Evaluation Period Is Not All Gloom

By ED SUMMERS

We have temporarily exhausted the supply of topics on which we are able to speak with logic and authority. This leaves us but two things to talk about: politics and final exams.

We had intended to write on the former; powerful arguments were marshaled against this, however, by influential person. This left only the latter: final exams.

All Kinds

There are all kinds of finals, just as there are all kinds of students to take them and profs to be taken. In general, they fall into two categories: the kind that flunk you out and the kind that don't.

The pitty of it all is that you don't know what kind you are getting until the awful hour arrives. In class, the professor amiably frustrates his questioners something like this:

"Dr. ——, what is going to be on the final?"

"Well, I think if you study your text and your notes and the monthly tests you will have covered all the material we have had this semester."

"But what are you going to emphasize?"

"Well, the material in the notes and the material in the text to which I referred in class."

Blunted here, students try a new approach:

"What kind of test is it going to be?"

"Well, I think it will be a three-hour examination."

"But what kind of questions will you ask?"

"Well, I think the questions will — don't hold me to this, now — cover the material about as thoroughly — maybe multiple choice, some essay, perhaps objective — about as thoroughly as I think necessary to fully evaluate you."

Thus loaded down with pertinent information from this briefing — or maybe just plain loaded — the student can commence his studies. Some courses can be passed in one night of frantic cramming before the exam; it seems to be common belief that they all can.

To “See How They Did”

The care and time some profs put into making up exams varies widely. One prof once gave a chemistry 120 class a ghastly final, quite irrelevant to the course material which nobody finished and left most of them nervous wrecks. It turned out this exam was actually a qualification exam put out by some organization or other, which the prof had conveniently passed on to his class "to see how they did."

Just Take It Home

Another type of final is the take-home exam. On this you may use any books and sometimes unlimited time is permitted. These are worst because the problems turn out to be impossible to do in less than thirty hours and, since the prof grades on the curve, you are compelled to do the whole thing. Then when the survivors file into class the following semester, the professor smilingly apologizes, "But surely you didn't expect me to work it before I graded it!"