

Gateway

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Where is our system's integrity?

by Jim Tanner

The University of Alberta has a marking system based upon a bell curve competition instead of some concrete standard of performance. The results of this system are often unjust.

In some cases students who have given equal performance receive different marks in different classes. Often students of unequal performance receive equal marks.

When the General Faculties Council introduced this system in 1966, they wanted to develop a more "uniform distribution" of marks so that there could be some "comparability" between marks and different courses. This system has achieved only some of its goals. The problem is, however, that the academic integrity of the mark has been forfeited in the process. Marks are no longer given as an indication of your expertise in a field, but they are given as a comparison of you and your classmates. In some classes the level of the performance is low, causing the level of marks to be unjustly high. In other classes the level of the class will be high, so some profs lower the marks just to make the average for the course meet some unclear standard. Where is the integrity of such a system?

Marking should be based upon each individual's ability to handle the content of the course. There is a way to achieve this while still maintaining the university's nine point system. If the bell curve method is removed from the nine point system and the standard of marking is based

READER COMMENT

upon actual performance the marks will then reflect a true standard of performance. The comparability and distribution of marks should become standardized knowledge of the professors at this university.

If we are going to give marks that indicate excellence then surely we must first realize what excellence is. Instead of marking on the bell curve, profs should mark on the basis of each student's performance and how well the course material is known by that student.

The action required is to remove the bell curve from the policy of General Faculties Council and replace that policy with one that emphasizes the importance of marking on the basis of performance. Then the university will no longer be relieved of the responsibility of dealing honestly with its students. Only then will the University professors have to justify their own reasons for excellence. Students will then be assessed on the basis of their actual performance.

Students at the University of Alberta are not equal members of the academic community. They are subject to special disciplinary rules that do not apply to other members such as professors and administrators.

Students are also at the mercy of their professors when it comes to marking. Beyond the type of marking system there is another consideration. What

does a student do when he has been assessed unjustly? A student may talk to the chairman of the department. There is no other procedure.

The question of a Marking Appeal Board is an interesting one. If a Marking Appeal Board was established at this university, it would of necessity be a statement to the effect that professors do not always mark justly. Now everyone knows that profs do not always mark justly. So why is it that we do not have a Marking Appeal Board? This board would allow students and professors to discuss in open forums what they are pursuing. It would allow the university community as a whole to discuss what it believes excellence is, or should be.

Why don't we have marking appeal boards? Because profs at this university do not want their jurisdiction and decision formally questioned. Yet this is a prime responsibility of a democratic society. If we want to live in a democratic society let us decide together the direction that we want to go, and let us find out what the standard for marking is. What is the direction of this university and who are we serving?

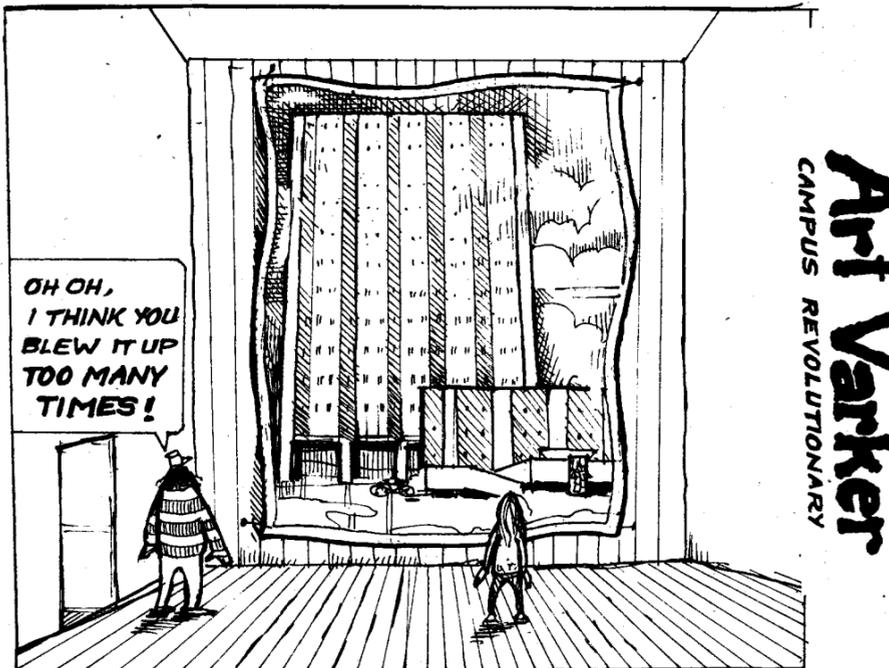
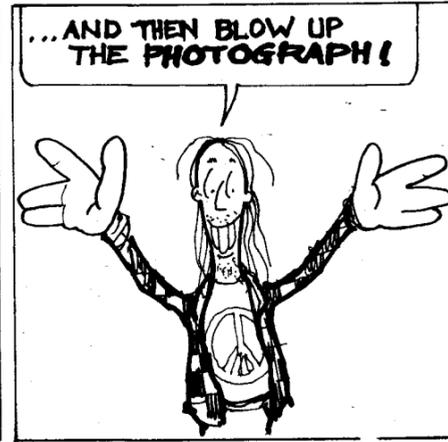
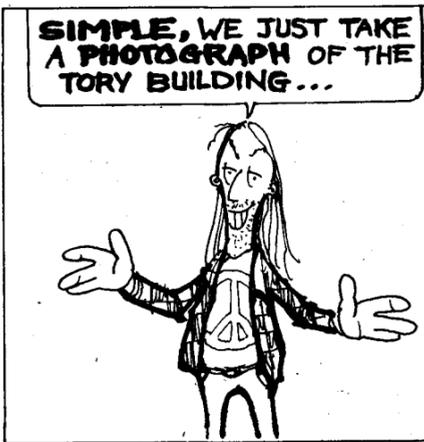
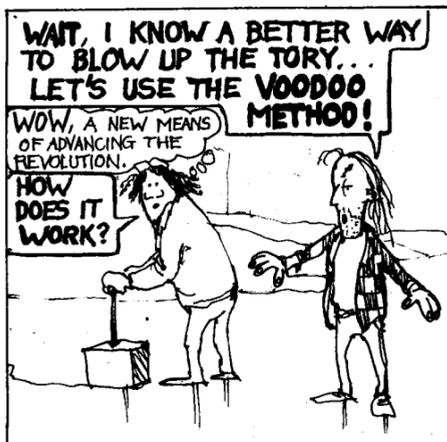
When students have marking system that pits each one of us against each other, we become too busy competing with one another to determine the direction we are going. We must change this system to one based on actual performance and coupled with a Marking Appeal Board, openly discuss what our performance, our excellence, and our university should be.

letters

Slob smokers

I was expecting flack from you slob smokers. Some of you went so far as to blow more smoke into my face (a sign of real intelligence). Some of you questioned my cause saying it was useless and not worth the newsprint it was printed on. All that I can say is I hope you could see through the smoke from your cigarettes that you were smoking while reading *the Gateway* and will have observed your silly arguments. Anybody who uses newspaper for rolling papers must be really dying for a smoke. Admit it, you smokers are to weak to quit.

Some of you felt deeply incensed about the article. It was an attack on you. You were being discriminated against, even downgraded. Well, you have just heard the beginning, the time has come for non-smokers to stand up for their rights. The time has come to tell smokers face to face (if you can stand up to it) and tell them that the great taste is not accepted by all people. Furthermore statistics have shown that a nonsmoker in a room full of smokers suffers from an adverse effect of an increased level of carbon monoxide in the blood due to the smoke in the air. Many organizations are intelligent enough to realize this harm and are now doing something about it. As of Tuesday, March 11, City Council has



Art Yarker
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