

English III

2003-2004

Grading For Success?

by Sarah Armstrong, Dylan Crawford, Clay Charles,
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Grading systems can play an intricate role in students' futures. Surprisingly, grades themselves are not that important to colleges. It is a student's Grade Point Average, or GPA, that determines his ultimate academic future. A student's class rank is determined by his combined grade point average from all four years in high school. Students are numerically ranked within their High School class according to this result. Class ranking can determine a student's options, career path, and ultimate level of academic challenge.

Suppose two students are applying to the same competitive college, and both students have all of the same A's & B's in equivalent courses at their separate High Schools. A college receives their transcripts and "Larry" has a weighted 4.2 grade average, while "Winifred" has a standard 3.2 grade. "Winifred" is rejected because her GPA is lower, as is her class rank. The lower a student's class rank is, the less likely are his chances of being accepted into prestigious universities and colleges.

Traditional vs. Weighted Grading

The traditional grading scale totals four points, rewarding students with A's in every class a high score of 4.0. In a weighted grading system, students in Advanced Placement, or AP, courses would be allowed an extra point on their GPA's for that class, permitting a GPA above a 4.0. If a student were to take all AP courses and received an 'A' in every one, his GPA would be a 5.0. While the proposition of a weighted grading system at MDHS has drawn varied feelings, such a system will go into effect at the beginning of the 2004-2005 school year.

The new system would help solve the ongoing soap opera of who is the true valedictorian and salutatorian: each class' top scholars who have obtained the highest GPA's throughout their high school career. These class rankings based on GPA create a steamy issue that usually rules out a motivated, deserving student each year. In the past, students who have selected less-rigorous classes over AP courses have received the prestigious title. This is a primary reason for implementing weighted grading in

Winter Tasks

by Jess Quarton

As first flakes hit frozen grass, the new season begins. Preparation starts for the madness of winter.

Snow tires, firewood, mittens, jackets, frozen car doors, procrastinated projects rush toward completion during the first snow.

Though winter is the best season, tasks like these make it hard to enjoy.

The fun starts after these jobs are put to bed, tucked away like little babies in their cribs.

It does not stop until Spring.

Unknown

by Dylan Crawford

It was on. Everyone was in position. Darkness swallowed everything ten feet in front of the seven encroaching Navy Seals -- they always traveled in sevens. Surrounding the target, each Seal fell into a different position: some up close on their stomachs, some crouched on one knee farther away. The snipers surveyed the situation from a distance. All seven constantly thought of every possibility; every scenario -- their senses acute to every single disturbance in the night. In their minds, possibilities played like tapes that hadn't yet occurred. This heightened awareness was part of their job; one of the survival tools they depended on.

The unknown has never puzzled me until recently. I had never really thought about it before - a realm so unexplainable, it's fathomable by none. When you hear a noise outside, and you are sure it was your cat, was it really your cat? Though you have heard your cat make that noise before, you will never know for sure; you weren't there to witness it. When there is no solid proof that something has occurred, most people quickly find a rational explanation for personal comfort. When you are positive something is watching you, but there is nothing in sight, you can't comfort yourself by saying that nothing is there when someone could be watching your every move through the scope of a rifle. I am not a paranoid person, but untouched boundaries intrigue me.

Many religions offer theoretical explanations to the

September of 2004. Many parents, teachers, and students feel that students should be rewarded by a 5.0 grading system for taking challenging classes; possibly the entire reason for implementing weighted grades is to determine a fair valedictorian. However, some feel that the weighted system will play little role in the decision of who becomes valedictorian.

Hard Work and Fair Play

Only students enrolling in AP classes would have the luxury of being governed by the 5.0 structure. "It would level the playing field," says Nancy Krahn, an MDHS parent and an advocating weighted-grades committee member. Students would be more likely to enroll in these courses knowing that they were not at risk of falling behind in class rank to students with a less-rigorous workload.

Some students feel it is unfair to award an extra point to a student's grade in an AP course. Others claim that colleges overlook resumes that do not include AP classes. Nancy Wadsworth, the school counselor at McCall Donnelly High School, feels that most colleges are largely unbiased between weighted GPA's and non-weighted systems. "Depending on the school," Nancy says, "there are so many applications to look through that they look at other things in addition to the GPA to see how involved a student is, such as participation in sports, working a part time job, class load and rigor of classes taken, and community service. A perfect 4.0 is not all that colleges look for these days."

Community Opinions

Many parents of students attending McCall-Donnelly High School are in favor of a weighted grading system. A supporting parent explains: "We thought they should weight [AP courses] because the brighter students should be encouraged to take a more rigorous workload, that teachers grade harder. [It] prepares kids well for college." Merry Armstrong, another advocating parent and weighted-grading committee member, says that she became a believer in the new system after learning that many northwestern institutions could no longer afford to pay for someone to re-weight GPA's on student applications from High Schools with different grading systems. She explains that colleges used to do so, but due to a surge in application numbers, many colleges no longer fund the position. Merry believes that the current 4.0 system favors students who earn high grades in lower-level classes. She says that, "[a weighted grading system] doesn't hurt anyone whatsoever, it just negates

unknown. The majority turn to religion for an explanation, and each belief system is different. The truth is that there is no real explanation; no actual hard evidence. Several religious documents, such as Hinduism's *Artharva Veda*, tell that fear itself is only that which we don't know: "There be no fear from friend, no fear from foe, no fear from the known, no fear from what lies before us unknown." Most people depend on having somewhere to run when the unexplainable occurs.

The first time I considered all this was a couple weeks ago. I was lying in bed, about to fall asleep, when a noise escaped the mouth of what was said to be a fox, barking. It surprised me because my ears had adjusted to the silence, so I automatically reassured myself by deciding that it was only a fox and not some horrific monster. But as I thought about it more, drifting into slumber, I came to the conclusion that it could have been anything making that noise. For all I knew, it could have been a demented hermit lurking through the depths of the black forest that surrounds my house.

Once I started thinking more about the noises I heard at night, possibilities began to unravel like toilet paper on Halloween. Earlier that week, I had ventured off into the woods out of boredom, and had heard more animal calls. My imagination ran wild as I pictured two snipers communicating to each other on opposite sides of me. They sounded just like two chipmunks chirping back and forth. I then saw myself in the cross-hairs of a scope, walking, oblivious to the fact that the pull of a trigger could annihilate my life.

Anything that is unknown to man creates deep fear in most people. Film makers have taken advantage of this for years by producing countless scary movies of aliens, and of lurking creatures of the night. While, in most cases, real life is not like the movies, there is always that chance that what you fear most might really happen. I think that I will keep imagining every scenario, as crazy as I may sound. Just to be ready, like a Navy Seal, for anything.

Lunar Confections

by Clay Charles

Frigid milk
overflows a waxing moon:
fresh, crisp, quenching.
Dip vanilla-chocolate stars
into the celestial refreshment.
Lick the course shell

penalization for AP students." She also found that many of the people who oppose a weighted grading system, "feel that it doesn't matter, that [colleges and universities] re-weight the grades themselves." Merry says that she did not find that to be true when she spoke to universities in the spring of 2003.

Students Weigh In

Most students at McCall-Donnelly High School are in favor of weighted grading. However, there are some students and teachers who believe that weighting grades is unnecessary. "It gives less of a chance for not-so-academically-talented students," says Skyler Yeast, a student at McCall-Donnelly High School. Another student, Molly Boone, says, "the courses are harder for a reason, and colleges know that AP courses are more difficult than regular ones."

Some students and teachers think that if this advantage were presented to the student body, some students would not try as hard to earn an "A" in AP classes because a "B" would reward a student with a 4.0 anyway. Karen Olsen, a Math and History teacher at MDHS, says, "If I were teaching an AP class, I would be concerned that the students might lower their standards and not put forth their maximum effort." Many teachers at MDHS feel that it is difficult to differentiate AP classes from normal ones. Science teacher Andrew Cochrane says, "It is tough to make the distinction between AP classes and normal ones, because not only AP courses are hard."

A Positive Outlook

Weighted grading would reward students who take harder classes. "Kids who challenge themselves need to be acknowledged," says Bob Burns, a Math teacher at MDHS. He feels that in the past, kids have avoided AP classes in order to keep their GPA's from falling. Anita Cussler, a student at MDHS says, "It's sad, but some people actually take easy courses just to keep their 4.0. But they are shooting themselves in the foot because they're not learning as much as they could but, weighted grading would take the pressure off students who are really worried about their grades because if they get a B on a 5.0 scale, it won't affect their 4.0."

Many students who are academically-oriented feel that a Weighted Grading system would allow them to be "rewarded for taking harder courses and not penalized," says MDHS student Fallon Decker. Another student, Travis Drake, says that he already takes as many rigorous classes as he can, but he "would be more motivated to

of a multicolored jawbreaker.
Tongues relentlessly salivate
toward its center.
White shell hides
endless rainbows within.
Enjoy.

Pain of Glory

by Sarah Armstrong

Standing at the start,
her heart beats with the ticking
of the clock.
A timer holds
her shoulder firm;
she's waiting,
waiting,
waiting.
Ten seconds still to pass.
She plants her poles
and places her skies
in a V shape, ready for action.
Waiting,
waiting,
waiting,
five seconds left.
Her back arches, as hands tighten
around perfectly-shaped grips.
The world and its problems disappear
as the course ahead comes
into focus.
Sounds disappear;
except for the clock's tick.
Coldness is unfelt;
yet her body is sensitive
to any movement made
by the sole determining timer.
His hand tightens,
anticipating release.
She senses even the slightest stiffen
and prepares to spring from
her held position.
She leans into his hand.
He releases her

to challenge the course.
The wind is fierce,
but she does not care.
A will to win drives her forward.
She glides on her skis,
left, right, left, right,

continue doing so" if the classes were graded on a 5.0 scale. These students are currently taking challenging AP and Honors courses. Even without weighted grades, they manage to obtain a 3.5 or higher GPA.

Although not all people feel weighted grading is a just way of sorting students, Bob Burns gives an honest assessment of how such a system could affect students after High School: "There is no such thing as completely fair grading, but we live in a competitive world. Years ago, I was telling some students about competing in Robie Creek and a good athlete asked me if I had won the race. After replying that I could not win a race like Robie, she then asked me why I would compete in something where I would not win. As a coach and teacher, I try to focus more on improvement and effort. Weighted grading will increase enrollment in AP classes and lessen the number of students taking easier course loads to protect their 4.0."

Winning is not the only prize.

This piece was printed in The Star News on August 19, 2004. The paper added the following biography of the authors:

The authors of this viewpoint are currently seniors at McCall-Donnelly High School. They interviewed MDHS students, parents, teachers, and administrators in the winter of 2004. Written as a project for their 11th grade Honors American Literature class at The North Fork School in McCall, the piece required the authors to select a controversial topic in their community, to gather diverse opinions about it, and to synthesize the results of their efforts. The greatest challenge of the assignment was to present information in a positive manner, clearly and concisely enough to be acceptable for publication.

Winter Revolution

by Clay Charles

A steamy, morbid body bag
smothers earth into dormancy.
In wretched stench, algae-ridden ponds
harbor toads inside malevolent forests;
Filthy ponds freeze, blasphemous toads succumb
to hibernation. White snow suffocates
all such profanity.
Time,
catalyst of all things,
revives earth with quiet veneration.

each skate increasing her tempo.
As she rounds each corner,
she digs, digs, digs, with her arms
to push herself out of the bend,
gaining speed with each pole.
Quick, quick, quick, quick, quick.
Her feet move so swiftly
as she steps out of a sharp turn.
Deep, deep, deep, deep, deep.
With each glide of her ski, she skates
further into a trance.
No pain can stop her now,
she quickens her turnover
through the last turn
and out onto the last
straight-away.
Projecting herself out
over her left ski, then her right one,
she sprints toward the finish.
Pumping harder and harder
with every strike of her poles,
until her tempo reaches
its absolute maximum.
Over the red line

with a final tremendous pole.
She collapses; it is over.
Each breath burns
as she gasps for more air,
frigid and painful as it is.
The coldness seems to shrink her lungs.
However, she knows
to breathe deep, slowly, controlled.
A blanket arrives,
covering her body; she lies
sprawled on damp snow.
Volunteers at the finish line
release tired feet
from her racing skis.
She has never
felt so weak and tired
from a one-and-a-half
kilometer race.

Hours later, she stands
above the other racers.
Third on her right,
second on her left,
she knows she raced her hardest.
The pain she remembers
was worth it all,
just to stand on a larger box
than any of the other girls.

Forest green, untainted fertile life,
resuscitated ponds' unadulterated water ripples
under fresh breezes. A frog
bounds into golden sun.

Differing Reminiscence

by Sarah Armstrong

Touch a memory of love:
soft kitten fur,
bright silky blues, scaly greens.
Warm breezes engulf life;
fluffy clouds float away.

Touch a gripping memory.
Cold floods
greet trusting fingertips,
slicing though sensitive skin;
a sharp sting of abhorrence.
Burning hate---
dry ice melts,
drifting, spreading
to invade an unsuspecting life.

BCS Ecstasy

by Clay Charles

The Bowl Championship Series was created in 1998 to ensure one, and only one, undisputed national champion of college football. The BCS is the perfect, simple solution for eliminating split national champions like Michigan and Nebraska in 1997. The BCS calculates the #1 and #2-ranked teams who duke it out at the end of the year for the bragging rights and title of "outright national champions."

To the skeptics' surprise, the BCS has yielded uncanny results. It is almost too precise to be true. Everyone is happy and the BCS has proved itself worthy by working a whopping fifty percent of the time. The controversy over this heaven-sent solution is based solely on the fact that critics have nothing more to write about. They would rather moan about something totally wonderful than write about real news like Michael Jackson's molestation case and Kobe Bryant's rape charges. Events like these, which involve celebrity scandals, do not happen every day. Doesn't the media realize that such isolated incidents are like witnessing the passing of a comet that barely

Cheerleaders

by Clay Charles

Fans who go to an athletic event to watch it don't realize what they are missing. The real trendsetters use bushy pom-poms to pump up the crowd, while yelling at the top of their extremely musical, genial voices. After a cheer, these girls exhibit their athletic prowess by kicking their legs up as high in the air as possible while waving their pom-poms with grace and savvy. This exciting demonstration, sadly, signifies the end of their show, and means that the routine, predictable game will proceed. Fans then have to wait until a stoppage in the game occurs for the real show to begin again. The most popular cheerleaders have a reputation for being very knowledgeable and mature. As down-to-earth people, they are constantly aware of what is happening around them at all times. If you love to sit at the top of the stands to obtain a better view, the real action is at the bottom, where the cheerleaders are.

Disappointment

by Jess Quarton

Sitting watching my team go down the drain,
I stare and ponder what it will be like
not returning to state after a perfect season.
Disappointed, staring from the sidelines, knowing defeat
is on the horizon.
But at the same time, very angry with the situation the
group is in.
Our unit has brought this opponent to its knees
many times before.
The clock ticks down, and with it the players' spirits,
their heads hanging in disappointment.
Game over; there will not be a next game,
until the following season.

misses eliminating earth? Why must we read about trivial non-issues like the validity of the BCS?

The BCS is based on an elementary math equation which is centered on a team's strength of schedule, the Associated Press Poll, and the Coaches' Poll. The latter two obviously have no influence because the University of Southern California is #1 in both "human polls," but is #3 overall in the BCS -- the poll that ultimately matters. USC now cannot play for the national championship although it is ranked #1. This is good because Louisiana State will play Oklahoma, which didn't even win its conference, for the national title. However, it is possible for USC to split the national championship with whoever wins the actual national championship game. This proves that the BCS is the simplest, most trouble-free solution for solving college football's dilemma of who the real national champion is.
