

Eye on Editorials

PAIR OF PENNIES "The Participation Grade"

By daniel j. taylor - Lion's Eye Editorial Editor - djt5036@psu.edu

Driving home from class one day last week, my girlfriend turned to me and said "Why do I always get called on? I don't have anything to say!" She proceeded to spend the next six-and-a-half to eight minutes ranting over the fact that her lack of opinion could potentially cost her grade points, claiming that just because she had nothing to convey to the class did not mean she did not learn. I silently listened, as boyfriends are supposed to--trying my best to nod, smile, and chuckle when appropriate. Right around minute five-and-a-half, however, I realized that this time agreeing was easy. It turns out I agreed.

This is an important point, to be stressed, because my girlfriend and I do not agree on much. What "cold" means, what a good movie is, the way to treat a child, how to act in public, and whether or not Uggs are cute are issues for constant debate. Therefore, when it became apparent that we were on the same page, I was astounded, and because I was astounded I decided to put in some time thinking about it--what's the deal with the participation grade?

In grade school the participation grade makes the most sense, because young kids have difficulty conveying their ideas in any way other than speaking. You cannot ask a youngster to write a few paragraphs on the vowels--you need them to say them aloud, "A, E, I O, U (and sometimes Y)" to make sure they can tell the difference. Likewise, as the liberal and moderate waves of opposition to the No Child Left Behind Act will tell you, even testing is not always an effective method. How do we find out if Timmy and Sara read "See Spot Run"?--we make them tell us. I'll be blunt: Young kids haven't learned much yet, so we can't honestly expect them to prove they've learned anything in a scholastic manner without the participation grade.

In high school the participation grade also is an understandable tactic. The biggest threat to student success in high school is apathy. During the teenage years things get so much more interesting that no one wants to pay attention to school work. The girls are "developing," the boys are getting six packs, social cliques have formed, and drinking in the woods seems like a way better idea than Statistics homework. How can the schools possibly combat the forces of hormones and social influence? Answer--the participation grade. The only way to rip the minds of students

away from weekend plans and cute boys and cleavage is to require it. Demand participation. High schools can appropriately enforce the participation grade because the up and coming youth of America need to be pried away from the one million and seven other more compelling distractions.

Collegiate education, however is a whole different beast altogether. There are two main differences, relevant to this argument, between college and the preceding years of learning. One, students are required to pay tuition to attend college. They pay wagonloads of money for the opportunity to learn, get qualified, and create networks. Second, college students in America are not obligated to attend. The first thirteen years of education are mandatory, while college is optional--they actually choose to learn! If students are choosing to pay money to do work, give them credit enough to not treat them like pre-pubescent. They do not need a teacher to keep them in line; they pay good money to do it themselves.

However, my girlfriend could be wrong, so I wonder, is the participation grade a bad thing? It does seem like a relatively good idea to enforce engagement in a course as a way to ensure involvement and gauge understanding, but the problem with requiring participation is a matter of principle. It is a lot like borrowing seventeen dollars for a movie ticket and a box of Snowcaps--having the money is not as important as being paid back. This issue is similar to the way that seating is assigned in the grade school and high school arenas, but disregarded in college. Upon reaching Penn State I was completely surprised by the way that no professors set up seating charts, but soon enough the students fell into their own pattern, all occupying particular areas of the room. The manner in which college students are allowed to fall into their own ordered system should mirror a similar manner which allows students to fall into their own ordered, learning system.

Look, let's put it this way: I know that lots of college students are lazy like me, procrastinate like me, and do not always understand like me, but learning is our opportunity, not our job. Whether or not we understand the material is our responsibility, so I would rather be treated like a scholar and not an unruly fourth grader.

ADVICE COLUMN:

ALL ABOUT U

BY BLU



Dear Blu,

I have a situation in which someone wants to establish a relationship with me. I kind of want to do the same, but I can't completely trust the person. I don't want to end up hurt.....so how do I handle this?

From, Confused

Dear Blu,

I am well over eighteen and I am still a virgin. I'm not embarrassed because it's a personal choice. The problem that I have now is that I met this person and I am truly falling for them. I don't know how to tell them that I am a virgin, and I don't want them to look at me differently or scare them off. What should I do? Please help me!

Signed,

The Unsure

Dear Confused,

Thanks for writing in. I would evaluate why you have trust issues with this person.

Blu

Dear Unsure,

I'm happy that you trust me with such a personal question. I first want to tell you that being a virgin is NOTHING to be ashamed of. You're part of a dying breed and if it's a personal choice, then you need to be proud of that and stand by your choice. If you and your mate truly have a connection then I believe that your mate will understand. If that person cares for you, when you tell them they should respect your decision. Best of luck! And write back and tell me what happened.

Live life and don't let it pass you by....

As always your friend,

Blu

Having trouble at school, need some relationship advice, or just want to get something off your chest?

Feel free to write in to allaboutu001@yahoo.com and be heard! Send in your response by a Wednesday and you'll get your response the following Wednesday in the Lion's Eye's Op/Ed section. Your identity will always be safe and you will always get a reply...try it and who knows - maybe the next published question will be yours!

People Poll with Adrienne Showalter

What is your favorite candy to receive on Halloween?



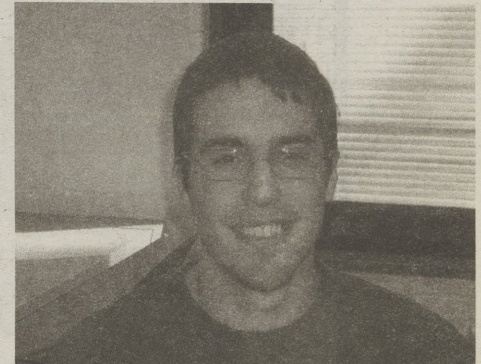
C. Cody Miles
Engineering
"Kit Kats"



Robert L. Kirkner
Engineering
"Butterfingers"



Ray Gaspari
IST
"Candy Corn"



Mike Edwards
Business
"Chocolate Marshmallows"