

Inflation invades upper instruction

American educators are concerned about inflation. Not inflated money, but inflated grades.

"The gentleman C of a former day has become the gentleman B," observes University of Michigan psychologist Stanford C. Erickson. "The higher grading trend has several causes, and one is student pressure. Without an A in this course I won't get into medical school," they plea, and there goes \$2 million in future earnings.

Grading deans are rarely easy or comfortable to make," he writes in a faculty memo published by the UM Center for Research on Learning and Teaching.

"BUT THE standards of teachers as to

what signifies 'excellent' are still the most significant single means by which a teacher shapes the academic values of the university," Erickson says.

"The grading mechanism has become a logistic necessity for managing a large number of students moving through an incredibly varied curriculum. Due to inflation, pass-fail grading and other changing concepts, the meaning of the final transcript may be blurred. We might consider redefining the function of grades," he suggests.

The teacher still faces two choices, to grade students according to how well they meet the standards set for the course or to grade them in competition with one another.

credit for too many of our successes and give blame for too many of our failures."

GOLD ANTICIPATED the issues that have led to a current instructional trend called "contract teaching," says Erickson. In most of its variations, the teacher sets forth specific performance levels for an A, B or C grade at the beginning of the course. The student contracts for a grade by agreeing to do a certain level of work and receives the grade only after the work is completed.

"The standards for a grade may be a single criterion, such as a certain number of correct answers on a final exam, but more frequently it is a number of options such as test scores, term papers and special projects," Erickson explains.

"In most instances, teachers allow students to repeat a test or written assignment until the specified performance standards are met. Testing is used to show that each student has mastered the material, rather than to place them on a competitive scale which compares them with one another."

ONE OF the issues that has concerned contract grading proponents involves quantity vs. quality. Most students will opt for and complete the A-level requirements, yet the department may challenge the teacher who gives every student the maximum grade. Erickson advises designating the quantitative requirements for earning a B or C, while reserving the A for exceptional quality work.

"In other words, contract teaching does not take the teacher off the evaluation book. In fact, it places a considerable

extra load on the teacher, since he or she must carefully spell out the goals of the course and the resources for achieving them. The teacher must still prepare tests and other criteria through which the student can prove mastery of these goals.

"Most teachers are pedagogically conservative and feel more comfortable conducting a class in the same manner they experienced as students," Erickson continues. "Perhaps the strongest persuasion for faculty to enter into the rather demanding contract arrangement is the very positive reaction of students."

"Some colleges around the country have totally converted to competency-based instruction. We will have to see if this will complicate or clarify the meaning of grades."

Milliken extends lottery's deadline

Gov. William Milliken has signed a law extending the state lottery until July 1, 1980. The original lottery law was to expire July 1.

The Michigan Lottery continues to be one of the most popular state lotteries operating," Milliken said. "Last year the lottery generated approximately \$64 million in revenue, pouring more than \$1 million every week into the state's general fund. Lottery money represents about two percent of the more than \$3 billion that goes into the general fund each year."

Food stamps cost more

Social Security recipients who also qualify for food stamps may find they will have to pay more for their food stamps than month when a 6.4 per cent hike in Social Security benefits takes effect.

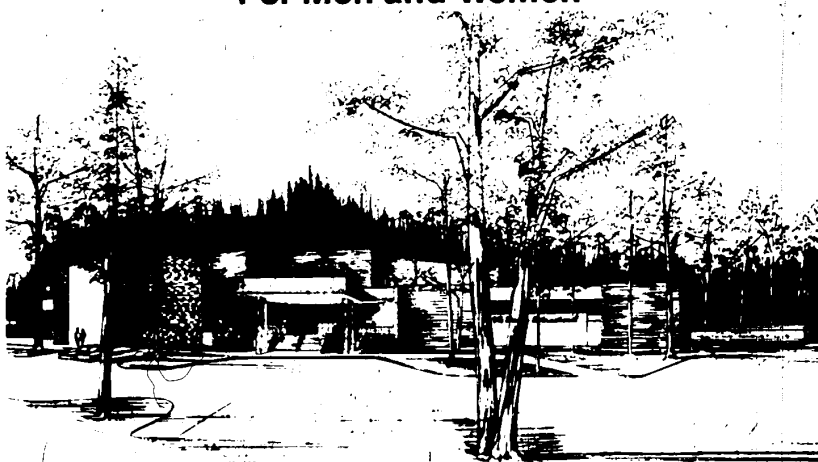
Because the cost of food stamps depends on the amount of net household income, the July boost in Social Security may also increase the amount a family must pay for food stamps.

However, the increase in the Social Security check will not affect the cost of stamps for those households which received less than \$300 from Social Security before July.

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