

Editorials

Will Mercer Avoid The Problems Of Emory's 'Wonderful Wed.'?

By Ernie Robinson

The day dawned brightly at Emory University in Atlanta several years ago with the initiation of "Wonderful Wednesday" — a system liberating the students from the drudgery of class-work for a free day in mid-week: a day for enrichment. The idea behind "Wonderful Wednesday" at Emory was to allow the students an opportunity for individual expression above and beyond the humdrum beat of mandatory drumming; a voluntary day for the persurance of skills felt necessary by the student, whether related to his major directly or not. The ideal met with immediate and overwhelming enthusiasm.

Some students evoked glorious images of exciting field trips, student-faculty seminars, service projects, or research, but most breathed a sigh in thoughts of lazily lounging in bed. Undoubtedly this factor was anticipated and realized as a natural reaction for some "students". Not without its merits though—those students would at least use the day to catch-up on sleep, and probably homework.

In practice, apathy was at first masked by the energetic scholars who ravaged the library, labs, faculty homes, and cultural aspects of the Capital City in quest of new experiences. The first

apathy began to leak from the faculty, many of whom did not wish to be disturbed because "The Book" said: "Remember Wednesday, to keep it at leisure. Four days you shall labor and do all your teaching; but mid-week is a sabbath to the Lord of Luxury; in it you shall do no work."

Students, seemingly, were overcome by the faculty resistance and fell, for the most part, into the doldrums also. In time they forgot even to do the catch-up work after sleeping all morning and puttering all afternoon. On Thursday they were no better off than on Tuesday.

Apathy there was, but apathy does not necessitate complacency. The professors recognized a lack in the ideal: thinking they correct the lull, they set about assigning various and nefarious reports that could "just incidentally be done on Wednesdays. When one teacher you have done just a little irritating; when all your teachers do it: "It is — — — —"

Student leaders banded together hoping to snub the "conspiracy." Grievances were brought before a Student-Faculty Committee on "Wonderful Wednesday" and an appropriate investigation proposed. "It is true," the Committee reported, "that some departments are taking unfair advantage of the ad-

ditional time." But nothing could be done, because the students were not told to complete their 2,000 word reports on Wednesdays.

In all fairness, it must be pointed out that the math, modern foreign language, and biology departments did offer special assistance classes that were not required. Students attending these informal gatherings said they reaped major benefits in understanding. This element proved the clue to a new scheme combatting the imposed work burden. Interested students gathered to discuss arrangements for speakers, movies and group field trips as well as community service and volunteer work projects.

As things began to roll bulletin boards were selected to list activities for Wednesday and publications circulated in some quarters advising of special opportunities. Professors were impressed by the responsibility the students at last seemed to be accepting—work assignments were lightened in many cases.

Success, however, bred new problems. Though the lectures and all were often of extraordinary quality all students did not attend, as provided, of course, under the regulations governing the free day. Faculty did come to the activities, many of them

literally "eating it up." Enthusiasm among professors increased until there was a subtle, but nonetheless real, competition for the best program. Many of the organizers were serious students, earnestly desiring enrichment in these extracurricular opportunities provided, but those who did not wish to engage in or sought other means of using their time, perhaps equally satisfactorily to their education, suffered.

Professors attending the events could not help but notice who of their students, proverbial "brown-nosers" or otherwise, were also there and consequentially, who was not. Unintentional or not, participation was reflected in grades. Students who were too lazy to take part, or who pursued other persuasions, evolved somewhat of an animosity toward the supposed "do-gooders." Over a span of time friction intensified.

Emory faculty, not entirely oblivious to the student dilemma, has voted to continue "Wonderful Wednesday" another year. What means they have for measuring the success or failure of the program is anybody's guess — probably they "just like it." The students did not vote: perhaps they should have, perhaps their variable would have been differ-

ent, but not the outcome probably.

I don't believe Mercer needs to follow the example of Emory in producing so many problems. We are not like Emory, not as large, not as liberal, not as heterogeneous, not as specialized, not as influenced by a city environment, not — — — Small classes, community spirit and friendly faculty can make "Wonderful Wednesday" a whopping success at Mercer.

Like Emory, though the responsibility for achieving the potential inherent in "Wonderful Wednesday" is OURS—faculty and students. Whether a day of freedom crushes us or creates new horizons for us depends on our reaction, our ability to discipline ourselves. We can learn from Emory's mistakes.

To me it can be equally advantageous a use for a free day to visit the Indian mounds, tour the State Capitol, see a popular movie, get a few hours sleep, talk to an English professor about a book, complete unfinished lab work, or delight in a completely irrelevant novel. Some are better uses of the day than others, especially in light of preparation for future employment. Whatever use is made of the day, I hope that I may later look back on the time spent without regret.

One Student's Plea To The Registrar's Office

Dear Sir:

This letter represents justifying my failure to in part an attempt at register properly for Winter Quarter at Mercer. The consequences of this behavior—or misbehavior, from your point of view—is quite irrelevant here. This will be a matter for someone other than yourself or me to decide. I only ask that you try to understand my viewpoint as one which is indigenous to many Mercer students and which therefore deserves your consideration.

From a theoretical point of view I can find few reasons why most college students should have substantial difficulties with the Office of the Registrar. Presumably, that office is one which performs the vital paperwork necessary to maintain the academic accreditation of the University and one which maintains a record of the students' academic career. It exists as an immeasurably valuable liaison among students, university administrators and faculty members and parents. The Registrar's Office is therefore a service to the many constituencies of the University, and does not itself enjoy further status.

From the first disillusionment with the accuracy of Mercer's Bulletin to that final shelling out of the last graduation fee, many students surely feel resentment, and rightly so. Several flatly dishonest conventions of university catalogue publications do not necessitate Mercer's conformity to them; they do, however, make it easier to fill up Mercer's dormitories. The employment of computerized registration at many universities does not make such a technique at Mercer self-evidently advantageous, although it is likely to make registration procedures more prestigious to those outside the University. In addition, there are several drawbacks in this system, some of which I am sure you are aware. I am referring not to unanticipated paperwork, however, but to the substantial and subtly systematic depersonalization of Mercer's much-publicized student-advisor-professor relationships. Several examples may help you to understand just what it involved, from a student point-of-view, in such a registration technique.

Computerized registration precludes a professor's knowledge of how many students are registering for his courses and

how many sections of each one he would have to teach to provide for any overflow of students. The student therefore cannot know for certain who will be teaching any specific section of a course. From this one sizeable number of intricate problems arise, and only one thing seems clear. If a low teacher-student ratio necessitates discrimination among students applying for a course, certainly the professor can make such decisions more judiciously than a machine supplied with only minimal information as to each student's particular situation. Computerized equanimity is at best arbitrary and, more likely, definitely dangerous. It can lead, for example, to being unnecessarily closed out of courses in one's major during his junior or senior year, or to being forced to take one or even two unwanted courses to avoid the possibility of being drafted. Who gets to take what when should be a matter decided between individual professors and students. It should not be jeopardized by a technique which simply purports to get the paperwork done a lot faster. Nobody likes Registration, but the computer

may not be the answer. It seems that the majority of students rendered their verdict on this new, improved method by the fact that they did not take advantage of the pay-by-mail opportunity. A successful computerized registration had these students co-operated can be safely doubted, however, and this question should remain secondary to the judgment of the value of this technique for Mercer at the present time.

To come to the point of this letter: I feel that someone must create an opportunity to somehow get us beyond the prospect of a continued bitterness, beyond the accusations of inefficiency and not-co-operation on the part of the students I speak for and your office concerning the problems I have mentioned. Hence the ideology behind my nonco-operative behavior. On its basis I do not consider my refusal to register properly as my withdrawal from the University. I shall continue to attend classes, live in the dormitory, and eat my meals in the cafeteria. I am enclosing a check and fee notification slip and will be glad to endorse my National Defense Loan check whenever I am assured that I

will not be forced under the threat of late fees to stand in line, as I and several scores of other students did Thursday afternoon, for almost four hours only to be notified that I "will not be processed" after all. This much was decided in my unmitigated frustration of Thursday afternoon and my recollection thereof of all—and other—problems involving your Office that never seem to end. Subsequent thought on the matter has resulted in this letter of explanation to you and in copies of it addressed to those who might be interested and helpful in dispensing with the cause of these problems as quickly as possible.

I hope that my behavior and this explanation will somehow prompt a recognition of the theoretically proper and actually operative role of the Office of the Registrar so that their discrepancy may be reduced and the element of service with regard to the students and faculty members at Mercer can be restored. I would hope that we can together confront a mutual problem rather than each other and that understanding will override anger.

Cal Gough
Class of 1970