

Adhering to Existing Scale Would Make A's Meaningful

RICHARD CRAMER
POINT OF VIEW

Although I think it would be draconian to try to impose a fixed grade-distribution plan for individual courses, departments or the whole University, I am not sympathetic to those who totally dismiss the phenomenon of rising grades as nothing about which to be concerned.

Every college course (not just in math or natural science) should present new facts, concepts and perspectives. It should also challenge students to show how well they understand, communicate to others and apply new materials. Individual or group projects, homework, term papers, quizzes and exams are ways of demonstrating a student's degree of mastery over a subject.

If an instructor cannot differentiate among students, this is, I feel, (a) willful derogation of an instructor's obligation to give meaningful feedback to students and/or (b) evidence that the instructor has not offered enough new and challenging material so that variations in effort and ability will produce recognizable differences in student performance.

I understand that egalitarian values argue against classifying students through differential grading. But we are misleading students if we give high grades that encourage all or most of a class to think that they have greater aptitude in a subject than they have really demonstrated. Showing some competence does not deserve such high grades that they devalue the performance of those who display truly outstanding competence. Moreover, a reputation for high grading tends to attract students who care more about grades than learning.

Finally, when a substantial number of faculty are giving very high grades, this puts pressure on other faculty to follow suit to avoid being singled out as "bad teachers" who stand in the way of increasingly devalued honors like Dean's List, Phi Beta Kappa, chances for post-graduate education, etc.

I should report in this regard my experience as an adviser in hearing students beg for my help in getting them into high-graded courses or to be allowed to drop courses where As or Bs are not virtually assured.

It is embarrassing to hear students report that "my friend got an A in Instructor X's section and didn't do nearly as much work as another friend who got only a B in another section." I usually find that the instructor of the latter section awarded a substantial proportion of As, but clearly expected more of her or his students to get that grade than the first instructor.

One of my colleagues has argued for a philosophy that would lead the instructor to put in whatever extra effort was needed to bring weaker students up to the standard of excellence that would merit an A grade. This is certainly noble, but even if many high-grading instructors were operating under this philosophy, I question why the best students should be short-changed by an instructor who would have little time left for them after devoting so much effort to the other students. This philosophy seems to put an unnecessarily low ceiling on what the best students might learn in the course. They will come away from the course with an A, but will they value that A and the course as much as they would have if they had been challenged to go beyond the standard the instructor is willing to accept for an A?

It has also been argued that cooperation with fellow students (and the teacher) should be an important feature in the process of learning. I do not disagree. But I cannot agree that group projects with a single grade for all group members should be the sole, or even primary, basis for assigning grades in a course.

More often than not, there is wide variation in the contribution made by group members to the final product, and they come away with different levels of understanding of what was done in the project and how it made use of course concepts and ideas.

Students will not be able to rely on the group from their class if they are expected to apply course materials in some future endeavor.

We need to be able to give them realistic feedback on how much they personally actually know about what the group has done. This can really only be done by assessing each student separately.

In sum, I would argue that the grade distribution problem would be resolved if the following were to occur:

- a) Instructors really taught new college-level materials of sufficient quantity and difficulty,
- b) They made a serious effort to measure individual students' level of learning of these materials and
- c) They made use of already extant University-approved definitions of letter grades (e.g., A = "outstanding mastery of course material"; B = "superior mastery"; C = "satisfactory mastery"; and D = "unsatisfactory mastery").

While I would oppose any University-wide formal rules or formulas on this matter, I think it is reasonable for departments to include the above among criteria used in evaluating their instructors' teaching performance when it comes time for decisions about salary, promotion and tenure.

One final matter: the concern students express about being placed at a disadvantage relative to students from other schools where "grade inflation" continues to exist. As it is now, most outsiders whom students will want to impress (graduate or professional schools, employers, etc.) recognize that a 3.2 average doesn't mean much from a school where 3.0 is the overall average. It would be far better to have that 3.2 when the overall average was 2.7.

To this end, I think it would be quite reasonable for students to inform outsiders what our overall grade-point average is when reporting their own average - if grades return to more meaningful levels.

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Baby Dumping Shouldn't Be So Easy

Our society is obsessed with convenience. We have 24-hour everything. We can shop from our living room through the Internet. And with the enactment of recent social programs, it has never been easier for a mother to abandon her newborn.

Residents of Hamburg, Germany, call it the "baby bank." A mother can approach the Sternpark Clinic and discard her baby in a chute, where the infant is placed in a baby carrier. A silent alarm sounds within the clinic and a nurse soon arrives to retrieve the child. No cameras monitor the outside of the clinic where the chute is located, allowing the mother to avoid criminal charges.

"Operation Foundling," as the program is called in Hamburg, has similar incarnations in South Africa. Here in the United States, California is discussing a program that would allow parents to abandon a newborn in a "safe place" such as a hospital emergency

room or fire department anonymously and with no threat of punishment. Such a law already is on the books in Texas, and variations of this are present in some communities in Alabama, Florida and Minnesota.

Let me preface my argument by saying that infant abandonment is a societal ill with no simple solution. In Germany last year, 130 infants were abandoned in trash bins and cardboard boxes. Thirty of them died. By estimates, twice as many children are abandoned in the United States than in Germany.

But the answer is not providing an easy, inhumane way for panicked mothers to throw away their children. As one German religious group puts it, "It's creating disposable children for the disposable society."

The majority of mothers taking advantage

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of the drop-boxes are young and their pregnancies are unexpected and hidden from their families, if a stable one is even present.

But "Operation Foundling" and its cousins, as with most social programs, do nothing to combat the root of the problem of teen pregnancy and a lack of culpability for their actions and subsequent repercussions.

The communities who see these baby banks as an appropriate solution to unwanted pregnancies should spend extra effort to promote safer sex and abstinence. They should step up education in schools and advocate more parent-child discussion.

But most of all, they should promote the word shunned more and more in today's society: responsibility. These mothers made the choice to have unprotected sex. They chose to have sex at a young age, out of wedlock or even a stable relationship. It would seem that they have already made some tough decisions that mature adults have to agonize over. These decisions have consequences pegged on to them, including children.

So if these mothers were responsible enough to spread their legs nine months before, they should be responsible enough to deal with its aftereffects. Abortion is available. For those who find that practice reprehensible, adoption is another option.

But abandonment is not a viable choice. It's a crime that should not be mitigated by a drop-slot, where a baby can be anonymously dropped like an overnight rental at Blockbuster Video. Hey, let's make it even more convenient by allowing unwanted infants to

be put in roadside recycling bins. Obviously, the program has dedicated, good-hearted people who believe in the cause working in these clinics. But if this type of "surrogate parenthood" spreads, teen pregnancies and subsequent abandonment will not be reduced. It will skyrocket.

By making the entire process anonymous and simple, with no threat of punishment for the crime of abandonment, deterrence is completely lacking. The first pregnancy may be one full of fear for the mother. But after getting rid of her first kid unscathed and with relative ease, her subsequent unwanted pregnancies will be much easier for her to handle.

Under the program in Germany, a mother can return for up to eight weeks to reclaim her child. So I guess it's a type of layaway for infants. I'm sure that she'll make a great mother once she retrieves her kid. And in 15 years or so, that child will be making the same drop-slot trip her mother made.

Maybe Mom can even drive her there. Though its aims are noble and well-meaning, programs such as "Operation Foundling" are not solutions to societal problems.

Anonymous abandonment without due punishment does not promote the responsibility that will curb future teen pregnancy. For that to happen, parents need to be more involved with their children's lives. Safe sex and abstinence must continue to be taught in school.

And for those who are irresponsible, the consequences for their actions must fall on their shoulders, not those of surrogate mothers in the clinics carrying out the program.

You got yourself into this, so take it like a woman. Step up and face reality.

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FAWN PATTISON
POINT OF VIEW



5 Easy Steps to Score

Ah, spring. The time of year when a young man's thoughts turn to romantic pursuits and the fairer sex. Everywhere on campus, couples in love are blissfully enjoying each other's company. But you, loser boy, are sitting at home watching demolition derby on TNN and wondering why you can't seem to attract the ladies. Is it your personality? Your breath? That unsightly fur growing on your back?

Wonder no more, hapless suitor. You too can be successful in love. (EDITOR'S NOTE: The opinions expressed herein are those of Mr. Slagle alone. The Daily Tar Heel assumes no responsibility for the results of those opinions. Those results might include: public humiliation, loss of funds, feelings of inadequacy, arrest, incarceration, flogging, hair loss and itchy rash.)

Lesson No. 1: Honesty Is Not Your Friend
Many people have said that the best way to attract a mate is to be yourself. These people are idiots. Chances are, you have been yourself for most if not all of your life, and it has gotten you nowhere. You must therefore stretch the truth a little to make yourself more enticing.

With any luck, when she figures out who you really are, it will be too late. (EDITOR'S NOTE: Lying is wrong.)
First, you need to create an occupation for yourself. Choose one that conveys a sense of power, prestige and mystery (Internet guru, Wall Street broker, CIA assassin) rather than one that says minimum wage, no responsibility and questionable personal hygiene habits (fry cook, supermarket bag boy, DTH columnist).

Lesson No. 2: Dress for Success
Now that you have a power job, you must look the part. Your wardrobe will reveal what kind of person you are. Here are some helpful examples:
Suit and tie: Serious professional
Hawaiian shirt: Carefree beach bum
Buttless chaps: Gay cowboy
Indian chief outfit: Indian chief or member of the Village People.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The DTH does not endorse the stereotyping individuals on the basis of their clothes. It should be noted that Mr. Slagle turned in this column wearing a pink bathrobe, fuzzy slippers and a pirate hat.)
Lesson No. 3: Planning Your Date
If you have correctly followed Lessons 1 and 2 (and shaved that fur off your back), then you should have found a woman willing to spend at least a few hours in close proximity to you.

Now you must plan your evening. The quintessential dinner and a movie is always a safe choice. That said, you must take great care in selecting the proper restaurant and film.

When choosing an eating establishment, remember that cheaper is not always better. Yes, the free toy with the Happy Meal is an added bonus, but you may want something slightly more upscale.

In choosing a movie, remember that you want to be perceived as sensitive, cultured and tasteful. Good choice: "The English Patient." Bad choice: "Naked Sorority Slumber Party." (EDITOR'S NOTE: What's wrong with "Naked Sorority Slumber Party"?)
It will lead your date to believe that you are a hormone-aided sex fiend devoid of class. (EDITOR'S NOTE: Oh.)
Anyway, "Naked Sorority Slumber Party 2" is better.

Lesson No. 4: Concluding Your Date
After the movie is over, you need to take your date home, because you are running out of witty things to say and because kidnapping is a crime. Once you arrive at her house, you will face the most crucial part of your date: the good-night kiss.

In deciding whether to go for the kiss, you must pick up the discreet clues your date will be dropping. If she lingers at the door, fidgets, casts coy looks in your direction or jumps on top of you while screaming, "I want to ride you like a pony," then proceed at will. On the other hand, if she runs to the house, slams the door and throws the deadbolt, your chances might be less than optimal.

Lesson No. 5: Following Up
After your date, you want to maintain casual contact with your potential paramour. You should appear interested, but not too interested.
Do: Call her a few days later. Don't: Watch her through binoculars from across the street.

By following these instructions, then you should be well on your way to romance. But if you follow these lessons and are still unable to snag a girl, you should resign yourself to the fact that you are a hopeless, pathetic goon who will never have a meaningful relationship with anything other than your microwave. But cheer up: at least you got rid of the back fur.

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Current Tuition Setup Aids Rich, Hurts Poor

JOHN F. STEWART
POINT OF VIEW

Please consider a new policy initiative for the state of North Carolina. Knowing how difficult it is for young people to make the transition to adulthood, I propose we soften the blow by taking a couple hundred million dollars of general tax revenue each year and providing several thousand \$50,000 grants to some of the state's young adults.

However, I suggest that we structure the grants to ensure that a third of the grants go to the children of the 10 percent of N.C. families with the highest incomes and that at least half of the grants go to children of the 25 percent of the families in the state who earn at least twice the median state income.

I would hope that by now the hairs on the back of the necks of members of Students for Economic Justice are beginning to bristle.

However, before you storm Gardner Hall to burn me in effigy (or in person), realize that what I have just described is the distribution of benefits of the current UNC-Chapel Hill tuition structure.

As reported in The Daily Tar Heel on March 2, more than a third of the UNC-CH entering freshman class came from homes in the top 10 percent of the income distribution (family incomes in excess of \$100,000 per year).

The median income of families of entering freshman was more than \$80,000 a year, roughly twice the state's median family income.

Though you can quibble with my numbers if you wish, the truth is that a UNC-CH education costs about \$50,000 more than is covered by in-state tuition. The difference between what your education costs and what you pay is made up largely by general tax revenue.

You are feeding at the public trough, and the majority of the feed is going to N.C. families who need it the least. This might or might not have been the intent, but it is the result.

If you support the current tuition structure, you are supporting a tax-funded subsidy that flows disproportionately to the state's highest income families. How can you justify this result? Let's examine the logical possibilities.

You could argue that we should be using tax revenue to benefit high-income people. This argument can be as simple as individual preferences. If you just are willing to state that you favor subsidizing high-income families, then fine. We're done. That's exactly what we are doing now.

You could, however, take the argument a little farther than just whom you like and whom you don't. Maybe you could find some logical basis to argue high-income people are more "deserving" than low-income people.

Or maybe income really isn't the issue here. If the state is going to subsidize higher education, shouldn't it put its money where the return is the highest and subsidize the best, the most deserving, students without regard to income?

Anyone with any knowledge of the relationship between socioeconomic status and most measures of educational achievement knows that students from higher income families have, on average, higher test scores, higher grade

point averages, higher high school graduation rates and so forth.

Though this provides an explanation of why high-income

families get a disproportionate share of the subsidy, does it justify the subsidy? On this point, we often hear Frank Porter Graham's "education is a public good" pronouncement. Because the general population benefits from education, they should cover the cost.

At risk of committing a heresy second only to publicly criticizing Dean Smith, Dr. Graham was wrong or partially wrong. Though higher education undoubtedly produces some external benefits, most of the benefits of education go to the individual receiving it.

The student gets the consumption value of what many will recall as the four best years of their lives, the student gets the warm glow of the knowledge he or she accumulates and the student gets the additional half million dollars of lifetime earnings a college education confers.

Even if the public benefits exceed the cost of the subsidy, support for the current distribution of the subsidy requires you to argue that:

- 1) The public benefits more from educating a rich student than from educating an economically disadvantaged one, and
- 2) In the absence of a subsidy, the rich are less likely to purchase education on their own than the poor.

Neither strikes me as particularly plausible.

What if you can't buy the "more deserving" or the "public good" argument? How else could one rationalize the disproportionate subsidy to the rich?

You could argue that taxpayers would never support a system of higher tuition for those able to pay while providing a generous subsidy to low-income students. Maybe the only way to get affordable higher education for the poor is to subsidize a lot of rich families in order to get a little trickle-down.

Or I suppose you could argue that the current system of low tuition combined with increasingly inadequate state funding will ultimately diminish the quality of UNC-CH to the point where high-income families will choose to send their children elsewhere, leaving more room for low-income students to receive a subsidized, albeit lower quality, education.

If you want to justify the current tuition structure using one of these last two arguments, I will have to admit with great sadness, you might have a point.

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