

The economic reply

Grades are meaningless

By MIKE PERRIN

Grades are a constant source of worry for students. Yet they are such a meaningless item to worry about; the standard grading system now in use at this university means nothing.

Or the only thing grades mean is how well a student succeeds in pleasing a professor, who may or may not be some sort of misfit (profs have problems, too) and who may or may not know what he is doing. Yet a single letter grade is supposed to sum up what you did in a given course. As an empirical piece of evidence, a letter grade is sorely lacking.

It does not reveal how the grade was arrived at — is it a relative measure of success versus other classmates? Does it indicate mastery of some pre-set amount of information? Or is it a measure of how brown a student can get his nose during some physical act?

So not only is it not clear what grades may mean, there is empirical evidence that grades do not measure academic progress. This evidence is cheating. Students only cheat for grades; they never cheat for knowledge. Cheating means that grades measure something which can be obtained by cheating — in many cases, how well can the student do tricks which the prof likes?

One example which has come to me is a prof who insists on a certain length of term paper for grading purposes. If a student turned in a term paper short of the desired length even by a half page, then that student flunked. And this man will continue at the university for many years, unless he dies. But let's skip any more personal references — we all know any number of abuses which have occurred from time to time.

It is clear that we have the present system for three reasons: it is easy for lazy profs to use, it is easy for misfits to abuse and it provides a ready source of evaluation for future employers. Unfortunately for those employers, they are unable to sort out the misfit graders from the conscientious ones, so they take grades at face value.

As long as any convenient system of evaluation is available to business, they will use it. Of course, to the extent that they hire the wrong

people for jobs, it costs them in the future, but these people can always be fired. The tragedy is the capable man who is not hired.

So we need an evaluation system which gives no reward for cheating, which is not prohibitively difficult to apply and which is an accurate measurement of a recognizable ability.

I propose two evaluation systems. Either one can meet these goals. Both are superior to the present grade system.

The first is the single grade system. Students would ALL be given A's or B's or whatever on the first day of classes. It wouldn't matter, as long as ALL students got the same grade, regardless of class performance, attendance or other factors. Students would receive the course credit with that grade. (F's are primarily a way for universities to keep enrollment up, anyway.) (Repeat courses.)

This method of grading would make it obvious that the grades have nothing to do with anything and that they are utterly meaningless. So the burden of evaluating of the individual would fall to the companies. They could conduct their own types of testing for jobs, or go for more in-depth interviews, or otherwise personalize and humanize their hiring processes to a greater extent than is now the case.

Students would no longer cheat for grades; they would get on with the business of learning free from

fear of stepping out of established bounds, free to try new ideas and innovations. Those who didn't want to learn wouldn't have to, but they also wouldn't get hired unless they could pass the employer's tests.

This system is easy to apply; profs don't need to worry about bell curves or percentages or any of that nonsense; profs would be judged by the success of their pupils, which is the true measure of success for profs, anyway.

The system would be accurate — each company would test for the things in which they were interested and so the results would be valid for them; this is the important thing; they would no longer be confronted with some letters; they would know what was tested for and how and what the results mean for them as a company. This is absent now.

The second system puts the burden of evaluation back into the University — professors would turn in written evaluations of students, like "Jim is here every day; the class laughs a lot at his jokes" or "Jim seldom comes to class, yet when he does, he takes over any group of his choice. He turned in a 20 page analysis of the American party system from 1776-1820." In this case, the evaluations themselves explain what is being examined and how it was obtained.

Misfits could still turn in bad evaluations, but there would be other evaluations to compare. It is easier to compare "Jim is a friendly

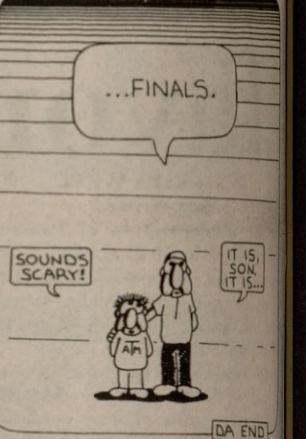
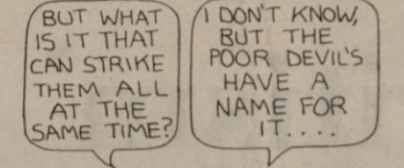
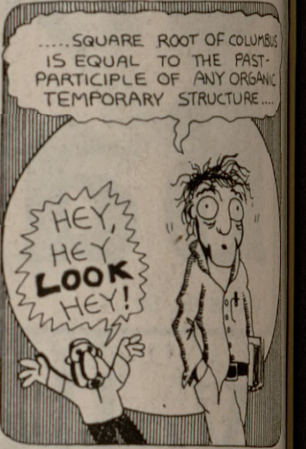
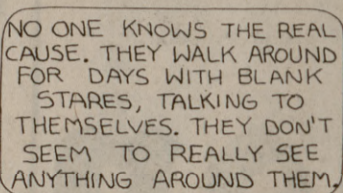
guy who breaks the class up once a week" with "Jim is a sullen boy who does not take class direction well" than it is to compare an A in History 105 with a C in History 106. The misfit's concerns are voiced in his evaluation.

If those concerns match the company's, then it is valid for them; otherwise, they ignore it. Over a four year period, a fairly large stack of information will build up and inconsistencies of profs will be easier to spot.

Students can't cheat. The prof just writes up his evaluation on what he sees. If he is wrong, there are other bases of comparison. If he is right, then that is important. So the system is accurate in context in that it reveals the basis for evaluation, thereby making comparison easier than the present letter system.

This system is more work for the University than my first plan, but any university evaluation will be more work for the university than employer evaluations. This system is still not that difficult and it does help show up the misfits and petty martinets in the system.

So as we pass through finals this week, it is obvious that all this sweat is meaningless. The results will be spotty and hard to check on. Students really deserve a more relaxed atmosphere than a systematic Inquisition gives them. Perhaps some day a more rational and more pleasant learning environment will be possible.



DA END

Listen up

State reps should be informed of 'unreasonable' fee increase

Editor:

A 200 per cent raise in the Building Use Fee started me thinking. What can I do to stop these unforeseen and unreasonable raises that seem to be a part of every semester? My solution was to talk with Larry Vick, my state representative from Houston.

He told me the increase seemed very high, but this was something

that many state legislators had expected. In the last state legislative session Vick and other legislators fought for a bill that would have eliminated the Building Use Fee. The bill did not pass, but with this outrageous increase Vick has decided to investigate the situation again.

During the Christmas holidays everyone that feels the increase is unfair should talk to their state representative. The students should not be penalized for the administration's frivolous spending and lack of planning. When the new legislative session starts in January, our state representatives will try to correct this injustice.

David Cates

never forget that game and the sick feeling I got.

Ron Ledbetter '69

Poor design

Editor:

I'm writing in regard to the way the Memorial Student Center is designed. With the University growing every year, the MSC cannot provide the student body with adequate recreation. Even now it's difficult to find a lane to bowl on or a table to play pool.

The MSC was designed for the former students and for the looks. I sure don't have anything against the former students but the MSC should be for the student body. This student body should be provided adequate recreation facilities seeing how the students will pay \$465,000 yearly to the center until 2001. With this amount of money we should have some use.

The bowling lanes and pool tables are good examples of poor planning. When a University of 21,000 students only has eight lanes to bowl on

and eight pool tables this shows me poor designing for recreation. Also when the rest of the MSC is completed the new express hallway will be open, and the ping pong tables will be removed and placed in storage because of lack of room.

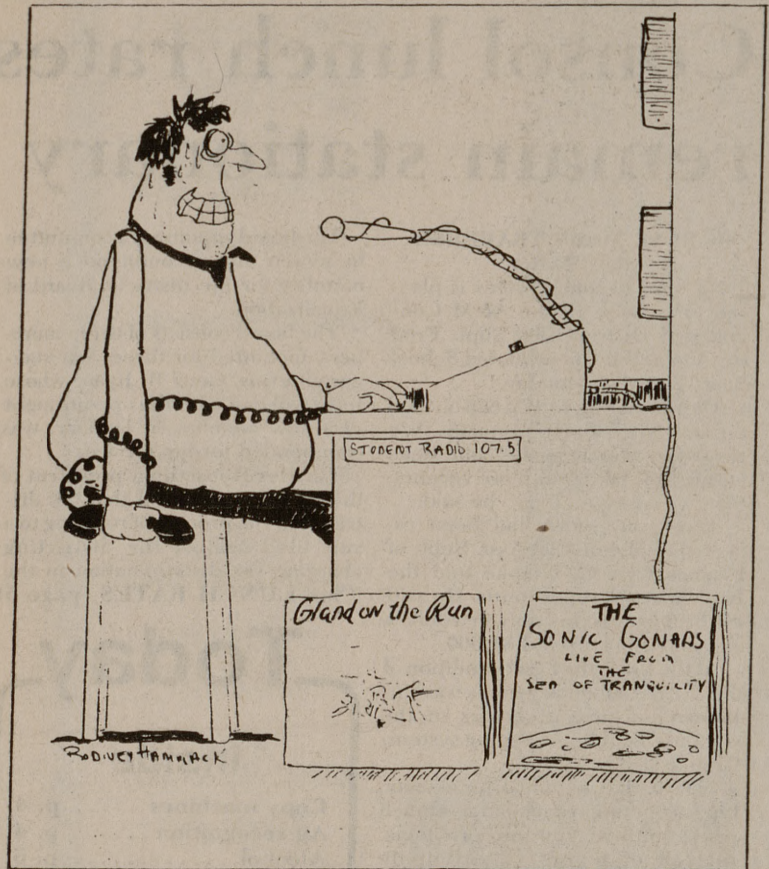
I don't know who is to thank for the great designing job. This new monstrosity of a student union complex has only a small portion of its basement for recreational activities. This is ridiculous because of the prices which are being paid for these unused benches and tables. I

think the money should be spent on providing the students with more recreational facilities.

Something needs to be done about getting this problem taken care of. A&M needs more of everything as far as bowling, pool tables and just general open space for the students. I hate to think what's going to happen in years to come if this problem isn't taken care of. I want to know who the MSC was designed for?

Jim Horst

Coasters and Co. By Rodney Hammack



... and the winner for the most obscene phone call is ...

Game sad

Editor:

I read Steven Gilbert's letter about the disappointing performance of the football team against T.U. and the letter criticizing him for writing it. Before Thanksgiving, I would have been upset by Steve's letter and agreed with Rusty Brown and Dan Cheshier, but this year for the first time in all the years I have been attending Turkey-Day games (some 26 years) I was truly embarrassed.

Steve was very kind in his letter. He did not mention specific players or squads, yet voiced his rightful opinion. It is sad that a team with so much potential was beaten so badly. It was a bitter thing to stand there and watch the game given away. There is no excuse for making the same mistakes all year. To fail is one thing, but to not even try is another. The Twelfth Man deserved better.

Perhaps I sound bitter, and it's probably because I am, but I am still an Ag. I'll be there next year yelling with the rest, but somehow I'll

Junior Promm III

A&M gets Promms' first visit

This is the first of a serial to be printed weekly in the Battalion.

The column will depict the ups and downs of life at Texas A&M as seen through the eyes of Junior Promm III and his family — Ed.

By ALAN KILLINGSWORTH

Henry and I sent Junior off to A&M two years ago but we really hadn't seen much of the campus. We had a free weekend so we decided that we would go and see all the things that Junior had written and told us about.

We first booked on a tour that had been recommended by an interior designer who had done a major job for the university. On his list of achievements were such things as the interior of the Edsel and the widely acclaimed eating atmosphere of the Biff Burger chain. My husband had met him while on a trip to Argentina. He claims that he can really tan a mean cowhide.

Anyway, I was really looking forward to this tour. I hardly slept the night before. I guess the itinerary I

had read that night did it. We would see the proposed site of a new wall that was being built on the North Side of the campus. They told us that the purpose was to beautify itself when it was built. I guess that's logical because how can anything beautify itself when it's not even there. I think that was a good enough reason to spend the money. They also told us they had been having problems with sleep walkers and I sure don't want Junior getting hit by a car late in the night.

The next place we visited was the new pedestrian overpass by West Gate parking lot. This was the second half of the morning tour and lasted until lunch. They wanted us to see someone using it. We waited and we waited. Some of the people in the rear of the bus started playing Beaver. That's the game where when you see a station wagon you yell "Beaver!" The person with the most Beavers wins. Henry played for a while but finally got too far behind and decided he'd never win so he quit.

Then all at once the people at the front of the bus started yelling that there was someone walking across the bridge. I never will forget it. People started pushing and shoving to get to the front of the bus. We finally made it up there only after ribbing a few people and stepping on a few toes. Sure enough, there he was. Henry commented on how he was sure that a person could see the entire campus from up there. He asked the tour guide if we could go up and look around but he said "no" because we had to eat lunch after we left.

We ate in the Tower dining room high over the A&M campus. On the way up there, they made us close our eyes and not peek because it would ruin the entire afternoon tour. No one noticed what he ate for lunch because he was too busy looking out windows. There was one blind person on the tour who kept complaining about lumps in the French dressing.

We decided that it would be bet-

ter if we left the afternoon tour until next semester. It was a lot to absorb in one day. As we went down the elevator we remembered to close our eyes when we walked through the University Center. We didn't even peek.

Junior was downstairs in the bowling alley. He'd been there since 8 a.m. trying to get a lane. Henry sat down in the sack lunch area and I decided to watch Junior wait.

I had a heck of a time getting Henry out of the chairs when we were ready to leave. They were so comfortable he just drifted into a deep sleep. It took me awhile to find him because he was wearing bright colors but his brown socks gave him away.

All in all, Henry and I had a most enjoyable day and we agreed that we would be more than happy to spend \$90 a semester for Junior to be a part and be able to use such a beautiful structure — even though we still hadn't seen it all.

The Battalion

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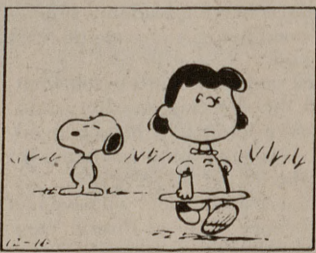
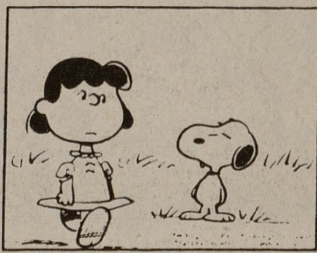
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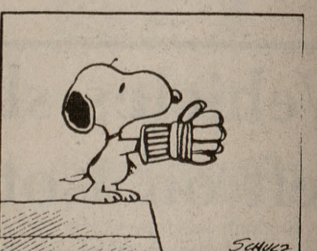
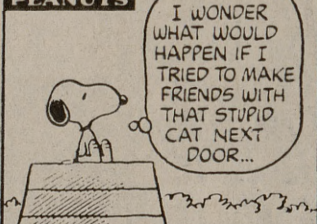
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