The Academic Work Ethic at Yale, 1939-1982

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> College is no bed of roses:
> Sunday pants of holy Moses!
> What that catalogue encloses!
> Studies of the '--gres' and '--oses,"
> Every human way to talk,
> All the animals that walk,
> Politics and Chinese history
> Adding to the ghastly mystery;
> Yea, cement and transportation,
> Tunneling and immigration
> Light and heat and their relation
> (Which, I guess, must be cremation!)
> What an awful situation
> I was in!
>
> "On First Looking into the Course-of-Study Magazine"
> Yale Daily News, April 21, 1928

> "You will never be this free again--make the most of it!" Kingman Brewster to the Yale freshmen, quoted in Yale Course Critique (New Haven, 1976), p26.

The Yale College curriculum was broader in 1976 than in 1928, but one challenge for undergraduates at all times was the same: how to choose wisely from dozens of interesting courses within and beyond their major field of study. The University supplied much useful information, especially the annual "blue book" catalog with its short descriptions of every course and

major. Undergraduates also could turn to a freshmen counselor (the graduate and professional school students who lived on the "Old Campus" with the one thousand freshmen), the Master and, after 1963, the Dean of their residential College, or a faculty advisor in their major. Those helpful sources of advice offered the views and opinions of people employed by Yale. Beyond friends, where could a student discover what his peers thought about Yale courses?

Occasionally the Yale Daily News, the campus newspaper, ran a few columns of brief comments on teachers and their courses, but in 1939 the paper sponsored a 48 page pamphlet, The Undergraduates' Guide to Courses in Yale College, 1939-1940, a tactful evaluation of 100 courses. Renamed the Course Critique in the next edition in 1947, the "Crit" (as it was called) appeared sporadically (1948, 1950, 1954) until it became an annual publication from 1962 to 1982.[1]

The Crits amplified the views of Yale students unafraid of hard work. Anyone associated with the News had a fierce work ethic (and, for the first three Crits, only the academically strongest were chosen as writers).[2] Many Crit staff writers were freshmen who were "heeling," the full semester tryout required of everyone who wanted to become a "Newsie." Many of the editors were ambitious sophomores who sought higher office in the News. Former Crit editor Jacques Leslie remembered "a lot of over-achievers" writing for the 1966 Crit.[3] So what follows is not

necessarily a "representative sample" of all Yale students' opinions in these years, but the Crit does offer a remarkable archive of serious students' views of curriculum and instruction.

The paperback Crits, varying in size from 44 to 216 pages, usually reviewed several hundred courses, primarily the lecture courses rather than seminars restricted to majors or courses with rigid prerequisites. Descriptions ranged from two to six paragraphs for each entry, and the prose, while often playful, was respectful. The layout was simple, with a few black and white sketches and, later, photographs of faculty here and there. After 1964, there were several lines of statistical information in addition to, and sometimes in place of, the profile of the course. Commentary on the majors appeared sporadically at first, and became an increasingly important feature of the Crits after the mid-1960s. The Crit staff usually explained how they assembled the information, and occasionally they included editorials on the strengths and weaknesses of undergraduate education at Yale.

I will say more about most of those features of the course critiques, but for now the point to highlight is the abundance of information they contained. They were not skimpy lists of numerical ratings or one liners lacking in detail. Each one was a richer source of guidance for the undergraduate in search of facts and opinions than can be found today on various commercial and nonprofit websites that rate faculty. During my years at Yale, the Crits from 1968 to 1972 were eagerly read before my classmates and I turned in our preliminary choice of classes and reread

during the two week "shopping period" at the start of each semester.

If the Crits assisted several generations of Yale students, they are now valuable for historians of higher education. I initially scanned the Crits to understand how university teaching changed over time. Apart from one study of Stanford University's history department and medical school, historians have neglected the topic of how professors professed (in contrast, there is a large literature on changes in how elementary and secondary school teachers taught).[4]

From the Crits, I learned of the prevalence of the "ten minute paper," an in-class quiz, sometimes announced, sometimes unannounced. Almost half of the courses in 1939/1940 had ten minute papers; 5% had 20 or 30 minute papers. Of the courses with quizzes, about half had them occasionally and the other half had them at least every other week, with six courses requiring ten minute papers twice weekly or more. Frequency varied by department (English and Economics assigned the most quizzes; Government and Philosophy did not use them at all) and by class (with all but one of the courses designed solely for freshmen requiring quizzes, weekly papers, or hourly tests).[5] There were fewer references to quizzes (that word had largely replaced "paper") by 1954, and in the next Crit, in 1962, there were even fewer--and one of the rare entries scolded as "out-of-place in a college course" the weekly quizzes on "picayune" facts in the

discussion sections of History 32 (Diplomacy). Gaddis Smith, who taught History 32 then, took 10 minute quizzes as a Yale undergraduate and therefore continued the tradition when he began teaching at Yale in 1961. In his opinion, the quiz "disappeared because of a growing consensus that it was a vestige of an old prep school approach to education—or even more of the old 18th and 19th century practice of recitations."[6]

The Crits don't tell us when the ten minute papers began--were they, as Smith imagined, the legacy of the oral "recitation" so popular in the 19th century, when professors grilled students on their homework and in-class assignments? The Crits don't tell us why the 10 minute papers faded away. But for an historian interested in knowing how teaching changed, the information about the papers will be valuable.

For understanding how professors professed, the Crits are also helpful for seeing patterns that did not change appreciably. For instance, the Crits could be read with a focus on a handful of faculty superstars, popular professors whose lectures or seminars were renown. They had forged a reputation on campus that was so strong that many students who had not taken the course knew of them. At Yale, these legends were almost always in one or another of the Humanities departments, especially French, Philosophy, Art History, Classics, and English (occasionally the course, not the instructor, was legendary, with the English Department's Daily Themes seminar the prime example).

The reasons why these professors were admired so keenly did

not change from one decade to the next. One cluster of admirable traits was limned by words like energy, verve, flair, vivacity, and intensity. Enthusiasm and passion made their large lecture courses (where most stars established and maintained their reputations) "inspiring" and "stimulating." Vincent Scully, for instance, was famous for "wielding his pointer like a lance" as he thumped the screen throughout his art history course in the huge Law School auditorium, "an appropriate setting for the lecturer's righteous plaints, damning evidence, impassioned pleas, and irrevocable value judgments." (1965 CC, p109) A second cluster of virtues stemmed from their awesome scope of knowledge. They seemed to know a great deal about everything. One student called philosopher Paul Weiss "an IBM machine surrounded with flesh." (1962 CC, p33) "Led by the expressive hands of the Master you learn that God is, but isn't perfect. The reason? Because God lacks Paul Weiss, that's why...Kant, Hegel, and Plato were not as smart as you had thought before; Paul Weiss will tell you why." (1963 CC, p57)

A closer analysis of the descriptions of the superstars would be useful, and my reading of the Crits leads me to predict that continuity rather than change would be a major finding from that inquiry. That would be worth knowing--it is too easy to assume that, in the late 1960s, there was a sudden shift of student preferences, with caring and accessible professors the new favorites.

Answering those questions is not the goal of this article. My interests have shifted from the history of teaching to another topic: shortcuts to learning. In what ways have students tried to make their education (or the acquisition of credentials) easier? Serious academic work requires time and effort; it rarely happens quickly or painlessly. In the face of those difficulties, what shortcuts have appealed to students?

I therefore examined the Course Critiques with two questions in mind: for the readers of the Crits, to what extent would the booklet point the way to easy courses, widely known as “guts”? For the writers and editors of the Crits, what do the booklets reveal about their beliefs in and embodiment of an academic work ethic? The rest of this article develops the answers to those two questions. I will argue that shortcuts from 1939 to 1982 were few and far between.

Gut hunter's brochure? The Crits from 1939 to 1968

Several Crits took pains to say they were not a "gut hunter's brochure," in the words of the 1950 editors. In the first Crit in 1939, the editors urged freshmen to "take as many advanced courses as you possibly can...as a rule the more advanced a course is, the better it is taught, the more likely you are to enjoy it and as a consequence get more out of it." (p39) The 1966 Crit began with a pledge that it was not "a guide to Yale's easiest courses." (p1) In various ways, that pledge was right.

Before the late 1960s, the reader had to work to figure out

which courses were the least demanding. For example, the 1963 volume explicitly identified more guts than had been spotlighted in previous Crits--and the number was **two**. Literature and Society (Sociology 26a) was described as Yale's "biggest gut." All that was necessary for a good grade was "handing in an old English or American Studies paper and reading a little of the material assigned." (1963 CC, p73) The description of the other gut was wittier but just as clear: "Signing up for American Studies 40 (Economics 39) is like joining a men's business club. Classes are exclusive (limited to juniors and seniors), are spiced with numerous light anecdotes, demand a minimum of mental exertion, and meet at the noon cocktail hour." (1963 CC, p5)

Sometimes the evaluations of easy courses stopped short of labeling them guts. After chaplain Sidney Lovett toughened his Old Testament "Cokes and Smokes" course, moving it from the Dwight Hall lounge to a classroom, the workload was still "not too hard and the marking is very fair." (1954 CC, p104) The reader could reasonably conclude that this course would not be onerous, even if it was no longer "notorious" for its ease, as Bill Buckley, a former News editor, wrote in God and Man at Yale.[7] In a typical Crit, the number of entries that highlighted "not too hard" courses was slight, rarely more than five percent of the curriculum.

When the gut-seeker found the occasional mention of a very easy course, he read entries that usually mocked either the course

or the person who would take it. For instance, the 1965 sketch of the English major included advice to "stick to the lecture courses in the thirties through the sixties [Yale undergraduate courses were numbered from 10 to 99]. The reading is usually so light that you'll be able to do it all before any exam. You can hand in your two- or five-page papers a couple of days late (even though they only take a couple of hours to write) and still get 80's on them." For the 19th century English novel course, the Crit even claimed that “reading only story outlines or classic comics” would suffice. But those words were addressed to "those who don't give much of a damn" and the next ten paragraphs offered suggestions "for those who do care about English literature and who want to be challenged," including the warning that those easy lecture courses were often "dull and uninteresting.” (1965 CC, p60) Nearly all other department overviews shared that orientation, describing how to get the most from the options available within the major, not dwelling on how to slide by with the least amount of work. Several overviews bristled at erroneous rumors that the major was easy.

Also frustrating the gut-seeker was the lack of information that Crits after 1965 included. Important details about workload and grading were rare. Although the editors and staff distributed questionnaires for every Crit except the 1963 volume, there were no statistics included in any of the seven Crits before 1965, apart from two early Crits that carried a line for each course with the number of tests, papers, and quizzes. With the addition of average grade (1965), number of tests and quizzes (1965), hours

per week spent on the course (1968), and ratings of the "quality" of each course (1968), the later Crits offered more information. The quantitative data supplemented rather than supplanted the write ups—-they never disappeared—-but now there was more statistical evidence for the gut seeker in search of an easy course. Even so, there was still little specific information on some crucial topics: Were the section leaders hard or easy? What books and articles were required for the course? What was the distribution of grades, not just the average? How did students rate the intellectual demands of the course? All of those questions would be answered by Crits throughout the 1970s, but before then, and especially before 1965, the Crits did not systematically ask or answer those questions.

Many entries made no explicit references to either ease or difficulty. The writers focused on the skill of the instructor, the caliber of the readings, distinctive features of the course, and whatever else the authors wanted to include. For example, here is the review of Edmund Morgan's well-respected lecture course on colonial American history:

> History 30a, as conducted by Professor E.S. Morgan, has often been rated as one of Yale's finest courses. Unfortunately, Mr. Morgan, an outstanding authority on colonial America in his own right, will be on leave this year, and it is not presently known who his replacement will be.
>
> The course considers the origins and development of the American civilization from the earliest settlements to the signing of the Constitution in 1797. In particular, the Revolutionary period, beginning with the Stamp Act crisis of 1764, is examined in great detail.
>
> A fixed pattern has not yet been set for this year's course,

but under Mr. Morgan three lectures per week were given, and a reading list assigned. Examinations usually were based evenly on material covered in lecture and in reading.

As a lecturer, Mr. Morgan is highly competent, enthusiastic, and possesses the gift of making his subject "come alive" for his students. Without exception, his lectures are clear and well-organized. His students consider the lectures "excellent," "informative," and even "exciting." On student commented that the lectures were "refreshing" because Mr. Morgan "is continually putting forth new and original interpretations."

Mr. Morgan's approach has not been one of assigning a survey text to be memorized, but one rather of exposing the students to original documents, of teaching history "from the inside out," of letting the student come to his own conclusions. One does not "take" History 30; he becomes instead a "historian" who learns as much about historical technique as he does about colonial history.

The first semester of the course includes one hour test and a final, in addition to a five-page paper. The second semester is arranged somewhat differently, with a 15-minute oral exam and a 15-page term paper in lieu of the hour test. (1962 CC, p18)

Hard or easy course? The writer did not offer his opinion.

Sometimes the writers did discuss aspects of the workload and the grading. The opinions required interpretation by the reader because usually the appraisals were qualified rather than unambiguous. For examples of those comments, consider the courses that President Bush took when he was at Yale from 1965 to 1968.[8] Of his 28 courses, 19 were profiled by the Crits he might have read. Of the 19, eight were as neutral as the History 30a write-up. Of the other eleven, five mentioned the ease of part or all of the course, three highlighted difficulties, three spoke of both ease and difficulty—and nearly all of them required interpretation of words and phrases whose meanings were not self-evident.

Bush would have seen the word "light" three times in the descriptions of the readings for European diplomacy, American oratory, and Mass Communications.[9] Similar evaluations for two

other courses were hedged. Some students considered the books "on the easy side" in English 15 even though they read Crime and Punishment as well as The Red and the Black, two long novels. Anthropology 25 was "not-too-rigorous" but it featured a "barrage of quizzes." (Bush's grades underscore the point that what is easy for one student might not be easy for another: his marks in the courses considered easy by the Crit were lower than his grades in the courses deemed hard--77.5 versus 83).

The same hedging of opinion was in the entries for his harder courses. Philosophy 15b (Logic) "takes a certain amount of work, a lot of thought (at times), and for a high grade, a good deal of study before each of the five exams" (Bush earned his highest Yale grade, an 88, in this course). Spanish literature had "fairly large doses of reading" and a senior seminar in History required "moderately heavy" reading. And the three ambiguous entries waffled even more. Readings were "long but not difficult" in American Studies, "indispensable but not heavy" in Professor Blum's 20th century American history. Tests in Introduction to American political systems were "graded strictly" but "curved generously."

Bush and his classmates could have picked up some useful information from the entries that addressed the importance of attendance. One of the most powerful shortcuts a student can discover is the extent to which the tests derive from the lectures. If they do, then steady attendance can minimize the need to read everything, and of course the opposite is also true—

careful reading of the assignments can make attendance less crucial if the tests do not stress the lectures. Of the 19 entries on Bush's courses, five of them spoke to this matter, with each comment offering different slants on the relationship between the exams and the lectures.

And there was another useful tidbit in several entries that spoke to the difficulty of the courses. The sketch of the Astronomy survey referred to a new textbook "whereas in the past the reading has almost been a private joke." The Crits sometimes cautioned readers that courses formerly considered simple were no longer a snap. The piece on Bush's Logic class made that point forcefully. Until 1962, Philosophy 15b had required "regurgitation of definitions with some additional problems for fun and profit" but it changed so much when Mr. James and Ms. Dickoff taught it that "whatever you have previously heard about Philosophy 15b, you might as well forget," the 1963 Crit warned. Two years later, the Crit noted that "gut-seekers who took this introductory course in logic with the idea of high marks and little work" were "shocked" by its difficulty, "sweating through such delightful items as the difference between a WAF (pronounced "woof") and LAF (pronounced "laugh")."

During and before Bush's years at Yale, there were very few other Crit insights on how to ease the workload. References to readings that could take the place of the course assignments were rare. It was unusual to see this sort of tip: for the History of

Ancient and Modern Philosophy course, unassigned secondary sources were as valuable on the final exam as the primary sources assigned by Professor Robert Brumbaugh. (1963 CC, p.54) In the one review that referred to “outline books” of the novels assigned in the tough Epic and Novel course, the “very guilty” students made “unhealthy” use of them only because they faced Moby Dick in a week and a half, The Brothers Karamazov in two weeks, and Don Quixote over the Christmas break. (1965 CC, p62)[10]

Moreover, the Crits lacked one of the most valuable clues for a gut seeker: the extent to which a course's readings duplicated assignments in other courses. Only in the 1962 Crit did an entry mention course overlap, and the language there is noteworthy: "It is warned, however, that those who have taken Philosophy 10a, Political Science 15b, History 10, or their survey brothers, may find overlap in certain areas of Mr. Baumer's [European Intellectual History] course." The word "warned" cast the sentence as a defense of academic exertion, although it could obviously be read as an invitation to the opposite. Because only one Crit from 1940 to 1968 listed the books assigned for each course, the gut seeker had to find out on his own what one of my friends discovered: the three intellectual history, political science, and philosophy courses that assigned Plato's Republic (yet he did so not for ease but because he sincerely thought the dialogue had to be read over and over to be understood).

What do we learn from this look at the course Crits from 1940 to 1968? The sweeping generalizations in the print and

electronic media about Yale in the years of the two Bush Presidents—the alleged lack of undergraduate interest in serious academic exertion—are too simple. There is no question that some students needed to hear that "Yale was not to be admired merely for its superb collection of striped and polka-dot ties," the rebuke Alexander Witherspoon gave his Milton class in the mid 1950s when they could not answer his question about an angel in Paradise Lost.[11] But there was always a large cadre of serious undergraduates, even if Andover was steering its best students to Harvard and its jocks to Yale.[12] The Crits were one way the conscientious students were heard on campus (and almost elsewhere—the 1968 editors wanted to replicate the Crit on other campuses but the business managers of the Daily News considered it too risky).[13] When they spoke out, they were not willing to coddle the gut seekers. If there was information that could be used in a search for the path of least resistance, the Crits were on balance a defense of academic rigor, not a flight from it.

The Academic Work Ethic among the Course Critique Staff

Once the Crits began including statistical information with each entry, life for a gut seeker improved. The 1965 Crit began this shift, as we've seen, and it soon accelerated. From 1968 on, he knew the hours per week students devoted to each course. The 1969 Crit reported the average percentage of assigned readings done along with the percentages for attendance. In 1970, the Crit's ten item survey distributed to all undergraduates ended

with this question: "How would you describe the depth of understanding, or intellectual rigor, necessary to do well in the course?" Instead of publishing just the average grade (as the 1965, 1966, and 1968 Crits did), the booklets from 1970 on included the grade distributions in the Honors/High Pass/Pass/Fail system introduced in September, 1967. There was more and more statistical information on the discussion group and labs in large lecture courses, and write-ups throughout the 1970s described and evaluated individual teaching assistants.

Those changes began in the same years as a major shift in Yale admissions policies and practices. The national search for talent intensified after 1964 as "Inky" Clark and his staff visited hundreds of previously neglected high schools. SAT scores and GPAs rose, private school admissions fell, and the campus ethos put more value on academic accomplishment as it de-emphasized fraternities and sports.[14] When a Yale alumnus heard that Yale students had no slang for “weenies” by 1970, he was stunned, then concluded, “In that case, they’re all weenies.”[15] The Yale undergraduates were smarter and smarter, yet the Crit, at first glance, seemed to make it easier and easier to avoid hard work.

By my recollection, it was not that way. Many of us were so committed to our majors that we occasionally sought an easier course so we could devote more, not less, time to the major. As a senior I took a Philosophy class that was less demanding than the

other four Philosophy courses I'd already had in order to spend more hours reading microfilmed newspapers from the early 1850s for my senior thesis on the demise of the Whig Party in Ohio. Or we searched for an interesting course to satisfy the (very modest) requirement that 12 of our 36 courses be outside the "division" of our major. We were certainly mindful of our grades and knew that law, medical, and graduate school admissions were becoming harder each year. But the Crit was a reaffirmation of our work ethic, not a temptation to ease up. Most of us liked the spirit of the 1969 Crit entry on French Professor Victor Brombert, who "believes in assigning a good deal of reading, and he expects you to do it—and that's not such a bad idea." (1969 CC, p88)

Rather than rest my case on personal experience or speculate on the motivations of other Yale students who used the Crits in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I'll focus on the Crits themselves and argue that they reveal a heightened commitment to academic intensity, not shortcuts. If they could be used to find easy courses, the editors consistently tried hard to accomplish other ends. My justification for that assertion is the evolution of the Crits. There were four significant changes from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s (and beyond-—the nature of the Crits hardly varied from the early 1970s through 1982) that all reflect the academic work ethic of the Crit staff.

The first of those changes in the Crits was a sudden emphasis on departments, majors, and special programs. Before 1965, only the 1948 Crit had sketches of the majors, and they were just two

or three paragraphs. From 1965 on, the profiles were considerably longer, usually six to nine paragraphs, and more outspoken in their views of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and the faculty.

For a sense of what these profiles included, consider the 1973 sketch of Religious Studies. It began by addressing misconceptions of the department: "It is not a branch of the chaplain's office, and has no intention of offering "how to" courses in spirituality. Neither is it an extension of the Divinity School (although the department shares some courses and faculty with the Divinity School)." More majors went to law, medical, or graduate school than entered the seminary. As with so many department profiles, the text then stressed the options available <u>within</u> the major. The requirements were modest--12 semester courses, a junior or senior year seminar restricted to majors, and a senior essay. Students could select from many areas because "the program is largely what you will make of it...depending on your point of view, the department is a confused catch-all or a purposeful, albeit gloriously diverse, melange of disciplines" ranging among textual studies, history of religious traditions, philosophy and theology, ethics, and sociology. Adding to the diversity was the option to take graduate seminars in the Divinity School "if you knock on the right doors long and hard enough. Get a Divinity School catalogue." The writer then became more judgmental, praising the Director of Undergraduate

Studies, applauding the departmental policy of including a student on each department committee, and chiding a chaired professor for short and uninspired comments on term papers (after 30 pages, "I don't understand much of this, but excellent research").

Readers of the Crits learned that the shape of many majors was malleable because the fields themselves were amorphous. In Sociology, "there are no Great Men in the field who hand down True Judgments from their pedestals. The few Great Men who are on pedestals hand down Uncertainties" and so the savvy juniors should "make their own programs" within the major. (1968 CC, p158) In Political Science, the department's quantitative theorists had little in common with the political philosophers (most undergraduates preferred the latter to the former). Interdisciplinary majors were especially boundless. In the demanding Political Science and Economy major, the juniors faced a daunting reading list of 160 articles and books, and, without much coaching on how to synthesize the works, took at the end of the year an externally written and graded exam. "The experience can be frightening, or exhilarating, or stupefying-or perhaps all three." (1968 CC, p138). Even one's fellow adventurers might not be of help: in the prestigious Scholar of the House option, the fifteen seniors (freed from all course requirements to focus on a year long project) initially gathered for fortnightly dinner meetings to discuss their work. Those dinners stopped in 1967 and were replaced by four groupings (Politics, History, Creative Arts, and Humanities). The Crit said the Scholars of the House found the

new cluster meetings "an utter waste of time" because the projects differed so much. (1968 CC, p157)[16]

Nearly all entries made the same point: Yale departments offered many fascinating courses but the burden lay on each student to avoid fragmentation. A core curriculum was not what a Yale education featured; freedom and flexibility were its hallmarks.[17] The Crits offered advice on how to put together a coherent major in light of the enormous variety facing each student. They recognized that the choice of a major and the choices within that major were more consequential than a smart selection of electives to fulfill distributional requirements. The frequent exhortations to forge a meaningful major were hardly what true gut seekers would have written or wanted to read.

Was the upshot of acting on those entries the "student as consumer," a phrase heard more and more often late in the 20th century? My sense--and this is the second of the four changes I see--is that the Crits by 1970 went beyond consumption. That had always been possible earlier--leaf through the booklet and shop. But in 1965, the bits of advice in the profile of the English major urged undergraduates to do more than pick courses shrewdly. "Find at least one good friend on the English faculty and cultivate his friendship" and "wangle your way into two" seminars at a time were straws in the wind, signs of what would be more extensive within five years: Crit advice on how to negotiate, not just consume.

The guidance was particularly explicit in an unprecedented 1970 "Advice to Freshmen" section. Some of the hints were about courses: Consider upper level seminars, take courses in lesser known departments, know that science lab courses require many hours. But some of the tips were strategic: Talk with upper classmen, ask upper level instructors for information, switch discussion sections if dissatisfied--and if refused, change the schedule to create conflicts with the unwanted section. (1970 CC, v). What a contrast to the discretion described in Calvin Trillin's reminiscence: "Achievement was admired at Yale in the fifties, but you didn't want to be caught trying."[18]

Entries for several majors celebrated rather than discouraged what this writer called "hardnosed maneuvering":

> The student must be a scrapper, on his toes, with all his eyes and ears open. While harassed by the maddening lack of coordination among the arts at Yale, he is in a good position to play Yale's own brand of Supermarket Sweep--collecting courses from the Drama School when available, from the Music School, and from the undergraduate offerings, especially [residential] college seminars. By careful selection and hardnosed maneuvering, one can tailor a very satisfactory major. (1971 CC, p50)

Students designing their own major ("Division IV") needed, not surprisingly, "a modicum of political acumen as well as persistence" and so "the student trying to get a Divisional IV major feels a little like Rock Hudson chasing Doris Day: he knows he'll get her in the end if he's persistent, and if she doesn't find out he's a total no-good. And he knows that when he wins her, he'll receive benefits the audience doesn't see." The Crit offered advice on how to write a successful Division IV proposal,

"often more a political document than an accurate representation of what a prospective major will do." For instance, two students proposed as their Division IV major the study of revolutionary thought:[19]

> They later found out that their plans had been almost identical. However, one proposal discussed revolution in detailed terms; reportedly, the Committee rebuffed it in a combination of the kind of perception and obtuseness common at Yale, with remarks like, "My God, he wants to study how to make revolutions. That's no subject for a major." The second proposal was interspersed with references to dialectics, contradictions, and the "People's Epistemology"; its author was admitted to the major. (1971 CC, p49)

The insights on how to work within and around official rules and regulations were not offered as tickets to high grades for little work. Instead, the Crits supplied pointers that required energy and commitment to put into effect, and presupposed purposefulness on the part of the student who would undertake those negotiations.

A third sign of the seriousness in the late 1960s and early 1970s Crits was the publication of editorials between 1968 and 1973 (there were none before and none after). All eight essays criticized one aspect or another of the Yale curriculum and the Yale faculty. Three took the University to task for slighting teaching, especially the lack of required course evaluations. One writer proposed peer review by teams of three to five colleagues; the other outlined an elaborate system in which one student in each class and a Crit staff writer would compile and share the data with the instructor, invite his written reply, publish everything in the Crit, and give copies to each department where

they would count in tenure decisions. A third editorial focused on teaching assistants, noting the lack of feedback and stressing the importance of training TAs to teach, a practice recommended in 1972 by the Yale faculty but adopted by only six departments by 1973.

Three other editorials took up crucial questions about the undergraduate curriculum. The 1968 Crit editor lamented the "unwarranted degree of specialization" most undergraduates pursued. He quoted Alfred Whitehead on the "fatal disconnection of subjects which kills the vitality" of coursework, noting that the Crit itself "thrives" on those disconnections--a more coherent curriculum would, he admitted, reduce the market for each Crit. (1968 CC, v, vi) In 1969, Bill Henry lamented the absence of introductory survey courses for non-majors. "Psychology 10 is splendid for future researchers, but often an utter bore" for everyone else, and Biology 11 was "sheer torture for poets and politicos." (1969 CC, v) A 1971 Crit editorial announced that "courses (and therefore this Critique) are relatively unimportant to your Yale education." Thomas Milch told readers to "put down your Blue Book and stash the Physics homework." What mattered were "guest seminars and lectures, campus activities, dining hall bull sessions, individual reading (begin with Alice in Wonderland) and perhaps even mixers and road trips":

> Have you ever examined the Weekly Calendar? A sample from last week: Yoga, a Barbershop Quartet, Israeli folk dancing, open air poetry reading, meditation sessions, a debate on legalized gambling, and lectures on Chartres Cathedral, urban planning, DNA tumor viruses...among the guests who visited

> Yale that same week and who were accessible to _any_ persistent Yalie: Albert Gore, John Turner, David Halberstam, Charles Goodell, Walter Fauntroy, and Kate Millett. There were also flicks of all kinds and college dramat performances and blue grass music... (1971 CC, ix)

The two most far-reaching editorials claimed that Yale education "breeds dishonesty" and "superficiality." Both said that requiring five courses per semester (modified in 1967 so graduation required 36, not 40, credits) was the problem, but the answer had to go beyond reducing the term load to four. For one editor, the solution required either a trimester or a 4/1/4 schedule, tougher grading (no more than 40% of all grades should be Honors or High Pass), and "rid Yale of its more blatant guts" so no one could pass a course by last minute cramming. For the other editor, the solution required nothing less than the abolition of grades and course requirements. "Rather than encouraging intellectual escapism, this freedom will allow a student to become truly involved in subjects of interest to him without the structural demands of three or four other courses which hold little interest for him at the time." (1971 CC, vi, vii, ix)

Whatever their prospects for adoption, all the proposals addressed important issues that were not as transient as the late 1960s pleas on other campuses for "relevant" courses, student governance, or politically fashionable readings. Moreover, several editorials called into question or would have modified the Crit itself. They took Yale education more seriously than the Crit, seeing the latter as a means to the improvement of the former, not

as an end in itself.

The fourth sign of a strong work ethic within the Crit is the greater methodological sophistication of its information gathering and analysis. From 1966 on, the staff made use of a campus computer to analyze the questionnaires. Editors increasingly referred to statistical analyses that would have been impossible without the computer—for instance, in 1968 the staff calculated the standard deviations for the replies to each question, and omitted statistics whenever the standard deviation was unacceptably high.

Refinements and fine-tunings continued year after year. In 1970, there was an appendix with the statistics for smaller courses that did not receive write-ups. The questionnaire scale was revised (and in my opinion toughened) to outstanding, good, satisfactory, tolerable, inadequate, and poor, with each course receiving, along with the numbers, a boldfaced single word rating (from those six questionnaire choices) with pluses and minuses included whenever the course was near the top or bottom of the range. In addition, the Crit included an unprecedented number of spring term courses from the previous year. The flurry of modifications and adjustments continued in the early 1970s, with editors sometimes revising previous initiatives, sometimes adding totally new features, such as the "Ten Best Teachers" section in the 1973 CC. The innovations often required strenuous work. For instance, Dave Eisenbud created a Fortran program to analyze the

data for the 1975 Crit (a program he tried to sell to other schools), and at one point, he had 80,000 punch cards in the back of his station wagon.[20] Several editors worked on the Crits throughout spring break, when Suzanne Koven turned down fifth row Bruce Springsteen tickets to finish the layout.[21]

The annual tweaking of the methods, as well as the clear explanations of those increasingly complicated procedures, demonstrated the academic work ethic within the Crit staff, signalling their unwillingness to pursue the shortcuts that some of their readers sought in the booklet and in their Yale education. The contents of the Crits over the years underscored the enduring commitment of Yale students to rigorous education, a commitment that strengthened rather than weakened in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This spirit was captured by the sign above the envelopes where students in 1971 dropped their Crit questionnaire: "Yale Course Critique: Give A Damn!"[22]

Afterword: The Tone of On Line Teacher Ratings Today

From their computers, undergraduates today can retrieve other students' ratings of faculty. A half dozen national and countless local websites offer fast access to classmates' opinions of instructors at hundreds of community colleges, colleges, and universities. A typical site includes, for each course, as many brief comments--one to three sentences--as students care to offer, with larger courses naturally drawing the most submissions. Alongside the comments are several numerical

ratings of various aspects of the course and the instructor (at the website used most frequently at my university, students rate us on easiness, clarity, and helpfulness).

The comments can be unsettling. At Williams College, the campus computer network's "Factrak" site attracted predominately positive appraisals of the Williams faculty, but the negative reviews were "so scathing they seem to be competing in the art of the putdown." The Dean of the faculty called Factrak "incredibly humiliating" to the faculty (and to the President, who one student claimed had a "Napoleon complex").[23]

In contrast, the tone of the Crits was always tactful and considerate. It was rare to read truly nasty or cruel remarks about any teacher. If a writer turned in a snide review, the editors rewrote it. As 1963 editor Jon Von Dyke recalled, "Our goal was to be constructive, and to avoid personal attacks or cheap shots."[24] The exceptions—an entry as hostile as "horribly boring" sections from "pathetic" TAs—targeted graduate students (1969 CC, p150).

There were two aspects of the Crits that are instructive for, and largely absent from, today's online ratings.

First, the campus newspaper oversaw the Crits. Although legally and financially independent of Yale, the Daily News was unmistakably written by and for Yale readers. It was read by faculty as well as students, and it relied on cordial relations with Yale administrators for the information and interviews

necessary for many articles. For instance, Kingman Brewster met weekly with the leaders of the News (and during his year as Chair of the News, Brewster valued the frequent meetings he had with the administration and many faculty).[25] The Crits, therefore, were not as autonomous as the larger contemporary teacher rating websites, whose owners typically have no institutional connections with, or loyalty to, any college. The Crit staffers were obliged to write as responsibly as other Newsies. If they had not, the paper's good relations with the Yale faculty and administration would have been jeopardized.

There is a second reason for the lack of malice in the Crits. The students hoped the faculty would read and use each Crit, even as the students were always the main audience. Many entries included suggestions for improving the course or the major, and the entries without explicit advice were nevertheless informative for the faculty readers. Before the mid-1970s, Yale professors were not required to distribute and collect course evaluations. The Crit was therefore the only form of course evaluation on the campus, unlike the contemporary on-line ratings. "We pretended to be oblivious to the critiques," Professor Gaddis Smith recalled, "but I suspect I was normal in looking with considerable curiosity at what the critique had to say about my course and the courses of others."[26] Vituperative write ups would have alienated the audience the Crit sought to reach and influence.

To know what can happen in the absence of those two

conditions, there is another case in point from long before the unpleasantness at Williams. It is instructive to hear the sardonic tone of the comments on Yale courses in issues of the 1929 and 1930 Yale Daily News. In those years, the paper published brief, and irreverent observations from "Jonathan" on 66 courses. Approximately two thirds were praised, but the tone in the descriptions of the less attractive fare was barbed. Introductory Psychology was dismissed as "a new science of uncertain value as taught here. One or two people usually quit the course for more fertile fields after a few days of it. Survivors unite in envying them."[27] The same type of evaluations appeared in 1930, and the commentary was even cattier--"about as light and attractive as mince pie" (Elementary General Chemistry); "very useful, very difficult, very dull" (Principles of Accounting); "the best way to learn practically nothing about practically all the philosophers" (History of Philosophy); "well, you won't be left out of the conversation when the talk turns to one-way streets and trolley cars" (The Modern City).[28]

At that time, the News made it clear that the columns were one man's personal opinions. Unlike the Crits, the editors did not initiate, edit, or endorse the material. Furthermore, there was no effort to offer constructive suggestions to improve the curriculum, and the Yale Alumni Weekly reported that the faculty were "bubbling" with anger at the columns, especially resentful of the ratings of each course from 1 (very easy) through 5 (very

difficult).[29]

The history of the Yale Crits, in short, suggests that affiliation with the campus newspaper (or perhaps another well-respected campus organization) and concern for faculty reactions would enhance the caliber of the ratings now available on the internet. Both conditions extend incentives to write persuasively rather than peevishly, to print opinions that are valued by others as accurate and helpful. The evaluators are themselves evaluated—as individuals by their editors, as a group by their readers. Could the anonymity of online ratings give way to more transparent evaluations, where students stood rather than hid behind their claims? The result could be what one former Crit editor called "the responsibility of citizenship" throughout his staff.[30]

[1] The Yale University Archives has the Course Critiques published in 1939/40, 1947, 1948, 1950, 1954, 1962, 1963, 1965, 1966, 1968 to 1977, 1979, and 1982. Based on my interviews with 21 former editors and publishers, I believe the Archives has all five issues published before 1962. It lacks issues published in 1964, 1967, 1978, 1980, and 1981. The Crit reappeared in approximately half of the years after 1985, no longer sponsored by the Daily News. In this article I do not discuss the recent Crits, which have been one third the size of their predecessors.

[2] In 1939, the writers were all on the Dean's list. The 1947 editors said they "relied" on students with high grade point averages, and the 1948 editors asked the department chairmen to pick "outstanding men" to oversee the entries for each department.

[3] Interview, March 12, 2002.

[4] For Stanford, see Larry Cuban, How Scholars Trumped Teachers (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999); for elementary and secondary schools, see Cuban's How Teachers Taught (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).

[5] George Pierson, who knew Yale as a student, professor, department chair, and historian, considered ten minute papers, along with required attendance and recall exams, "the favored medicine" of the "old guard" faculty of the 1920s. George Wilson Pierson, Yale: The University College, 1921-1937 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 257.

[6] Email correspondence, August 1, 2002.

[7] William F. Buckley, God and Man at Yale (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), 7.

[8] His transcript is reprinted in "Dept. of Aptitude" in The New Yorker, November 8, 1999, 30.

[9] The American oratory instructor, Rollin Osterweis, also attracted Bush for a second course, 19th century Southern history, an elective well known on campus for its ease.

[10] Only twice did the Crits carry advertisements for "outline books," one for Yale Student Outlines—"comprehensive, essential review—written by Yale men for your courses—call LO2-0763"—and the other for dozens of titles in the Barnes and Noble College Outline Series. In October, 1968, I spent three dollars for the mimeographed Student Outline for Robert Crowder's introductory psychology course, a course I found overwhelming with or without the outline book at hand.

[11] Lewis Lapham, "Quarrels with Providence" in Yale Alumni Magazine, March 2001, 90. For more on the Yale English Department in the 1950s, see Alvin Kernan, In Plato's Cave (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), ch. 5.

[12] John Perry Miller, Creating Academic Settings (New Haven: J. Simeon Press, 1991), 69.

[13] Interview with Hunter Morrison, May 3, 2002.

[14] Geoffrey Kabaservice, The Guardians Kingman Brewster, His Circle, and the Rise of the Liberal Establishment (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), ch. 7; Jerome Karabel, The Chosen The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), chs. 11-12; Nicholas Lemann, The Big Test The Secret History of the American Meritocracy (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1999), ch. 12.

[15] Calvin Trillin, Remembering Denny (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1993), 64.

[16] Crit coverage of interdisciplinary majors lagged the growth of

those programs. They were flourishing before the Crit devoted much attention to them. From only three interdisciplinary majors in 1939/40, the number rose to 15 in 1954/55 and 20 in 1962/63. The Crit included only two write ups of those options in the 1954 and 1962 editions. By 1970, in contrast, 20 of the 53 Crit entries on majors were devoted to interdisciplinary programs.

[17] For the only overview of the curriculum in these years, see Daniel Catlin Jr., Liberal Education at Yale: The Yale College Course of Study, 1945-1978 (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1982).

[18] Trillin, Remembering Denny, 42. For similar perspectives, see "Inside Eli or How to Get On At Yale" (Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University), a short anonymous pamphlet from the 1950s.

[19] In this vignette and in others, the Crits gossiped about the faculty. In the 1971 Crit, the most candid issue, students learned that the architecture faculty "spend half of their time quarreling among themselves," that several Drama instructors taught gratis, that Division IV advisors received no workload reduction, and that anyone with a project and an advisor in American Studies would be admitted to the Intensive Major even though the catalog said admissions was competitive. These backstage glimpses could enhance the negotiating skills that were promoted by the Crits of the late '60s and early '70s.

[20] Interview, May 23, 2002.

[21] Email correspondence, August 27, 2004.

[22] Interview with Fred Crall, March 27, 2002.

[23] "Student Web site for rating faculty drives a rift at Williams" in The Boston Globe, June 3, 2002, A-1.

[24] Interview, February 13, 2002.

[25] Kabaservice, The Guardians, 57, 159, 285, 292.

[26] Email correspondence, August 1, 2002. Wilson Nolen (Crit editor in 1947) heard that favorable Crit reviews helped one assistant professor earn tenure (Interview, January 28, 2002), and former editor Mark Capaldini said that some Yale faculty included on their vita the Crit designation as one of Yale's Ten Best Faculty (Interview, April 30, 2002). John Morton Blum was pleased rather than annoyed when the Crit wrote, in a favorable review, "Blum—biased about everything" A Life With History (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 149.

[27] Yale Daily News, April 20, 1929 (Yale University Archives).

[28] Yale Daily News, April 14, 18, 21, 23, 1930.

[29] Yale Alumni Weekly, April 26, 1929 (Yale University Archives).

[30] Interview, Mark Capaldini, April 30, 2002.

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