

Experiment Works At Kalamazoo College

# Imagine! College Course With No Classes, Lectures

KALAMAZOO—Odd things happened recently in one of Kalamazoo College's classes.

•No one went to the classroom for lectures;

•Any one who failed a quiz was given a second chance;

•Every one knew his final grade without the report card.

A far-out experiment in free study?

Hardly. It was an English seminar on Milton, designed mainly for one purpose: to let students work on their own, at their own pace.

THE RESULT, reported Dr. Laurence Barrett who developed and taught the experimental senior-level course, was gratifying. "There is no doubting the students' ability to do good work by themselves."

"Most of the work they did was better than I could have done as a college senior, and some of it was better than most graduate students could do."

Here, in a nutshell, is how the course was put on a do-it-yourself basis: the study material was broken up into several "blocks," each providing background usually covered in class and consisting of a written outline, a tape-recorded lecture, a reading list, a sample exam.

When a student, working alone, finished a block, he asked for an exam. If his grade was lower than a B, he tried again. His final grade was decided by the number of completed blocks. The only scheduled activity was a once-a-week group meeting for analysis of Milton's Paradise Lost.

IN ESSENCE, the format gave all class time to doing one thing thoroughly and in depth—the study of Paradise Lost, provide guidance for study material but left learning it to the students, and allowed grading on the amount of study done rather than performance, which was required to be top-level.

"Leaving the responsibility for completing study blocks to the discretion of the student is an admirable teaching device," one student commented. "It was instructive for me," said another student. "In showing me that I need the kind of self-discipline demanded by a course of this type."

The experiment was motivated by a variety of factors, some of which underlie much of today's move toward more do-it-yourself studies.

First off, evidence shows that a student who takes an "active" part in the study is likely to learn better. One student put it this way: "The teacher's thoughts are important to the student, of course, but what he is made to do in his study is equally important."

"THE STUDENTS SEEM to have liked the responsibility," Dr. Barrett noted. "They did the work most conscientiously, and they learned a tremendous amount—much more, I think, than if I had tried to cover the material in class."

For the weekly group session, from two to three hours devoted entirely to Paradise Lost, Dr. Barrett borrowed the faculty lounge and, as one student noted, the physical surroundings made "an incredible amount of difference" in getting everyone into the discussion.

## State Aids Car Permit 'Failures'

LANSING -- What happens to persons who flunk their driver license tests?

Some of them take the tests over, pass them, and become valid drivers. Others become discouraged and forget the whole thing, while others, taking the "anti-law" alternative, take their chances and drive without a license.

For some persons who fail any part of their written or oral exams, or who need brushing up on road sign identifications, the Department of State has provided a solution. Hundreds of persons are referred to schools conducted by the Department through selected driver license examining bureaus in several areas of the state.

THESE SCHOOLS are designed to aid persons "polish up their knowledge of rudimentary traffic laws and road signs" to help them in passing their tests the next time they take them.

In the Detroit area, where many of the schools are held, they have a second purpose. They serve as a "driver improvement" technique for licensed drivers who "have gotten into trouble," most of them in a non-serious way and most of them for the first time.

"Freeing class time to do one thing in careful detail provides the best possible basis for class discussion," Dr. Barrett said. "I think of a class as a happening which should involve everyone present, and I am badly buggered by those students who wait, like guppies, for the teacher to toss out a little dried fish food."

In ideal form, a course should give every student as good a knowledge as he might get in a course designed just for him. But, in a class of 20 or more students, how can each student move at the pace best suited to his own potentialities?

The answer is to break down a subject into small blocks, let each student take as much or as little time for a block, and test him on his understanding of each block before moving on to another. If he fails the test, he repeats until he passes.

But there is another aspect. The student can pursue any block that deeply interests him as much as he wants. Each block is far more than a collection of bits and pieces of knowledge; it is organized to deal with a specific facet—Milton's early poetry, his biography, 17th century science, reformation theology, and so on.

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