

# METHODIST COLLEGE PRIDE

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## '97 Spirit Week, Homecoming a rousing success

By Sonya Sparks Murdock  
Staff Writer

What does the Monarch football program have in common with the women's soccer and men's cross country teams? How about with Darrien Tucker and Sema Hashemi? Or with East and Sanford Halls? Give up? They were all winners on Homecoming Day 1997.

In fact, Homecoming itself was considered a real winner by most students who participated. SGA president Brett Davis considers this year's Homecoming, which is his third at Methodist, the best yet. "The student body really had a sense of community, with the contests between the dorms ... it brought people together," said Davis. Andrew Farriss, an SGA senator, agreed: "I feel like it was really successful. Everybody got involved in the activities for the (Spirit) week and generated excitement."

MC alumni and RHA advisor Rob Foreman said, "It was the most spirit I've seen. The students were excited, and the staff was excited. I came here in fall 1988, and this was by far the most activity and the largest (Homecoming) we've had." Coincidentally, this was the first year that the RHA, the SGA and SAC have worked together to plan Spirit Week.

In the past, festivities were held the day before Homecoming, not all week. Farriss thinks that Spirit Week made the difference this year. With an overall student participation

rate of 42 percent, the joint committee was satisfied with their efforts. Nearly 250 people attended the bonfire on Wednesday night, Oct. 29, which was a better turnout than the committee expected. Recalling an unsuccessful bonfire two years ago, Farriss conceded, "For one thing, they actually got the fire started this year." The chilly but bearable weather didn't hurt matters, either. "It was just cold enough (for a bonfire)," Farriss added.

Also successful were the penny wars between the dorms, which raised \$541 for RHA programs such as alcohol awareness and rape prevention. Sanford Hall dominated the penny wars, while East Hall's "East is the Beast" theme won the judges' votes for best decorations. Director of Alumni Affairs Summer Brock said, "According to the judges, (the East Hall decorations) had an incredible look. They were wide open and showed a lot of thought and creativity." The Alumni Association announced the winners at halftime during the Homecoming football game, presenting trophies to Sanford and East Hall representatives.

On Friday, Oct. 31, students were entertained during lunch by "Play with a Rattle," a MC student band. Meanwhile at the Union, the SAC sponsored a caricatures artist to doodle student portraits for free. (SAC also sponsored Lester, the Professional Fool, at Saturday's football game. He was the wacky character

who, swarmed by fans, twisted balloons into a variety of shapes including hats, flowers and monkeys with bananas.) But back to Friday. That evening, the cafeteria workers dressed in costumes to serve students a Halloween treat: steaks for dinner! Although it "wasn't Outback," Farriss admitted that the special dinner was better than the usual cafeteria fare.

Later that night, "Midnight Madness" officially kicked off basketball season as the men's and women's teams showed their stuff in alternating ten-minute scrimmage games. The crowd also enjoyed performances by the dance team and the cheerleaders and competed in free-throw and lay-up contests. Matt Eviston, the MC Sports Information Director, said that the games gave players and scoreboard operators an opportunity to practice without pressure before the season begins, while also providing fun for the students. Midnight Madness is generally held just past midnight on October 15, marking the first day that the players can officially "touch the ball."

Homecoming day began with the MC Education Department holding its annual Alumni Breakfast for its education students and alumni. The guest speaker was Monty Coggins, a biology and biochemistry teacher at Pleasant High School in Cabarrus County. Coggins, who is the North Carolina Teacher of the Year for 1997-98, said, "I became a teacher



The 1997 Homecoming Court was crowned at the Homecoming Dance Nov. 1 at the Holiday Inn Bordeaux. The winners were (left to right): First Runner-Up for Queen Nicole Vrentas; First Runner-Up for King Nate Weston; Queen Sema Hashemi; King Darrien Tucker; Second Runner-Up for Queen Brandi Byrd; Second Runner-Up for King Felix Sarfo-Kantanka. (Photo by Bill Billings)

by accident." He explained that his first teaching job was only on an interim basis, but he enjoyed teaching so much that he ended up teaching for the next 18 years.

Dr. Gilda Benstead, Head of Methodist's Education Department, said that it was important that the students currently in the education pro-

gram have the opportunity to hear Coggins discuss his work in order for them to better understand the responsibilities they will face in the field of education. Benstead credited the Student Education Association and the MC Student Council for organizing the breakfast. "They made decorations, acted as

hostesses and even put together the programs," said Benstead.

The rest of Homecoming day took off with sports. The non-stop action began with the fifth Annual William P. Lowdermilk Golf Tournament on November 1 at 8 a.m. The winners of the alumni event, a four-

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Senior Cliff Harris works at starting the bonfire that helped kick off Methodist College's Homecoming Spirit Week. Nearly 250 people attended the bonfire on Oct. 29. (Photo by Jennifer Packard)

## Colleges combat grade inflation

By Lisa Bertagnoli  
College Press Service

Just like a nickel used to buy a loaf of bread and a movie cost a dollar, a C grade used to mean average.

"You should talk to my dad about a 'gentleman's C,'" says Suzy Avril, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, who, like her father, did her undergraduate work at Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H.

"Parents understood Cs then," she says. "Pushing for As was for desperate academics."

It appears, however, that those "desperate academics" far outnumber the gentlefolk at Dartmouth these days. The mean grade-point average has been creeping up about 1/100th of a point each year, says Thomas Bickel, registrar at the Ivy League school. In the 1992-1993 school year, the mean GPA was 3.23; now it's 3.28.

Other schools show similar ascents in grades. Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa., sports an average GPA of 2.9, up from 2.6 in 1972. At Stanford, only 8 percent of students in the 1992-1993 school year got Cs or Ds; no Fs were given out that year.

The odd thing about grade inflation is that it's happening when first, the education system in this country is in full crisis mode and second, when ACT and SAT tests aren't rising along with grades. "That's the definition of grade inflation: when grades go up over a period of time

and the achievement grades represent doesn't go up accordingly," says Perry Zirkel, a professor in the education department at Lehigh.

That's precisely the problem with grade inflation. As and Bs are turning into the kindergarten equivalent of gold stars: Everyone gets one, and therefore they don't mean much.

### More Art Than Science

The problem is more marked in the humanities than the hard sciences, educators note. "I'm a math professor, and in math there are right and wrong answers," says Bickel. "Grading humanities essays is much more subjective; there's more room for disagreement."

Softer grading in humanities classes sometimes lands English, history and other such majors in trouble when they take science classes. An English major once came to Gail Mahood, head of the geology and environmental sciences department at Stanford University, upset over a B grade in Mahood's introductory geology class. "She thought it was terrible because in her department, a B is mediocre," Mahood recalls. "In my class, a B is perfectly fine."

By the same token, premed and science majors who take humanities courses can be frustrated by the subjectiveness of the grading. "They really don't want to write the essays and such but they want an A," says Avril, who is also a teaching assis-

tant at the University of Chicago.

### Why So High?

Subjective grading aside, professors are hard-pressed to explain the upward creep of GPAs nationwide, even at the best schools. Some blame the high cost of education. Avril says a professor once told her that students, especially those paying full-freight tuition, expect sky-high grades simply because they pay sky-high tuition. Avril blames "female socialization" for her own laissez-faire grading system. "I feel I have a hard time being harsh," she says.

Still others point to a pack mentality. Zirkel points out that at Lehigh, new teachers start out with even grade distribution, but eventually tire of student complaints (and reputations of being hard graders) and succumb to grade inflation. "They will tell you they're a cog in the system," says Zirkel, who terms himself "not popular, but not off-the-chart unpopular" with students.

His real unpopularity at Lehigh might be with his fellow professors. In an effort to bring grades back down, this year, Zirkel offered a cash reward to the Lehigh professor who would score the highest on an index composed of final-grade distribution and teacher evaluations. He had no takers.

A similar plan met similar fate

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## Skip days give students a break from studies

By Kristina Lane  
College Press Service

Minutes before dawn, there is a faint chime of campus bells. As the bells grow louder, bleary-eyed college students are jarred from their slumber. Soon students' screams are heard across campus as they race up and down dormitory hallways.

One might think this is a cruel joke, stirring students from much-needed rest. But it's one time a year students don't mind waking up early. That's because the bells herald a tradition known as skip day, and for

the next 24 hours, students enjoy a time-out from their academic responsibilities--no classes, no tests, just time to relax and enjoy the day.

On many campuses, the annual skip day is a decades-long tradition. At Doane College in Crete, Neb., for example, skip day is known as Stop Day and has been going on since the 1940s, says J.S. Engebretson, Doane's director of public relations.

"Stop Day was originally created for campus cleanup," says Engebretson, who says the day now is intended as leisure time before the

beginning of spring exams. "These days, some students might work on beautification in the morning, but by afternoon, everyone is having fun at a nearby park."

Festivities begin at dinner on the day before Stop Day, as the student government association president announces a dance at the student union. The following day, students gather at Tuxedo Park to play volleyball or softball while members of sororities and fraternities sing, dance and act in the annual talent show. The winners of the talent show

are crowned Mr. and Ms. Doane of the year.

Lorrie Swertzic, a Doane senior, says she finds Stop Day to be a perfect release from stress before the onslaught of final exams, and believes the tradition should continue as long as Doane exists.

"No one misses the activities on Stop Day," she explained. "It is a good, clean environment with a lot of fun--total Doane environment. You have to be involved as a student to understand the feeling."

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