

Pittsburg State University's College of Technology (COT): A Historical Perspective

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One of the first questions a person might ask is what does the College of Technology offer? What departments are housed under its roof? What goes on inside those walls? These are valid questions that get asked often. So many colleges or departments across campus are clear cut such as the College of Nursing or the College of Business, but the College of Technology (COT) is somewhat of a mystery.

The Leonard. H. Axe library archives provide a wonderful source for a historical perspective of where the College started and how, over the years, it has evolved. According to the Pittsburg State University website, the university was developed on the premise of preparing youth for a changing job market (Pittsburg State University, n.d.). In 1897, Russell S. Russ envisioned a school for preparing teachers to teach things like metalwork, woodworking, etc., and on September 8, 1903, 54 students enrolled at the Kansas State Training Normal School Auxiliary, now Pittsburg State University. Although the roots for PSU are founded in teaching, there is a strong tie to the needs of industry. Going back to 1939, *The Educational Leader* provided some insight. In an article titled, "Educational Significance of Industrial Arts" written by W.T. Bawden (1939), he discussed a speech he gave to the Society of Phi Beta Kappa at Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1937 in which he referenced a speech by Ralph Waldo Emerson that was focused on the discussion of how men are divided into two groups: the thinkers and the doers (p. 53). In Bawden's article, he tries to make sense of this discussion a hundred years later. He discusses how the child plays and imagines

and the “successful entrepreneur possesses an inventive mind and a lively imagination” (p. 54). Today, almost two hundred years later we are still having this discussion. We still grapple with how much of our education should be for the “thinker” or should be for the “doer.” Furthermore, the article discusses the dilemma of how the “industrial arts are understood to be a refuge for those ne’er-do-well, who has been tried everywhere else in school” (p. 55). Yet, the facts clearly speak for themselves as the article points out that a “high type of thinking is involved in the methods of planning and laying out of a project and in the selection and use of tools and materials” (p. 55). Bawden continues by stating “furthermore, if a system of schooling which neglected action and doing, in its overemphasis upon thinking and abstractions, was properly deemed deficient in Emerson’s day, how much more inadequate must it be regarded now” (56). All in all, Bawden concludes that “education must be more comprehensive” (57). This is definitely a factor which continues to play a role in curriculum development in today’s College of Technology (COT).

Another article from 1941 titled “The Contribution of Industrial Arts to Adult Education” by Brewington points out how the industrial arts are very well suited for adult education because of “the practical education” (p. 82). In the article the author cites several definitions of industrial arts including Hall’s (as cited in Brewington, 1941) definition, which states the subject of “industrial arts is to increase the student’s knowledge of the world’s work, to educate for appreciation of workmanship and intelligent consumption of the products of others...” (p. 79). Another definition, from Snedden (as cited in Brewington, 1941) includes this: “...those forms of training and study based upon industrial pursuits and designed to enhance general intelligence and vocational guidance...” (p. 80).

Over time, the Industrial Arts evolved into the College of Technology. Returning to the first question, “What does the COT have to offer?” it is clear that it continues to

offer education which is both theoretical and applicable. The second and third questions, "What departments are housed in the COT?" and "What goes on inside its walls?" are easily answered. The COT prepares students for a variety of technical careers in several fields. Departments in the COT include Automotive Technology, Engineering Technology, Graphics and Imaging Technologies, Technology and Workforce Learning and the School of Construction.

At present, thanks to the foresight of Dr. Sullivan (see interview next in this issue), the COT is a comprehensive organization focused on all industrial sectors. All departments are housed under one roof and students come to learn through hands-on experience that is directly applicable in the professional world. Even workforce learning is part of the COT and students are able to learn about supervision, training, and leadership skills needed to succeed in any industry.

In summary, the adage that change is constant rings true at the COT. Today, the COT is not a refuge "for those ne'er-do-well" (Bawden, 1939, p. 55), but rather an oasis for those who know that theory translated into practice and learning by doing is what they want their "comprehensive education" to be.

REFERENCES

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