Brehznev dies 'suddenly'

MOSCOW (AP) — Leonid Brezhnev, head of the Communist Party and president of the Soviet Union, has died, the Tass news agency reported today.

The official agency said the 75-year-old leader died a "sudden death" at 8:30 a.m. (12:30 a.m. EST) Wednesday. It said the announcement was made by the Central Committee of the party.

Brezhnev had led the Soviet Union for 18 years, taking over from the ousted Nikita Khrushchev in October, 1954.

There was no immediate announcement of a successor. Politburo officials Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko are widely regarded as the chief contenders for the post.

Brezhnev was last seen in public Sunday presiding over the massive Red Square parade marking the 65th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.

"The name of Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, a true continuer of Lenin's great cause and an ardent champion of peace and Communism, will live forever in the hearts of the Soviet people and the entire progressive mankind," Tass said.

Brezhnev kept a firm grip on power by insistng that colleagues join in decision-making and share the blame for ideas that went wrong.

He was the most conservative of the Kremlin leaders who preceded him, author of the so-called "Brezhnev doctrine" — a tough policy of brooking no opposition from dissidents as evidenced in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the Soviet support of the Polish martial law regime.

After the fiery V.I. Lenin, ruthless Josef Stalin and visionary Khrushchev, he often looked to be a faceless bureaucrat, stiffly reading his speeches and laboriously consulting colleagues on major decisions.

But he also did more than any of his predecessors to consolidate the Soviet Union as a major world power and bring it to nuclear parity with the United States.

He chose modest, controlled economic growth for the country instead of Kruschev's wildly ambitious schemes; preferred coexistence and detente to Lenin's revolutionary fervor; and replaced Stalin's aggressive expansionism with a careful probing for international gains.

Brezhnev was said to have considered his major accomplishments the signing with President Jimmy Carter in June, 1979, of the SALT II strategic arms agreement; the adoption of a new "Brezhnev" constitution for the Soviet Union in 1977, and his moves toward international detente.

However, detente suffered a sharp setback in late 1979 when

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University, Bowerman close to agreement

By Debbie Howlett
Of the Emerald

It was not University Pres. Paul Olum who had the biggest news at his monthly press conference but Curt Simic, vice president for public relations. Simic told a few reporters, just before Olum made his remarks, that an agreement with Bill Bowerman about a controversial track facility is near.

"We should have something on paper by today or tomorrow," Simic said at the Wednesday morning conference. "We really feel very optimistic . . . we'll have to wait and see what we get back in writing.

Bowerman had earlier promised to donate $350,000 to build a facility to house the track team at Hayward Field. But in October, Bowerman withdrew his pledge, citing a conflict with University and athletic administrators about control and use of the facility.

"There are a number of road blocks that will eventually be surmounted," Bowerman said when contacted Wednesday afternoon. But, he added, "I think we're down to the final steps — I hope we are."

During a late-night news broadcast Tuesday, Bowerman was reported to have agreed to go ahead with the project.

The broadcast reported Bowerman was prepared to fund the full amount if no other donor came forth. But Wednesday afternoon, the former track coach said he'd not spoken with any media representatives since last week.

"We're trying very hard now to come to an agreement," Olum said during his press conference. "There's a good chance we're going to make it."

Olum said any agreement between Bowerman and the University would be "one that will keep the University's integrity.

He also announced enrollment has been set at 15,405 students, a 7.5 percent decrease from last year's count. The fourth-week figures Olum cited are considered to be "final" numbers.

"That's worrisome," he said.

Olum attributed the decline to a number of reasons: a poor economy, fewer students graduating from high schools and an increase in admissions requirements.

Olum said he is especially concerned with freshman enrollment figures, which dropped off 14.8 percent. The junior class enrollment "held even," University Registrar Wanda Johnson said.

Olum also announced plans for a joint marine studies program between the University and Northeastern University. The program is "interesting in part, because of its magnitude," Olum said.

The program intially will involve a student exchange but eventually will expand into a cross-disciplinary effort, Rudy said. The OIMB is located near Coos Bay, and the Northeastern marine lab is located near the entrance to Boston Bay.

An A is an A is an A — or is it?

By Leslie Knight
Of the Emerald

This is the first half of a two-part look at grade inflation, why it is decreasing and how it has prompted changes in grading systems.

A student has a 3.5 grade point average — does this indicate academic excellence or is it merely "grade inflation?"

It's probably both, according to University sources.

While grade inflation, commonly defined as more A's and B's than C's and D's, increased from 1968 to 1975 throughout the nation, a University trend indicates grade inflation decreased from 1977 to the present.

One accepted cause of the acceleration of higher grades in the late 1960s is related to the Vietnam war. Male students were likely to be drafted if they lost their student deferments.

Theodore Palmer, head of the University mathematics department, says some professors felt pressure to protect students and lowered their grading standards.

Students also worked harder to stay in school during this period, says William Davie, philosophy professor.

When the Vietnam crisis ended, the resulting relaxed attitude helped keep grading standards down.

Political science professor John Orbell says internal conditions, rather than external forces, contribute to grade inflation. In the past, professors have been under pressure to inflate grades because more students would sign up for their classes, he says.

"There has been in the past a clear inference that a good teacher is one who attracts a lot of students. One way to attract a lot of students is to offer a lot of A's — offer a lot of mickeys," Orbell says.

Orbell says this system left many professors cynical and students disillusioned. But the problem is no longer a major one at the University, he adds.

For example, the mathematics department reached a high of 36.8 percent A's in 1977 but dropped to 16 percent in 1981. The literature department dropped from 41.7 percent to 18.8 percent A's for the same years.

The number of A's given in history, political science and physics and other departments also dropped significantly during these years. Undergraduate totals for all letter grades have remained consistent for the past 10 years.

But statistics aside, some professors say grade inflation still exists.

Stanley Greenfield, English professor, is concerned that grading standards are declining.

Greenfield says a C is no longer considered an average grade, which partially accounts for higher percentages in the A-B range. "Students feel cheated if given a C plus," he says.

Professors may assign higher grades than students deserve for various reasons, says Greenfield. They may be overly sympathetic, or they may want to receive good grades on student evaluations at the term's end, he says.

Orbell says although A's have become more honest reflections of a student's work, it's still hard to flunk out of school.

"Giving a student an F, even if deserved, can be a hassle," he says.

One reason for fewer F's in classes is the natural screening process achieved when students withdraw, says Davie.

"If they were locked in after the first two weeks there would be more D's and F's, but I can't say that's more desirable," he says.

Grade inflation can be the result of a professor or a Graduate Teaching Fellow not feeling comfortable with their teaching, Palmer says.

"A competent teacher has much less of a temptation to give grades higher than generally accepted than one who is uncomfortable with their teaching," he says.

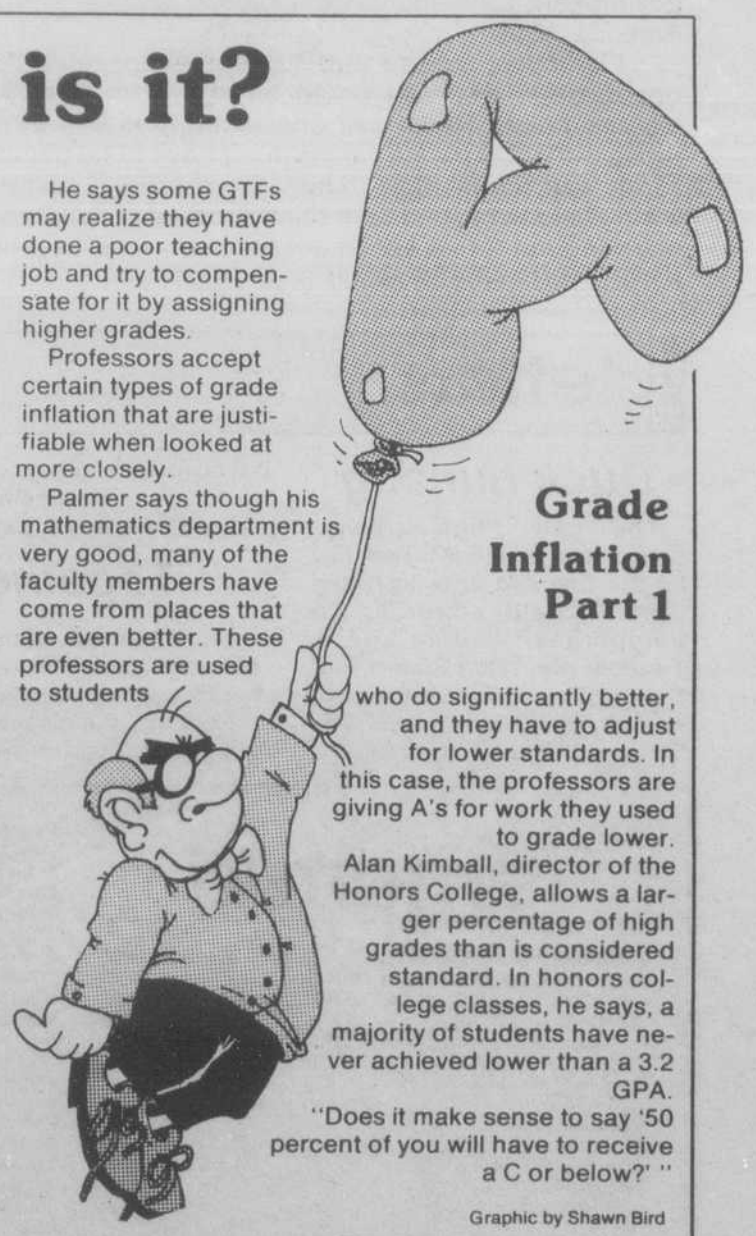
He says some GTFs may realize they have done a poor teaching job and try to compensate for it by assigning higher grades.

Professors accept certain types of grade inflation that are justifiable when looked at more closely.

Palmer says though his mathematics department is very good, many of the faculty members have come from places that are even better. These professors are used to students who do significantly better, and they have to adjust for lower standards. In this case, the professors are giving A's for work they used to grade lower.

Alan Kimball, director of the Honors College, allows a larger percentage of high grades than is considered standard. In honors college classes, he says, a majority of students have never achieved lower than a 3.2 GPA.

"Does it make sense to say '50 percent of you will have to receive a C or below?' "



Grade Inflation Part 1

Graphic by Shawn Bird

Tomorrow: How grade inflation affects grading standards.