



OUR VIEWS CONSENSUS OPINION

Making the Grade?

The proposed changes to the University System of Georgia's GPA system by the Board of Regents offer no clear benefits to the student population at Tech. On top of this, the plus/minus grading system has possible disadvantages for students.

Proponents of the system say the minus grades would deter students from skimming by at the bottom of the grade cut-offs and reward those who are near the top of the grade cut-offs. This sounds great on paper, but the reality at Tech, however un-ideal, is that students, even the best, are often stretched thin between three or four challenging courses.

Come final exam time, these students have to make realistic choices as to which courses to place the most effort on. They must prioritize their time as to reap the most benefit. Thus if a student has done well in a class throughout the semester and is able to withstand a slight drop to their average and keep the same grade, but has struggled in another class and is precariously close to the grade cut-off, that person would logically spend more time studying for the class in which their grade is more uncertain, while allowing for the possibility for a slight drop in the other class.

For the majority of Tech students, whose GPAs fall in the middle range of Bs and Cs, the plus/minus system would, at best, result in the same final GPA when the pluses and minuses are evened out over the course of a student's career. But for the students at either end of the range, the plus/minus system would mostly likely hurt them. For example, a student who is barely getting a C in a class would instead be awarded a C-, or a 1.7 GPA equivalent, yet, a student who is truly excelling could receive, at highest, an A—no A+ exists.

On top of that, a professor with the option of giving out an A- would be tempted to give the 3.7 to some students who would normally simply be given an A. This means that the number of students receiving 4.0's could only decrease as a result of the system. We do not need to encourage additional grade deflation, especially when the national trend is towards increased grade inflation.

Fortunately the Board of Regents is giving individual institutions choices in the adoption of the plus/minus. For the sake of Tech's students, it is imperative that no actual GPA changes be implemented until the real effect of the changes can be known. Grading at Tech is different from other schools, thus possible effects cannot simply be surmised based completely on data from other schools. If Tech does choose to try the system, the grades should only show up on transcript records and the administration must thoroughly evaluate the data generated before taking any next steps.

Consensus editorials reflect the majority opinion of the Editorial Board of the Technique, but not necessarily the opinions of individual editors.

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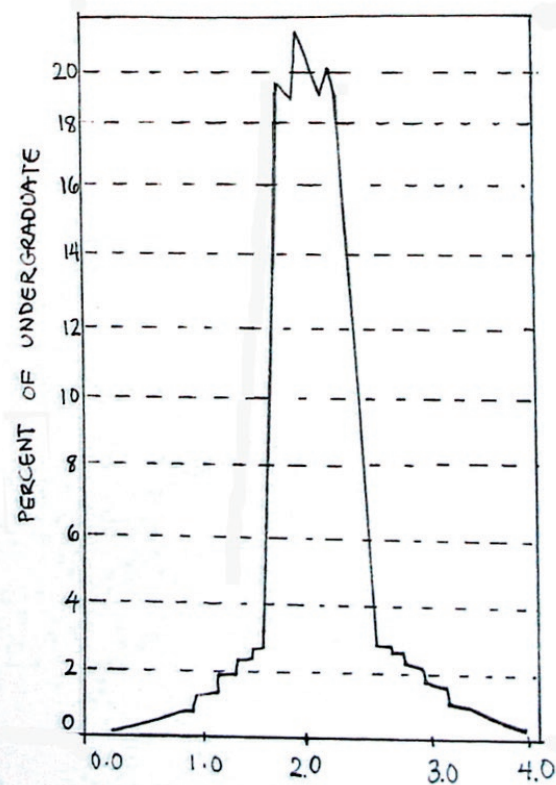
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GEORGIA TECH FALL SEMESTER GPA



By Ting Cheng / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

Counter criticisms with praise

I have come to the inevitable conclusion that people love to complain.

I see it everywhere. Everybody has some lingering resentment that they'll happily share with you at the drop of a hat.

Editorials and commentaries—even the most thoroughly researched ones—are usually rants against a proposed bill, a corporate practice or a societal trend.

For every system in place—from the presidential administration to the way farmers grow peanuts—there's some freshly-published critique claiming that we would see worlds of improvement if the people involved would just follow these steps.

All this makes me wonder why people seem to have this natural inclination toward hostility. Perhaps aggression is a more powerful force than approval, and we feel much more motivated to spring into action and speak our minds when we find ourselves in disagreement.

We feel threatened, we throw our defenses up and we prepare ourselves to take on the system.

Even worse, we often sense that we cannot influence the course of events taking place, which simply fuels our rage and turns many people into self-appointed messiahs whose book will show you the path to greater enlightenment.

Tech is particularly notorious for harboring a student body that loves to criticize. When students discuss some aspect of Tech life, it's likely to be a condemnation of a particular professor or department or an expression of disdain over some new policy or project.

Of course, I don't doubt students of any university can easily find fault with their institution, but by dwelling on the negatives without devoting equal time to the positives, we run the risk of developing an overall cynical attitude toward the world and devaluing our happiness



"We exert so much energy on condemning the bad that it would serve us well to spend some time praising the good."

Joshua Cuneo
Online Editor

as a result.

Which is why, before this turns into a rant on rants, I'm going to spend the rest of this editorial doing something a little more unusual: discussing things I like. So, at the risk of sounding like a brown-nosing sycophant, here's a short list of the things that I, at least, like about Tech:

1. Open-mindedness.

Tech has a long history of tolerating diversity. We were the only public university in the south to desegregate without a court order, we took in women before the idea of a female engineer was widely accepted and we currently host students from over 90 different countries.

We're all used to this variety, and we all get along pretty well. Even some of the most liberal and conservative student groups maintain cordial relations with each other. That's more than I can say for some parts of the world.

2. The campus.

Okay, so maybe we don't have the rolling hillsides of some of our counterparts farther north, but Facilities usually does an excellent job keeping the campus clean and trimmed. I see very little litter, plenty of freshly cut green space and lots of plant life.

The construction projects, although temporarily inconvenient, always give way to the betterment of the Institute. The Student Center alone has improved in leaps and bounds since I first enrolled here.

3. The student organizations.
Tech has a student organization for every conceivable interest and then some, and if nobody offers what you want, it's very easy to start up your own club and promote it to the students.

These organizations have been behind a lot of the new activities that have surfaced in recent years, and it's fantastic to see that level of involvement from a student body that's often stereotyped as antisocial.

4. The administration.

I don't always agree with the policies that the administration sets for the student body, but they're usually very amiable toward students, and when they do put themselves in a position to listen to student input, they take it seriously.

That sort of respect from the powers that be was something I missed in grade school, and I'm happy to see it here.

5. The technology.

Tech knows the best way to spend money on the technology that serves the greatest needs of the student body, and it manages to snatch up many of the latest developments soon after they hit the shelves.

Have you ever noticed how most of the machines in the labs are rarely more than a couple of years old? Or how the library started renting out digital cameras not long after they became cost-affordable? Or how almost every lecture hall now

Proposed GPA changes lack real benefits

The days of scraping by with a low A or B to earn that 4.0 or 3.0 may soon be coming to an end.

Tech is considering switching to a plus/minus GPA system (A-, B+, B, B-, etc.), based upon the desire, from a professor's point of view, to better distinguish student performance.

In the case of a single class, having more options to evaluate students with must surely be appealing to the professor.

This system could provide more accurate feedback on student performance and make a distinction between students within a letter grade range.

While the proposal looks good from the perspective of the professor distinguishing student performance within a single class, it loses its merit when viewed from the perspective of the student, who is inevitably struggling for grades in dozens of classes throughout his time at Tech.

A plus/minus GPA system offers no overall benefits to any students during the course of earning their degrees, yet would still be detrimental to some.

For the majority of students—those in the mid-C to mid-B range, changing to a plus/minus system will have no overall effect on their GPAs.

Students at either end of the



“A plus/minus GPA system offers no overall benefits to any students during the course of earning their degrees...yet would still be detrimental to some.”

Stephen Baehl
Development Editor

GPA spectrum similarly stand to gain nothing from such a change; though they would face possible loss.

Given that the system has little to no impact on most students and would only stand to punish those already performing at the top of the GPA range, the enactment of such a change would only punish those already achieving excellent grades by making such an achievement even harder—something that hardly needs to be done at a place like Tech, already known for its low GPAs.

The only students immediately affected by such a system would be those with “borderline” grades (i.e. an 89 or a 91 in a non-curved, 100-point grading scale).

Under the plus/minus system, the 89 would merit a B+, or a 3.3

GPA. The 91 would be an A-, giving a 3.7 GPA.

Statistically, for a student that ends up at the borderline more than once (that's just about everyone), he has a 50-50 chance of being on either end of the deal.

Averaging the 3.3s and 3.7s, he would see a mean GPA of about 3.5 for all his borderline classes.

By the same logic, under the current system where the same student would get either a 3.0 or a 4.0, he would see the same average GPA.

These logical assumptions are backed up by both simulations and actual data on a plus/minus grading system.

A 1997 computer model by Wake Forest professor Rick Matthews indicated that, on average, students with GPAs between

1.0 and 3.6 would see at most a 0.06 change, indicating that the “plus” effects statistically negate the “minus” effects.

A 2002 report by Cal State University examining the effects of its own change from a standard 4.0 scale to a plus/minus system seemed to validate the simulation's results.

The report revealed that overall GPA for lower and upper division (undergraduate) courses tended to increase by approximately 0.1 percent (that's percent, not grade-point), essentially indicating no statistically significant change.

So, with the effects of the system negating any change in borderline grades, where would the impact be felt most? In the highest and lowest grades.

Using a system with a C+, C and C-, as Andy Smith, vice provost for Academic Affairs, said would be the case under the proposed plan, gives the following correlating GPAs: 2.3, 2.0 and 1.7.

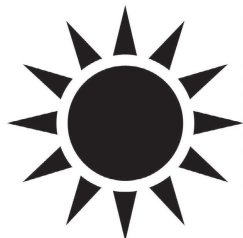
The last, corresponding to C-, is particularly problematic, as a student with a passing grade no longer has a passing GPA.

Of course, this could be fixed simply by doing what Arizona State University did—using only C+ and C.

See GPA, page 10

OUR VIEWS HOT OR NOT

HOT- or -NOT



Close encounters

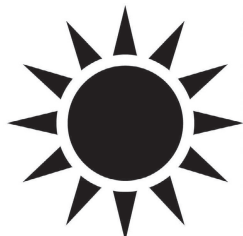
This week a group of Tech students made contact with life in space. While it wasn't E.T. or little green men, the contact was just exciting for the group, who were able to speak with an astronaut and Tech alum in the International Space Station via a simple HAM radio. Students were able to ask prepared questions regarding important policy questions and everyday life in the space station.



Basketball woes

It is disappointing that our basketball team has lost four games in a row after the loss at home this past Wednesday against Maryland.

During the Clemson game, Tech saw 27 turnovers and gave a generally dismal and sloppy performance against the Tigers. The team is still young, but Tech fans have come to expect a higher level of play over the past few seasons.



Low crime

The latest crime statistics from GTPD indicate a 22.3 percent decrease in the amount of crime on campus over 2005. Thanks to increased officers and an additional canine unit out patrolling campus, the amount of motor thefts has decreased by 40 percent. Thanks to GTPD for continuing to keep us safe.



Where's the rush?

This semester's turnout during rush was unseasonably low, even for spring rush. Many houses didn't reach quota and some are delaying bids until next semester because their pledge classes are so small. However, the reason is understandable; the awful weather put a damper on everyone's weekend.

YOUR VIEWS LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Not living up to promises

Up until last week there were probably few outside of student leadership and the administration that knew of the Honors Program.

Even now the very scarce amount of information that is available on the program exists only on their website www.honors.gatech.edu, which is incomplete and “under construction.”

But even more in the dark about the program are the program's prospective entering class, who will be given the opportunity to join the Honors Program but who don't even know that it exists at this moment.

In an attachment to the minutes from the Faculty Senate meeting on Sept. 9 in which Professor Nobles and Professor Engles made their formal presentation on the program.

It stated that in the year before the Honors Program begins the administration “will work closely

with the Office of Admissions and Undergraduate Recruiting to publicize the Program to prospective students in pre-application meetings and materials.”

It also said that those applicants “who do express such an interest in the Program will be asked to complete additional web-based application materials—e.g. essay(s) in response to specific questions or topics—and to provide reference letters from at least two teachers in disparate disciplines such as science and English.”

However, according to the article published last week in the *Technique* on the beginning of the program, the administration has no such plans to do so.

They instead plan to simply screen applicants based on their general applications to Tech. This will be a process that is sadly less than accurate and unfair to the

See Letter, page 10

Letter Submission Policy

The *Technique* welcomes all letters to the editor and will print letters on a timely and space-available basis. Letters may be mailed to Georgia Tech Campus Mail Code 0290, emailed to editor@technique.gatech.edu or hand-delivered to room 137 of the Student Services Building. Letters should be addressed to Kyle Thomason, Editor-in-Chief.

All letters must be signed and must include a campus box number or other valid mailing address for verification purposes. Letters should not exceed 400 words and should be submitted by 8 a.m. Wednesday in order to be printed in the following Friday's issue. Any letters not meeting these criteria or not considered by the Editorial Board of the *Technique* to be of valid intent will not be printed. Editors reserve the right to edit for style, content and length. Only one submission per person will be printed each term.

Advertising Information

Information and rate cards can be found online at www.nique.net. The deadline for reserving ad space and submitting ad copy is noon on Friday, one week prior to publication. For rate information, call our offices at (404) 894-2830, Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Advertising space cannot be reserved over the phone. The *Technique* office is located in room 137 of the Student Services Building, 353 Ferst Drive, Atlanta, Georgia 30332-0290. Questions regarding advertising billing should be directed to Grant Schissler at (404) 894-9187, or Rose Mary Wells at (404) 894-2830.

Coverage Requests

Press releases and requests for coverage may be made to the Editor-in-Chief or to individual section editors. For more information, email editor@technique.gatech.edu.

BUZZ

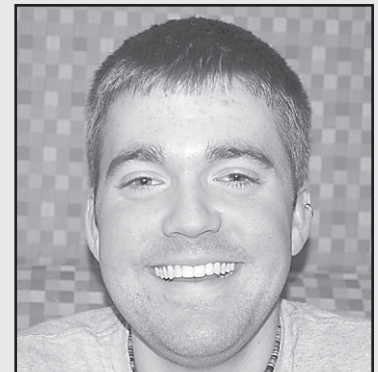
Around the Campus

Do you like the idea of plus/minus grading?



Jeff Levy
Fourth-year CE

“No.”



Kevin Thurow
First-year AE

“I got a 89.7 percent in Calculus and got a B.”



Kristen Izzo
First-year MGT

“I think it's a bad idea.”



Lauren Janeway
First-year ID

“I cut it pretty close sometimes.”

Photos by Michael Rothberg

Letter from page 9

entire entering class.

According to the same article, the Honors Program will offer students "campus-wide extracurricular social and intellectual activities," along with "topical seminars, cultural colloquia and honors advising" all while living together in Howell Hall.

In Professor Nobles' own words, he hopes the program will encourage students "to think, inquire, discuss, debate and even challenge the received wisdom of the discipline."

Now I am not sure what is being referred to when the article mentions "cultural colloquia," but I am pretty sure that there is nothing academically challenging about "topical seminars."

Of course this would all be easily solved if you could find out what

kind of classes the Honors Program wants to offer, but as of yet no course descriptions are available.

"Everything is in place for the program to start now except for some minor details, like Honors course descriptions, which will be worked out in the next few months," said Anderson Smith, vice provost for Undergraduate Studies, as reported in same article by the *Technique*.

I don't feel like course descriptions are a minor detail at all, especially when the program starts this coming fall.

They should be made available now, not in the next few months.

The administration is also considering making a degree designation for the Honors Program.

Tech annually ranks among the most difficult colleges in the nation. Our engineering programs are some of the finest in the world.

For this reason our classes are already incredibly difficult. It is not uncommon for students to take more than four years to graduate. It would be just wrong to give a few students the designation of "honor" simply for participating in a few "topical seminars" or "cultural colloquia."

When Professor Nobles came before the Undergraduate House of Representatives (UHR) earlier this year to speak about the Honors Program what he received was an overall "no" from all the representatives present.

There were many concerns shared about the Honors Program: that it would deprive already established programs of resources, devalue the education given to the large majority of Tech students and that the Institution already offers many of the educational opportunities and experiences that the Honors Program

wanted to create.

Professor Nobles assured us that student input was still being taken, and that the Honors Program was still in development.

He also expressed an earnest desire to do away with many of the problems with Tech classes like no classroom discussion, the low faculty to student ratio and minimal student-teacher interaction. He felt the Honors Program offered a solution to all of those problems.

However, it seems that nothing has changed since Professor Nobles last came before UHR.

In fact, despite an overwhelming student objection, the administration has decided to move forward with plans for the Honors Program to begin this fall.

This is a very important issue to the entire Institute.

I appeal to Tech alumni and

students to make their opinions heard as well.

If you are alumni, speak with the administration about your concerns on the impact of this program at Tech.

If you are a student, make sure that our student leadership knows how you feel. If you do not let those in charge know how you feel, it may already be too late.

I agree with Professor Nobles that all of the previously mentioned problems are an issue we need to deal with as an Institute.

However, I think the Honors Program is the wrong idea. The "honor" of our Institute should be shared by all of us and not devoted to simply a few.

Edward Tamsberg
Fourth-year CmpE
edward.tamsberg@gatech.edu

GPA from page 9

This would then mirror the problem seen at the opposite end of the spectrum, where only two grade options exist: A and A-.

Under the proposed system, there is no A+ (4.3), and rightfully so, as this could lead to external institutions adjusting down all Tech GPAs to match a 4.0 scale.

Nevertheless, this leaves the problem of there being not only a lack of incentive, but a disincentive, in this proposed system for students in the A range.

Their grades cannot get any better, but can get worse (A-, a 3.7).

Thus, students in the middle have nothing to gain from a change; students at the top can only face potential loss, and students at the bottom face either no change or a potential (and possibly devastating) loss.

This leaves the only argument for such a grading system change one of a subjective nature—that individual students within a class should be better distinguished by their performance.

In other words, an A student with a 97 should be distinguished from an A student with a 91 (or, in the case of an engineering class at Tech, the A student with an 85 should be distinguished from the A student

with a 77).

To answer this, it is helpful to examine the definition of each letter grade, as per the Institute's rules and regulations, section V: A—Excellent; B—Good; C—Satisfactory.

We need not go further.

The purpose of the grade is not to show, out of a nature of competition, which student is "more excellent" than another; rather, it is to provide an evaluation of that student's work in the course.

At Tech, it's already hard enough to achieve a 4.0 in most classes.

Any student currently doing so, especially in the school's rigorous engineering and science disciplines, more than deserves the title of

"excellent."

The workload is bad enough for current students with a 4.0 without having to add the extra stress and burden of trying to outstrip all the rest of the competition.

Few enough students can currently claim a 4.0 GPA in any major at Tech, let alone a 3.9 or 3.8—this requires consistently excellent performance in every class, be that a string of 95s or a mix of 98s and 91s (again, on an un-curved system).

In the grand, four (or five or six)-year scheme of things, the potential GPA penalty to such students under this system seems like just another slap in the face from a school already filled with enough challenges.

Positives from page 8

comes fully equipped with a host of multimedia goodies?

I have more, of course, but I'm running out of space.

My point is, there's so much more to life at Tech than the idiot professors in your department or the latest sports scandal making headlines.

We exert so much energy on condemning the bad that it would serve us well to spend some time praising the good. We'd feel better, and we'd develop a more optimistic outlook on life and on the world. Why should we settle for less?

The Undergraduate Judiciary Cabinet is now accepting applications

What?

The UJC is a student panel that hears cases of all levels of nonacademic misconduct.

Why?

Improve your life perspective
Ensure the integrity of the system
Represent the Tech community

Who?

Undergraduates in good standing who have completed two semesters
Participants, as members of a serious organization, are expected to be responsible, objective, and committed.

How?

Applications can be picked up at the Dean of Students Office and are due back Friday, February 10.

For further information contact Chief Justice Kevin Flaherty at kflaherty@gatech.edu