

OUT
TO
LUNCH

DON'T
KNOW
FOR
HOW
LONG

Deans out to lunch — Registrar

by Rick Rofihe

Marks have always truly meant nothing, but now they mean even less. This year, the archaic and meaningless "percentages" system was scrapped and the ancient and meaningless "letter" system rushed in to fill the gap.

What does this change mean? Almost absolutely nothing. Go to the registrar's office, smile, and ask them what a "B" is worth. "Is it worth an 80, a 70, or two queens, a pawn and a rook?" "A 'B' isn't worth anything," they will reply. "A 'B' is a 'B' is a 'B'. An 'A' is an 'A', a 'C' is a 'C' and a 'D' is a 'D', and an aardvark is an eater of ants. There are no equivalents."

Going to apply for a job? Advancing to graduate studies? Hopping into law or medicine? Transferring to another university? What will your marks mean to them without an equivalent? Is a "C" at Dal. same as "C" at the University of Alberta?

You see, the faculty scrambled the golden egg-grades. Sure, they meant well. De-emphasize marks they said. Cut competition. Socialism forever. Good then — A plus, A, A minus, B plus, B, B minus, C, D, Fs and F.

But did the professors give examinations that could be examined according to calibre, using letters rather than percentages? Generally, no, as

most marked with numbers and then translated them into letters. But what scale was used for translation? As of press time, the Registrar's office maintains that there is no official means of translating letters into numbers and back again.

In actuality, there are several such scales of translation. The Chemistry Department has one. The Music Department has one. English professors each have one, as do Economics professors. But not the same one.

As the faculty has refused to legislate on the matter, the individual departments were forced to make their own. Even then, some departments passed this option onto the individual professors, which leaves the university with an abundance of letter-number equivalency systems.

Of course, on the transcript, only the letter grades are shown, for it comes from the registrar's office, which only follows orders and is thus foot-loose and number-free.

However, most students do find out their number-marks for at least some subjects. Most professors keep such records to average them for a final mark, which is then converted into a letter grade. With the profusion of scales, it is definitely possible that if both number and letters

were shown on transcript, it could look like this:

Subject #1 — 60 — D; Subject #2 — 65 — C; Subject #3 — 65 — B minus; Subject #4 — 70 — C; Subject #5 — 55 — C.

But then, it would be a visible absurdity and that's not the way the university works. It deals in illusions. (A wave of the hand, and there's hundreds of students in one classroom. A touch of the magic wand, and they are absorbed by the lecture. A few drops of magic dust and they're degree-holding hopefuls.) Now the mark mirage has been self-exposed, not only as arbitrary, but as absurd. Any adaptive action based on an arbitrary, absurd, irrelevant graded marking system that exists in a vacuum is similarly condemned. What is needed is a completely fresh framework based not on knowledge for competition's sake, but on useful knowledge for knowledge's sake. For people's sake.

What should one do then? Something? Something. Nothing. Nothing? Once one starts to participate in the illusion one is part of it.

(NOTE: Something is being done, but I don't know what. I asked the registrar, and he said the Deans were out to lunch talking about it, but weren't back yet. That's where the headline comes from.)

Economic council meets exploitation

OTTAWA (CUP) — "Poor may be subsidizing rich students, educators told", read some of the headlines in the daily press last week.

The story was treated as another astounding discovery by the Economic Council of Canada, arrived at by unknown and complex calculations somewhere in the bowels of the Federal bureaucracy.

Yet one of the rallying cries of the student power movement of years past was universal accessibility.

An analysis of the Canadian Post-Secondary Student Population done by the Canadian Union of Students in 1964 pointed out that 28 per cent of Canadian university students came from families earning less than \$5,000 per year, but 52 per cent of the families in Canada earned less than \$5,000.

And most students who fought for "unac" (universal accessibility) could have told you that since the government paid for 80 to 90 per cent of higher education, with eighty per cent of the taxes coming from individuals, and since most of those individuals were not too far from the poverty line; then there was something not too just about 70 per cent of university students being the sons and daughters of a relatively elite group.

So finally, years later, Arthur Smith, Chairman of the EEC is telling us "The great bulk of tax revenues are derived from families with low incomes . . . as much as two-thirds of all the tax revenues available for financing post secondary education may well be coming from households with gross incomes of less than \$10,000 a year."

"Higher education may be tending to become a mechanism for transferring income — from poor families to rich families," he said.

"May be tending to become," indeed!

And, as the Carter Report on Taxation pointed out in the mid sixties, although 80 per cent of tax revenue comes from people, "only 12 per cent of total funds used to finance investment in U.S. subsidiaries in 1964 came from the U.S."

That's quite a chunk of money, and things haven't changed much since then.

And so, the radicals pointed out, the poor are not only paying for the "rich kids" to go to school but for the foreign economic takeover of their country.

People began to wonder whether universal accessibility was not either impossible (since the people who pay taxes, as opposed to the corporations, have no control over the government that distributes them) or irrelevant anyway, since, having given up a number of working years, and paid a number of dollars for a degree, there are no longer any jobs for the degree-holder to occupy.

But the EEC issued a press release, and the daily press takes it as a serious and wondrous revelation — of something that two thirds of the population has always known. They're the two thirds whose children are least likely to make it in university.

"We need some kind of system so that no young person with the ability and motivation for higher education is denied his chance because he is short of funds," Smith said, like the Unac crusaders of old.

So he suggests that university students will have to pay an increasing proportion of the cost of education through tuition fees. But the parents of those now 'denied their chance' are already paying those costs and they're not getting anything out of it.

Their money built the buildings and paid the administrators and teachers. And now, they'll be told that their tax money wasn't enough. They'll be told that education is an individual and privatized good. They'll be told that they, as individuals will have to finance their own individual learning either now, or from the profits of a job four or five years from now, if they can find one.

And if they haven't already mortgaged their lives for the next generation just getting through the years of income-less "education."

Halifax poor:

"We want action"

"We want more jobs."
"We want better housing."
"We want action!"
"All power to the people!"

we have solidarity."

Armed with these demands and others, about 100 people marched from the Halifax Neighbourhood Centre to the MacDonald Bridge to meet demonstrators from Dartmouth, and continued through downtown Halifax to Province House and City Hall. The march was part of a national day of demonstrations organized as a result of the recent Poor People's conference.

The march was organized by the Halifax and Dartmouth Welfare Rights groups and other citizen groups to point out the many problems poor people in this country face.

"This is only the beginning," said spokesman Dave Block. "For the 100 people here there are another 100 who are waking up. This demonstration shows

At Province House, the demonstrators marched around the building, but no one came out to meet them. There Block said on behalf of the crowd, "We are a minority of people, but we are no larger than the minority that rules us."

Mayor O'Brien was on the steps of City Hall when the demonstrators arrived there. He said that he did not know what their demands were, so Block read their statement (see pg. 1). O'Brien only said that the city would "consider" the demands that were the city's responsibility.

Block and other demonstrators were pleased with the march. He called it "one of the better marches Halifax-Dartmouth has seen."

Meetings are being held this week to plan further actions and programs.