

- The credit system has been taken for granted as a standard measurement of the amount of learning a student receives in Philippine colleges; but this is an erroneous idea and it is nowhere used in other parts of the world outside of the U.S.A.

## ACADEMIC UNITS AND THEIR USE

In its efforts to see some variety in the offerings of our private colleges and universities, the Bureau of Private Schools permits the use of a curriculum by a college provided it is substantially as good as or better in some ways than what it generally prescribes.

In his work entitled *Excellence*, John W. Gardner the present Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare of the United States, emphasizes the need for diversity in education in order that schools and colleges may be able to meet the enormous differences of human capacities and levels of preparedness and attitudes of young people. From the depth of his knowledge and experience, he strongly urges every educational institution to play a distinctive role in the pursuit of its own pro-

gram and to win for itself honor and recognition.

It should be the policy of the Bureau to encourage responsible institutions managed by competent educators and administrators to construct and adopt the curriculum of their choice as long as it is carefully and intelligently planned.

In determining how much a student has learned about a course the measurement is the total number of units he has earned.

The academic unit, however, is but a mechanical and convenient indication of the length of time spent in a classroom for a subject. In our system in this country one unit is equivalent to 18 hours of class meetings in one semester. It is not a measurement of the degree of knowledge a student has acquired or of the mental development he has attained. It serves as

a measure of the number of class meetings set aside for a subject in a semester or a term. It does not even indicate the *actual amount of time a student devotes personally to the study of the subject*. A serious student may spend three or more hours of study outside the classroom for a subject which is given only a one-unit weight; while another student taking a 3-unit subject might give no more than one or two hours of study out of his own time. The number of units taken by students is thus far from being a measurement of his knowledge of a subject. For instance, many if not most students finish 24 units of Spanish in our colleges (including the U.P.) without knowing how to speak or write the language tolerably.

The unit or credit system is an American invention. It is not used in British, European, and other institutions of learning where examinations and the ability to pass them successfully are the test adopted in measuring a student's knowledge of the subject. The fact is that for sometime now, outstanding American educators and col-

leges have ceased to give importance to credits or units as measures of a student's learning. In our own country Government Board and Bar examinations must be passed by a person who desires to practice a profession and to secure an employment in the civil service. This shows that in the last analysis we do not rely on units earned but on the successful passing of an examination to determine one's knowledge of a subject.

The units we now use, otherwise known as Carnegie units, have become the basis of the credit system. It was first adopted merely as a mechanical and convenient way of appraising the formal work of a student at the time when electives became the fashion in the curricula of American schools. The proliferation of electives created a difficult problem for determining college entrance requirements for graduates from different secondary schools. Gradually a system of uniform number and kind of subjects and uniform weights for each of the required subjects had to be adopted; and the most convenient and easy method was

to use a quantitative rather than a qualitative standard. This was found to be the number of hours of class sessions for each required subject in a year or in a semester. The system has been introduced into the college classes and in graduate courses.

A competent American professor, Kenneth E. Eble, in his work entitled "The Profane Comedy" says of this system: "*The credit system is one of the large academic sins. Upon it depends the dull student whose A's in tetherball and leadership offset E's in reading and numbers...* A scholarly investigation of the growth of the credit system appeared in the AAUP Bulletin (Winter, 1955)." Then he goes on to say the following: "The writer Dietrich Gerhard, traced its beginnings to public demands for a more varied list of courses and more practical courses in both high schools and colleges in the 1870's and 1880's... The tart critics of American higher education, like Thorstein Veblen and Abbott Lowell (President of Harvard), were even harsher in their criticisms of forty years ago. Veblen, writing

before 1918 against the system of academic grading and credit, called attention to 'the pervasive way in which it resistlessly bends more and more of current instruction to its mechanical tests and progressively sterilizes all personal initiative and ambition that comes within its sweep.' Its acceptance today does not change the fact that only an educational system grown large and impersonal and remote from learning would tolerate it. Like all bureaucratic growths, it remains because, like weeds in hard soil, it cannot be pulled out without destroying the plants around it."

The well-known American writer, Martin Mayer, in his famous work entitled "The Schools" makes the following comments on the Carnegie Unit System: "Alone among the world's schools the American high school builds its curriculum on prefabricated identical blocks called *Carnegie units*. By this system, every 'course' meets the same number of hours every week and yields one 'credit point,' whatever the subject studied. *Nowhere else in the world are all the subjects of study*

*given equal weight or equal time."*

The use of units, which was originally confined to high schools in the United States but which was later adopted in its colleges and then blindly imitated in the Philippines, is being recognized for some time now as a meaningless way of evaluating a student's educational achievement. In the work entitled *Improving Transition from Schools to College*, the report of Arthur E. Traxler and Agatha Townsend contains the following critical remarks and explanation of the Carnegie Unit System: "Secondary schools and colleges need to work cooperatively toward the substitution of more meaningful statements of accomplishment for the clock-hour kind of evaluation represented by the Carnegie Unit. Historically, the Carnegie Unit served a useful purpose in secondary education and contributed to the transfer of secondary school graduates to college by bringing order and system out of a chaotic college entrance situation. Also, the unit method of reporting is so thoroughly embedded in thinking and practice that it

cannot abruptly be dropped. But the Carnegie Unit is outdated by modern techniques of evaluation, and the committee reaffirms the position expressed in the Fourth Report to the effect that the Carnegie Unit should be abandoned as rapidly as other procedures for measuring secondary school work — measurement of fundamental educational objectives, for example — can be evolved and brought into practice."

Finally, the following lengthy quotation from the paper of President Dietrich Gerhard of Washington University on "The Emergence of the Credit System in American Education" gives us the critical views of famous educational leaders and should deserve our serious attention:

"Undoubtedly the best interpretation of the system stems from Abbott L. Lowell and from Norman Foerster. Foerster, in his book on *The American State University* (1937), talks of 'purchasing a diploma on the installment plan,' and he adds: 'Once a credit was earned, it was as safe as anything in the world. It would be deposited and indelibly recorded in the

registrar's savings bank, while the substance of the course could be, if one wished, happily forgotten.' Lowell, Eliot's successor at Harvard, spent a great deal of his presidency on undoing the havoc wrought on the college by Eliot's system of indiscriminate electives. The program of distribution and concentration, soon more or less to be adopted by most other American universities, worked at least as a partial cure for the credit disease — with as much and as little success as these reforms of the curriculum can have in institutions which cannot cut loose from business accounting in education. You can follow his endeavors in his reports from 1909 on, in his collection of essays with the characteristic title, 'At War with Academic Traditions in America,' including the succinct statement, in his report of 1917: 'One of the most serious evils of American education in school and college is counting by courses — the habit of regarding the school or college as an educational savings bank where credits are deposited to make up the balance required for gradua-

tion, or for admission to more advanced study.'

"Let me, finally, give you a quotation from the work of a professional educator, once more from George Counts' *The American Road to Culture* (1930): 'In both the secondary and higher schools, the entire curriculum is organized into relatively minute units of work. Although efforts are always made to insure the pursuit on the part of the student of certain sequences and of a unified program, the result is all too often a mere collection of points and credits. Moreover, as the student remains in the institution from semester to semester, his successes and failures in accumulating these precious credits are meticulously recorded even to fractions of percentages in some office or bureau. After he has acquired the appropriate number of such disparate units, with but little provision for the integration of his knowledge, he receives either his certificate of graduation from high school or his college degree. Even the granting of their highest academic honor, the degree of doctor of philosophy, has

been reduced in certain of the large universities almost to a matter of meeting routine requirements.

"Having been a student adviser for more than a dozen years, I can certainly testify to the truth of such criticism. And even if I had not been under the obligation through half of these conferences with advisees to render the services of an adding machine, the impressions would have come unwanted to me — if in no other way, then in such recent experiences as a graduate student's retort to my question: 'Did it ever occur to you that you could read a

book not for credit?' 'It is not the custom in this century, Dr. Gerhard.' I shall always regard it as a most gratifying proof of the educational success of the History Department at Washington University that at one time two of our students were informed that they had fulfilled all the requirements for the degree without having realized it. This happened in the beginning of 1950 — they were G.I.'s. I am afraid that the story is not likely to repeat itself." (*American Association of University Professors Bulletin*, Vol. 41, No. 4.)