

High marks remain a concern

Committee to examine grade inflation

BY BRIAN HUDSON
ASSISTANT UNIVERSITY EDITOR

Instead of a meter of success, the steady incline of grade point averages could be a University-wide problem, say some members of the Faculty Council.

A study released by the University's Educational Policy Committee last spring found that GPAs at UNC are on the rise, causing some to fear that the curriculum might not be challenging students enough.

While the information was presented to the Faculty Council at its April meeting, the council has been on hiatus for the summer and was unable to address the issue.

But now that school is back in session, there's little doubt that discussion of grade inflation will resurface.

Peter Gordon, chairman of the policy committee, said that as council members sit down to discuss inflation, several solutions could be considered.

"We all pretty much accept the fact and think it's good that assessment is primarily a duty of the instructor of the class," he said. "The University context in which that's done is really an issue that EPC addresses. Now how to

address that, given the tremendous diversity of classes and programs ... is an extremely vexing issue."

One solution the committee proposed was establishing a mean GPA for all departments. In their study, EPC members recommended that senior academic administrators should consider establishing a mean GPA of 2.7 and enforcing budget sanctions to departments that exceed that limit.

Chairwoman of the Faculty Judith Wegner said grade inflation will be addressed by the council this year, but a resolution of the issue could be hindered.

Next year, the general education curriculum that every UNC undergraduate must complete will undergo a complete overhaul.

Wegner said it would be a moot point to compile information and attempt to rectify the problem when the that information will change next year.

Grade inflation cannot be addressed through quick, simple solutions, Wegner said. Instead, attention must given to the entire process and philosophy of grading.

"Some people might say there are too many As, that it's too slack,"

she said. "We need to be sure the evaluation is fair to students."

Because grades are an assessment of the goals students meet for each course, University faculty must evaluate the goals they put forth and analyze the broader process of evaluation, Wegner said.

The EPC's study is an extension of the Turchi Report, a broader study of grade inflation that was completed in February 2000. Named after its author, UNC economics professor Boone Turchi, the report documented the rise in mean grade point averages between 1967 and 1999.

The EPC report released last spring indicates that grade inflation is a continuous occurrence at the University and in some cases has become widespread. The committee's study found that the average GPA for a UNC student increased from 2.991 in the spring 1999 to 3.065 in spring 2003.

At the time of the publication of the Turchi Report, the most frequent letter grade at UNC was a B.

But since that time, the letter grade A has surpassed B to become the most commonly given grade, accounting for 40 percent of all evaluations.

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.

Internet programs' rise prompts security fears

BY KELLY OCHS
FEATURES EDITOR

Before hitting the books this year, many UNC students will be making new friends — over the Internet.

Thefacebook, a site created this year, has become the latest Internet craze for many college students. The site allows users to create a profile and to search for other students who have similar interests.

But like any Web site, the potential for invasion of privacy exists.

Users can connect to other people at their school who have the same classes, live in the same residence hall, like the same bands or participate in the same activities.

Once connected, the users can invite other users to be friends. If the "friendship" is accepted by the other user, it creates a social network between the students that links them to even more students on campus.

"Thefacebook definitely is a source of information for its users," said Chris Hughes, a junior at Harvard University and one of the site's creators.

Hughes said that although the potential for abusing the site is large, Thefacebook gives users the option to block people from viewing their information.

"We really rely on users to alert us if there's any objectionable content," he said.

Mark Zuckerberg was a sophomore at Harvard University when he first came up with the idea to create an online directory where students at Harvard could search for other students in their classes and with the same hobbies. He then recruited four other friends to help him build the site.

Hughes said he never expected Thefacebook to grow as quickly as it did.

"At the time, we were only thinking in terms of Harvard," he said.

But students at Harvard jumped at the chance to create a profile on the site, which was launched on Feb. 4.

Thefacebook soon became available for use at Yale and Columbia universities. Hughes said the creators initially made the site available at schools where Harvard students knew other students.

Now the site has grown to 47 schools and has more than 200,000 users. Hughes said that by the end of August, more than 100 schools will have access, and he expects the site to grow to more than 200 schools by October.

Eileen Earnhardt, a junior Spanish and political science major at UNC, does not have an account on Thefacebook but said if people want to get information about someone else, they'll be able get it, even if that person doesn't have an account.

UNC freshman Jessica Peery, a

dramatic arts major, said she has an online profile on AOL Instant Messenger but would not put her last name on the Internet.

"I guess you always have to have the side thought that you have to be careful," she said.

Because the site relies primarily on word-of-mouth communication, it does not generate much of a profit. But Hughes said users eventually will be able to buy advertising space for a small fee to announce local events or parties.

"It would be nice to have a little more (financial) freedom to update the site," he said.

Thefacebook was initially intended to be an interactive directory where students can search for other students who share common interests.

"At the end of the day, it's information that you want to be public," Hughes said. "Users have a lot of autonomy over what they provide."

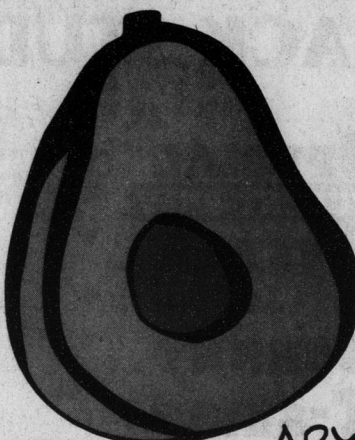
But some students have reservations. Tabitha Disher, a freshman English major, said people told her Thefacebook was a good way to meet others at UNC. But she said privacy is always an issue online.

"On the Internet, it's completely anonymous," she said. "You can be anything."

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