

REPORT TO THE UNIVERSITY SENATE FROM

THE ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE

March 20, 1968

On November 3, 1966, the Steering Committee asked the Academic Policy Committee to investigate reports that the grades above 4.0 were being misinterpreted by some graduate schools, and to consider whether they should be dropped, and whether more extensive revisions in the system might be warranted as well. Last year's Committee ascertained that a few graduate schools, notably Wayne State and the University of Wisconsin, were indeed systematically lowering the GPA's of our applicants; Wayne by subtracting 0.3 throughout and Wisconsin by rounding each course grade down to the nearest integer and recalculating the GPA. The Committee recommended dropping all grades above 4.0, but since this would undoubtedly result in our giving more grades below 4.0, the Senate was asked to indicate whether the whole system should be replaced. A straw vote was indecisive: some wanted no change at all, some to drop only grades above 4.0, some to change to a 5-point scale (4, 3, 2, 1, 0), some to 0-100. Various compromises were suggested, some even more esoteric than our present system. The whole question was sent back to the Committee just as the school year was ending.

After due consideration, including some fact-finding, this year's Committee has decided to recommend no change in our present system, while issuing another plea to the faculty to consult the official guidelines on how to use it, published by the Committee on Instruction on March 1, 1965. Copies of these guidelines have already been distributed to all faculty in the past, but we will send everyone another copy (with a few small modifications, such as inclusion of average grades in various categories at Oakland) and have it sent out again every September until it is familiar. The Registrar, Mr. Atkinson, now believes that the problem of explaining our system to graduate schools has been largely overcome, and that through the use of a stamp saying:

"4.3 = HIGHEST GRADE, AWARDED ONLY FOR
EXTRAORDINARY ACADEMIC ACCOMPLISHMENT"

prominently affixed to the transcript of any student receiving above 4.0 in one or more courses, the problem should gradually disappear.

The results of the questionnaire distributed to the faculty a few weeks ago showed that last year's Senate was a truly representative body. With 112 returns counted out of 171 in residence, more are opposed to our present system than in favor of it; but many are indifferent and, more important, each of the three suggested alternative systems also had more "opposed" than "in favor"! There were strongly worded arguments on both sides of every aspect of the question. Among those using letter-grades during the semester and converting to the 4.3 scale at the end, there is some inconsistency in equivalences, but this group has now dwindled remarkably (only 20 out of 112 admit to doing this) and any attempt to adopt an official scale of equivalences, no matter what it is, leads to worse difficulties. A similar questionnaire distributed to about 700 selected students indicated clear support for our present system.

Average grades by classes (freshmen, etc.) can now be predicted within 0.05, indicating that we have achieved overall stability. Grades no longer "peak" at 4.0, 3.0, etc., indicating that most faculty are now using the entire scale. There are still inequities, but probably not so many as a more discrete system would produce, especially in large classes. Our sister campus in East Lansing currently is considering adopting a system something like ours! In short, all signs seem to indicate that we should not change our grading system at this time.

The following guidelines are revised operational descriptions to expand the official definition of the grades. These guidelines will be distributed to faculty members at least once each year.

- 4.0 - 4.3 Demonstrating extraordinary academic accomplishment; a student maintaining this level of performance throughout his undergraduate career would qualify for the most prestigious fellowships.
- 3.5 - 3.9 Worthy of high honors; a GPA in this range would qualify the student for the better graduate or professional schools.
- 3.0 - 3.4 Scholarly performance; many graduate schools require a GPA above 3.0 for admission.
- 2.5 - 2.9 Average performance; most O.U. scholarships require a GPA of 2.5 or better.
- 2.0 - 2.4 Work acceptable for graduation, but of marginal quality; to be in good standing a student must maintain a GPA of 2.0 or better. Students should do better than this in their major field.
- 1.2 - 1.9 Penalty grades indicating weak performance; a student with a GPA in this range is on probation and cannot graduate unless he raises it above 2.0.
- 0.5 - 1.1 Severe penalty grades; a student with a GPA in this range is eligible for dismissal. A grade of 0.5 receives credit but is very damaging to the student's GPA.
- 0.0 Performance of such poor quality that no credit can be given.

Richard J. Burke, Chairman
Academic Policy Committee