

Opinion

Grade on content, not format

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According to MSNBC.com, 1 in 5 college students constantly feel stressed over massive workloads, tight deadlines, financial struggles and immense pressure to perform academically. Another staggering 40 percent

of students report stress most of the time, mainly due to the unlucky distribution of major assignments at once. Most students reading this can probably agree to some degree that homework piles up easily, as does the motivation to just get it done. It's hard enough to pay the bills, let alone enjoy life when a mountain of term papers and reading assignments are looming over that metaphorical shoulder. It is in these moments of crunch time that students hammer out the best of their cumulative knowledge, agonizing over pages of notes and diagrams, delving deep to extract the most pleasing, impressive and appropriate answers. It doesn't matter if no one has slept or showered in four days—all of that effort and hard work will surely translate into an amazing grade worthy of framing.

Unless of course, the paper wasn't stapled correctly.

It's impossible to deny that some professors' neuroticisms are encroaching on the sanity of their students. Though one might take offense, it's important to note that anxious and controlling people exist worldwide, and their wrath upon society is painful. The stress of few becomes the stress of many, and deeper messages responsible for communicating the important facets of life are lost on anal-retentive shortcomings.

Any college student can attest to that one professor who gripes about handwritten assignments or despises Internet research. Mind you, these are milder examples. Although every instructor has a specific style and certain requirements, some push the meaning of fastidiousness to an entirely new level.

For some reason, the first bone of contention in any class taught by these difficult-to-please professors regards paper formatting. It's not the APA, MLA, ASA crap that induces stress and possible mental breakdowns among students, rather it's the tiny, insignificant elements that cause fits of rage. Losing points over the placement of name, date and class is not uncommon, as well as the manner in which you stapled that 15 page research paper that took five hours of your life you'll never see again. It's not a stretch in the least bit to say students receive zero points on weighted assignments because the professor didn't like the paper clip that held it together.

Then there is the great cell phone debate. As younger generations seamlessly transition into the technological curve of instant communication, our conventional professors are cursing AT&T and Verizon Wireless for their detrimental effect on lectures. Yes, it is rude to text and surf the web as the teacher struggles to educate and inform their classes. However, it's illegal to take that inconsiderate student's cell phone. It's understandable the frustration professors everywhere must feel, but most take the high road and appropriately lower the student's grade. The reality is college students are adults, and as such pay their own bills, including cell phone and tuition, therefore reserving the right to utilize either as they please.

Ultimately, a professor's demanding and difficult standards only hinder classroom performances. How can an instructor refuse to read something incorrectly formatted? Why on earth is it acceptable to fail a hardworking student because he or she overlooked some insignificant detail about page numbering or stapling? It is infuriating and discouraging, and it creates a stigma that success is an impossible dream. Students are not children to be patronized on behalf of a control-crazed instructor and their thoughts deserve evaluation, stapled or not.

Making time to volunteer

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I come from one of the poorest countries in the world, Bangladesh, where more than half the population is below poverty line. Bangladesh falls in the UN's list of "World's 50 Poorest Countries." I always thought I

had a fair perspective on people in need. However, after coming to the United States, the perspective that I had before changed significantly.

First of all, I was astounded by the number of people suffering from mental and/or physical retardation in the US. I was even more shocked to see beggars on the road when I went to Maryland to visit family. That was the last thing I expected here. There are barely any opportunities to help people in need back home, which is why I was adamant about taking full advantage of the system here which takes care of people in need relatively well.

Even though I had some experience in working with the underprivileged, such as orphans from back home, I knew working with mentally retarded people would be a completely different experience. I started working as volunteer for the United Cerebral Palsy, UCP, in Mechanicsburg, PA two months ago.

UCP operates all over the US to advance the independence of people with disabilities, including people with cerebral palsy. Working at UCP made me rethink the way we, as college students, citizens of our respective countries or just being the privileged section of the society, are living our lives. If this country has so many people in need and lacks people to help them, shouldn't we make it our duty to do something about it?

If the people we love ever got themselves into a position where they became helpless, and even ourselves for that matter, wouldn't we want people to help us? I wonder how hard it can be to take an hour off from our busy schedule to do something nice for these less fortunate ones.

The whole concept of going to college is to make us stronger and well-rounded, which should mean doing things outside the box. We, as a whole, can make a big difference if our motives are similar and pure enough. Of course, being a college student myself, I know how stressful college life can be. However, every other weekend, we can take an hour off at the least, and devote our time to rehabilitations, orphanages, group homes such as the ones under UCP or other NGOs, or non-governmental organizations that work with issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, etc. The list just goes on unfortunately.

Attending reputed universities like Penn State should help us realize our responsibilities more and set a better example for the next generation. I think we need to get a strong grasp on the fact that these less fortunate and helpless people are our own, and we should be more responsive in the name of humanity at the very least.

I met a former Penn State graduate, Michael Haron, who works as a manager at one of the group homes under UCP in Mechanicsburg. He started his volunteer work as a Big Brother for United Way in his junior year and has been involved in activities that help the underprivileged ever since. I felt that we should be able to relate to people like him since he graduated from our very own college. There is a lot to learn and be motivated by people like him.

People are so selfish in today's society and detached from humanity that they have become insensitive towards the less fortunate. I believe by volunteering, college students and anyone for that matter can regain a sense of social responsibility, and also reap an emotional reward by knowing that they are making a difference in someone's life.

The Bowl Championship Series is in serious need of change

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The Bowl Championship Series, or BCS, is the current way that college football decides its champion, however it is a flawed system that needs changed.

The BCS is made up of three elements: the first element, the Harris Interactive poll is made up of 114 influential members of the college football world. They come together and vote on where they feel the teams such be ranked awarding them points. When the points from each writer are added together, the teams are ranked in order with the teams receiving the most on top of the poll.

The second element is the USA Today Coaches poll. This poll is voted on by the most informed coaches in the country that the NCAA feels can put any personal bias aside while voting. Their votes are all added together and they rank the team in order based on which team receives the most votes.

The third and most control controversial element are the 5 computer polls. These polls rank the teams based upon different elements. They are strength of schedule, wins and loses, and margin of victory. They also give bonus points to teams that undefeated no matter what conference they play in.

This all sound pretty fair, but when this system has been used it has two distinct problems. The first problem is that if three teams from the six major conferences have no

losses or the same record, it splits the championship and does not give all of the teams a fair chance.

A perfect example is the 2004-2005 football season. USC, representing the Pac-10, Oklahoma, representing the Big 12, and Auburn, representing the SEC, all finished the regular season undefeated. The BCS voted USC and Oklahoma to play in the championship game. USC won beating Oklahoma by 35 points and Auburn won its bowl game as well. This caused the championship to be split by both USC and Auburn while neither team got the chance to earn the title outright.

The other problem with the BCS is that it does not give teams that play outside the six major conferences a fair shot at the title. Several teams have been able to earn a BCS bowl and they are 3-1 in those games.

To fix the problems with the BCS, I suggest that the NCAA switch to eight-team playoff. The winners of the six major conferences would get automatic births and would be two wild cards for Mid-Major schools. The games would be played in the major bowl games, and would make television networks, the NCAA, and the schools and conferences a lot more money. Not only would it be one of the most exciting tournaments in sports, but also it would be a fair way of giving every team a shot at winning a championship.