

THE MERCER CLUSTER

"The Pacesetter of the Seventies"



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New S. G. A.

The members of the new S.G.A. are faced with a tremendous task for the next year. One of their first orders of business should be to clear the air of any misunderstandings which might have arisen from the campaign week. The last minute endorsement of Tommy Maddox by ten newly elected senators and officers did not do great things for the unity of the S.G.A. The Cluster hopes that the Senate can unite itself and begin to attack some of the problems on this campus which have been tolerated or simply ignored for too long.

The great faculty crisis which threatens this university must be met with a firm demand for improved departments and better quality professors. Buildings can wait — the faculty can not. It should be the responsibility of the S.G.A. to communicate this to the administration.

Another perennial trouble spot which the Senate must work on is student apathy — this year 807 students voted in the April 10th election and 737 voted in the run-off. No student government is going to solve a problem of apathy overnight. But the new S.G.A. must renew the student's faith in the Senate. If the students are to present a single, united voice to the administration this is essential.

Open Dorms Delay

Just about any student will tell you that open dorms are great! The arguments for open dorm policy are too lengthy to even go into and most students agree that the experimental weekend last quarter during Homecoming was a big success. Basically, the student body is in support of the idea. Why then has the open dorm policy been held up? There are a number of reasons for the delay but the main one stems from the fact that each hall has submitted a different proposal for working out the details. What it boils down to is that the students can not get together and present a unified, sound proposal. As a result the office of Student Personnel has taken no action and the dorms are not open.

It has been a classic example of ineptitude on the part of the S.G.A. and the student body. If the proposal has been handled properly, the students could be enjoying open dorms right now, instead of merely waiting for them. The Cluster hopes that the S.G.A. can untangle the mess which the open dorm policy has gotten itself into, and make a comprehensible proposal to the Administration.

Spring Break

It really seems strange that the Administration, or whoever was responsible, should decide that the Mercer University Spring break should not include Easter. This is a truly amazing phenomenon in view of the constant reminders of Mercer's ties with the Christian faith and the Baptists in particular. That the students were asked to return to class two days before such an important religious holiday seems to be a bit incongruous with the basic University policy. It might lead a stranger to this campus to believe that Mercer does not recognize Easter, which can not be correct — can it?

A Great Year

Any body who remembers the state of the Cluster before Gary Johnson took over this time last year must realize that he has worked miracles in over-coming some pretty big obstacles. It has been his initiative which has brought about many innovations in the organization, content and style of the paper. No one could possibly accuse Gary Johnson's administration of producing dull papers. The Vietnam War Moratorium, the sex survey and the subsequent publication of *Dawn* magazine, plus several controversial editorials kept the campus interested and involved, in one way or another, with the Cluster. And the award sitting in the trophy case in the Student Center attests to the quality of his papers.

The new staff of the Cluster congratulates Gary on a great year and a fine record of journalistic excellence.

The Cluster Staff

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Grading Policies Are Inadequate

by Cal Gough
Guest Editor

The consequences of grading policies on a Mercer student's orientation toward what education is must be examined. Now, good intentions and theoretical considerations aside, grading in fact operates as a device for maintaining (through aversive control — and this is important) both curriculum decisions made by the faculty (and only by the faculty) and the teaching styles of individual professors. English 51 is deemed germane to the liberal arts notion, it is therefore required for graduation, and any student disinterested (as expressed in refusal to do what English 51 professors say to do) is punished with a low grade. Co-operative (i.e., obedient) students are given higher marks. Some form of performance (theme-writing, test-taking) is measured and reflected in these grades; learning and policy are not. The causes and the legitimacy of both co-operative and nonfunctional responding are ignored as a factor in the grades given. No individual's growth is evaluated, but rather his comparative status among other students in a certain type of performance is measured.

It is often argued that performance is all that can be evaluated. Why? Because performance is susceptible to easily-quantified measuring techniques? Too often, the limitations of the current system are forgotten, and this technique is paraded as the only "possible" (even "legitimate") means of evaluation. Sometimes efficiency masquerades not only as Necessity but as Sufficiency as well.

From my point of view as a student, I offer these suggestions for discussion among those at Mercer discussing the grading situation.

1. "Performance as 'good student' has little to do with being a good learner." (Read about the "Totalitarian Classroom" in "Is That Right Mr. Yes?" in *Change in Higher Education* Jan./Feb. 1970.)

2. Students are able to contribute toward their own evaluation from a standpoint (experience) inaccessible to the (behavior-oriented) teacher. Nowhere is this fact reflected in the present grading scheme.

3. Subjecting all students to any single system of evaluation is a simplistic approach to education. (Why this nagging lack of options in a "liberal-arts college?") Why not let the student choose, first, whether or not he is to be evaluated at all, and, second, how he will be evaluated?

4. What relevant psychological effects does grade-giving power have on most professors? (Don't they realize that students see grades as (potential) rewards and/or punishments which can be (in some cases, definitely will be) used for or against them? Students expect that any expression of their (possibly legitimate) disgust, outrage, boredom (and sometimes merely consistent disagreement) with the professor and/or the course will be reflected in their grade. The concept of grades as "incentives" is ludicrous to the student — he is forced to co-operate with the teacher (thus compromising his integrity and/or his objections). What I'm asking is this: Why can't professors see that (some) kids find themselves trapped in the

realization that a grade will be given, the professor's reluctance to give it and the student's performance in areas beyond the responses measured notwithstanding. If professors actually feel the "carrot-and-stick" approach is integral to education, why isn't this reflected in their rhetoric about "liberation?"

5. That (some) students cry out to be graded along the A-B-C-D-F scheme is not sufficient grounds for using such a device. (It's just as logical to place the burden of proof on advocates of grades as it is to place it on opponents of the system...)

6. "We must give grades because, pragmatically speaking, it is necessary that others (graduate schools, e.g.) know how this student performs in a graded situation." (Notice the circularity of this argument.) Presupposing for argument's sake the necessity of some form of evaluation, it nevertheless seems evident that any significant learning situation deserves significant evaluation. A grading scheme is simply not a technique adequate for the purpose it supposedly serves. (If the learning is insignificant, why evaluate it? If it is, why mock this significance with evaluations so ambiguous and devoid of information as A-B-C-D-F?)

7. When specifying "terminal behaviors" of performance, it would be wise to avoid limiting the choice to only one parameter of performance (such as grades-on-tests-themes-and-final). Learning involves the laborious working through of existential problems, not merely an expertise for quick cognitive recall necessary for high performance on paper. (Reductionism is the greatest danger of any theory of evalua-

tion techniques.) (A "liberated" individual struggles with problems — and the struggle may extend beyond the 40-minutes allotted for a quiz.)

8. I propose that grading systems of any sort are incompatible with the professed goals of liberal education. Grades serve a judgmental rather than a feedback function. Grades disclose absolutely no information as to why any given response was unacceptable.

9. Let students in on policy decisions affecting them and you won't end up with so much flagrant misunderstanding and ingratitude toward the faculty's good intentions and the excellent theoretical thinking of faculty committees. Abuses will occur within any system involving one person's evaluation of someone else's efforts: these can be reduced if the actual (not the hoped for) consequences of evaluative devices can be considered when a new system is being set up.

10. Some general sentiments: (a) Options should be included on levels of every system whenever possible. (b) Every system should be reviewed regularly. (c) Grading systems perpetuate the competitive aspect of education to the virtual exclusion of the humanizing aspects of the process (sharing insights, working with feedback, etc.).

I realize that in these suggestions I have sometimes presupposed some sort of evaluative system while at the same time indicating a preference for no evaluation at all. This reflects my feeling that, although grades should be eliminated completely, this will not be the case at Mercer anytime soon, and suggestions for improving the present system should be entertained.

Letters To The Editor

Dear Gary:

A basketball season devours energy and time. The sacrifice of the freedom of campus and time is an unavoidable price for the serious player. There are practice and study.

During this past season, in particular, team and coaches must also have experienced the disappointment and frustration of that lugubrious list of losses.

For these reasons I would express my appreciation to players and coaches for this past season. Young and inexperienced players may have been. But the drive and talent were tangible. And there was no way of hiding under a bushel the fact that they could be and were exciting. We enjoyed watching them — and remain appreciative of the spirit that survived even when the losses ran out of sight of the wins.

I am already anticipating next year — and wish players and mentors a good season and support.

F. Robert Otto

Dear Students,

I am the Librarian in charge of binding periodicals in the Stetson Library. Unless the periodicals are left in the library I will soon be out of a job. I cannot have volumes

bound unless I have all issues; and I cannot have all issues unless they are left in the library, uncut and unmarked.

Many thanks
Martha M. Stoumb

Dear Editor:

Of late, there has been considerable controversy over the intrinsic value of Mercer's literary review, the *Dulcimer*. Unfortunately, the controversy has tended to degenerate into arguments ad hominem which naturally accomplish nothing and often tend to obscure objective thought.

It seems evident to me that a literary review has intrinsic value only when it reflects or contains a fair cross section of work obtained from variegated sources. Similarly, this work must be adjudged "good" in a literary sense by persons qualified to do so. In both of these senses, the *Dulcimer* has had intrinsic value in the past. First, the *Dulcimer* has reflected a wide assortment of contributors and has not limited itself to a literary clique. Granted, the field of contributors has not been as wide as could be desired, but the fault in this case certainly does not lie with the *Dulcimer*. The *Dulcimer* does not have a staff whose

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