

**COMMITTEE ON NARRATIVE EVALUATIONS
ANNUAL REPORT, 1995-96**

To the Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division:

This is the last annual report of the Committee on Narrative Evaluations (CNE). The members of last year's committee concurred with the Committee on Committees to eliminate CNE, allocate its charge to the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), and establish new procedures to hear undergraduate grievances in regard to narrative evaluations. The Senate confirmed these changes in a vote on February 21, 1996.

Two other issues came before CNE before its dissolution. Both issues concern the grading system: one, an issue tenaciously pursued by one senator through many committees; and the second, the CEP proposal to change the grading system. The nagging question is this: should faculty be allowed to mention a letter grade in a narrative evaluation of a student who did not choose the grade option? The CNE unanimously supported CEP's policy statement: "mention of a letter grade is appropriate only when an undergraduate student has requested a letter grade." We urge that this guideline become the rule. Though CNE's decision was made before the CEP proposal for changing the grading system was presented to the Senate, the issue is still relevant. Students coming to UCSC are given the choice if and when to take grades. On the issue of faculty academic freedom, invariably brought up in this dispute, the Chair notes that, just as academic freedom of faculty on campuses that regularly assign letter grades is not abridged by their being confined to five notations, so too the grading system at UCSC does not limit legitimate academic freedom. A brief summary of the CNE position on the CEP proposal to change the grading system follows.

CNE Responses to the CEP Proposal

Three of the four members of the CNE stood in opposition to the CEP proposal to extend the grade option, regularize grading with A-F and calculate grade point averages.

In an effort to halt what seems to be an inexorable drive to make UCSC look like every one else, and thereby better compete (?), three of the four CNE members offer the following criticisms of the CEP proposal.

Arguments Against CEP's Proposed Changes in the Grading System

1. Enrollment Issues. The data on admissions and enrollment presented by CEP in support of its proposal are misleading. They are also not the most germane issues that the faculty must face in structuring an educational environment. According to their findings, few students know about the Narrative Evaluation System before coming to UCSC, and those who do know, do not find the NES the most compelling reason to enroll at UCSC.

The job of Admissions and Enrollment Management here should be clear--to trumpet the NES and the quality of education at UCSC. Recent improvements in admissions and enrollment suggest that they have had some success without changing the grading system.

2. Graduate and Professional School Acceptances. No one disputes that the rate of acceptance of our best students at the top graduate and professional schools is excellent. CEP's proposed changes are to benefit students at the "next level down," students applying to health sciences other than medical schools and students not at the top of their classes. We are asked to believe that by showing grade point averages in the 3.0's, these students are more likely to be admitted to professional schools, especially to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.
3. Erosion of the NES. The extension of the grade option and calculation of GPA, with concurrent bolstering of the NES, strengthens grades and diminishes the NES. The problems of the NES--underfunding of the NES processing center, lack of timeliness in delivery, thin description, and uncritical assessment--will magnify as the simple solution of giving and getting grades become universal.
4. Grade Inflation. Grade inflation is rampant on college and university campuses in the United States. Recent newspaper articles, including The Chronicle of Higher Education, show that A-/B+ is the average grade at several major universities. Grades are a burning house. Other campuses are looking to overhaul their grading system, looking for a way out, as UCSC runs in.

Minority Position in Favor of the CEP Proposal

The faculty member supporting the CEP proposal found the proposal timely, necessary, non-erosive of the Narrative Evaluation System, and an important improvement. This member was unconvinced by the arguments of the majority of the committee, finding that the enrollment data signified a need for change, that no evidence that our best students are served well by NES does or could exist, that student choice--a founding principle of UCSC--is enhanced by the proposal, and that NES inflation is as worrisome as grade inflation.

Finally, all members of the Committee on Narrative Evaluations, though divided on the CEP proposal, are in agreement on their commitment to excellence in undergraduate education.

Respectfully submitted,

COMMITTEE ON NARRATIVE EVALUATIONS

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