

# or worse?

longer one teaches, the more dialogue one has with a decreasing number of students." Dr. Fisher also warned, "If someone disagrees with you in class, you have to make damn sure you read his paper carefully, and your opinion doesn't stomp all over his." Remembering his day under professors, Dr. Fisher added, students have to play the student game—get to know the professor, and ask him questions or you automatically take ten marks off your average."

Many subjects this year have one or two huge lecture sections and a multitude of seminars or tutorials (eg. Economics 200). These four professors were asked if they had seminars in their courses, and if so, how useful were they for evaluating the student?

"I have no formal seminar," said Prof. Butler, "although I do invite my classes home twice a year for an evening of folk singing."

Prof. Kemp had no seminars either. "I find, though, that there is a movement in my classes for an opportunity to discuss in small groups issues brought out in class. I did not centrally organize the system, but I'm sorry that I didn't push a little harder for it. It's a hell of a lot better to have them talking about the topic instead of only reading books. I find that students do more outside reading and not less if they do not have the threat of a major exam."

Prof. Hughes said that last year he had a seminar in one of his courses. "I found it infinitely better. We assigned four books and discussed them. There was a term paper and a related final exam. As far as I'm concerned, discussing things in a small class is teaching. The rest is just processing, selecting, or playing games."

## The stanine system

Exams and term work, however, are deemed meaningless if they are not graded in some set way. Provost Ryan has described the administration's latest pet, the grade-point system, in the following way: A conscientious mathematics prof. can mark from 0-100 per cent, but a conscientious English professor could not fairly give marks under 30 per cent or over 90 per cent. This is the difference between positive and normative knowledge. The grade point lets the extremes of any subject's range be 1 and 9. This then allows the central comparison of marks between faculties in our complex university.

The professors were then asked "Can you (or do you) use the grade-point system in the way Provost Ryan described it?"

Prof. Butler said from his experience with other professors, he thought there were two widely differing views of the grade-point system. Some see it as a stanine or curved mark, while others see it as a method of converting percentages into another form. In the English department, he said, there is not an official definition, although the Registrar's Office and the department both circulate a percentage-to grade-point conversion table. (The tables strangely enough differed somewhat.) "At present, I am just mentally curving all marks when I feel I've been too tough." He said that he found 1's and 9's were easier to give than 30's and 90's. "I do feel, however, that the English Department is against the new grade-point system."

Prof. Kemp agreed that Provost Ryan's concept was useful for centralization, and especially for awards. He said a philosophy department meeting was held to explain this particular interpretation.

"In Sociology, there is no departmental policy" said Professor Hughes, "Interpretation is left up to the professors. In my view, any marking system is arbitrary at its best."

In Anthropology, there is no department

policy either. Said Prof. Fisher, "I do know, though, that the education faculty has a universal curve chart. This is ridiculous! How can you say that any one class will distribute in that way?"

After the professors had expressed their displeasure with the present system of marking, they were asked to idealize an evaluation system.

## Abolition of exams

Prof. Butler: "I'm in favor of total abolition of exams and marks. I'd like to see something comparable to Lethbridge, where you can take a number of pass-fail courses not counted on your average, but counting towards your degree. This lets students take courses they are not sure of, but in which they are interested."

Prof. Kemp's idealization was a system with no numerical grades. "There is a double standard now," he said. Some students (and even some professors) care more for the grade than for what is learned. The latter is obviously the more important. "The sad part is that, in this system, such people are quite correct." Kemp made it clear that a numerical system would always be useful in a subject of factual knowledge.

Prof. Hughes agreed with Professor Butler's idea of the pass-fail system. "I find marking a very depressing experience. It is extrinsic to the learning process."

Finally, the four were asked to idealize a teaching system. Prof. Butler thought having no marking system would completely change the teaching system. "First, instead of using university marks for industry, industry would have to make its own exams.

"Secondly, those students who are not benefiting from the university (the 'meal-ticket' students) would drop out. This would leave us with a more serious breed of student.

"Thirdly, it would put pressure on the faculty to do a good job, because, without the weapon of marks, a professor would have to be good to get students out to his classes.

"Fourthly, my class attitude at least would be different. At present, I have to act as a judge in class, and students know that all they say will be used as evidence against them. Exams would go, because now they are nothing but measures of a student's commercial potential. Conversely, they force him to become commercially valuable rather than educated."

## Classrooms are terrible

Prof. Kemp: "Classrooms are terrible around here. They should be forums where central issues are thoroughly discussed. Students tell me they are uncomfortable in the class atmosphere; this is not a good learning situation. More research should be encouraged out of class, and this means enlargement of the libraries."

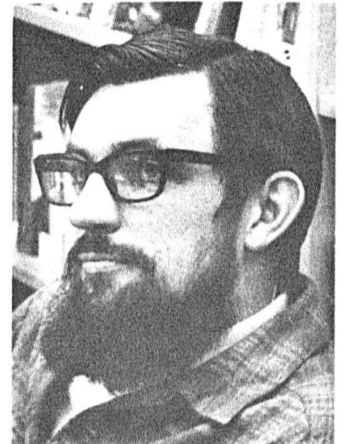
Prof. Hughes: "I'd like a little house in Garneau with two or three colleagues. We'd teach small groups of students downstairs. In our present system, books are used to transmit subject matter, but they are secondary to involving students in that reality."

Basically, then, Professors Butler, Kemp, Hughes, and Fisher condemned the apathetic, castrated approach many students take toward useful changes in the system. This apathy has even caused Prof. Hughes to stop consulting students on exam procedure.

What is self-evident from their words is that our present marking system, although it should be thrown out on principle alone, is very imprecise. It is administered differently from department to department, and sometimes from professor to professor.

## Darryl Butler

*"Students have been so lobotomized by the school system that they think exams are decrees of Almighty God"*



## Robert Hughes

*"Most students like the exam system the way it is, because they have learned to succeed in it . . . it costs the student to be original"*



## Ted Kemp

*"I find that students do more outside reading and not less if they do not have the threat of a final exam"*

