

GFC favours nine-point grading system

General Faculties Council Monday voted overwhelmingly in favour of the present nine-point marking system at the University of Alberta.

Results of the preferential ballot were released Tuesday, following Monday's GFC meeting at which a wide range of proposals for marking systems were debated.

This probably kills further discussion of alternatives to the nine-point system.

Other proposals on the ballot were a three-point, four point, five-point, pass/fail and a percentage systems.

"I haven't heard anything more today to support that a change in the system was worth it," said George Baldwin, dean of arts.

"Any change in the system would be too costly in terms of energy and time at university," said Baldwin.

The U of A has employed a nine-point grading system, since 1966. This system is unique in North America and has been criticised by students and faculty members.

"All other marking systems have been tried with equal

imperfections," said Joseph Cahill, a philosophy professor.

"The issue is who does the marking and the knowledge one has of the system."

Ed Daniel, pharmacology professor and a member of the committee which recommended the nine-point system four years ago, said the same misconceptions about the system still exist.

Daniel maintained the advantages of the system have been achieved.

One such advantage was an attempt to better distribute marks.

Daniel's contention was supported by U of A Registrar Alex Cairns, who said that since 1967-68, eight and nine grades have increased from eight to 16.9 percent, while failing marks have dropped from 13 per cent to 7.8.

Of the new systems proposed, Robert Buck's received the most support. Buck, a classics prof, favored the British system which rates students first, second, or third class; the latter a bare pass.

According to Buck, this would be better than a pass/fail

system because it retains grants and scholarships.

Juanita Chambers, professor of educational psychology, supported Buck's proposal because "it allows for difference in the quality of performance."

But Chambers noted that the success of any system depends on how it is applied by professors.

A chief opponent to the nine-point system, was Robert Curtis, a former GFC member who called for this meeting last January.

Curtis said profs don't understand the present system.

"The system changes from faculty to faculty yet it is supposed to contribute to conformity," said Curtis.

He supported a pass/fail/honours system in which no credit would be given for failing marks. According to his proposal, promotion would be determined by credit for each individual course rather than an average of courses.

The present service, he said, tends to be statistically invalid.

"The more grades you have, the higher the probability that the statistics are invalid."

With the pass/fail, the scholarships would be given to people who need them and prizes for academic excellence.

A.D. Fisher, who combined his proposal with Curtis', said the nine-point system is being misused as long as it compares work between faculties.

Peter Flynn, grad students' president, argued that students should choose how they are marked.

"I don't believe you can satisfy all people because they come to university with different goals," Flynn said.

"North American universities shield students from responsibility for their actions," said Flynn.

Gerald Fridman, dean of law, charged that Flynn's proposal "smacks of anarchy"

and joked that it "could bring about acts of negligence against faculty members for deciding the wrong way."

Supporting this, Provost Al Ryan agreed that the pass/fail system could lead to a "disastrous" mistake.

E.J. Rose, chairman of the English department, pointed out that the grade-point system is nothing more than a "reportorial convenience", not necessarily an indication of a student's worth.

The consensus of the meeting was that no marking system is perfect and they seem to fall in and out of favour.

"I understand that my daughter in high school is going back to the percentage system which my parents used 55 years ago," said Ross MacNab, physical education professor.

Students converge on U to discuss national union

Delegates from across Canada will discuss policy for a national students union at the U of A, Oct 18-21.

The fledgling National Union of Students was founded last year at a conference in Ottawa. Halifax was the site of the union's first meeting in May.

The open meetings will be held in the General Faculties Council chambers in University Hall.

Some student leaders believe it has a chance to be effective, although other attempts at a national union have failed.

"I think it's legitimate," says George Mantor, SU president.

"Look at the possibilities of a body of 250,000 students. The Federal government will have to listen when looking at that large a bloc of voters."

Trying to get agreement on sore issues may be difficult. But it's probably student finance, says Mantor.

Such groups as the Ontario Federation of Students, aren't convinced the NUS will be an improvement over what they already have.

The impetus for the union came from the University of British Columbia, which had the largest delegation at the Ottawa meeting.

A constitution was drawn up at that meeting and was later ratified in Halifax.

One of the important topics to be discussed is how much to charge for fees.

"We must hold a

referendum to see whether the U of A students want to join," says Pat Delaney, SU academic vice-president.

Delaney estimates it could cost each student 30 to 40 cents.

It appears that most of the universities are awaiting the outcome of the Edmonton meeting before deciding whether to support the union.

Universities in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces have been reluctant to join but they will attend the conference.

"I think it is the only way we will get somewhere with the provincial and federal governments on such issues as student financing. These can be dealt with by everyone," says Delaney.

On the other hand, the federal government would prefer to deal with one body, not 15, he added.

Besides being a potential political force, the union would also be a clearing house for information on such matters as student loans and budgets.

This information could be sent to Ottawa and be available on request from other members of the union, Delaney suggested.

Like any other new organization, the NUS faces such problems as funding and policy. The composition of the central committee also has to be decided.

According to the HUS constitution, representatives to the central committee would be elected by each province.

"I think the U of A can be a forerunner in this union," said Mantor. "We haven't that much to gain from it but we can provide input to help other universities."

So far, the U of A students' union has contributed about \$1500 toward the new union.

New program could mean loans to North Garneau

A new housing program now before parliament would entitle the University of Alberta to loans of up to \$5,000 for renovating houses in North Garneau.

Doug Roche, MP for Edmonton Strathcona, has said that the North Garneau situation is "just the type of situation the act is designed for."

The program, called Residential Rehabilitation Assistance, would provide up to \$5,000 per house, and as much

as half the amount would be forgiven.

It is included under the national Housing Act.

Those eligible for the assistance include non-profit corporations and co-operatives (under which the university applies), homeowners earning \$11,000 and landlords who agree to rent controls.

Under the program, priority would be given to repair of the housing structure and upgrading of the plumbing, electrical and heating systems.

In addition, the university

could obtain funds under the program for conversion of existing properties.

The program states that the nature and quality of repair work should lengthen the life of the property about 15 years.

"This program defeats any arguments that the rehabilitation of houses in North Garneau isn't economically feasible," said Jim Tanner, president of the North Garneau tenants association.

"We could get \$2,500 cash free. "Unbelievable," Tanner said, "I couldn't have written the program any better myself."



Experimental classrooms - a new learning concept. see story on page 3

photo by Bob Goethe

Power out in Ed building

Classes in the Education Building were cancelled Wednesday afternoon after power was cut off about noon. A break in the steamline occurred near an electrical vault causing the transformers to short out.

Clive Collar, electrical supervisor for the physical plant, said that the damage to the transformer was slight and the power would be restored at about 6 p.m.

Power was out in the old building but the new addition was not affected and work continued as normal.

Classes are back to normal today.

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