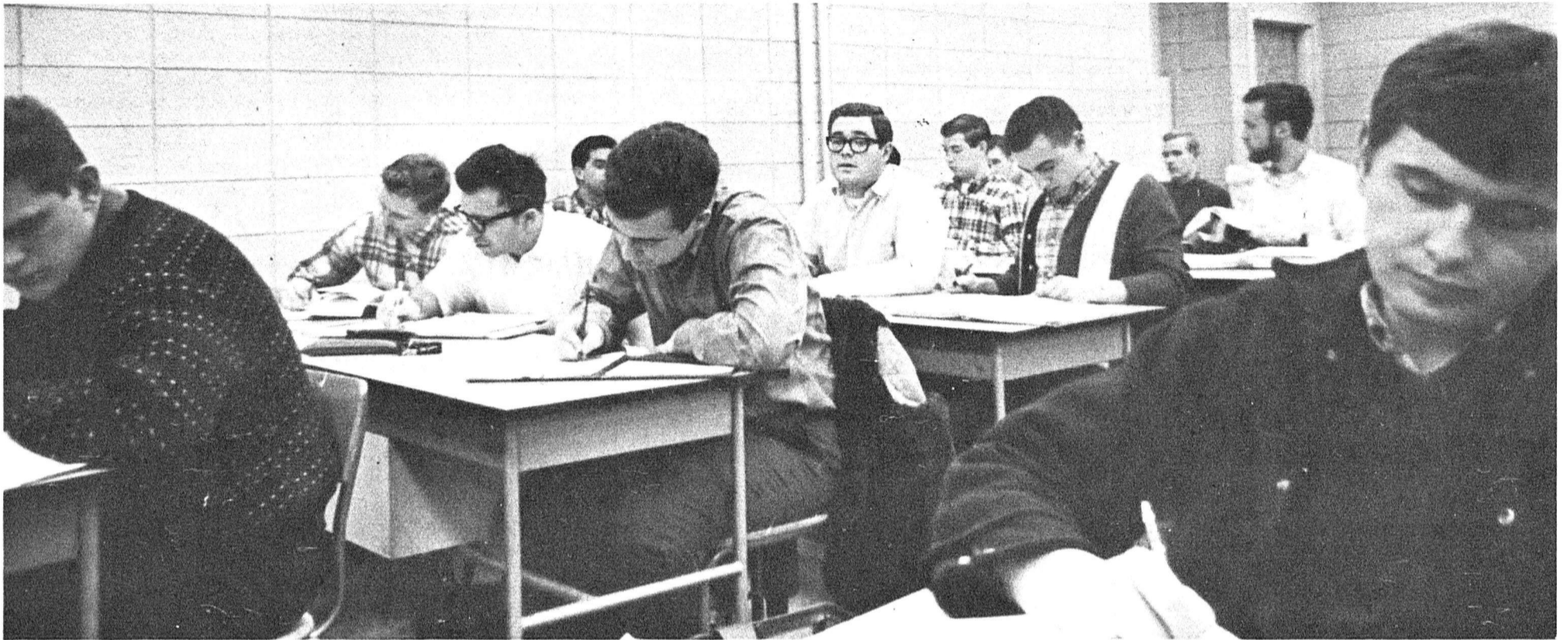


Exams—for the better



YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED THIS SITUATION AT LEAST ONCE

. . .did you like it? — Did you benefit? — Did you write everything down?

At least four professors would like to see the demise of exams as only part of a complete change in the way students are evaluated (grading is for eggs, you know).

Professors Darryl Butler of the department of English, Ted Kemp, Philosophy, Robert Hughes, Sociology, and A. D. Fisher, Anthropology, comment on the value of term work, and their far-reaching idealizations of a new evaluation system. Several even envisioned a new system of leaning altogether.

Feature by Alan Douglass

First, the question of those mighty levellers, the major exams. Should they exist?

All four said these exams were useful only for some subjects. Prof. Fisher mentioned Chemistry courses, where "All you have to do is teach a formula, then see if the students understood it." Prof. Hughes said, "They cause too much cramming."

"More harm than good is done by major exams to arts courses," said Prof. Butler, "because they hang millstones around students' necks. The focal point becomes the final exam, and not the course ideas. Exams give professors fantastic power, which puts unnecessary fear into students."

Prof. Fisher described the present major exam system as "a barbaric situation, like jails or asylums. I think it is criminal to sit 400 people in a poorly-lighted and poorly-heated ice arena, then make them hold up their hands to use the bathroom, and forbid them to smoke or drink coffee."

What kind of major exams do these professors recommend?

All except Prof. Hughes set essays. Prof. Fisher summed up the attitude with "I think that anything in university which dehumanizes students is bad (for example, multiple-choice exams)."

"In two of my classes," Prof. Hughes said, "the students make up their own exams, and then grade both the questions and the answers."

How do students react to major exams?

Prof. Butler summed up the reaction most succinctly. "Students have been so lobotomized by the school system that they think exams are decrees of Almighty God."

Prof. Hughes agreed, saying, "I think most students like the exam system the way it is, because they have learned to succeed at it. This is because, a lot of the time, it costs students to be original."

Prof. Kemp said, "Every professor should ask himself whether exams interfere with the on-going process of education in a university."

Prof. Fisher said, "In 1965 they carried four kids out of the anthropology 202 exam, and every year the arts faculty hears from student counselling that there are four or five students who will not be able to write finals because of the strain involved. Exams make students cynical," he added. "A student can drop pills all night, scrape a 40 per cent or a 50 per cent on the exam the next day, and pass. What kind of an education is that?"

But major exams form only part of the system by which a student is evaluated. In many courses most evaluation is done through term work. What mark weighting is used by these professors?

All four said they used between 50-50 and 70-30 in favor of term assignments.

Prof. Kemp stated the attitude of

many professors by saying, "I prefer more term work emphasis, because in this way you can make term work a part of the learning process. The discussion of errors helps understanding, but on a final exam, this is impossible."

What kind of term work is assigned?

Prof. Butler assigns two term papers and two or three student reports to his English classes during the term. "I find it better to have student-student discussions than to have student-professor discussions."

Prof. Kemp said that he would hold no term exams this year. He would assign only essays, the topics of which students would choose themselves. They would consult him on whether the topic was applicable if they were in doubt. "But this evaluation by essay might put an undue emphasis on a student's ability to write, so if a student wants to replace his essay with a report, or do a research project, this is fine with me."

In one of Prof. Hughes' classes, a "task force" gets together to create a report, and can request to be graded in any way they want: oral class presentation, submission to the professor or simply stating what they feel they deserve and seeing who agrees.

Prof. Fisher said that it depended on the course. In his own field, anthropology, he said, "You have to know the facts—what has been done in the past. Students come out of a rigidly structured grade XII, and if they find no structure in their 200 level courses, they blow their minds. I don't think you should throw the teaching to the students (oral reports) at this level. I find papers the best way for me to evaluate a student."

Professors are often accused of favoritism in their student evaluations. Asked, "Do your personal opinions of students help or hinder their marks?" All four professors lamented the impersonality of their large classes.

Prof. Butler has 55 students, and said, "They are hard to get to know. I wish they would come and see me. It is much easier to give a mark to a student if he has asked questions in class or has come to the office."

Prof. Kemp has over 300 students. "What bugs me," he said, "is do I give an unfair advantage or disadvantage to students whom I have come to know personally? A professor should ideally know all of his students. With 300 students, it might be fairer not to know any of them. At least that way we could make fair comparisons, which is what evaluation is all about."

Prof. Hughes said, "I don't know. It could involve whether people agree with you or not. Some profs mark harder on those they know, and some mark easier."

Prof. Fisher said that it is a documented psychological fact that the



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