

THE BEAVER

Same Notes on Student Life

A funny thing about exams: You worked hard on the subject the night before, panic-stricken about how little you knew, pouring knowledge into yourself from the books like beer into a big mug until you were saturated, brimming. Then you walked carefully to the exam, careful not to jiggle and spill a single fact from the reservoir. In the exam you just let it flow forth through your pencil, like releasing floodgates.

So the Beaver mused coming out of an exam. He felt pleasantly drained of all knowledge. It had always been a matter of conscious habit with him to forget an exam as soon as he had taken it. He had a certain distaste for the undertaker type of student who engaged in post-mortems at lunch, as if the results could be changed by a lot of groaning and gloating. It was like putting body english on a bowling ball.

After each exam, the Beaver felt, you should let your mind go blank (according to its natural tendency), and not worry about the results until after Christmas vacation. After all, worries combined with Christmas celebrations just give a man ulcers.

Accordingly, on seeing his math instructor outside the bookstore, the Beaver intoned "Merry Christmas" instead of "When will the exams be graded?"—and was prepared to make further talk about construction progress on the ME building if the instructor showed signs of tarrying.

Over vacation the Beaver enjoyed the last laugh on exams. While his vacation was bubbling with Christmas spirit in every sense of the term, his friends from State schools lived under the shadow of exams to come in January.

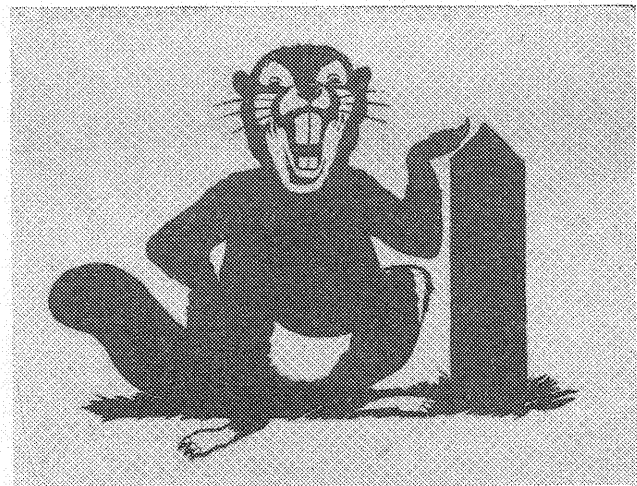
There were other advantages to having exams three times a year instead of twice. It not only cut down the importance of each one; it reduced the amount of material each exam covered. This meant a lot to the Beaver when he considered his cramming habits.

The Sidewalk Kibitzers

■ WITH GREAT CURIOSITY the Beaver watched the noble concrete structure rising next to the ME building. He joined the ranks of faculty, students, and secretaries in a mute equality of interest and stood beside the green fence, enthralled by the swinging cement pot and the nonchalant workers it almost decapitated on each swing.

It was highly satisfying to the faculty and students who wallowed in construction theory in class and text to have this practical scene, like a laboratory, thrown literally in their collective lap. But the Beaver wondered how the contractor was bearing up under this erudite and endless scrutiny. Didn't it take a bold and hardy man to build under the kibitzing of the entire engineering department?

The construction zone served some useful purpose apart from entertaining students, meandering deans, and secretaries making their hourly coffee-cruises to



the Spoon, however; it had completely obliterated a large area of iceplant.

Other Kibitzers

■ THERE WERE VAGUE stirrings on campus again about the instructor question. Something seemed to be lacking in teacher-student relations—though it was intangible enough so that no one knew where to aim an accusing finger. As the Beaver saw it and heard it from his friends, not many teachers showed much interest in their students. Small classes were not, in themselves, enough to achieve this; something more was needed. And certainly when students find they can get more from a course by working in their rooms during class time than by going to the class, something *is* needed.

A point of basic significance seemed to be that, although the instructors undeniably understood their material, there was either no attempt or no ability to present it lucidly and dynamically to the students. It would be odd indeed to assume that, if a person knows his field well, he automatically knows how to teach it to groping undergraduate minds, and yet this seemed to be the general assumption. Sometimes, in fact, the opposite was true: An instructor, teaching while engaging in his own research, tended to feel the latter as his center of interest and his teaching only a necessary evil to be dealt with as summarily as possible. The result was an impersonal relationship in which the student ground out problems from the book at night and then watched them hacked over in class the next day. This was certainly not Teaching with a capital T. The Beaver wondered if the faculty wheels could not institute a requirement of teaching ability for its instructors.

The criterion was clear: Did the students feel it worthwhile to attend a class, *i.e.*, was material presented in the class in a more lucid, more integrated, more dynamic way than it could be obtained from a modest perusal of the text? And further, did the students have a personal enough relationship with an instructor to go to him in office hours and get sincere help on individual problems connected with the course?

There was a test, of sorts, for these things in the Tau Bate questionnaires—in which the students for two years had rated the teaching of their instructors. The Beaver wondered what had ever happened to those questionnaires, and what results they had ever brought about.

—Jim Hendrickson '50