

Elusive GPRs

Texas A&M ranking 5th of Southwest schools

By TERRY DURAN
Campus Reporter

The eternal search for those elusive grade points goes on as college students stay up all hours of the night, ruin their eyes, destroy their brains and generally wreck their bodies.

Then again, some people study. Amid talk of grade inflation and the traditional grading system being old-fashioned and outmoded, almost all colleges and universities are still using the four-point system, where a grade of A is worth four points per credit hour, a B is three, and so forth.

Most of the schools that went to a pass-fail system in the upheaval of the late 60s and early 70s have gone back to the four-point system, though many retain optional pass-fail gradings for some courses.

Of nine Southwest Conference schools, only five compute the overall average grade point ratio (GPR) for their entire undergraduate student body.

Of those five, Texas A&M University is in last place. Southern Methodist University, the top of the list, had an overall

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undergraduate GPR of 2.922 for just under 7,000 students in the Fall 1979 semester.

In the No. 2 slot is Texas Christian University, with its 4,936 undergraduates who had an overall GPR of 2.846 for Fall 1979.

Following TCU is the University of Texas at Austin. The 34,617 undergraduates there in Fall 1979 posted an overall GPR of 2.70.

In fourth place is Texas Tech, with a GPR of 2.59 for 19,690 undergraduates in Fall 1979.

No. 5 is Texas A&M, with an undergraduate population of 26,927 and a GPR of 2.412.

The University of Houston, with 183 undergraduates, doesn't calculate the composite GPR of its students, nor do Baylor University with 8,551, Rice University with 432, or the University of Arkansas with its 12,292 undergraduate students.

These figures show the smaller schools of the five, SMU and TCU, are on top of the heap. Both church-supported schools are generally credited to have an atmosphere that places more emphasis on studying than the other three schools.

Dr. Charles McCandless, Texas A&M's associate vice president for academic affairs, said he was not upset about Texas A&M's ranking with the other Southwest Conference schools. "A 2.4 or 2.5 average GPR does not appear unusual to me," he

said. "In fact, it sounds pretty reasonable."

"If the average grade was a B, then that (a 2.4 average) would concern me," he said. "However, we normally think of a C as being average, and the professors here grade that way. You have to be somewhat above average to get higher than a C."

McCandless declined to comment on the standards of the other universities. He also said he doesn't think students who are enrolled in the College of Engineering, or who are members of the Corps of Cadets affected the overall grade ratio significantly.

Corps Scholastic Officer Mike Formby said the overall average for the Corps of Cadets was 2.36 for the Fall 1979 semester. He said the College of Engineering traditionally has the lowest grades, and the Corps has about 50 percent engineering majors, a much higher average than the University as a whole.

Formby said the Corps average at midsemester was 2.42.

Figures for the Fall 1979 semester at Texas A&M show the senior class to have a GPR of 2.637. The junior class, consisting of 6,302 students, compiled an average of 2.377, while the sophomore class, with 5,637, averaged a 2.211.

The freshman class of 6,214 compiled a class average of 2.311.

Thirty-two percent of the undergraduates had a B average or above in Fall 1979, with the senior class again coming out on top — 41 percent of the seniors had B averages or better.

Dr. Arvoe Juola of Michigan State University has studied the overall pattern of a representative sampling of universities' average GPRs.

Grades dropped drastically as

standards rose, Juola says, and the harsh grading of the early 60s set the stage for later student activism in the areas of humanistic orientation and anti-elitism.

Juola's studies show that the overall average nationwide in the early 60s ranged from about 2.35 to 2.45. In 1965, he says, grades began to rise at an accelerated rate, and in what he calls the "highly emotional" period of 1968 to 1972, rose higher and faster.

After 1972, Juola said, the upward trend began to slow down, and grades throughout the country

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peaked in about 1974. After 1975, a very gradual — only a few hundredths of a point per year — decline has brought his sampling's average to about 2.71.

"It's amazing how closely the schools follow the trends throughout the country," Juola said. "There is really very little difference in the data from any one part of the country economic location. The trends are almost universal."

Juola also said that most schools consider a grade of C to be just "the middle point in the scale" now, as opposed to the 60s, when C was "the standard to go by."

"What we have now," Juola said, "is a Dolly Parton curve — top-heavy. A grade of C is now the acceptable minimum at most places

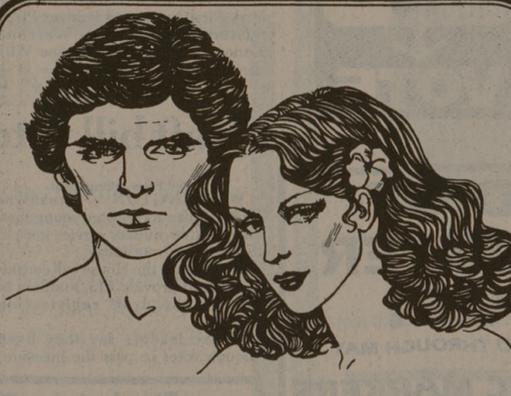
for academic competence; there's really no magic about the old cutoff point anymore."

Juola said many schools have gone to a more-than-four-point system, where differentiation is made between, for example, a grade of 81 and one of 89. Under this system, for instance, an 81 would be a 3.1, while an 89 would be a 3.9.

Many of these systems are still being experimented with, though, Juola said.

Meanwhile, through trend and term paper, the 19,188 Aggies who posted above a 2.0 continue the search for the elusive grade point.

After all, over 800 Aggies posted a 4.0 last fall — it must be possible. Somehow.



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