

Michael Gaffney's letter featured as your letter of the day on July 16, was recently brought to my attention. Mr. Gaffney makes evident his ignorance of the past when he touts Internet based knowledge acquisition as the great democratization of learning. The rhetoric is indistinguishable from that of 90 to 50 years ago when correspondence classes were to be the great social equalizers. In that era, the mantras were the same – study at home, –at your own pace, –individual attention for each student. Unfortunately, the truth was that fewer than three percent of enrolled students completed their Diplomas. More money was spent on attracting students than teaching them. A profit could only be made by having each poorly paid marker service hundreds of students, and the need to retain those students brought inexorable pressure to inflate grades until, indeed the whole concept was discredited.

I have no doubt that in time, the internet based knowledge purveyors will suffer the same fate as those who saw knowledge as a chance to milk the unsuspecting public nearly a century ago. I quite agree with Mr. Gaffney that bricks do not a University make; neither does sterile knowledge! It is the people and the ideas that percolate that make a University.

It is disturbing that the amassing of knowledge appears to be what Mr. Gaffney understands by learning. If this is all there is to it, buy a few text books, read them and award yourself a Master's degree. Alternatively, now that the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has committed itself to post its course material on the WEB for free, get it there! Of course, as the folks at MIT know, there is vastly more to learning than amassing knowledge. One is unlikely to acquire even a smidgen of wisdom from interacting with your computer's monitor.

It has been said that “those who do not learn from the past are doomed to repeat it”. I was interested to note, when visiting the Lansbridge Website that the teaching staff comprises graduate students at other universities and professors moonlighting from their home institution, in some cases with more than one secondary employer. I encourage all your readers to fully inform themselves on refund policy, their tutor's qualifications, the number of students under his/her tutelage and the number of other employers the tutor serves before even considering entrusting their futures to the snake-oil salesmen selling knowledge and calling it education.

*Jack Vanderlinde*