

Has the grading system at Texas A&M



ELIZABETH KOHL

Academia and the overall intelligence of college students has increased tremendously in the last few generations. For this reason, it is time for the University to catch up and accommodate future students with a grading system that better measures their achievements.

In the current grading system, many students find themselves struggling to earn the grades they desire. Perhaps it was one poor test or maybe the attendance policy caused one's grade to slip to a low A or B. Regardless of why it happened, one semester's worth of hard work can be destroyed in a single class session, causing students to ride the borderline of letter grades.

As a result of borderline grades, some students try to improve their GPR by taking "blow-off courses" or those in which they feel they can easily get an A. Using up electives on classes that are "easy," as opposed to interesting, is common place. But because each class's grading structure is based on the discretion of the professor, an above-average grade is sometimes near impossible to come by.

Students at large universities understand that professors, even with the aid of teaching assistants, are limited by time constraints in their testing methods. For this reason, many professors test what their students

have learned with multiple-choice tests. Should one of these exams only have 20 questions, a student missing more than just one question will be borderline between A and B.

While Aggies have become quite efficient at taking multiple-choice tests, there are better alternatives to measuring student competency. Beyond the stereotype of high difficulty levels, a good essay test allows students to showcase the information that they have learned. Even short-answer or fill-in-the-blank tests could be added to a few multiple-choice questions to improve testing quality.

Testing large student bodies with essays and short-answer tests has been proven possible. Universities such as Wake Forest and Yale both use these techniques more regularly than multiple-choice exams. And while students at those universities are inquiring as to what the essay question is going to be, at A&M the only question is "What color scanner do we need?"

Multiple-choice exams may seem to be easier, but it is hardly an accreditation to the University that Aggies are undoubtedly some of the best responders to any question followed by four answers, one being the appropriate, the others wrong. Borderline grades lead to improper measurement of students' knowledge. A&M is on the same four-point system that most state universities are on. But by recognizing students for "excellent, good, satisfactory or passing" achievement, there are no

shades of gray in between. Students falling slightly short of any letter grade often find their hard work is overlooked. Nearly every student enrolled at A&M has found themselves trying to hang on to that A, B or C.

An organization could be started for all the disgruntled Aggies who received an 89 and only three grade points in at least one class. Because of this, A&M would have a much better representation of its student body's abilities if it offered "+/-" grade points in addition to the current grading system. Even though implementing a system like this would bring some students GPRs down, it has the ability to more evenly distribute grades.

The main obstacle faced by current administration preventing them from altering the measurement of GPR is that it would simply be a hassle. In the long run, however, the University would find that a new system would show that there is a large group of students who work hard and simply make a mistake or two that causes them to fall slightly short of the next whole letter grade.

It is time for A&M to become disenchanted with scanner machines and the ultra simplicity of the grading system. The student body is becoming mentally diversified and needs better methods to their accomplishments.

Elizabeth Kohl is a junior accounting major.



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MAIL CALL

Football fans battle it out

I attended the Tech-A&M game, this past Saturday and witnessed Tech fans unprofessional behavior after the game. I must agree with Bryan Massey's letter to *The Battalion* that their behavior was embarrassing. I think we should use their behavior as an example of what not to do at Kyle Field when we host a team.

As Aggies, we hold ourselves to a higher standard of behavior. Accordingly, when other schools' fans come to our campus, we would treat them with sportsmanlike friendliness, not taunting. In Aggieland, our character is a lot above, so let us make sure we continue to set the example for the rest of the Big 12, Ags.

Matt Criswell
Class of '00

There have been mixed reactions after the Tech and A&M football game, from both the Aggies and Raiders. Some are proud and some are ashamed of the actions of the Red Raiders. I can understand that it was inappropriate for some students to chant comments about the Aggies, but I also heard some of the same comments made about the Raiders by some Aggies in my section. Obviously, not all Aggies are the fair and polite students that they claim to be.

I also understand that some of the Aggies did not understand why we took down our own goal post. I was amazed, but proud, that our students were so full of spirit that they celebrated in such a way. Some Aggies may think it is ridiculous, but of all the schools in Texas, you would understand how you can at one point, become overwhelmed with such pride in your school.

Lauren Olson
Texas Tech University

I would just like to take the time to say all of you are very poor losers. For all of you to act appalled at the actions of Tech students is very wrong.

Some friends of mine went down to College Station for the game last year, and they were cursed at, told that they sucked and had objects thrown at them while sitting in the student section.

Before you start attacking the actions of others, maybe you should look at yourselves. At least our students do not assault each other.

Ian Fairchild
Texas Tech University

I am a student at Texas Tech, and I am tired of hearing about Aggies excuses about the loss on Saturday. As far as being undignified, I distinctly remember last season at Kyle Field when a group of Aggies threw gum and other things at me during yell call, or whatever it is called, because I was holding my guns up. Boy, that sounds like real sportsmanship conduct to me. Running out on the field is just a horrible thing.

Our traditions may not be as popular as yours, but stop saying that we have none. We do have one tradition, and that is beating you every year.

Eric Shaw
Texas Tech University

A&M may have a fine sports program, but in the eight years I have been in College Station, I have seen no difference between the way Aggies treat visiting fans after a home victory, in any sport, than the way we get treated when we lose on the road. The only difference is we classify our behavior as showing school spirit, while their behavior is touted as a lack of class.

Gregory Salata
Class of '99

Texas Tech and A&M have always been big rivals, and our behavior was no less dignified then A&M's would have been if they had won. It is amazing how righteous people become after losing a game. However, sadly I have to say that you are wrong about A&M's "dignified" school spirit.

I have personally been to football games in the past between Tech and A&M in which I was yelled at, cussed at, given the finger to and literally pushed around by A&M students because of my support for Texas Tech. Next time, let me encourage you to watch your fellow students and fans, you are not as morally upright as you may think you are.

In the future, if you cannot handle losing or winning gracefully, stay home.

Luke Stapleton
Texas Tech University

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DNA trials and tribulations

DNA technology is paving the way toward a better judicial system. However, many of the legal system's own are resisting DNA's impact on appellate laws in favor of established convictions.

The National Commission on the Future of DNA Evidence, a high-level study committee appointed by Attorney General Janet Reno, recently recommended that convicts be allowed to file appeals based on new DNA evidence, even after appeal deadlines have expired. This recommendation would allow trials to be reopened, or at least revisited, in hopes that wrongfully convicted person could be exonerated.

The proposal — which is not legally binding — has already been criticized as naively ignorant of the onslaught of appeals sure to come if Reno uses the committee's advice to shape Justice Department policy. Moreover, the recommendation challenges the finality of criminal verdicts.

But these criticisms are unfounded. To be reconsidered, appeals would have to fall under a number of guidelines, which means dockets will not be unreasonably burdened. Besides, the supposition that criminal convictions are more important than truth is paradoxical to the foundation of the judicial system.

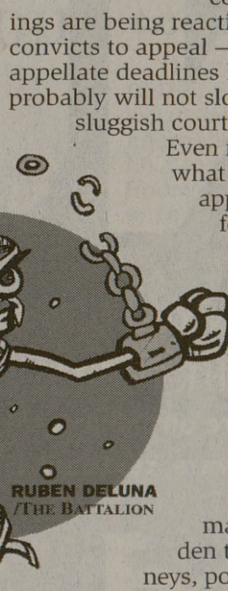
There always is the fear that allowing appeals will increase the possibility of an overly heavy burden on judges. But assuming that case loads would increase drastically by allowing convicts to appeal may be an erroneous assumption. The commission advises that prosecutors allow convicts to ask for appeals but make no guarantees on the success of the appeals. The basis of the each appeal is still considered on its merits and the case's initial evidence, not only the new DNA evidence. A new appeal does not



BEVERLY MIRELES

LEGAL ISSUES Part 4 of 5

DNA evidence: Should courts allow genetic evidence after trials are over?



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guarantee an overturned conviction.

The committee's executive director, Chris Asplen, has admitted as much to "Court TV". According to an Associated Press article, he told the network that there are many cases in which the DNA evidence would have no real effect on the original verdict.

However, in cases where DNA evidence would clearly alter the initial decision, Asplen said "the prosecutor should not object on a statute of limitations grounds."

Therefore, the opponents of the commission's findings are being reactionary. Allowing convicts to appeal — even after the appellate deadlines have expired — probably will not slow an already sluggish court system.

Even if courts are somewhat burdened by the appeals, law enforcers should realize that bogus convictions are more of a detriment to justice than overwhelming case loads. After all, there is no statute of limitations on the truth. Retrying cases may feel like a burden to district attorneys, police officers and other law enforcers, but if these officials are willing to settle for anything less than the truth, perhaps they were not meant for legal professions.

And people should remember that the presumption of innocence is one of the basic structural principles in the legal system, much in the same

way that the Hippocratic Oath is fundamental to the medical profession. The burden of proof lies on plaintiffs to prove the guilt of defendants, not on defendants to prove their own innocence.

If new DNA weakens the prosecution's arguments from the prior trial, prosecutors have not made a convincing case, and the convict deserves a retrial anyway.

As Asplen said, "[DNA] isn't like an alibi witness coming out of nowhere." DNA evidence is a reliable source, when properly collected and stored. Scientist and deputy director of the commission, Lisa Forman, said DNA is often used in cases such as rapes because of its impartiality.

"The science involved is blind to the adversary system," Forman said in *The New York Times*. "This is the most dispassionate type of evidence."

Those contesting the purpose of the proposal do not argue with DNA's reliability, but they obviously are discounting the usefulness of such a tool. DNA evidence will maximize the benefits of DNA in legal proceedings, rather than uselessly hindering cases.

To date, retrials triggered by DNA evidence have resulted in the release of 67 people (62 in the United States, 5 in Canada), according to the Innocence Project, a group at the Cardozo School of Law that attempts to overturn convictions using DNA evidence.

If DNA evidence has already affected the lives of 67 wrongly convicted people, releasing them from an undeserved punishment, imagine the affects it could have on the multitudes of prisoners across the nation.

Law enforcement not obliged to using DNA evidence in appeals would be better off remembering that it is better to let a guilty man go free than to have an innocent one suffer.

Convictions may look favorable to justice on the front page of a newspaper, but if they do not reflect justice, then they are of no use.

It is in everyone's best interests if prosecutors bring the guilty to justice. And with the power of DNA, justice can be served unequivocally.

Beverly Mireles is a junior microbiology major.