

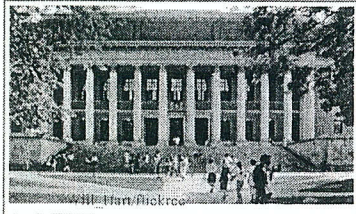


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Breaking Ranks

Thanks, But Students Don't Need Final Exams

By *ERIK HAYDEN* | October 04, 2010 1:33pm



To their joy, fewer and fewer Harvard students are taking part in that venerable tradition: the final exam. What was once a stressful capstone is virtually disappearing from the university's classrooms. Keith O'Brien of the Boston Globe quantifies the trend: "in the spring term at Harvard last year, only 259 of the 1,137 undergraduate courses had a scheduled final exam, the lowest number since 2002." The drop in these "big, blockbuster tests" he attributes to a slow change in professors' mindsets. Many prefer more frequent testing, projects or group presentations. "Life is not structured like the exam anymore," Charles S. Maier, a professor of history told O'Brien. "Life is open book; it's not closed book."

But the switch, apparently happening on college campuses nationwide, may also have some ulterior motives. O'Brien quotes M. Vali Siadat, a math department chairman at Richard J. Daley College in Chicago who researched the subject: "Siadat said it's clear to him that students aren't doing well on in-class final exams. Otherwise, he said, professors wouldn't be eliminating them." Both sides of the debate are summed up nicely by another dean of education:

"You can interpret this in two ways," said Robert Bangert-Drowns, dean of the school of education at the University at Albany SUNY. "One way is, institutions for higher education are abdicating their responsibility for having high standards and demanding high performance from their students. But on the other hand, if you looked at a lot of final exams in courses you'd think, 'This is not a very valuable standard.' These tests ask the kind of questions that students may never be asked again in their lives, in detail that they may never be asked again in their lives."

Sources

- The Test Has Been Cancelled The Boston Globe

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