

Handwritten signature in pencil, appearing to read "Sandor".

Handwritten initials in red ink, appearing to be "LB".

January 14, 1966

REMINDER: This coming Monday, January 17th there will be a Town Meeting in the Sanborn livingroom at 7:15 P.M. discussing and taking a straw vote on the Dean's List and graduation honors.

Reflections on the implications of a Dean's List

by Harriett Crosby

There has been controversy on the issue of Dean's List ever since College Council voted to abolish it in a preliminary vote. In a later meeting a decision was made to take the matter to a Town Meeting to provide an opportunity for students to think and express their opinions

As a member of College Council, I would like to explain my reasons for having taken a firm stand against the Dean's List. The importance of the issue to me lies not so much in deciding whether we should or should not have a Dean's list but that we all recognize the underlying direction of education implied in having a Dean's List.

There seem to be two basic approaches to education either of which Pitzer could assume. One is the traditional method, accepting external authority and the standards which others set for one, doing only the homework which is demanded by the professor. This method does not encourage students to do work on their own if it is not a requirement of the class. It demands working by the standards of others to get high grades. It is the sponge technique; absorbing all that the professor presents without necessarily giving thought to the implications in other areas of thought and wringing itself dry when exams come. Obviously, this method of education is in line with having a Dean's List but it is not in keeping with the kind of education Pitzer is trying to promote which entails self direction.

The other approach to education is the developmental approach often termed progressive. This method does not limit education to four years at college. It is a preparation for life, where the individual discovers the excitement of learning and finds the motivation to continue studying on her own after graduation. This technique aims at giving the student the tools and the desire to educate herself through out life. It instills the joy of learning for its own sake. Studying a subject should not be

an arduous burden of busy work which she hates but is forced to do. Rather it should be an enjoyable experience which she does willingly because she derives satisfaction from it. This does not imply that studying should be fun and games, nor that it should be sugar coated so that everyone will want to study. No, many classes that any student takes are not fun and easy, but she can get deep satisfaction from doing them thoroughly. In this way we discover the happiness to be found in hard work. For to find joy in working hard, we find the meaning of existence. (If you would like to know more about this philosophy of education read Summerhill by H. S. Neill.)

I have had the fortunate experience of going to a school which put into practice the progressive philosophy, Putney School in Vermont. Its success has been widely acclaimed. Far from having a Dean's list, there were no grades or exams. The students studied and I mean they worked hard, harder than a lot of students here do. Why? Because they wanted to learn and getting a grade as a proof of their learning meant nothing. They knew how they were doing. They talked with the teachers, got long comments on their papers and got written reports from each teacher three times a year. Competition was minimized and each student worked at fulfilling his own potential. Instead of having exams at the end of the term, there was project week. Each student took one academic and one non academic project (sculpture, potting, drama, dance, metalwork etc.) supervised by an adult. But did they goof off without the pressure of classes? No, there was more inspired creative diligent and serious work done then than all year. Motivation came from the individual's determination to develop his own interests and to do well what he set out to do.

Although we may not want to or may not be able to eradicate grades from Pitzer and go on a pass-fail basis for all classes, we should consider this philosophy of education and decide if we want to go in this direction or not. If we do approve of 1. Its emphasis on self direction rather than external pressure, 2. Letting the individual fulfill his own potential without being forced into competition, 3. Letting the learning be its own reward without having to prove it with a grade, then we would certainly do away with the Dean's list.