

# New emergency number speeds emergency aid

By Michele Matassa  
Of the Emerald

People calling for multiple emergency services in the Eugene-Springfield area go through a time-consuming process.

They have to place the original call, then wait until the operator repeats their call to any emergency services before help can arrive.

But a newly consolidated communications center, scheduled to open in July, will eliminate that wasteful repetition by coordinating fire, police and ambulance services at the same location, says Clay Durbin, director of the new center.

"With the present system, you're doubling the calls and the conversation," Durbin says. "With everything being dispatched from the same center, you cut that down."

Construction of the new Public Safety Communications Center should be completed next week, and when computerized radio and telephone equipment is delivered in late June, the center can begin saving time for 86 percent of the county's population, Durbin says.

The dispatch center, located at the Eugene Police Department, will serve the Eugene and Springfield police and fire departments, along with 19 rural fire stations, and should field about 300,000 calls per year, he says.

The \$500,000 project, which the city has been working on for a couple of years, is a giant step toward modernization and improved public service, Durbin says.

Especially since a woman died in Dallas, Texas, after an ambulance dispatcher questioned the caller's need for help, quality service has become an important goal, he says.

"The public is becoming very aware of how calls for emergency services are handled," he says.

As another way to improve the handling of those calls, the city will add a 911 service — which already operates in about 50 percent of the United States — in January 1985, Durbin says.

With that addition, callers will only have to dial 9-1-1 to reach a central dispatcher who operates all emergency services, he says. And since most callers are nervous and frightened, the simplification will pay off, Durbin says.

"When people call the police or fire, generally speaking they are very upset," he says. "They don't have time to think rationally."

Dialing 9-1-1 will be an easy, automatic reflex and will eliminate the caller's present burden of deciding which service to call and which number to dial, Durbin says.

That public benefit is why the state of Oregon has mandated 911 service and is requiring its public safety departments to implement it by 1991, he says.

And that public benefit is why the city of Eugene will implement it in early 1985.

"Nine-one-one isn't designed for public safety departments," Durbin says. "Nine-one-one is designed so the public can access emergency services."



Photo by Michael Clapp

The new Public Safety Communications Center is under construction at the Eugene Police Department and will help coordinate emergency service vehicles.

# Grade inflation shrinking under scrutiny

By Michael Hosmar  
Of the Emerald

Grade inflation is disappearing, according to some University administrators and faculty members.

"There's a new attitude of seriousness about grades — professors are more firmly in charge," University Pres. Paul Olum says.

Grade inflation — higher grades for work which would have earned low marks several years ago — was partially caused by individual departments and teachers competing for students, Olum says. If a particular department padded grades, it attracted more students, which in turn made increased funding for this department easier to obtain, he says.

**'You could call it a re-valuing of academic performance'**

— Shirley Wilson

Because underfunded departments were scrutinized more closely than their larger, better funded counterparts, teachers in stronger departments could "have a more permissive attitude toward students," he says.

Grading on a curve has also contributed to grade inflation, and he discourages its use, Olum says. If one professor presents the same subject to two different groups of students, he says, grade curves may not present an accurate picture of each student's ability.

"What if one class is smarter? What if one class is skewed from the norm?" Olum says.

It's unfair to give a student in one of those classes an 'A', when he would get a 'B' in the other class, he says.

But Olum says he believes professors have noticed these inconsistencies and are improving the credibility of their grading practices.

Gerard Moseley, associate provost of student affairs, also says grade inflation is slowly disappearing.

"My experience is that there is grade inflation that happened over a period of time," he says, "and I think that it has been abated by the recognition, nationally, that it was occurring."

Before he came to the University, Moseley conducted a detailed study on grade inflation at the University of Texas — one example of a school trying to stamp out grade inflation, he says.

The results of the study — including evidence that one professor was grading substantially easier than the other — were circulated to the dean and professors in the communications school, he says.

"The faculty began to question whether their grading practice was okay or not," Moseley says. "The dean was particularly perturbed because it appeared that the grades being assigned were too easy."

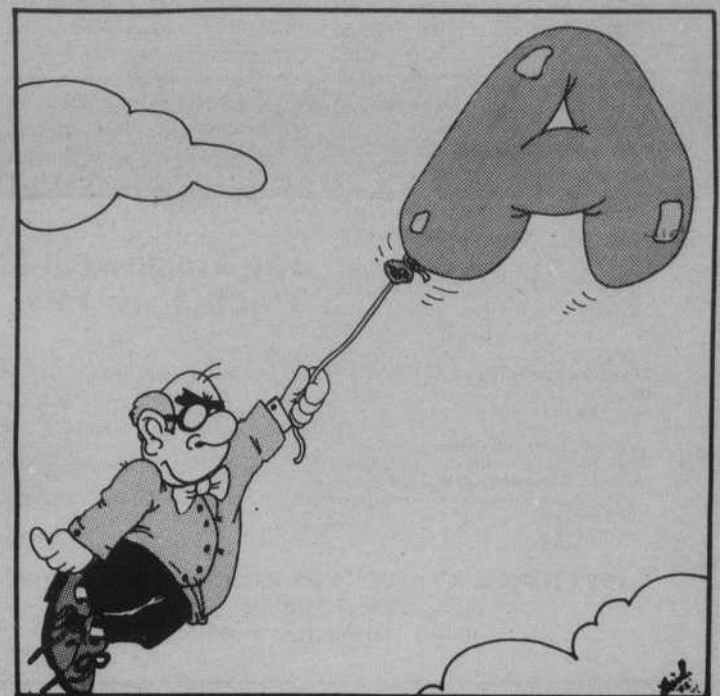
"Attitude shift" from negative reinforcement to positive reinforcement may have also contributed to grade inflation, says Shirley Wilson, University dean of students.

Research results show students produce better work when professors reward them for accomplishments rather than punish them for shortcomings, Wilson says.

But some professors argue that giving students higher grades hasn't damaged the credibility of the grading system because students are producing better work, she says.

"You could call it a re-valuing of academic performance," she says. "Students do the same work, but we just evaluate it differently."

In the past, professors and administrators wanted



File graphic

to send more students through school each year to better prepare them for the specializing job market, says journalism Prof. Jack Ewan. To do this, they graded easier, he says.

"Teachers have a higher tolerance for mediocre work today than in the past," Ewan says. "There's a point, however, where the importance of respectable grading standards will become more important than the number of students making it through school."

"Someday, the market will be flooded with mediocre-educated people and we'll have to upgrade standards," Ewan adds.

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