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Gavel Raps, Edition 1 (February 1995)

University of South Carolina School of Law Students

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GAVEL RAPS



Edition 1

February 1995

Mandatory Grade Normalization: *What's in It for Students?*

By Sara Kelley

The other day I was standing in line waiting for my financial aid check when I overheard the following conversation between two undergraduates:

U1: So, how'd you do in Western Civ?

U2: I got an A, how about you?

U1: Yeah, me too.

U2: Cool.

Hearing this, I turned to one of my fellow unfortunates (that is, a fellow 2L) and asked wistfully, "Do you remember A's?"

Indeed, she did remember A's. She made lots of A's before she came to law school, both as an undergraduate and as a graduate student. Like most of us, she was an "A machine." She hasn't seen very many A's in law school. Like the rest of us, she endured the humiliating, degrading (pardon the pun) first year believing there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

"It gets better second year," comforted our upperclass friends. "No more grade normalization!"

Alas, it wasn't to be. The light at the end of the tunnel was an oncoming train.

Here's a quick quiz for you. Don't sweat it; this one won't affect your G.P.A., and it won't keep you from getting a job at Nelson Motors (a.k.a. Nelson, Mullins):

Why did the faculty vote to make upperclass grade normalization mandatory?

A) To make grades more meaningful.

B) To raise the prestige of our law school.

C) To make students more competitive.

D) None of the above.

The answer is certainly "D) None of the above." Let's go over the choices one by one, in case you got the wrong answer. Don't worry if I go too fast for you. You can always stop by my office to ask questions if you think you've missed something. No appointment necessary - really, I have an open-door policy. My office hours are 2:00 a.m. to 2:15 a.m. on alternate Wednesdays during the full moon.

"A) To make grades more meaningful." Who are you kidding? Normalized grades are no more meaningful than non-normalized grades. In fact, they are often less meaningful. A case in point is my Workers Compensation class last semester. The professor, an adjunct, is not one who has historically given all A's. I checked out his grade distributions before I took the class - some A's, a bunch of B's, a bunch of C's, occasionally (admittedly, rarely), a D+. Those grades sounded pretty "normal" to me. This adjunct has been teaching Workers Comp. for fourteen years. He knows how to grade exams. Nevertheless, when he turned in his grades for last semester, they were given back to him as "too high." They were outside of the arbitrarily chosen range required by so-called "normalization." So the professor regraded our exams - and gave us lower grades than he thought we deserved. Meaningful? And for those professors who don't know how to grade exams? Well, I suppose there are some of those. But does an A "earned" because your exam paper happens to make it the farthest down the steps mean

any more because there are now fewer A's given out *really* mean any more than it did before normalization?

"B) To raise the prestige of our law school." XXX. Thanks for playing. Who outside of the school really knows anything about grade normalization, anyway? Can anybody out there tell me what UVa Law's grade normalization policy is?!? Perhaps the Career Services Office does a good job of distributing this information to in-state employers. I really don't know. But so what? USC is the only law school in this state. Most South Carolina lawyers graduated from this law school. Consequently, most South Carolina firms already think this is a reasonably good school. I guarantee you that all those New York and Atlanta firms who sent you form rejection letters over Christmas know nothing about USC Law's grade normalization policy, and don't care. All they know is that you don't have 3.998 G.P.A. like all their other summer associates.

"C) To make students more competitive." First, we must ask ourselves "Is this really a worthwhile goal? Isn't there enough back-stabbing between law students already?" Second, grade normalization may make some students more competitive, but only the ones who already have no lives because they're too competitive already. Everyone else believes in the throw-the-papers-down-the-stairs method of grading. Why work harder when you're already convinced there's no correlation

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Editor's Note

By: Brian McCarty

Welcome to the first edition back of Gavel Raps. One time, a long time ago, this publication won an award for being one of the best law school papers around. I will be the first to admit that our first edition lacks that stature, but after a year and a half around this place, I am excited about what it could be with student input.

That's right, student input. I will arrogantly state that I led my student newspa-

per to receive the best overall award in this state, but I, and the rest of your fellow students need your help. Without it, Gavel Raps can not be much of a publication. I'll venture to say I know what it takes to make a student publication great—student participation.

And, that's what we're looking for. We need your participation. This is your student newspaper, and your voice at the law

school. Without it, we will not succeed.

I know we all are very busy people. But, I will make it simple. If you have a gripe, complaint, touching story, or humorous story about the people or this place, let me know by either dropping a story in my box or by giving me a call at 750-9345.

Thanks for your help. I am sure together we can make Gavel Raps a meaningful for the students of USC Law.

What's happened this year with Student Government?

By Bob Masella

I would like to recognize a few members of the law school community who have worked to make USC Law a better place this year. I'm sure I will leave out a few to whom I'm sorry but appreciative of all the work everyone has done.

SOCIAL EVENTS

Thanks Chuck Hollis for taking care of the entertainment department this last year. Chuck put together a really nice season of parties last Fall. You and Scott Joy sure know how to cook and we appreciate all the time you put into this. Chuck put together all the SBA parties this last year including the Pig Picking, the Halloween party with the Medical and MBA Schools the end of the year bash and he has promised another bash this semester along with the 3L sendoff. It's necessary to have a little humor and fun and you've done a great job.



CONGAREE VISTA PROBONO RUN

Allison Peters worked with the South Carolina Bar Association to join forces with the SBA this last Fall to benefit the South Carolina Bar's Pro Bono Program. This was something the SBA had never done and the turn out was great and lots of money was raised for a great cause.

THE FACEBOOK

The Facebook is one of the most useful books you will buy at law school. It has the names, pictures, addresses and phone numbers of all your fellow students. Last year the Facebook was delivered to the student population in the middle of April! Not only did it come out so late but it cost \$10.00 per copy. The timing and costs were so bad that we still have 300 copies of them left.

This year we were determined to get the book out in the first semester with our actual goal being within the first few months of the semester. Stephen Woods took on the project and really dedicated himself to do it in time and to DO IT RIGHT. If any of you know what it's like to give up life and get something done - that's what Stephen

did. The picture day was the first trick - organized to be done within one hour, most said it couldn't be done, it was. Then once Stephen got the photo's back from career services he with the help of some of the SBA legislators got them all organized and the correct names attached. After all this, he worked with the printer to get the final additions of the 1994-94 Student Directory proofed and printed.

JOANNE HEITING

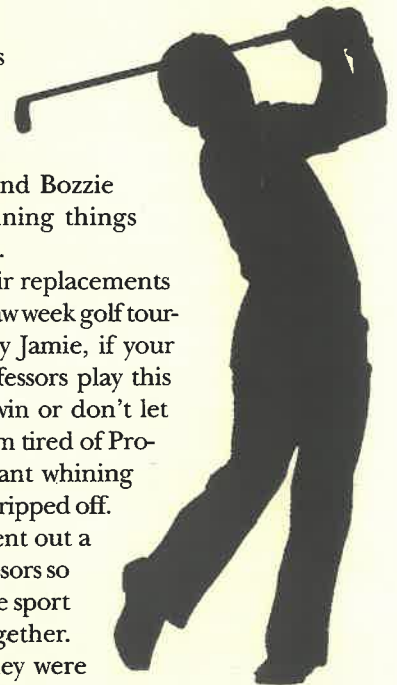
The patron saint of the law school is still with us and going strong. If it wasn't for Joanne we would have never have gotten the face book out as soon as we did. She is always there for us when we need an ear and I would just like to thank her for all her help.....THANKS JOANNE!!!! Also, congratulations to Joanne, she is a grandmother again.

SPORTS

For all you athletes and golfers you know how smoothly things have been running this year. Jamie Francis and Bozzie Boggs have been running things and keeping it smooth.

Jamie is training their replacements and getting this year's Law week golf tournament on track. Hey Jamie, if your going to have the Professors play this time, either let them win or don't let them come so close, I'm tired of Professor Cowden's constant whining about how his team got ripped off.

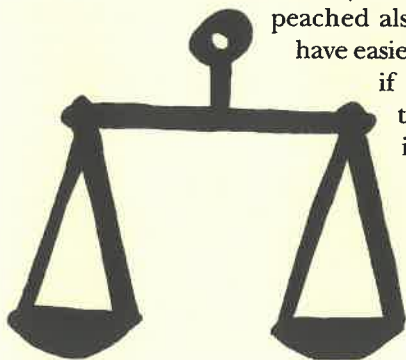
Last summer Jamie sent out a request to all the professors so that we could find some sport we could all enjoy together. Jamie told me that they were most interested in joining us in a softball tournament because they felt as though they were a little over the hill. So we challenge them to compete in this year's softball tournament during law week and I think they might be able to field pretty good team! So keep your eyes open, they'll be the ones in the wool uniforms.



THE CONSTITUTION

Next week we are going to have a student wide discussion regarding the revisions (revamping) of the Law School's Student Bar Association's Constitution. James Fowles has taken a lot of time and energy to get this right for us all.

We need to have a vote and copies will be available to the general public to review prior to the vote. Some of the changes are: the SBA president cannot hold an outside job while holding the office and if the president decides to work outside the school during their term in office they will be automatically impeached also the student body will have easier access to making policy if they don't like the way the student government is running things and numerous ambiguities that have been problematic in the past have been remedied. So come see what's been done with the constitution and vote.



LAW WEEK

Shelly Willis began working on this years law week last spring and she has all engines running at full steam. We have decided to move the Barristers Ball to the Sheraton Hotel off of Bush River Road this year so that we accommodate more people for this years speaker Ms. the ABA President elect. The Ball will be held on March 24th and tickets will be priced at \$20.00 each. After dinner there will be entertainment and dancing and refreshments will be handled through a cash bar.

Law Follies is being handled by Kendall Corley and she has already picked out the location. We will have our usual jocular event but this year and Kendall has added food to the menu so all the free beer won't run straight through.

The Trivia Bowl is being handled by,,,,,, and we will again have cash prizes for the winners. Thank goodness Howard Stravitz is in New Jersey.

There are lots of other events and fun to be had during this years law week but remember keep your head - don't drink and drive - and don't forget about your reading assignments....

BLOCK SEATING

Shelly Willis and Ben Dunn took care of what we thought was going to be a thing of the past. In case your not aware dealing with this mess is a pain in the rear but both Shelly and Ben handled it without much pain for the rest of us. Thanks guys.

FINANCES

When we took over last year we inherited a deficit which exceeded \$15,000. There were lots of explanations for the losses but for an organization like the SBA \$15,000 in the hole is almost as great as the national debt. Once Jay Rinehart got a hold of the books things changed. We let Jay take over and he did. He was able to retrieve money that the University overcharged us for, such as \$4,500 double charge for use of the Carolina Coliseum for an old Law Ball. Jay sparked up a great relationship with the campus fund finance personnel and has made a onetime nightmare into an easy going business relationship.

Jay has also been able to keep track of the money that comes through the SBA office, something that has been difficult to handle since the creation of the SBA office.

Finally, we would also like to thank Dean Burke for helping forgive some of the SBA's old debt so that we could get back in the black.



ELECTIONS

Heygood Tighe and Kevin Eberle remedied a number of problems we had with the election code last year and are getting the Spring elections cranked up. They will be holding informational meetings for all those who wish to become involved in the SBA and the Honor Council. So keep your eyes open for days and times of the meetings and elections.

Remember, if you have any concerns about what's happening at the school please let me know. I've gone to the deans about everything from soap and hot water in the bathrooms to grade normalization, I'm here for all of you and I will continue to do so until you find my replacement.

I want to sincerely thank your other executive officers - Kendall Corley, Jay Rinehart and Chip Collins for all their help and leadership and thank you for allowing me to represent you.

continued from page 1 Mandatory Grade Normalization:...

between grades and effort anyway? As I pointed out in my discussion of choice A), grade normalization does absolutely nothing to make the grading system more meaningful to most students.

So, what *do* students get out of grade normalization? Oh, several things: longer delays in receiving grades, poorer job prospects than they already had, and lower self-esteem than they must have had when they decided to come to law school in the first place!

THINK! PRO BONO

By: Bob Masella

For all of who are ready to look beyond the hallowed walls of ye olde law school for some extra curricular activities- think! pro bono. A variety of projects need volunteers and participation is a great way to break up the routine of studying, studying and more studying.

How about some fresh air and a little physical activity? Habitat for Humanity is looking for a few good volunteers.

For a less physical project, but no less important, why not try literacy tutoring? Training sessions will begin soon.

Looking for a truly rewarding activity and one that you can continue after graduation? Become a Guardian ad litem. Richland County will start a training session the first part of February.

Information on these and many more projects can be had in the Pro Bono office, room 233. Stop by and talk about what you would like to do with Pam

Robinson, goddess of Pro Bono.

The ever popular Hot Dog Sales are in full swing. There will be some terrific guest chefs so please plan your fat grams, cholesterol needs and bucks (\$1.25) accordingly.

Later in the semester a clothing drive will be held to gather clothing for the Oliver Gospel Mission and Sistercare. Start going through those dressers and closets today. Don't throw anything out clothing for men, women, and children is needed.

Finally-Hug a Mug-a Pro Bono mug is not only a useful gift, but a gift that keeps on giving for only \$5.00 (USC-is the best law school in the state). Stop by the Pro Bono office and pick one up today. It is truly a great Valentine's Day present when you care enough to give the very best.

Remember proceeds from Pro Bono activities go towards funding public interest internships for law students.

Utterings about Life Outside the Law School from the Bottom of the Class

By: Brian McCarty

As both a close follower of politics, and a sports fan, I feel that the two should not mix. Lately, it seems as if we can no longer escape politics. When ESPN carries coverage of a Presidential press conference, things have gotten out of hand. (And, I flatly refuse to discuss OJ, because I can't compete with the combined staffs of the supermarket tabloids.)

Clinton's presidential interference with the baseball strike not only shows his desire to be part of every part of our lives, but it serves as a striking example of how sports and politics now mix. And, those with political agendas to show through sporting events do not care about what they do to the athletes.

Take the recent Rutgers-UMass basketball game. Rutgers, a huge underdog, was leading the #4 ranked UMass team at the half. The Rutgers team was undoubtedly feeling the magic of a special night that could live in their minds for the rest of their lives. And, political motives ruined it all with a sit-in that suspended the game.

I do not care what they were protesting, and, I have made it a point not to find out. It is irrelevant. The political people were wrong to rob the Rutgers team of their special night. They showed no concern for their team. They could not care less. They had their agenda. For once, I wish two teams would start playing basketball and break up a political protest. Just imagine the looks on the protestors' faces when two goals are wheeled into the middle of them, and people who do not care about them begin to play ball.

And, the President has his political motives. He wants us to depend on him to give us baseball. And, then, well, we would have to re-elect him, wouldn't we?. It is just sickening to think how the politicians have invaded our lives.

The late Tip O'Neil, a great Speaker of the House, loved to attend sporting events. And, when he did, he insisted on not being announced at the games. Because, to paraphrase him, politics and sports don't mix, and people come to sporting events to watch them, not be reminded of politics. Tip was right. And, he stayed loved and got re-elected by the people from his district again and again. I just wish other politicians and politically minded people had his good sense and let us be without political concerns for a few moments of our lives.