

## **February, 2002 - Lisa O'Neill, Philosophy**

Last semester I had all of the honors freshmen in my OR 151 seminar. At the end of the semester I asked them to complete a survey regarding the quality of their honors courses. The responses were very positive. However, a common suggestion for improvement concerned research papers.

Many of the students had to write research papers for their honors courses and felt burdened by having to do a lengthy research paper on which a significant percentage of their final grade depended. Students argued that they did not think they were prepared for the responsibility of such a large project, and they doubted their abilities to do well on such an assignment.

A solution that may alleviate their concerns while allowing professors to require substantial research papers follows. In my Honors Philosophy Seminar I assign a long research paper (roughly 15 pages). But I require that students submit two drafts during the semester. I comment on but do not grade the drafts. However, if a student fails to turn in a draft on the due date I deduct one full grade point for each day the draft is late. Needless to say, all the drafts are submitted on time. At the end of the semester, students are required to hand in the earlier drafts along with the final version. The final version needs to reflect that students read and incorporated the comments.

The process accomplishes several things. It forces students to write throughout the semester, and it allows me to identify problems early and to help the student "get on the right track."

Students initially groaned at the thought of several drafts, but many thanked me at the end of the semester. They claimed that they probably would have waited until the last minute had I not had required the drafts.