

Staff photo by Marsha Hoehn

Peer adviser sessions offer incoming freshmen the chance to discuss Texas A&M away from the structured orientation program.

# Freshmen peer at A&M

## Peer advisers help in new students' orientation

by SCOT K. MEYER

**Battalion Staff**  
The people lining up in pairs and talking enthusiastically among themselves while they wait for the program to start are not freshmen. They have not been walking around an unfamiliar campus all day, nor have they sat in large groups, listening to the indoctrination lectures of their summer orientation conference.

These people are not confused; the confused ones will arrive shortly. But they know what it is like to be confused, and that is why they are here.

These people, all Texas A&M students when both students, are peer advising. When the freshmen arrive, two peer advisers on Sunday take each group of six to eight on a casual tour of the campus. The places the tour group will go will be determined by what the freshmen want to see.

The peer adviser sessions are an optional part of summer orientation. They give incoming freshmen the chance to discuss Texas A&M with current students — hence the name "peer" advisers.

Glenna Witt, associate director of student affairs, is in charge of the peer adviser program. The program is three years old, and it has been running each year.

Last year, about 35 percent of the freshmen attending their summer orientation expressed an interest in peer adviser sessions. This year that figure increased to 90 percent, she said, and over 300 freshmen signed up for each session.

The program was set up to give the

orientation of new freshmen a personal touch, Witt said. After being herded around in large groups all day, the freshmen are given a chance to break into smaller groups, and talk to students who understand the problems they will face.

The peer advisers mix Aggie tradition and trivia with advice ranging from how to study for exams to where the best places to dance are. They are also able to answer questions that the freshmen might not feel comfortable asking an administrator — questions like "How hard are the classes?" or "How do I get football tickets?"

Witt said the peer advisers must apply in the spring. The requirements are an overall grade point ratio of at least 2.25, and involvement in at least one student activity, she said.

The peer advisers are not paid, so the motivation to become one may not be clear. But the advisers have their own reasons.

Valerie Vickers, a senior management major, said she became a peer adviser "because I really do feel that it's the freshmen who make A&M great, and they should have a student to tell them how things are here."

Another reason Vickers gave was that the program keeps her excited about being an Aggie. "It's amazing how enthused the freshmen can get you," she said.

Sherrie Balcar, a senior account-

*"When I was a freshman... so many things about this place that I take for granted now were totally new to me."*

ing major from Schulenberg, said, "I can remember when I was a freshman, and so many things about this place that I take for granted now were totally new to me then, coming from a small town."

The peer advisers talk with their groups for about two hours. After the groups break up there is a mixer the freshmen can go to, followed in many cases by a yell practice.

The next day the freshmen will register for their classes, but their transformation into college students is already complete. As one peer adviser told her group, "whatever happens, you are now Aggies." And they witnessed one of the most important characteristics of Aggies: a willingness to help each other out.



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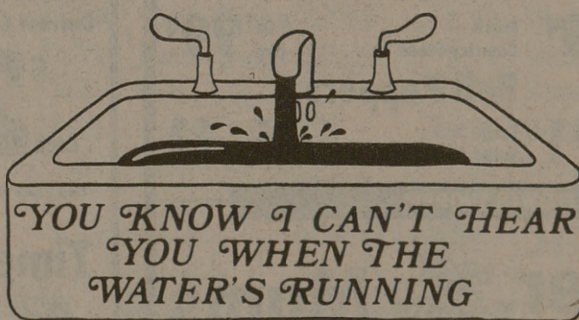
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