

The New University Conference asks the Faculty Council to approve the following changes in the system of evaluating students at Indiana University:

1. The use of letter grades, A, B, C, D, E, P, I, W, S, and any other letter grades now in use shall be discontinued. No such grades of any kind will be recorded anywhere.
2. A student shall receive credit for a course when he satisfies the instructor that he has completed the work for the course. The student's transcript shall simply list the courses he has completed for credit. There will be no record of courses enrolled for but not completed, either on the transcript or anywhere within the University.
3. The student himself should compile an official public record of his educational development or status. This record shall consist of a simple file kept for him by the University and shall include the transcript listing courses he has completed and whatever else he wishes to identify and recommend himself by.

The accompanying document, "Degreding Education," is submitted as a researched polemic in support of these proposals.

Submitted to the Faculty Council by the New University Conference through Robert Alawitter, English Department.

DEGRADING EDUCATION

Education and Technological Society

We live in the midst of a technological revolution, and the universities we work in are in the vanguard of that revolution. We are not reactionary. We recognize that the university must teach and develop the skills necessary for a complex post-industrial society. But we also think that it should do much more. We are humanists who think that technology and humanism are not necessarily incompatible, that ultimately technology is liberating and makes humanism possible. As humanists we have a self-developmental concept of education. The technological revolution makes educational self-development possible on a large scale. At the same time self-developmental education can be the most efficient for technology, because it is self-motivated and free to specialize in new ways. It is no accident that the idea of mass self-developmental education and the technological revolution have arisen side by side. For both, the old idea of a liberal education, consisting largely of the mastery of an unwieldy body of traditional knowledge, is obsolete. Much of the traditional religious, esthetic, ethical, economic, political, and psychological baggage that the old liberal education served to transmit is obstructive to both self-development and technological revolution. The rapid obsolescence of technological information has its counterpart in the new humanist students' demands for relevance and contemporaneity.

The concept of education as self-development, rather than as the transmission of a cultural heritage, is also inherent in the idea of a democratic society. We believe that in a democratic society everyone has the right to be educated to the full extent of his capability and desire. Further, the possibility of a democratic technological society depends on the uncoerced exercise of this right. We believe that today more than ever it is necessary to reaffirm the faith of our forebears that education can make us free. We recognize that education can be stifling mind-control, subversive of democracy and freedom, if it is primarily the transmission of a cultural heritage or the development of technical skills. Schools and universities are going to have to educate for intellectual independence, creativity, sensitivity, and self-motivated learning if they are going to be able to produce a people capable of participating in the decisions of a complex post-industrial world. The real need to order a vast and complex society for efficiency's sake unfortunately tends to result in excessive repression; forms of order tend to become autonomous and self-perpetuating; authority tends to degenerate into authoritarianism. Especially since democracy is not inherent in the technological revolution, a new free and self-directed education is necessary to counter the development of a technological elite, already well on its way to becoming the new ruling class. Thus self-developmental education can be an important bridge between scientific technology, on the one hand, and democratic humanism on the other. The acquisition of knowledge and technical skill is most efficient and most mind-expanding when pursued out of the individual's felt need for self-development and self-discipline. As expressed

by the Student Advisory Committee to the College of Arts and Sciences, the pedagogical mission of the University should be "to educate people for intellectual independence and the ability to continue self-directed learning after college." (SAC 1)

Degree Requirements

Two highly visible regressive mechanisms that stand in the way of self-developmental education in American universities and schools are now under attack from a variety of positions. One is degree requirements and the other is grades. Both persist because of nostalgia for a dying system of liberal education, a mistaken understanding of bureaucratic efficiency, and the sheer inertia of a huge established system.

Degree requirements are in part the vestigial remains of the Renaissance educational ideal of the well-rounded gentleman who knew all of the cultural heritage there was to be learned and who was competent in all the technical skills appropriate to a mandarin. He was a skilled athlete (HPER, 2 credits), soldier (ROTC, still required in some places), ruler (Govt. G103-104), writer (Eng. Comp. W131), man of letters (Freshman Lit.), musician (Music Apprec.), lover (not offered this century); he knew the history of Western Civilization (Western Civ.), conversed with philosophers (P100), spoke French (18 hours), travelled (Geography G107), and understood his relation to the natural world (Biology and Man). This educational ideal of a small aristocratic leisure class can only be perverted when preserved in the context of mass education for a complex and fast moving technological society. We congratulate the Educational Policies Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences for exorcizing at last this ghost of Renaissance man by dropping the group requirements, although full consistency would involve dropping area requirements as well. All degree requirements are mechanical administrative devices for counselling, keeping public records of large numbers of students, and channelling students into useful professions. While we recognize the inevitability of bureaucratic efficiency, we find this system inefficient in terms of human resources and creativity. We support the recommendation of the Student Advisory Committee that an Independent Learning Program with no substantive requirements should be the program of the College. The Educational Policies Committee expresses our goals in recommending Independent Learning.

It encourages self-motivation and the student's own desire to learn. It stimulates personal and intellectual independence and the development of self-discipline. It provides for a more personalized and individual educational experience. It offers opportunities to make academic study more "relevant," as the saying goes, by asking the student to combine his intellectual pursuits with practical experience on the job, in the community, or abroad Finally, we believe that the Independent Learning Program offers the best chance for developing among a significant number of students that spirit of inquiry, the zest for knowing, which will lead to the lifelong pursuit of learning and of truth which is the mark of the educated individual. (EPC 11-12)

Quantitative requirements should go sometime, too. These changes are not mere anarchist hallucinations, but are all being implemented in major university systems right now.

We also propose here the complete abolition of the abecedarian grading system at Indiana University.

Critique of the Grading System

"What did you get out of rat lab?"

"A B-."

--Typical Student Comment often Overheard
On Most American College Campuses

In a futile attempt to overcome the apathy or cynicism of the majority of his students, many a teacher has told his class that grades are insignificant, that what can be learned in the course is important. Students, of course, are hardly ever tricked into taking this argument seriously. Daniel P. Hoyt has run down the importance of grades for students very well in his ACT Research Report on The Relationship Between College Grades and Adult Achievement.

Grades are presently important in college because they determine, in large part, the degree and type of educational opportunity which will be available to the student. Nearly all colleges gear their academic probation and dismissal policies to the academic record; students who fail to reach certain standards may be denied the opportunity to continue their studies. In addition, students seeking to transfer to other institutions or to gain acceptance into graduate or professional schools may find their paths blocked by a transcript which contains too many low marks. On the other hand, unusual opportunities are often made available to students with exceptional grades through honors programs, programs of independent study, or other specially contrived educational experiences. Finally, the omnipresent GPA is commonly used to limit the credit load a student may take, determine his eligibility to participate in extracurricular activities, certify his qualifications for a loan or scholarship, and recommend him for employment. (Hoyt 1-2)

That is, grades are important because they limit educational opportunities, and, finally, occupational and life chances. Grades exclude people from educational opportunities in the interest of society, distinguishing and training an intellectual elite to operate a complex and technical social machinery. Two questions are involved: (1) the desirability of this educational discrimination, and (2) the efficiency of the grading system as a means of discrimination.

Educational Discrimination

Indiana University is trying to implement a plan to end the educational discrimination which is a form of institutionalized racism, discriminating against Indiana's black population. Everyone working with this program understands that educational opportunity means much more than adequate financial aid. It means, for

one thing, special adjustment of matriculation requirements to let educationally disadvantaged people into the University. It also means a special adjustment of the grading system to relieve these students from the pressure of the required Grade Point Average (GPA). Otherwise, "we would still be placing these students in a hyper-competitive, threatening, evaluative environment of a kind that must be anathema to young people who have been subjected to the educational retardation processes" described by James S. Coleman, et al., in Equality of Educational Opportunity (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966). (Fala 29) So that we don't bring in disadvantaged students only to flunk them out, we will need something like a special Pass/Fail grading system modified to permit unpenalized withdrawal from a class for any reason at any time during the semester. In other words, a credit/no credit system whereby the student earns credit in a course that he passes but is not penalized by a permanent negative record if he fails to pass a course for credit. Finally, disadvantaged students will have to be permitted to continue in the University even though they are not acquiring credits at a rate that will allow them to graduate in four years. The truth is that the Junior Divisions's program for disadvantaged students depends upon the abolition for these students of the University's grading system.

But why is the University undertaking such a program at all? Because it recognizes the right of every American citizen to equality of educational opportunity. And because it recognizes further that to limit opportunity by the measure of educational status is unfairly discriminatory and undemocratic.

Virtually every sociologist is familiar with the traditional distinction between achievement and ascription: the statuses that a person is able to attain through his own efforts are achieved statuses, and those statuses that one possesses, let us say, simply because he was born of a given race, or into a given family, are based on ascription. A person is always able -- at least theoretically -- to achieve more, but ascription is largely unchangeable. . . . some "achieved" statuses may be far more difficult to attain than we realize, and the phrase "his own efforts" should really carry very little meaning for the average sociologist. Most of us are aware -- and can actually demonstrate -- that the extent to which one is willing or able to "make an effort" to change a status that may appear to be easily changed, is profoundly influenced by structural conditions based entirely on ascription, and therefore beyond one's control. . . . The major upshot of the Coleman Report is that ascription accounts for far more of the variance in school achievement than anything a youngster is able to do for him[self]. (Fala 28)

The point is that to take the educational status expressed in a GPA as a measure of achievement is fallacious; and to limit educational opportunity by this false measure of achievement is undemocratic. This is the reasoning implicit in the Junior Division's program for disadvantaged students. We think it is very sound reasoning. Put simply, it means that grades are an undemocratically discriminatory means of deciding who goes to college, and who stays in, once admitted, and who gets special opportunities within the

University. And this is true, of course, not just of black students, but of all students. The 13% of the IU Freshman class that flunks out are disadvantaged students, victims of educational discrimination. Sociologist Michael A. Fala's summary of why the University of Wisconsin's special program for disadvantaged students ought to be a general program applies equally well to Indiana University:

It is sad that, insofar as this university is committed to the idea of providing equal educational opportunity, it finds it necessary to do so within the framework of a Special Program without giving any serious attention to the structural deficiencies of the general program. Special programs merely buttress general programs, in many instances; Robert E. Park would describe the relationship as one involving symbiosis. . . . we are pursuing a policy that is inescapably discriminatory whether or not we intend that outcome, and tends to discriminate on the basis of race, family background, the general cultural background into which one is born, and so forth. (Fala 29)

So long as we have a discriminatory general program partly compensated for by a special program for disadvantaged students, we are not even making a serious effort to end educational discrimination against black people. All that such a special program can do, really, is to shepherd a few black students through the university into the ranks of the educationally privileged. At best such programs will result in perfect correlation between the proportion of black people among the educated elite and the proportion of black people in the national population. That is all such special programs aim at. They will not end educational discrimination against the disadvantaged black masses. What is needed for that is a general program aimed at ending educational discrimination altogether. And it is needed -- the black lower classes are not consoled now, embittered rather, by the existence of a black bourgeoisie. Increasing the size of that bourgeoisie is not going to make the rest of the black people more content. It is not going to make the excluded white lower and lower-middle classes more content either, rather the opposite.

Efficiency of the Grading System

Since grades are so negatively important to the student in determining his life possibilities, since they are a key instrument of our discriminatory educational policy, there must be some overriding justification for them. Are they, then, an efficient means of identifying people with the educational qualifications necessary to operate a complex technological society? It is rather shocking to discover that grades do not well serve this purpose. Daniel P. Hoyt's review of the research on The Relationship between College Grades and Adult Achievement summarizes: "present evidence strongly suggests that college grades bear little or no relationship to any measures of adult accomplishment." (Hoyt 1 -- "Refinements in experimental methodology are extremely unlikely to alter that generalization; at best they may determine some of the conditions under which a low positive, rather than a zero, correlation is obtained." Hoyt 45) Summaries of some of the more dependable studies are fascinating.

Pallett (1965), for example, found no relationship between college grades and ratings on any of the eight dimensions he found to characterize success in business. The Utah group (Price, Taylor, Richards, & Jacobsen, 1963) found academic success was independent of the other 24-28 performance characteristics of physicians, though grades in medical school appear to bear low positive relationships to their early career success (. . .). In the field of scientific research, college grades have generally been unrelated to performance; occasional low positive relationships have been reported (. . .). While studies of engineers have paid little attention to the criterion problem, in the best defined study, Martin and Pachares (1962) found no relationship between salary and grades even after adjusting for the differences in reputation among colleges.

Even in the teaching profession itself, grades have little or no relation to professional success. The review of Barr *et al.* (1961) showed that the median correlation between GPA's as predictors of success in teaching and supervisors' ratings as measures of success in teaching was only .09 (33 studies); between GPA's and pupil gain scores, .00 (10 studies); and four studies of GPA's and pupil or peer ratings discovered correlations ranging from .10 to .28. (Hoyt, 44)

Hoyt also concludes that "the practice of basing admission to schools of education, business, engineering, or medicine largely or exclusively on undergraduate grades seems indefensible. It is certain that many potential contributors in these fields are denied the opportunity for professional training. These personal tragedies must represent a sizeable loss to society as well." (Hoyt 50) Stuart Miller's survey of the literature on grading for Berkeley's Muscatine committee concludes that Graduate School admissions and transfers to undergraduate colleges as well as professional placement can be handled without grades with relative ease. As to efficiency, U.S. Government estimates of graduate drop-out rates go as high as 20 to 1.

It may be better to give graduate admissions officers more resources to conduct extensive admissions investigations than to skimp on their budgets and encourage them to use college grades to fill real gaps in knowledge. By considering individually each student who presents himself for admission, The University of Michigan is able to show dramatic reductions in the number of drop-outs among those who enter at the college level. The extra money spent doing this is probably an economy in the long run; the teacher, the student, the administration and society save a lot of time, effort, and money when the right people are selected in the first place. (Miller 13)

The grading system, it seems, is an absurdity. In spite of their overwhelming importance to students in limiting their educational opportunities, in spite of their importance to society as an instrument of educational discrimination, grades do not measure preparedness for professional life, and we do not know what they do measure. Hoyt points out that a tremendous research effort

has gone into developing grade-prediction systems, while relatively little has gone into discovering the meaning of grades. (Hoyt 2) We are caught up in a process we do not understand. Supposedly centers of disciplined intellectual activity, the universities cling to an unexamined, superstitious faith in grading. Defended as a means of administrative efficiency, the grading system is in fact a product of bureaucratic inertia and lack of imagination, at best. At worst, it may be a terribly irresponsible and inhumane waste of personal and social resources.

Inconsistency and Unreliability of Grades

A good example of the uninformed and narrow concept of efficiency that lies behind the grading system can be seen in the Self Study Committee's proposal to restore plus and minus grades.

With the increasing number of students in the University, and the difficulty resulting therefrom to get to know a good many of the students well enough so that differentiated letters of recommendation can be written, it seems particularly important that we differentiate at least in the grades as much as possible. Every faculty member knows that there is a great deal of difference between a B+ and a B-, or a C+ and a C-, even on the undergraduate level. (Cousins et al. XVI, 3)

Even if grades were a valid form of recommendation to employers and professional schools, or if we knew what grades measured, this statement would be naive. Grading methods and standards are much too crude, variable, and dependent on subjective factors to make fine distinctions like that between a B+ and an A- meaningful. Respectable scholarly opinion supports widespread student opinion on this -- professors have different criteria of excellence, or weight criteria differently; not only do different professors give widely varying grades to the same paper, but the same professor, unaware that he is reading a paper he has graded before, is likely to give it a different grade; sexual and personal biases interfere with objectivity. Singer (1964) discovered a significant correlation between the grades men got and their manipulateness, between the grades women got and their attractiveness. There is some testimony from science professors that subjective elements come into play in grading even in the hard sciences. "Pleasing personal behavior, self-assurance, apparent interest and enthusiasm on the part of the student may sometimes be mistaken for achievement in the course; unattractiveness, timidity, and an apparent indifference for the lack of it." (Committee on the Teaching of Botany in American Colleges and Universities of the Botanical Society of America [1938] 33) William G. Perry (1963) reports to Harvard's Bureau of Study Counsel that it is possible to bull in advanced physics as in English. One talented student gave Perry an "impressive analysis of the art of amassing 'partial credits' on examinations in advanced physics. Though beyond me in some respects, his presentation confirmed my impression that instructors of physics frequently honor on examinations operations structurally similar to those requisite in a good essay." (Perry 125-135)

The apparent uniformity of grading standards is probably only a manifestation of the fact that most professors, whether or not they realize it, grade on a curve, having a good idea of the distribution of grades before ever meeting the class. (Miller 4-7) One

Yale professor instructs TA's in large lecture classes to bunch test scores around 80, and this seems to be common practice at Yale, to offset tough competition for curved grades; this helps the predictability of the GPA at Yale, of course, since the prediction tends to be self-fulfilling. Statistical analysis of grading at Berkeley shows that between 1947 and 1960, male Verbal SAT scores rose 66 points, Math SAT scores 87 points, High School GPA .13 points; but in the same period the University GPA for men remained constant at 2.34. (Miller 9-10)

Quantification of Educational Experience

In research completed in 1961, by the Educational Testing Service, 53 readers from six professional areas graded 300 essays on a 9-point scale, achieving a median correlation between readers of .31. A typical paper received the following grades from the 53 readers:

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 (high)
How many gave it	2	5	12	13	10	8	2	1	0

The ten English teachers had a higher median intercorrelation (.41) than any other group, and all groups agreed with the English teachers better than with members of their own profession. But factor analysis showed that the basis of English teachers' agreement was their stress on simple mechanics (punctuation, spelling, grammar). (ETS 8-17) This study points to the conclusion that grades are not only highly unreliable but measure chiefly the measurable, that part of learning which can be most easily quantified. Many of the expressed goals of education are not quantifiable, such as self-motivation, intellectual honesty, self-knowledge, independence, creativity. The very best that can be hoped for grades is that they can be sophisticated to measure quantifiable knowledge with more or less reliability. We cannot even be sure that grades serve even that negligible function since the evidence is inadequate, and contradictory. (Hoyt 46) "Marks and terms are clumsy devices, more suitable for measuring cordwood than culture" -- David Starr Jordan. (Miller 4)

Grades and Self-Perception

The quantification of the educational experience, which ultimately reduces it to a three digit number between 0.00 and 4.00, the GPA, is perhaps the most important instrumental cause of the apathy, alienation, and cynicism of students. As the public recognition of educational and intellectual status (misunderstood as pure achievement), course grades and the GPA become the end and guiding purpose of education for the student. To students, it often seems that teachers, peers, parents, friends and apparently employers all regard grades and the GPA as the ultimate proof of the student's ability, seriousness, maturity, knowledge, and creative potential. Everyone seems to agree that grades are a proof of individual worth; it is no wonder that students too often come to depend on this proof as the only sure measure of their personal worth. One student, in a class where self-directed, self-motivated learning was encouraged, introduced an essay with this apology for choosing the routine assignment provided for people who had nothing on their minds:

The framework of the university compels me to fulfill assignments in order to continue my education. I do want to establish my sincerity and the best way for me to do so is to make an effort to meet the standards of achievement that other students have set. (IU student paper, Fall 1968)

This insecurity is the product of many years of conditioning in public schools and Indiana University. Externally imposed measures of self-development are eventually accepted and internalized to the point where the student is dependent on them. This insecure dependency is very common, though not everyone is conscious of it. It is not so irreversible as the cynicism of students who recognize the absurdity of grades and extend this judgment to the entire formal educational process. This kind of cynicism is anti-educational because the cynical realist has come to realize that academic success measured by grades alone will increase his occupational opportunities and life chances: self-development has become irrelevant. Pretending to such students that grades are not important is an elementary act of bad faith. Both the insecure and the cynical students approach a course as a problem in how to get a good grade. The idea of a "good" grade is variable and, we think, unfortunate. Some students have identified themselves as merely C students, some as merely B students, some as merely A students.

Academic Dishonesty

Out of cynicism or desperation arises academic dishonesty in the form of cheating, which is probably much more common than many of us think. The Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia recently made a survey of cheating in American colleges and universities. At least half of the 5,000 students interviewed had cheated. The incidence of cheating was highest among upperclassmen, academically weak students, men, career-oriented majors, and students motivated by non-academic goals such as social life, athletics, and parental pressure. (Fala 11-12)

We are faced with the inescapable fact that any time we receive a set of term papers . . . a substantial proportion of them will be the product of one of the numerous intra- or inter-campus term paper rings which, to those interested in criminal syndicalism and white-collar crime, are among the more fascinating and exotic of the innovative adaptations of students. (Fala 12)

Motivation for Competition

The grading system perhaps does motivate students, but we should be concerned with motivation for what and what kind of motivation. Cheating, though widespread, is not the most disastrous effect of grade-motivated effort. We agree with Wisconsin TA Inez Martinez?

If grades do motivate, then they reinforce a value scheme that equates acceptability of self with performing better than others, that posits the belief that private rewards must and should come at the expense of the good of others. The logical outcome of such a value system is precisely the war mentality of the "big, competitive world," with self-interest groups pitted rifle-barrel to rifle-barrel. Further, if one accepts at all the

idea that education is primarily to create a society of self-realized individuals, then competition is patently nonsense. There are simply no grounds for comparing the development of my self with the development of your self. And, if education is to create a society of self-realized persons, competition is not only nonsense; it is an obstruction. For, as psychologists like Abrams Maslow have pointed out, self-realization occurs primarily through human relationships based on trust and acceptance rather than on fear and power struggle. (Martinez 5)

One can compete for the extrinsic rewards associated with learning, or for the opportunity to learn, but for learning itself competition is irrelevant and disruptive. Education is most efficient and creative when the goals are intrinsic. We agree with Carl Rogers that

the student's desire to learn can be trusted . . . human beings have a natural potentiality for learning. . . . Self-initiated learning, involving the whole person of the learner -- feelings as well as intellect -- is the most pervasive and lasting. . . . Creativity in learning is best facilitated when self-criticism and self-evaluation are basic, and evaluation by others is of secondary importance. . . . The best research organizations, in industry as well as in the academic world, have learned that external evaluation is largely fruitless if the goal is creative work. The individual must be permitted to make his own evaluation of his own efforts. (Miller 12)

The Starting Block

The disastrous effect of the grading system on our students' understanding of what college education is can be seen by reading "Hints on How to Study." This miseducational little booklet is distributed to freshmen by Phi Eta Sigma, a male freshman honor society: "Eligibility for membership is based solely on scholarship [measured entirely by grades]. All freshmen men who earn a scholarship average equivalent to or better than one-half of the highest grade and one half of the next highest grade in their first quarter, term, or semester of college will be elected. PLS subscribes to the Protestant work-success ethic, the power of positive thinking, competitive individualism, rote learning with mechanical aids, and a highly regimented life-style, all leading up to scholastic honor and a good "public record which will be on file for the rest of your life." "You are now in business for yourself," the pamphlet begins, with unconscious irony, "the important business of getting a college education. You are 'on your own,' perhaps for the first time. Whether you emerge from this new enterprise with scholastic honor or in mental bankruptcy will depend on you alone, in the last analysis." "GET STARTED RIGHT" is the first hint, illustrated by the picture of a sprinter poised on a starting block, ready for the rat race. Keep healthy and well-groomed, make a time-schedule and stick to it, adjust the light properly and "keep your desk cleared for action"; "avoid day-dreaming. Work intensely while you work. Keep this one job before you. Forget everything else" -- and no apples will fall on

your head. Methodically apply reading, remembering, vocabulary-building, writing, notetaking and notekeeping, and exam-taking techniques, and presumably you will succeed in getting good grades, the infallible signs of a good education. Interest, of course, can be useful -- it helps you concentrate and remember. Self-development, critical thinking, creativity -- these are not in question. The sprinter on the starting block is not a straw man; he is the conscientious student responding intuitively to the grading process.

Creativity and Conformity

The grade-oriented student understanding of what education is all about has its counterpart in the recommendations of the Teaching Subcommittee of the University Study Committee:

Every Department in the University may be reasonably expected to have a framework for its grading policies, particularly on the freshman and sophomore levels. It seems only fair that the grading policy in a freshman or sophomore course be announced at the very beginning of the course, so the students may know how to channel their efforts. (Cousins et al., XVI, 2)

The student motivated by grades does study the teacher's grading policy in order to learn how to channel his efforts. It is not surprising that good grades correlate closely with conformity.

All studies correlating faculty ratings of creativity with grades show that faculty are quite aware of the discrepancy between measurable academic achievement and creativity (Miller 20):

The study by Kelley (1958) on discrepancies between instructor grades and term-end grades in the same course showed that those students who got higher ratings from the instructor indicated on personality tests that they were more conforming, compulsive, rigid, and insecure than the other group studied. This would show that teachers tend to bias their grades in favor of conformists. Another study, by Holland (1960), showed that the nonintellectual factors most related to academic achievement are persistence, strong superego, and the like. Holland then cited Cattell's findings on the characteristics of the creative person: intelligence, emotional maturity, dominance, adventurousness, sensitivity, introversion, radicalism, self-sufficiency, tenseness, less subjection to group standards, impulsiveness, and the like. The two sets of personality traits for achievers and for creative types are at odds. . . .

Some would argue, however, that creative and nonconforming students do not belong in college. That would be a shocking tack to pursue, but one often hears it. On the other hand, it becomes increasingly obvious to all that one must go to college if one is to be successful in all but a very few fields. In fact the creative students do come to college and then tend to leave it. Some argue that alienation has always been good for creativity -- ~~that alienation has always been good for creativity~~ -- perhaps so. But it seems self-evident that the inhospitable environment which colleges present to the creative person, and the punishment that grades visit upon him, probably do our society more harm than

good. In fact, an estimate of the social cost that the wear and tear of low grades and lack of recognition visit on our society would probably be staggering. Fortunately, it is impossible to calculate; only the light of imagination may find it. (Miller 19-21)

Academic Authoritarianism

A disturbing explanation of the discrepancy between creativity and grades is that creative and independent students are more trouble for the teacher than conforming students. Dissent in the classroom, however calm and reasoned, is disruptive to a teacher concerned with well-organized coverage of the course-material. Submissive conformist students tend to support the teacher in his suppression of dissent in order to get on with the orderly transmission of knowledge. It seems likely that under the pressure of time and large classes, the creative student gets penalized with a poor grade, perhaps without the instructor understanding the discrimination involved. (Miller 20) Perhaps it is true also that since professors tend to be people who succeeded in school, and since success in school is closely related to conformity, conformist faculties are afraid of student independence and dissent. (Miller 8)

The belief in the value of order for its own sake is a basic feature of an authoritarian philosophy. At a lower level, this becomes the exercise of authority for one's own sake, rather than for the sake of the other person or the group. There is a constant danger in schools that authority will degenerate into authoritarianism, because teaching unfortunately attracts those who consciously or (more commonly) unconsciously wish to exercise authority in order to satisfy some unfulfilled need within themselves. (Nash 105)

Certainly the grading system is an expression of authoritarianism, as it is an orderly and narrowly efficient public evaluation system which continues to be defended regardless of its meaninglessness and its inefficiency in human terms. Certainly the grade system defines the teacher-student relationship as one of threat and fear, while we know that learning takes place best in a nonthreatening environment. There is no doubt that the grading system at least reinforces and brings out latent authoritarianism in teachers, and its counterpart, submissiveness in students. (See Fala 9-11) Neither democracy nor learning can afford to tolerate authoritarianism. Authoritarian education serves to socialize people into an authoritarian society.

Therefore we agree with the Educational Policies Committee's recommendation "to remove from the Freshman year as much of the threat and fear of the grade point average as possible." (EPC 19) And we agree with the Student Advisory Committee that "What is required is a grading system which permits all students to progress in their education without threat and fear." (SAC 10) We think this means that what is required is no grading system at all.

We think instructors deserve to be liberated from the authoritarian role forced on them more or less unwillingly by the grading system. We think most professors want teaching to be a dialogue in which the participants meet each other freely and honestly, in which authority is a natural function of knowledge, experience, understanding, intellect, creativity, and humanity.

Alternatives to the A - F Grading System

1. Pass/Fail in the Freshman year; A-F thereafter, except for up to two courses per year outside the student's field of concentration. This is the recommendation of the Educational Policies Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences. (LPC 29) We do not understand this proposal. It proposes to remove the threat and fear of grades for one year and then restore them in some but not all (why not all?) courses outside the student's specialization. That is to bring the student under the coercion of grades chiefly in those courses where he needs to make his best showing if grades are going to interfere with his chances for professional school or employment. Furthermore, it seems to assume the student needs a year to learn the ropes. The extrinsic motivation and the authoritarian teaching situation, with its pressures for conformity, are allowed to corrupt particularly that part of his education which the student is likely to be most interested in, where he is most likely to be creative, self-directed, self-motivated, and self-evaluative if left alone. If Pass/Fail is good for freshmen, it is good for all students. The only real question becomes the validity of Pass/Fail.
2. Pass/Fail for all courses. Pass/Fail is a grading system which relies on the stigma of failure to motivate and coerce students. The relationship between student and teacher is still a power relationship. Pass/Fail may reduce the threat and fear of grades and encourage self-motivation more than the A-F system, though we do not know. Whitman College found that its faculty graded more severely, gave more F's under Pass/Fail than under the old system. (L. Perry 82) And Whitman's experience seems to be typical. (Fala 23) Pass/Fail does not solve the problem of educational discrimination, since it still requires a standard of measurable achievement and disqualifies from further education students who do not meet the standard. Pass/Fail would have to be supplemented by a general policy of allowing withdrawal from a course at any time during the semester in order to avoid failure. The present policy -- "the desire to avoid a low grade is not an acceptable reason for withdrawing from a course" -- reveals the fundamental illogic of grades: if grades measure what is learned in a course, then withdrawal to avoid a failing grade means withdrawal because one has not learned anything. Is there a better reason for withdrawing? Finally, that Pass/Fail is not different from A-F in any important way is strongly suggested by the fact that wherever Pass/Fail has been implemented it has soon expanded from a dichotomous to a trichotomous system with the introduction of Honors (H) in order to recognize exceptional students. A fourth grade, such as High Pass is likely to follow. (Fala 22-23; Miller 23-27) The number of distinctions within the system of quantified public evaluation is relatively unimportant; the system itself is vicious.
3. The Student Advisory Committee has proposed a very complex combination of three systems: A-F, Pass/Fail, credit/no credit. If, after completing the course, the student is rated as having performed "A," "B," or "C" work, the course is passed with full credit. If the evaluation of the student's work is "D" or "F" level, he receives an automatic withdrawal, and no record is placed on his transcript. . . . Separate records of courses from which a student has withdrawn may be maintained by the university in order to examine a student's rate of progress. . . .

When transcripts are requested by the student, three alternatives will be available to him: 1) a transcript showing only courses for which the student has earned credit with each grade specified as "S" (satisfactory); 2) a transcript showing grades of "A," "B," or "C" in the major field of study, all other courses showing "S"; or 3) a transcript showing all grades in all courses, except any courses specified by the student, at the time of enrollment in such courses, as being taken strictly on a satisfactory-withdraw basis (similar to the pass-fail system presently in effect). The "withdrawn" courses will never appear on the transcript. (SAC 10-11)

This is an inelegant, unwieldy system. Its chief advantage seems to be its appearance of allowing each student to choose his own poison. In fact it only allows this choice at the transcript level. Within the course and within the university the old A-F system would prevail, with an S/W (Pass/Fail) option in some courses -- the option is unclear. The criticisms of The Educational Policies Committee's proposal and of the Pass/Fail alternative apply here. The SAC proposal makes grading more severe, in fact, by giving no credit for grades of D -- changing all D's and F's to W's and then keeping track of the W's is simply a redefinition of W to mean failure.

Whatever the intentions behind the SAC proposal, within the university it is in effect more repressive than the present system. The alternative transcripts proposal we can only understand as a shocking symptom of how thoroughly the grading system has structured student's thinking and how deep and permanent is the anxiety it has produced. Relative freedom appears in the SAC proposal as one of three alternatives on one of three levels of evaluation. Even in this ninth corner the grading syndrome has left its spoor: an unnecessary S beside each course on the transcript will legitimize the credits given.

4. Comprehensive Examinations, Recommendations, Other Combinations. Comprehensive examinations are highly controversial. The major experiment was at the University of Chicago, where comprehensive examinations have been discontinued. Reports from the Chicago experiments are conflicting. Comprehensive examinations in graduate schools are a useful analogy, however, and they lead us to believe that such a system is not a good alternative to the course-grading system. The little traumas of public evaluation in courses are simply postponed and accumulated into one overwhelming trauma. Anxiety is not significantly reduced, only refocused, probably increased. Exam-taking becomes a major skill to be developed. Conformity is encouraged by students' anxious desire to learn what they know or expect will be expected of them on a more or less uniform examination. (Miller 27-29)

Brief prose evaluations are another dubious alternative to grades. They may be more informative than grades, but they leave evaluation in the teaching situation and encourage, even more than grades do, pandering to the instructor's values and prejudices. (Miller 29-30)

All sorts of specific combinations of grades, comprehensive examinations, and written course evaluations can be imagined. But any system constructed out of them will suffer the faults that they have in common.

5. Credit/no credit. The student receives credit for a course when he satisfies the instructor that he has completed the course work. The student's transcript will simply list the courses he has taken for credit. There will be no record of courses enrolled for but not completed. No grades of any kind will be recorded anywhere. The grades I and W will be unnecessary. Not completing the work for a course will lead eventually to withdrawal in fact for which the student should in no way be punished. Abolition of the grading system is not the abandonment of evaluation. We will be left with the basic evaluation that grades are a misguided attempt to refine -- the instructor's decision that a student has fulfilled the basic requirements of the course. Beyond this minimal requirement the student will be free for self-motivated, self-directed, self-evaluated learning; for self-development, creativity and intellectual independence. Students and instructor will be relatively free from the systematic threat and fear so that they can participate in serious dialogue with each other. We do not think that the abolition of grading is a panacea. Self-developmental education and real dialogue will not automatically follow, but an environment will tend to be created which makes possible and encourages the kind of learning and teaching that we all would like to be a part of.

Because there would be no public or official failure, the educational opportunities that grading limits would be opened to everyone.

6. Dossier. The student himself should build an official public record of his developmental status. It should be a simple file kept for him by the University and should include the student's transcript of courses completed and whatever else he wishes to identify and recommend himself by. The dossier might include evidence of the quality of what he considers his best work -- writing; photographs of such things as paintings, designs, and sculpture; programs and reviews and evaluations of performances and projects of all sorts; recordings of musical or oratorical work; committee reports he has worked on; recommendations from faculty and others.

Such a dossier would be a highly personalized record much more valuable to employers and professional school admissions officers than the present dossier of transcripts and recommendations. In a totally self-developmental educational system, such a dossier would replace credits as a basis for graduation and ultimately would make college and university degrees altogether obsolete. We predict that in some future the dossier will achieve such importance, because the alternative in a rapidly growing and economically squeezed mass education system seems to be highly regimented degree programming and highly impersonal evaluation. Fortunately, we do seem to be moving away from such rigidity.

Works Referred To

Barr, A.S., et al., Wisconsin Studies of the Measurement and Prediction of Teacher Effectiveness, Dembar Publications, Madison, 1961.

Coleman, James S., et al., Equality of Educational Opportunity, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966.

College of Arts and Sciences Educational Policies Committee, Preliminary Report, Indiana University, 1968.

College of Arts and Sciences Student Advisory Committee, Report, Indiana University, 1969.

Committee on the Teaching of Botany in American Colleges and Universities, An Exploratory Study of the Teaching of Botany in the Colleges and Universities of the United States, Botanical Society of America, Publication No. 119, Ithaca, New York, 1938.

Cousins, George F., et al., Growth and Change at Indiana University, Vol. III -- Teaching at Indiana University: Report of the Teaching Subcommittee of the University Study Committee, Indiana University, 1966.

Diederich, Paul B., John W. French, Sydell T. Carlton, Factors in Judgments of Writing Ability, Educational Testing Service Research Bulletin, Princeton, New Jersey, 1961.

Fala, Michael A., Dunce Cages, Hickory Sticks, and Public Evaluation: The Structure of Academic Authoritarianism, Teaching Assistant Association, University of Wisconsin, 1968.

Holland, J. L., "Prediction of College Grades from Personality and Aptitude Variables," Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol. 51 (1960), pp. 245-254.

Kelley, E. G., "A Study of Consistent Discrepancies Between Instructor Grades and Test Results," Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol. 49 (1958), pp. 328-334.

Hoyt, Daniel P., The Relationship Between College Grades and Adult Achievement: A Review of the Literature, ACT Research Reports, No. 7 (Sept., 1965).

Martin, R. A., and J. Pachares, "Good Scholars Not Always Best," cited in Business Week, Feb. 24, 1962, pp. 77-78.

Martinez, Inez, "The Degrading System," Critical Teaching: Elegies to the Multiversity or Clarion for the Carrion, Teaching Assistant Association, University of Wisconsin, [1968], pp. 4-6.

Miller, Stuart, Measure, Number, and Weight: A Polemical Statement of the College Grading Problem, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan, 1967.

Nash, Paul, Authority and Freedom in Education, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1966.

Pallett, J. B., Definition and Prediction of Success in the Business World, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1965.

Perry, Louis B., "College Grading: A Case Study and Its Aftermath," Educational Record, Vol. 49 (Winter, 1968).

Perry, William G., Jr., "Examsmanship and the Liberal Arts: An Epistemological Inquiry," Examining in Harvard College, ed. L. Bramson, Committee on Educational Policy, Harvard University, 1963, pp. 125-135.

Phi Eta Sigma, Hints on How to Study, 1961.

Price, P. B., C. W. Taylor, J. M. Richards, Jr., and T. L. Jacobsen, Performance Measures of Physicians, final technical report to the Office of Education on Cooperative Research, August, 1963.

Rogers, Carl, "The Facilitation of Significant Learning," Instruction: Some Contemporary Viewpoints, ed. L. Siegel, Chandler, San Francisco, 1967.

Singer, J. E., "The Use of Manipulative Strategies: Machiavellianism and Attractiveness," Sociometry, Vol. 27 (1964), pp. 128-150.