

'The Best Thing That Ever Happened'

(UBC's radical New Arts I program has completed its first year of operation. To test reaction to the program, UBC Reports asked one of the two New Arts I coordinators, Dr. Ian Ross, to select three students for a tape-recorded discussion. The participants, in addition to Dr. Ross, are first-year students Silke Andresen, David Sharpe and Steve Graham. For a description of how New Arts I operates, see the box below.)

UBC REPORTS: Well, we are here today to discuss your reactions to the New Arts I program. I wonder if we can begin, Silke, by asking you to give us your reactions and how you feel about Arts I generally.

MISS SILKE ANDRESEN: Well, my reaction, on the whole, has been quite favorable. When I first heard about it, I asked some friends who were going to UBC if they had heard about the program. They said, "It's a good idea; apply." And — so there I was, in September, among the 240 people in New Arts I.

Since then, I've sometimes had severe doubts about the program. But now that I've assessed what I've gotten out of the year, I think generally it's been much better than what I would have gotten out of a regular first-year program.

Other than Arts I, I take psychology 100 and German 100 and I've found that German doesn't really give me that much. It's like all language courses; I go home and memorize, I do exercises, but that's all there is to it. And psychology, again it's sitting in a big lecture hall. Right now I do my readings, but it's never really contemplating an issue.

STUDENTS CONDUCT PROGRAM

UBCR: How does the kind of thing that happens in Arts I vary significantly from the two outside courses that you take? In what specific ways does the professor conduct the Arts I lecture or seminar?

MISS ANDRESEN: Well, I think the first thing is that he doesn't conduct; the students conduct it. At least, that is how it came to be as we got to know each other in the course of the session. You know that our curriculum in group two consists of a study of a series of themes: war, love, death, and education. Well, a seminar or two before we take up a new theme, we agree on the reading to be done and the sequence of topics.

When we come to the period devoted to the new theme, supposedly everybody has done his reading, and seminars usually begin with a student presenting a report or a strong point of view on the topic. And afterwards we either agree with what has been said or disagree and begin to evaluate the argument.

UBCR: And it largely becomes a seminar or discussion group?

MISS ANDRESEN: Right. And there isn't really that much that the professor — Dr. Ross, for instance — does, other than trying to steer the discussion back to the main issue if people go off on tangents or are reduced to name-calling. In those senses, he controls it.

UBCR: Dr. Ross, perhaps you can be more specific about this. Silke says that one specific thing may arise out of the discussion and will be thoroughly debated. A more conservative academic might say that the object is not to discuss a specific idea within, say, Plato's "Symposium," but to get some idea of the structure

of thought, the whole framework of thought of Plato. Do you think there might be a danger in allowing what a conservative academic might describe as undisciplined student thought?

DR. IAN ROSS: Well, let's accept that there is a problem. You mentioned Plato's "Symposium." The students attempt, in their discussion, to elucidate the argument of the Symposium which concerns different views of love. Different students attach themselves to these views, and out of the expression of opinions we get a dialogue somewhat similar to the one Plato constructs.

Now, I don't believe that teaching is telling. I believe that teaching is opening up perspectives and communicating a passionate desire to arrive at the truth. It is not enough for one man to say, "Such-and-such is the structure of Plato's thought."

PARTICIPATE IN DIALOGUE

Every reader of Plato has to come to his terms with the structure of Plato's thought and evaluate it for himself if it is really to be a part of his thinking and not mere information. The best way to see what Plato is after, indeed, the best way to tackle any question of values, is to participate in dialogue, to follow the back-and-forth movement of ideas about the importance of sensual love or the love of wisdom or whatever may be the issue addressed.

It may be that some students will come out of one of these seminars, having heard a number of points of view expressed, somewhat confused, but I take it that if he's worth his salt he goes back over in his mind what he's heard and wrestles with the structure of Plato's thought.

My concept of teaching, then, includes creating the conditions for students to take up ideas and make them their own in a critical way through the discipline of discussion and independent study.

UBCR: Steve Graham, I understand that you have some reservations about the Arts I program and the way it operates?

MR. STEVE GRAHAM: Well, I joined Arts I because I became somewhat cynical about the university set-up. I told Dr. Ross, as a matter of fact, that if I could work and not come to the seminars I'd just as soon do that, because as far as I was concerned a BA was what you need after your name to get anywhere.

And I was hoping in Arts I to deal with social questions. I guess my attitude towards it from the beginning was preconceived. I wanted to deal with social issues, and the reason I took love was that I was hoping to deal with modern social problems such as divorce, promiscuity, prostitution, homosexuality—what actually is tenderness and this feeling we call love?

Throughout the whole thing I felt that we were beating around the bush and not getting anywhere. Too much time was spent theorizing, theorizing, and whereas theorizing is fashionable at cocktail parties and may have some use to that extent, it isn't really too good when you get out into life.

CHANGE COMES WITH MIXING

And I found the same thing in dealing with war. We didn't seem to dwell too much on the horrors of the trenches or the real causes of it. We touched on them, but even the bulk of the library's books, which were supposed to get at the reasons for aggressiveness, didn't really.

And by the time we got to death, I was pretty well disgusted, books costing the price they did.

We're doing education right now and one thing that bothers me a lot, or did, was Plato's "Republic." I couldn't see why we wasted time on a book like that, because it doesn't deal with a modern situation. Here was Plato setting up ideas to deal with the shortcomings of man, trying to set up a perfect sort of government, and then completely denying the human frailties that people have within themselves.

It was a Cloud Nine world which didn't deal with the way we are today. Perhaps in the education field I'm less qualified because I had given thought to the other fields before I came to UBC. I had never really thought of the concept of education, which is what is being discussed. I thought more of just changing the curriculum to drastically improve it over what the government presently gives elementary and high school students.

As for myself, I found that change didn't come from what I read, although I noted a couple of places where it did, but from mixing with the students in Arts I. I did come in somewhat cynical, being an idealist in a school where idealism didn't exactly flourish. So with the students I took a conservative, hard line and had them present back to me the ideas that I stood for, hoping of course at the same time that they would convince me.

I find that I've got a balance now and don't regard getting a BA as something which is necessary but as something which can fulfil you. In this way, it is helping me become more of a balanced person, and I think it's worth it.

UBCR: Do I sense, then, that Arts I has not quite lived up to your expectations?

DEAL WITH HUMAN PROBLEMS

MR. GRAHAM: Oh no. I found education in high school for the most part dull, and it disappointed me. I regarded university as worldly — the thing to do.

Actually what I wanted was all the answers to life on a silver platter. I had been hoping for something, perhaps more reading in the sociology line, and that of course comes next year. But I still felt that university could deal with human problems as they are, rather than with just sitting around and theorizing.

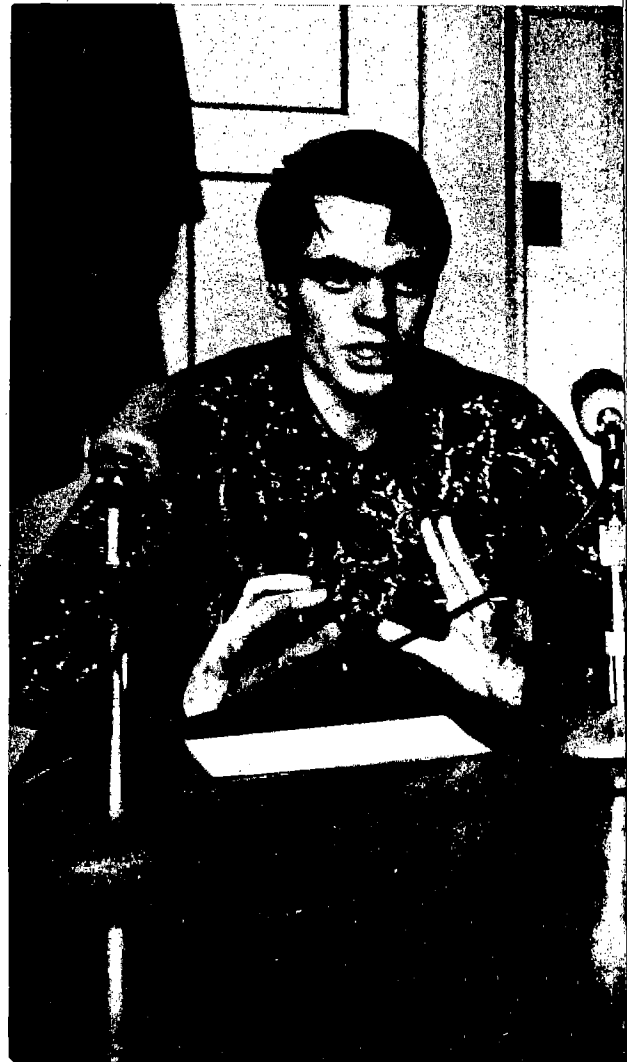
I don't really go along with the idea that you have to start off with ideas. I think that all of us are smart

enough to have some when we come in, so we can work from there.

UBCR: David, could we hear briefly from you now about your feelings about Arts I?

MR. DAVID SHARPE: First of all I'd like to take up a couple of things Steve mentioned. You criticized Plato because he wasn't relevant for today, that he wasn't really in a modern situation. You said that he set up a republic which didn't take into account what people actually are. Do you feel that perhaps this is the conclusion that you were supposed to come to, that we took Plato not to agree with him necessarily, but to find out constructively, intelligently how to disagree with him?

Now I think you'll find that in many present-day systems — education systems, political systems — that



Arts I student David Sharpe, left, makes a point during a tape recorded discussion of the radical new program, which has just completed its first year of operation.

there is a basic split made between reason and emotion which I think goes back to Plato. He considers only the reason without the emotion, and I think that this is a hang-up that we have right up to the present-day systems.

The high school system is working under the assumption that people can be educated as intellectuals, that their emotional development will just happen along with it, on the side.

I read the precis of the Chant Report, and there it was expressly stated that they were only interested in the intellect. Now I think that this proves that the consideration of Plato is very revealing to us.

MR. GRAHAM: Well, I dig the latter half of what you've been saying. I agree that it doesn't seem to take emotions into account. But on the very point of whether we are supposed to question Plato, I think that this is something for high school, not something for university.

GROUP TIED TOGETHER

I think we should go to farther fields. This again, I think, is theorizing. I think we should get down to dealing with practical problems.

MR. SHARPE: This is a very practical problem. Arts I is set up on the idea that the individual should be educated, both reason and emotion. At least this is how our particular part of Arts I is working. We are forming a group which is emotionally tied together, the group spirit and the whole bit; we're friends. There's an air of respect, of friendship, in our group. Now this was established first of all, before we could get into actual development as a group.

UBCR: Do you feel that if you were not in the Arts I program, if you were part of the larger body of first-year arts students, that that feeling of friendship and closeness would not be possible?

MR. SHARPE: I would say that it would be very difficult. In Arts I we are in an experimental situation and we are conscious of what's going on. We evaluate what we do as we do it.

We see that it is to our advantage educationally to form a group — not just get together and sit around and talk, but actually form a group. And I don't think that this would take place in first year, first of all because nobody would be aware that this is what should be done; secondly, because of the course set-up in the first year.

UBCR: Do you personally feel that Arts I has lived up to the expectations that you had for it?

How Arts I Works

When UBC's New Arts I program was approved, it was described as "the most fundamental change in curriculum in the history of the faculty of arts."

The 240 students accepted for the program in September, 1967, were divided into two sections of 120 students each. Each section is staffed by six instructors, each of whom direct the work of 20 students.

Each section meets as a group for lectures and each instructor also conducts seminars and tutorials for his own group of 20 students.

Students completing the New Arts I program successfully are given credit for nine units of work in the first year. Arts I students are also required to take two additional courses—a foreign language and an elective course.

The curriculum of the New Arts I program consists of a sequence of themes of broad humanistic interest. Group one dealt with conflict between freedom and authority and its relationship to responsibility. Group two studied the theme of war in the first term and love, death and education in the second.

The academic week of the New Arts I student takes the following shape: six hours in regular courses, one two-hour lecture or panel discussion with all the members of the Arts I group, four hours in seminar discussions, a tutorial session to discuss an independent study project or essay, and attendance at a film or monitoring of a television or radio presentation relative to the group's theme.

Students are also required to make contributions to seminar meetings, and for independent study they may be reading a classical work of literature, doing research on a topic in current affairs or observing contemporary institutions, such as a law court, in action.

Co-chairmen of the New Arts I program are Dr. Gerald F. McGuigan, assistant professor of economics, and Dr. Ian Ross, associate professor of English.

...ed To Me' — A Student of Arts 1

MR. SHARPE: I don't indulge in expectations. I went into Arts I just because it was something different, and I am entirely satisfied with Arts I. I think it's the best thing that has ever happened to me, not just educationally, and that it has specific advantages for me.

ENTHUSIASTIC FOR EDUCATION

It has made me very enthusiastic for education. Right now, after going through Arts I, the thing I want to do most of all is to continue my education. It has given me a new slant on education.

I look upon education now as being something more than mastering of areas of knowledge. It's more a dealing with inter-relationships, with insights. Through the year there have been many occasions when suddenly

high school two years ago I decided I didn't want to go to university because I didn't feel it offered me anything.

At the suggestion of an uncle, who is a Danish teacher, I enrolled for a five-month course at a Danish Folkehøjskole, where the learning experience is similar to that in Arts I. I didn't realize that until I enrolled here, of course.

Most of them are residence-type colleges and there are no marks or exams. Most of my time there was devoted to doing things that I wanted to do and the discovery of the satisfaction that could be gained from this sort of activity.

Most of these Danish schools are limited to an enrolment of 100 students — the one I attended had only

room with a carpet on the floor and we hold our big meetings there, and people are on the same level, as it were. We can get a back-and-forth discussion on the basis of the physical environment almost immediately.

UBCR: And you have not found a significant number of students who are reluctant to participate in the general discussion?

DR. ROSS: Well, I find through the year a growing willingness to contribute. I think some students started out very passive, feeling that it wasn't their place to speak. I believe some of the girls felt that.

EVALUATION GOES ON

UBCR: Can we deal now with the future? There has been an evaluation study of the program going on during the year, has there not?

DR. ROSS: Both publicly and privately, I would say, I think everybody's been evaluating it in one way or another. There is a committee of the Faculty of Arts with the specific duty of seeing what we're doing and trying to assess it in some way. They've issued two questionnaires, and members of the evaluating committee have sat in on our big meetings and seminars.

UBCR: I take it then that the Arts I program for first-year students will be continued next year.

DR. ROSS: Yes indeed. We'll call again for applications from the incoming first-year class. We have 240 places, and if we get more than 240 applications, we'll have to run some kind of ballot to fill the places. We were set up to do that last year but as it turned out we didn't need to send anyone away.

UBCR: David, you mentioned that some plans are afoot for an Arts II program. Can you tell us how this has evolved, who's been involved in it, and give us some information about your hopes and plans?

MR. SHARPE: Yes. We realize that the university will not be able to set up an Arts II program next year. There are a number of students who, because of their experience in Arts I, wish very much for a second year in the same type of education. These students have decided to propose to the university a program set up by these students, in consultation with professors.

It would be small-scale, and not the kind of program the university would offer if it does set up a full-scale Arts II. But for those people who have the initiative and the energy to do it, they will have their second year Arts II.

MORE SPECIALIZATION SEEN

There would be one basic difference, in that the individual will be able to specialize to a far greater degree. I think there is potential in the concept of education in Arts I that hasn't been developed in one year. We've been introduced into one whole area in the Arts I method of education, but there is an opportunity for specialization which hasn't been tapped yet.

Now one more year will not merely be a continuation of Arts I, a sort of hesitancy to leave the nest. The advantage will be that, having gotten used to the Arts I method of education, we will be able to take full advantage of our experience next year.

We have a professor who is willing to continue next year, and I have full confidence in this professor. I think that Arts II, if it receives permission to go ahead, will be fantastic — I've used that word before but I can't put it any other way.

UBCR: And you would plan to take such a program, would you?

MR. SHARPE: Definitely, yes.

UBCR: How about you, Silke?

MISS ANDRESEN: No, I'm not volunteering for this program, because through Arts I I've discovered what I want to do.

UBCR: What is that?

MISS ANDRESEN: Well, I found that most of my essays and writings take a psychological-sociological viewpoint. I didn't know this was what I really wanted at the beginning of the year, but I found that you sort of discover what you want to do, and that's how I found out what I want to major in.

UBCR: And, Steve, I take it you plan to go into the second year of university but not into the Arts II program?

MR. GRAHAM: So many students who come into first year take courses thinking they're going to be great and find they're all disappointing flops.

We've had a chance to find out what we like, and I know what I want to take. I think Arts II is good but I don't feel it's for me.

UBCR: What will you go into?

MR. GRAHAM: Religious Studies and Anthropology.

DR. ROSS: It might be of interest just to mention that we are considering possible themes for next year. You see, one of our ideas is to take a thematic approach so that we can explore different areas of knowledge and have people put forward different points of view.

The group that I'm in, planning for next year's Arts I, is suggesting the broad theme of "The forest and the city" as a possibility, and I believe the other group is thinking of "The social contract" and then "Twentieth century disintegration" as their theme.

CITY CONSIDERED AS THEME

MR. SHARPE: Yes, I might mention in Arts II we thought a good theme would be "The city," taken not as a municipal organization but as a gathering of people through time, a natural gathering of people.

UBCR: And this would include everything from the Greek city state up to the modern city?

MR. SHARPE: Yes, everything that the group would want to consider. I think that the group is in a position to sit down and know what it wants to consider.

DR. ROSS: We might, in fact, be studying an area in our own city.

MR. SHARPE: Yes, there are all sorts of possibilities.



Other participants in the discussion reproduced on these pages are students Steve Graham, right, and Miss Silke Andresen, and Dr. Ian Ross, who with Dr. Gerald F.

McGuigan is one of two co-chairmen of the New Arts I program.

Photo by B. C. Jennings.

things just sort of click on a metaphysical level, such as — what is government?

Well, what is government? This sort of thing. And then just sort of magically, after thinking about it for a long time, things just fall into place. Now this is what I would call real education, and it is probably something which would happen in the regular system. But after 12 years in high school, it has not produced as much as it has in this one year of Arts I. I think that if we had 12 years in the Arts I system, the things we'd be doing now would be fantastic, fantastic.

I think that Arts I has several other advantages. It's introduced me to areas of interest that I never knew I was interested in. If I was going into regular first year, I would have to make decisions on which courses I wanted to take.

Because Arts I is free, that is, you can consider the subjects freely from various points of view, I naturally found that my considerations of various subjects always sift down to education theory.

When we looked at the 17th century, without planning it I found that I was looking at the school systems of the 17th century. During this past couple of months, I have spent most of my time arranging a plan for an Arts II, dealing very concretely with educational theory.

I would say that my whole year has been based upon this. I'm surprised even now that I'm interested in educational theory. Arts I has allowed me to discover this.

It has also given me the opportunity of groping around. This is something that's very hard to explain, but I'm deeply appreciative of the fact that for three months I could grope around, not knowing where I was or what I should be doing, and yet not being penalized for it, as I would be if I had assignments, and in the end being able to come to a decision in a free and natural way.

CULTIVATE WORKING ALONE

Our particular group has no assignments, and this cultivates in me the ability to work on my own. This includes self-discipline in the traditional way of sitting down and being able to keep at the books, but also self-discipline which includes initiative.

I think that through this year I've acquired this ability to start things on my own, without anyone even hinting that I should be doing something.

UBCR: Silke, on the whole, has the Arts I program lived up to the expectations you had for it when you entered university?

MISS ANDRESEN: Well, when I graduated from

32 — and so, as you can imagine, there was close contact and a seminar-type of education.

I guess I came to university because I found, contrary to what Steven thinks, that the world really doesn't offer you that much. If you go out and get a job, you don't find what you're looking for there. You need the abstract — you need the ideas. You don't read Plato in high school, you don't really meet up with ideas.

I found that I needed ideas in abstract. I was selling advertising for a newspaper, and that isn't very abstract; it's just figuring out good things to write and how to sell things. And I really felt this need, that I wanted to talk to somebody about war or the idea of war in general, or love in general.

UBCR: David has spoken of the interpersonal relationships that he has found so rewarding within the Arts I program. Have you found the close-knit, discussion-seminar type of thing to be the kind of thing you wanted? Do you feel you benefit from this more than from a straight lecture-type program?

DIFFICULT TO BE CRITICAL

MISS ANDRESEN: Yes, I benefit more, because you learn more, I think, by expressing your ideas, and while you're saying it you find out whether it's really good or you get shot down.

In other words, when you're sitting in a lecture hall it's much easier just to sit there and not think critically about what's being fed to you. I realize that the prof. wants you to be critical, but I think it's very difficult sometimes to be critical.

UBCR: You mean the setting is prohibitive.

MISS ANDRESEN: It is, definitely. Certainly we are allowed to ask questions — I'm sure that most profs. are even glad to have students ask questions, but it doesn't always seem feasible, and I think most first-year students are sometimes a bit awed by the whole UBC atmosphere.

I think it's probably the uncertainty of being away from home and being out on your own and facing a whole new atmosphere. It takes a long time for a freshman just to get used to the idea.

UBCR: Dr. Ross, have you found in general, among the students in the Arts I program, a willingness and eagerness to participate in the lecture-discussion kind of thing?

DR. ROSS: Yes, I think so. We don't have a formal lecture hall, as you know. In fact, we have a finished