

comes the reply. On that note, the four exit, and the executives settle back in their chairs. "Hot stuff!" says one—hot enough for an A.

Veterans of BU107 sing the presentations' praises. Junior Maria Hunt arrived at Skidmore a potential theater major; her positive experience with the course (she received an A) both changed her outlook and her field of study to business. But those fresh from the exercise seem too shell-shocked for such perspective, feeling mainly, "Thank God it's over." Later, however, they also begin to analyze what the experience taught them. "The best part about this was working in a group," declares Robert, a Government major. "I knew my teammate John from before; he was a friend of my girlfriend's girlfriend. We didn't get along. But because we had to, we learned to work together." Robert's comment summarizes what most kids say—and their teachers hope—they pick up from the exercise: how to work well with peers, a practice customary in an office, but at odds with the traditional solitude of academic study.

"Getting along" can be especially delicate in the social turmoil of freshman year. Students can't switch groups, but they can "fire" a disruptive or lax member from the team. That's a traumatic decision, meaning an F for the person dismissed. One group debated until the night before their presentation about the fate of a perennial absentee. They finally

opted to keep him on, figuring "he'd be our devil's advocate: If we could explain it to him at the last minute, we could explain it to anybody." As it turned out, they nearly had to explain his absence to the executives. True to form, the student overslept and almost missed the presentation. Another member of this group was unexpectedly handicapped: A sprained wrist prevented her from changing placards as planned.

Despite these concerns, group thirty-three begins on time on the morning of day 2. They outline IH's strengths (an historic name, a strong financing subsidiary, an immense network of dealers) and weaknesses (inefficient production, nonentrepreneurial management, overly-mature markets). Their plan: reorganization of the upper echelons and the creation of new markets in developing nations, facilitated by an influx of capital from layoffs and sell-offs. The three examiners interrupt constantly, throwing off the group's neatly organized schedule. Undeterred, the students start asking questions themselves, so that the presentation assumes the almost cozy air of an office strategy-swapping session. After deliberating among themselves, the executives turn into judges again. They offer some behavioral criticism. One student is told, "David, you dominated." "He's been dominating since Septem-

ber!" exclaims another student. They also scold the near-absentee for looking sleepy. In the end, however, group thirty-three receives an A—this year's Cinderella story.

High grades or low, the students get an intense introduction to the business world of result-oriented values—"street-smarts," as business department chairman William Greene puts it. That these are eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds taking their first business course is not beside the point—it is the point, the cornerstone of the business department's program. Martha Seidner, who took the very first BU107, recalls Colleen Burke's description of the system: "We throw you into a swamp your first semester, watch you start to drown, then pull you out over the next three years."

If the enthusiasm of the visiting executives is any indication, the students aren't the only ones being taught. "We learn a lot, too," insists Robert Benchley, publisher and editor of *Benchmark*, a new business magazine. "This acts like a mini-business school course. I welcome the chance to find out about strategies, because I never went to business school—just journalism school." Curiosity motivates many of the older executives as well, who are intrigued by the whole concept of business courses; in their day, you



*Poker-faced students David Susser and Ellen Hermann await the verdict (above). Michael Rappeport of R.L. Associates talks with Joann Zacek and Cynthia Hutchinson about their grade of C: "That's management."*

