

# Students Take Over, But It's All Academic

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was bored with the way college had been going," said Jonathan Barber, a 19-year-old sophomore at Swarthmore College. "I was bored with prep school before that, and I thought I was wasting my parents' money."

To awaken his interest and get value for his parents' money, Mr. Barber met with friends and then put up posters inviting Swarthmore's students to list courses they would like to study and run for themselves.

About 100 signed up, inventing numerous courses for their delectation — from beat poetry to mystical religions.

## Clamor Extended

Mr. Barber and his friends then obtained an office opposite the official registration headquarters to organize the students.

Such student enterprise is one result of the national student clamor for more relevance and less tradition, for more ties to life and fewer bonds to what many regard as the "lifeless" areas of classic textbook learning.

In the last two years, the clamor has extended into student demonstrations that have seriously disrupted normal academic programs at institutions as widely separated as Columbia, the University of Wisconsin and San Francisco State College.

At Swarthmore, the cry for student-run studies has the approval of the academic authorities.

Concerned about updating the institution, the officials had set up commissions that examined programs and policies.

The faculty has approved most of the recommendations, including No. 13, which urges "that the college permit a group of students to propose a topic to an instructor for single credit and to run their own course with a reading list approved by the instructor and a final examination administered by him, but with no further involvement of faculty."

## Faculty Involved

Swarthmore, which has just over 1,000 students, is not the only institution of higher learning to legislate such largess. Other colleges and universities, including Harvard, Antioch and Oberlin, now give credit for student-run courses.

Where this leaves teachers is unclear.

Said Mr. Barber:

"We were hoping that if the faculty got involved, they'd be involved as participants rather than as people guiding courses according to what they thought was more important. In taking them out of that situation, it might be possible to change the tradi-

member."

Debby Bone, a fellow student, said, "It was a chance to lose our idea of the teacher as authority figure."

Joseph W. Bernheim, a Swarthmore psychology instructor, asked students organizing a course in "Radical Education" if he could sit in and do the reading they prescribed. He became the associated faculty member and sometimes slips into the dastardly character of authority figure despite himself.

Dr. Daniel Bennett, an associate professor of philosophy, became the faculty member of a course on "Black Thought," in which all the students are Negro. Assigned a paper (on white abolitionism) as if he were a student, Dr. Bennett, 38 and white, does his best to blend into the scenery.

"The majority of the class considers me a slightly alien presence," he concedes. "It's partly the color, partly the generation thing."

Thomas H. Blackburn, an assistant professor of English, adopts a see-no-evil policy and attends none of the "Science Fiction" seminars.

## A 'Resource' Person

"I see my role as the 'resource' person, to use educational jargon," he says. "If the students run into problems, they'll turn to me as the resource."

These three courses—"Radical Education," "Science Fiction" and "Black Thought"—were the principal ones to emerge intact from the student lists. The Swarthmore authorities had gingerly tried other student-run courses and were not yet ready to sing hosannahs.

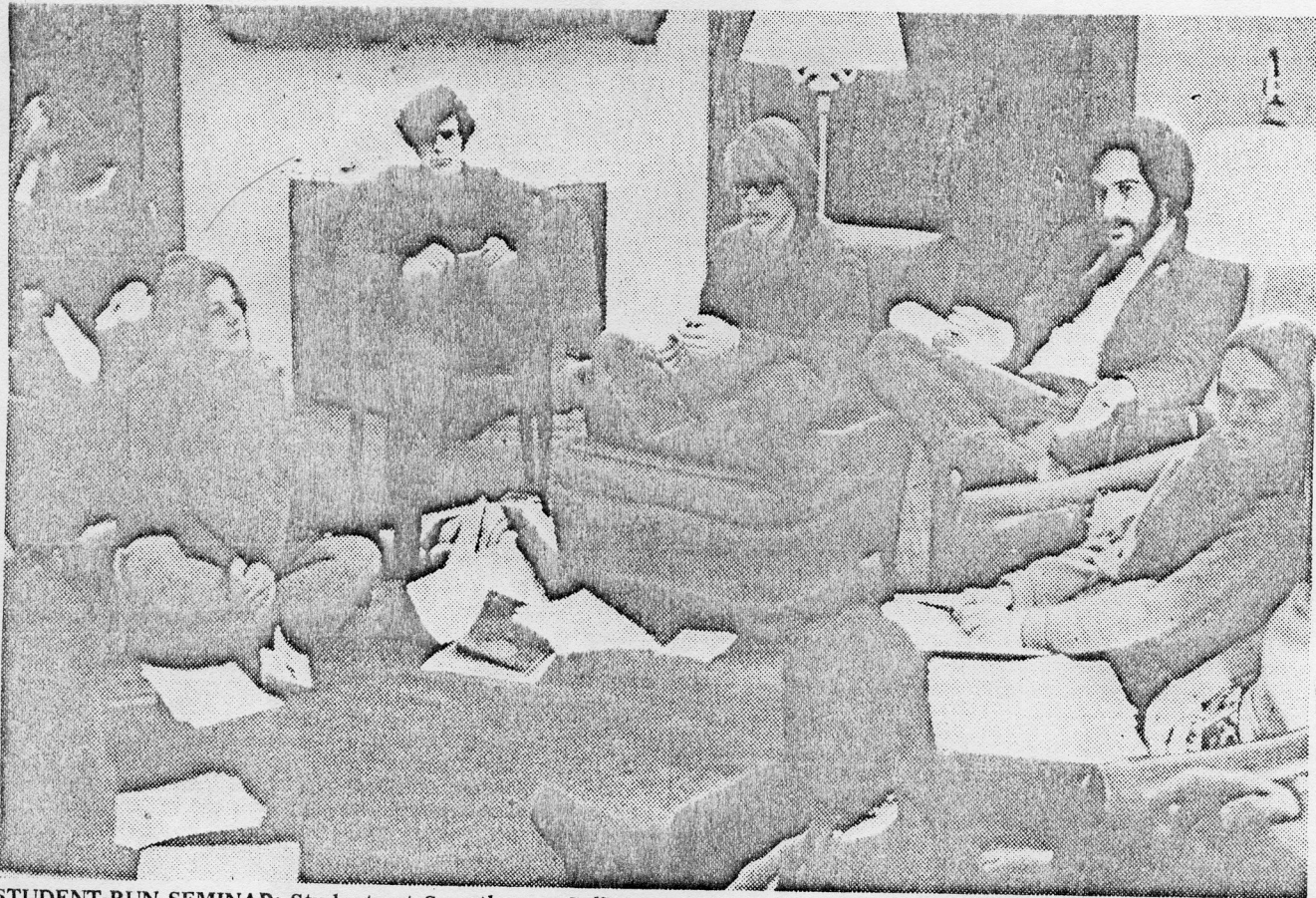
But the 105-year-old college is conservative enough to cherish the idea of survival and daring enough to try anything twice. Its Quaker tradition prejudices it in favor of peaceful solutions to the wildest stirrings of the most militant students. Last month it suffered the indignities—or exaltation—of a Negro student sit-in that was lifted when the college president, Courtney Smith, died of a heart attack. With feelings of identity roused by "sensitivity" sessions during the sit-ins, the Negro students proceeded naturally to a "Black Thought" course.

## Reading List Set

They prepared a reading list — Frederick Douglass, Richard Wright, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.— assigned themselves different portions, and experimented with radical instruction methods. Decently one student accompanied his presentation with music from the Civil War era, and a coed served a corn recipe at least that old.

Last week 23 students

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**STUDENT-RUN SEMINAR:** Students at Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pa., attending seminar in "Radical Education" on campus. Joseph W. Bernheim, with beard, psychology instructor, sits in as an associated faculty member.

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turned up to relate the atrocities of history to the realities of their own day.

These were some of the things said:

¶ "What I'm trying to say is that the Jim Cross methodology has been established in the North before the era of Jim Crow in the South."

¶ "In Birmingham it was illegal for blacks and whites to play checkers together."

¶ "The press in the South would write stories about

'white virgin, mother of six, raped by black man.'"

While the "Black Thought" seminar proceeded, 19 white students—the "Radical Education" class—filed into the next room. As the Negroes talked about their heritage of oppression, the white students next door discussed the problems of Negro children.

The white students' reading list was heavy on recent books on ghetto education (John Holt, Jonathan Kozol), plus the philosophic underpinnings (Paul Goodman) and the reaction (Dr. Max Rafferty, who recently lost a

race in California for the United States Senate).

"I absolutely freaked out in the library reading Rafferty," Debby Bone said. "I couldn't believe that a person could write such a thing."

"It seems to me there's a danger in reading somebody like Rafferty in that we'll really be turned off," complained another. "He says fear is necessary for implanting values."

This week the college's Curriculum Committee met under the chairmanship of Peter Gram Swing, son of the late radio commentator,

and spent its full two hours discussing the student-run courses, with a further review scheduled later.

Mr. Swing, who teaches music at Swarthmore, is on his way to becoming a believer.

"It turns them on," he says of the student-run courses.

He might be prejudiced. The fourth student-run course is one for which he is faculty sponsor. Called "Vocal Chamber Music," it has four members—plus Mr. Swing, but only when the music is scored for quintets