

STATE AND LOCAL

Are A&M faculty free to speak?

By JEFF BRADY
Reporter

At one time, dramatists, pacifists and unorthodox educators were quieted and extremists were asked to conform.

With a few exceptions, faculty and administrators say that in terms of restriction and conformity A&M is not the institution it was a decade ago. The little college on the Brazos has come a long way on the road to becoming a world university, they say, and free expression among faculty members has helped fuel the trip.

Contrary to popular belief, most A&M educators now agree that they not only can, but are encouraged to speak out and challenge established viewpoints.

"We now have it pretty good," says Dr. Paul Parrish, former president of the Bryan American Civil Liberties Union and A&M English professor, referring to the freedom of expression educators have at A&M.

"But I probably wouldn't have said the same thing six years ago," he says. "There has been a marked change in my ten years here."

Parrish describes the atmosphere when he first arrived on campus as restrictive and inhibiting.

For example, a theater arts presentation three weeks into rehearsal was cancelled, he says, when word got that it included a scene of rear male nudity and another of simulated sex.

It was a very significant moment for many of the newest faculty members, Parrish says. It illustrated the

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kind of censorship that existed in 1974.

"I just don't think that could happen here now," Parrish says.

A professor of philosophy who has been at A&M for 18 years, Dr. Manuel Davenport, compares the situation on campus 12 years ago to the McCarthyism that gripped America following World War II.

McCarthyism has been called a "tyranny of the majority," Davenport says. "Tyranny of the majority" maintains that whatever the majority wants is right.

"And most of the time the majority is wrong," he says.

When asked about serious confrontations, Davenport described a protest of the Vietnam War staged in 1968 in which a handful of faculty and student demonstrators had to be guarded from a crowd of hundreds by campus police.

"That kind of situation is intimidating in itself," he says. "It has a chilling effect on free expression."

For one faculty member, however, little has improved in recent years and, if anything, A&M has reversed its tendency toward tolerating open communications.

Dr. Rod O'Connor, former director of the first year chemistry program, chuckles when asked about

freedom of speech at A&M, and denies that communication is either open or responsive.

"I've seen A&M change from the best university in the world to a cesspool," he says, referring to the opportunity faculty members have to express themselves on campus.

O'Connor left his position with the chemistry department following a committee inquiry of his unorthodox teaching practices, during which time he was asked not to address members of the committee, the media or students concerning his situation.

"My right of academic freedom was violated, my right of appeal turned out to be a farce and my right to stand in the presence of my accuser was nonexistent," O'Connor says.

He now teaches graduate courses part-time in the basement of the Chemistry Building.

"The channel of appeal is identical to a chain of command," he says. "The department head is your accuser, prosecuting attorney, judge, jury and the person who decides about appeals," O'Connor says.

What concerned the administration most, he says, was that he spoke to his students and the newspaper about the investigation.

"That was not liked," O'Connor says. "As a matter of fact, I've been told on numerous occasions, in writing and verbally, that you do not discuss these things with the public."

"But if there's any place in the world that should be the last bastion of free speech it's our colleges and universities."

O'Connor, however, is in the minority. The consensus of faculty and administrators seems to be that lines of input and comment are fairly well-established and no one has to suppress opinions.

The faculty senate, for example, created in the fall of 1983, is viewed as particularly effective in furthering this exchange.

"The advent of the senate has provided the faculty with a forum for free debate that they didn't previously have," says Dr. Clinton Phillips, Dean of Faculty.

Regarding the future of faculty expression at A&M, head of the philosophy department Hugh McCann says "I think the faculty voice is going to be heard and regarded even more clearly now."

These days faculty unrest is hard to find at A&M: no one is on strike or demonstrating; few are protesting censorship or suppression; and almost all educators are satisfied that their opinions are heard.

Davenport predicts the next 10 years will be a decade of social unrest and conflict much like the 1960's. He says society's behavior follows a cycle through which America will have completely traveled by 1990. If this is so, more turbulent times may be in store for A&M as educational development expands.

Austin police crack down on traffic violators

Associated Press

AUSTIN — The city of Austin, faced with a surge in traffic deaths as growth has congested city streets, will launch a crackdown on traffic law violators.

The get-tough policy approved by the City Council includes giving fewer warnings and more tickets, officials said.

Police also will allow less leeway over the speed limit. Tickets will be written for driving at speeds more than 5 mph over the limit.

There were 88 traffic deaths in Austin last year, far more than in the previous record year of 1979, when 65 people died on Austin streets.

The crackdown, which was authorized by the City Council on Thurs-

day, is part of an overall traffic safety program ordered for the city.

Allen Brecher, Austin's director of urban transportation, said some parts of the program can be started in 30 to 60 days. These include unannounced checks of drivers' licenses and proof-of-insurance cards.

Other parts of the program will begin in two to six months, he said.

Long-range projects, including redesigning intersections, will take more than six months to complete.

Under the engineering aspect of the program, sites where accidents are common will be reviewed to determine whether new traffic lights or new designs for roads would reduce the accident toll.

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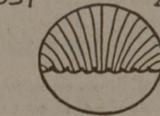
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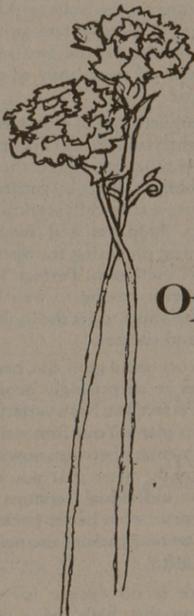
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