

Grade inflation still a UNC issue

Rising GPAs hurt public confidence

BY BRIAN HUDSON
UNIVERSITY EDITOR

A recent study from UNC's Educational Policy Committee found that students' grades at UNC are continuing on a dangerous trend of inflation.

The study is an extension of the February 2000 "Turchi Report," named after its author, UNC professor Boone Turchi, which documented the rise in the mean grade-point averages between 1967 and 1999. The EPC's study, which was presented to the Faculty Council during their April 23 meeting, found that GPAs are continuing to rise.

"I think it generated a substantial amount of interest and discussion, and I think everyone recognizes how complex and serious the issues are," said Peter Gordon, chairman of the EPC.

The EPC's study found that the average GPA for a UNC student had increased from 2.991 in the Spring 1999 to 3.065 in Spring 2003.

At the time of the Turchi Report, the most frequent letter grade at UNC was B, but since that time A has surpassed B to become the most commonly given letter grade. According to the EPC's study, over 40 percent of all grades awarded at the University are As.

The report goes on to propose several reasons for the GPA inflation. The EPC said that Web sites such as Pick-a-Prof might have spurred the increase. Pick-a-Prof allows students — for a fee — to access a professor's grading history as well as feedback from former students.

This information "could lead faculty to compete for student

enrollment (either consciously or unconsciously) by giving higher grades," the report stated.

Student evaluation of teachers also could have an effect on inflation, the study stated, because it provides a way for students to reinforce teachers for giving them higher grades.

Grade inflation is a problem because it could erode public confidence in UNC's evaluation of students' performance, the report concluded, leading the EPC to propose several ways for administrators address inflation.

The study recommended that senior academic administrators should consider establishing a mean GPA of 2.7 for all departments and enforcing budget sanctions to departments that exceed that limit. The idea of GPA limits was originally proposed by the Turchi Report, but EPC officials said it did not receive serious consideration.

Gordon said senior academic administrators now should gauge the report's recommendations.

"The next step would be to seriously consider what would be involved in implementing the various types of remedies proposed," he said.

Gordon said he got the sense that addressing inflation was something the Faculty Council intended to pursue. During the meeting, a straw vote indicated that a majority of the council members desired further action on the matter.

Joe Ferrell, secretary of the Faculty Council, said council members are interested in continuing discussion.

"I think the general reaction is yes, it should be further discussed and investigated," he said. "(But) most people are puzzled about what should be done."

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.

Restrictions limit lives of immigrants

BY EMILY VASQUEZ
STAFF WRITER

Amid the pressures of intensifying homeland security regulations this year, the nation has grappled with civil issues ranging from the legality of detentions at Guantanamo Bay to the possibility of immigration reform.

Leaders of the Hispanic immigrant community in Chapel Hill and Carrboro say that the tensions have penetrated the local level as well.

Carrboro Alderman John Herrera, who works on behalf of the Hispanic community, said he believes the atmosphere of the state has shifted significantly during the past year.

"The wave has turned more anti-immigrant," Herrera said. "There is the feeling that we have too many folks here and it's time to close the door."

Herrera added that factors beyond homeland security have also contributed to the equation.

"The economy has chipped people's comfort zones," he said. "When the economy is not thriving things can get mean."

Herrera noted the change in driver's license regulations in February, which made it impossible for immigrants to obtain licenses using foreign documentation.

Hector Perez, executive director of El Centro Latino in Carrboro, said the Internal Revenue Service is also making significant changes this year regarding the Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers used by some immigrants in place of Social Security numbers for tax and identification purposes.

Perez said changes will make it more difficult to obtain an ITIN, which many immigrants rely on whenever a Social Security number is required, such as for renting an apartment or on employment applications.

In Chapel Hill, supporters of the Hispanic immigrant community have provided leaders with funding to advocate policy changes.

Lew Borman, chairman of the Chapel Hill Committee of Volunteers, which makes recommendations to Chapel Hill Town Council regarding funding for community services, said the committee has been impressed with the sophisticated leadership within the Hispanic community.

Borman said although they are operating under a tight budget,

"There is the feeling that we have too many folks here and it's time to close the door."

JOHN HERRERA, ALDERMAN

the committee has made it a priority to provide funding to support the needs articulated by leaders.

But Perez said the difficulties have helped refocus community leadership. "You just have to go out there and work harder and be more strategic," he said.

In the wake of the changes made in driver's license regulations, Herrera began talks regarding a revision of voting rights that would allow immigrants who are in the process of naturalization to participate in local elections.

Herrera said the change would push leaders to consider the growing immigrant population more and would help the community recognize that many immigrants are documented and working toward citizenship.

In late April, Herrera presented this idea to a delegation from Orange County. Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-Orange, a member of the delegation, said she was surprised by the idea, but that she considers it realistic for Orange County someday.

"It's pretty cutting edge," she said. "I think it's the sort of thing that will take place here."

But, she said, it likely will be a slow process and could easily take 10 years.

Kinnaird said the changes like those she and Herrera are promoting likely will have to occur on a national scale, but she said discussions on such issues often start locally.

Kinnaird warned though that similar discussions might be avoided by some leaders in coming months as elections approach.

Perez said despite waves of negative sentiment this year and growing reluctance due to the elections, he feels this year has still been one of progress in the community.

El Centro Latino's after school outreach programs for elementary and high-school students continue to grow.

Also, this year, a program to promote health among Hispanic males also has taken off through a collaboration between El Centro, Planned Parenthood and the Department of Health.

Perez said he is excited by the program. "There is Latino leadership developing out there."

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Student loans could face major change

Lawmakers divided on interest rates

BY LAURA YOUNGS
MANAGING EDITOR

Republicans and Democrats are sparring on Capitol Hill about proposed changes to the Higher Education Act that would end fixed interest rates on consolidated loans to offset the cost of potentially increasing student loan limits.

Known as the College Access and

Opportunity Act, Republicans on the Education and Workforce Committee are pushing a bill outlining adjustments that would increase the amount first- and second-year students can borrow. At the same time, it would reduce the origination fee students must pay to acquire loans, from 3 percent of the amount borrowed to one percent.

First-year students would see an increase from \$2,625 to \$3,500, while second-year students could experience a \$1,000 increase to \$4,500. The maximum total loan limit of \$23,000 would remain.

With college costs rising, putting loans on par with tuition will give students access to more money without causing higher debt, said Alexa Marrero, spokeswoman for the U.S. House of Representatives Education and Workforce Committee. "The goal is to essentially modestly enhance them."

But to counteract the cost of those increases, Republicans have asked that those interest rates be variable and not fixed. Doing so would give students access to competitive interest rates, Marrero said.

"Borrowers are fixed into an interest rate based on the day they had the dumb luck of deciding to consolidate their loans," she said, adding that while borrowers can lock in low interest rates now, some are stuck with the higher rates of several years ago cannot take advantage of new rates.

"It's very important to look at the big picture," she said. "We have to look at what's better for borrowers over the long term."

But not everyone sees making interest rates variable as advantageous to students.

"The very first thing we should agree to is, no matter what, we should not hurt any students," said Tom Kiley, spokesman for Congressman George Miller, D-

Calif., who is a ranking member of the committee.

Kiley said that taking away the chance to secure fixed low interest rates could hurt students' ability to repay loans and cause defaults to rise. He added that pitting current students against graduates trying to pay their debts is unnecessary and will cost borrowers thousands of dollars in higher rates.

"It's really a false choice," he said. He added that for students planning for the future, not having the ability to fix low interest rates could deter them from aspiring to higher education altogether.

But no matter market rates, the federal cap is 8.25 percent, and in North Carolina, that ceiling is 7.75 percent. In addition, there is no origination fee in North Carolina, said Steven Brooks, executive director of the N.C. State Education Assistance Authority.

"The idea was not to give them more attractive terms, but to give them one place to pay," he said.

About \$21 billion during a seven year period would be freed up to help the program, money otherwise spent to make up for interest rate deficits, Marrero said.

She added that the variable rates would actually save borrowers money as well, as students stuck with the higher interest rates of the moment could go after competitive rates.

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

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The Daily Tar Heel

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One copy per person; additional copies may be purchased at The Daily Tar Heel for \$25 each.

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