

# GRADED AND LEARNED

By Ann Higdon

IT'S EARLY IN THE MORNING, AND THE SUN DANCES AROUND TALL, LANKY YOUTHS OPENING THE DOOR TO THE WAREHOUSE. THERE, SITTING ON WOODEN BENCHES FOR HOURS ON END, THEY INDULGE IN THE, THEN PRECIOUS, HOBBY OF LEARNING AND PONDERING FOR THE SHEER FEELING OF ENLIGHTENMENT . . .

The above paragraph describes the values of knowledge and university life in the Greek and Roman Era at Athens under the guidance of such great ones as Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. Back then, students could go to university as long as their reasons were of an intellectual and inquisitive nature. Now, however, the idea of learning for learning's sake is slowly becoming lost behind the scenes as the glamour of important, rewarding, high paying jobs puts the campus into Canada's economic spotlight. The pressure is being put on students to appear at convocation with high marks and a good working knowledge of their specialty. Unfortunately, marks and a thorough education do not "Walk down the same road" as sometimes one can be achieved with only a little assistance from the other. Thus leaving several factors responsible for the disturbed equilibrium of today's university grading system.

One of these factors maintains that students can no longer afford either the time or money to dabble in the "unrequired" homework of their chosen area of study and this does not even include such culture-inclined subjects as classics, languages, philosophy and/or religion, all of which serve to put the student's view of the world as a whole in better perspective. When a professor outlines the required work for his course (and the marks.), students are hard put to satisfy their curiosity outside of the requisites. Those requirements are followed to the line because they pertain to future courses, graduate school or, again, rewarding employment.

It seems that the unemployment issue is affecting universities in such a way that most students enter and graduate with dreams of high-paying work. Government propaganda in the last few years and student loans have given more high school students encouragement to go to university. This is easily noticed by the obvious fact that there are many students graduating and not finding employment and yet an increasing number of students still keep coming. With emphasis on employment through university, comes a growing concern for good marks, (since employers tend to view them as evidence of a good working knowledge of the student's area of interest (again partly the fault of the school system and employment trends). The student should remember that university usually provides a broad preparation not practical experience for the future whether it includes employment or graduate courses. The emphasis should be taken off the job market and put on the valuable asset of knowledge.

Although university education does not, in most cases, replace "Practical experience", the idea that it is important as a basis for employment must not be neglected. Students tend to fall into the "high school syndrome" when going through university. Many students find themselves "cramming" for tests, and term papers and after receiving their grades, forget the material they studied (studying is becoming a more general word to include memorizing for course work.) Almost heedlessly, students are ignoring the implications, that if they follow the "high school syndrome" method, they will lose much emphasis on understanding and agility in the course. It would be wise for students to tone down "rush for marks" and spend more time becoming very familiar with course work and thus, putting light on their understanding. Maybe understanding then, could lead to curiosity and a more urgent hunger for knowledge.

Of course, there are several arguments against the case that the need for marks is overshadowing the quest for knowledge in today's university student. One of these defences is the idea that marks and knowledge go hand in hand. Well, the school system did start with the good intentions of measuring knowledge in students by assigned points (or marks) for each bit of information learned. However, there is a loophole in it, in such a way that students need only submit a certain amount of what is to be graded to memory although marks measure, to a certain extent, the capacity of learning in a student, they should not dominate the priority of knowledge.

Another controversy arises over the fact that it is expensive enough (tuition fees and texts) to study the requisite courses in a program, let alone other interesting subjects not necessarily connected with the student's goal. This is a fairly valid reason except for the instance that learning should never be considered a waste of time or money regardless of the importance of the material. Although students may (excuse me, change that to, will probably. . . ) graduate and have no success in obtaining the right employment, they shouldn't consider their time or money thrown away. If, however, they do, then those people most likely didn't enter university with the idea of "enlightenment" and might probably have been more suited to a vocationally inclined job even if it is at the expense of broadening their mental scope on the environment.

Finally, the last (hopefully) and probably least excuse for valuing marks over a stable basis for knowledge is the face value of the marks themselves. Students feel much happier with themselves if their "report cards" reflect 80's and 90's. Of course, this is understandable, as long as the desire for high marks does not overwhelm and crush the number one priority of university education; the valuable experience of knowledge and possibly wisdom.

To back up this article, I conducted a little "mini-poll" which consisted of replies from seventeen students in either Arts, Business, or Science who were asked two questions. The first question was whether or not, they thought that there was too much emphasis on marks as compared to the old-fashioned idea of learning for learning's sake. Out of 17 students, 16 of the answers were affirmative, while one was negative (pertaining to the argument that marks are in direct proportion to knowledge). Then I dropped the big one. I asked these students if they personally paid more attention to the grades rather than the degree of value of their knowledge. Well out of 17 students, 10 replies were affirmative and seven were negative (these students said that they honestly went to university for the sake of knowledge.) Although the above results reflects the opinions of a very tiny portion of the university population, the evidence supports itself.

So, in summary, one could likely say that students do tend to place more emphasis on grading than learning. However, after analysing the causes for this trend, the fault is found to lay evenly on both, the sides of the students and the university systems. But putting the blame on each other will not serve any purpose. Therefore, knowing how slow government "systems" tend to be, students should personally try to improve their flexibility between the pressures of employment, mark status and "the good 'ode fashion values of ejumacashun".

