

Students express

opinions on grading



By Sandy Carter
of The Print

Third in a series: Students
look at grades.

In response to the first part of this series Carol Peterson impulsively polled her Thursday Mental Health class. "How many think their grades are too high?" she asked. A hand or two. "How many think their grades are too low?" Two. Hundreds of the hands went up, accompanied by a good-natured buzz of comment and laughter. "How many think their grades are about right," she asked finally. Almost all the hands were back up again.

What did the poll reflect? The confusion and ambiguity surrounding students' attitudes towards the traditional grading system.

A later survey of student opinion sampled in halls and library yielded the following comment in response to three questions:

What do you think is the significance of grades?

GLENDIA FRENCH: "I don't know if grades really mean anything. I get A's in writing, but I don't think I write that well. Does a grade really reflect how I stand in relationship to the other students? Personal opinions of a student have to enter into an instructor's analyzing of a student's work, even if not consciously. Grades have to have some value, but what? Don't ask me."

RANDY OSTERMAN: "To my employer, they help determine your initiative."

MARILYN BUSHWAY: "I think they're something people strive really hard for but they put pressure on the student to get it quickly, just to get a good grade. But then, maybe we don't retain it because we have to move on. What you do incorporate into your life, you keep."

SUSAN MACDONALD: "They push a student to do his best. I think grades do matter. I don't like this 'pass-no pass' system because it allows the student to sort of slide by. There's no incentive. Grades produce incentive from within."

TANYA BURSHEIM: "They don't mean that much if you get a job or something. There

are so many people above three-point that it doesn't mean as much as it used to."

BRIAN HANSEN: "They create competition, which is good in some respects because it makes you work hard."

RON MCHANEY: "Outside the context of the school, I don't think a specific grade has much significance at all, as opposed to performance. There's not enough uniformity to make them very meaningful."

MIKE SMITH: "I really don't believe in the grading system or the testing system. As far as I'm concerned, they are an inadequate means of measuring someone's skill. There's no really good way of measuring. I don't think grades are really necessary because I know what I got out of it. By putting a grade on a class, it really makes a person think more about the grade than the material they're learning. Or they may actually fail the class but still have an accurate understanding of the subject matter. Some people just can't take tests. They get behind a test and just fall apart."

LINDA ROBINSON: "There is definitely a correlation between intense lecture time, stiff grading, and material which I retain indefinitely. I've taken two courses below the 100 level, and the majority of my instructors have put great emphasis on the fact that their lectures and grading procedures are equivalent to a four year institution. These instructors have taught at four-year institutions and I trust their expertise."

Have you ever picked an instructor or a class because of its reputation for "easy A's"?

Of the seven students asked this, only two replied affirmatively. One elaborated, although visibly uncomfortable about being quoted on this point: "Yes, I have. But if it was going toward my major, I wouldn't...I took architecture at PSU last term. They're trying to get back to a C average and it was very hard, extremely hard grading. I got a C and I was proud of it."

Other answers: "Major classes have to maintain rigorous standards, but 'fun' classes just sort of let you slide. I pick my instructors by per-

sonality."

"Just the opposite, in fact. I figure that if they grade harder they expect more and I'll learn more."

"I'd prefer not to take an easy grader."

"It would be a reflection on himself and a waste of his time and money..." (if a student picked a class that way.)

Do you feel that your report card grades are too low, too high or reasonably accurate?

All responding students considered their grades "reasonably accurate."

Faculty Opinion: Two Camps

English instructor Dick Andrews saves, among all the paperwork which spells the class preparation of a busy man, a single mimeographed sheet which sets him sparking with indignation each time he looks at it. The paper in question is a copy of an article from *Today's Education* magazine, November-December issue, 1978, entitled, "In Defense of Grade Inflation."

The opinion piece, written by a California instructor, says, among other things, "For nearly two decades as a high-school teacher, I have unashamedly given A's and B's to dozens of students of less-than-average academic ability...I continue to do this. The old method of norm-referenced grading, more commonly known as 'grading on the curve,' produces a few winners and a few losers, leaving most students in the middle to be smothered by the deadening verdict of mediocrity...Grades given under such conditions merely inform the student whether he or she has beaten someone else out of an A or B. I have never given a class all A's, but I hope to before I retire."

Outrageous? Farfetched? At least two sources in the ranks of College instructors privately voice opinions not too different.

One, particularly concerned with keeping older, returning students from giving up school, weighs each poor grade in consideration of whether or not the individual would be so discouraged by it as to not return next term.

Primary interest in combat-

ting these types of attitudes comes from instructors in transferrable courses, including Craig Lesley of the English department.

Lesley, a member last year of the Academic Affairs Committee, initiated its consideration of an alternate grading system. Under the proposed system, teachers could assign the following letter grades:

- A - 4.0
- AB - 3.5
- B - 3.0
- BC - 2.5
- C - 2.0
- CD - 1.5
- D - 1.0
- DF - .5

An A.A.C. memo on the subject, which was discussed at last May's faculty meeting, describes the system's advantages: "Assuming the prevalent grading philosophy is to encourage students by giving them a higher grade than a lower one, the half-steps here represent a smaller 'bump-up' than the full steps of the traditional system. My speculation is that the school G.P.A. will actually decline a little with this system, by about .1."

According to Lesley and Andrews, the faculty at the May meeting overwhelmingly approved the submission of the new system to the Instructional Council, the administration's final authority on new policy.

The minutes of that May

meeting, which also had to deal with a grading proposal regarding students' option of taking a class for a change of grade if they got less than a C the first time around, were fatally vague, from Lesley's standpoint: "Consensus of opinion of Faculty present. Majority in favor of proposals for grading, but not change of grades."

The Instructional Council files contain a copy of these minutes, which were duly acted upon as understood by the Council. (Students here may now repeat a course for change of grade.) Eileen Elliot, secretary to the dean of instruction, who dug out the council's minutes from last spring, remembers the group's interpretation of the memo as being not in favor of the new grading system.

In light of the newly unearthed misunderstanding, Lesley says he'll start over again by reintroducing the issue at the next Faculty Senate meeting. If that body approves it, it will once again be on its way to the Instructional Council, this time with every effort to make the recommendation "perfectly clear."

If implemented, Lesley feels the new system will be a "more accurate one," but a cynic may question if any system, no matter how ideal in theory, can survive the abuse of subjective interpretation to tell any more truth than the one before.

JOHN'S

Auto Electric Service & Supply

COMPLETE AUTO REPAIR

- VW Specialist
- Tune-up & DEQ
- Complete electrical repair
- Carburetors

812 Molalla Ave.
Oregon City

656-3633

