

..... ENGAGING SOCIOLOGY

Exam Stories: Testing the Truth

College exams are quickly approaching, so it is a good time to take a look at the latest chapter in the tome of teacher–student legend and rumors.

The first one was reported from Calgary, Alberta, by a civil engineering student at the University of Manitoba. This tale says a professor announced an open-book final examination in which the students could “use anything they are able to carry into the exam room.” One innovative undergraduate, it is reported, carried in a graduate student who wrote his exam for him.

Another legend came from North Carolina. Supposedly, on the day before the final exam, the professor left his office unattended, with the door open and the examinations sitting on his desk. A student who came by to ask a question found the room empty and quickly left with one of the exams. However, the professor had printed the exact number of exams that he needed, and the next morning, he counted them again before going to the classroom. Discovering that he was one short, he suspected that it had been stolen, so he trimmed a half-inch from the bottom of the remaining exams. When the exam papers were turned in, the student whose paper was longer than the others’ received a failing grade.

Finally, two guys were taking introductory chemistry, and they had done so well on all the quizzes that by the last week of class, they each had a solid A. These friends were so confident going into the final that on the weekend before the exam, they partied. However, with hangovers on Monday, they overslept

and missed the exam. They found the professor and told him they missed the final because they had been away, had had a flat tire on the way back to campus, and were without a spare. The professor thought this over and agreed that they could make up the final. The two studied intensely that night and went in the next day for the exam. The professor placed them in separate rooms and handed each of them a test booklet and told them to begin. The first problem was simple and was worth 5 points. They were both relieved. They did the first problem and then turned the page. The next question was, “Which tire? (95 points).”

Campus legends such as these help reduce the strain of college life and spread the reputations of legendary professors. Furthermore, they keep alive hopes of someday outfoxing the professors—or the students, depending on which side you are on.

* * * * *

Engaging With Sociology

1. Can you think of examples to add to this list? How do you know whether they are true or not?
2. How did you hear about the urban legends with which you are familiar? How did you learn they were not, in fact, true?
3. In what ways do such stories illustrate *collective behavior*?

.....

Source: www.snopes.com.