbourhood, peers and mass media influence the students’ acquisition of basic skills). Elementary teachers reported serious problems in both literacy and numeracy skills. These have resulted from the “wholesale innovation, the appealing but unworkable philosophies and practices introduced throughout the late sixties” (p. 19). Although elementary teachers and administrators are often blamed for not imparting the basic skills, Hall and Carlton focus on broader social changes (e.g., rapid expansion, massive recruitment, discontinuity in policy-making at higher levels). They detail how the Ministry of Education’s curriculum controls have been inconsistent; how an enriched curriculum has led to specialization and rotational teaching where students face discontinuity in standards and content; where teacher preparation is at variance with practice; how the new pedagogy minimizes basic skills; where grouping and continuous progress have led to lowered standards; and how student attitudes toward work commitment have declined. These processes have “enhanced structured discontinuities about which revolve many of the difficulties in the learning of basic skills” (p. 87).

Hall and Carlton report that “skill deficiencies tend to be aggravated rather than eliminated as the student moves through secondary school. . .” (p. 172). Growth in the secondary sector is characterized by increased bureaucratization, fragmentation and specialization. Students enroll in mathematics and English courses but do not acquire the basic skills. This appears especially true in English where the emphasis is on verbal communication skills rather than grammar and writing. The authors report that open curriculum and free choice have not eliminated streaming, and the result has been detrimental to basic skills. Performance standards in the secondary sector have declined due to policies of social promotion and continuous progress, the absence of external standards such as Grade 13 examinations, societal mandates to retain the economically disadvantaged, and the perception that employees and post-secondary institutions have lowered their requirements. The resulting deficient basic skills do not appear to be easily ameliorated by remedial programs.

One research objective was to examine how well prepared secondary students are in math and communication skills as they entered the work world. Hall and Carleton argue that basic skills “are embedded in a cluster of attitudes, habits, and motivation patterns

of the student. . . and do not operate as separate entities as far as the worker is concerned . . .” (p. 173). The skills required were, of course, relative to the job requirements. The employment sector was divided into five major types, and both former students (now employees) and employers were interviewed. In general, banking, retail trade, office workers, textile workers, and workers in other types of manufacturing reported no serious skill deficiencies. The only exception was the employers of office workers who expressed dissatisfaction with writing skills. Hall and Carlton found that oral skills were deemed more important by employers than the “three R’s.” Although employers are largely satisfied with basic skills, they “deplore a whole battery of shortcoming — poor work, low productivity, insubordination, instability and absenteeism. . .” (p. 204).

Whereas students who entered the employment sector assess themselves favourably in skill adequacy; students in the College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) were less favourable; and university students were least favourable. Hall and Carlton found some variation both in adequacy of preparation and need for basic skills among the major groups of CAAT students. Secretarial students, who have poor backgrounds, are reportedly adequate in math but unsatisfactory in writing skills; the teaching staff found the nursing students adequate in skills, although the students themselves reported deficiencies in both math and English; and both students and teachers in the technical courses (e.g., welding) saw English and math as irrelevant. In sum, most teachers and students in CAAT are aware of their deficiencies, but have adapted to them and do not see them as “crippling.”

The absence of basic skills at the university level cannot be attributed to the elementary and secondary school sectors since a small portion of the student body comes from Albertown. Faculty comments, diagnostic tests and achievement levels in course work were all reported as indicators that students are poorly prepared in both English and mathematics. Students reported they felt better prepared in mathematics than English. Students adapted to their shortcomings in various ways including “borrowing reports,” avoiding difficult reading, carefully selecting instructors, and accepting low scholarly standards. Faculty have also adapted by using audio-visual materials, ignoring deficiencies in basic writing skills, reliance on multiple choice examinations, etc.

Hall and Carlton argue that the demand for and expansion in higher education resulted from the need for highly skilled manpower, from Canadian sources and not immigration, and from the unexpected surge of jobs in the service sector (p. 249). Universities have admitted lower quality applicants which has sanctioned the further “loose preparation” of secondary students. It has become a vicious cycle. At the same time, entering university students are characterized by the relaxed academic standards of the secondary schools which emphasize the peer groups and sociability. Of course, technological changes (e.g. computers, calculators) have also eliminated the need for the development of certain basic skills.

In their summary chapter, Hall and Carlton note that students, teachers and employers have all adapted to skill deficiencies which has made “survival possible.” At each level, the skill deficiencies and work attitudes are attributed to the system from which the recruit has come, and all have had to adapt. In their “functionalist perspective,” they note that “changes in education can be achieved only when we attend, explicitly, to the embracing momentum of our social, political and economic organization, to which schools both respond and contribute” (p. 259). After identifying selected societal trends (e.g., knowledge expansion,

democratization) which bear directly on skill acquisition, the authors outline some considerations for policy development.

In summary, this book leaves the sobering message that students have not been satisfactorily acquiring basic skills. Hall and Carlton seem to be operating from the underlying assumption that this is a change from “the good old days.” From the methodology employed, one may query: “Have students *ever satisfactorily* acquired the basis?” Educators lament the situation regarding basic skills in school; whereas, employers are more concerned with declining work commitment. In order to assess the “back to basics” argument adequately, a panel design would be appropriate. To rely heavily on administrators’, teachers’ and employers’ retroactive memories to assess the situation, as Hall and Carlton have done, may be questionable. Likewise, students’ self-assessments may not be adequate measures of actual proficiencies, i.e., self-assessments are influenced by the milieu in which they occur. More objective measurements seem desirable.

Nevertheless, if we accept the validity of the measurements reported in this monograph, there is cause for considerable concern. It appears that no single social system must “shoulder the blame” for the deficiencies in mathematics and English. Rather, they result from rapid social and cultural change. Perhaps the educational institutions need to reconsider their goals and objectives. In short, this monograph should be read and considered by all educators. It has “much food for thought.”

Merlin B. Brinkerhoff
Department of Sociology
The University of Calgary

Claude T. Bissell, *Humanities in the University*, Legon, University of Ghana, 1977. 82 pp.

In his foreword to this book, Vice-Chancellor D.A. Bekoe of the University of Ghana, Legon, explains that it comprises the 1976 Aggrey-Fraser-Guggisberg Memorial Lectures, an annual series established in 1957. He proceeds to a sketch of Dr. Bissell’s distinguished career, that concludes with his appointment at Toronto as “University Professor, a position which conferred on him the freedom to teach, study, and write as he sees fit.”

Early this year, within a week after receiving Dr. Bissell’s book, I was given to read a report prepared only a short time previously by the student association at Legon, dealing with the recent invasions of the campus by police. Attached were statements by individual students who had been subjected to obscenely brutal attacks and beatings, many of them resulting in serious injuries, some permanent. The students had been forced to abandon the campus; whether they have yet returned is not clear to me. I know of only one reference to these events by the Canadian news media, and that was a passing allusion in a piece reprinted from *The Economist*. Such is life in the Global Village, where the freedom to teach, study, and write as one sees fit becomes steadily more tenuous. One wonders how a “world-wide electronic dialogue” such as Dr. Bissell at one point mentions, would affect it.

In truth, it is more important than ever that those who can do so – especially those who can do so with acknowledged authority – should speak out for that freedom. Scho-