

# TO DISPEL A MYTH

This statement is designed to dispel what we hope is a myth. Students, faculty, and administrators continue to be troubled by the belief that new ideas — which inevitably challenge and criticize old ideas — are not welcome at Texas A&M. A student in a classroom is afraid to write a critical letter to the *Battalion* lest “something happen to her.” A faculty member refuses to join a relatively staid organization because he “doesn’t have tenure yet.” An administrator wants to be quoted anonymously because he doesn’t want to “get into trouble.” Such vague fears have had a serious impact. Students, faculty, and administrators moving to the Texas A&M campus from other universities are astonished by the absence of a vigorous spirit of criticism, the only kind of atmosphere that can generate the ideas necessary to grapple with our rapidly changing times.

John Stuart Mill, in his renowned essay “On Liberty,” provides three reasons for encouraging new, challenging, critical ideas. First, the new idea may be true. If this new idea is suppressed, we are denied the opportunity of exchanging falsehood for truth. Second, even if the new idea is in error, it may contain a portion of the truth. Through the conflict of this idea with other ideas, the whole truth may emerge. Third, even if the new idea is totally false and the old idea is absolutely true, the old idea can be strengthened when advocates are forced to defend it. These advocates will develop a greater appreciation of the reasons supporting it.

The importance of encouraging new ideas has been demonstrated by the very rise of science that has helped move our university toward greatness. Unfortunately, science has not always been as well received as it is today. The example of the brilliant Galileo and

the Church’s attempts to suppress his work comes perhaps most quickly to mind. Nobody denies that science should have undergone rigorous criticism, and no innovator should work under the illusion that he or she will necessarily be thanked for disturbing the status quo. But criticism should stop short of punitive measures and their threat. The benefits of science over the centuries remain strong arguments for the spirit of toleration.

We have seen no consistent pattern of punitive measures leveled at those who have promoted new ideas, challenges, and criticism at Texas A&M. No doubt a few misguided student leaders, faculty members, or administrators may have leveled such measures in the past. But recently we have seen members of the university body strongly encourage new approaches, which have been so necessary at a time when the university has been expanding rapidly and striving hard for greater excellence. Even the most severe critics must admit that the university has handled the severe problems of growth with a minimum of disruption. Such a transition can only have been accomplished through a receptivity to change.

A university must have faith that false criticism will be exposed as such, that criticism containing a portion of the truth can be used to improve our situation, that true criticism will be acted upon as swiftly as possible. The university must continue to be the citadel of truth throughout the world. We encourage students, faculty, and administrators of Texas A&M to do whatever they can to dispel the myth of the suppression of the spirit of criticism. As Mill writes, “the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation . . . .”

**Brazos Civil Liberties Union  
A&M Civil Liberties Union  
Box 1116  
College Station, Tx 77840**