SCEP Scrutinizes Values, Incentives of Grading System

By DON GOLDFIEN

The Student Committee on Educational Policy has initiated its 1962-63 program with a series of "brainstorming" sessions to supplement the MM grading system and is relatively to learning, initiative, and creativity in the educational environment.

SCEP Chairman Al Kessler hopes to gather more objective information on the effects of the grading system on student achievement and imagination. The committee is interviewing a sample of the freshmen and seniors with other schools, such as Wood College, which have eliminated or drastically curtailed grades, as well as students who have complained that the grading system and the accompanying high level of competition have influenced most students to sacrifice learning for grades. The committee is attempting to focus on the work required for a good grade. The committee has also surveyed other schools on the effects of their grading systems.

The deeper question as to whether those who get high grades have learned more and developed their talents more fully than others is a pertinent one here. Although it is obvious that grades are objective (compared to a professor's personal evaluation of a student), for example, it is not clear just how relevant they are to the qualities that employers and grad schools want in graduates, or how reliable when used to compare one student with another. Any constructive criticism of the grading system must be accompanied by suggestions for changing it, and some rough indications as to the effects such a change might have on course content, teaching quality and individual motivation and accomplishment.

Several proposals have been made so far. The use of broad comprehensive exams to provide a basis for grades, for example, is not clear just how advantageous but would be difficult to administer without favoring students who had taken courses covered only upon the exams. Other incentives needed. The total elimination of grades except Pass and Fail would raise the problem of what else would motivate students to study. Although more freedom in choosing courses and a general rise in teaching quality could provide incentive for students to use their time wisely, most SCEP members voiced concern that some Tech students, freed from the constant worry of grades, would learn much less than they do now. More opinions, criticisms, and proposals will be needed before SCEP can seriously evaluate the grading situation and make suggestions to the faculty. Therefore, members of the committee has assumed subactivities, such as the "Freeblaw Year," and "Creativity and Grades," which they will intensively investigate and report on to SCEP. All other students who have relevant ideas and criticisms are invited to attend meetings (date, place, and time are available in Litchfield Lounges). Other aspects of the Student Committee on Educational Policy's program for 1962-63, including Preslerman Feedback and work with the Faculty Committee on the Environment, will be discussed in another article.

SMOKE A WINESOME SMILE

(from the "Famous Dary")

"By George, the makers of Marlboro packs and 100 yards of butcher's twine. (Of all his impressive accomplishments, this last is the one Gregor likes to do best fast. He can build a rude telephone out of two empty Marlboro cloves. He can, for example, sleep standing up. He can do a click sound when she is hungry. Actually, she is not too overemphasized? (The little woman, incidentally, is not, as you might think, my wife. My wife is far from a little woman. She is, in fact, almost seven feet high and heavily rounded. The little woman is a bird, and holds the world's hammer-throw record. The little woman referred to is someone we found crowing under the rosebushes when we moved into our apartment several years ago, and she has remained ever since. She never speaks, except to make a kind of guttural clicking sound when she is hungry. Actually, she is not too much fun to have around, but with my wife away at truck meets most of the time, at least it gives me somebody to talk to.) But I digress. "Do you think the importance of tests in American colleges is being overemphasized?" I said the other night to the little woman, and then I said, "Yes, Max, I do think the importance of tests in American colleges is being overemphasized." (As I have explained, the little woman does not speak, so when we have conversations, I am forced to do both parts.)

To get back to tests—sure, they're important, but let's not allow them to get too important. There are, after all, many qualities and talents that simply can't be measured by quizzes. It is right to penalize a gifted student whose gifts don't happen to be of the academic variety? Like, for instance, Gregor Sigalov. Gregor, a freshman at the New Hampshire College of Tanning and Befies Letters, has never passed a single test; yet all who know him agree that he is studded with talent like a ham with cloves. He can, for example, sleep standing up. To administer without favoring students who had taken courses covered only upon the exams. Other incentives needed...