

THE GRADE DEBATE RAGES ON

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To "C" or not to "C"?

That's the question on the minds of many college professors and administrators as the spotlight is turned on two schools whose grading policies allow students to dodge the dreaded "F."

A move by Stanford U. faculty to revive the "NP" or not passed grade has attracted national attention and added to the debate over "grade inflation." Stanford students currently may drop classes at any time up to the final exam. As a result, 93 percent of grades are "A"s and "B"s, according to a campus survey. Just 3 percent are "no credit" — Stanford's answer to the "F." Failing grades don't appear on transcripts.

On one side of the debate are students and some faculty who believe the old policy encourages academic freedom. On the other side are administrators and other faculty who wish to avoid the "grade inflation" label.

The debate was resolved earlier this summer as faculty voted overwhelmingly to reinstate the failing grade and to limit class retakes. The policy will go into effect for the 1995-96 academic year.

Senior Anietie Ekanem, chair of Stanford's student government, says the old system was better for students.

"[The previous policy] ensured that people explored different areas, took different sorts of classes," he says. "Students will not explore as much, with the fear of the 'F' grade hanging over their head. If you're a pre-med and you want to take an English class, one bad grade can count so much against you."

Despite students' concerns, all but three faculty members supported the plan when it came to a vote on June 2.

"It makes more sensible use of academic resources," says Gail Mahood, a professor of geology who chaired the committee proposing the revisions. "This makes changes that would make the transcript a more historic record of academic achievement. It encourages teachers to use 'C's, which were fast becoming extinct."

Ekanem says that the "vast majority" of Stanford students opposed the change.

"We feel it was an extremely poor policy," he says. "[The administration] received more than 300 e-mail listings. Two people were in favor of it. That says something."

Brown U. in Rhode Island also has been accused of a too-liberal grading policy. Instructors at Brown don't give "D"s or "F"s; students have the option of taking classes with an "A"—"B"—"C" or a satisfactory/no credit system. Either way, if the student "fails" a given class, the grade does not appear on external transcripts. About a fourth of the classes taken at Brown are on a satisfactory/no credit basis.

Most students find the system rewarding, says Brown senior Natasha Freidus. It's less a matter of accountability, she says, than of academic freedom.

"It decreases the level of competition among students and decreases concern with grades," she says.

Senior Alisa Algava agrees. "I have and will continue to defend it," she says. "It enables us to take a variety of classes."

Brown spokesman Mark Nickel affirms that there are other methods of accountability. "There is a permanent mark on the transcript — an academic warning — if students don't receive enough credit in a period of time," he says.

Brown is approaching the 25th anniversary under this policy without the rumbles that have shaken Stanford.

While concerns over grade inflation have catalyzed change at Stanford, Brown seems committed to preserving its policy. Elsewhere, the trusty 4-point scale — and the mediocre grades that come with it — remains the common denominator of achievement in college. ■ James Nash, *Michigan Daily*, U. of Michigan

WHEREVER THE MOOD STRIKES YOU

It was a typical Saturday night at Penn State U. Music shook the walls and blasted from balconies and open windows. Keg taps ran faster than the water taps while staggering students waited for the elevators at a student apartment building.

Traffic between floors was so heavy that police had to be called in to dislodge an especially stubborn elevator. When the doors finally opened, passers-by were greeted with the spectacle of two half-dressed university students, doing the nasty. (Insert your own Aerosmith joke here.)

The arresting officer noted the perpetrators were using a condom, but wrapping that rascal was no protection from the law. They still were charged with disorderly conduct. Not surprisingly, the students involved were unwilling to comment on their impromptu use of between-floor transportation, but they are certainly not the first students in history to love freely in an unusual on-campus locale.

Each campus has "hot" spots that are as entrenched in its tradition as the fight song. One unique place is the Tower, located in the middle of the U. of Texas campus. The Tower is rumored to be haunted because of a massacre in 1966, says Texas sophomore Mike Brick. In the 1980s the Tower gained greater infamy after several students committed suicide by jumping off it.

The dark past of the Tower isn't a deterrent to adventurous lovers. "It's closed most of the time, but if people can get in there, they do," Brick says. "I would say it's the danger aspect — the haunting thing — that attracts people to it."

Similarly, the Cathedral of Learning, the main classroom site at the U. of Pittsburgh, is a popular place for the adventurous because of its foreboding atmosphere, says Jason Brame, a junior at Pitt. "The whole place is really Gothic — and dark, so there's lots of places [to do it]," he says.

Then there are students who prefer an aesthetic angle. Houston's Rice U. has a sculpture with marble slabs set at 45, 90 and 180 degrees. Students particularly enjoy the 180-degree slab, says Ian Marquardt, a junior at Rice. Rumors of 45- and 90-degree activity cannot be confirmed.

For schools with campuses in the middle of cities, the natural beauty of an open space is inspiration enough. The most popular site at Boston U. is a park called the beach, or the BUB, a 20-yard stretch of lawn overlooking the river behind the main classroom buildings, says sophomore Snehal Shah.

"It's the only grassy area on campus," he says. You can guess what drink is popular on the Boston U. campus.

The campus football field is another favorite place to score. The 50-yard line is especially popular at Penn State U. Unlike couples exposed in elevators, those found making creative grass stains there are cited only for trespassing.

But that isn't to say students have completely



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gotten away from hitting the books.

"The big place [at the U. of California, Santa Barbara] is the library — I guess it's the mystique of being caught," says senior Brett Chapman. The library has private study rooms that can be rented by graduate students. Chapman speculates that late-night library exclamations are probably not from exciting reading material.

"The thrill of possibly being caught could add to the experience, but unfortunately I haven't found a willing partner," Chapman says. And even if he does find an accomplice, the question remains of what to do afterward, since the library is a smoke-free building. ■ Deepika Reddy, *The Daily Collegian*, Penn State U.