

Slouch By Jim Earle



"It's the ultimate personalized check. It includes my account number, dorm address, home address, box number, laundry mark, forwarding address, driver's license number, age, weight, CPR and my waist size!"

Setting it straight on editorial policy

I got a call the other day, wanting to know why I run such "garbage" on the editorial page.

The caller referred to several recent letters that voiced "unpopular" opinions and wanted to know if I hated Texas A&M or was merely trying to degrade The Battalion.

It occurred to me that I should clarify the editorial policy for page two. I publish what people send in. I don't solicit or necessarily agree with the opinions expressed. I merely publish them.

The editorial page is an open forum for readers to express their views on issues that affect their lives at Texas A&M. The policies that have been set to govern what is run on that page include limits due to space constraints and limits of good taste.

Good taste is not restricted to only those sentiments complimentary to the University or those held by a majority or vocal minority of students at Texas A&M.

Letters must be signed and include the writer's phone number and address. It is



Angelique Copeland

customary to include your class. When the letter is printed, some extra form of identification will be published along with the name, either class or address, to aid in identification. On a campus of more than 35,000 students, duplicate names are not uncommon.

Letters are never restricted to those that voice "popular" opinions. I invited the caller to submit his own "garbage" for publication. The editorial page is, in large part, what you the reader make of it.

On teaching mathematics

Mathematics is viewed as a difficult subject by most students and a threat by some. Why is this? Part of the answer lies in the nature of the subject, its classical and ancient roots, its dynamic growth, and the claims for its pervasive applicability in modern society. Another part of the answer lies in the pressures created by large enrollments, tight time schedules, and highly structured courses and syllabi. Yet another part of the answer lies with the instructor and whether good or bad pedagogy is used. Last, but not least, a part of the answer lies in the attitudes that students develop during their formative years about mathematics, its nature, and content.

Mathematics, as taught in the usual curriculum, is presented as a highly logical and deductive science. Unfortunately, it can lead to the (justifiable) belief by students that there is just one way to obtain a result. The "this is how you solve it" approach prevails. When viewed in this way, mathematics seems dull and dead instead of the exciting alive subject that it is.

Why is mathematics important? The answer simply is that it pervades and impacts on our everyday lives, not just in the classroom. It has also become the language of science, engineering, business, and other disciplines and is, perhaps, the world's most important labor saving device.

Ideally, the teacher of mathematics should strive to get the students to approach mathematics as fun. A key to successful study of mathematics is to recognize that it can be played as a game with definite and specified rules. Students should be taught to solve problems with a view of understanding the principles involved as well as developing their skills.

Turning to the actual role of the mathematics department of Texas A&M, we find that the overview of the teaching function can be expressed as a mathematical problem. Around 38 percent of the student body

Reader's Forum

(i.e. over 13,000 students) is currently enrolled in mathematics courses. The resources of the department to handle this load are: 82 faculty members, 65 teaching assistants, and 35 graders. Moreover, the majority of the students are enrolled in either the engineering mathematics or the business mathematics sequences. How do you solve the problem of offering and assigning these classes within the constraints of classroom size and availability, time patterns, and workload formulas? While the problem probably has several solutions, the one with the least amount of undesirable aspects is that these first and second year courses must come in two sizes: large and larger.

It is also not trivial to solve the problem of staffing of both faculty and teaching assistants. There is an official shortage, according to the American Mathematical Society, of Ph.D. mathematicians in the academic market place. The graduate student pool at Texas A&M in mathematics provides less than half of our overall need of teaching assistants. Thus we must compete with other departments for the services of their graduate students to fulfill our needs.

The mathematics department hires a number of foreign faculty. Most of these are very distinguished mathematicians and some are pre-eminent in their field. Moreover, the large majority have had considerable experience in major American universities. Sometimes there are initial problems perceived by the students with a

foreign faculty member. These problems usually center around accent, language style. With effort on both parties we find that these problems either disappear or become less significant after a few weeks. Our faculty also travel to other places to teach, lecture, or to do research, and most visit other institutions in the U.S. We do have some who travel to places like France, Germany, England, Israel, and other places. Mathematics form an international community of scholars. They meet in international conferences (some on the campus of Texas A&M) and publish in international journals, and change both long and short term with each others institutions.

A word about mathematical research in order. Both pure and applied research is carried on by various members of our faculty. Of the five current faculty who have received teaching awards at Texas A&M, three are strong in research. Mathematicians do not see any dichotomy between research and teaching. They complement each other. Research is vital in a university like Texas A&M to keep the curriculum healthy, alive and relevant.

From time to time students may have problems in their mathematics courses. There are problems with understanding content, they should see their instructor or teaching assistant. For the lower courses, the departmental administrators stand ready to listen and help solve the problem if bad study habits, lack of skills, or poor motivation, the student should recognize it as such and seek help in these areas. In anything that we can do to help students with in the study of mathematics we stand ready to serve.

Editor's note: Lacey is head of the department of mathematics at Texas A&M.

It's your turn

Traditions create special atmosphere

Editor:

A special feeling does exist on this campus. The simplicity of the traditions and friendships allows people from the city, and the farm to come together forming a unique place to be. There really is something special about a large group of people standing, silently, *individually* in the dark, creating a union, a whole greater than the parts, a spirit of hope and giving rather than fighting among themselves. In the nasty real world where competition is the violent way of life, it sure is a welcome feeling to have even a single moment of *peace*. Being an Aggie is something special, it can not be explained to anyone who has not experienced it. It is as powerful an experience as any Theist could hope for; I am sorry Mr. Gross (among others) has not felt the Aggie Spirit. The most important point Mr. Gross failed to mention was that some people did *think* about the choice of Texas A&M as a place to grow and learn. In fact I was given this choice, and I picked this institution over any other spot on the earth. Texas A&M may not be the best school for you, but to me it is the only place to be. I've got the spirit. Do you??

Donn Friedman
University Oaks

Greeks not needed

Editor:

I am writing in support of Brett Peabody's letter of October 21. He has captured precisely the feelings I have concerning the recognition of Greeks by the University. Having grown up near another SWC school and having many friends enrolled there, I have seen the snobbery and exclusive unfriendliness that go hand-in-hand with Greek kinship, and I must say that this type of attitude would not look good at Texas A&M at all.

One of things that I have always admired about Texas A&M is its tradition of equal-

ity, brotherhood, and friendliness. My father, Class of 1954, always said that at Texas A&M an individual left all of his differences and airs outside of campus and came into a student body that was like one happy family. Diversity and individualism are fine when they don't separate the student body into social castes, and I fear that the admission of Greeks as on-campus organizations would only facilitate such division.

Texas A&M's fine traditions must be kept paramount above the selfish wants of so-called "more fortunate" people and organizations. Exclusive niches would be detrimental to the reputation of our school. In regard to Otto Boneta's letter of October 7, in which the Corps is referred to as a so-called niche, need we remind anybody that the Corps is more than 80 years older than the non-reg student body? I would like to see this school continue on a path of fellowship without inviting the preppie-like "better than thou" attitudes of the Greeks.

James Block, '84
Christopher Douglas Finch
Fred Pinkleton

Bicyclist replies

Editor:

I realize that bikers sometimes go too fast through crowds of people which is very dangerous. But, if people would just keep walking and not try to dodge bikers, life would sure be a lot easier for us bicyclists. If I am planning to ride around a pedestrian and he stops or moves just because I am near, my route has to be changed.

By the way, if I happen to ride by someone and they tell me to slow down and then kick my front wheel out from under me, I would definitely get up and casually break their neck.

So, just keep on walkin' and let the biker do the anticipating. And, we'll all be happier.

Scott Satterwhite
2707 Evergreen

Response to GSSO

Editor:

Why is it you gays insist on being recognized solely on the basis of your sexual preferences and then turn around and complain that people treat you differently because you're gay? I know the bumper sticker reads "Steers and Queers, No Place but Austin," but I don't even wish you "guys" on t.u. Why don't you just go back into the closet where you belong? The rest of us

don't care who you sleep with, why reminding us?

Lauren Wallingford

'Statistics' alarming

Editor:

I am extremely surprised by the statement made by the Gay Student Service Organization in The Battalion that one in ten Texas A&M students are gay. I thank you for enlightening me with your statistics. I will be more careful in the community shower from this point on.

Steven A. Martin

A word about traditions

Editor:

Aggie traditions. I can think of no other topic on campus that is characterized by such extremism in opinions. To the extremists, I would like to suggest that Aggie traditions, like all traditions, should be a beacon to help guide our future, rather than a monument from the past to which all future direction must conform.

Jeff B...
502 Southwest Parkway

Don't steal posters

Editor:

This letter is directed to all of you who steal the posters that the various MSC Student Committees make. The posters are put up with an intention in mind. If they wanted you to have them, they would have them in the first place.

At a recent meeting, Town Hall discussed this problem. There are still 5,000 posters left for the Charlie Pride concert and nobody will know about it if the posters are all stolen.

To put an alarm on or to guard a poster would be ridiculous, and outrageous. The committees only hope to depend on the integrity of Aggies. The posters are there as means of advertisement and are essential to your knowing what is going on. Remember, Good Ags don't steal.

Holly Wright
Town Hall

THE BATTALION

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The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting newspaper operated as a community service to Texas A&M University and Bryan-College Station. Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the editor or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M University administrators or faculty members, or of the Board of Regents.

LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length, and are subject to being cut if they are longer. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must also be signed, show the address and phone number of the writer.

Columns and guest editorials are also welcome, and are not subject to the same length constraints as letters. Address all inquiries and correspondence to: Editor, The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.

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Warped



By Scott McCullar