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Competitive edge in college apps cut by lack of recognition

It's that time of year. Seniors are filling out Common Applications and sending them off, their hopes set on a spot at their dream school. They painstakingly take time to answer each question with the utmost caution.

List your current courses.
Have any of your relatives worked at a university?
Then they reach the class rank bar and have to select N/A.

Then the activities tab, where they're unable to mention a letter in anything other than sports or performing arts.

These disadvantages give students a less competitive edge.

While we've always associated them with athletics or performing arts, varsity letters can also be awarded to students who have excelled in other arenas such as robotics, student publications and science or technology. Other schools nationwide (and even here in Michigan) recognize such endeavors. With so many of our students achieving excellence in academic fields, why aren't our varsity jackets crowded?

Varsity letters could be beneficial. And so could a class ranking system.

For a school to not use a class ranking system isn't common practice. If it were, it wouldn't be a question on almost every academic form. Without a ranking, how can our seniors expect to be on a level playing field with other applicants when so many college applications ask for it?

Schools that have diminished or altogether eliminated class ranking systems have done so hoping students will focus on individual academic achievements rather than where they fall in the pecking order.

Also, with the increase in students taking advanced placement or international baccalaureate courses, school officials may be worried that emphasizing class rank might push students to overload themselves, since these courses can bump a GPA above 4.0.

An unorthodox class ranking system or not having one implemented at all can pose problems for college admission officers, too. Consider the traffic jam that occurs at the very top because so many students have high GPAs. It can make it hard for schools to distinguish one from another.

Or what about another scenario in which every student is ranked in the top 50 percent? Or a student is ranked in the number-one spot at one school, but another student at another school in the same spot has a higher GPA?

Instituting a class ranking system for students offers an additional way to judge a student's academics when the grading standards vary in their degree of rigor. Without a class ranking system in place for some schools, many college admissions officers are left to rely more on standardized test scores.

When students are unable to give their class ranks, they appear less competitive and could be at a disadvantage, especially when applying to universities which admit students based on class ranking, such as Texas A&M, Tufts University or Swarthmore College.

Class rank is not trivial by any means and isn't always a valid measure of academic achievement given that there is an unevenness in rigor and grading scales across schools.

The last class valedictorian North recognized was in 2001. After that, the ranking system and class valedictorian were done away with and replaced by the academic hall of fame, which is where the top students in a class have gone since then.

The academic hall of fame is an excellent reward for the most premier academic students to be recognized for their achievements as opposed to awarding one class valedictorian. And while the student body is very appreciative for having the academic hall of fame to show off their accolades, not knowing their own class rank could hinder their college application process.

To show everybody else what we do here, we should display our students and their successes—athletic, performing and academic—in the best light possible.



Sympathize with the stressers

Sarah Wietecha
ASSISTANT EDITOR

“Why weren't you in class yesterday?”

“I had a doctor's appointment.” “I had a family emergency.” “I was on vacation.”

If there were a ranking for the most commonly used excuses, these would top the list.

Absences are a usual routine to many teens with busy schedules, and the number taken tends to increase as homecoming rolls around and students adjust to their new workload with the new school year.

Many students have been diagnosed with “chronic absence” at some point in their high school careers. These are the students who don't bother to show up to class regularly, and when they do show up, are not engaged in the lesson.

So how does this vicious cycle begin?

Many would be quick to judge and say that the student is just lazy. One of the dilemmas in the American education system is the ingrained idea that if a learner is not giving 110% all the time, he is deemed unqualified to do a job, and is written off by fellow peers or teachers. Sometimes one needs a “mental break day” to maintain sanity amongst the hustle and bustle of everyday life. This endless cycle takes a toll on a teenager's mental stability.

I've always had a question pertaining to this cycle that has never quite been answered in the 12 years of my education: why isn't stress treated the same in schools as physical illness?

If a student stayed home from school because they had the flu, almost everyone would be sympathetic and understand their absence. Now turn the tables. Say a student with little sleep and stress overload stayed home from school because he or she can't find the strength get out of bed. Would those around them be as sympathetic and understandable as they were to the student with the flu? Not likely.

Well, why not? Personally, I don't have enough stress to have to take a day off school. I and others without this weight on their shoulders can't fully comprehend how it feels. But we will try. Picture yourself slowly starting to lose enjoyment in everything you do because of your workload. Basically having an existential crisis every day, and having your mind slowly unravel as you drift into an empty consciousness due to lack of sleep and stress overload.

Keep that thought in your head and go back to the original statement: is an absence for stress understandable?

I empathize with kids who are out of school for anxiety or stress related reasons. Unfortunately, I've often found myself looking at others and saying, “Well, they aren't REALLY sick. It's just an excuse to get out of a test.” Is this right of me? Do I really know why they skipped that test?

Sometimes I question if my own moral compass is skewed. I often wonder if I have become blind and ignorant to how others feel. We are all guilty of accusing another student for skipping out of laziness. We categorize them. They are the ones who show up only when they feel like it. This is the norm. However, as fellow peers, we must try to understand them, not judge them.



“The spirit week because everyone is generally happy. I like the football game because I can bring my South friends and we can hang out.”
Emma Andreoli
FRESHMAN



“I'm looking forward to the football game. I'm looking forward to dancing ... I like fast music that I can break dance to.”
Christian Perrino
SOPHOMORE



“I'm looking forward to the pep assembly because it only happens once a year, and this year we're going to be juniors, so we'll be on the good side of the stands.”
Paul Lucchese
JUNIOR

YOUR TURN: What are you most looking forward to for homecoming week?



“I'm most looking forward to our school spirit, celebrating this celebration with our grade and also our entire school together supporting our school pride for Norsemen Nation.”
Olivia Bloomhuff
SENIOR



“I'm looking forward to watching the staff beat the students again in the tug-of-war. It's going to be enjoyable to see the tradition carried on.”
Charles Crimando
ENGLISH TEACHER



“I really enjoy spirit week, but most of all I really enjoy seeing all the floats and how the kids did making them.”
Lisa Lucas
SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER

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