

Grading becomes 'alphabet soup'

A B is now a C at UNL, academic records show.

A 3.0 is the average grade point average (GPA) of UNL students. That means B is average work.

Lewis Fowles, associate dean of Academic Services, said figures show the average student's record after the fall semester, 1973, is higher than

2.9 and rising.

Four years earlier, the average GPA was 2.7, Fowles said.

Fowles attributed the grade rise to contract grading, liberalized pass-fail privileges and similar techniques which give students increased control over their grades.

In contract grading, a teacher and student agree a certain amount of work is worth a D, so much more is worth a C and so on up to A. Pass-fail privileges vary among colleges. The College of Arts and Sciences allows up to 24 hours of pass-fail.

Associate English Professor Stephen Hilliard attributes grade inflation to two other forces.

Hilliard is chairman of the Faculty Senate Grading Committee.

He said the rising GPAs reflect a nationwide trend.

It is partially due to educational philosophies of younger instructors who "emphasize the carrot more than the stick," he

said.

It is fostered, he said, by expectations of students who, receiving fewer and fewer Cs, see the grade as increasingly severe. Teachers can't help but pick up that sentiment, he said.

For all purposes, Hilliard said, a B has the effect a C used to. It pulls a student's GPA into a range considered average by more and more employers and graduate schools.

He said he sees no problem with that because it's compensated for on all levels.

The problem, he said, is instructors who hang on to old grading scales, giving students Cs for average work, although B is the accepted statistical average.

Hilliard said he would like the grade D removed. He rarely gives Ds, he said, because C has the effect D used to.

That C is now D is one argument for letting students retake a course in which they scored a C, he said. University policy now allows students to retake courses in which they scored a D or F.

In fact, that is one suggestion included in a Faculty Senate survey Hilliard just compiled. He said the results will not be released until they're reported to the Grading Committee this fall.

Three hundred and forty instructors, more than half the UNL faculty, responded with opinions on grading techniques, Hilliard said.

One question concerned withdraw privileges, he said. As it stands, students must show their college deans convincing evidence the students must withdraw. And they must withdraw from all their classes.

Hilliard said the question concerns letting students withdraw from only one class, at the discretion of that instructor.

Some teachers favor that as a "more realistic"

approach than granting incompletes (Is) to some students, now the only option.

"There are some students are just not likely ever to complete a course and teachers know that when they give them incompletes," he said.

He said an I looks worse than a W on a student's grade transcript but "too much of either looks bad so it's still a punishment."

Another question concerned a University-wide definition of a pass in pass-fail.

Should it be D or better or C or better? Or should it remain at the discretion of the instructor?

Hilliard said there is interest among faculty in "academic bankruptcy." It would allow a student once to drop or withdraw from all his courses without giving a reason and with no one's permission.

It is in response to cases when students have what are generally considered valid reasons for leaving, but their reasons are not covered under University policies.

Another question concerned standardizing grading systems between UNL and the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

UNO has an A-B-C-D-F system, UNL's includes pluses.

UNO voted several years ago not to adopt a system with pluses, Hilliard said, so any changes would likely come from UNL.

Hilliard said there's inflation other than grades at American universities.

"There is a massive overproduction of college graduates on all levels," he said.

A study by economist Eli Ginzberg, reported in a 1972 Public Interest magazine, said the total United States workforce will increase 20 per cent from 1968 to 1980.

But during that time, the number of college graduates with bachelors degrees will increase 50 per cent; those with masters degrees, 100 per cent; graduates on all levels, and Ph.D.s more than 115 per cent.

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