Journal of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers

Features:

The Expanded Grade Context Record at Indiana University and Its Relationship to Grade Inflation
—R. Gerald Pugh

The Impact of an Online Application Process on Minority Graduate Students
—Michael C. Poock and Peggy O. Berryhill

Fraud on the Electronic Campus
—David M. Sauter

The Forum:

Commentary, International Q&A, Book Reviews
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Editor’s Note

Did the nagging pay off? Was it really nagging? Perhaps it might better be termed “encouraging.” I’m referring to the repeated pleas to our membership to provide articles for C&U, something we all apparently find highly desirable but which we rarely find the time to do.

So in this issue, the answer to the first question is a resounding “yes!” With the exception of the excellent article exploring online graduate school applications vis-a-vis minority students, everything else in this issue has been written by “our own.”

Grade inflation and its effect on grade reports and transcripts at Indiana University is explored by R. Gerald Pugh; fraud on the electronic campus (shades of the totally paperless completely electronic campus!) is covered by David Sauter.

In The Forum, Richard Riehl gives advice on handling the potentially unhandle-able; Tom Johnson provides a book review; and Jim Frey gives additional advice concerning international students.

All in all, satisfactory for now. AACRAOans, keep up the good work; keep those articles rolling in. But for now, this is the season for re-creation, so rest, relax, enjoy, and come back to first semester 2000 a new person.

Roman S. Gawkoski

Instructions to Authors

The C&U Editorial Board welcomes manuscripts for publication in College & University, AACRAO’s scholarly research journal. AACRAO members are especially encouraged to submit articles pertaining to their own experiences with emerging issues or innovative practices within the profession.

The Board also welcomes comments on articles, timely issues in higher education, and other topics of interest to this journal’s readers in the form of letters to the editor or longer guest commentary. We especially invite AACRAO members to participate in reviewing books.

Manuscript Preparation

Manuscripts for feature articles should be no longer than 4,500 words. Manuscripts for guest commentary and book reviews should not exceed 2,000 words. Letters to the editor will ordinarily be limited to 200 words.

All submissions must be saved to an IBM-compatible disk (Microsoft Word, preferably) and include a hard-copy original printed on 8.5" x 11" white paper. Because the Board has a blind review policy, the author’s name should not appear on any text page. A cover sheet should include the title of the manuscript, author’s name, address, phone and fax number, and e-mail address.

References should be formatted in the author-date style and follow guidelines provided on page 526 of The Chicago Manual of Style, 14th edition. A list of references should appear at the end of the article. Text citations also follow the author-date format; examples may be found on page 641 of the Manual. For more information or for samples, please contact the C&U Editor.

Essential tables and charts should be included on separate pages at the end of the manuscript. All graphics should be submitted on clean, reproducible, or camera-ready paper.

All submissions are accepted for publication with the understanding that the College & University editors reserve the right to edit for clarity and style. Please do not submit articles that are under consideration for publication by another periodical.

Authors whose manuscripts are selected for publication will be asked to submit a short biographical statement and an abstract of their article, each no more than thirty-five words.

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Editorial Procedure

The editor will acknowledge receipt of manuscripts (letters will not be acknowledged) and will forward them to members of the C&U Editorial Board for review. The Board will consider the appropriateness of the article for AACRAO’s membership, the current needs of the professions, the usefulness of the information, the nature and logic of the research methodology, clarity, and the style of presentation.

This review may take as long as three months, after which the C&U editor will inform the author of the manuscript’s acceptance or rejection.
The concept of the Indiana University grade context record was first introduced to registrars at the AACRAO Annual Meeting four years ago. Some who heard about this idea first were horrified at the thought and second, were concerned that, as registrars, we were actually partners with the faculty as supporters of this new policy and practice for reporting grades each semester and for a new transcript option. I was not bothered by this because I believe that the context grade concept has three professional virtues for academic administration:

- it advances the student evaluation process and improves communication about class performance from faculty to students;
- it provides a tangible linkage between faculty policy-makers and the registrar, vividly illustrating this historical and important relationship; and
- it provides an opportunity for registrarial leadership and creativity in record design.

Note that none of these virtues is or is related to the phenomenon of grade inflation. Yet, it is grade inflation (or the perception of grade inflation) that was at the origins of a call for the implementation of grade indexing, one of the important new data elements in the expanded context record. Stated another way, I believe that the context grade concept has three professional virtues for academic administration:

- the faculty has no intention of acting unilaterally to remedy what is a national phenomenon in higher education.

The Princeton Committee had recommended the elimination of the A-plus grade and its point value of 4.3, which was seen as a contributor to grade inflation. Randal Archibold, in two articles in the *New York Times* (1998), detailed the grade inflation phenomenon. Between 1993 and 1997, the mean GPA at Princeton increased from 3.08 to 3.42; at California-Berkeley from 2.95 (1986) to 3.10 (1996); at Duke from 2.7 (1969) to 3.3 (1996); at Harvard from 2.7 (1966) to 3.3 (1998); and at Dartmouth from 3.06 (1976) to 3.23 (1992).

Another way of looking at this phenomenon is to examine the distribution of grades. At Princeton, 69 percent of the grades awarded each term in the early 1970s were A’s and B’s; two decades later, 83 percent were A’s and B’s. Rutgers, a state institution also in New Jersey, awarded 42 percent A’s and B’s in the 1960s; 58 percent in the ’70s; and up to 66 percent in the 1990s. At Cornell, in 1965, 18 percent of all grades were A’s; in 1994, 36 percent was the figure. Harvard awarded 21 percent A’s in the 1960s and 43 percent in the ’90s. Dartmouth was at 44 percent but with less of a rise from 37 percent two decades earlier. Forty percent is the total at Stanford and Yale in the recent past with 42 percent at Georgetown.

A Fall 1999 study by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA indicates that 34 percent of this year’s grades were A’s and B’s.

Dr. R. Gerald Pugh has been with the Office of the Registrar at Indiana University since 1968 and Registrar since 1978. He has served AACRAO as member and chair of several professional committees and most recently as the interassociation representative to EDUCAUSE. He was co-founder and serves as conference director for the AAU Registrars and the Registrars’ Summer Institute. He was a contributing author to *Breakthrough Systems*, 1996.
freshman college students report earning an ‘A’ average in high school, up from 32 percent last year and just 12.5 percent in 1969. A ‘C’ average was reported by just 12 percent compared with 13 percent last year and 32 percent thirty years ago.

Arthur Levine, President of Teachers College, Columbia University, directed a national study which reported that in 1969 7 percent of all grades awarded were As and that the number was 26 percent by 1994. Dr. Levine states, “A’ grades are going through the sky and ‘C’ grades are going through the floor.” In addition, the April 16, 1999, Wall Street Journal trumpeted the problem by referring to an era of rampant grade inflation” in American high schools and colleges. Further data from Levine’s study is in articles by Archibold (Feb. 18, 1998) and Pederson (1997).

Archibold quoted two Princeton students in the New York Times series:

“If you are getting A’s, it means you are doing good work.”

“If you go to class and participate and write a semi-intelligent paper, you get an ‘A’.

Most of the grade inflation discussants agree that the phenomenon began in the 1960s as a by-product of campus activism and general questioning of values and relevancy. The Vietnam War and the draft are often cited as contributing factors to the start of the trend as well. The first faculty concerns about the change in grading patterns began to surface in the early to mid-1970s; this is when publicity about the distribution of grades first occurred and the label of “grade inflation” began to be applied. The first indexing proposals originated then as well. As time passed, there appeared to be some slowing of the structural changes and less rhetoric. But in the 1990s, both numbers and critics were on the rise again.

It may be helpful to review the reasons or explanations offered for the grade inflation phenomenon.

■ Students today are smarter and better prepared. After all, more than one-third who recently took the SAT had an A-minus or higher high school grade point average.
■ SAT scores have also been rising parallel to GPAs.
■ A greater emphasis on student retention has resulted in more students pursuing their academic goals with more seriousness and dedication.

■ There has been more strategic student decision-making in choosing courses and instructors. Students are more intensely grade conscious and research more carefully instructor and course grade patterns and histories.
■ More comprehensive student course evaluations and their availability and access to students permits more informed course decision-making.
■ Withdrawal deadlines from courses have lengthened; with later deadlines students have a better probability of knowing that a below average grade may be in their future so that withdrawal as an avoidance of a low grade is a viable option.
■ The creation of pass-fail grade policies provides an option to an average or below average grade and avoids any effect on a student grade point average.
■ Many degree programs have fewer required courses; hence, students have more options in selecting courses in which, presumably, they have a high likelihood of being able to do well.
■ The institution of grading policies which negate first or prior grades (including elimination of first or prior grades from GPA calculations) for courses re-taken by students results in higher grade point averages for students and for classes in which there are repeat students.
■ More students are taking courses taught as seminars or by independent study where grades tend to be higher. A recent Princeton study found that between 1992 and 1997, only 3.7 percent of junior independent study work grades and 5.3 percent of senior thesis grades fell below B-minus. “In short, it has become virtually impossible to find an independent work grade below B-minus” according to the Princeton Faculty Committee on Examinations and Standing.
■ More students are taking courses where testing is done via essay exams or just by papers submitted rather than through objective-type tests which are seen as being more likely to yield higher grades.
■ Faculty in some courses provide more opportunity for grade improvement by providing feedback and opportunities to rewrite and resubmit essays and papers.
■ Faculty grade standards are national in scope rather than local, thus leading to higher grades so as not to handicap their students for jobs or graduate school admissions in comparison with students at other institutions.
■ Higher grading—even if subconscious—is a product of efforts to maintain or expand course enrollments; enrollment competition is more obvious today between departments and faculty.
■ Student course evaluations are more prevalent in tenure, promotion and salary decisions. Randal Archibold in his May 24 New York Times article notes that Professor Peter Seldin reports 88 percent of schools now use student evaluations in these...
decisions compared with 23 percent twenty-five years ago. In the same story, Professor Anthony Greenwald (University of Washington) contends that grading affects student ratings.

- Grades are higher because institutions communicate to faculty that students and their parents are to be treated as customers. As such, they expect results to their satisfaction. Even a grade awarded, if not accepted as valid, becomes an issue for appeal and often pressure to satisfy the request or demand is felt.
- Accepting the concept of thinking of themselves as customers, students and parents today are more willing to complain and pursue grading grievances. As a result, the number of cases appealed increases.
- Conversely, procedures were put in place to hear grading grievances. This is the “if you build it they will come” syndrome. Now that procedures are in place, appeals are filed and more appeals almost always result in higher grades.
- Philosophically, some faculty do not want to thwart academic exploration by giving low grades which would be seen as negative or contribute to low student self-esteem.
- Alternatively, grades are viewed by some faculty as a motivator or reward for effort expended, not accomplishment attained. Some professors see higher grades as a way to provide students with a sense of satisfaction and positive self-concept.
- Then there are the philosophical positions that if a student fails, it is the teacher's fault so the student shouldn't be penalized.
- And, as well, the concept of mastery learning which seems to say that if given the objectives, all students can succeed at the top level if given time and resources to pursue the goals.

There may be some other explanations for higher grades today but the above are ones heard over the years. Most likely there aren’t many others, if any, which are not at least related to one or more of the above.

In a perceived or suggested environment of grade inflation, the registrar and faculty, as always, are linked. The faculty entrust the registrar with their grades of student performance and the registrar, in addition to recording these marks, puts them in the context of other data elements, usually stored electronically. The registrar is, therefore, in a position to provide data reports and research studies which provide support, clarification, or refutation for the issue of grade inflation.

Let's review a registrar's mission statement:

*The purpose of the Office of the Registrar is to support the instructional mission of the University and, to a lesser extent, the missions of research and professional service by coordinating, supplementing and facilitating the activities of the faculty who are responsible for fulfillment of the instructional mission. This is accomplished in accordance with institutional academic policies and practices as well as with rules of other external regulatory or accrediting agencies. This is an office of the faculty. We act as proxy for the faculty in maintaining an accurate and complete academic record of courses offered, teaching assignments, classroom facilities utilization, class enrollments, personal student demographic information, grades awarded for student academic performance, and degrees conferred. These records are assembled and maintained using centrally constructed information systems which enable departments and school personnel and students to conduct their business in a decentralized electronic environment.*

The Faculty Constitution assigns to the faculty the authority to offer courses; determine the curriculum; determine academic policy; set the calendar; establish degree requirements; and establish the grading system. This authority forms the basis of the work of the registrar on behalf of the faculty.

Through its elected representative body, the Faculty Council (and its committees), and in conjunction with the various academic officers, the registrar is charged with implementing, administering, and monitoring academic policy. The registrar also provides analyses, alternatives, options, conclusions, and recommendations as a result of regular or special reviews of academic policies, procedures, and operations. The faculty depend upon the registrar to identify functions which can be improved, to identify and resolve problems, and to identify and define issues through the systematic application and analysis of the academic and student data maintained by this office.

The registrar keeps the faculty's record of courses taught and the performance of the students who enrolled. The faculty determine the nature of the abstract of that record as it presents the academic history of any given student. Today, in most institutions, that student record looks much like it did a hundred years ago. What is presented? The course (number and probably an abbreviated course title), the semester and year taken, the hours of credit, and the grade. Usually a total grade point average is also present but that often refers just to each semester and/or the entire career program of work. These few and modest elements are not the only ones related to the course.

How helpful are just these data elements alone in presenting to the student or other readers of the record the nature of the academic performance rendered?

The course transcript generally means or refers to an exact report of what happened. How exact are we in presenting what happened if all we provide is course, semester, credit hours and grade symbol?

Here are the typical symbols of performance: A, B, C, D, F. We now say one is the highest passing grade and one is the lowest passing grade with "F" being failure. We used to
say excellent, above average, average, and below average in addition to failure. Now we don’t even say that. What these symbols mean depends upon the reader; in fact, everyone brings a lifetime of experience and specific connotations to those academic symbols.

Many years ago considerable additional information about a given student was provided on the transcript:

- Date of matriculation
- Name of father (or guardian) and address
- Place & date of birth
- Entrance test information
- Major subject
- Maiden name
- Graduation date & degree
- Religious affiliation
- School last attended
- List of recipients of certified transcripts
- Date of death/place of burial

How much of that was related to academic performance? How did any or all of those items relate to academic performance or advance knowledge about student class performance? As one would suspect, most of these items have now been eliminated. This information provided some context about each individual but not class performance.

But there has been no real progress or advance in information displayed in the student records or even communicated to the student that could be considered as illuminating the context of student academic performance. But without this information, really, how helpful today is the transcript? How exact is it?

Most transcript information today does not address performance, much less try to help us (faculty, students, recipients) understand performance.

Professor Gail Mahood at Stanford, chair of the faculty committee on grading, explains that grade inflation leads to grade compression at the top. (Margolick 1994.)

“If you think of grades as the slang we use to communicate to students and the outside world, we have a problem in that our vocabulary has really shrunk. We can’t communicate with as much precision as would have been possible in the sixties.”

Professor Jackson Toby (1994) at Rutgers also addresses effective communication about performance.

“Grades can’t communicate clear meanings unless they are understood in the same way by the professor who assigns the grade, the student who receives it, and the other people who read the transcript.”

Professor Lee Mitchell (1998) at Princeton (chair of the department of English) believes there’s no discussion, no standards and no universal understanding of the grade symbols and what they mean.

“Frankly, much of the turmoil (dare I say it?) is a tad inflated. After all, grading is among the more powerful gestures that teachers make and, at the same time, among the least examined collectively. I know of no university where new faculty members are uniformly counseled on the protocols of grading or where colleagues regularly strive for consensus about what a particular grade means or where deans customarily take the trouble to suggest that departments review their grading policies. I rarely have been asked by colleagues what I’ve meant by an ‘A’ paper or a ‘B’ exam or a ‘C’ final grade…No one has ever suggested that my colleagues and I might want to consider discussing our expectations as a group to transform grading into something more than a happenstance collection of idiosyncratic evaluations. The fact is that our Ph.Ds and competence in certain scholarly materials authorize us to assign whatever grades we think students deserve, no questions asked.”

At Indiana University, the President and the Trustees took notice of the subject. They asked the faculty leaders and academic administrators to take a look at the concept of indexing, conduct department discussions on grading, and establish department grading policies. The Faculty Constitution at Indiana University is very clear that grading policy is assigned to the faculty so that grading issues are exclusive faculty matters.

Prior to discussion is the phase of information gathering. The registrar was a logical place for the faculty to start. The opportunity here for the registrar was to illuminate the environment, provide information, sharpen the focus, articulate the issues, and share information collected from colleagues. What did we report about who and what was being done relative to the phenomenon of grade inflation?

- Indexing—discussed but only implemented at Utah (now discontinued there) and at McGill.
- Narratives of student performance—only at California - Santa Cruz (just recently discontinued).
- Only success (‘C’ and above)—Brown University records only achievement and there is a withdrawal deadline of 24 hours before the final exam.
- Percent of A’s awarded in each course section—implemented at Dartmouth in 1994.
- Median grade of the course and number of students enrolled—implemented at Dartmouth in the mid-1990s.
- Creation of an achievement index as a substitute for the GPA—Duke discussed but ultimately rejected the concept of a recalculated GPA based upon greater weight to rigorously graded courses. This concept is similar to a sports team opponents index based upon the difficulty of opposing teams. In other words, how difficult is the schedule of completion? The concept here was that doing average work among very good students counts more than doing well with sub-par students. As an aside, Phi Beta Kappa selection at Indiana University has been based, since 1973, on weighting courses and grade averages. As such, among many faculty there is some background history and experience with department and course grade variations and use of...
much of what we submitted for faculty discussion is cited in the bibliography. These articles represent a reasonably comprehensive summary of grade inflation activity and information written in the last decade.

In addition to these reports of what others were doing and had done, we also had our own reports on student grade averages, class grade averages, and departmental/school grade averages over time. The information we made available showed support for grade inflation as well as showed more consistency and stability of grading patterns. This was the beginning of using a wider range of data elements to more thoroughly examine the grade inflation phenomenon.

The faculty policy for the expanded grade context record at Indiana University evolved. A report from the Educational Policy Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences in 1993 recommended that the policy permitting students to repeat courses in which they received a grade of ‘F’ and in which the second grade would replace the original ‘F’ in the grade point average computation be rescinded. Further, this committee recommended that the last possible date for course withdrawal with an automatic grade of ‘W’ (which is not reflected in the student GPA) be moved from the end of the eighth week of the semester (mid-term) to the fourth week. Finally, the committee recommended an index be added to the permanent student academic record.

It is worthwhile to cite some key perspectives of this committee’s report:

A “more challenging academic environment” is the phrase currently in vogue that is used to describe the need for change. What this typically means is that we think students should dedicate more time and effort to their academic pursuits relative to their non-academic pursuits. Both more time and higher quality time appear to be needed. Since learning takes place primarily on the basis of student effort, these higher expectations are appropriate. Our teaching will be most productive when we inspire, induce, and—yes—demand a more focused student effort as the basis for academic success.

The responsibility for setting standards obviously belongs to the faculty. Students experience many conflicting demands on their time, including academic, social, and economic pressures. While from our own experience we understand and sympathize with this universal problem, we as faculty must ensure the primacy of the learning experience.

Therefore it is our responsibility to create a more challenging academic environment. On the Bloomington campus we provide over 70 percent A’s and B’s for an average of 12 hours of study time per week by full time students. Almost everyone says that the Dean of Faculties study on students’ use of time has “flaws” (was there ever an empirical study that did not?) but we have not found either students or faculty willing to claim that the results clearly miss the mark. Students tell us in candid conversations that if we want more student effort we will have to set a higher standard.

When we accept responsibility for students’ success, or fail to establish a framework that expects concentrated effort from them throughout the semester, they will “game” us down to low academic standards. They have done this already and the primary fault is not theirs. Much less learning goes into their degree than could have been accomplished—including less knowledge, perspective, analytical skill, self discipline, planning and organizing skills, and personal responsibility for their own success. The student suffers the most from this state of affairs in terms of lost potential. The faculty and the institution also lose substantially over a long period of time, including the loss of academic reputation, and the “sense of malaise about our commitment to teaching” (Faculty Council Commission on Teaching, Report, 2/21/92, p.1).

We are not alone in addressing these issues. There is clearly a nationwide concern with the declining quality of undergraduate education. However, improving the academic environment, whether nationally or locally, will not come from some highly focused effort with an expectation of immediate results. Such an approach could do great harm. Neither will it come exclusively, or even importantly from exhortations to faculty to put more effort into their undergraduate teaching. We have had exhortations and guidance for many years and most of us are putting more effort into undergraduate teaching. Improvement will come from many modest, but significant changes in policies—and time. (It is in the spirit that the recommendations of the COAS Task Force on Teaching are made.)

I hope you can see in this rationale how the subject has been broadened, expanded, or, in fact, even altered, from just the subject of grade inflation to the academic environment and student achievement in general.

No change was made by the Faculty Council with regard to the repeated ‘F’ policy or to the withdrawal date. However, indexing was another matter. Cogent arguments were articulated and summarized for and against indexing before the subject was debated by the entire Bloomington Campus Faculty Council. Here is the recommendation of the Educational Policies Committee:
The grade indexing proposal is opposed on the grounds that the potential for misinterpreting the reported ratios on a transcript is substantial, students bear the burden of any misinterpretation, the practice drives a competitive wedge between students at a time when cooperation in learning is being emphasized, and finally there is no evidence to support the contentsions that it will reduce grade inflation or encourage students to excel in their coursework. Listing on a transcript how many students in a class received the grade indicated or higher out of the total number enrolled does not inform the person reading the transcript as to the nature of instruction in the course. The size of the class is indicated but not what the course requirements are, how students are evaluated, and how elegant the instruction is. It could easily and mistakenly be surmised that a course in which many students receive good grades should not be accorded the same weight as a course in which there is a distribution of grades representing a bell shaped curve or one in which many students receive grades below a ‘B.’ Indeed, a lot of high grades might indicate a course in which the best students enrolled, demands were high, students were so challenged and actively engaged, and the learning environment was structured so that all the students could master the course work. Conversely, a course with many low grades might signify incompetent instruction. As faculty move to encourage cooperative learning and mastery learning, there is no reason why students, with the proper instruction, should not be able to do well. With regard to the students bearing the burden of the misinterpretation of grades, unless a significant number of other institutions establish similar grade indexing, it is possible that the proposed “ratios” will place IU students at a disadvantage. This is one of the reasons why students at the University of Utah, the only higher institution of note to establish such a policy, are dissatisfied with it. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that grade inflation at the University of Utah has been stemmed by the introduction of this policy. Finally, this approach may discourage serious faculty discussion and action on the intellectual issues that grade inflation raises.

The Council debate on indexing contained discussion in depth of all of these points of view and lines of argument including the existence (or lack) of real grade inflation and normal distribution of grades versus mastery learning theory, and grade indexing. Many of the points regarding grade inflation cited earlier in this paper also were a part of the discussion.

The lesson is that policy is made by those who are present at the time the vote is taken. The views of those still present for the vote are the views that prevail. In this case, it was 22-21 in favor of indexing on internal records. The index was defined as the number of grades equal to or higher than the grade a given student received compared with the number of students enrolled in the course. A registrar, who serves as proxy for the faculty, would never be pleased when half of the faculty are in favor and half are opposed. True, the policy passed, but registrars have to make things work. Often, it is tough to successfully implement policies when the opposition still remains significant, consensus has not been achieved, and all the opposing faculty arguments are still left to be reconciled with the new policy.

The opportunity on how this policy could be implemented with many opposing objection arguments still unresolved came to us after we thought carefully about two comments from policy proponents:

Professor Carr of French and Italian stated:
“A grade without context has no meaning.”

Professor Orr of Economics said:
“Accurate but imperfect contextual information is more fair than no context. We should tell a more detailed story than that of a single letter grade.”

While these comments were in support of the index alone, we saw in those statements a way to employ much of the information we had available about student performance and faculty decisions on grades to really tell a far more complete story about the context of student performance than any of the proponents had ever imagined. Further, we could see that, when all the contextual information was presented, many of the concerns expressed by faculty opposed would be positively addressed.

As we carefully examined and inventoried the performance data we had stored electronically, we saw how much of it could be assembled in a cogent and unique way to really present the complete context of performance for each course.

The School of Music and the Honors College felt that the index would disadvantage their students who were of high quality and admitted through a highly selective program. Their indexes in courses would all appear to reflect very high grades and could lead an observer to the conclusion that such courses were graded easily. The response was to include on the record for each course the average cumulative grade point average for each student enrolled so that highly talented students, through display of their overall collegiate academic average, would be clearly identified. In effect, we would identify whether or not the students enrolled in any given class were already high performers.

Education majors took many courses in their school and had high course averages compared to a number of Arts and Sciences departments. Yet, it was hypothesized that students tend to do better in courses in their major, so we added the data element of percent of majors in each course section to give the reader some idea of the course section student composition. Perhaps, one could then derive some assessment of the level of student motivation and experience in the subject.
Since there was debate but no action about changing to an earlier automatic 'W' grade withdrawal date (the later date was linked to higher grade averages), we proposed to add the number of students in each course who had chosen to withdraw in the first week of the term and also the number who withdrew in all remaining weeks (after the first) of the semester. Thus, courses and their final grade averages could be examined in light of how many students, perhaps not expecting to do well, withdrew from the course, thus avoiding a low or failing grade. First week withdrawals were separated from others because many changes in the first week are due to issues of scheduling, not necessarily academic performance.

Correspondingly, since higher numbers of students choosing to take courses Pass-Fail were linked to higher grade averages, we proposed to list for each course the number of 'P' grades awarded. This would provide some evidence about the number of students who were in a course and who, by virtue of choosing a 'P' grade option, avoided the risk of an average or below average mark and, therefore, a lower grade point average.

Some faculty felt that grading was too anonymous and that some faculty were less rigorous than others. But the full story was never really examined because relevant information was not so readily available in the public domain. There was some feeling that faculty grade distribution information be more greatly disseminated. Further, students told us that it would be helpful in graduate admissions applications and job searches to have faculty with whom they had studied identified on the record. So these two issues became joined and we added the faculty instructor's name for each course on the transcript.

Because not all faculty wanted an academic record with the index alone and since the policy passed was for internal records only, we suggested that this new record format be produced as an option available to each student to request. Advisors would be able to see this information online but all others could view it or receive a copy of the record only with student authorization (no different from the traditional transcript policy). Special training and tools were put in place for advisors to access this information about their students so that they as well might see the context of academic performance in each course of a student's enrollment. So, for jobs or graduate school admission, each student could judge whether the data in the expanded context transcript were helpful; then each student could make the choice of whether or not to use that document.

However, in order to insure that all students received this performance context information, it was proposed that the semester grade report be re-formatted so that this information was included. Because there was agreement about how important this context information was in communicating student and class performance, there was agreement that the semester grade report was the best way to do this.

In addition to providing grade context information for each student enrollment on their semester grade report and in one transcript format of their permanent academic record, it was our recommendation that all of the grade context information for each course each semester be made public information and displayed to all via the Web. Given our legal counsel's interpretation of Indiana's open records law and faculty distribution of this information since 1975, there was agreement by the Faculty Council and the Educational Policies Committee as well.

After all was said and done, the original focus of the polemic of grade inflation had been by-passed in favor of the effort, in concert together, to support the faculty in the creation of a better learning environment through the distribution and communication of more comprehensive academic performance information. In the final analysis, the issue of a divided faculty vote was eclipsed by the implementation of a methodology which supported a more rational and comprehensive performance report. We really didn't decide or even take sides on the issue of grade inflation. Rather, the shift was to focus on how we can better describe student academic performance and improve upon communicating that information with more than just symbols made up of five letters and some pluses and minuses. The context information is a substitute for individual connotations to the traditional grade symbols and permits an understanding of performance regardless of grade inflation. In keeping with the Indiana University motto of "Lux et veritas," translated from the Latin as "Light and Truth," the expanded context record is a good example of how full information disclosure can lead to real honesty about student performance.

Between action of the Bloomington Faculty Council in April, 1994, and implementation for the Second Semester, 1997-98, the faculty of the Educational Policies Committee and the registrar's staff together assembled a semester grade report and a permanent record transcript format to contain the following information in addition to course department number, title, hours of credit and grade:

- **Index.** An index showing the number of students in each course section who received a given grade or higher grade compared with the total number of students receiving a grade with credit point values (GPA grades).
- **Grade Distribution.** Complete distribution of all grades awarded in each class section, including those grades which do not have credit point values (e.g., I, P, S, R, NY).
- **Class GPA.** The mean grade average of all grades awarded in the course section.
- **Average Student GPA.** The mean average of the cumulative grade point averages of all students enrolled in the course section.
- **Majors.** The percentage of students in the course section whose major school (or major department for College of Arts and Sciences/Graduate School students) is the same as the school or department offering the course.
- **Course Withdrawals—1st Week.** The number of students who withdrew from the course section in the first week of the term (WX).
Course Withdrawals—Through the Term. The number of students who withdrew from the course section beyond the first week of the term (W).

Pass/Fail—No Credit Enrollees. The number of students who chose pass/fail or who chose non-credit enrollment (NC).

Instructor Name. The name of the instructor of the course section.

Context Effective Date.

Already addressed is the way the faculty came together by going far beyond just the idea of an index to provide the context for academic performance. But what, you may ask, has been student opinion?

The student newspaper, the Indiana Daily Student, soon after implementation on March 27, 1998, noted in an unsigned editorial:

“The ultimate victims of grade inflation are graduate schools and employers who cannot adequately evaluate the abilities of a student relative to his or her peers. This hurts all students regardless of where they might be relative to the mathematical average.”

“With this information [the data on the context grade report], every graduate school will be able to know just what every instructor’s grades are worth and just how the student performed relative to his or her peers—to the extent teachers make their grades meaningful by making their A’s, B’s, C’s, D’s, and F’s mean what they were intended to mean. Every other university will know IU’s grades carry real meaning and will have to adopt a similar system in self defense. In this way, IU will make history.”

In an IDS article by Sara Rupel, freshman Rick Hersberger said good grades are not difficult to get at IU.

“(Students) here are given a lot of slack. I had a literature class last semester, and I got an A-plus on everything I wrote. I know there is no way everything I did in there was worthy of such a high grade,” he said. Hersberger said the plan sounds complicated but is probably worth the effort. “The more comprehensive a grading system there is, the more people will be held accountable for their studies,” he said.

In Eric Seymour’s column in the Daily Student on March 28, he states:

“This problem is difficult to turn around because no academic department wants to get a reputation for tougher grading for fear that students will choose to major in other areas, and the department will lose funding. Colleges as a whole are slow to address grade inflation for the same reason. Fortunately, IU’s new indexed grading system might be a step in the right direction in that students in honestly
graded classes might compare their grades with their peers. Just as it took time for students to believe an 'A' is the standard, not the pinnacle, it will take time to convince students there is no shame in a 'C' because we are all going to be merely 'average' at something."

Although I have described a national issue of grade inflation and the Indiana faculty response to it, there are some professional registrarial concerns which also merit some thought now that we have developed the expanded grade context record.

- Even though the academic record should reflect faculty policy, as a profession what do we have to profess regarding this new format?
- Is the academic record of performance—essentially the same for over a century—not due for some recommendations for improvement? Can this format help us in this regard?
- What is the reaction of registrars and registrar leadership to this new record format?
- Why is it that EDUCAUSE, the organization for managing information technology in higher education, is the group which selected this project as one of two winners in 1998 for the
Best Practices award for innovation and creativity? Where are the best practices in our profession as judged by AACRAO?

Where does AACRAO as a professional association stand on this academic record initiative?

If a faculty member at your institution hears of this new record format and moves to have faculty discussions or proposes its adoption at your institution, what will be your response?

A few years ago a gentlemen from our human resources area suggested that his analogy for the registrar was a county recorder. I replied that while that might be the case some places, it wasn't and it shouldn't be that way anywhere if the registrar is fulfilling the role described when the job was first established a hundred and fifteen years ago in American higher education.

In summary, the registrar is the administrative officer of the faculty. The registrar implements academic policy on behalf of the faculty. What does one do about policy implementation when the faculty are divided? The answer, I believe, is the hallmark of professional expertise and a professional's calling in the following ways:

- provide information and perspective
- offer honest comparisons
- describe what is done elsewhere
- represent institutional history
- channel the energy
- sharpen the focus
- increase your visibility to mediate
- search for commonalities among the view points
- try to diminish the differences
- try to forge a consensus which overcomes the problem issues
- use your professional expertise in proffering alternative solutions or possibilities

The role of the registrar at the confluence of virtually all academic trails provides an opportunity for great insight into the nature of the academy, a deeper understanding of the role of faculty governance, and an opportunity to provide the means to fulfill academic needs.

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The Internet, and especially the hypertext information system known as the World Wide Web (WWW), is becoming increasingly pervasive in this country. From the explosion of e-commerce to the development of online academic journals, the WWW is having a profound impact on society. Education has not been exempt from the influence of the WWW, and that influence is considerable. When examining the impact of the WWW, it is possible that education is “facing a paradigm shift of historic proportions” (Barnard 1997).

The growth of the WWW is quite clear. As Sloane noted in 1997, the WWW “has grown considerably since its introduction and is now one of the most widely used applications on the Internet,” and access to this technology is being experienced at all levels of education. Indeed, access to the WWW can be found in many primary and secondary schools (O’Neil 1995), and its growth and use by college-aged students is on the increase (Hartman 1997). More importantly, this growth shows no sign of slowing; rather, it is expected to continue into the foreseeable future (Bell 1997).

Higher Education

Colleges and universities certainly feel the influence of the WWW. Hossler (1999) noted that such continuing technological innovations are altering fundamental practices in higher education. Much of this involves streamlining common administrative processes. That is, as an institution’s administrative and academic units exchange data and information via the WWW, they reduce or eliminate the flow of paper (Barnard 1997; Bell 1997; Harris and Herring 1999).

Perhaps one of the administrative areas most affected by this technology is college and university admissions. The use of the WWW to reduce the vast flow of paper common in the admissions process has resulted in faster service, lower costs, and fewer person-hours (Cavanaugh, Martin, and Cover 1996).

In addition to simply processing data, admissions offices are using the WWW for recruitment purposes by developing Web pages and other promotional information (Hossler 1999; Stoner 1996). Students are also incorporating the WWW into their college selection process. In his recent dissertation, Strauss (1998) studied the college selection process of 389 students at Ohio State University and found that the majority had access to—and utilized—the WWW for information regarding colleges and universities.

One of the advantages of the WWW in the admissions process is enhanced interaction between student and institution. The WWW has allowed for the engagement of dynamic interaction for students, rather than simply retrieval of static information. That is, this technology allows for vastly greater communication between students and admission staff (Hartman 1997) and “increasingly, colleges and universities are creating web pages that permit students...to track their progress through the admission process” (Hossler 1999).

Undoubtedly, the WWW will have a huge impact on the means by which prospective students apply for admission. Yet, despite recent technological advances, colleges and universities are only now beginning to explore Web-based—or online—admissions (Guernsey 1998). Indeed,
examination of Web pages at various colleges and universities reveal that few have true online applications.1

Clearly, the use of this technology in higher education has been addressed by academic researchers (e.g., Duggan, Hess, Morgan, Kim and Wilson 1999; Rodd and Coombs 1998). Yet there is a dearth of research on applications via the WWW. However, the use of this technology in the application process is changing, and leading the way may well be graduate education.

Unheard of a few years ago, it is now possible to submit an application for graduate school via the WWW at selected institutions. Universities that currently use this method include the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The end result is a paperless application (although currently letters of reference and transcripts are still submitted by paper).

While utilizing the Web in the graduate admissions process has clear advantages for both students (e.g., increased interaction, convenience, etc.) and universities (e.g., lower costs, faster processing time), it presumes a universal access to this technology. Unfortunately, access to this technology is not evenly distributed across racial lines—and this “technology gap” is growing.

Technology Gap
It takes no great leap of insight to foresee the day when online applications are commonplace in graduate education. Unfortunately, access to the WWW is not available to all segments of society. Even with the great proliferation of the WWW in primary and secondary schools, there remains a great divide across racial boundaries when it comes to access to this technology. This point is well noted by Barnard (1997), who states that the Internet “provides previously undreamed of opportunities. However, the current revolution in [technology] also threatens to create an expanding gap between the computer literate and the technologically deprived.”

While the availability of computers and access to the Internet is growing in primary and secondary education, that access is unevenly distributed among schools. As Gladieux and Swail (1999) note, “students with the greatest need get the least access.” This point is supported by the Educational Testing Service, which found that there is an inverse relationship between schools with access to the WWW and the proportion of minority students (Coley, Cradder, and Engel 1997). Moreover, as the proportion of minority students increases in a school, access to WWW declines (National Center for Education Statistics 1998).

This divide also can be seen in households. In a 1997 study, Beckles found that race and class barriers prohibit many African Americans from access to the WWW. In that same year a national telephone survey of 2,500 households by Katz and Aspden (1997) found that African American and Hispanic respondents were more likely to be unaware of the Internet when compared with White respondents.

A 1998 report by a branch of the U.S. Department of Commerce indicated that the technology gap between racial groups appears to be increasing. The authors note that “the ‘digital divide’ between certain groups of Americans has increased between 1994 and 1997 so that there is now an even greater disparity in penetration levels among some groups” (National Telecommunications and Information Administration 1998). For example, a greater percentage of Whites has access to telephone lines (95.5 percent) than either African Americans (86 percent) or Hispanics (86.5 percent). Whites also have a far greater computer ownership rate than either African Americans or Hispanics, and this gap is increasing. In 1994, 27.1 percent of White households owned a computer, compared with 10.3 percent for African American and 12.3 percent for Hispanic. In 1997, computers could be found in 40.8 percent of White households, yet only 19.3 percent and 19.4 percent for African American and Hispanic households, respectively.

Purpose of the Study
Applications to graduate schools promise to be increasingly driven by the WWW, yet studies cited above indicate that access to this technology is not evenly distributed across racial lines. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to assess the impact of an online application process on prospective minority graduate students.

This is an investigatory study into a new field. The WWW is an emerging technology as applied to online applications, and few graduate schools incorporate this tool. Given the limited use of this technology, the present study is inherently narrow in focus. However, what follows is the first step towards a greater understanding of the impact of the WWW on minority applicants to graduate study.

Methodology
This study uses historical data provided by the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). UNC-CH is a highly selective Research I (Carnegie classification) institution with a fall 1999 Graduate School enrollment of over 7,000, constituting a substantial percentage of the total student population on campus. Each year the Graduate School receives approximately 9,500 applications from prospective students, with an overall acceptance rate of 36 percent. The vast majority of the research programs at the University fall within the purview of the Graduate School. However, programs that fall outside the scope of the Graduate School are excluded from this study (and this study's data), as online

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1 A distinction is made here between paperless online applications and (a) applications that can be downloaded by prospective applicants and mailed to an admissions office, and (b) applications that can be submitted via the WWW yet need to be printed and manually entered into a database by admissions staff.
applications were not available to prospective students applying to these programs. This includes such programs as M.D., J.D., and D.D.S.

Like other institutions, UNC-CH has traditionally utilized paper admission applications. However, beginning in 1997, prospective domestic applicants were given the opportunity to apply online at UNC-CH via the WWW. The option of applying online was implemented late in the admissions year, resulting in few individuals utilizing the process. The proportion of domestic applicants who applied online increased to 30 percent in 1998. However, it was only in 1999, when the online applicant pool increased to 49 percent, that sufficient data were available to implement this study. With a target population of domestic applicants for 1999, this study examines those who applied via the WWW with those who applied by traditional paper applications. Although students can generally be admitted to UNC-CH during the fall, spring, or summer semesters, all academic terms in 1999 will be examined cumulatively.

Finally, comparing applicants can be a bit problematic, as a variety of qualitative data are considered when evaluating applications for admission, including letters of reference, statements of purpose and, when warranted by academic departments, interviews and portfolios. However, two quantitative measures have also been utilized, namely GRE scores and undergraduate grade point averages (GPA). In an effort to minimize subjective measures, only the quantitative measures of GRE and GPA are used in this study.

### Results

As Table 1 indicates, Hispanics and Asian Americans more frequently applied online than by paper. This is not true for the other racial groups, where the majority applied by paper. African Americans and Native Americans showed the lowest percentage of online applications, with just 41 percent and 42 percent, respectively. Since it is clear that substantial proportions of racial minorities are taking advantage of online applications, the following will address issues of quality of the applicants.

When examining the GRE, those who applied online had better scores than those who applied by paper. That is, for each racial group the verbal, quantitative and analytical GRE scores of those who applied online were higher— in every case—than those who applied by paper (see Table 1). While this increase is around 20-30 points for each GRE section within many of the racial groups, the most notable increases were with African American and Native American applicants. African Americans who applied online saw an advantage of 36, 44, and 44 points in the verbal, quantitative, and analytical sections when compared to African Americans who applied by paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Group</th>
<th>Method of Application</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>GRE-V</th>
<th>GRE-Q</th>
<th>GRE-A</th>
<th>Acceptable Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>GRE-V</td>
<td>GRE-Q</td>
<td>GRE-A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>n(%)</td>
<td>309(59)</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WWW</td>
<td>218(41)</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>n(%)</td>
<td>67(43)</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WWW</td>
<td>88(57)</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>n(%)</td>
<td>130(43)</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WWW</td>
<td>172(57)</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>n(%)</td>
<td>22(58)</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WWW</td>
<td>16(42)</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>n(%)</td>
<td>3037(51)</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WWW</td>
<td>2932(49)</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Last two years of undergraduate program.
Finally, for all but one minority group the acceptance rate for those who applied online was greater than those who applied by paper. Asian Americans, with 51 percent and 33 percent, demonstrate the greatest disparity between online and paper acceptance rates respectively. The lone exception to this trend is Native Americans, with an acceptance rate of 50 percent by paper and 44 percent online.

Moving from applicants to those who actually enrolled (see Table 2), it is clear that unlike the acceptance rate, the yield rate (the percentage of applicants who actually enroll) was much lower for students who applied online. Indeed, for all non-White accepted applicants, the yield rate was lower for those who applied online when compared with those who applied by paper. The yield rate for online and paper applicants was about the same for Whites.

With few exceptions, the GRE scores for those who actually enrolled and applied online were greater than those who applied by paper. The most noticeable difference is the greater GRE scores for Hispanics students who applied online, with two of three scores in excess of 50 points higher over those who applied by paper. African American, Native American, and White students who applied online also had higher GRE scores when compared to students who applied by paper, although they do not approach the magnitude of Hispanic students. Somewhat of an exception are Asian American students. Asian American students with online applications had stronger verbal portions of the GRE when compared to their paper application counterparts, but there were either no or minimal differences for the quantitative and analytical portions of the GRE.

Unlike the GRE, the GPA of enrolled students who applied online was greater for only three racial groups. Although this difference is fairly minimal, higher GPAs can be seen for students who submitted online applicants and are African American, Hispanic, or White. Conversely, the GPA of Native American students who applied by paper was slightly higher than those who applied online. There was no difference between Asian American students and online and paper application.

**Table 2: Enrolled Students’ Method of Application, GPA\(^1\) and GRE Scores, by Race**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Group</th>
<th>Method of Application</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>GRE-V</th>
<th>GRE-Q</th>
<th>GRE-A</th>
<th>Yield Rate(^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>WWW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n(%)</td>
<td>76(59)</td>
<td>53(41)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-V</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>512</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-Q</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>529</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-A</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>551</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield Rate(^2)</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n(%)</td>
<td>13(42)</td>
<td>18(58)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-V</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>555</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-Q</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>606</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-A</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>620</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield Rate(^2)</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n(%)</td>
<td>21(35)</td>
<td>39(65)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-V</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>538</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-Q</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>629</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-A</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>598</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield Rate(^2)</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n(%)</td>
<td>11(69)</td>
<td>5(31)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-V</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>555</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-Q</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>623</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-A</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>613</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield Rate(^2)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n(%)(^3)</td>
<td>627(48)</td>
<td>693(53)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>GPA</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRE-V</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>578</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>GRE-Q</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>631</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>GRE-A</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>638</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yield Rate(^2)</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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1. Last two years of undergraduate program.
2. Term denotes percentage of accepted applicants who enroll.
3. Total exceeds 100% due to rounding.

**Discussion**

While in society as a whole there is a gap in access to the WWW that tends to divide along racial lines, this gap appears to be absent in graduate education. This study suggests that with a graduate online application not only are racial minorities not excluded from the process, but they tend to be stronger applicants when compared with individuals who applied by the more traditional paper method.

Paper applications are still the more common method of applying for admission to graduate study. Yet, the number of racial minorities who applied online is staggering when one considers that this is a new method with little precedent in education. Perhaps even more enlightening are the academic qualifications of the online applicants. With few exceptions, racial minorities who applied online were stronger applicants than those who applied by paper. This phenomenon can also be seen in accepted applicants who enrolled in graduate study.

Not surprising, then, is the higher acceptance rate for minorities who applied online. With the exception of Native American (the racial group with the smallest number of applicants, and thus more susceptible to minor
fluctuations in data), all racial groups experienced a higher acceptance rate for online applications. Thus, if online applicants tend to be academically superior to those who apply by paper, one would expect the former to be offered admission more frequently.

Yet, a high acceptance rate does not always translate into more students on campus. Indeed, the yield rate (the percentage of admitted applicants who actually enroll) is lower for all racial minorities who applied online. This resulted in fewer African American and Native American online applicants actually enrolling when compared to applicants who applied by paper.

The lower yield rate appears to be somewhat offset by the larger acceptance rate for Hispanic and Asian students (that is, a smaller yield from a larger acceptance pool may still result in more students enrolling). For both racial groups a larger number of enrolled students applied online than by paper.

A yield rate that is lower for online applicants is not surprising, given that these applicants tend to be—as an aggregate—academically superior to those who applied by paper. Stronger students most likely have more educational options (i.e., offers of acceptance from a larger number of institutions). Thus, the online application process may attract stronger applicants, but universities need to be increasingly competitive if they wish to turn these applicants into students.

Finally, a distinctive difference between graduate and undergraduate education needs to be noted. Undergraduate students often begin their collegiate career shortly after leaving high school. As earlier research noted in this study indicated, access to technology is not evenly distributed from among primary and secondary schools or across households, which may impact access to online processes. However, graduate students begin their post-baccalaureate education either immediately/shortly after their undergraduate experience or after a period of employment. It is quite likely that access to technology may be more readily available to these individuals prior to their graduate experience, either in their undergraduate college or university or in their place of employment.

**Limitations**

While this study yielded some intriguing findings, there are some clear limitations that must be acknowledged. These limitations stem from the relatively new and still emerging influences of this young technology and the inherent lack of long term data available for examination.

First, the target population was limited to individuals who applied for admission for terms beginning in 1999. While these snapshot data were useful, it is unclear if the findings here apply to other academic years or if this year was an anomaly. Second, this study uses non-random data from a single Research I institution (Carnegie classification), which hinders the generalizability of the results to other research institutions. Third, and related the above, this study was inherently narrow in focus. Since few institutions use the emerging technology of the WWW in the application process, a broader scope was not possible. As such, the conclusions presented here may not be applicable across the graduate education spectrum.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Web-based admissions is an extremely recent development. Early exploration of such revolutionary phenomena is essential if one hopes to foresee and plan for resultant consequences and implications. Yet, the drawback to this early exploration is limited data due to the infancy of this admissions process. Therefore, as Web-based admissions continues to evolve in the years ahead, it is essential to examine and assess its impact. Toward that end, herein are offered recommendations for further research.

First, broaden the scope of this study by examining more institutions over a larger number of academic years. It is presumed that Web-based admissions will continue to be adopted by an increasingly larger number of graduate institutions. Therefore, it would behoove all associated with admissions to replicate this study with a greater number of institutions over a greater time span to determine if the results presented here are common or unique.

Second, compare the findings in this study with undergraduate education. Compared to graduate students, individuals applying to baccalaureate programs are less likely to have consistent access to the WWW since they tend to rely on the technology available in high schools and the household. Given that high school and home access to this technology varies greatly, a technology gap in undergraduate education may be more pronounced.

Third, extend the exploration of this topic to beyond Research I institutions. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill enjoys an academic reputation as a selective Research I institution whose graduate students often attended the most prestigious undergraduate institutions. Replicating this study with non-Research I institutions will help assess whether the heretofore unseen technology gap in graduate education is actually experienced at other types of institutions.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, replicate this study using a greater variety of methodologies to address students’ motivations for their application decisions. While studies such as the one presented here and those recommended above are critical to examining the impact of the WWW on graduate admissions, they beg the question of why students choose either the paper or online method of application. Understanding the cause(s) of the application decision is essential if one hopes to plan effectively for the consequences and implications of this continually unfolding phenomenon.

**References**


Fraud exists on today’s electronic campuses. Throughout this research article, it is worth mentioning the phrase “electronic campus,” as this is the future many envisioned…and that future is now. Initial research was printed in the November-December 1998 issue of About Campus. The author wishes to acknowledge Jossey-Bass publishers for their permission to re-use the material.

Introduction
This article is written in six segments. Introductory remarks provide basic concepts, followed by citing recent examples of fraud. Consequences and then assessment of risk versus reward for students follow next. Finally, the role of decentralized services in higher education today is outlined, ending with specific action steps to consider.

By way of introduction, consider this story:

The President of X College resigned in February 1996 after the governing board learned he had falsified credentials on his resume. He claimed to have an MBA degree from University Y and a doctorate from University Z. The trustees discovered that he had falsified his credentials only after anonymous flyers appeared on campus.

Like many colleagues, the author had been seeing examples of this fraud for many years—in the newspapers, on campus, and from conversations with peers. During the author’s tenure as Registrar at Xavier University in Cincinnati, and as Registrar at Wright State University in Dayton, he was constantly reminded at just how precarious the campus environment can be. By working within state associations, registrars can sensitize their offices, campuses, and community. Success hinges on constantly being “out there” both to create awareness and to monitor the status of suspected fraud. At times it is a daunting task, and can turn even the most positive person a bit cynical.

The purpose of this article is to acknowledge the situation that exists, to broaden its scope to think in terms of the entire campus, and then outline action steps. For the AACRAO 1999 Annual Meeting in Charlotte, the challenge of the “Call for Papers” provided some additional motivation:

“As the millennium approaches and each of us personally experiences a turn in the calendar of millennial significance, AACRAO also marks the coming new century with a look both forward and backward as the countdown to the year 2000 marches on. AACRAO has a rich history and tradition of excellence in professional development and member assistance. The soon-turning of the century clock is reason to look back on our heritage and recall the frontiers, advancements and achievements of an association approaching its own century mark in a few years. It is also a time to look forward to the technology challenges and changes still ahead for admissions, registrar, and enrollment management professionals in higher education.”

While the phrase “The New Century Beckons for AACRAO” brings to mind the best professional dreams for the future, there are challenges to face. The learning environments on today’s technological campuses have been immeasurably enhanced by the ability to create and edit documents, by combining digitized imaging with text, and by accessing global data sources via the Internet. The experience outside the classroom is increasingly technology-driven as well, with students managing daily transactions online with their college or university.

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However, the same technologies and capabilities that enrich the academic process have a dark side involving fraud and academic misrepresentation, a looming challenge that raises new concerns within the educational community. Consider this example:

A student was charged with tampering with a university document when it was learned he altered his semester final grades. He scanned his grade mailer into a home computer system using simple point and click technology. Every grade and quality point was changed, from grades of failure or incomplete to grades of ‘A,’ ‘B,’ or ‘C’; the corresponding GPA was altered from 0.000 to 2.933. This was discovered when he appeared on campus as the next term began, with falsified grade report in hand, professing to still be enrolled. An investigation revealed that the student had used his fraudulent grade report as evidence to both maintain a scholarship from a hometown civic group, and to secure additional student loans from a local bank. He was dismissed from the university.

Yesteryear’s occasional anecdote of a mischievous inappropriate document has been replaced by the increasing use of technology to perpetrate illegal academic fraud. The narrow window of fraudulent opportunity using “white-out,” scissors, and copy machines, is opened wider by the same technologies that simultaneously are enhancing student learning opportunities.

Examples are on the rise of how advanced technologies describe a new educational environment, engaging and extending learning and administrative processes far beyond what was possible only a few years ago. The power of technology enables greater academic success, as it becomes the electronic umbrella overarching what the student does on campus. That umbrella also extends off-campus, with the evolution of distance learning, Web-based student services, and increased technological capabilities at home and work. Academic fraud and misrepresentation are no longer only for the shrewd and sophisticated. New technology has placed into all students’ hands such a range of skills and opportunities that the likelihood of academic misconduct and illegal doctoring of credentials is increased.

The fraudulent misrepresentation of academic credentials is not a new campus phenomenon, nor is it limited to the students who typically violate academic or student conduct rules and regulations. Unfortunately, today’s professional needs to broaden the paradigm of technological fraud to include ANY student. What is noteworthy is how the advent of new technologies has elevated this concern from obscurity into the limelight. Registrars and admissions officers have tackled the problem with particular vigor, through professional conferences and workshops and through dialogue with business communities. Individual states have worked with state government officials to begin rewriting existing, weak fraud laws. This inclusion of “academic records” to the list of definitions will provide a better basis for prosecution. Raising the offense to felony status will provide additional deterrence.

Examples of the Potential Epidemic

If one assumes that technology’s impact on fraud is limited to students pulling term papers of the Internet, a scan of today’s headlines reveals the breadth and depth of the problem. There are increased numbers of students committing fraud by changing academic information, such as grades and grade point averages, or fabricating résumé information including falsifying degrees or embellishing history. Consider the following examples from educational headlines in which technology played a leading role:

Example I
An MBA student, two days prior to graduating, was expelled when it was discovered her transcripts from another institution were altered. She changed two grades of ‘C’ to ‘B’ to satisfy transfer grade policies. An alert staff member in the dean’s office called the host institution, as the transcript appeared to be changed from a “typical look.”

Example II
Jane was eligible for tuition remission from her employer upon successful completion of courses. For several terms, she fabricated grades, changing withdrawals to letter grades. She used home computing technology to post those grades onto her term’s invoice, subsequently marked “paid in full.” When discovered by her employer after a routine audit check of accounts, she was prosecuted for larceny, as the tuition reimbursement amounted to more than $5,000.

Example III
One month before graduation, a senior at an Ivy League university was expelled and charged with larceny for falsifying his admission application. The student was accused of using falsified high school and college transcripts and bogus letters of recommendation to transfer to the university. Once admitted, he received more than $41,000 in grants and nearly $20,000 in loans.

What Are the Consequences?

Consequences for business and society are increasingly alarming. Consider the impact scanned college logos, falsified reference letters, and fraudulent credentials would have upon the admission process. News reports routinely carry stories of professionals who do not have the credentials they claim to possess—and who used technology to fraudulently alter academic documents.

A Chicago law firm had hundreds of cases retried after it was discovered a leading attorney did not pass the Illinois Bar Exam. An architectural firm, also in Chicago, was involved in major lawsuits when it was learned one of the firm’s architects did not have the required credentials. In Cincinnati, a mental health clinic manager had his Ohio license revoked when, after fifteen years; it was discovered that all of his credentials were fraudulent. Unfortunately,
he may continue to practice in other states. It is imperative that when doing reference checks and resumé reviews, we “return to the source” to verify every degree and employment position. Unless there is continued diligence to “return to the source” of all documents—transcripts and professional credentialing alike—the scam continues.

Fraudulent academic achievement oftentimes results in lost opportunities for others. The Ivy League student with fraudulent admission materials meant a denial of admission to another qualified applicant. If fraudulent documents are one consideration for the first cut of the resumé review process, honest graduates may never make that first cut.

In a broader sense, students who commit fraud and academic misrepresentation lessen the value of education for students who legitimately earn their credentials. Once undetected, the damage is done, and a lifetime of employment is grounded in deception. The domino effect occurs as the person goes from job to job undetected. A fake diploma looks just as good on an office wall as does a genuine one.

Assessment of Risks Versus Rewards
In conversations with students who committed fraud, there is typically a carefully calculated risk assessment. The students believed their incentives and rewards from altering academic records were HIGH, and their perceived risk of detection and punishment was LOW. Today’s “information economy” rewards knowledge, and intellectual capital is an organizational strength. The college diploma and transcript remain important credentials, a validation of the knowledge base for employment. The economic return-on-investment for those with these academic credentials continues to grow.

Economic and employment benefits to those with these credentials constitute a powerful incentive for misrepresentation of academic achievement. An attractive resumé, though embellished, or an impressive diploma, though fraudulent, can be the beginning of substantial rewards. The more technology is used “successfully,” the lower the perceived risk of detection. Peruse computer software catalogs, journals, or magazines to discover a software package to produce virtually anything, including the illegal. With the perceived benefits of fraud contrasted with those perceived lower risks of being caught, the occurrence of fraud will only escalate. Consider these excerpts from an April 1998 Web site:

Company X presents THE COMPLETE COLLEGE DEGREE KIT—College diploma, VERY AUTHENTIC LOOKING. Printed on high quality paper, these prestigious looking fake college diplomas, identical to those of the REAL universities, will fool your friends—blank, suitable for framing. Transcripts are also available—to be even more convincing it has the registrar’s stamp on it. An optional template is available in MS Word format on disk to help plot transcript data. Included in each kit are these six pieces: a Novelty Diploma; two blank Novelty Transcripts; two Registrars’ Office envelopes; transcript template disk.

Fortunately, this Web site was closed down in a matter of days when the educational community brought forward the threat of swift legal action. From these and other highly publicized cases, the credibility of credentials of all educational institutions is called into question, putting academic reputations at risk.

Consider this additional advertisement from XYZ Research Institute:

The cost of an external degree program, should you decide to enroll, will depend on the results of the preliminary evaluation. In general, the cost range is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Level</th>
<th>Cost Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>$2,100–2600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>$2,500–3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate (Ph.D.)</td>
<td>$3,500–4000</td>
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The diplomas granted by our affiliated university do not reflect how the degree requirements were met (traditionally or externally). This means YOU decide if you wish to divulge that your degree was obtained externally. Diplomas are of typical university style and framed beautifully. The University maintains a complete and permanent record on each graduate and responds promptly to requests for transcripts when authorized by a graduate.

A WORD OF CAUTION: Nontraditional education is an honest, fully legal recognized method of obtaining a degree. Possessing such a degree has literally changed the lives of thousands of people around the world. However, external programs are not for everyone and not all degrees are alike. There are unscrupulous “diploma mills” who advertise in legitimate publications. Don’t be misled; our service will help you get all the facts first—before you enroll and before you spend any money.

Decentralized Services in the Learning Environment
Ten years ago the educational community had a better sense of how and when fraud was committed. Information was typically controlled by faculty and staff who had a higher level of confidence in the security of hard copy data. Data could be “touched” and even “locked up” in a vault. In today’s electronic environment, the academic community continues to decentralize information across the campus. Students, faculty and staff have access at both on- and off-site locations, “demystifying” what was previously unreachable data. For example:

1. Prospective students learn about our institutions via the Web, ultimately applying electronically for admission and financial aid.

2. Academic advising is accomplished online via automated degree audit reports and online academic planners.
Syllabi, grade books, class lists, and other sensitive information are contained within various faculty and student record databases on- and off-site.

Faculty print class lists and key in grades from their offices, both on- and off-site.

Diplomas and transcripts are produced within registrars’ offices utilizing the very same desktop technology available for home use. Today’s push is for greater use of networking and shared information, data warehouses and Internets/Intranets—all of which create opportunities for seemingly private information to be publicly accessible, retrievable, and alterable. How concerned must we become before we no longer have the confidence in data, records, and credentials? Information is now widely dispersed, accessible, and subject to manipulation in the digitized cybercampus. Perhaps trust is no longer to be presumed.

All members of the educational community must now become watchdogs. Consider the educational climate as the issue of trust takes center stage for a faculty member scanning a new class, accepting assignments, or working with colleagues. Imagine a placement officer uncovering fraudulent letters of recommendation within a student’s credentials file. The detection and reporting of these crimes have increased in recent years. One such example was discussed in a full-page article in the March 1998 Chronicle of Higher Education. The story featured a tenure-track Ph.D. professor who was indicted on charges of stealing grant money and student paychecks, in addition to submitting fraudulent contracts and time sheets.

**Action Steps**

For professionals committed to enhancing student learning, the challenges of fraud and misrepresentation within the academic community are many. The entire higher education community must become more vigilant. Fortunately for higher education and all the extended learning environments of business, industry, and home, there are increased signs of awareness of these issues. Professionals on campus are becoming more proactive in anticipating how the technologically enhanced campus enables fraud and academic representation to occur.

Some of the solutions lie in the very technological advances that are part of the problem. Consider these action steps:

1. Improved training for all individuals most likely to be viewing fraudulent documents is imperative. Discussions of common practices, including the technological advances which potentially foster the fraud environment, must be part of the training.

2. Admission, registrar, and student service professionals should publish and distribute informational brochures on their campuses and for area businesses regarding the fraud and academic misrepresentation issues in order to educate the entire campus community on the nature of the problem and the risks involved. Daylong workshops and extensive information booklets help outline the scope of the problems and provide useful tips. High-tech samples provide the participants with real-life evidence of the situation on today’s campus.

3. Tamper resistant paper such as transcript paper, grade mailers, and grade sheets now contain elements such as micro printing, scan-resistant background, watermarks, and laser signatures/seals. The printing industry is attempting to stay abreast of the misuse of technology by the fraudulent market.

4. Networks with improved security walls can limit access and prevent students from simply cutting and pasting online information into plagiarized documents.

5. Tougher sanctions within both the educational community and in the criminal justice system help deter fraud and send a strong message when it does occur.

**Conclusion**

The challenge for all educators is to use these opportunities as “teachable moments” for students and the educational community for discussion of the moral and ethical consequences of actions and capabilities which technology presents. Professionals need to underscore the significance of the fact that credentials are earned with hard work and energy, and not by committing fraud and academic misrepresentation at the hands of technology. One must continue to prepare for the new millennium, for both the KNOWN rewards, and for the challenges one FEARS may exist. Preparedness now and in the future will determine the rise—and potential fall—of the credibility of academic institutions.

In closing, consider this reference to Dr. Parker Palmer, a writer, teacher, and activist who spoke at the Wright State University campus recently. Dr. Palmer discussed “the mind of the gathered group,” and recognized that there are multiple styles, both in personality and in the workplace. Each person brings a piece of a larger puzzle…without any one piece the puzzle is incomplete. That philosophy would serve higher education well in the fight against fraud and misrepresentation in that together there is a collective strength, more powerful than that of any one individual. In the future, recall “the mind of the gathered group” in planning for life beyond Y2K.

Finally, a personal “technological journey” may remind the reader of a life’s progression. The author purchased his first typewriter, a manual, in 1968. In 1973, his high school trumpet was sold to help purchase an IBM Selectric typewriter to begin freshman year at Miami University. This was replaced in 1983 by an electronic typewriter, a word processor in 1991, and a home computer in 1996. This journey may describe the current technological climate…many individuals take for granted the technology that slowly rises ahead. What is sometimes a daily professional stretch for the author is child’s play and routine for many…and herein lies the dilemma to be overcome in the world of fraud and academic misrepresentation.
Handling Difficult Students: Can You Spell “Chicken Soup”?

Faculty committees and administrators make the rules, but it is up to others to take the heat from those who do not understand or appreciate the wisdom behind them. That’s the job of our frontline staff members, who are called upon to be the bearers of bad tidings in enforcing office and institutional policies. The ones who are the most successful in dealing with irate students are somehow able to make them feel as if they have a friend in a time of need. While some folks seem to come by this talent naturally, others can get there through practice and experience. The following is a recipe for success that spells C-h-i-c-k-e-n S-o-u-p.

C is for control. The difficult student is often out of control, while you must remain calm. One way to stay in control is by recognizing that in encounters such as these, like the grieving process, students go through three distinct stages. I call it the VCR: the Venting, the Clarifying, and the Resolving. Rather than merely defending the fort, your job is to help the student move through these three stages successfully.

In the Venting stage, the student simply wants an attentive and sympathetic ear into which to pour his or her troubles. It is not a good idea to try to move on to the second and third stages before the student completes the Venting stage. Listening and nodding doesn’t mean you are agreeing, just that you feel the student’s pain.

When the student either runs out of breath or gets that “So what are you going to do about it?” look, it is time to move on to stage two. Of course, if you begin the Clarifying stage and are repeatedly interrupted, you may have to retreat to the Venting stage again. One way to help make the transition to stage two is to say something like, “I understand how you feel. Let me explain how it’s all supposed to work, and maybe we can see what went wrong.”

In the Clarifying stage it is important not to become defensive—saying things like, “If you’d only have read the class schedule,” tend to send the student back to the Venting stage. Clarifying calls for calmly exchanging information. It is time to move on to the third and final stage when it becomes clear that the student fully understands what caused the trouble.

In the third and final stage, it may become apparent that the student was absolutely right and something needs to be done to make restitution. More often, of course, it becomes apparent that the student was at fault for his or her own dilemma. You can facilitate saving face or even gain a small victory by saying something like, “I can see how you misunderstood. Maybe we need to work on making that a little clearer in the catalog.” But be careful not to push this too far or the student may go directly back to venting about how rotten the catalog is. If the student is unable to move through this final stage, you’ll probably hear about it later, so it is a good idea to alert your supervisor to the details when someone walks away still angry.

The “C” might also stand for “Count to ten” before responding to a verbal attack. Sometimes it works to excuse yourself to “check with your supervisor,” allowing time for both of you to cool off, for you to actually seek advice from your supervisor, or simply to practice your silent scream. If you “check with your supervisor” too quickly or too often, though, the student may conclude that you have no power to help him or her, so why waste any more time talking with you? If there is a demand to talk with “the director,” it is generally a good idea to make an appointment, rather than to allow the student to charge...
right in. There are seldom any issues that are of an emergency nature, and making an appointment for even an hour later will enable the student to calm down, as well as time for you to brief your boss.

**H is for happy face.** Admissions counselors know all about putting on their smiles in the morning of a day when they have to say the same things over and over to a parade of prospective students. They know that the next person to ask a question is unaware that you’ve answered that exact question over a hundred times earlier that day. I sometimes try grinning at the telephone before answering it or making a call—even the phoniest smile will make you sound friendlier.

Your smile at an irate student has to be tempered, of course, with a look of genuine concern. If students think you’re laughing at them, it probably won’t calm the waters. But, even if it is clear at the outset that the student is angry, a friendly smile is far better than a look of boredom, defensiveness, or alarm—all of which may fan the flames.

**I is for the issue.** In some cases students think a rule is stupid or because of special circumstances shouldn’t apply to them. It’s easy to get trapped by being defensive of the rule, as if the student had just insulted your hairdo. But if you know the policy thoroughly, know the reasoning behind it, and can explain it clearly, you can be far more effective in dealing with those who challenge it.

If the policy seems stupid even to you, you have three responsibilities: 1. Learn the logic behind it, even if you disagree with it. Assume an idiot didn’t write it. 2. Be willing and able to describe this logic to others as if it is your own, (here’s where acting comes in) and 3. Let your supervisor know, diplomatically of course, why you think the policy is stupid and ask if it can be changed. I’ve found that rules that are defended as, “I don’t agree with the rule either, but it’s still the rule, and I have to enforce it,” may let you off the hook for making the rule, but it may make the irate student even more difficult in the long run. They may think you are now their ally, but giving the student the impression that your supervisor is the common enemy is not likely to change things in favor of the student, and it is definitely not conducive to job security.

**C is for confidence.** Or “Never let them see you sweat.” Some individuals seem to thrive on confrontation. If they smell fear, they go on the attack. You can’t give these folks a reason to think you’re unsure of yourself. One way to do that is to focus on listening and acknowledging their point of view, rather than on defending your position. If they say something discourteous to you, ignore it, unless it is truly abusive. If they say something critical of the college, don’t feel as if you have to rush to the college’s defense. It will probably survive the criticism. Don’t be afraid to say, “I guess I can’t agree with you about that, but I understand your position.” And be able to spot the following as rhetorical questions that don’t merit an answer. “Don’t you think that’s unfair?” “Don’t you think that’s pretty stupid?” “Why can’t this place get its act together?” and “Why didn’t anybody tell me?” It’s best to answer these questions indirectly, tactfully showing how the rule is fair, that it’s not stupid, that the college does its best to keep its act together, and that you work hard to let students know what the rules are.

**K is for kindness.** As in “kill ‘em with kindness.” One of our occupational hazards is that we cannot give anybody a reason to report they’ve been treated rudely, no matter how rudely they’ve treated us. But you don’t have to take rudeness as if you deserve it, either. It sometimes works to say something like, “I can understand how you must feel, and I would like to help you. But can we agree to be nice to each other?” Say it with your most sympathetic smile.

**E is for empathy.** Empathy goes beyond sympathy to emotional identification with the other person. It begins with listening carefully to the person’s words, but also to observing who they are and the context of their complaint. It includes being able to monitor your own responses to them. That sounds pretty abstract, so here’s an example, drawn from an actual incident. I learned of the event the hard way. A letter to the president from a prospective student accused one of our staff members of being rude to her. She provided a detailed description of the encounter that did, indeed, make it appear that Ursula (not her real name) had behaved outrageously. My first response was disbelief, since Ursula was known across the campus as someone who really cared about students. But after I talked with her about what had happened, I began to understand. The student had come into the office on the first day of fall semester classes. She had not filled out an application, we had no transcripts, and she wanted to enroll immediately in a degree program. Ursula explained that she could not be admitted because we had no official documents, but she could register as a non-degree student. That was not the answer the prospective student wanted to hear.

Now, for “the rest of the story.” The prospective student was a 63-year-old woman, who stood four feet tall, and whose first language was not English. She also happened to be a retired army colonel. Now Ursula had a heart of gold, and she really did provide first-rate customer service. She was also a very large woman, with a fine, big gold, and she really did provide first-rate customer service.

**N is for narrow.** As in narrow down the topic. Irate students are often mad at the world, the institution, you, and even themselves. Sometimes it’s hard to identify the real issue. Do they simply want to tell someone that a rule or policy is stupid and should be changed for all students? Or do they want to tell you why special circumstances in their
case should make them an exception to the rule? Your job is to listen carefully, make the exception if you have the authority to do so, ask them to write an appeal if you do not, and let them know when they can expect an answer. By asking them to put their appeal in writing you allow a cooling down period. And we do, after all, work in an institution that values clarity in the written word.

S is for sorry. A sincere apology can change the encounter, at least from anger to frustration. You can always say you’re sorry that the student feels the way he or she does—but mean it. An insincere apology can be inflammatory.

Sometimes, of course, the student is truly right. The institution has treated him or her badly in some way. Then, an apology acknowledging that the student was right is essential to making a recovery. In fact, if it is done right, your enemy can be transformed into a friend.

O is for ownership. One afternoon I walked into my doctor’s office for my annual checkup. I’d made the appointment two months earlier. When the receptionist told me the doctor wasn’t in that day and didn’t someone call me to let me know the appointment had to be changed, I became what you might call a difficult patient. The receptionist was very sympathetic, even looking disgusted that someone had failed to call me. She seemed more than happy to recommend that I register a complaint with the office supervisor. I told her I didn’t have the time or interest to do that, but I’d just like to re-schedule. I was told I needed to do that at a desk down the hall. At the desk down the hall I was asked if I was there for an appointment. Trying to remain under control, I replied, “No, I’m here to make another appointment, since the one I had today was canceled without my being notified.” Evidently, the person I explained this to felt under personal attack. She gave me a blank look and said, “Well, it wasn’t my fault.” Which didn’t tend to calm my growing irritation. Gritting my teeth, I rescheduled my appointment—which had to be put off for another two months.

As I walked past the receptionist desk on my way out, I was asked if I’d been re-scheduled. I said, yes, in two months. Her reaction surprised me. She said, “Oh, that’s awful. Are you sure you don’t want to make a complaint?” So I asked to see the supervisor, who was excellent. She apologized and changed the rescheduled appointment to the following week.

The entire unhappy incident, of course, could have stopped with the first desk, if someone had claimed ownership and apologized. Instead, the receptionist fanned the flames, and the appointments secretary defended the fort. You can go a long way toward defusing a student’s anger and frustration by accepting ownership for the issue at hand and working to see that it gets resolved, even if someone else made the mistake.

U is for you. As in take care of yourself. You will deal better with difficult students if you are feeling healthy and confident. Even though you may not feel like it sometimes, you are in a position of power in your role as a frontline staff member. If you’re feeling a loss of control in some other aspect of your life, you may be tempted to try to regain your personal power by pushing back at pushy students.

P is for personally. As in don’t take it personally. Remember that the student’s anger is directed at you only as a symbol of institutional authority. It sometimes helps me to think of the student’s anger as an illness. My job is to try to help the student get well, not to engage in a power struggle. If the illness is incurable, I might at least be able to help improve the patient’s quality of life through kindness and caring.

In summary, the above recipe is based on the assumption that we can learn practical techniques for dealing with difficult people. American humorist George Ade once wrote, “To insure peace of mind, ignore the rules and regulations.” Each day, our frontline staff members are asked to interrupt the peace of mind of many of our students by reminding them that they cannot ignore the rules and regulations. That can be a cold and lonely job. To help them succeed, the least we can do is offer them a little chicken soup.
Q. When we admitted a student from an institute of technology in Taiwan several semesters ago, we decided that no undergraduate transfer of credit would be granted because it is a technical junior college. The student now wants to receive credit. Does anyone grant credit for courses completed at this type of institution?

A. Several basic philosophical questions underlie your request for information:

- How does an educational institution establish policies concerning transfer of credit?
- Who establishes these policies at your institution?
- What is the pedagogical reason for each policy?
- Who can waive, modify, or replace a policy?
- On what basis are policies waived, modified, or replaced?

In responding to these questions, you probably would not say “because that’s what one other educational institution does” or “because that’s what a student wants.”

Presumably there is a pedagogically sound reason why you decided not to grant transfer of credit to this applicant when the admissions decision was made. Presumably the decision is the same one you would have made if the technical junior college involved had been located in the United States instead of Taiwan.

It may indeed be appropriate to review the policy, to determine whether or not the reasons for it are still pedagogically sound, in light of changes that might or might not have occurred in your institution’s academic programs in the years since the policy was established. It is usually a good idea to review all academic policies periodically, to make certain they are in line with an institution’s current educational philosophy and mission.

A request from a student can serve as a catalyst for scheduling a review of a particular policy. It should not serve as a reason for changing that policy.

It is not pedagogically sound for educational policies to be institution-specific or country-specific. It can be pedagogically sound for a waiver of an educational policy to be institution-specific. For example: Your institution could develop a special working relationship with one technical junior college, and within that relationship and based upon the additional information provided through that relationship, you might waive a policy that applies to technical junior college programs at other institutions.

A waiver of a policy should be based upon solid criteria. That usually means that it is based upon information that has been obtained by the policy-making institution and that has been analyzed by it. It does not mean relying upon precedents set by other institutions.

It would be convenient for the student in question if you were to change your policy quickly, so that he could get credit and thus be able to graduate earlier and with a lesser outlay of tuition and other expenses. However, he does have the option of reaching that goal by transferring to another U.S. institution that already has a policy more favorable to him than he perceives yours to be.

If this student had been promised transfer of credit at the point of admission, or if the transfer of credit decision was not communicated to him, or was communicated in a vague or ambiguous way, then there might be a sound reason for waiving this policy for this particular student. However, it appears that the decision to grant no transfer of credit was clearly communicated to the student at the point of admission, and the student indicated his acceptance of the decision by enrolling.

Waiving a policy can have repercussions. Other students may hear of it, and some faculty members and administrators will learn of it. Waivers tend to be interpreted as precedents unless the specific reasons for a waiver are spelled out clearly.

Changing your policy is an official act. A new policy should be applicable to technical junior (or community) college programs at other institutions in Taiwan, in other countries, and in the United States. It should be stated clearly, so that it can be uniformly applied by your administrators and consistently explained to your applicants. If a new policy incorporates exceptions (e.g., unless a student is enrolling in a degree program in engineering, or unless a student is enrolling in a degree program in liberal arts), these also must be clearly stated as part of the policy.
Q. An applicant from China completed the preparatory class offered by the Center of International Humanitarian Programs of a university in the Ukraine. Does this represent completion of the first year of study in a degree program? Or completion of one year of remedial courses? Should we grant transfer of credit for these courses?

A. It is reasonable to presume that a preparatory class (whatever variation of this name might be used) is a remedial bridge between an applicant’s insufficient secondary school preparation and the requirements for admission to a degree program, unless the university that taught the preparatory class provides significant evidence to the contrary. Significant evidence would be confirmation from the university, in a publication or via a written communication, that all students who are admitted to a specific degree program at this university are required to enroll in the preparatory class. If they are so required, then the preparatory class is an integral part of the degree program, and the courses are de facto credit courses. If they are not, then the preparatory class is a remedial bridge program, and the courses are de facto non-credit.

Whether or not you would grant credit for the courses in a preparatory class that is a remedial bridge program depends upon your policies concerning remedial courses taught by educational institutions in the United States. It should be noted that in some educational systems there are preparatory classes that are an integral part of a degree program, required of all students. For example: all engineering students in Egypt and some other Arab countries are required to complete a preparatory year prior to being admitted to their primary field of study for the second and following years. A similar situation existed in many fields of study in South Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. In such cases, the preparatory year is not a remedial bridge year; it is a standard part of the curriculum, and the courses are therefore credit courses.

Q. An applicant has submitted credentials from an educational institution in Mexico. We could not find any information about the institution in standard reference materials, including the International Handbook of Universities, the World List, the World of Learning, and the Directorio General de Escuelas Superiores (General Directory of Higher Schools) which is published in Mexico. The applicant obtained a letter from the institution stating that it has a commercial name and an official name. The commercial name appears on the educational credentials. The official name appears in reference books. Is this a legitimate situation?

A. Some educational institutions find that they can more easily recruit students if they have a name that sounds more important than the name under which they have been officially established and officially recognized as a degree-granting institution. For example: In Mexico, a centro universitario (university center) might prefer to advertise to the public as if it were a universidad (university).

This situation is not limited to educational institutions in Mexico. At least one institution in the United States called itself a college in the United States and a university in Europe.

The official name of an educational institution is the name by which it has received official degree-granting recognition. This is the name that will appear in official directories and in other forms of official documentation. Official educational credentials ought to be issued in the official name of the educational institution. You are under no obligation to participate in an institution’s names charade by accepting educational credentials issued under its pseudonym.
Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services

By Robert C. Dickeson
Jossey-Bass 1999
$26.95
176 pages

This deceptively slim volume with the brightly colored dust jacket packs a wealth of practical information on how to go about setting priorities in an academic institution. The author’s career has taken him into higher education, government, and business, including twenty years in top-level positions in two universities. In describing the theoretical framework for priority setting, he makes liberal use of practical examples, many taken from his own experience. This gives life to the text and encourages the reader to apply the principles discussed.

Although aimed at the highest levels of a campus administration, there are lessons for middle managers as well. Reassessing commitments and moving to reallocate resources will not happen, as the author states, in the absence of strong leadership at all levels of the hierarchy.

A forceful case is made for accountability and the need to review both academic and non-academic programs to measure their effectiveness and worth in relation to the institution’s mission. Selecting the appropriate criteria to be examined, collecting data, establishing a rating system, and determining the levels of review and decision-making are discussed with some specificity and reference to the world in which we live. AACRAO is cited with approval for its development of common guides and useful templates in the management of student records.

The author responds to commonly asked questions about the process of ranking programs in priority order and discusses what is needed to give effect to a decision to shift, reduce, or eliminate an existing program. Finally, he lists the elements that can bring about a strategic balance in an organization. This can range from a recognition of the time-honored functions of teaching, research, and service to distinguishing between responsibility and authority as they relate to a program or a larger unit in the structure of a university or college.

Appendices labeled as “Resources” help the reader to focus and reflect upon the author’s message. Included here is a section entitled “Criteria for Measuring Administrative Programs.” This is followed by a series of short case studies including one for a Student Affairs Division in which a reorganization was about to occur.

There are several pages of references for further reading and a useful topical index. For anyone involved in or contemplating organizational change, this is a book that should be consulted very early on in the process.

Thomas L. W. Johnson
Executive Associate Registrar
University of Wisconsin - Madison
Full Page
AD FPO for
Quodata
(pull from last issue)