

Interesting merits and demerits of a U.S. versus U.K. education

By Alise Refson
Of the Emerald

"What language do they speak in England?" It's a question I've been asked an alarming number of times since my arrival at the University six months ago.

It has led me to believe that a brief comparison between the American and British educational systems might be helpful.

From my limited experience, English high schools seem to be institutions with the one-track aim of churning out students wise in the art of studying, (a skill suited only to the tiny minority who go on to universities). American high schools seem to be communities charged with the function of teaching youths to get on with each other. In their attempts to persuade students that learning is fun, they sometimes fail to prepare them for the demands of college. Yet, a large percentage of American high school graduates head in that direction.

The English student begins high school at 11. Compulsory education continues until 16, optional until 18. The student has no control over his curriculum until he is 15.

Mastery of the compulsory basics is the first priority. The "frilly" subjects available to American students, like jewelry-making and personal intercommunication, are no doubt fun, but seem to produce a propensity of college students virtually unexposed to the laws of grammar. However, the English system might do well to adopt some American "real life" preparatory classes, such as driver's education, citizenship and personal finance. A compromise seems in order.

During their last two years of high school, English students study three chosen subjects, preparing for Advanced Level Examinations, or "A" levels. A British student cannot change

his area of specialty at will. Degree requirements specify particular A levels and a student who took arts subjects at A level would be unable to take a B.S. degree.

The final A-level exams are comprehensive, covering work of the entire two-year period. This is a far cry from the American school system where students are only tested on one term's material.

In American colleges, the constant pressure of mid-terms and papers due daily forces students into tightly-regulated work regimes. An English student might be assigned papers on a weekly or even

Over twice as many students attend college in the U.S.A.

monthly basis and only have exams at the end of his first and third years.

English students pursue degrees in one of their A-level subjects. When an English student takes a degree in physics, for example, it's a degree in physics alone — nothing else need be studied. Some joint-honors courses, where students study two subjects in depth, have been developed, but this still contrasts with the incredible number of seemingly unrelated subjects taken by American students.

Many Americans I have spoken to regard the English degree as shockingly narrow, but it can be argued that an English high school satisfactorily fulfills the demands of a general education. For instance, an English student going to a university with a science back-

ground will have had two years of calculus in high school.

For extensive studies in a field, Americans rely on graduate course work. After all, only 36 credits are needed in one field to qualify for a bachelor's degree. Thus, Americans become more specialized in one area than the "specialized" English.

Apart from a few sequence courses, tiny isolated topics can be studied at random in American universities. Many Americans enroll for certain classes simply because they are the only ones that fit together into an otherwise impossible time-schedule. While at the other extreme, the incredible possibility exists that students may be unable to get into classes high on their priority list.

The basic difference between English and American education seems to be that the former stresses professionalism and the latter diversity. Here, the University provides a fun atmosphere, where the student is led through a shallow exploration of knowledge. Only in the last few moments is he expected to discover his true vocation and pause there to dabble a little longer.

From the fact that well over twice as high a percentage of Americans go to college as English, it seems reasonable to suppose that many Americans go to college without any real intellectual curiosity. The nature of the system encourages their continued low-level participation.

There seems to be an unwritten right for every American citizen — who can find the finances — to have a college education regardless of ability; the entry requirements are, after all, minimal. In England, university fees are paid by the government but this right has to be won through academic achievement.

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Letters plan gets a 'well done'

During a brief and informal meeting of the Student University Affairs Board Thursday, both ASUO Pres. Rich Wilkins and SUAB Chairer Gale Graham made references to the success of the recent congressional letter-writing campaign.

"SUAB and ASUO have worked together and done a good job in putting across this proposal," Graham said. The campaign was "well done."

The ASUO/SUAB co-sponsored proposal yielded a total of 650 letters from students. Due

to this success, similar campaigns will be initiated at the beginning of each term, said SUAB vice chairer Mike Prothe.

"I want to thank all of you for helping with the letters," Wilkins said. "It was a group effort. It came off well."

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