

Opinion

Issue to decide balance of power

The recent furor over whether graduating seniors to take final examinations will have one effect that has been largely ignored.

The Faculty Senate is a relatively new organization at Texas A&M. The finals controversy is the first major issue it has had a hand in.

The Senate's first proposal must pass through several more channels before it can become University policy. But the final decision will determine, to a great degree, the organization's future.

The current issue is a major test for the Faculty Senate. If the outcome is decided along the lines of its recommendation, a precedent will be set for its active involvement in academic affairs. It would be a major victory for the Senate, giving the body, as it were, political clout on campus.

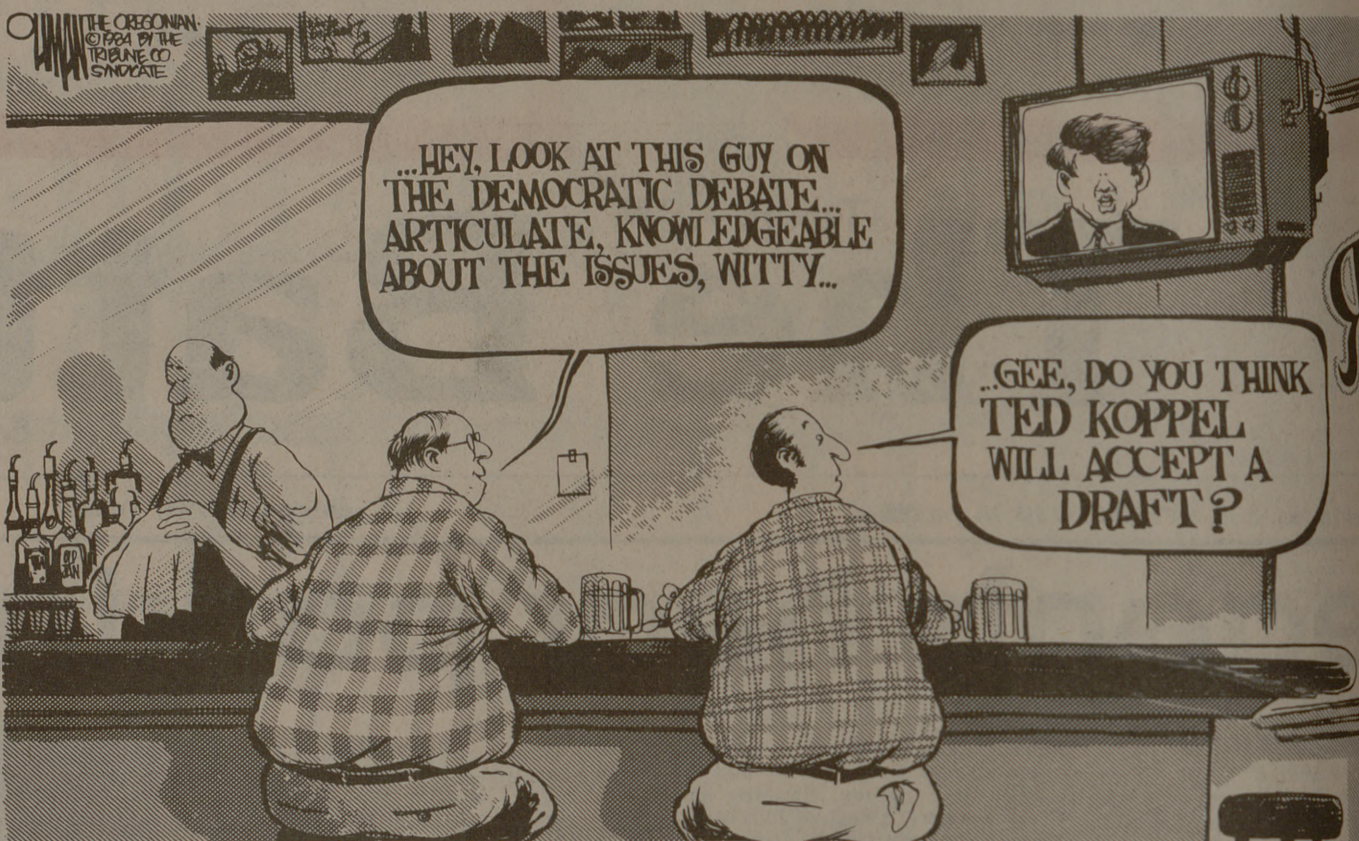
On the other hand, if no change re-

sults from the recent proposal, the Senate may go the way of its student counterpart, the Student Senate. It will enter into the vicious circle of studies, investigations, proposals, recommendations and more studies, none of which have had any major effect on the actual policies and procedures of the University so far.

Student Government also has a major stake in the outcome of the finals issue. The Student Senate, with its all-talk-little-action reputation among many students and faculty members, could improve its status with a decision in favor of maintaining the status quo.

In other words, there is more at stake than finals for graduating seniors. The eventual balance of power at the University may be determined by the current controversy.

— The Battalion Editorial Board



Arguments against senior finals invalid

Last Monday, the Faculty Senate passed a resolution recommending the policy exempting seniors from taking final examinations be changed by December 1985. After that time, according to the proposal, seniors should be required to take finals along with the rest of their classmates.

In a separate resolution, the Senate recommended that the administration take appropriate steps to maintain timely and meaningful commencement and commissioning ceremonies.

A recent editorial in The Battalion criticized the Senate for timing the vote on the resolution in order to catch students off guard. As one of the students who was invited to speak to the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Standards during its deliberation on the issue, as well as to the Faculty Senate, I know that the Senate took many steps to try to avoid that situation.

Besides inviting a number of students to present their perspectives to the committee and the Senate, the vote on the issue was intentionally postponed until students were back on campus in order to avoid the appearance that the faculty was trying to "pull one over" on the students while we were home on vacation.

The Faculty Senate is not obligated to consult the students before making recommendations to the administration, just as the Student Senate is not required to ask members of the faculty how they feel before passing legislation of its own. Both bodies are responsible for representing the views of their respective constituencies to the administration. Usually, both bodies have at least solicited the opinion of the other before passing legislation. However, this should not prevent either group from accurately conveying their opinions to the University community.

The Faculty Senate has been accused unfairly on some points. However, I

would be neglecting my responsibility as a student representative if I did not present the student perspective. There is no doubt that the student body is overwhelmingly opposed to the faculty's decision.

The most serious charges that the faculty levels against the present policy are that it is a serious compromise to academic standards and that it requires evaluating students on unequal bases. Many professors complain that graduating students quit coming to class after their last exams and miss valuable class time.

The faculty further insists that many students abuse the present policy by "manipulating" their schedules in order to postpone large numbers of courses until their last semester to avoid having to take the finals. Some students do take unusually large course loads their last semesters, but in most cases the students are taking all that they need to graduate on time or at least as soon as possible. It is far more common for students to take as light a load as they can their last semester in order to have as much time as possible to devote to job interviews.

For most of us job interviews are by far more important during our last semester than the prospects of being exempt from an exam.

As for the other arguments, objective analysis shows that the basic problem is one of classroom management and test scheduling, rather than academics. It's rather hard to see what academic standards are being compromised as long as professors can evaluate their students on all material that they choose to hold them responsible for.

There is nothing in the present policy that restricts a professor from scheduling a test the week prior to dead week in order to evaluate all students up to that point in the class. Many professors do this already for just that reason.

The complaint usually comes from

professors who use the final as merely a third exam instead of a comprehensive wrap-up of the semester. Students often complain of classes in which their entire grade is based on only three exams, or in some cases, only one exam, a project or

the authority to require classroom attendance and participation as part of the overall grade. Of course, this requires some effort by the professor to keep track of his students or at least notice whether they are in class.

Most students tend to respond to what is required of them by the professor, especially if they know that their graduation depends on it. It seems a bit unfair to expect students to continue to attend class after their last test if the professor doesn't require it and gives them no incentive to do so.

Although the faculty argues that the present policy does not promote fair and equitable academic standards and is "anti-intellectual," it presents no convincing arguments that a change of policy will make the education experience any better. There is no proof that requiring seniors to take regularly scheduled final exams will enhance their education.

However, there are many problems that such a change of the policy would create. Changing the policy would require a change in commencement ceremonies. Presently, approximately 95 percent of the graduates participate in commencement ceremonies. The number of visitors who attend graduation is also considerably higher than at other universities.

The popularity of the commencement ceremony is undoubtedly tied to the fact that students actually receive their diplomas as they walk across the stage and graduation takes place while students and faculty are still on campus. But change in the present ceremony undoubtedly cause a decline in participation at graduation, particularly if diplomas are not distributed at that time. Graduation is postponed, many students would have to choose between beginning work or waiting around to receive diplomas.

The administrative problems that change in the system would cause would be enormous. A change would put more of a burden on the deans' and registrar's offices during the busiest time of the year for processing grades. A postponement of graduation would require students to try to take care of last minute details that may block graduation at the time when most faculty members would have already gone on vacation or stopped keeping regular office hours.

While the Faculty Senate realized the recommendation it has made would undoubtedly cause these problems, it decided that these are purely administrative problems and should not be the concern of an academic body. It has therefore suggested that the administration take appropriate steps to overcome difficulties the recommended policy cause.



joe jordan

(Editor's Note: Joe Jordan, a senior physics major, is student body president.)

paper and the final. Most students would agree more grades should be taken in order to fairly evaluate student performance. It seems unfair to have one-third of your grade based on one bad test. The answer to the problem is more frequent testing and other forms of evaluations, not simply requiring seniors to take final exams.

As far as students missing class is concerned, the problem is clearly one of classroom management. Any professor has

Letters: Kerr martyred

Editor: After watching the evening news on Jan. 19, I realized that a lot of people in the war-torn country of Lebanon are confused about their position and objectives. Students at the American University said they were "relieved" Dr. Kerr was murdered because he was "impartial to the struggle." Why should he be partial? He was concerned with academics; it was his duty to be "impartial." He is supposed to espouse knowledge, not ideology.

For all the Islamic people who are "reed" Dr. Kerr is dead, understand this: he is a true martyr. He died because he wanted his students to receive knowledge, not an ideology. Knowledge is universal; an ideology is restricted in space and fades rapidly with time.

Gary S. Hill
Geography Graduate Student

Views of SPA misinterpreted

Editor: B. Mecum bandied about the words "naive" and "closed-minded" to describe one Student Peace Action member's possibly misinterpreted comment on bilateral disarmament, and made much of the fact that peace demonstrations don't occur in the Soviet Union.

I, for one, welcome B. Mecum's perspective; all of us who yearn for peace must work together — the sophisticated, naive, open-minded, and closed-minded alike — to make clear to any government (and supporting corporations) that the arms race in which they are engaged (profitably) is pure madness. I'm going to

protest in front of Westinghouse with Student Peace Action and the other three community organizations in the January 21st coalitions. I'm 37; I lost my naivete a long time ago.

Contrary to the conclusion Mecum draws, the vast majority of those in the peace movement reject unilateral dis-

armament. He has made a mistaken generalization from the opinion of one member of SPA. Perhaps Mecum consider this: it is precisely because peaceniks in the Soviet Bloc aren't permitted to protest that we in the U.S. value highly — and make use of — right to question the wisdom of our government's policies.

— Kristin P...



"I think this miserably cold weather began right after that government weatherman got on TV and predicted that this was going to be a milder than usual winter."

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