

## CHAPTER 7- Grades, Grades, Who Can Make the Grade?

As an illustration of the importance of knowing one's law school history, the grading system and how it developed is especially appropriate, since attempts to tamper with the original concept seem to be still ignorantly evident. The how's and why's of grades at all is obviously a complex topic, and those who think we should have a more traditional grading system for the benefit of employers probably really don't understand all the ramifications of this issue.

The issue of grades arose sometime during the introductory block, evidently at least a few students were concerned about the "bottom line", for as well and good it might be to be thoughtful, inquisitive, etc about this rather free-form experiment, to what degree were we expected to "perform" for the faculty and be suitably rewarded? The tentative word was reassuring - any evaluations of this period would be for our own use solely, but then this turned out to be little more than the highly colored or subjective opinion of one faculty member anyway, who may or may not have had good judgement. And what of the rest of the semester? The issue became part of a faculty-student dialog during the first semester and continued into the spring semester. While there were many thoughts on each side, the student sentiment was based on the idea that grades encourage competition that is very probably destructive of much of a learnign process and more likely destructive of any spirit of "working together" or cooperation. Polls taken of the students were overwhelmingly indicative of this concept; even those students who would accept some of the faculty rationale for a numerical grading system only did so in the light of a hybrid system (very much like the present system) that would promise the best of both worlds. But this is getting ahead of our history, for very early on in the dialog we were promised that we could have any grading system that we wanted. And at this point, probably at least 80% of the students favored a pure "credit/no-credit" system. This probably wasn't the type of response expected by the faculty, for the dialog of the first semester was then ended, and giving as a rationale both the protection of the rights of those students who wanted a traditional grading system and the need to make some showing of "tradition" to prospective employers, the promise was forgotten and the Dean and faculty presented their system, a "compromise" that wasn't in the cards of the original promise. Soon after, Ben Hopkins presented his system, which was well-worked out to the degree of even having a sample transcript, and which attempted to rationalize itself by presenting sub-issues and arguments. However good the merits of either the Dean's or Ben's proposal, it was clear to the students that the communication channels between them and the faculty were getting muddy, and in light of hokum going on in Ben's class, it was getting difficult to distinguish between ideas of merit and b.s. from this source. In other words, pronouncements of the faculty had taken a giant step, even at this early stage, of being in the catagory of "inherently suspect". Some of us kept faith with the faculty much longer, but this only delayed the ultimate betrayal.