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The Drift of Men: Business Education, Women Students, and the Decline of Arts in the 1920s

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ABSTRACT
The rising enrolment of women in faculties of arts significantly influenced the development of business education in English-Canadian universities. To identify commerce as a professional program for men, and to fortify its academic integrity, universities eliminated skill-based courses in office procedure from the curriculum. This article explores early business education by focusing on two universities: Queen's, which introduced commerce in 1919; and Western, which established commerce in 1920, and then secretarial science in 1924. The study provides an opportunity to explore the gendered division of business education. It assesses the ways in which commerce was constructed as an applied social science within the arts faculty, not just to protect the discipline from charges of vocationalism, but to assert authority over knowledge production by excluding women and their connection to secretarial work.

RÉSUMÉ
L'augmentation du nombre d'étudiantes dans les facultés des arts a considérablement influencé le développement de l'enseignement commercial dans les universités canadiennes anglophones. Afin de définir le commerce comme une formation professionnelle pour les hommes et de renforcer son intégrité académique, les universités ont éliminé de leurs programmes les cours pratiques de bureautique. Cet article explore les débuts de l'enseignement commercial en se concentrant sur deux universités : Queen's, qui a introduit le programme de commerce en 1919, et Western, qui a créé ce même programme en 1920, puis le programme de secrétariat en 1924. Cette étude permet d'explorer la division genrée de l'enseignement commercial. Elle évalue la façon dont le programme de commerce s'est construit comme une science sociale appliquée au sein de la faculté des arts, non seulement pour protéger la discipline des accusations de vocationnalisme, mais aussi pour affirmer l'autorité sur la production du savoir en excluant les femmes et leur association au travail de secrétariat.

The historian F. H. Underhill once darkly predicted that the whole spirit of a liberal education would soon be overshadowed by organized business enterprise. Reflecting on the rising demand for commerce programs, Underhill noted that the arts faculty

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could not compete for students in a university that offered these more practical options. "It is the humanities that are in danger at present," he warned.[1] Underhill was speaking at the National Conference of Canadian Universities in 1930. Nearly a century later his words might seem prescient in light of current discussions of the decline of the humanities and the devaluing of the BA degree.[2] But Underhill's analysis of the threat to arts is best understood in the context of the early twentieth century, when the introduction of women into the university was still considered recent and disruptive. For Underhill and others in his audience, the challenge was not that arts programs were failing to attract students, but rather that they were failing to attract the right kind of students. The concern that commerce, engineering, and other new professional programs would have a detrimental impact on the humanities was inextricably linked to what they perceived as the feminization of arts. English and modern languages, Underhill claimed, had already become women's programs; by attracting young men of energy and ambition, "the cancerous growth of commerce" would continue this process of drawing away the best students from the study of politics, history, and philosophy. "And once the drift of men away from the other courses begin, these soon tend, under our modern co-educational conditions, to become female preserves into which the timid male is more and more reluctant to thrust himself," Underhill concluded. "[N]o University teacher wants to be condemned to teach women."[3]

While Underhill was often deliberatively provocative in his public statements, university leaders across Canada at the time shared his view that the quality of the BA degree would be lowered if arts faculties attracted more women than men. Following their admission into English-Canadian universities in the late nineteenth century, women students soon became a sizeable percentage of the numbers in arts. Most were attracted into the humanities by the demand for secondary school teachers in these disciplines, particularly in modern languages and English. By the end of the interwar period, the imbalance in women's registration was striking. The vast majority of women students were registered in faculties of arts, and at most universities were almost entirely absent from programs offered by faculties of science, engineering, or medicine.[4] The proportion of women undergraduates in Canada rose from 16.3 per cent of total enrolment in 1919 to 23.1 per cent in 1940, declining slightly during the 1930s, with women representing about a third of the overall enrolment in arts.[5] Between 1935 and 1939, for example, all of the women registered at Queen's graduated from the faculty of arts; of these students in the arts faculty, only one woman graduated with the BCom degree.[6] After the First World War, academics expressed their fears that the general quality of undergraduates was declining. The problems created by weak and immature students had already started within the arts faculties, some warned, because it was here that the universities experienced the burden of women students. As the principal of Queen's, R. Bruce Taylor, put it in 1927, "where there is lack of seriousness, whether in men or women, it is apt to be accentuated by the opportunities which co-education gives."[7]

Business education became a focal point for these apprehensions. By the early 1920s, programs in commerce or business administration had been created at Toronto, Manitoba, McGill, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Dalhousie, Queen's, and Western. Over

the next four decades, every Canadian university established the BCom or an equivalent degree and, until the 1960s, most offered their business programs within faculties of arts, rather than in professional schools or faculties.[8] The growing presence of commerce in arts faculties sparked bitter disputes on university councils, as well as debates among academics at the National Conference of Canadian Universities. These debates were based on two related concerns: first, that commerce lacked the intellectual rigour of a true liberal education; and secondly, that commerce, like other programs with a professional orientation, would draw men students away from the traditional honours courses in arts. The second fear was substantiated by enrolment. The new business programs aggressively targeted their recruitment activities at young men, and in 1940, less than 10 per cent of students in these programs were women.[9]

The assumption that women students devalued a program had a profound impact on the early history of business education in English Canadian universities. To ensure academic rigour at the curricular level, theoretical knowledge was prioritized over technical skills; this hierarchy, in turn, was closely linked to ideas about the differences between men's and women's professional education. The complex anxieties about women's participation in a profession influenced the way in which commerce was perceived both by its opponents and supporters in the faculties of arts. To identify commerce as a professional program for men, and to fortify its academic integrity, universities eliminated skill-based courses in office procedure from the curriculum. Some universities, including Western, St. Francis Xavier, Mount Saint Vincent, Acadia, and Mount Allison, created separate BA degrees in secretarial science, designed specifically for women students, which consisted largely of the kind of skill-based training that had been removed from commerce programs.

This article explores the development of business education by focusing on influential programs at two Ontario universities: Queen's, which introduced commerce in 1919; and Western, which established commerce in 1920 and then secretarial science in 1924. I argue that the perception of a crisis in arts generated by women's enrolment shaped business education at the university level. My study provides an opportunity to explore the gendered division of business education and to assess the ways in which commerce was constructed as an applied social science within the arts faculty, not just to protect the discipline from charges of vocationalism, but to assert authority over knowledge production by excluding women and their connection to secretarial work. The controversy surrounding the introduction of commerce reflected larger changes in higher education during the interwar period, as both men and women increasingly sought university education to secure future employment. In response to this demand, how could arts faculties resist both the feminization of arts and the encroachment of professional education? More specifically, how could they reverse the drift of men?

Men and the Work of Tomorrow: The Growth of Commerce in Arts Faculties

The rise of business education was part of the transformation of Canadian universities after the First World War, as higher education expanded to accommodate an

emphasis on science, engineering, medicine, and other professional programs. The liberal arts curriculum was altered to include new social science disciplines, the BSc emerged as a degree distinct from the BA, and universities embraced an enlarged role in occupational training.[10] Yet as the universities modernized, ideas regarding masculine authority over knowledge production still remained deeply embedded in the classical tradition inherited from the nineteenth century. Studies of the development of economics, history, engineering, and pharmacy in the twentieth century have revealed that these disciplines were socially constructed to exclude women; gendered ideas defining legitimate knowledge and authority within the disciplines marginalized women students, and women graduates then experienced barriers limiting their access to professional work.[11] Scholars have shown how these gendered boundaries were most pronounced in faculties of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and in the older professional schools of law and medicine.[12] New professional programs designed specifically for women, such as household science, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, nursing, library science, and social work, had to navigate carefully their place in the university by developing theoretical as opposed to skill-based curricula.[13] Business historians have applied the concept of closure strategy to examine education and the accounting profession in Canada. They argue that exclusionary practices originated in the assumption that the occupational status of a profession would be related negatively to the proportion of women in that profession. This belief justified the systematic exclusion of women from opportunities in education, employment, and professional participation prior to the 1960s.[14]

In English-Canadian universities, most business education programs originated in departments of political economy, housed within faculties of arts. Commerce—like economics, psychology, political science, and sociology—was seen by its supporters as an applied social science which could strengthen rather than weaken the arts faculties, training men for business by applying broadly based knowledge to solve problems.[15] Although political economy at Oxford had originated in a reform movement that critiqued contemporary social conditions, women students had been excluded from the discipline as it developed, marginalized by the construction of legitimate economic knowledge as masculine.[16] The first chair of political economy at the University of Toronto, W. J. Ashley, who had been recruited from Oxford, had maintained that training in historical, statistical, and inductive methods was an essential preparation for young men going into politics or public service.[17] Ashley subsequently moved to the University of Birmingham, where he established in 1901 an influential school of commerce, the first program of its kind in Britain. As he had at Toronto, Ashley continued to promote the idea that the true role of the university was to engage and train future citizens. He believed that business leaders could only benefit from the mental discipline of a liberal education, as well as from applied courses in public finance, statistics, and accounting. "If I were to sum up the fitting purpose of a University in educating men for business," Ashley later claimed, "it would be in some such phrase as this, the humanistic spirit applied to utilitarian studies."[18]

This early influence of political economy contributed to the development of business education in English Canada over the next four decades. At Queen's,

the commerce program was established in 1919 by the political economist O. D. Skelton, shortly after his appointment as dean of arts. In designing the curriculum, Skelton worked closely with his former student, the economist W. C. Clark, who was appointed the program's first director. The courses led to the BCom degree, but remained housed within the faculty of arts, in the department of political and economic science. Students in commerce were required to take two years of general arts courses, one year of economics, and then focus in their fourth and final year on specialized commerce subjects, selecting from areas in general business, banking and finance, accounting and auditing, commercial specialist, foreign trade, and public service.[19]

The design of the commerce program at Queen's reflected Skelton's conviction that the mission of the university was to prepare young men for leadership positions in business and public administration, equipping them with specialized knowledge of contemporary social, political, and economic problems. As Skelton put it, Queen's urgently needed to provide "the most thorough training of the men who are to do the work of tomorrow."[20] At the National Conference of Canadian Universities held at Queen's in 1923, Skelton presented a report, "University Preparation for Business," on behalf of the standing committee on commerce which had been appointed the previous year. The report stressed that the essential role of universities should be expanded to take all knowledge for their province and relate themselves to all phases of constructive human activity. "The university can train men in orderly and systematic thinking," Skelton argued; "it can give them a background of fact and theory; facility in gathering and analysing relevant data; a grasp of such technical tools as accounting and statistics; and, not least, some vision of the professional ideals which should animate the business world."[21] In 1937, commerce and business administration became a separate school at Queen's, but remained within the faculty of arts.[22]

Skelton's sweeping vision provided inspiration for the creation of the commerce program at Western. The program was established in 1920 by W. Sherwood Fox, professor of classics and the dean of arts. Fox's goal was to attract men students, particularly veterans, who would otherwise go to Queen's or Toronto in search of business education.[23] While the enrolment of women at Western had been rising steadily, the enrolment of men had not kept pace. From 1920 to 1921, for example, the registrar reported that the total enrolment at Western was 530 students and 45 per cent were women.[24] The increase in women's enrolment in arts was largely due to the agreement of the province in 1919 to recognize Western's honours degrees, giving graduates the standing of specialists, an important recognition if they wished to teach in Ontario's public high schools or collegiate institutes.[25] The BA in commerce at Western was a four-year honours degree, initially called commerce, changed to commercial economics in 1926, then to business administration in 1928. With the exception of courses in accounting and commercial law, for their first two years students were required to take general liberal arts courses, including English, mathematics, philosophy, languages, and a choice of biology, physics, or chemistry. In 1922, Fox recruited a former student of Skelton's, Ellis H. Morrow, to serve as head of the department. Morrow had graduated from Queen's in political science in 1919, and

then completed a master's degree in business administration at the Harvard graduate school of business.[26]

Morrow was ambitious for the new program at Western. He urged Fox not to accept students with a lower standard matriculation and initiated plans for a future graduate school modelled on that of Harvard. "The Harvard people seemed to be very interested in our progress and I believe are watching us closely," he informed Fox in June 1924.[27] Morrow introduced the Harvard case history method in the fourth year, which he believed would encourage senior students to develop their management skills by discussing real problems and then seeking workable solutions. He formed an advisory board of local businessmen, with members appointed by the Ontario United Boards of Trade, and used these contacts to promote the program, obtain resources for the case studies, and employ Western's graduates.[28] Enrolment increased steadily. Although the program moved out of the arts faculty and became the school of business administration in 1950, the degree retained its original emphasis on a broad liberal education with students taking their first two years in arts.[29]

The establishment of university programs in commerce and business administration was controversial within the wider academic community. At the National Conference of Canadian Universities and other public forums, academics challenged the credibility of business programs which offered such demonstrably occupational training. At the heart of this opposition lay the apprehension that commerce would continue to drain resources from the humanities by attracting the most talented young men. In proposing the BCom degree, Clark and Skelton encountered opposition from several faculty members and administrators at Queen's. James Cappon, professor of English and Skelton's predecessor as dean of arts, objected strongly to the creation of a commerce degree. In his final report as dean in 1919, Cappon included a terse warning to the principal: "In the midst of all our practical modern developments, this original and most characteristic function of the University, that of training a large-minded citizenship, remains properly the chief function, the function which distinguishes it from a Technical or Business College."[30]

Pursuing this theme, J. M. Macdonnell, a member of the Queen's Senate, published "The Decline of the Arts Faculty" in the *Queen's Bulletin* in 1923. The article appeared along with a defence of the commerce program by the director, W. C. Clark, entitled "University Training for Business — A Reply."[31] Macdonnell had been influenced by the political economist and humourist Stephen Leacock, whose recent article, "Oxford as I See It," had criticized Oxford's decision in 1920 to admit women to degrees. Drawing on his own career at McGill, Leacock had argued that women should be educated separately from men, in such aesthetic subjects as visual art and music, or in practical nursing skills, instead of crowding into a liberal arts curriculum intended for men.[32] Citing Leacock, Macdonnell assessed the root of the trouble in arts to be the steady increase of women students, and argued that this development had resulted in a widespread perception that the humanities themselves were effeminate subjects. "These are considered scarcely manly occupations by the 'he-man,'" Macdonnell noted. "It is so easy for the aggressively practical student to make the

student who is pursuing purely intellectual things feel that he is a dreamer, unpractical, almost unmanly to spend his time at Latin or Greek or Philosophy."[33]

In their defence of commerce, Skelton, Clark, and Morrow avoided engaging publicly on the subjects of either he-men or the feminization of arts. Instead, they responded by emphasizing the need for universities to produce men graduates who could adapt to the rapid changes of the postwar economy — the men, in Skelton's language, who were to do the work of tomorrow. They contended that commerce would still provide the broad cultural knowledge associated with the arts degree, but these graduates would have the expert analytical skills required to tackle real problems. In his 1923 report to the National Conference of Canadian Universities, Skelton acknowledged that business courses had sparked criticism, particularly within the arts faculty, on the grounds that vocational studies could not provide as disciplined a mental equipment as the traditional liberal education. These criticisms were misplaced, Skelton countered, given the fact that commerce courses were grounded in a general arts education of the world of letters and history and science, and rooted in the humanist ideals of the true university. "The aim of a university course in commerce should be to train an executive with range of vision and power of analysis, not a competent clerk," he concluded.[34]

Both Morrow and Clark also stressed the importance of the university degree in providing breadth of knowledge within business education. In his promotion of commerce at Western, Morrow asserted that the foundation provided by courses in the arts faculty gave business graduates the critical thinking skills they needed for success. In 1925, Morrow told the readers of the *Dalhousie Gazette*: "But once he has learned his lesson, after he has found his place and has realized that in life as in college he must work from the bottom up, the graduate received his promotion on the basis of a mind trained to think."[35] Similarly, in his reply to Macdonnell in the *Queen's Bulletin*, Clark argued that Macdonnell and Leacock exaggerated the decline of liberal arts education in Canada. Rather than be seen as narrowly vocational or technical, Clark suggested, commerce should be regarded as a professional course. As such, it was entirely appropriate for business education to be housed in arts, which after all for decades had been training students to enter the teaching profession. He urged: "The task in so far as it can be performed by education is one which only the University can perform, and it is one which will call for the best which the University has to give."[36]

The fear that commerce would weaken the arts faculty resurfaced throughout the interwar period. In spite of its rapid success — or perhaps, more accurately, because of its success — business education was forced to defend its academic credibility, and by extension, its place in the faculty of arts. This debate continued to be tangled up with assumptions about the over-enrolment of women students in the humanities. The National Conference of Canadian Universities had appointed a standing committee on commerce in 1922, and the issue was revisited at subsequent meetings following Skelton's report in 1923.[37] At the conference in 1930 held at the University of Toronto, the main item of discussion for the first day was, "What Is a Liberal Education?" It was here that Underhill presented his views regarding the cancerous

growth of commerce, cited at the beginning of this article. While Underhill's acerbic comments about women students went unchallenged, his concerns about the damage to the humanities resulted in the creation of another committee to examine the curricula of commerce courses in Canadian universities.[38] In 1932, Charles N. Cochrane, professor of ancient history at Toronto, gave an address, "The Question of Commerce Courses in Universities."[39] Like Underhill, Cochrane regarded commerce as a parasitic growth, transforming the once vital arts faculty into a "wet-nurse" for the university by luring away its best young men. "By this means, he is encouraged to hope not merely that he may attain technical efficiency, becoming an expert in the diagnosis and prognosis of conditions, but also that he may achieve what amounts to a new ideal of culture," Cochrane stated. "No wonder the Arts colleges are largely deserted except by literary- and historically-minded females."[40] Although the metaphors were often muddled, these attacks made it clear that business education at the university level needed to be disassociated from the taint of technical efficiency, and distinguished from the kind of technical training that produced what Skelton described as competent clerks. For Queen's and Western, this meant that commerce had to be separated from the kind of business training that attracted women students.

Secretarial Studies: Training Women for Clerical Work

To gain academic credibility for degrees in business, universities had to define what set their programs apart from the skill-based training offered by women's colleges, as well as those springing up at a plethora of high schools and private business schools. By the 1920s, many public high schools and technical schools offered courses in typewriting, shorthand, office machines and procedures, and bookkeeping. The growing availability of jobs in these areas provided the incentive for parents to prioritize occupational training over academic education for their daughters. As the offices of banks, governments, insurance companies, and businesses expanded rapidly, the nature of clerical work was transformed by technological advances in typewriters, mechanical calculators, mimeograph machines, dictation machines, and telephones. The demand for women who had the skills to operate these machines — to type, take shorthand, and transcribe — only grew, particularly in the financial sector and commercial offices.[41] As the principal of Mount Allison Ladies' College noted early in 1929: "Parents realize that these boom years can't last — they want their daughters equipped to earn their own livings. Two departments on this campus which are humming are the Household Science and Secretarial, whereas two that aren't are Fine Arts and Oratory."[42]

Commercial education had initially been promoted by middle-class parents and regarded as occupational training suitable for both boys and girls. Once the sector became feminized, however, it lost prestige and women were clustered in the lower-paying jobs, such as stenographers and file clerks.[43] In public high schools, as enrolment in commercial education became dominated by girls, it also became more practical in orientation, emphasizing skills in typewriting and shorthand rather than a broadly based curriculum in mathematics, science, and English. Commercial

courses declined in status, and were associated with curricula designed for working-class girls at the new technical high schools. Typewriting in particular was seen to be a repetitive production job, in spite of the fact that most secretarial work was much more complex, requiring editing, proofreading, and formatting skills, as well as the ability to take dictation, manage time, organize files, and analyze social interaction.[44]

At the post-secondary level, BA programs in secretarial science originated in commercial courses offered by women's colleges in affiliation with universities. Catholic convent academies had taken the lead in establishing commercial programs designed to prepare young women for the rapidly expanding opportunities in clerical work. At St. Francis Xavier, the university's affiliated women's college, Mount St. Bernard, first began offering commercial courses at its convent academy. In the early 1920s, Mount St. Bernard opened a commercial school, and by 1927, women students pursuing the BA degree through St. Francis Xavier could also take a two-year diploma course in secretarial science. In 1967, this diploma program was expanded to a bachelor of secretarial arts.[45]

At Mount Saint Vincent, the program in secretarial science similarly evolved from the commercial courses in bookkeeping, shorthand, and typewriting that had been offered at the convent academy since the early 1900s. In 1925, Mount St. Vincent was chartered as an independent women's university, and in 1932, began offering the BA degree in secretarial science. Undergraduates in secretarial science took a liberal arts degree, combining courses in English, philosophy, science, and mathematics with such skill-based courses as typing and shorthand.[46]

At Acadia and Mount Allison, degree programs in secretarial science also originated in commercial courses offered by their affiliated colleges. In the early 1900s, Acadia established courses in typewriting, shorthand, and office management at two affiliated institutions: the Acadia business academy and the ladies' seminary. In 1936, Acadia opened a secretarial science department within the arts faculty, which was renamed the School of Secretarial Science in 1949. Students had the option of pursuing the four-year BA degree, with a diploma in secretarial science, or enrolling in the three-year non-degree diploma program. In 1968, Acadia began offering a bachelor of secretarial administration.[47] By the early 1900s, students at Mount Allison could earn diplomas in secretarial studies through the university's affiliated commercial college, which offered popular courses in bookkeeping, business practices, typewriting, and stenography. After the Second World War, these commercial courses gradually were transferred to the university. In 1950, Mount Allison created a three-year secretarial program, and a four-year BA degree with a certificate in secretarial studies.[48]

In the fall of 1923, Western announced its plans for a new BA degree in library and secretarial science in the department of commercial economics. The secretarial program at Western was the first degree of its kind to be established outright at a Canadian university, rather than evolving from commercial courses previously offered by an affiliated women's college. After the Second World War, other universities followed Western's example by creating stand-alone degree programs in secretarial science, including Waterloo College (later Wilfrid Laurier) in 1954, Ryerson (later Toronto Metropolitan) in 1972, and New Brunswick in 1980.[49] Those universities

that offered both commerce and secretarial science, such as Western, Acadia, and Mount Allison, revealed enrolment patterns that were divided sharply along gender lines. At Mount Allison in 1957–1958, for example, there were ninety-six men and only four women in commerce, while there were seventy-four women and no men studying for the secretarial certificate.[50]

Degree programs in secretarial science were an attempt to secure new employment opportunities for women. The majority of women students in the interwar period came from families with modest middle-class incomes. They were motivated by the desire to secure employment after graduation, either as a temporary stopgap before marriage or as a more long-term strategy for financial independence. Whether they pursued a degree in arts and planned to go into teaching, or enrolled in an occupational program, most women graduates regarded their education as an essential part of maintaining their position within the middle class.[51] To attract women undergraduates into secretarial science, universities had to market them as professional courses that would produce a superior class of executive secretary, one who was informed and literate as well as highly skilled.

The reception by university women of these degree programs initially was mitigated by the widespread assumption among students themselves that secretarial work was a low-status occupation requiring only high school or business college training. Why go to university if you were planning to fall back on clerical work? Most women went to university because they wanted to prepare themselves for professional employment, and more precisely, secure a higher status job. "You see, there weren't an awful lot of interesting things for women," one Queen's graduate commented, "and the girls who didn't go to college had gone in and done secretarial work, taken a course at a business college."[52] Similarly, a student writing in the *Western Gazette* on "The University and a Girls' Vocation" noted that graduates viewed a secretarial job as a waste of their degree. "What are you going to do?" she asked rhetorically. "Do you mean to say, after all those years at the university, you are going to come home and go to business college?"[53] The dean of women at Queen's, Hilda Laird, later recalled in an interview her frustration that the options for women graduates were so uninspiring. "In those days, women, their choice was between teaching and nursing and being a stenographer," she remembered. "They really were the only professions open to them and that distressed me."[54]

As Laird perceptively noted, the main factors propelling women into secretarial work were the lack of other options. In 1923, the new Canadian Federation of University of Women established an educational committee, led by Geneva Misener, to examine the limitations for women in higher education. In a statement circulated to university leaders, including Fox at Western, Misener stressed the fact that apart from nursing and household science, women graduates overwhelming went into teaching rather than professional work or research. "It is now over fifty years since women were first admitted to universities in Canada," she wrote. "Comparatively few have made any contributions to their professions or to the knowledge of any subject by research."[55] Other studies conducted by alumnae confirmed this conclusion. In 1926, Laird reported to the Queen's alumnae association that she had surveyed 131

women undergraduates regarding their intended careers, with the following results: teaching — 118; secretarial work — 5; library work — 3; journalism — 2; law — 1; social work–1; household economics — 1. Two years later, Laird's research showed a slight shift. While women students still overwhelmingly identified teaching as their goal (143 of 178), seven wished to become private secretaries, and another seven wanted to become businesswomen.[56]

The Division of Business Education: Commerce for Men, Secretarial Science for Women

The devaluing of women's professions, and by extension the training required for the profession, is key to the division between commerce and secretarial science that characterized business education at the university level. During the 1920s, both Queen's and Western revised their commerce programs to remove technical training in typewriting, shorthand, and office procedures from the curriculum. While some employers acknowledged that these entry-level skills might also be useful for young men getting started in business, most academics became convinced that commerce needed to be distanced as much as possible from clerical training — courses associated with women's work and secretarial studies.

At Queen's, women had shown an early interest in the new program of commerce and administration, and in the first decade, they represented a small minority among enrolled students. In the 1928–1929 session, for example, there were 150 men and 28 women enrolled in commerce.[57] The director, W. A. Mackintosh, tried to distinguish commerce from other degrees offered by the arts faculty, and emphasized that commerce should be seen as professional in character, similar to law. In his report to the principal in 1925, Mackintosh wrote: "In accordance with the object the students in Commerce have been restricted as far as possible to those who are definitely looking forward to business as a profession, and any attempts to look on Courses in Commerce and Administration as merely an Arts Course with an overdose of Economics are consistently and on the whole successfully discouraged."[58] While women were never excluded from student activities, such as the commerce club founded in 1921, both students and professors increasingly described commerce as a program supporting a man's career in business. Mary Katherine Rowland, a commerce graduate of 1928, recalled that there were only a few women in the program during her time, and they all had difficulty finding positions outside of secretarial work after graduation.[59] Women students experienced this sense of difference in the classroom. In a letter to the *Queen's University Journal* in 1923, one commerce student noted that the women received an indifferent welcome in the program: the professors addressed the class as "you men," and reserved opportunities for attractive positions and interesting trips to men students. "Our professors express their passive grief at our presence by consistently ignoring us," she wrote.[60]

In 1921, Queen's had introduced secretarial work to the commerce program as an additional area of specialization in the BCom degree. As the university calendar described it, the secretarial work option was "designed to prepare students for secretarial

duties, with business houses, civic societies or professional workers."[61] Commerce students pursuing secretarial work as their area of specialization were required to have knowledge of shorthand and typewriting. After completing their first two years in arts, secretarial students at Queen's took a range of more specialized courses in economics, business statistics, office management, accounting, and business correspondence.[62] In keeping with his view of professional education, however, Mackintosh pushed to have the secretarial option removed from the curriculum to signal clearly that this was a program for men. In 1924, Mackintosh also campaigned to have the commerce program moved out of the arts faculty into a separate faculty of commerce, or housed in the faculty of science or medicine. The campaign sparked heated debates between arts and commerce students in the *Queen's University Journal*. Taking an editorial position on the side of arts, in 1924 the journal referred disparagingly to commerce as a "glorified shorthand course."[63]

The campaign to remove commerce from arts was unsuccessful at this time, and a separate school of business was not created at Queen's until 1963, but in 1928 the program was revised to drop the option of secretarial work as an area of specialization. For Mackintosh and many of his students, the controversy over a separate faculty of commerce had revealed an urgent need to eliminate secretarial studies from the curriculum. The reference made by the *Queen's University Journal* to commerce being a glorified shorthand course had been a calculated insult, implying that commerce was contributing both to feminization and vocationalism. Students in the BCom program in future would have three choices of specialization: the general business course; accounting and auditing; and commercial specialist. The commerce calendar for the 1928 session stressed its orientation as a professional program for men: "The Courses are designed to give the prospective man of business some cultural and professional background; to provide him with a perspective which has been too rarely attained by any but the leaders in present day business."[64]

At Western, the commerce program had been established in 1920 as a strategy to counter the growing enrolment of women in arts and to attract men students away from Queen's and Toronto. While several women initially registered in commercial economics, the university publicly promoted commerce as a new degree for young men and emphasized the differences between Western's program and those of local private business colleges, such as Westervelt.[65] An important factor was the distinction between training for clerical work and training for executive leadership. Morrow was concerned that commerce was slow to attract the kind of talented young men he wanted for the program, the "good mature men" he described in one letter to Fox.[66] Like Mackintosh at Queen's, Morrow wished to establish commerce as a professional program and remove any hint of stenography. Morrow's solution, however, was to create an entirely separate degree program for women students in secretarial science.

In 1923, Morrow organized a conference on commerce at the university, and invited members of the advisory board of local businessmen to participate. The board was to serve as a kind of focus group to discuss the problems and future direction of the new commerce program.[67] In the document he circulated to the board before the conference, Morrow addressed the issue of whether shorthand and typewriting

should be included in the commerce program. He argued strongly against it, stating: "Our primary duty as a University is to give a broad and liberal education and the commercial curriculum must be subordinated to this end." Maintaining that it was unusual for these skills to be taught in courses of the type offered at Western, Morrow pointed out that if shorthand and typewriting were part of the commerce curriculum, they would necessarily have to replace subjects of greater worth to the men students. In Morrow's view, the graduate might then find himself permanently relegated to work of minor importance without the opportunity to grow with an expanding experience. As Morrow told the advisory board, a secretarial and library science course "suitable to women" had just been approved with a large requirement of stenographic work. "Stenography is a highly technical subject," Morrow stressed, "and cannot be considered to have the cultural or developmental value of the work it will replace."[68]

Western opened its four-year BA degree in library and secretarial science in 1924. The outline of the program approved by the university explicitly stated: "This course is open to women only, except in special cases."[69] The program was housed in the commerce department under Morrow's supervision, and was regarded by both students and the administration as an ancillary course for women. The student-run commerce club expanded to include students in the secretarial and library science course as well those in commerce; the *Western Gazette* expressed the hope "that the girls will turn out in force, who along with the boys will augment the membership."[70] Morrow designed the curriculum in secretarial science to focus almost entirely on technical training in typewriting, shorthand, the use of office machines, and office procedures.

The secretarial program provided women students with the same stenography skills that Morrow had eliminated from the commerce program, on the rationale, as he had warned the board, that typewriting and shorthand should not be allowed to replace subjects of greater cultural or developmental value to the men students. In a tacit acknowledgement of the hypocrisy involved, Western's press release emphasized that great care had been taken to see that the standard of the course would not be below that of any other courses offered in the university.[71] The *London Free Press* immediately understood the distinction being made, commenting: "The course now to be offered at Western is closely linked up with the department of commercial economics, and the women students will be given an opportunity to take a great deal of the commercial work offered and to apply it to their own particular field. Typewriting and shorthand are included as essential in the course."[72] Students in the program initially took courses in general arts, and at the end of their second year, were allowed to elect either library science or secretarial science as their speciality for the remaining two years of the program. During its early years, the only instructors assigned to the program were members of the library staff, and the secretarial courses were contracted out to the London Technical School. In 1926, the university appointed Margaret Thompson, a graduate of a private business college in London, England, to the position of instructor in secretarial science. Thompson was responsible for teaching shorthand and typewriting, and organizing and overseeing the students'

practice work. The office practice course involved both lectures in office methods, and practical training in the room named the secretarial science "laboratory."[73] In a pamphlet created for the university's endowment fund campaign of 1928, a short article by the dean of women stated that the enrolment of women had increased at Western by nearly 50 per cent during the previous five years.[74] The article included a photograph of the secretarial science laboratory featuring the university's modern office equipment: students were sitting at typewriters, listening to dictation machines with headsets, and operating a mimeograph machine (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Secretarial Science, ca.1928. Western University Historical Photograph Collection, AFC 339-S2-SS8-F17, Box 2, Western University Archives and Special Collections.*

The lack of academic rigour in the women's program was problematic from the start. Western was criticized for creating a program that provided students neither with a sufficient foundation in arts subjects, nor a professional qualification in library science. The first university diploma programs in library science in Canada had opened at McGill in 1920 and Toronto in 1928. In both programs, the majority of the students were women. Previous training in library science had been conducted only in summer schools for public librarians offered since 1904 at McGill, and since 1911 in Toronto by the Ontario Department of Education. For the founders of library science, it was essential that these new programs establish academic qualifications equal to those of other professional schools within their universities. Library science at McGill and Toronto would require students to take a broadly-based education in liberal arts in addition to their professional training,

and supporters argued that this training should include principles and theories rather just proficiency in technical details. As library science developed, there was also a growing recognition that the work and education of professional librarians needed to be distinct from the administrative tasks of support staff. This desire for professional status led to the creation of bachelor's degrees in library science in 1930 at McGill, and in 1936 at Toronto.[75]

Bertha Bassam, professor of library science at Toronto, later stated that Western's program in library and secretarial science received criticism from those who were concerned to establish library science as a professional degree. In an interview, she noted that the graduates of Western's program would not have had "enough of the ordinary BA subjects to go on to an MA."[76] In her history of the program at Toronto, Bassam explained further: "This criticism came about in part because, although a four-year course leading to a BA degree, it was in fact neither a complete Arts program nor a complete one in librarianship, thus not qualifying its graduates to enter any post-graduate field."[77]

In response to these criticisms, the Ontario Department of Education asked Western to terminate its degree in library science. In 1927, Western revised the program to remove the option of library science, but continued to offer the BA in secretarial science. In 1931, to accommodate the fact that the majority of Western's women students went into teaching, the university designed a four-year honours degree in secretarial science. The honours degree qualified graduates for a specialist certificate to teach commercial courses in public secondary schools. Western's honours degree in secretarial science combined skill-based courses in shorthand and typewriting, with courses from business administration, arts, science, and social science. After the library science option was eliminated, secretarial science at Western endured for most of the twentieth century; following a restructuring of the program in 1981, the degree was renamed Administrative and Commercial Studies.[78]

Conclusion

The perception that women's enrolment had produced a crisis within arts faculties by the 1920s significantly influenced the development of business education in English Canadian universities. To reverse the drift of men out of arts, proponents argued that commerce would provide graduates with the broad cultural knowledge of an arts program, as well as the expert analytical abilities required to tackle problems in business. This study of Queen's and Western has shown that universities eliminated technical, skill-based training from commerce as a deliberate strategy to ensure its academic credibility and clearly identify it as a professional program for men. While secretarial science courses in typewriting, shorthand, and office procedures were designed for women, commerce was developed as an applied social science, and marketed as a degree which would produce leaders in business and public life. Skill-based training was detached from the commerce curriculum to make way for what Morrow at Western termed subjects of greater cultural or developmental value, but in the education of women students, this appears to have been considered a necessary sacrifice.

The anxieties emanating from arts faculties over a hundred years ago sound startlingly familiar. Scholars have continued to assess the threat to the humanities and social sciences in the face of market pressures, financial cuts, and technological change. They also continue to voice their concerns that arts disciplines have too readily conceded their vital role in knowledge production.[79] The history of the decline of arts is made more complex by attention to the ways in which assumptions about gender were deeply embedded in the social construction of disciplines. Commerce was constructed as an applied social science to distance it not just from vocationalism, but more specifically from women's vocationalism; to assert authority over knowledge production by excluding women and their association with skill-based secretarial work.

For university women, the curricular changes of the interwar period resulted in growing academic isolation for much of the twentieth century. Women enrolled in humanities subjects where they could qualify for teaching positions, or opted for one of the few occupational programs available to them, like nursing, household science, social work, and secretarial science. In their quest for professional status, programs dominated by women had to struggle to ensure their education encompassed principles and theories rather than just proficiency in technical details and administrative tasks. Ironically, fears that arts degrees were becoming feminized and devalued prompted changes that actually increased the concentration of women students in arts faculties. Canadian universities established secretarial science for women both as a response to market demand and as a calculated strategy to ensure that the more prestigious programs in commerce or business administration would be successful in attracting talented young men. This process was accelerated after the Second World War, by which time most universities had moved their commerce programs out of arts and into professional schools or faculties. At Western, the division established during the 1920s between commerce for men and secretarial science for women remained firmly in place in the school of business administration. "The school was not welcoming to women when I arrived in 1963. There were no women on faculty. Even harder to believe there were few female students," Doreen McKenzie-Sanders, the former editor of *Business Quarterly*, remembered. "On the rare occasion when a woman would apply for admission she was referred to the Secretarial Course."[80]

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