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College may stop education

by Tracey Taylor
Battalion Reporter

The years a student spends enrolled in a university are years of study and memorization. They are years spent reading books, writing papers, attending labs and taking finals. However, for some these are years spent learning different lessons.

For the students involved in activities outside the classroom, the years are spent learning to get along with people, learning how to organize large groups, and learning about themselves.

Many top educators and university officials feel that the time a student spends away from the books is more important than the time actually spent studying.

Dr. Alexander W. Astin, director of the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, recently told a group of educators at Texas A&M University that the biggest problem in American education today is the uninvolved student.

Astin and a group of his colleagues recently completed a study of students enrolled in colleges across the nation to try to discover what makes them stay in school.

What he found was the more involved a student is, the less likely he is to drop out.

"We have found that every form of involvement we can identify seems to relate to staying in college," Astin said.

"Every form of non-involvement seems to relate to dropping out."

"What makes a student stay is how involved a student is in the process of being a student."

Being a student should include involvement in extracurricular activities.

... "Extracurricular activities are an opportunity offered by colleges that develop students' skills, talents and personal qualities in ways that no course can do. There should be more (courses) at colleges and universities for personal and social development." — Dr. Alexander W. Astin, research director at the University of California...

ular activities such as student government, a job, or even a close relationship with a professor, he said.

Therefore, an educator's biggest challenge is not to teach as much as possible, but to get the student involved and facilitate learning in whatever way possible.

ble, Astin said.

"Extracurricular activities are an opportunity offered by colleges that develop students' skills, talents and personal qualities in ways that no course can do."

Institutions of higher education should not worry about or compete for the smartest students, or the highest Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, or the largest libraries, Astin said. He said if competition is necessary, it should revolve around the intangible opportunities the campus and the university as a whole has to offer.

At Texas A&M, student activities are an important part of the total college experience, said Director of Student Activities Dr. Carolyn Adair. She agrees with Astin's theories.

She feels lessons learned from being a leader of student groups and from informal involvement with other students can be applied positively to academics. She said that students involved outside the classroom should do better in academic courses.

Some college professors argue that students will eventually learn the lessons taught by extracurricular activities on their own.

Texas A&M University is unique because it offers academic credit for some of the student-involved outside activities. Adair said university officials decided some Student Programs Office activities offered were important enough to be included on students' transcripts.

The Student Programs Office now offers three one-hour courses which fall under the heading of Management 481 to selected group leaders. The classes range in size from 27 to 105 people.

One of the classes is an administrative seminar for people such as the newspaper and yearbook editors, the head yell leader, the president of the student body and the presidents of groups like Off-Campus Aggies and Residence Hall Association. The class meets once a week and offers a different speaker each week. Speakers in the class range from Dr. John J. Koldus, vice-president for student services, to assistant athletic director Wally Groff.

The second course offered is called Management of Student Organizations and is open to leaders of the recognized stu-

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dent organizations on campus. Its goals are to teach students the basic principles of managing a group and suggests techniques for getting a group started.

The third course, which eligible juniors may apply for, is a public speaking seminar offered during the spring semester. Students are taught how to speak on behalf of Texas A&M University. Groups, such as Aggie Mothers Clubs and the Association of Former Students, invite the students to speak at their

meetings. The students try to cover relevant on-campus news as well as traditions and food. Adair said the goal of the course is to teach students public speaking and how to speak on behalf of an organization.

There are 543 recognized student organizations on the Texas A&M campus. That number does not include sports teams under the Athletic Department's control. Adair is optimistic about students' participation in the groups.

Adair believes extracurricular activities are a tradition at Texas A&M that will not be challenged. In fact, she said, the activities have actually maintained the traditions at Texas A&M. "This institution has changed more in the last 20 years than any other institution. But activities have helped it remain the same," she said.

Participation in activities is just a few of the things that get students involved. Adair cited relationships and campus jobs as other worthwhile activities.

Astin believes education is a lot simpler than it is made out to be. What is important, he said, is not just content, but content in relation to where the student stands in knowledge and personal development.

"There should be more at colleges and universities for personal and social development," he said.

The general feelings of students as well as some other educators and university officials, can be summed up by a poster in a campus dormitory room.

The poster reads: "Don't let your studies interfere with college education."

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Tillis is known not only for singing but for his trademark stuttering. He traces the stutter back to age three when he was sick with malaria.

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