GRÁDE INFLATION RESOLVED

by ANDY BOROWITZ

TO: President Lawrence H. Summers
FROM: Task Force on Grade Inflation
SUBJECT: Findings and Recommendations

It has now been several months since you asked us to prepare a full report on the problem of grade inflation at Harvard. Even though the following report is incomplete, as well as several weeks late, we hope you will agree with us that it deserves an A+.

To bring you up to date on the current state of grade inflation here in Cambridge, we offer the following three examples as anecdotal evidence of the phenomenon:

• An economics major received an A on a final exam for identifying "supply" and "demand" as two key elements in the law of supply and demand.

• A graduate student in classics received an A- for a paper in which he asserted that the Theban plays of Sophocles included Xena, Warrior Princess.

• A history concentrator received summa cum laude honors for his senior thesis, Positive Identification of the Body in the Tomb of General Ulysses S. Grant.

While we are aware that you battled another kind of "inflation" in your old job, we must stress that grade inflation, Harvard-style, is a different kettle of fish entirely. It cannot be wiped out, as you (jokingly?) suggested at our last meeting, by having "that sourpuss Greenspan speak at Commencement."

(Mr. Greenspan has already spoken at a Harvard Commencement, in 1999, and not only did his address have no discernible effect on grade inflation, it may have actually precipitated the stock-market collapse of the following year.)

How, then, to wipe out grade inflation? Here, President Summers, is the good news: the Task Force strongly believes that Harvard should make no effort to wipe it out, since—and we know that we run the risk of raising some eyebrows by saying this—grade inflation is Harvard's best friend.

Yes, grade inflation has become a cherished, integral part of life at Harvard, as much a part of the University landscape as easily impressed foreign tourists in the Yard or hilarious factual errors in the Crimson. It's why many of the best high-school seniors in the country apply to Harvard in the first place. Even our competitors in the Ivy League have figured this out: witness Yale's recent decision to change its motto from Lux et Veritas to "Yale: Even Easier Than Harvard."

For this reason, we are concerned that eliminating or even reducing grade inflation at Harvard would be tantamount to killing the golden goose. It is the recommendation of this Task Force, in fact, that grade inflation be allowed to flourish like the burgeoning hothouse flower that it is, sucking every last nutrient from the soil and blocking out the sun from all plant life in its monstrous shadow.

With this lofty goal in mind, then, it is our conclusion that Harvard's grades are not nearly inflated enough; if anything, they are woefully deflated, especially in light of the academic harlotry of our Ivy competitors, who blithely disperse As the way a mother gives out Kleenex in cold season. We are leaving our rear flank woefully exposed to opportunistic rivals like Princeton, which now offers honors to any student who can successfully identify the ingredients of a Singapore Sling. Harvard, we believe, can—and must—do better. Starting next fall, we should start granting straight A's to all Harvard undergraduates immediately upon matriculation. Bold? Some might call it that. We call it something else: Harvard at its best.

In summation, President Summers, we believe that Harvard's happy experience with grade inflation leaves us with only one open question: what other aspects of Harvard life could be similarly inflated? Perhaps this is the work of another Task Force, but we would like to leave you with the following suggestions:

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