

DR. DARNELL'S PHILOSOPHY ON GRADES

Grade grubbing is an ugly, ugly practice. For those of you that are unaware, *grade grubbing* is when a student requests a class grade be raised even though one's performance did not warrant that higher grade originally. What is equally ugly is the increasing number of *grubbers* each semester. *Grubbers* are individuals that write e-mails like the following:

Hey,

I just noticed that I'm a twenty-two points away from a B. This is horrifying!! What can I do to get a B? Can you give me some extra credit? I know that I didn't do very well on the tests, but I really want a B. I guess if you can't help me out, I'll just take it again next semester. Please let me know as soon as you can.

John Doe

It is NOT acceptable to say to professors "I need a B," "I want an A," "I really need this class to graduate," or "I need an A so that I can keep my scholarship." These requests are a not-so-subtle request for special treatment. These requests ask the instructor to ignore course policies, grades earned, and standards of teaching and student performance so that a student can be 'given' a grade whether it was earned or not. It is akin to emotional blackmail and it will not be tolerated. Consider this syllabus clear warning that you will held accountable to the policies held within.

I agree with my colleague Dr. Ragan Fox, of CSU—Long Beach, in his column "A...My Name is Average" where he asserts, "I don't recall a single moment when I approached a professor and acted like his or her grade was a jumping off point to final grade negotiations." Grades are an assessment of your academic work by a tenured, communication scholar and practitioner. Grades are not randomly assigned to you based on personality whims, nor are they 'auctioned' off to the most persistent student.

Receiving the letter grade "A" is not a Constitutional right, like the right to remain silent when arrested. The letter "A" is reserved for the very best work done by students. A grade of "C" notes completely adequate, acceptable work. Acceptable isn't a synonym for outstanding. More specifically, you do not begin a class with an "A," with the instructor deducting points along the way. In fact, you start the class with an "F." You've done no work, nor acquired any skills. Your addition of skills and knowledge will determine what grade you have at the end of the semester. A classic example of this confusion came from a student in 2008. She wanted to know why her group received a "C+" on their final project when they went over all of the information I required of them. I told her that she was correct, they had indeed completed all the tasks required, but they didn't do them very well and because they didn't do those tasks poorly, they didn't earn a "D." Likewise, because they met the minimum standards they didn't get a higher grade. Additionally, all "A's" are not equal. Scoring 100/100 on a paper means that the paper was perfect. Perfection is rare. Even diamonds have inclusions and flaws.