

Questioning the Testing Policy

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No limit is placed on major labs, papers, or investigations, and though the current guidelines also call for all tests, major projects and quizzes to be registered and scheduled, many teachers do not update regularly.

The Testing Policy Committee then wrote a proposal. The proposal was not an end in itself, but rather, "[It] was created to create discussion and generate interest among students, faculty, and administration. It consisted of a very basic format that also included examples of possible resolutions and examples of major assignments," Alex said.

The proposal's goals were "to provide each student with the opportunity to exhibit mastery of the subject material, allow students to utilize time management skills, [and to] reduce stress and increase sleep to heighten attentiveness and participation in class."

Through a series of brainstorming sessions and informal talks with the student body, the committee made several recommendations.

Among them were the less plausible suggestions of limiting tests to four per week and a limit of three in the last week of the quarter, when most projects are due. More realistic was requiring more projects, as well as all tests, to be scheduled on the At-A-Glance page. The proposal also made it clear that the student, not the teacher, must take the initiative and deal with problems in advance if they arise.

With a set of potential solutions in hand, the Testing Policy Committee attempted to present their ideas to the administration's Curriculum Standards and Assessment Task Force, but "they were not ready for student involvement," according to committee member Katherine Chen ('02). Instead, the Testing Policy Committee turned to Faculty Council, and President Joe Liles graciously put the committee on the Faculty Council's agenda for an early January meeting.

After the initial presentation of the proposal, a discussion followed. The discussion

was centered on a number of points including the student's responsibility in keeping up with work, the possibility of scheduling certain periods or certain days for testing in one subject area, the importance of considering time-consuming items other than tests, and lightening homework in periods where it seemed many students had tests and projects. Mr. Liles said, however, "that testing is necessary at our school [because] testing lets students know where they are in a course," and the unofficial minutes of the meeting noted that tests bunching up in groups "was a necessary consequence of having 2-3 tests per quarter, and that they cover at least 2-3 weeks' worth of material. The [Committee members] understood the dilemma." According to all involved, the dialogue was, in the words of Mr. Bullard, "beneficial, and at the very least it makes the faculty aware of student concerns."

Also discussed were the advantages to a few tests per quarter that weighed heavily on quarter grades, or many tests and smaller grades. An excellent example of this dichotomy is the difference between Physics with Topics and Advanced Biology.

Dr. Bennett sees many advantages in the Physics system. He said, "tests serve a useful purpose by requiring students to review a fairly large body of material and see connections, [an] advantage [that] is lost if teachers only give quizzes on smaller bodies of material, [and] learning to study for [multi-chapter, multi-topic] tests in high school will help students once they are in college." On the other hand, a bad day along with a test that counts 40% can damage a quarter grade harshly, but Dr. Bennett points out, "the rest of the grade goes for things like homework, labs and class commitment, which are based on work that students do every day/week, and this reflect overall performance, not just performance on one assessment." Also, test corrections allow students to recover some points lost on a bombed test.

Mrs. Brinson takes the opposite approach in Advanced

A senior's assignments schedule for the week of October 24 - November 4, 2001.

Biology. There, students have a test almost every Friday, as well as a lab during their lab period. The other class time is used to discuss the reading done outside of class for comprehension. Mrs. Brinson said this method gave the class "structure," and though tests count for two-thirds of the quarter grade, screwing up on one individual test would not kill one's grade because there are six more. Furthermore, students may take a pass twice a quarter and reschedule their exam if that Friday is particularly bad for them. However, even routine stress is still stress, and seven tests are nothing to sneeze at. On this issue, Josh Michener ('02) said, "It is nice to be able to mess up on a single test, and not have it count very much, but it can be tiring to begin studying for the next test almost as soon as you get the earlier one back."

The Faculty Council members present at the meeting reached a consensus on a few of the issues. Mrs. Skidmore said one issue was, "the need for keeping up with assignments and homework and for regularly reviewing in order to master material being covered. That does then alleviate massive

amounts of new learning before a test which seems to create a need for staying up all night to feel prepared." According to Steven, "The teachers have agreed to come up with ways in order not to make students too stressed,"

such as using less weighted, less stressful, but more frequent, regular quizzes. The goal would be, according to Mr. Bullard, "that studying for a test should be little more than a review of material, taking an hour or so." In this way, the stress of individual tests will decrease.

Also, the Faculty Council made no resolutions but "agreed upon that all tests and major assignments should be posted on-line using 'OIC' or posting directly using the on-line form," said the unofficial minutes. Those present agreed to encourage their colleagues, even those who are flexible with their assignment dates and thus avoid the At-A-Glance log, to schedule their tests and assignments so other teachers can tell at what times other teachers have scheduled their tests, and avoid bunching up.

After the Faculty Council meeting, having gathered teacher input, the Testing Policy Committee was able to present their work to the junior class at a Monday Meeting. There,

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"[the Testing Policy Committee was] drastically supported by the students in our efforts to look at this issue even further. The fact that the majority of the students thought they were not properly using the testing policy

procedure raised a lot of eyebrows, especially for the administration," said Alex. The Testing Policy Committee noted many of the suggestions raised by the junior class at that meeting.

The Testing Policy Committee is currently evaluating the feedback it received from the meetings with the Faculty Council and junior class. In addition, the idea of a "Student Initiative Council," integrating and overseeing committees such as Testing Policy and Senior Exemption Exams, has been generated. According to the President, "The student initiative council seems like a very possible, but difficult option that I want to put a lot of my effort into. I see a permanent council as the best way to ensure the continuation of our student initiative that we have started this year." Soon the Testing Policy Committee, regardless of affiliation with the Student Initiative Council, will begin to add more junior members who will run the committee next year, and will then prepare for a longer-term solution to multiple tests.

For now, we'll all be a little more aware of tests and projects, but stress will still be our way of life.

Got suggestions for the Testing Policy Committee you want to see in print, or want to comment on this article? Write a letter to the editor and see your words in the next issue!

To Allison Meyer:
Hey hot mama. Thanks for being a friend this past year. You are a wonderful RLA and I know you will do well in the future.
Toyin O.

To: Anthony Reid
To our chocolate love god,
I hope you have a fabulous Valentine's Day.
Your faultless RPCs

To Ashley Alexander and Whitney Norris,
You two are awesome!
Keep on cheerleadin!
Thanks for being great friends
Happy Valentine's Day
-Emery

To Carleda,
Happy Valentine's Day.
Your Secret Admirer

Kevin,
You're the best and I love you always.
Remember: Socks!
(He He He)
Brettany