

Grade Inflation Talks To Get Second Chance

By JOHN MABERRY
Staff Writer

A controversial February report on UNC grade inflation caused some students to fear their grade point averages might plummet this fall, but officials say the report is still in its discussion stages. Misconceptions initially circulated about the report, which called for a campus-wide reduction in the average GPA, and what it would mean for the coming fall semester.

"The initial report was intended to state a problem and to offer a set of proposed solutions," said Boone Turchi, an economics professor and the primary author of the report.

But Turchi said the report did not entail any immediate change in the grading policy for the next semester.

"We need to do a more complete study next year," he said.

"At the end of the semester, it seemed the best thing to do would be to form a one-year committee that would start disseminating and collecting information from faculty, staff and students."

Although no change in policy is imminent, the report has illuminated present inflation in the average University GPA.

Some professors say the report will not influence their current grading systems.

"I don't think my grades have changed in many years so whether they are too high on the average does not really concern me," said economics Professor John Akin.

"Bringing something into the spotlight will definitely make people think about it, but as to how the report will affect grading procedures, I can't say," said Student Body President Brad Matthews.

Critics of the report are concerned that lowering GPAs would harm gradu-

ates' efforts to enter the work force or graduate school. This concern stems from the fact UNC stands alone among universities taking action to curb grade inflation.

But Turchi said the University's reputation would negate any dip in GPAs.

"I frankly think (lowering GPAs) will have no effect at all," Turchi said. "Fact is, this is a fine University. We would get a lot of positive publicity."

The target aggregate GPA in Turchi's report was between 2.6 and 2.7. He said within five years of implementing a new grading standard, a 2.6 could hold the same value with employers as the current average of 3.0.

Turchi's concern was for the students whose lower GPAs would be misunderstood during the time before employers and graduate schools fully recognized the change in grades.

"It's very incumbent upon us to make very clear what our grades mean," he said. "We need to write in big red letters on the transcripts that this student is caught in the middle of a transition, and then show what their marks mean going backwards."

Other critics fear that UNC will stand alone in implementing any deflation policy, giving students a competitive disadvantage.

"Graduate schools have so many admissions obligations that they're going to take the easiest and most mechanical way out," said political science Professor Joel Schwartz.

Turchi said grade inflation was a trend that plagued universities across the nation, particularly Ivy League schools. "The Ivy League has a big problem. Their GPAs mean nothing."

Despite Turchi's assurances, some students still believe that lowering the average GPA is an unfair proposal.

"Basically, I think it's the individual's responsibility to determine their own grades, not some outside arbitrary standard," said freshman Clay Phillips.

Matthews said grade inflation was a complicated issue that would not be settled in the immediate future. "This is an issue that is going to require a lot more discussion."

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UNC Student Body President Brad Matthews says the outcome of the grade inflation debate is uncertain.

CCI Program Under Way for Fall

By LAUREN BEAL
Assistant University Editor

When prospective UNC students received their acceptance packets with housing and meal information this spring, they got one extra brochure.

This year, officials offered students two models of IBM laptops at discounted prices in preparation for the Carolina Computing Initiative. The program will officially take effect in August. Initiated by the late Chancellor Michael Hooker, the program requires all incoming freshmen to have a laptop.

It also includes courses incorporating the

computers and renovations of campus buildings to accommodate the new technology. For entering freshmen, the new experience will start with summer orientation.

Elaine Tola, Academic Technology & Networks computer consultant, said the pilot programs that began last summer would continue this year.

Students who place orders for laptops will receive their new computers and learn how to use them at C-TOPS.

"They will leave with an understanding of how the machine is laid out," Tola said.

Students will be shown how to use online library searches, set up UNC e-mail accounts and browse classes' home pages.

While purchasing laptops through UNC is highly suggested for students, it is not required. Tola said officials hoped students who saw the sessions at C-TOPS would be encouraged to make setting up their computers a top priority.

As officials prepared for the launching of the program, this year's freshman class served as guinea pigs, often benefiting from the increased technology.

Marian Moore, vice chancellor for information technology, said the initiative began as a pilot program this year by offering discounted laptop to students and inviting them to take selected courses that incorporated laptop use.

"This year was a voluntary program," Moore said. "It was outrageously successful - we had over half of the freshman class buy laptops."

"We ran focus groups and got really good feedback," Moore said. "Everyone has agreed that it was worth the hassle."

Although the initiative will be phased in over the next four years, Tola said she thought the technological increase on campus would not be gradual. "I'd expect to see a huge influx of classes using technology on a regular basis."

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University to Dig Into Renovation Plans

By ALEXANDRA MOLAIRE
Assistant University Editor

Alternate campus walking routes and dust-laden surfaces won't become a thing of the past as many projects continue to alter the face of campus.

The Student Union renovation and expansion, the Undergraduate Library renovations and the Master Plan will all change the campus atmosphere in the coming years.

But the Union project is the only one with a tentative timeline with construction set to begin June 1.

If the project stays on schedule, it should be completed within two years, said Union Director Don Luse.

The \$13 million project, funded entirely by student fees, consists of three

phases. The completed project will include a 24-hour copy center and computer lab, student offices, meeting rooms and lounge space, Luse said.

He said that when construction started, the stairway between Student Stores and the Union would be sealed off. The Union bus stop will be moved to directly behind the bookstore. "We'll do our best to make sure the construction inconveniences people to a minimum."

While changes for the Union are under way, renovations for the Undergrad were put on hold after funds went to benefit Hurricane Floyd relief.

But plans and designs for the nearly \$9 million project are now ready to go, said Joe Hewitt, director of the Academic Affairs library.

In the midst of the upcoming legisla-

tive struggle for UNC-system funding, UNC will lobby lawmakers this summer to secure funds for its own projects. "We will be pushing it," Hewitt said. "It's hard to say how it will go with the legislature in the short session. It's unpredictable."

Although state funds were withheld from the renovation, the library is raising funds privately. The goal is to raise \$5 million with \$2 million going toward capital expenditures and \$3 million for an endowment, Hewitt said. "With \$9 million from the state, we'll use extra money to go top of the line with furniture and computer equipment," he said.

Once the University secures money, the project will probably be mapped out on a 12-month schedule, he said.

A project that is further in the future than the Undergrad renovations is the

Master Plan, a four-phase, long-term map for campus growth.

This summer, a team of environmental consultants will survey the campus to determine how much UNC can build without harming the water quality, said Linda Convisor, project manager from the Office of Facilities Planning.

Convisor said the University hoped to present the plan to the Board of Trustees this fall. But construction won't start until funds are secured.

She said the plan gave UNC the chance to improve campus conditions. "We're looking at a way to build a community, to use growth to fix some of the problems of the past."

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BCC Advocates to See Realization of Dream

By KAREY WUTKOWSKI
Staff Writer

After nearly nine years of administrative and fund-raising struggles, supporters of the Sonja H. Stone Black Cultural Center are able to see their dream for a freestanding center in blueprint form.

The building, slated to open in summer of 2002, is in the design development stage. "We are starting construc-

tion in January of 2001 with a duration of 530 days," said Anna Wu, project manager for the UNC Facilities Planning Department.

The BCC, currently located in the Student Union, will find its new home in a three-story, 36,000-square-foot building located between the Bell Tower and Coker Hall.

The recent bequest from UNC alumnus David Benjamin Clayton will help finance the \$9-million building.

The building will boast an auditorium, art gallery, library, multi-purpose room, dance studio, classrooms, seminar rooms and office space. "Obviously you can look around (the current center) and see how small and cramped it is," Evans said. "The BCC is an educational center

and a learning experience. This area will not cover it."

BCC acting Director Harry Amana said the building would allow the center to hold its programs in one place. "We won't have to borrow other people's facilities," he said. "It gives us a central place to work in with more space."

Amana said other organizations would be able to borrow the building. "It's going to force the rest of campus to see the building," he said. "It opens up the BCC to the rest of the campus."

BCC Program Coordinator and Publicist Lori Clark said the building's general use might change the center's image. "It will be a draw for us," she said. "It will bridge some of the gaps we've had before." The BCC moved into its current 900-square-foot space in the Student Union in 1988.

"After (former UNC Professor) Dr. Stone passed away in 1991, people thought they needed to do something for her spirit, her drive," Evans said.

The drive for the building was temporarily halted when Chancellor Paul Hardin refused to support it, saying the

BCC should be a "forum, not a fortress." In September 1992, about 1,500 students seized South Building in protest.

"Once Hardin agreed to a freestanding BCC (in 1992), there was a big push," Evans said. The BCC then undertook a fund-raising drive for the freestanding center, raising \$3.5 million.

Tyra Moore, president of the BSM, said this fund raising was a challenge. "They had some very good response in the beginning. But once you tap the initial resources, it's hard to get money."

In September, the Clayton bequest granted \$6 million to the fund, giving the BCC enough to begin construction. The new building renewed debate over what some perceive as the BCC's exclusionary nature. Sophomore Charles McGaw said he thought a multicultural center would be preferable.

"It's acting like it's just for black culture, not for everyone," he said. "That's why I think a multicultural center would be better."

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BCC acting Director Harry Amana said the new facility would give the BCC a central place to work in.

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