

HOW TO FAIL UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS

It is not just anyone who is able to fail an examination. In a university examination especially, failing, like obtaining a first, requires effort. Failing in the university is indeed a highly practiced art at which only very few are proficient, seeing how few indeed come by it in any university examination. Over the years, techniques that give assurance of failure, have come to light.

Attendance at lectures, is normally required of all who aspire to take a university examination, but it is more pleasurable to relax in bed on a morning. Indeed, if we have been drumming all night at a wake-keeping or in celebration of some Hall week, then next day we shall be in need more of sleep than lectures.

True, it gets to be tedious lying in bed all day, but it is to break such tedium that Junior Common Rooms were invented. There, in the J.C.R., beverages of varying potency are available for purchase, and when the student loans or the book allowance is on hand any quantity of potent beverage is ours for the asking, and if there is a record player in good working order, playing all of one's favourite tune is just the thing to do to

while away time till others should return from lectures, when, if we are lucky, the drumming may be starting all over again.

We may also take off into town to soak in any quantity of nocturnal delights of city life. Travelling out of town to sample other pleasures is a further possibility.

If we can keep at some such routine, as reported above, for 28 days consecutively or cumulatively, some lecturer is bound to notice. University regulations provide that whoever excludes himself from lectures to such noticeable length shall be deemed to have fallen short of the minimum attendance requirement which confers eligibility for the year's examinations. The technique of staying away from lectures, therefore, pays. It leads to exclusion from examination!

There are those who attend all required lectures who still fail brilliantly. They manage it by ignoring all that transpires at lectures. To ignore proceedings at lectures, dozing helps, for in that situation we do not even get to hear what is said, let alone write anything down. We may also doodle while the lecture proceeds, and especially in a large class, we may also give

our own lectures to immediate neighbours about the weekend exploits. So engrossed in the extra-curricular, Interim assessment tests pass by unnoticed such that, come the time for the main examination, everybody has a head-start of up to 30% of the mark already, everybody except us, but that is because failure is our goal.

Failure is, however, more certain if we can manage to be without a mark from a course, which is subject to Continuous assessment. Since referral is not possible in a Continuously assessed paper, the examiners cannot possibly refuse to pronounce us failed. A conscientious Head of Department may even see to it that we do not get to write the examination in the first place, which is effected merely by withholding endorsement to our registration for the examination.

As examination candidates, we must report at least half an hour before examination begins, but there is advantage in reporting late. First, there is the real possibility that the Invigilator will turn us out or if we are admitted, the chance of writing all the answers in the remaining time are pretty slim.

Some fail to turn up altogether. We have it on the assurance of persons close to the Board of Examiners that, unless the reasons are good, absence from examination inevitably leads to the award of grade X. Grade X is still the award where absence is due to head-ache” “ , : stomach-ache: or various other ailments that are self –diagnosed and treated by self prescribed medication without reference whatsoever to the university doctors.

Under University regulations, a grade X assures failure, not only in one paper from which we are absent, but in the examination as a whole. For those determined to fail, this procedure especially commends itself, for instead of attending each paper, to perform below par, absence from one single paper is all we need. To make the grade, however, we must be careful how absence is explained: we misread the timetable or that we overslept and then we could not find transport and could not also locate the examination room....something like that and it's an X !.

Some candidates who report for examination, are sworn only to ignore the Invigilators and the instruction to candidates: don't disturb; don't confer with another ; don't leave the examination room without permission; stop writing, which are observed severally in the breach. Such breaches invite

action on the part of the Board of Examiners, which may depress marks, possibly well below the pass mark.

Cheating is by far the best assurance of failure. Trying to gain an unfair advantage by copying from a book, for example, is what cheating is about. An examination candidate once asked to go to the washroom. He was discovered reading from notes which had a bearing on the examination in progress. He still protested he was not cheating; if he meant to cheat he could have smuggled the notes into the examination room or he would have engraved portions in his palms while his thighs could carry other portions!.

Whatever forms it takes, cheating attracts the award of grade Z. Not unlike grade X, a grade Z entails failure not just in one paper but the examination as a whole. Grade Z could lead also to being barred from university examinations for a stated period or indefinitely while suspension and expulsion from the university are other possibilities. The inquiry to arrive at grade Z, usually brings the attendance failure to wider notice. It is just the kind of news the dailies are waiting for.

Grade Z transmutes failure that might pass unnoticed, to the dramatic, which is to say grade Z lands colour to failure, colour that does not fade and

remains forever present in our individual files at the Registry. Notwithstanding that we may subsequently have made a good grade, Grade Z is still present in the transcript of academic records issued at our behest to admission offices of graduate schools, both home and abroad, even to prospective employers in the public sector as well as the private.

A student once went to Forum with a story and a complaint: he had not been able to report at once when session began, because he “travelled”; the Registry, his Hall of Residence and Faculty had all been reluctant to register him, because they said registration was over; they had been even more difficult about putting his name on the PAYE; in the process he missed a couple of Interim assessment tests and the Faculty would not set supplementary papers for him; and then they said he had not registered for the Main Examination although he had filled the registration form which he gave to a friend to have endorsed for him at the faculty and taken to the Registry while he sorted out his PAYE entitlement; although he had not been allowed to write a single paper, the Registry had written to say he had failed; how could he fail when he had not written any paper at all?

There were those at the Forum who wanted to ask whether the student will have liked to be passed instead. The letter from the Registry said also that, the regulations allowed failures one more chance only at re examinations and in the immediately following year only. The recipient was not to return to campus... was to re write the examination from outside... was to be without PAYE or bursary... or was to pay his own examination fee...

It was when the eyes grew misty and the voice began to quaver as the student read his letter that realization dawned that not all who behave like wanting desperately to fail really want to. What a shame to try so hard!

Source: " EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE THIRD WORLD"