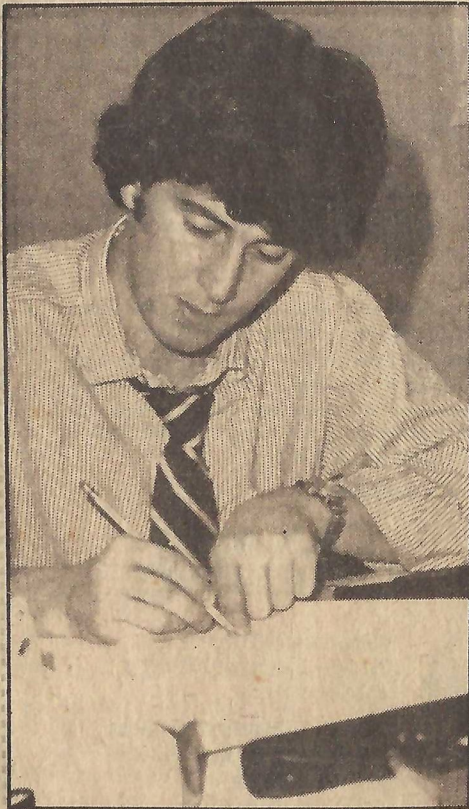


THIS WEEK



Poring over printouts

Teams from five universities battled it out last weekend in the first national business school competition, held at Queen's University and co-sponsored by The Financial Post. Part of the competition: a computer-simulated corporate case history (which preoccupies McGill University's Jon Schachter, above). Victories went to Queen's, University of Western Ontario and Dalhousie (p. 13).

The Financial Post

January 27, 1979/75¢ a copy

70007



'Frankly sir, your company's in terrible shape' (left). Queen's Gordon Crowson and Shan Atkins convince judges Robert Lowe (Currie Coopers & Lybrand), John McKay (Vicom Ltd.) and David Lakie (Molson's) their strategy is best.

Pictures by George Sheen

Business students put to competition test

By James Bagnall

KINGSTON

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY nimbly ran the gauntlet of regionalism, national unity and egoism as it played host last weekend during the first national business school competition.

The most appalling prospect — having five Ontario universities competing in the final round — had already been swept away by strong efforts in the preliminaries from Dalhousie, Calgary and McGill.

But another spectre appeared late in the competition, co-sponsored by Queen's and The Financial Post.

Tournament organizer Geoff Arnoldi was succumbing to rampant paranoia as contestants from Queen's threatened to sweep all three events.

His prayers were answered in the last hour when Dalhousie's computer squad broke a five-way deadlock to win the business game and Western's orators — resplendent in flowing academic gowns and three-piece suits, defeated the resolution that "the social responsibility of business is business."

Queen's (which plans to host next year's competition as well) saved its honor with a victory in the highly touted case study competition.

The 40 competitors fell over one another in an effort to downplay the competitive angle and, in keeping with this desire to preserve reputations, no overall winner was declared. But the pressure was evident before the competition got under way.

One Western competitor muttered plaintively: "Why is everyone out to get us?" (The self-

professed masters of the case study were dragged before their esteemed alumni association to explain just why they were putting their school's reputation on the line, to which Western's Michael Harrower replied: "I think it's about time we started to experience what the other business schools are doing.")

The competitors (predominantly fourth year commerce students) displayed surprisingly uniform strengths and weaknesses.

All five schools, for example, played the computer simulated business game so well it took 11 years of simulated activity before Dalhousie pulled ahead by the minimum requisite of \$100,000 profit.

The Queen's team was the day-long front runner until one of the last quarters revealed that \$5 million in retained earnings had disappeared. "What happened?" cried Geoff Maier in mock horror, glancing at the mile-long statistical equations being generated by Western's squad. "We spent it, I think," replied his sage teammate Steven Flesch.

The debating contests revealed a generally uniform weakness in speaking skills among the contestants — a direct reflection of its lack of emphasis at every business school in Canada. Some debaters — notably from McGill and Western — were reasonably polished speakers but this reflected previous experience outside the commerce program or in student politics.

The final debate (featuring Queen's vs Western) proved to be the class event but preliminary rounds revealed a marked inability on the part of the teams to meet each other's arguments head on. Straightforward business

examples were also ignored.

The resolution "Business never had it so good," for example, was reduced to a rambling discourse on technology, life, love and sex when one speaker tried to prove that every activity known to man was easier to perform today.

Meanwhile, the case study event nearly proved to be an exercise in immolation as three members from each school barricaded themselves in windowless rooms for six hours to ponder short- and long-term strategies for a Swiss furniture company facing severe import competition and a downturn in the domestic market.

If Canada's business schools differ in their advocacy of the "case study method," it was difficult to tell — the method of presentation and the substance of each team's recommendations were similar.

Each of the company's considerable problems — excessive idle capacity, inventory obsolescence, poorly defined administrative lines of authority, underperforming salesmen, high level of raw material wastage and a dearth of consumer-oriented promotion being among them — was neatly addressed by all teams and prompted one judge to comment: "If these students are representative of the quality of our business graduates, then the future of Canadian business is in good hands."