

# The Guilfordian



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## Should Guilford Change Its Grading System?

For the Present System

Dear Janice:

You asked me to state briefly my view on changing the present system of grades to one which would merely record "passing" or "failing." Point blank, I am against such a change. I am against it not because I believe that the present grading system is a perfect tool of educational measurement. I am against such a change because I believe that the present system of differential grades, imperfect as it is, performs certain vital functions in the educational process which I feel, a mere recording of "passing" or "failing" cannot perform, at least not on undergraduate level. Evaluation of graduate work is altogether a different story.

Education, as I see it, is a refining process. Liberal arts education in particular is the co-operative effort on the part of student and teacher to develop the potentialities of each individual student and bring his innate abilities and human qualities to fruition. The process is complex, cumulative, up-grading and uplifting.

As every refining process the educative process requires continuous testing of its results. It requires constant quality control. It is here that a system of differential grades, if properly handled, performs a vital function. It points to underdeveloped areas of weakness as well as to developed areas of strength. It recognizes achievement and, at the same time, stimulates effort. A mere recording of "passing" and "failing" has neither special indicative value nor has it incentive power. It fails to register progress and may retard or even impede, the vital process of growth.

Now I have heard it said that the present system of grades is not without similar dangers; that, in particular, the average student may feel frustrated and become discouraged if, in spite of his best efforts, his record shows no sensational improvement. Such notion overlooks an important fact. It overlooks the fact that the student as he advances in his four years' course of study is gradually exposed to a greater and greater challenge so that, as a matter of fact, the maintenance of a more or less stable record of average achievement indicates the student's ability to meet such increasingly greater challenge squarely and fairly. That certainly indicates progress; it indicates personal growth.

To those, on the other hand, who meet the challenge of higher learning with superior achievement—as many do—the system of individual grades renders the same service that individual and differentiated scoring renders to the participants in competitive athletic contests: it makes them potential candidates of the "Mono-

gram Club" of scholars; more important, it makes them candidates for entering the professions — if that is their goal.

Cordially yours,  
 Curt Victorius

### For a Change

Americans have a great faith in the efficiency of education, which is a factor of prime importance. However, in the effort to carry out the "Learning Theory," college educators frequently lose sight of the true goals of education—the development of good character, the building of good citizens, and the promotion of those sensibilities in the students minds which will evoke an appreciation of the beautiful. Of course, scholarship is still the most important factor in securing the coveted college degree. However, it should not be regarded as the only criterion by which a student's success in life is measured, because what really counts in our Democracy is life itself and how it is lived. Thus a good educational system presupposes a composite aim; the training of young men and women to become good citizens of the future, mentally and physically fit to assume their role in society.

The idea of education viewed from this angle is to get the students interested in doing their best in anything that is undertaken at college, whether it be studying a lesson, playing baseball, leading a discussion group, presiding over a class, or editing a student paper. It is not the highest marks achieved in tests that are the chief criterion of the good all-around student, but the attitude of the students toward work, toward their teacher and schoolmates, toward school rules and toward the college spirit in general.

Of course we want the students to achieve a certain degree of scholarship as evidence of the fact that they have mastered a certain subject. However, a student whose attitude toward work is very satisfactory, should be entitled to recognition as the student who, because he is endowed with the gift of intellectual power, can grasp the subject quickly as he listens to the teacher when he explains the lesson; then, again, if a student happens to manifest leadership in a given activity, let's say in a literary or dramatic, or debating club, or contributes to the success of these clubs by actual participation, he or she should be given the deserved recognition.

Not to be overlooked is the teacher's part in this process of teaching and learning. It involves the teacher's skill in ascertaining the aptitudes and capacities and abilities of the students. It is the teachers personal job to encourage them to do their best in every field of endeavor. There is always the factor of individual differences which must be taken into consideration. The teacher must seek these differences and provide opportunity to every student to give expression of their interests.

The tendency to single out the bright student and to praise him to the sky must be counteracted. The practice of awarding grades A, B, C, D, F, and the tendency to compare grades of the brighter students with those of the slow learning student has no merit, because it leads to tension, jealousy, competition, and rivalry for grades. It leads further to frustration and nervous breakdowns. A grade chaser tends to resort to devious methods to achieve high grade and defeats the very purpose of scholarship. The only grade to be assigned is satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

Of course this system of education will not find approval with the college teacher who believes that scholarship is measured chiefly by grades. The writer has gone to various schools and from the experience he has gathered, he has come to the conclusion that the grading system as used today is detrimental to character building and the fos-

tering of scholarship. The proposed scheme or system of education is based on the three-fold purpose: finding out, promoting, and developing the talents of every student; the development of skills, attitudes and the training of character. This can be achieved by the application of the grade awarding and grade chasing technique. There should be periodic tests, of course, but they should be used merely for the purpose of insuring the study habit of the students. The main objective is to encourage everyone to do his or her level best in all tests, to study hard, to review the work, and to pay particular attention to the content, accuracy, and neatness of the student's work.

If the student is not required to study for a grade but for the purpose of gaining knowledge and an appreciation of the beautiful, he will not be as frustrated as he is today, but he will be a happy and hardworking student. This system has been tried by farsighted teachers in other schools and with considerable success in promoting sound scholarship and good character

George Tielman

### For the Present System

A school which gave out letter grades which indicated no more than whether or not a student has passed or failed, would be a workable system for a student body which is genuinely interested in the detached pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake. Such a system would fit their needs and attitudes.

However, there are several classes on this campus, in which teachers do not emphasize grades and usually do not place grading marks on homework or examination papers, other than some pass or fail indication or a sentence or two describing how good or bad the work was.

In general the student reaction to this method has been unfavorable, resulting in complaints about the confusion under which they work; uncertainty about how well or not they are doing. Whether we like it or not, we live in a society where the emphasis in almost every field of endeavor is on competition. Most of us have been trained from childhood under such a system and we're grade conscious. Often those people who work the hardest are stimulated by just a sense of competition and take a pride in the high honors they've won. With no other grades but P and F such a stimulus would be absent. Students who put in longer hours in studies for more than mediocre grades will be a little bitter to have to go unrecognized. In our society today most achievement is based on a stimulus of competition, recognition and reward. It is unrealistic to suppose that any group but the minority are interested in seeking knowledge for the sake of it and open to question to maintain that this detached interest would replace the competitive spirit should competitive grading be abolished. Before we make a move in any new direction we ought to be sure that the abolition of the grading system is what everyone wants and not just a dream of ideal scholastics on the part of a few.

Student's Comment

### For a Change

Here is the story of a little school with a big idea, yet a very simple one. The idea that education, to be of greatest value must be geared to the physical, mental and spiritual development of the individual, and that education is life itself and not preparation for life.

The late Marietta Johnson, the founder of this school, in realizing these aims of education saw that our traditional education institutions were, if anything hindering the sound development of the student. In her teaching experiences she noticed that the school life of the student was uninteresting and often frustrating. These realiza-

tions led her to eliminate many of the traditional methods while adding many new features to her new school and educational philosophy.

Her new school, The School of Organic Education in Fairhope, Alabama, was to have no tests, marks, honor societies and was to do away with competition between students whenever possible. There were not to be students who felt superior or inferior because of their academic standing nor were there to be the other frustrations which are associated with the vicious competition of the traditional school system. In their place there would be new incentives to learn and new goals. The goal was not a mark but that each student do his best. The new interests were drama, arts, crafts and especially group work and play. Students were to learn by doing, if it were nature study, to go out and investigate nature itself, not just read about it in a book. The student was to be trusted and with no tests or marks there was no reason to cheat or even consider the necessity of an honor system.

To an outsider this sounds very idealistic and impractical. Strange as it may seem, this atmosphere of self discipline did not result in chaos and a "do as you please system." It meant that students were working to better themselves, often going beyond the usual standard. A student who could find virtually no interest in academic work might "find himself" in the other outlets, such as manual training, arts, folk dancing or music. Of course there were some who could never become adjusted to this system after experiencing the traditional atmosphere of competition.

Students did not need tests and competition to urge them to learn for learning was a stimulating experience in itself. It was LIFE—not preparation for life. They wanted to learn for they wanted to live.

This of course, seems quite irrelevant to Guilford College but it does touch upon some problems which are current on this campus.

Students at Guilford sense that something is lacking in their college experiences but do not seem to know where to start or what the actual deficiency is. It is quite apparent that all too many of us count the minutes of our class periods as a convict "does his time." Our campus on week-ends shows that to those who can, the weekend is a time to get away from it all. College life should not be that way and does not need to be so.

Some students and faculty feel that the elimination of the system of handing out grades would be a step towards enriching our college life by lessening the tensions which accompany the competition of known marks. It is hoped that such a system might eliminate some of the honor problems that are so prevalent at this time. The exact details of such a system would have to be worked out by a group of INTERESTED students and faculty who are sincere in their desire to better our college experience.

It would be a very mistaken notion that such a system would be an elixir to our honor problems or that it would be simple to administer. Such a system of tests with grades which are recorded but never revealed to students except for important reasons, would be a great and possibly an impractical compromise to the philosophy of Organic Education as vaguely described earlier but it would be a step in the direction to lessen college tension. Not only would there be the direct problems of administering a new and unfamiliar system but there would have to be more work on the part of the faculty to make academic work more interesting giving the students an inward desire to learn. Marks

\*Mrs. Johnson's ideas were really not new, they were also held by such men as Rosseau and John Dewey, the latter whom visited her school several times. Her work was praised by such people as Dorothy Canfield Fisher, novelist.

would be replaced with remarks and comments by the teacher.

Not only must we have more creative experiences in our academic work but we also need new group experiences — working together upon a common problem or goal (such as was had when the college lake was made); group social life such as square dancing, folk dancing, hikes, picnics and retreats for study or contemplation; and more cultural experiences in music, art, literature and drama such as music appreciation sessions, concerts, art exhibits, etc.

There has been an attempt here to make a comparison between an educational system of grade and high school level with one of collegiate level and consequently it must be realized that the differences and circumstances of the two levels create many considerations in trying to apply the technique of one to the other. A change in our grading system is necessary and will work but it must be accomplished with a faith and interest that believes it will work. To accomplish such a change or any other change, students must organize, analyze the problem, outline the mechanics of the new system and "sell it" to the other students and faculty. It will not be fool-proof but it will work as it has in other educational institutions.

Frank Laraway  
 Don Rockwell

## Cheerleaders Join Student Affairs Board

At the March 11th meeting of the Students Affairs Board, the Board approved the constitution of the Cheerleaders and unanimously voted that the body become a member of the Board. Charlie Austin, head cheerleader, presented the constitution and the petition to join the Board. Emily Warrick, the newly elected head cheerleader, will represent the organization on the Board.

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