

LSCM 4360.007/.777

GLOBAL ALLIANCES & INTERNATIONAL SUPPLY CHAIN MGT



Summer 2022
Dr. M. T. Farris
Online



Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 7 PM to 8 PM
<https://unt.zoom.us/j/86875775688>
Meeting ID: **868 757 756 88**

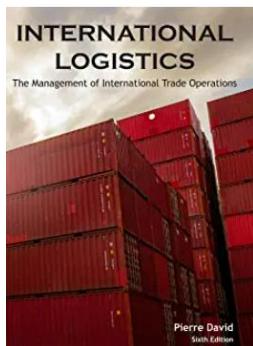
Contact: Canvas eMail messages ONLY

Welcome to LSCM 4360. The text does an excellent job of providing a basic foundation of international logistics. Coupled with current events awareness and the tertiary assignments (résumé, CSCMP cases) students will be exposed to a strong blend introducing them to international logistics. While we will use a textbook, it is static and unchanging, so we will monitor current events to connect the dots to develop and hone your skills to understand the ramifications of what is going on in the world. Can you connect the dots on the right?



COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Supply chain and alliance strategy in the multi-national firms. Materials management, international sourcing and distribution, and importing/exporting procedures. International carrier management and operations are examined. Section .777 is for students living more than 50 miles from the Denton campus.



COURSE MATERIALS:

Pierre David, **International Logistics: The Management of International Trade Operations**. 6th Edition: Cicero Books, ISBN-13: 978-1736945605; ISBN-10:1736945602. 866 pages, 3.36 pounds

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

The course has the principal objective of providing an introduction to logistics operations and issues in an international supply chain environment. Key processes, relationships to logistics management and other business functions, and the strategies and techniques frequently employed to obtain a competitive advantage in a global business environment will all be addressed. Specific objectives for the course include obtaining a competitive advantage through supply chain management, and techniques employed to improve the developing an understanding of the supply chain concept, approaches employed to performance and efficiency of supply chains in an international environment.

Please read this syllabus carefully. It is closely followed and basis of all course administration. Summer moves quickly. We will fit in a 15 week term into 10 weeks. To successfully complete this course, you must master a number of different measures:

- Correct submission of your résumé on time
- Complete 21 quizzes to reflect your mastery of the text
- Complete a CSCMP-quality case
- Complete the cumulative final exam (NOTE your final grade can be no higher than one grade above your final exam performance)

GRADING (1,200 TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE):

Résumé	25 points	Grading scale is 90%+ = A, 80%+ = B, 70%+ = C, and 60%+ = D. The first part of the course design involved going through the text look-it-up-and-learn and the second part tests retention of knowledge. <u>Your final grade cannot be more than one letter grade above the grade attained on the final exam.</u>
Quizzes	550 points	
CSCMP Case	200 points	
Cumulative Final Exam	225 points	
TOTAL	1,000 points	

NO OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXTRA CREDIT:

No extra credit will be available. With the number of measurements there is no need to add any more.

RÉSUMÉ (25 points):

Time to start thinking about graduation! Do you have your résumé ready? You never know when you will be asked for a copy. In order to be prepared you will be required to submit a résumé for this class.

- In order to receive credit you must electronically submit your résumé in CANVAS ASSIGNMENTS for this course no later than 5:00 PM on Friday, June 10. There is a 100% penalty for late submissions. Students adding the course 9-June or later will have 48 hours from the time they add the course to complete their résumé submission.
- You must use the following naming convention for your WORD document upload into Canvas.

Full or Intern_StudentLastName_SemesterofGraduation_YearofGraduation.

For example,

Full_Farris_Spring_2030.DOC OR Full_Farris_Spring_2030.DOCX¹

Student Farris is seeking a full-time position and will be graduating Spring 2030.

Failure to properly name your file or incorrect file formats (anything other than a WORD Doc such as PDF) will receive 0 points.

1. In addition to fulfilling the course requirements by submitting your résumé in CANVAS, if you want your résumé to be visible to employers through Career Services you must also submit your résumé via Eagle Careers powered by Handshake <http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center/eagle-careers>. You need to have a profile created as well. When you have your résumé ready to upload into Handshake you must do the following:
2. Under 'Personal Goals,' you need to select either, 'I want a job' OR 'I want an internship', then click 'Done'
3. You need to choose in the 'Other' dropdown 'Has Public Resume' if you want to have recruiters see your résumé.

THE WORLD IS OUR TEXTBOOK:

In addition to the static text, current events play an important part of understanding the international arena. Students must stay current with what is going on the world as it relates to ever-changing international logistics. Beware of "fake news." Staying current can be your leg up on the rest of the class as these are the most frequently missed questions. Each quiz will contain two or more questions drawn from the posted readings or current event questions using reliable (non-Fake news) sources published within 10 days prior to the start of the quiz. Obviously **DO NOT** read every article but learn how to scan headlines to sort out the wheat from the chaff before you drill down. All of these links can also be found within CANVAS at the top of the course:

¹ This student obviously does not plan to pass LSCM4360 on the first attempt!



- *American Shipper News* (www.americanshipper.com)
- *CSCMP Supply Chain SmartBrief* (cscmp@smartbrief.com)
- *FreightWaves* (newsletter@freightwaves.com)
- *Hellenic Shipping News Online Daily Newspaper* (www.hellenicshippingnews.com)
- *Institute of Supply Management Report on Business* (www.ismworld.org)
- *Wall Street Journal Logistics Report* (interactive.wsj.com; contact paul.page@wsj.com)
- Don't forget to look at the posted readings/graphics!

QUIZZES (550 points):

The text does an excellent job of providing a basic foundation of international logistics. Testing for the course will involve a combination of on-line quizzes (multiple choice, true/false questions) and a cumulative final examination (multiple choice, true/false questions). They require the student to pull together key international logistics concepts to devise an answer and are intended to test understanding, not memorization skills.



Course testing begins with a quiz concerning the mechanics of the course using this syllabus as the basis of your information. You may take the syllabus quiz as many times as you wish for the score of your last attempt. You are allowed one attempt for all other quizzes.

The quizzes are intended for you to prepare for the cumulative final examination at a steady pace. For all quizzes, first, complete the text and current event reading then view any support materials which help you understand the material. (Students learn differently so much support material is provided. It is up to the student to determine which support materials best help learning the content. Each individual learner will utilize a different mix of support materials). Then complete the on-line quiz. Some concepts are repeated throughout the course and may appear on multiple quizzes. Each author test bank question is valued at 1 points and the Farris-authored current event or posted readings questions are valued higher. The time limit for the quizzes is based on 1 minute per question.



So, if a quiz has 15 questions you have 15 minutes to complete the quiz. It is not intended to be a look-it-up quiz and you will not have enough time to look up all the answers in the textbook so you must have read and digested the material BEFORE you take the quiz. Running out of time during the quizzes is a clear indication that you have not prepared sufficiently prior to taking the quiz.



The quizzes are intended to help prepare you for the cumulative final examination. To no surprise, past experience has shown a strong correlation between successfully completing all the quizzes and the final examination score! Each quiz will be open for a **36-hour period** so there should be **NO ACCEPTABLE EXCUSES** for missing a quiz and there are no make-ups. Missing a quiz does not spell doom however it certainly does not help. Students miss quizzes. It happens but do not make it a practice. Spring 2022 the average "A" student missed 0.62 quizzes, "B" students missed 1.46 quizzes, "C" students missed 2.79 quizzes, and "D" students missed 3.2 quizzes. Notice a pattern?

CAUTION: When you open a quiz, the timer will automatically start. Each quiz, by definition, is open-book and open-note and is intended to help you determine how well you have mastered the material. Be wary of your time restriction. The time limit for the quizzes is based on historical data. There IS enough time if you are prepared. Running out of time during the quizzes is a clear indication that you have not prepared sufficiently prior to taking the quiz (usually this means you need to be more comprehensive in your reading. "Reading" a chapter is not the same as "comprehending" the chapter). After completing each quiz, you will immediately receive a total grade for the quiz. Detailed results will be released after the quiz cut-off period and will be available only until the cut-off for the following quiz. Take advantage of the feedback while it is available.

CUMULATIVE FINAL EXAM (225 points):

On **Thursday, 11-August** there will be a cumulative 116 question 86-minute final exam covering the quiz elements and is held in a proctored environment at Sage Hall Room 331 on the Denton campus. No notes, text,

or support materials allowed. The testing Center is available between 8 AM and 4 PM. You can take the exam at anytime throughout the day but must be finished with the exam by 4 PM. Plan now and arrange your work schedule so you can make it to the final exam. If you cannot make it to the 11-August test or you have a documented (following university guidelines) the missed final exam will be replaced with a live, proctored fill-in-the-blanks/short essay exam which be graded using the same final grading scale for the course. The student will automatically be awarded an (I) Incomplete grade.

Throughout the semester you will complete quizzes to ensure you cover the text material and current events. Historically, the average time to answer a question in these look-it-up-in-the-text quizzes has averaged 36 seconds. The timing for the cumulative close-book final exam (which consists of questions from the quizzes so they have already been seen) is set for just under 45 seconds per question. The final is intended to test your understanding of the material, not to show that you can look up answers. Your final grade cannot be more than one letter grade above the grade attained on the final exam.

CSCMP-STYLE CASE – (200 points):

On **Wednesday, June 15** each student will be sent a unique version of the CSCMP Innovative Distribution Company case which must be completed and **submitted no later than 5 PM, Sunday, 3-July**. There is a submission form at the end of the case which should be used to submit the answers. This is a very popular case which has been completed by over 2,500 students worldwide. It requires the student to determine the complete laid-down costs of shipping from three different sources to the Alliance, Texas; two internationally one in Chengdu, China, another in Freising, Germany; and a third, from a domestic source in Nebraska.

Since each version of the case has different numbers, students are allowed to work together but must submit the answers to the case version sent to them. You will not receive a passing grade for the course if you do not submit a file.

WHEN IS SOMETHING LATE:

The world of business is full of deadlines. Quizzes have a specific shut-off time but have a generous 36-hour window to complete the quiz. NO quizzes will be re-opened after the deadline. The penalty for missing the case deadline is 100% thus you will receive a score of 0 points for missing the deadline for quizzes or case submission. The only exception will be due to documented excused absences defined below.

EXCUSED VS. UNEXCUSED ABSENCES:

Students are expected to meet published deadlines. Life happens causing disruptions in plans. It is the uncontrollable elements that cause the most disruptions and I will work with you but you must provide acceptable documentation. Contact me as soon as you can but take care of your family obligations first.

There is no penalty for absences due to university-sanctioned activities. However, it is your responsibility to provide as much advance notice as possible of your scheduled absence and documentation supporting this absence. It is your responsibility in these instances to ensure any assignments or quizzes/tests due during the missed classes are made up in a satisfactory manner to the instructor. You should make these arrangements PRIOR TO missing class.

Absences due to the following reasons may be excused providing proper documentation is received from you and the ability to complete the assignment on-line is not reasonable. This will be managed on a case-by-case basis.

1. Death or major illness/injury involving a family member.
2. Illness of dependent family member.
3. Participation in legal proceedings or administrative procedures that requires the student's presence.
4. Religious holy days.
5. Illness that is too severe or contagious for a student to attend class (as determined by the Health Center or an off-campus physician).
6. Required participation in military duties or civilian emergency (Paramedic, volunteer fire department, etc.) duties

7. Pregnancy complications or medically necessary appointments late in a pregnancy can typically be accommodated easily. Your baby's health is of paramount importance. Please notify Dr. Farris so we can plan a workaround.

Some absences are obviously beyond your control (#1, #2, #5, #6, and #7 above). Please provide proper documentation as soon as practical without neglecting any responsibilities you have due to these situations. Please do not bring me a note to inform me that you are contagious or leave a seriously ill/injured family member to tell me you will miss a class. My personal recommendation is to fulfill your responsibilities to your family/community first and inform me in a timely manner later.

Occasionally, special circumstances not covered above may warrant an absence to be excused by the instructor. For example, emergency work-related absences will require a signed letter from your supervisor on company letterhead explaining your situation. My favorite unplanned excuse was a student who was concerned about missing my live final exam because he was in a bank lobby while it was being robbed. When the police arrived and started taking witness statements, the student negotiated a time with the police to return to be interviewed after the "Farris Final." I would have worked with him (and in spite of everything he aced the final!) Keep in mind that ALL documentation will be carefully scrutinized and are subject to confirmation. False documentation will be actively pursued with the Dean of Students. Spring 2021 this resulted in three student expulsions.

OFFICE HOURS:

When you need one-on-one assistance, please contact Dr. Farris via CANVAS messaging. Dr. Farris will be on ZOOM for his office hours. If these are not convenient other meeting times can be arranged. The ZOOM link is located on the first page of this syllabus. Problems, or potential problems, should be addressed before they become major problems.

CHALLENGE POLICY:

You have until the next due date to submit a **written** request for a regrade (known as a "challenge") after a quiz or graded case has been returned to the class. To earn additional points, you must be able to convince Dr. Farris, **in writing**, that your answer is correct.

PSSST...THE "SECRET" TO DOING WELL – KEY ELEMENTS MISSED BY STUDENTS:

Teaching evaluations offer an interesting insight regarding key elements of the course missed by students which would enhance learning and simplify the course:

1. The course is designed for flexibility. ALL quizzes have a 36-hour availability window (1½ days). The quizzes close at **5 PM** but the shut-off time should not matter unless you lose sight of the fact you can complete the quiz any time before the **5 PM** shut-off. because the quiz is open for 36 hours prior. Use the flexibility of the course design to your advantage.
2. Students have complained about the lack of feedback but ignore the fact that when each quiz closes feedback is provided up until the next quiz closes. The feedback includes the correct answer and usually the location in the text where the answer can be found. If the question was a current event question typically a link to the news item is provided. Students that do not access this feedback when it is available are missing out on an important aspect of the course pedagogy. Analysis of the four lowest performances on the Spring 2022 final exam found that these students only got 1.5% of the very same current event questions correct on the final. This strongly suggests these students did not take advantage of the feedback throughout the semester.
3. Determine what you do not know and this will simplify your preparation for the final exam. There is no formal final exam review or midterm in the course because feedback is provided on a timely basis to enable students to learn in small chunks throughout the term.
4. Students learn differently so much support material is provided. It is up to the student to determine which support materials best help learning the content. Each individual learner will utilize a different mix of support materials.

5. At least one teaching evaluation comment addressed the lack of live interaction. Please be aware that this is an asynchronous on-line course and NOT a synchronous offering. Other than ZOOM office hours there is NO live element. If you need live interaction we do offer live classroom sections on the Denton campus if you would like to mask up, drive to campus, and hunt for a parking space.

Dr. Farris religiously holds ZOOM office hours and is also available other times (by request) if this is not convenient. Just ask! Two teaching evaluations from the Fall 2021 semester indicated that Dr. Farris “did not help students that were struggling” but nobody used office hours, posted questions in the Discussion section, or sent a CANVAS note with “issues” other than for missing a quiz.

6. There is a lot of current event material but **DO NOT** read every article in the links. Learn how to scan headlines to sort out the wheat from the chaff before you drill down. Keep in mind that this course deals with international logistics and the links offer news items for both domestic and international logistics. Be selective because the domestic stuff will NOT be on the quizzes. You will also note that it is common for timely topics to be listed on multiple links (e.g. Last year when the Evergreen Evergiven was stranded blocking the Suez Canal there were new items about it on almost all the links) so you should be able to develop the skill to identify the “hot” items in international logistics. Avoid distractions and keep on focus.

One teaching evaluation complained I do not tell students what the current event questions are or identify to the students before the quiz where to look for the answers! If I knew what the current events were going to be at the start of the semester I would be very wealthy. The current event questions come only from the links cited in Current Events section at the top of page 3 (and these are also posted toward the top of the CANVAS course.) What will you do if you are in an executive meeting at work and someone asks “What’s going on with that blockage in the Suez Canal and how will it impact our operations?” As a business professional you MUST know what is going on and cannot respond “Ur, I need to go find out...what blockage?” Hone your skills now on staying current throughout your career.

7. Throughout the term Dr. Farris frequently recommends forming a study group instead of “going it alone.” This is a common technique used in Big Ten and Ivy League schools and works well for senior level courses such as this. Use ZOOM, set up a standard meet time, no travel, and you don’t even have to buy coffee for everyone. Discuss the ‘hot’ current events or a concept you do not understand. Miss a quiz and work with your group to get the visibility of the questions missed. A student comment from teaching evaluations “For the first part of the semester I ignored the recommendation to join a study group and floundered. Desperate, (sic) I set one up and got back into the ‘A’ range. Best advice I almost didn’t take.” Work smarter not harder.
8. This course is comprised of two parts. The first part forces you to go through the text and support materials to learn the material. The quizzes are essentially look-it-up-and-report. The second part is the final exam which consists of similar questions and is NOT intended for you to show that you can look up material but to test your command of the material. Use the quizzes and feedback to learn/understand the material and prepare for the closed-book, cumulative final exam. Your final grade cannot be more than one letter grade above the grade attained on the final exam.

IS THIS COURSE SECTION THE RIGHT FIT FOR ME?:

Students learn differently and everyone has their own unique set of variables guiding how they approach college courses.

This course **IS** a good fit for you and will be a worthwhile learning experience IF you:

- Are good at managing your time and do not wait until the last minute to complete quizzes or assignments.
- Are willing to embrace staying “current” in the news (or developing your skill to do so).
- Make it a point to review the feedback provided on quizzes and assignments.
- Recognize the importance of setting up a study group where you actively interact with group members.
- Are willing to reach out during office hours if you do not understand a concept or have a question.

This course **IS NOT** for you and you are better off changing to a live, on-campus section if you:

- Need to physically show up in a classroom at a scheduled time each week.
- Prefer to have a course (traditional of lower level college courses) which are only look-up-and-report.
- Do not want to learn how to put the pieces together and must be tested only straight out of the textbook in hopes that your career will only be comprised of questions that can be answered directly out of a textbook.
- Expect to have all questions handed to you in advance so you can look up the answers.
- Really need to have your hand held throughout a course.
- Once you complete a quiz you do not care about the feedback other than to know your score.
- Only want to go it alone and not tap into your peers in a study group.
- Will never seek help in office hours regardless of how confused or uncertain you are about a concept. After all, this exposes you to having the professor probe and query to understand what you do understand and what you do not understand so he can help you.

A WORD ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

Each student should be aware of the guidelines for academic honesty as outlined in the UNT Student Guidebook. Dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating on tests, plagiarism for submissions in class, or posting copyrighted material (e.g. quiz or exam questions) in the public domain (such as Quizlet or StudyBlue). These violations are taken seriously, will be investigated, and academic sanctions will be actively pursued. The minimum penalty is an “F” in the course and referral to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action which may include expulsion from the University. For additional information about the University Integrity policy go to <http://vpaa.unt.edu/academic-integrity.htm>

FINAL GRADE APPEALS, CHANGES, AWARDED AND REMOVAL OF AN 'I':

This instructor strictly follows the guidelines set forth in the current Undergraduate Catalog for grade appeals, changes, and the awarding and removal of an ‘Incomplete.’ Please check the latest Catalog for details and procedures.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT:

The College of Business Administration complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodation for qualified students with a disability. If you have an established disability, as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act and would like to request accommodation, please provide documentation to Dr. Farris prior to the first assignment deadline.

UNT POLICIES:

If you have CANVAS problems you should immediately contact the UNT Student Help Desk: helpdesk@unt.edu or 940.565.2324 and obtain a ticket number. The instructor and the UNT Student Help Desk will work with the student to resolve any issues that are not user-generated.

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences. According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004)

The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called *Eagle Alert* to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills,

fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Retention of Student Records

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. The instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. Visit UNT's [Code of Student Conduct](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct) (<https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>) to learn more.

Access to Information - Eagle Connect

Students' access point for business and academic services at UNT is located at: my.unt.edu. All official communication from the University will be delivered to a student's Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect and how to forward e-mail [Eagle Connect](https://it.unt.edu/eagleconnect) (<https://it.unt.edu/eagleconnect>).

FINAL GRADES

It is the practice of Dr. Farris to send a confirmatory Canvas email message identifying your final grade on Canvas. Also, see *Making the Grade* attached at the end of this syllabus.

KEY ACTIVITIES AND DATES

Quizzes must be completed by 5 PM Central Daylight Time on the topic date.
Each quiz will be available starting 36 hours prior to the shut-off time at 5 AM.

DATE	TOPIC
Monday June 6	Course opens
Friday June 10	Syllabus quiz (20 pts) - Take as many times as you wish for the highest score Resume submission (25 pts); both must be completed by 5 PM
Sunday June 12	Chapter 1 International Trade (28 pts) Spring Current Events Awareness quiz (35 points)
Wednesday June 15	Chapter 2 International Supply Chain Management (24 pts) CSCMP-style case (200 pts) released after 5 PM
Sunday June 19	Chapter 3 International Infrastructure (27 pts)
Wednesday June 22	Chapter 4 International Methods of Entry (27 pts)
Sunday June 26	Chapter 5 International Contracts (27 pts) Chapter 6 Terms of Trade or Incoterms Rules (25 pts)
Wednesday June 29	Chapter 7 Terms of Payment (28 pts)
Sunday July 3	Chapter 8 Managing Transaction Risks (27 pts) CSCMP Case Due (200 points)
Wednesday July 6	Chapter 9 International Commercial Documents (27 pts)
Sunday July 10	Chapter 10 International Insurance (27 pts)
Wednesday July 13	Chapter 11 International Ocean Transportation (25 pts)
Sunday July 17	Chapter 12 International Air Transportation (24 pts) Chapter 13 International Land & Multimodal Transport (23 pts)
Wednesday July 20	Chapter 14 International Terminal Operations & Chapter 15 Packaging for Export (32 pts)
Sunday July 24	Chapter 16 International Warehouses & Distribution Centers (20 pts)
Wednesday July 27	Chapter 17 Transportation of Dangerous Goods & Chapter 18 Transportation of Refrigerated Goods (30 pts)
Sunday July 31	Chapter 19 International Logistics Security (24 pts)
Wednesday August 3	Chapter 20 Customs Clearance (22 pts)
Sunday August 7	Chapter 21 Cross-Border Trade & Chapter 22 Developing a Competitive Advantage (28 pts)
Thursday August 11	LIVE LIVE LIVE ON-CAMPUS FINAL EXAM (225 pts) 86-minute cumulative final exam is available from 8 AM to 4 PM. You must go to Sage 331 on the Denton campus any time <u>before</u> 3 PM and finish no later than 4 PM.

MY TURN: MAKING THE GRADE

BY KURT WIESENFELD
Newsweek, June 17, 1996, p. 16

It was a rookie error. After 10 years I should have known better, but I went to my office the day after final grades were posted. There was a tentative knock on the door. "Professor Wiesenfeld? I took your Physics 2121 class? I flunked it? I wonder if there's anything I can do to improve my grade?" I thought: "Why are you asking me? Isn't it too late to worry about it? Do you dislike making declarative statements?"

After the student gave his tale of woe and left, the phone rang. "I got a D in your class. Is there any way you can change it to 'Incomplete'?" Then the e-mail assault began: "I'm shy about coming in to talk to you, but I'm not shy about asking for a better grade. Anyway, it's worth a try." The next day I had three phone messages from students asking me to call them. I didn't.

Time was, when you received a grade, that was it. You might groan and moan, but you accepted it as the outcome of your efforts or lack thereof (and, yes, sometimes a tough grader). In the last few years, however, some students have developed a disgruntled consumer approach. If they don't like their grade, they go to the "return" counter to trade it in for something better.

What alarms me is their indifference toward grades as an indication of personal effort and performance. Many, when pressed about why they think they deserve a better grade, admit they don't deserve one but would like one anyway. Having been raised on gold stars for effort and smiley faces for self-esteem, they've learned that they can get by without hard work and real talent if they can talk the professor into giving them a break. This attitude is beyond cynicism. There's a weird innocence to the assumption that one expects (even deserves) a better grade simply by begging for it. With that outlook, I guess I shouldn't be as flabbergasted as I was that 12 students asked me to change their grades after final grades were posted.

Many students wheedle for a degree as if it were a freebie T shirt

That's 10 percent of my class who let three months of midterms, quizzes and lab reports slide until long past remedy. My graduate student calls it hyperrational thinking: if effort and intelligence don't matter, why should deadlines? What matters is getting a better grade through an unearned bonus, the academic equivalent of a freebie T shirt or toaster giveaway. Rewards are disconnected from the quality of one's work. An act and its consequences are unrelated, random events.

Their arguments for wheedling better grades often ignore academic performance. Perhaps they feel it's not relevant. "If my grade isn't raised to a D I'll lose my scholarship." "If you don't give me a C, I'll flunk out." One sincerely overwrought student pleaded, "If I don't pass, my life is over." This is tough stuff to deal with. Apparently, I'm responsible for someone's losing a scholarship, flunking out or deciding whether life has meaning. Perhaps these students see me as a commodities broker with something they want -- a grade. Though intrinsically worthless, grades, if properly manipulated, can be traded for what has value: a degree, which means a job, which means money. The one thing college actually offers -- a chance to learn -- is considered irrelevant, even less than worthless, because of the long hours and hard work required.

In a society saturated with surface values, love of knowledge for its own sake does sound eccentric. The benefits of fame and wealth are more obvious. So is it right to blame students for reflecting the superficial values saturating our society?

Yes, of course it's right. These guys had better take themselves seriously now, because our country will be forced to take them seriously later, when the stakes are much higher. They must recognize that their attitude is not only self-destructive but socially destructive. The erosion of quality control--giving appropriate grades for actual accomplishments--is a major concern in my department. One colleague noted that a physics major could obtain a degree without ever answering a written exam question completely. How? By pulling in enough partial credit and extra credit. And by getting breaks on grades.

But what happens once she or he graduates and gets a job? That's when the misfortunes of eroding academic standards multiply. We lament that schoolchildren get "kicked upstairs" until they graduate from high school despite being illiterate and mathematically inept, but we seem unconcerned with college graduates whose less blatant deficiencies are far more harmful if their accreditation exceeds their qualifications.

Most of my students are science and engineering majors. If they're good at getting partial credit but not at getting the answer right, then the new bridge breaks or the new drug doesn't work. One finds examples here in Atlanta. Last year a light tower in the Olympic Stadium collapsed, killing a worker. It collapsed because an engineer miscalculated how much weight it could hold. A new 12-story dormitory could develop dangerous cracks due to a foundation that's uneven by more than six inches. The error resulted from incorrect data being fed into a computer. I drive past that dorm daily on my way to work, wondering if a foundation crushed under kilotons of weight is repairable or if this structure will have to be demolished. Two 10,000-pound steel beams at the new natatorium collapsed in March, crashing into the student athletic complex. (Should we give partial credit since no one was hurt?) Those are real-world consequences of errors and lack of expertise.

But the lesson is lost on the grade-grouching 10 percent. Say that you won't (not can't, but won't) change the grade they deserve to what they want, and they're frequently bewildered or angry. They don't think it's fair that they're judged according to their performance, not their desires or "potential." They don't think it's fair that they should jeopardize their scholarships or be in danger of flunking out simply because they could not or did not do their work. But it's more than fair; it's necessary to help preserve a minimum standard of quality that our society needs to maintain safety and integrity. I don't know if the 13th-hour students will learn that lesson, but I've learned mine. From now on, after final grades are posted, I'll lie low until the next quarter starts.