

PERSPECTIVES

Monday

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Take this term and SHOVE IT!

In the following accounts, all names and classes have been changed to protect the overstressed.

Marjorie is 20 years old. She used to be cheerful and bright, a joy to her friends and parents. Today, we find Marjorie a very distraught woman.

"I don't really have time to talk to you," she says, wringing her hands. Her fingernails and knuckles are black with grime. "I have another geology lab 'midterm' this week. We've had a 'midterm' four times this term. And then I have a 10-page paper to write for English, due next Wednesday — during Dead Week! By January, I'll have forgotten everything I'm learning."

Marjorie bursts into tears, unable to continue. When she finally calms down, her face now swollen and red, she explains that she hasn't done laundry this term and she doesn't remember what her friends look like. A minor error message from her printer caused her to throw her computer out the window earlier this week.

Josh sits before us, and his musty, three-day-old odor is as distracting, as are his knees, bouncing from the effects of the third triple espresso of the morning. He's 18, and his face is grizzled from a lack of sleep, shaving

and sobriety.

"I barely sleep when I'm sleeping — caffeine still pumps through me. I don't even care how papers or tests turn out anymore. I just keep cranking 'em out. But hey, 'C's get degrees." Josh slits his eyes like a feral cat and smirks at us impatiently. "I had this group project due yesterday, and I struggled to the last minute. Our group couldn't meet regularly — people were slackers or too busy — so we faked it and each of us learned almost nothing. What's the point?"

OK, enough fun. Actually, everything about the preceding stories was fictionalized. The editorial board didn't meet with students to hear their horror stories. We didn't have to. We can all feel the pain. Conversations between co-workers and friends have changed; instead of asking, "How are you?," we just compare notes to see whose workload is the worst.

And for the good of the students, we do have a serious point. It's threefold, and it goes something like this: Midterms aren't midterms. Group projects aren't group projects. And Dead Week isn't Dead Week. These truisms need to change.

Midterms, by their name, are an evaluation of curriculum learned during the first half of the term.

They must be partnered with a final exam in holy matrimony. One midterm and one final — group marriages should not be allowed. If a professor is going to have three midterms, just call them "Really Big Tests" and acknowledge that the information will be lost by the time there's another "Really Big Test." Having too many "Really Big Tests" won't help the learning process.

Group projects, in order to be effective, take time. Class time must be set aside for meetings. The tasks involved must be effectively broken into parts by the professor, to teach students how equal work can be accomplished. After all, these are college students learning to live on their own for the first time, not project managers at a blue-chip company. If there isn't class time for these efforts, then scrap the group project and have individual assignments.

Finally, Dead Week needs to be sacrosanct. This is the time for everyone to breathe deeply, catch up on the 18 chapters of reading they didn't get done and prepare their brains for the big download coming during finals week. We know professors hate grading finals past finals week, but it doesn't help students to have a "really big test" during Dead Week and then no final; some classes do

have finals and students' won't have time to study. Leave Dead Week alone.

These three points are bad for students' personal lives, bad for their education, and bad for their sanity. Students need time to study; spending the term going from one crisis to another — some students call it "putting out fires" — doesn't lead to learning. Instead, information is barely stuffed in and then allowed to explode onto paper. Things like remembering to buy toilet paper get shoved out of the brain.

The joy of education is in seeing information come together and make sense, as a whole. Finding connections between knowledge gained last year about the form of governance in 18th-century China and something learned this year about the literature of the Greeks is amazing.

A university education should be about consuming and absorbing information. It is not conducive to this learning process for students to be so overworked that a slight mishap makes them freak out. Please, professors and administrators, let us learn. Don't make us prove it every three days.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

