



## What I Think: Semester exams should be given a lower weighting.

# Addition by subtraction

### IASAS schools weigh in

Final-exam weightings at the other IASAS schools are in line with current weightings at JIS. [Editor's note: Taipei American School did not immediately respond to our query.]

#### SINGAPORE



• 15 - 25 percent

#### MANILA



• Max. 20 percent

#### KUALA LUMPUR



• 10 - 20 percent

#### BANGKOK



• Max. 20 percent

BY EUN JEE CHANG

A recent controversy at JIS – one of the top international schools with successful students in advanced programs such as the IB and AP – is whether semester exams should be retained.

Semester exams have long been a part of our school's academic tradition. At the end of each semester, students are required to take an exam that summarizes all of the units that have been covered in every academic course. For many of the courses, semester exams constitute 20 percent of the final grade.

Despite their being a part of JIS's long, successful history, semester exams have been questioned as to whether they are actually effective and helpful with regards to student learning.

According to Mr. Peter Round, the vice principal of academic affairs, "Although I think they are necessary,

the main problem with semester exams is the time they take. If you include the days leading up to the exams and the exams themselves, they dominate about a month of each school year. We have to be sure that they are of high value in terms of student learning, and I wonder if we really need to have two sessions a year."

Although semester exams arguably take up a month each school year, including the two weeks of lead-in preparation, when our high school students, not to mention parents and teachers, were surveyed two years ago, an overwhelming percentage agreed with keeping the usual two exams per year.

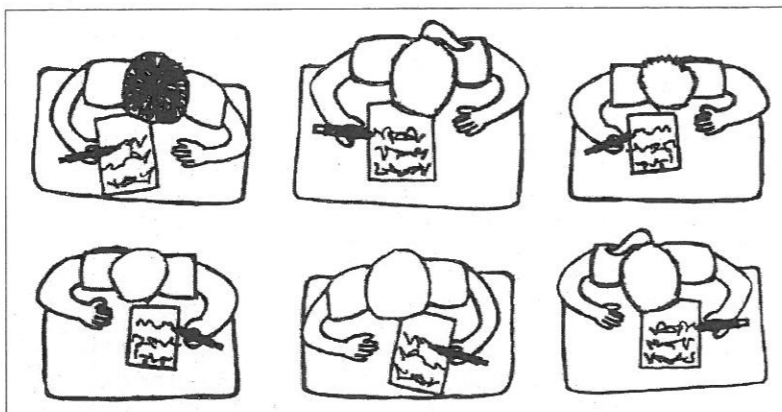
When I interviewed several high school students, most still favored keeping the two exams.

Barak Waters, a junior, said, "Having two exams per year is necessary because we tend to forget what happens during the beginning parts of the year, and it is necessary to re-

view these things with an exam each semester. If we had only one exam, there would be too much work to cluster in the amount of time given to study."

This year, the exam system was slightly changed so that not all exams from the same subject would be on the same day, thus reducing the stress on students. Although semester exams are favored by many students, the end-of-semester tests remain a major source of stress for them.

The benevolent purpose behind the change is appreciated by our students, but many remain under the same pressure to study for one or more exams per day.



Andrew Smith

Since the purpose of the change was to lessen the burden on our students' shoulders, why not change the weighting of the exams? Sure, the new change might minimize the burden to an extent, but the main problem lies in the impact of the exams on grades.

According to current policy, the percentage of semester exams falls in the range of 15 to 20 percent. While the current percentage has its advantage – namely, giving students a chance to raise their marks – it takes up too much weight on the final grade, leading to a situation where students' efforts during the preceding months can go to waste.

If the percentage of semester exams were reduced to a standardized 10 percent, the new policy would achieve two goals: first, it would reduce stress by reducing the risk of students' efforts going to waste, and, second, it would continue to encourage students to work hard during the semester to earn the grade they deserve. [E]



## What I Think: Sodexo's daily offerings need more variety and healthier options.

# This or that?

BY DHIKA HIMAWAN

Two years ago, we welcomed to our campus a new cafeteria that promised to provide more variety and healthier options for the students.

While many complain about the prices and taste of the food, Sodexo, the new provider, has certainly offered healthier, albeit costlier, options. Evidently, Sodexo's lunches are less greasy than the food we had in the previous cafeteria. The noodle bar, for example, is certainly better for us than the instant Korean ramen sold by the cafeteria before, regardless of the taste.

Recently, however, sugary cupcakes, cakes and cookies have started to appear in the snack bars, overweighting the fruit bowls that take up only a little space in the display glasses. Fruit smoothies are available only in the Vive Café, while the other two Sodexo counters replace

### HEALTHY FOODS WE MISS FROM THE OLD CAFETERIA

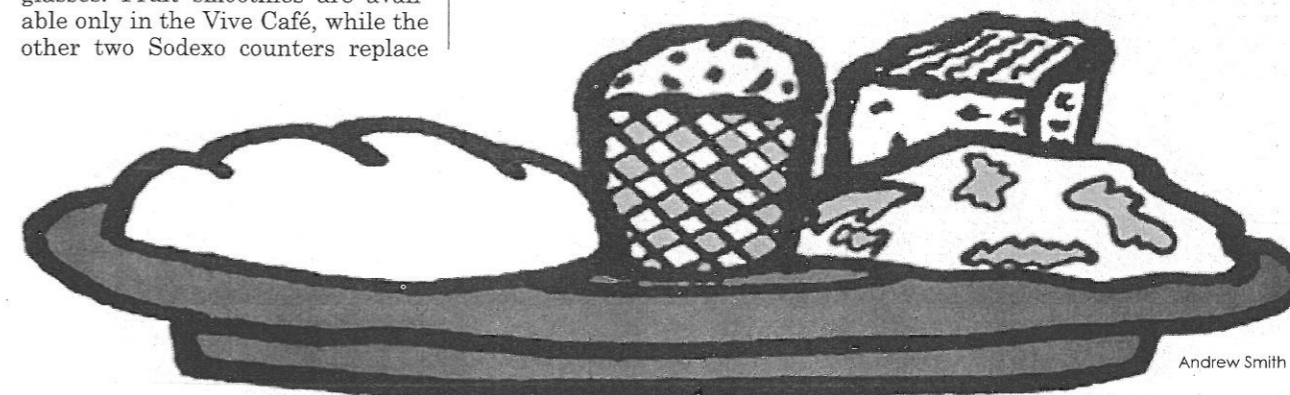
- ◇ Juices from the juice bar
- ◇ Fruit crepes
- ◇ "Mama's Kitchen" meals loaded with veggies
- ◇ Whole-wheat sandwiches
- ◇ Tofu katsu
- ◇ Fresh-cut meat kebabs

providing more choices that are better for us rather than cater primarily to what the majority of students desire the most.

In fact, the Asian and Western lunches seem increasingly to offer menus of deep-fried chicken, hot dogs and burgers. Using olive oil or any other healthier ingredients may

because the students' tastebuds often run contrary. Fruits and salads cost more at Sodexo than they do for comparable items sold at D'Toko and the Booster Hut. D'Toko, for example, has a system of raising prices for unhealthy snacks in order to subsidize the price for fruits and promote healthier diets. This way, students save money by eating the fruit bowls.

The lack of healthier choices is perhaps most keenly felt by one segment of our student population, vegetarians, who are often seen roaming the cafeteria, wondering what they can eat. The main outlets for serving vegetarian meals are the Indian-food counter and the salad bar. Yes, there are far fewer vegetarians than non-vegetarians in our school; nonetheless, if Sodexo expanded its vegetarian offerings, it might win over some non-vegetarians as well. Akshika



Andrew Smith

the juices with slushies.

Shayon Roy, a senior, believes that "the smoothie counter in the previous cafeteria had more fruits" and that "we were also able to see the juices being made."

We all know that the students dictate much of what Sodexo offers and that a "give them what they want" policy is a "recipe" for business success, not to mention happy customers; nevertheless, Sodexo should keep in mind its original charge of

no longer compensate for the deep-fried lunches or sugared snacks.

In addition, the selection of breads also needs to include healthier assortments, such as whole-grain varieties. If the school brought in Sodexo to offer healthy choices in the first place, then we should re-examine whether that objective is being optimally maintained.

On the other hand, attracting the students to buy healthier foods is a challenge for Sodexo, and not only

Dave, a vegetarian, said, "There isn't much variety for me; that's why I mostly bring food from home."

Even though Sodexo is the largest food provider at JIS, the Booster Hut and D'Toko remain many students' first resorts. If the mothers have expanded their lunches and snacks, then so should Sodexo. With so many cultures on campus, expanded choice – including an expanded array of healthy choices – is always the best policy. [E]