

Case #13

Ellen Green, Ph.D. teaches English at a two-year college in Texas. Eight years ago, in an effort to boost enrollment, the college began a dual-credit program allowing high-school juniors and seniors to take freshman college courses, earning credit for both high-school and college.

The faculty at the college has reservations about the dual-credit program. The high school students often seem unable to demonstrate the self-control and work ethic expected of college students. But since parents are eager for their children to get a head start earning college credits and the college wants higher enrollment, the faculty teaches the dual-credit courses. The faculty sees the dual-credit program as “all about money.” The college wants the tuition dollars, and the parents want their children to accumulate college hours at lower cost before leaving home to attend a more expensive four-year university.

Last semester Dr. Green taught a dual-credit college class on the campus of a local high school. When she tallied the grades for the course, the high school asked her to provide number grades for the students. Since the college awards letter grades only, Dr. Green was caught off guard, but agreed to provide number grades. Two students had collaborated all semester on their work and earned a weak A. When Dr. Green came to their names, she remembered that one of the girls had participated in class discussions and also had discussed the papers with her after class. She awarded this student three points more, giving her a 93, while the other student, who sometimes missed class, received a 90.

Dr. Green has both students in class again this semester, and the girl who earned the grade of 90 asked why she received three points fewer than her friend. Dr. Green explained that her perception of the friend’s class participation and general interest in the quality of the work led to the extra three points. The girl asked that her grade be raised three points to match the second student’s grade, but Dr. Green said no. The girl asked again on two later occasions and Dr. Green again said no.

Dr. Green learned from other students that the girl with the grade of 90 wanted three more points so that she could be valedictorian of the high school class instead of salutatorian. The valedictorian is also in Dr. Green’s class, and she earned a grade of 98 for the course last semester.

The mother of the girl with the 90 called Dr. Green, asking once more that the grade be raised to 93. The mother then called the chair of Dr. Green’s department, determined to get those three points. As a side point in her complaining, the mother noted that Dr. Green had canceled class on two Fridays. The mother stated, “I paid for three hours a week instruction, and I want my money’s worth.” The mother sees herself as a consumer, and she wants what she paid for.