

Local

Rats play consumer roles

By BOBBY SWANSON
Battalion Reporter

"How goes the rat race" may soon be more than a cliché. Two Texas A&M University economists have been testing consumer theories on rats for eight years and have found the animals economic behavior to be similar to that of humans.

Dr. Ray Battalio and Dr. John Kagel said many economists questioned the use of the animals to test human aspects of work, pay and spending.

"Some even laughed," Battalio said. "But no one is laughing now."

The pair said they are now praised by their colleagues and covered by the national media. Fortune magazine will include their work in an upcoming issue.

They said their animal research in economics is an important screening device for future human experiments.

"Animal research can suggest the areas of research which might be worthwhile with people," Battalio said. "Given limited resources, it is probably better to spend a nickel on rats than a dollar on humans, especially since human experiments are expensive to conduct."

Battalio and Kagel said their economic rats must work for a living and are paid for the work they do. There are 11 rats in separate houses, which are sound insulated to eliminate distraction.

The rats must press levers as work. The number of times required to get food or water is pay. The rats decide how they will spend their pay as they work.

The rat houses are monitored by computers that record the amount and selection of work each rat performs.

"Like consumers, when we raise the prices, rats buy less," Kagel said. "When the price for food is increased and water is decreased, they eat less and drink more," Kagel said.

An earlier study done by the two showed rats prefer root beer to water. When water is free and root beer



Photo by Bobby Swanson

Dr. Ray Battalio (left) and Dr. John Kagel, both Texas A&M economics professors, examine one of the rats being used in their study of the consumer behavior of rats. After eight

years of study, they have found that rats "work," "earn" and "spend" much like humans.

has to be earned, the rats would work to get the luxury item, Battalio said. The rats also got greedy. They wanted the root beer until it cost too much, and then they began to drink water again, he said.

The economists have tested the effects of "welfare" on the distribution of income among rats. Kagel said rats given unearned rewards tend to work less.

"This appears to be consistent with observations and conjectures of some economists about the welfare states evolving in some Western economies," Kagel said.

"Some people laugh at us for doing experimental economic research with rats," said Kagel. "Sometimes we get emotional responses, but basically we are well received in the scientific community."

Nov. 3 set as Mayo essay contest deadline

Entries are being accepted through Nov. 3 for the fifth annual Thomas-F. Mayo Price Essay Contest.

A \$100 prize will be awarded to the winner.

The contest is sponsored by the English Department and open to

students enrolled in English 103, 104 or 104H.

The prize is given in memory of Mayo, who was the head of Texas A&M's English Department from 1944-52 and longtime college librarian. Mayo, who taught William Faulkner in high school and was a

Rhodes Scholar, died in 1954.

Essays are limited to 750 words and must be written in response to a class assignment in either of the three courses. They will be judged on originality, fluency, vividness, organization and mechanics, as well as thoughtfulness of treatment.

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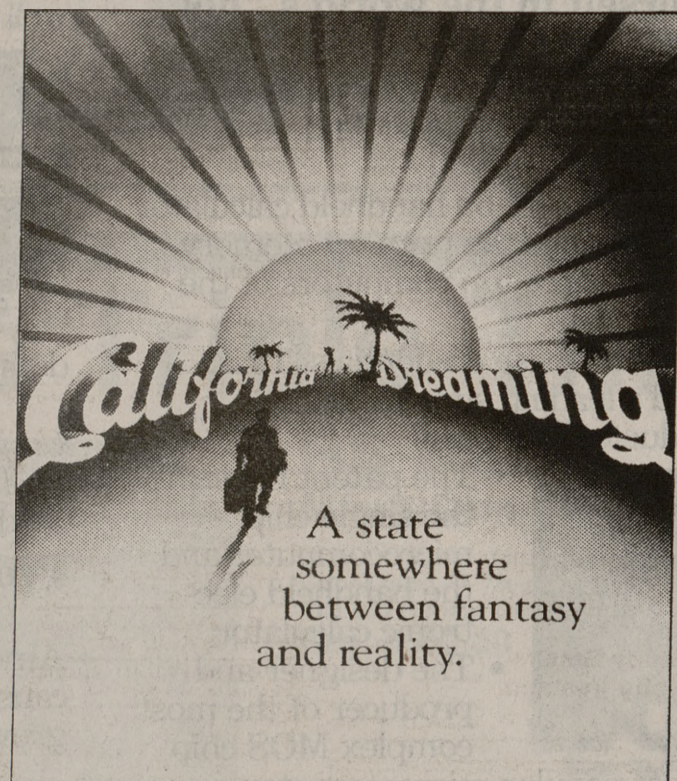
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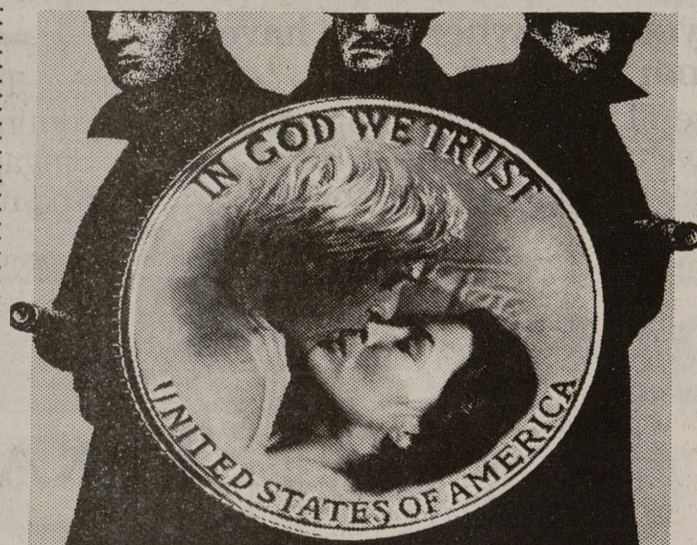
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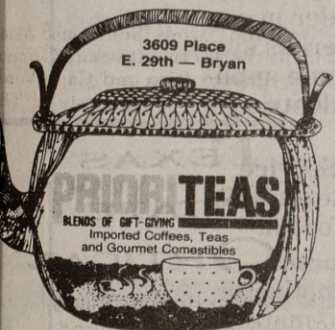
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