



## RULES AND REGULATIONS: PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

*Student Regulations Often Contradict the Stated Philosophy of the Junior College*

*By Terry O'Banion*

The junior college is purported to be a student-centered institution. Authors of books and articles extol the virtues of the junior college as a place that cares for the individual. Garrison reports that even faculty members see themselves as student-centered rather than subject matter-centered.<sup>1</sup>

Most junior colleges are committed to a student-centered approach, at least in statements of philosophy. The philosophical commitment is stated eloquently on the first page of the college catalogs. The prospective student is told that the college is dedicated to providing its resources for his growth and development. He is told that the junior college believes in the worth, dignity, and potential of every individual and that at the junior college he can be more than a nameless face in the crowd. He is told that the college promulgates the finest ideals of American democracy in order to better equip him for his role as an informed, mature participant in the democratic processes of society. The junior college is described as a place where every student will achieve success commensurate with his interests and abilities. With comprehensive programs and an open door, there is something for everyone—even for those who have been unsuccessful elsewhere; all may come, and all will be provided for.

The prospective student readily accepts these promised opportunities. Once enrolled, however, the student discovers new facets of the junior college. He discovers, often with the help of a required orientation class designed for this purpose, the rules

and regulations of the college. These appear in a special section of the catalog, several pages removed from the section that describes institutional philosophy; they also appear in great detail in the student handbook.

These rules and regulations tell the student how the college really operates—how the college practices its philosophy. In many cases, he discovers that there is a great deal of difference between promise and practice. Usually he finds—especially if he is in need of academic or personal help—that philosophical promises lose something when translated into rules and regulations. He will discover—to his dismay—that the proof is in the practice.

Junior colleges have adopted almost *in toto* many of the rules and regulations pertaining to students that have been used for decades by four-year colleges and universities. They have done this without giving thought to whether these are applicable to the purposes and functions of the junior college or to the needs and characteristics of junior college students.

It is easy enough to see how the rules and regulations are adopted; they are plagiarized. A new junior college is under time pressure to get its door open. Most enroll students a scant six months after the president is appointed. Hoards of prospective students write for information. High school counselors and four-year college and university officials recognize a new institution only when they receive a catalog. Under these demands, the new president



asks the registrar to prepare a catalog as soon as possible.

With four-year college and university catalogs at hand, the new junior college catalog is rapidly assembled. Catalogs from other junior colleges may be used, but they are not necessary because their rules and regulations were extracted from the same four-year colleges and universities. The rules and regulations, laid out in micrometer type, shape the way in which the college will relate to students and specify the procedures by which the purposes of the college will be incorporated. Once "cataloged," they are carefully guarded by faculty committees as the "standards" of the college.

Examination of several such standards reveals practices that not only fail to display basic philosophy but in many cases actually deny basic philosophy. These rules and regulations relate to probation, suspension, admission, social probation, and grading.

#### Probation and Suspension

In a dissertation on probation and suspension policies, Dula stated that "policies and practices of academic probation and suspension, as they apply to junior colleges, appear to have been appropriated nearly intact from four-year institutions."<sup>2</sup> Thus, most junior colleges follow the traditional practice of placing the student who fails to make a "C" average in any one term on academic probation. If the student fails again in the next term to make grades, he is placed on continued probation. In some institutions, the student who fails for a second time is suspended for a term. Most colleges, however, allow a third term, and some allow a fourth; eventually, the student who fails to achieve an overall "C" average is suspended permanently and irrevocably.

The student, once suspended, often has no further opportunity. There is something in the educational tradition that says the institution has been fair enough after it has given the student two or three tries; if the student fails to succeed, it is his fault. Another argument holds that administrators must protect the taxpayers' money and cannot allow students to continue in college if they cannot meet the standards. Another states that the student will be greatly harmed if he is allowed to continue to fail, as if any human being would be willing to con-

tinue for years in the accumulation of "F" grades. These arguments have been voiced by most educators, but one wonders if the arguments are really sound.

If we probe more deeply, we begin to see how the probation-suspension system works against the student. Some evidence questions the efficacy of the system. In a study on probation-suspension policies in twenty-seven junior colleges, Schultz concluded that "placing a student who is having academic difficulty on probation results in little improvement."<sup>3</sup> Dula, after studying 148 junior colleges, concluded that "(1) the act of placing a student on academic probation is itself tantamount to dismissal for over one-third of the students placed on probation, (2) relatively few students ever survive to the point of suspension once they have been placed on probation, and (3) no discernible differences were found in the outcomes produced by one kind of regulation over another in terms of their severity."<sup>4</sup> These studies suggest that the system, as it exists, is probably a thinly disguised scheme for getting rid of unwanted students.

No responsible educator wishes to waste the resources of his institution. But this does not imply that he has to shove his problem students through the revolving door. No responsible educator wants a student to continue to fail. But this does not mean that it is necessary to isolate the student from one of his best sources of help.

There are no easy solutions for helping all students achieve some measure of success. The junior college that is dedicated to this philosophy, however, must constantly explore and experiment with practices in order to move closer to this goal. Some promising practices include: (1) the development of intensive and individualized reading programs, (2) the provision of sufficient numbers of competent counselors, (3) carefully planned work-study programs, (4) autotutorial programs, (5) experiential self-development courses, (6) community tutoring services, (7) experimental general education programs, (8) human potential seminars, and many other practices. Many of these are currently in operation by junior colleges.

Junior college administrators, faculty members, and students should reevaluate their probation-suspension regulations. Are probation-suspension



regulations designed to identify and discard those who need help so that help can be provided? Even if probation-suspension policies are designed to identify those who need help so that help can be provided, there is still the problem of the negative connotation of the probation-suspension system. Perhaps other, more positive, systems exist for identifying students who need special help. Perhaps a probation-suspension system is not necessary at all in the junior college.

#### **Borrowed Regulation**

Also borrowed from four-year colleges and universities and supported by many junior colleges is the regulation that denies admission to a student who has been suspended from another institution. There is a gentlemen's agreement among institutions that the act of suspension by one institution means that no other institution will accept the student for further study. Here, the myth holds that the admission of a student who is ineligible to return to his former institution is tantamount to flouting the regulations of some accrediting agency or professional organization.<sup>5</sup> Administrators who could change the regulation reduce their guilt in the hand-washing ritual of calling up the demons of outside agencies: "But the accrediting association would not allow . . .," "The federal regulations state very clearly that . . .," "The university requires . . .," "The state department controls the money."

Junior colleges boast of their philosophy that promises students a second chance, yet many of them will not admit students who have been suspended from other institutions. When suspended students are admitted, they are almost always admitted on probation and then usually for only one term. Chances for admission are greater if the student performs appropriate acts of contriteness before a petitions committee. If a suspended student has served in the military or has spent several years in penance on a job, his chances for admission are considerably improved.

By following such procedures, junior colleges are missing many opportunities to enroll students who have very high levels of aptitude. In Florida, California, Illinois, and a number of other states, the state universities attract the top 10 or 15 per cent

of high school graduates. When one of these students is suspended from a state university, there has been something wrong with his educational experience; there is certainly nothing wrong with his ability. The junior college that admits such students will be accepting very capable individuals. The junior college that provides these students with the necessary environment for their growth and development will likely have, in addition, grateful and enthusiastic students. Many of these students need only the smaller institution and the individualized instruction available at junior colleges to insure their success.

Udem and Muck found that 70 per cent of all university and state college students who had been unsuccessful in their first college experience succeeded when they later enrolled in a junior college.<sup>6</sup> That such students can succeed after having been suspended from universities is demonstrated at such junior colleges as Santa Fe Junior College, Gainesville, Florida; Kennesaw Junior College, Marietta, Georgia; Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland, Ohio; and at dozens of other junior colleges across the country. Such students may need special counseling or special consideration, but the dividends in terms of development of human potential are worth the effort.

#### **Social Probation**

Junior colleges have also plagiarized a regulation that disqualifies less than "C"-average students from participating in leadership positions in campus organizations and clubs. The regulation usually reads, "Only those students who earn an overall "C" average may hold an office in student government, serve as a cheerleader, or hold office in any club, class, publication, or organization on campus." Academic respectability is the ticket of admission into the leadership positions available to students in the college.

Junior colleges want to be known as personal institutions where the student can be something more than an IBM card. This regulation, however, isolates students with academic difficulties from opportunities for leadership activities. Yet it is often these very students who most need this experience. Junior colleges have supported a philosophy that student activity programs, or extra-class activities,



can provide students with meaningful growth experiences. Often a student will catch fire in a student activity because he excels in some area. While such experiences can be meaningful for many students, they may be particularly meaningful for students who do not excel in the more formalized part of the curriculum.

The rationale of the regulation is probably based on the assumption that students who earn less than a "C" need more time to study. The college assumes that the student will study more if he is not permitted to participate in time-consuming student activities. This is the same rationale that dictates another regulation that limits the number of hours a student can work if he is on probation. The assumption concerning time is untested, and, even if research were available to support it, such regulations would be difficult to enforce in the junior college. The junior college has no control over the student's time outside the classroom, and, if he is not permitted to participate in student activities on the campus, he is likely to participate in high school and community activities. The junior college is not an isolated, residential, four-year liberal arts college where such a rule probably originated and could be enforced. Neither can the junior college control the outside working hours of its students. Most junior college students work part time, and some of them manage to hold down full-time jobs while successfully pursuing full-time studies at the junior college.

This is not an argument for students to over-extend themselves in student activities or to spend more hours in outside work activities. Rather, it is an argument for the examination of rules and regulations that are unexamined, untested, and unenforceable. Alternatives suggest improved counseling services to aid students in decision-making concerning the use of their time and financial aid programs to assist students for whom it can be determined that work has interfered with their academic progress.

#### **"F" Means Someone Failed**

The grading system "A," "B," "C," "D," and "F" is not original with the junior college; one suspects tradition again. The main reason given for accepting this traditional grading system is that

it is a universal language understood by everyone who needs to know something about academic performance.

The myth suggests that all students are graded the same in every institution. An "A" at Harvard, however, does not mean the same thing as an "A" at Parsons. Even within the same university, colleges grade differently; within colleges, departments grade differently; within departments, divisions grade differently; within divisions, instructors grade differently. Students know well that instructors teaching the same course do not grade the same. There is often a great deal of difference when two instructors grade the same student for the same course. Is grading a universal language? Perhaps. But few have learned to speak it well.

Four-year colleges and universities are beginning to recognize the limitations of the traditional grading system and are experimenting with new approaches. Yale University recently adopted a pass-fail system. The University of Illinois now allows students to take courses out of their major areas on a pass or noncredit basis. Such systems encourage the student to explore areas that he ordinarily would not explore for fear of earning a poor mark.

Likewise, a number of junior colleges are beginning to consider the advantages of pass-fail systems, pass-noncredit systems, "A," "B," "C," "X" systems, and "S" and "U" systems. One junior college, College of the Mainland in Texas City, has devised an excellent grading system. Students may receive grades of "A," "B," "C," "I," "WI," or "WP." Under this plan, a student who at the close of the semester has not completed the minimum objectives of the course may receive an "I." The student then negotiates a written contract with the instructor for a period of time to complete the minimum objectives. When the student has completed the necessary requirements for completion of the minimum objectives, the instructor negotiates a grade change for "I" to the appropriate grade of "A," "B," or "C." In the event the student does not complete the minimum objectives in the time negotiated with the instructor, he is withdrawn from the class, and the instructor changes the grade of "I" to "WI." The "W" is given to a student who withdraws within the first nine weeks; after that time, he may receive a "WP" or "WI."



Students who wish to transfer and have not removed the "I" from their transcripts may select one of two options: (1) withdraw from the class and receive a "W" or "WPI" depending on the time of withdrawal, (2) negotiate in writing with the instructor procedures for completing the minimum objectives in absentia, in which case the "I" will be recorded on the transcript prior to matriculation to the transfer institution. The "I" would change to "WI" if the student does not abide by his contract.

A student who receives an "I" in a course which is a prerequisite to another course has the responsibility of obtaining the written permission of the instructor of the course in which the "I" was received and the instructor of the course in which the student desires to enroll.

#### Central Criteria

The College of the Mainland indicates that criteria central to the development of this evaluation system are the following:

1. A system that will attract students of all stages of personal and educational development to enroll in the college
2. A system that will encourage students to work with more heart and persistence
3. A system that will foster instructional responsibility on the part of professors and students
4. A system that is geared openly and directly to behaviorally specified objectives
5. A system that will guarantee quality control.<sup>7</sup>

These systems encourage students to broaden their interests and allow more freedom of movement with respect to courses. Such a course of action would not lead to campus anarchy. Degrees and performance would still depend on what is on the transcript. Grades should reflect academic performance, after a performance has been turned in. There is punishment enough for the student who has spent an entire term in unsuccessful performance without adding an "F" to his difficulty.

A recent and important report by a special commission of the Council of Student Personnel Associations in Higher Education speaks to the point being made in this discussion. In the report on

"Current and Developing Issues in Student Life," the authors conclude:

We would do well if we were prepared to function with as few restraints as possible and to insist on the revocation of any orders or regulations that are not really essential to the mission of the institution. Student, faculty and—in some instances—institutional pressure to modify grading procedures; opposition to ranking students on the basis of grade point average; increasingly serious life-time consequences for students if dismissed from their institutions; increasing assurance that what one learns bears little relationship to the grade that is assigned—relatively persuasive evidence on all these matters suggests that students have ground for objecting to a great deal of the faculty-administration relationships affecting their tenure as undergraduates.<sup>8</sup>

These several rules and regulations, and many others that must be ferreted out of the small print, are, for the most part, adopted from the universities without question. The plea here is not for doing away with standards or for doing away with rules and regulations. The plea is for a reexamination of the basic meaning of rules and regulations in terms of the philosophy and purposes of the community junior college and the needs and characteristics of junior college students.

For too long, the rules and regulations that define how the junior college operates have denied the basic philosophy of the junior college movement.

<sup>1</sup> Garrison, Roger. *Junior College Faculty: Issues and Problems*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Junior Colleges, 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Dula, Thomas. *Academic Probation and Suspension Policies and Practices in Public Junior Colleges*. Gainesville, Florida: Office of Institutional Research, Florida State University, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> Schultz, Raymond. "The Impact of Academic Probation and Suspension Practices on Junior College Students." *Junior College Journal* XXXII; January 1962.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.* Dula.

<sup>5</sup> Meadows, Mark and Ingle, Ronald. "Reverse Articulation: A Unique Function of the Junior College." A paper presented at the Convention of the Southern College Personnel Association. Knoxville, Tenn.: Fall 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Udem, Jan and Muck, Steven. "An Analysis of the Records of Students Entering El Camino College on Probation from Other Institutions of Higher Learning." (Unpublished), El Camino College, 1965.

<sup>7</sup> College of the Mainland. "Grading System." 1968.

<sup>8</sup> COSPA. *Current and Developing Issues in Student Life*. Commission Report, March 1968. (Mimeo.)