

# YOUNGSTOWN COLLEGE

YOUNGSTOWN 2, OHIO

GENERAL OFFICE

14 March 1951

Mr. K. W. Dykema  
Chairman, Academic Standards Committee

Dear Sir:

Permit me to register my amazement at the willingness of your committee to continue an unsound system of grade values and point index calculation. In fact, were it not for my long-standing application of the Red Queen's advice on believing impossible things, I should find it hard to give credence to your report of the committee's reaction.

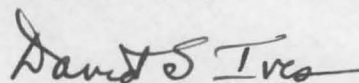
It seemed hardly necessary in my earlier letter to do much more than to call attention to the situation, assuming that an institution of learning would not wish to countenance avoidable inaccuracies in any part of its modus operandi. If my assumption was wrong, further discussion would appear pointless. I shall add here, however, what I could not know when I first wrote: it was not until Mrs. Smith received her copy of my letter that she told me that she had become increasingly concerned about the situation, especially after overhearing a group of students discussing it and advising each other of the advantages of taking F's under certain circumstances.

Whether the instances when an F produces a better grade average than a D are few or many, seems irrelevant. That there are any is bad enough; and what is more, it indicates that there is error in every calculation involving an F. What reason is there for having inaccurate averages when merely adopting a sound method will provide accurate ones? Nor can I see that it matters in the least that one can dig up compensating factors that might reduce the effects of the system's unsoundness. What kind of system is it that requires that sort of defense?

To be sure, it may be argued that there is nothing objectively exact about a course-grade in the first place, and that a degree of error running through an averaging system is therefore of no consequence. Carried to its logical conclusion and acted upon, that type of argument could of course lead to various kinds of chaos. Skipping the moral and spiritual varieties, I restrict myself merely to the matter of students' peace of mind and the normal maturing process. Students frequently question the practice of giving letter or number grades at all, and not without some reason. If they are alert, they will and should. But since, as with marriage, no one has ever contrived a satisfactory substitute, grades are likely to be with us for a long time to come\*, so that students' questioning of the practice, though academically interesting and indicative of a certain stage of development, is ultimately futile. Normally, students grow up and resign themselves to that fact; why, then, hinder a natural and healthful process by giving them,

in the form of an unsound system, something real and tangible to seize on as an apparent justification of their criticisms of grading in general? (Not to mention the encouragement it gives to the confusing of issues!)

Respectfully,



David S. Ives

DSI:jmm

\*There are of course the modern elementary and secondary educationists, whose summum bonum is to keep 100% of the nation's children in school for 12 years, apparently by not giving grades, since by not flunking any one, you avoid making him unhappy and desirous of dropping out before he completes the magic number of years. Unfortunately they will defeat their noble purpose because of a factor inherent in the nature of the process: since the final result can be only to teach no one anything, what the pupils are thus persuaded to remain 12 years in will long before have ceased to be a school. (And to think that this should happen in an age when belief in the magic efficacies of numbers was thought to have disappeared in enlightened societies!)