

Opinion

Dragos Ruiu

Marks no measure



'Tis the season to be grumpy, for it's marks time at the U of A.

Every year at this time, I am amazed at how utterly unrepresentative marks are. You can get great marks in classes where you are lost about the course material, and lousy marks where you actually understand the subject.

Most of the problem lies with the attempt our professors make to judge our worthiness in the two hour period that constitutes a final exam. Some professors mistakenly set tests that are impossible to finish in the allotted time. They believe that your speed is representative of your comprehension.

What a crock! Sure, those kinds of test will check if you memorized the material and you can be an automaton, blithely plodding ahead and doing the problems by rote. God forbid that we should want to think about the problems.

Then other professors use questions that are like puzzles, where your knowledge of an arcane section of the material is the key to doing the whole question. Uh huh, that's a good test of your knowledge; we might as well pick marks out of a hat.

Then there is one of my favorite kinds of exam: the one that makes you recite sections of the textbook verbatim, and the professor docks you marks when you phrase something differently. An absolutely infallible judgement of understanding...

Mind you, I've written some pretty fair exams, where my mark has indicated my knowledge, for better or worse. Unfortunately the exceptions stand out and leave a bitter taste.

But university is supposed to be a learning experience, and I've learned that if I want to judge a person's capability to perform a task, his university transcript will give me utterly no indication of this.

The Gateway

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Impression erroneous

The U of A Students' Union Telephone Directory, produced each year, is now available at Information desks on campus. The Directory, while being a marked improvement from the 1987-88 Directory, is not without flaws.

Anna Kwan (*The Gateway*, Dec. 1) points out that the cover photo is inappropriate. Unfortunately, in a rush to have the Directory out in first term, less care was taken in choosing this photo than was necessary. It is not the intention of the Students' Union to promote or condone the consumption of alcohol in places other than licensed establishments. Hopefully, students will not be left with an erroneous impression.

The Students' Union Executive Committee is examining ways to improve the Directory for 1989-90. If you have any suggestions, or have other concerns with this Directory, please stop by 259 SUB and let me know, or call me at 432-4236.

Paul LaGrange
President

WHY DO I NEED TO STUDY THIS.....? IS THIS REALLY GOING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN MY LIFE?



Letters

Deferral policy boneheaded

There is no way to sugar this pill, no way to be tactful about this subject, so I'll just come right out and say it: University policy on exam deferral sucks!

Two and a half weeks before exams started, I went to a set of pink sheets to get my schedule. As I wrote down my exam times, I was surprised and shocked to find that three of my exams were scheduled for Dec. 15, at 9 a.m., 12 p.m., and 3 p.m.

The next day I called the Associate Dean of Arts, Dr. Lynn Penrod, the person responsible for granting exam deferrals. After leaving several messages on each others' answering services, we finally got in touch, wherein she told me that the University will not grant a deferral for my reason. Dr. Penrod gave me the following rationales as to why I shouldn't be granted a deferral. Allow me to blow each of them apart.

Argument #1: "If your exam schedule is that important to you, then you could have looked in the program planner back in September when you registered, all the exam times are listed in there." (This seems to be the strongest line of defense anybody can come up with.)

This argument is sheer and utter garbage for several reasons: First and foremost, when choosing courses, what might some of the things which influence a student's selection include? What he needs for his major? His minor? What he needs to fulfill his core requirements? The professor? The likelihood of receiving a good grade? When the classes run? How many sections are available? Every student at this university knows how difficult it can be to get into a particular course, and when the computerized voice on the phone tells you "impossible to get into 372" has been added to your timetable..." I doubt your next step would be to say "hmmm, I'd better rush right over to my program planner and be sure this course doesn't mess up my exam

schedule too much." Besides, when have those exam timetables ever been etched in stone? Schedules have been altered before, so I could have followed Dr. Penrod's advice, planned by entire timetable to give myself an agreeable exam schedule, and still ended up with three on the same day.

Argument #2: "I have 6000 students under my responsibility, if I did it for you, I'd have to do it for everyone else, and things might degenerate to the point where every student simply wrote his exams whenever it was convenient."

Of 6000 students, I would guess maybe 200 at the very most had to write three in one day. I'm not asking for a free-for-all, just that some consideration be given to those who are stuck in a no-win situation.

Let's face it, no amount of preparedness could possibly compensate for the fact that by the time the third exam rolls around, you're mentally exhausted and unable to think efficiently. I defy any University official to tell me otherwise. I'm quite sure that most professors and administrators want to see as many of their students do as well as possible. However, these kinds of asinine policies do not lend themselves toward academic success.

Argument #3: "When I was in school, sometimes we wrote three exams in one day, all of them three hour exams and all hundred percent finals..."

Yeah, and my grandmother used to walk to school through ten feet of snow in fifty below weather. All I can say of this argument is any University Administration that would allow a travesty like that to occur is even more myopic than ours, and if Dr. Penrod and her peers sat passively without challenging that policy, then something somewhere was very wrong.

Dr. Penrod told me that no Associate Dean in any Faculty would grant a deferral for my reason and the only other way to do it is through a private arrangement with your professor which never reaches administration. Each of my professors whom

I approached said he/she was very sympathetic to my situation, and then proceeded to quote me chapter and verse of University policy. Essentially, I had been walking down a dead-end street all along. I wrote my three exams that Thursday and let me assure you, it's no day at the beach.

As a final suggestion, I was told to write down my complaints in a letter to Dr. Penrod, who would table the issue at the next Arts Administration meeting in January. I think I've gone one step further. My advice to you: if your April exams end up in such a pattern, don't take it lying down! Go see the Associate Dean of your Faculty and let them know what kind of joke is going on. Then you must put pressure on your individual professors who teach the courses, and appeal to them to do the right thing. We're not writing exams to show who has the best endurance or who best manages the stress of writing three exams in eight hours, we're writing to show what we know. Only by getting off our asses and challenging these bone-headed policies can we get back to doing exactly that.

Mark Sheckter
Arts II

Treatment criminal

On January 3, I entered the University Bookstore at which time my arm was grabbed by a police officer and I was told that I would have to leave my tote bag at the door.

I explained that it was not a tote bag — it was my purse. Now, while my purse is larger than a normal purse and is made out of cloth, I did purchase it in the handbag section of a department store and it has been strictly used as a purse.

I was told by the police officer that it would still have to be left in the front area.

Now as most of the readers already know, anyone can walk out with the items that you leave in the front area and there is no system for ensuring that students' items will not be stolen.