

Reading days during exams would facilitate learning

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GUEST COLUMNIST

Reading days? Sound unfamiliar, unusual, unheard of? Well, they are, at least here at this university. Students have one weekend, a mere two days, to prepare before exams begin. I don't believe this is a sufficient amount of time to study for four exams that are supposed to be cumulative of an entire semester's work.

Wake Forest is not a university that gives out good grades easily. Many of us spend a semester just trying to keep up with the work in every class. A rare few have the time to actually sit down and slowly and thoroughly learn all the information for a test. Cramming for tests is a much more common phenomenon.

Needless to say, this information rarely stays in the head for much longer than an hour after the test. The faculty and administration then expect us to re-absorb all the information for an entire semester, information that probably wasn't truly and fully learned the first time, and take a cumulative exam.

Exam time is so stressful because of the immense amount of material that must be learned in the small amount of time given to study for them.

Sure, an entire semester has gone by and students should be learning all this material as they go along. Unfortunately, with four difficult classes (I can't think of an easy class at the university), with their innumerable assignments and tests, it's hard to fully learn information for a class and remember it for exams.

In the past few years, the university has been nationally recognized. It continues to increase in status and reputation. This is a school that competes with the best universities in the country and many of these schools give their students reading days.

Princeton University, for example, allows their students a week to simply study and prepare for exams. The University of Virginia also gives students a reading day or two. Classes here are also difficult enough to warrant extra time beyond one weekend to prepare for exams.

You might have heard that next semester the university will allow for two reading days. Unfortunately, exams next semester also begin two days earlier, on a Saturday. So essentially those two reading days are not much different from the current system of giving no reading days at all.

Yet the biggest problem caused by the lack of reading days is the effect it has on the students. Students need time to truly learn the material they are taught in classes.

We race through a semester, trying to keep up with everything and we study hard enough to achieve a desired grade but don't really learn the information. Students deserve to have that opportunity to really learn from their classes. A true education shouldn't be about getting a good grade or knowing the most information for a test and for that test only.

It should be about learning that information and carrying it with you beyond the class itself. This is the purpose of a liberal arts education. Reading days would allow students the time to absorb the material from a class, time that they may not have within a busy semester or within the short weekend that they are given to study for exams.

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Annoying callers are funny

ERIC WILLIAMS
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Whenever people find out that I work at the information desk (which isn't that hard because I'm sitting in plain view) they usually ask me, "What's the weirdest or funniest call you've ever gotten?"

Well, that's hard to answer directly because the field is so very vast. What I have noticed over the last year and a half is that there seem to be certain types of weird questions with one or two *really* weird ones here and there. In retrospect, they now seem somewhat amusing. At the time, however...

Anyway, here are a few types of callers. All of the following are true, or at least truth-based. Remember, this is not a "How to" guide so don't get any ideas!

The first group of callers consists of those that know nothing about the person whose number they need except their first name. It's not unheard of for a conversation to proceed as follows:

"Can I get John's number?" a caller asks.
"What is John's last name?"
"Uh, I don't know."
"Do you know what year he is?"
"Um... I'm not sure."
"Do you know which residence hall he's in?"
"No."
Finally, I ask: "Do you even know John?"

On the flip side is the group that is entirely too helpful. For example, a caller may say, "I'm looking for the number of Jennifer Lawson. She has junior status because she came in with so many AP credits, and she lives in Efirid, and she's from Marietta, which is in Georgia right

outside of Atlanta. And she made a 'B' on her last econ test. If that helps any."

Combine elements from these two groups and you get the people that know the person's last name, can't spell it, but try anyway.

"I'm looking for the number of Jason Pheelzinger."
"Could you spell that, please?"
"Um. F...E...A...L..."

Of course there are always the special service requests. Some of these include:

■ "I spilled something on my floor. Can you call someone to come clean up my room?"
■ "I'm looking for Mark. He's probably in the food court. Could you run down and give him a message for me?"
■ "Can I get a wake-up call?" (I kid you not, there are at least a couple of those every semester.)

What always amazes me is how unprepared people are on a regular basis. At least once a day, someone will call and say, "Hi. Can I get Joe Green's number?"

As I begin to give them the number, they interrupt, "Wait. Let me get a pen."

What information desk list would be complete without the callers who ask for the most outrageous information but yet are serious about it.

■ "Do you have the number for admissions at Appalachian State?"
■ "Do you know the hotel where the other team's players are staying?"
■ "What is Lillian Smith's number?"

"I don't have a listing for that, ma'am."

"You should, she graduated from here three years ago."
■ "Could you call a taxi and have them pick me up in front of my residence hall?"

My favorite is always, "What's the number for campus information?" I've always wondered, do you go ahead and tell them that they're speaking to the right person or do you say "5255" and let them call back?

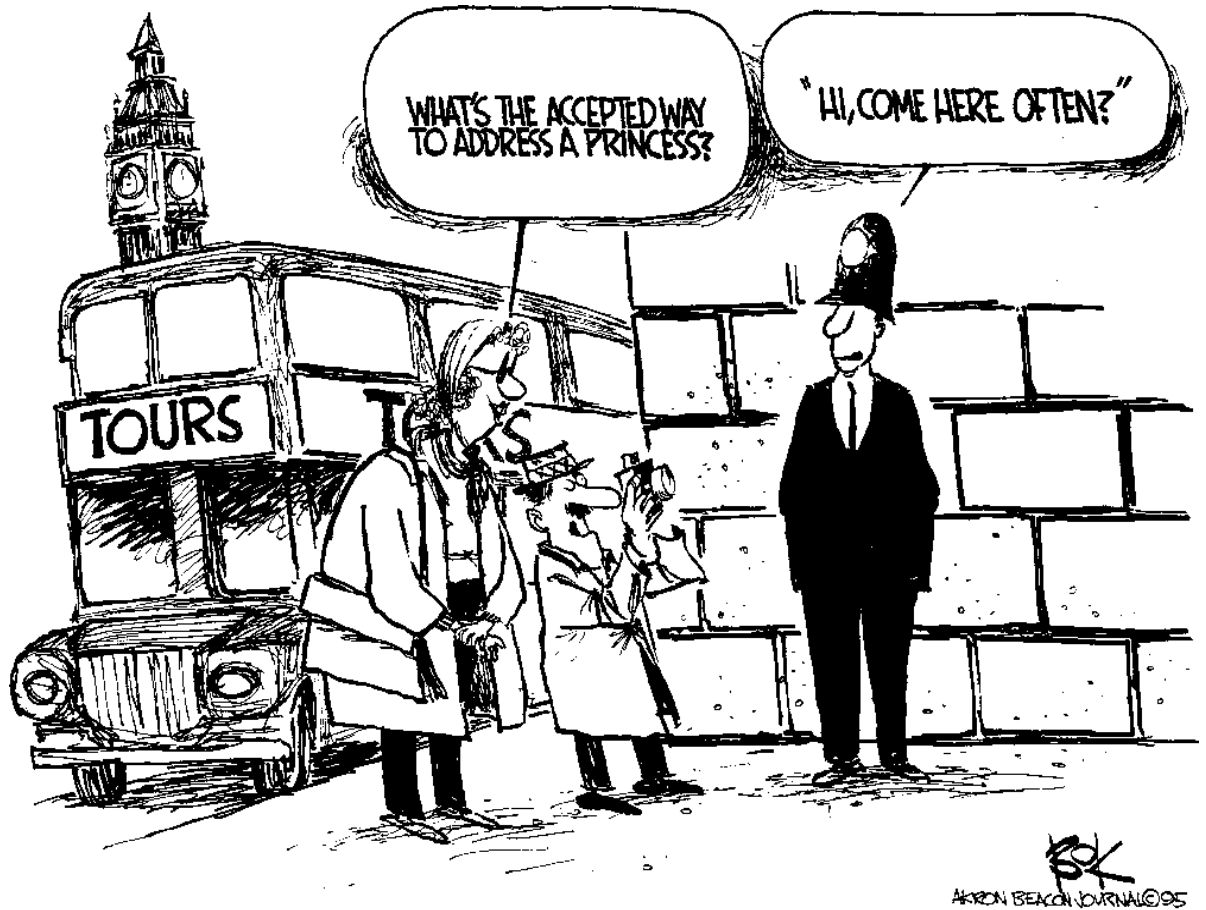
Last, but not least, are the calls of those that have a very unique interpretation of the word "information." These calls usually come on Friday and Saturday nights and have loud music going on in the background. Remember, don't get any ideas!!

Probably the most interesting call I received this semester (the most interesting clean one, that is), was one Friday night. The person called and said, "We're playing a game, and we want to know if 'undelineated' is a word." This is actually the second time I've referred to a Scrabble game.

Others include:

■ "What is Snoopy's dog's name?"
■ "Who were the three Axis powers in World War II?"
■ "What time is it?" (This question is asked constantly from 7:30 a.m. until about 9:30 a.m. following a power outage.)
■ "Are there any seats left for the football game?"
■ "What is the number for the Russian Embassy?" (I know who you were, by the way.)

Whatever you do, please don't call and ask, "What's the fastest land animal?" That's just been overdone.



Economic realities threaten ideals of liberal education

CHARLES STARKS
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Do most students here think course work is only about grades? So it would seem. When Dean Paul Escott decided to flex his muscles a few months back with that memo "reminding" faculty not to grade too lightly, a lot of students threw a fit.

Escott was perhaps taken aback at the gruff response. And indeed, if this university were an island, I would be the first to say "tough beans" to those students.

Unfortunately, we are not collectively an island. The rest of the world is out there, mocking all our attempts to gate ourselves off from it. And the choices made by the people of that world profoundly affect those of the students here. The rest of the world sees high grades, not intellectual vitality, as the mark of an educated person.

It has chosen material well-being as the ultimate measure of success. And the current, tough economy is the result of these attitudes.

It would be nice if students here could ignore this. But unless all of them find careers in academia (which is quite impossible), the vast majority will have to live in this world from graduation on.

Indeed, our grade-intensive atmosphere is no doubt at least partly caused by the world's money-intensive atmosphere. With a complete Wake Forest education fast approaching \$80,000 a pop, most people, including, I suspect, many parents, would certainly expect some sort of tangible reward for their expense, like high grades and an impressive resumé.

In many cases, a rich life of the mind by itself just doesn't make economic sense to the people who foot the bill.

In his Nov. 16 letter, "Grades justified," Andrew Frey proposes that the reason for this grade-intensive atmosphere is that the students here are not up to par intellectually, particularly when compared with those at, say,

Duke University. I doubt that Duke is a more intellectual place than our university. The demands of society are at least as strong on Duke students, especially since they are shelling out eight or nine thousand dollars more than we are each year.

Students here are very intelligent, as they show every time they earn an A in a demanding class. They are fully capable of rigorous intellectualism. But because of the demands of parents and society, their attention is turned to grades rather than knowledge.

And the problem is much greater in scope than the stereotypical quandary of whether to study or party. The problem is one of economics.

Real wages have remained fairly stagnant for the last two decades, but our expectations for tolerably comfortable living have continued to rise. As a result, we have had to work more and more to keep our standard of living on the upswing.

Twenty years of obsession with raising productivity has left us with an economy that demands that we specialize in our fields to such an extent that any interest not directly related to our career is regarded a superfluous waste of time and money.

This economy pretty much rules out the liberal arts for their own sake. The great thinkers of the past are now only useful to the extent that they can tell us how best to do our jobs.

It is little wonder that so many students major in business, obsess about grades and put off taking philosophy until their senior year. They can hardly afford not to do so.

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