

went to college and *then* went to work. For others, spending one or two days in Saratoga offers a pleasant change of pace, a chance to relax and play teacher. "It's a huge favor for us to ask," says Colleen Burke. "But I never met an executive who didn't enjoy it." Says one vice president, "Beats workin'."

Behind the cheerleading lie some pragmatics. The most important part of the exercise may be the postpresentation chats between graders and graded. "It's good to be aware of the new generation," says Steuben Glass sales manager Andrea Gabriel, who comes with recruiting in mind: January and summer internships are just around the corner. Last year, a bank vice president telephoned two weeks after the presentations. Although he'd given one group a C, an individual member had impressed him. He wanted her to come for an internship and then if that went well, "to stay and grow with the bank." So if the two days make a fine long-term investment for a company, they also give successful students a healthy dose of confidence—and contacts.

Prospective recruiting aside, the public relations aspect of their participation is not lost on these executives. "I asked Dad to come," says freshman Keith Fitz-Gerald, "because companies like his are always looking to do a promotion thing." His father, executive vice president of Merrill Lynch, did not disappoint him: In a dramatic burst of corporate PR, Fitz-Gerald Senior arrived at the presentations via helicopter at 7:15 the first morning and departed that after-

noon the same way. Said one student as she watched the helicopter drift off into the sunset, "That's Skidmore at its best."

Correction: That's Skidmore at its brand-new best. Caught, like so many small liberal arts colleges, in the rising cost crunch, Skidmore can only benefit from being known in corporate circles as a college with an innovative business program. "This is my personal vendetta against liberal arts education," laughs Burke, who went from Vassar to become one of eighteen women in the 1970 class of 800 Harvard M.B.A.'s. Nearly one-half of Skidmore's 2,100 students take at least one business course, despite substantial humanities requirements; about 35 percent opt for a business career after graduation. "Our business major is good because there are a lot of liberal arts courses along with the pragmatics," says Barbara Hubert, director of career planning. "With courses like BU107, business is humanized."

Not all of the executive-teachers are concerned with purely humanitarian impulses, though. For every good-natured manager there's one like Burton Weinbaum, a corporate vice president at A&P, whose tough grading semester after semester has made him the legendary scourge of BU107. Back in the sixties, Weinbaum was a guest lecturer at Cornell; he eventually decided to stop, disgusted by questions such as "What has the food industry done for mankind?" He likes the students' attitudes much better nowadays. This year, though, he's displeased by the kids' "soft" remedies in the International Harvester

case: "They're applying a Band-Aid instead of a battle-ax," he growls. And Weinbaum is almost a pussycat compared with one executive from the Saratoga chamber of commerce who showed up for the very first semester of the presentations. He became personally abusive toward the students, criticizing the way one freshman wore her hair and taking offense at the blouse another wore. Says department chairman Greene: "When an executive goes overboard, we don't ask him back."

Faced with the contradictory orders at the orientation—"Remember these are freshmen—but don't pat 'em on the tush"—the executives are constantly torn between parental and professional impulses. "The better they are, the tougher you want to question them," admits GE's John Hamann. "The problem is," asks General Foods plant manager Robert Berry, "Do you give them credit if they obviously worked hard, but just missed the boat?"

A case in point is one of the final groups on the final day. Bolstered by reports from earlier groups on the importance of a smooth presentation, this team is poised and ready. Their notes are on computer-printed index cards; their graphs are color-synchronized. "I've had debate experience. So I'm not nervous. A little hyped-up maybe. But not nervous." "We know this case cold. We deserve an A. If we don't get an A, I'll be pissed." After urging one another, "Be cool, be cool!" they march in, single file, each student shaking hands with each executive. Their presentation lasts a snappy eighteen and a half minutes, including change of placards; the ex-debater uses his pipe as a pointer. Advocating no layoffs or stock-splitting, just budget cuts, they come across as smooth, calm, and cautious. Too cautious, perhaps: They receive a B, just like yesterday's 9:00 A.M. team. That group lost points because their proposals were overambitious, this team because their remedies were too modest. "The kids learn some hard, frustrating lessons here," says Burke. "They grow up." Yet even she would sometimes wax indignant at the injustices: "I can't believe that brilliant team got a C! And that C-group got an A!" But, she finally admits, "that's the real world. That's management." =



*Return to innocence: A blissful quartet departs for the dorms.*