

students, profs accept stanines

Grades—the cutting edge of the university—are the best method of academic assessment, and are likely to stay. Though there is no campus-wide or even intradepartmental standard, the system is pretty fair and is generally approved.

These are some of the results of a random group of faculty members interviewed recently in a campus survey.

"As long as grade point averages are required for later assessment by graduate schools or employers, the University has an obligation to grade, somehow," said J. C. MacKenzie, a professor in philosophy.

In an effort to determine what standards of undergraduate assessment are applied to individual cases, instructors from different disciplines were asked to elaborate. The responses, though everywhere difficult to formulate, were unanimous in that there is no consensual standard.

"There is no university policy," said D. B. Scott, the university ombudsman. "There is certainly no quota," replied J. B. Meekison, Chairman of the Department of Political Science. "Different professors teach differently. Some give lectures; others hold seminars." Grades are differently assessed because the "emphasis is placed on term work". He personally gives students "a great variety in choice of term projects".

But how, specifically, are grades assigned?

For MacKenzie, a pass grade is deserved by a student who reveals "primarily an understanding of a problem as set by the instructor. A critical grasp would gain a higher grade."

An instructor's standards, he went on to say, is a "personal conception, picked up from one's own background."

"The setting of exams is important,"

explained Scott. "The instructor must know what to test for, and how to do it." The test must set "reasonable goals", and should not have a "spread of marks, such that there is a low average". This reflects an "inability to test".

Often stressed was the desire that there should be an equitable distribution of grades. If not, it becomes "the responsibility of the departmental chairman to investigate," said Meekison. "The student must get a fair deal."

Some instructors give high grades rarely, if at all. In those cases, "the instructor may not be aware of what the student doesn't know," said Scott. He may be acting psychologically "to protect himself".

Conversely, when high grades are given too liberally, it is "unfair and dishonest," he said.

How is the stanine system received? Most instructors didn't object to it.

"It's a pretty good system," said Meekison, in a typical response, but like all systems, it "can't be perfect."

Originally set up to allow instructors more leeway than in the 4-point or ABCD systems and to fill the reluctantly utilized

85% - 100% gap that existed in the old percentile system, the stanine has indeed resulted in a general rise of grade point averages. (Minutes, GFC meeting, November 6, 1972).

Are the students happy with it?

Complaints and enquiries are not "abnormally" high at Student's Help, said Help-er Kerry Love, even for this post-exam time. Nor were they at the Ombudsman's office.

Of the complaints received, the biggest number appear to be about "translating grades from the percentile to the stanine," said Scott, "say where a 79% is equal to only a stanine 6." No correlation was intended between the two systems.

Also, students complain that the grading system is either not outlined at the beginning of a course or, if so, it is not adhered to in some instances. As worked presently it appears to be a mixed system between marking and grading.

Dr. Scott went on to emphasize that it is University policy to permit students to review with their professors "how the grade was arrived at." The professor may be reluctant, but he must do it, he said.

"It is the student's right."

The stanine is currently weathering some flak on GFC.

"I sense a great number of dissatisfied people," said Rob Curtis, Law undergraduate representative on GFC. "The system is not working properly. Some professors can't use the system, simply interpolating the percentile range to the stanine."

Conversely, there are obvious inter-faculty discrepancies, he said. "In Engineering, National Research Council grants are given to bright students by Ottawa committees. So in graduate engineering there are higher student grades than in Law," he said.

"There should be an open search by GFC for what the Sub-committee (on grades) found," he said.

(The *ad hoc* Committee to Study the Nine-Point Grading System concluded that the system was all right, but that professors must learn how to use it.)

Alternate marking systems, like Pass-Fail, and self-evaluation are being tried out in some areas on campus.

(Self-evaluation involves submitting a grade to the instructor at the end of the course, which may be applied to part or all the course, if the instructor agrees with it.)

Such a scheme was introduced last year in the Department of Recreation, but through "administrative difficulties", was not well received, said Bruce Walkey, a Recreation major.

In the more traditional disciplines, these ideas met with scant approval.

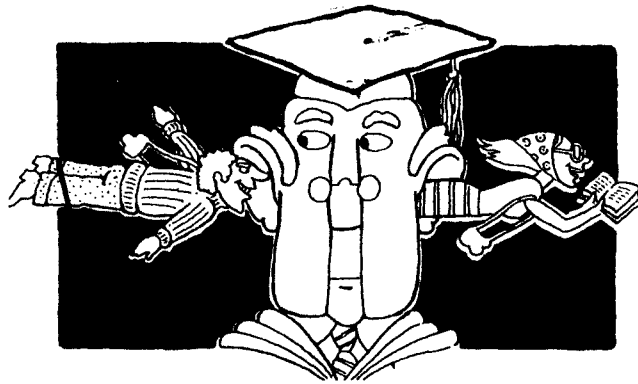
"The nature of science subjects does not allow for Pass-Fail," said Kuspira.

"In Physics, it is not applicable at all," said Scott, himself a physicist.

Although granting Pass-Fail as having "a lot to be said for it," MacKenzie asked: "how are Pass-Fail marks to be evaluated later? Even in an accompanying letter of recommendation the student's rank would have to be somehow given."

Despite the University's conservatism (or because of it?) radically new grading systems are being applied elsewhere in the province. At Calgary's Mount Royal College, for instance, students contract with their professors about their grade, before the course begins.

When GFC convenes to pursue this topic, debate should not be lacking.



Canada: parallels to repression

With the return of Juan Peron, imminent national elections in March, and further "authentications" of Martin Bormann's scamperings through the pampas, Argentina has been uncharacteristically prominent in international news lately.

What seldom reaches the press, however, is the treatment of Argentinian political "dissidents," says Daniel Zadunaisky, a third-year medical student in Buenos Aires currently touring North America as a representative of the "Argentine Movement for the Liberation of Political Prisoners in Argentina."

According to Zadunaisky, who spoke here on January 26, a special set of laws exist for persons advocating ideologies counter to that of Argentina's military regime and for strikers, regardless of their cause.

One such law is the so-called "Anti-Communist Law," which entails arrest for possession of political publications or simply someone's volunteered opinion that one is a communist. Trials for such crimes are

handled "harshly and in haste" in private courts with sentences never less than two years.

Another is the "State of Siege" (entirely similar, as was pointed out by a member of the audience, to the War Measures Act) which invalidates the constitution and gives the President supreme authority to arrest anyone without charges or a trial for an indefinite length of time.

There have been instances of people being held for over two years upon such conditions, Zadunaisky charged. Political activists, he added, have a habit of disappearing from the streets, only to be found several days later, dead and mutilated.

Equally harrowing was Zadunaisky's description of prisons for "especially dangerous" political prisoners. At one point, a condemned ship was bought by the government and "converted" into a floating prison (major conversion—portholes barred). Reports garnered from parents of prisoners being held on the ship indicated that cells were cold and

humid, measured two metres square, had two beds, a table, a closet, no hot water, toilets which did not flush, and nonexistent medical care.

Eventually it was closed due to protests from the "Committee of Parents of Political Prisoners," the prisoners were transferred to a maximum security prison, which sported cells of two to three metres, one small window, no letters, papers or medical attention, absolute silence among prisoners and fifteen minutes exercise and two bathroom privileges daily.

An escape attempt from this prison in August, 1972, ended with the recapture of 19 prisoners who surrendered upon being promised they would suffer no retribution. Five days later, they were awakened at three in the morning, lined up in front of their cells, told "now you're going to see what repression really is," and machine-gunned. This account was given by three men who lived through the massacre.

Zadunaisky told of a four months pregnant woman who was sexually molested and electrically prodded for her dangerous political activities. Such "repression" is legal under the State of Siege Act. He added that the "feminist movement in Argentina is very insipid."

Parents of prisoners estimate that from 1,000 to 1,200 Argentinians are being held under these conditions today. Zadunaisky himself is uncertain of his reception when he returns to Argentina in early February.

His entrance in Miami at the beginning of January was marked by a week's detainment and questioning by the FBI. (Typical questions: are you a communist; a subversive? Are you planning to overthrow America; the Argentinian republic?)

The Edmonton committee hopes to arouse public concern over the treatment of political dissidents/prisoners during the pre-election period, when, it is felt, the government is "concerned about its image and particularly vulnerable to pressure from the US and other prestige countries."

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grad fears allayed

The secretary of the Graduate Students' Association is optimistic that the "humaneness" of most departments and two reforms which are already planned will protect grad students from bearing the brunt of any budget cuts made this year.

Peter Flynn predicted yesterday that a motion from the Deans' council to raise the minimum and maximum limits for graduate teaching assistantships and graduate service assistantships and a G.S.A. request a guarantee that no grad student will be fired to make room for someone new (except in cases of incompetence) will "stabilize" the grad students' financial position.

Both matters will be presented to the Board of Governors, presumably in the near future.

Flynn said that the figures published in last Tuesday's Gateway have little significance because departments are free

to allocate the grants they get in any way they wish. Individual departments can set their own pay levels for grads within the limits set for the whole university; and to decide how many students they will hire.

"Most departments are very responsible and very humane," Flynn said. But he admitted that in the "exceptional cases" where a department decides to cut the number of G.T.A.'s and G.S.A.'s (as English did last year), the G.S.A. is "damn near totally powerless to say how many they should hire."

"We're not totally powerless because anyone can go talk to the Board."

All the same, he reported that the G.S.A. has decided to "hold in abeyance" their requests to be recognized as an official bargaining agency for grad students. "We just aren't convinced that we will have to go to that much trouble," he said. "The Board seems willing to talk on an informal basis."

error?



The University is presently advertising for a Personnel Officer to "recruit clerical-secretarial and other female non-academic staff for all departments of the University."

The ad, a contravention of the spirit if not the letter of the new provincial Individual Rights Protection Act, appeared in Friday's *Journal*. But Mrs. Curtis of the University Personnel Office said on Monday that it does not reflect a University policy.

In fact, she said, the university will interview men who apply for clerical positions and presently employs one male clerk typist in the Department of Music.

"The 'female' in the ad refers to the fact that the majority of applicants for clerical jobs are females," Curtis said. "But I guess the female shouldn't have been in there."

She agreed to discuss the matter with the Personnel Director and with Personnel Officer L.W. Davidson who were responsible for the wording of the ad.