

Opinion

The Battalion

(USPS 045 360)

Member of
Texas Press Association
Southwest Journalism Conference

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The Battalion is published Monday through Friday during Texas A&M regular semesters, except for holiday and examination periods.

Mail subscriptions are \$17.44 per semester, \$34.62 per school year and \$36.44 per full year. Advertising rates furnished on request.

Our address: The Battalion, Department of Journalism, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-4111.

Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Battalion, Department of Journalism, Texas A&M University, College Station TX 77843-4111.

Not so fast

Brazil's announcement Friday that it will suspend interest payments on its debt to foreign commercial banks may lead to hard times for private financial institutions in this country, but much of the panic over a possible breakdown of the international economy is unwarranted.

For years, commercial banks in the United States saw Latin American countries as prime lending ground. Now that Brazil has said it cannot make interest payments, and with Argentina following suit on Saturday, American banks are feeling the less profitable side of free enterprise.

Despite inherent risks in investing, the larger U.S. banks never hesitated to accept the high returns they used to receive from Latin America. Now it is time to pay the price for those earlier good times.

Although U.S. banks have developed a thicker skin in dealing with Third World countries over the last four years, since the current global debt crisis began, suspension of interest payments still riles Wall Street.

But as discouraging as the Brazilian and Argentinian actions may seem, it's not time to start stockpiling canned goods just yet. They do not pose a threat to the entire international banking industry.

The economic crises in Brazil and Argentina should not be overlooked, but the government shouldn't be quick to defend the interests of commercial banks, either. Most experts agree that while government regulatory agencies need to carefully monitor Third World investments, the latest "crises" will not have enough of a national or international impact to warrant government intervention.

Before the government bails the commercial banks' assets out of Brazil, it needs to look at the facts:

- Brazil is not actually defaulting on its debts; it's withholding payments until it can renegotiate the terms of its loan.
- Brazil is suspending payment only to foreign commercial banks, not to foreign creditor nations.
- Argentina has yet to announce concrete plans to suspend payments.

While these are signs for concern, they are not reasons for the panic Wall Street has been expressing. Right now, the panic exceeds both the profits and the problems.

Farmers Write!

All for the love of sleep

I bumped into my old friend Alt Ergo the other day. He was going to drop a course.

Amit Mukerjee
Guest Columnist

"Why?" I asked. "Is the instructor bad?"

The course met too early for him, he replied a bit wistfully, and he couldn't wake up early enough. Pressed further, he admitted that it started at 12:30 p.m.

You would expect me to have been indignant at this revelation. Righteous chastisement should have been bursting forth from my lips like molten steel from a smelter. After all, 12:30 p.m. is not the time of day you expect to see dewdrops on the rosebush and stretchful yawns on sleepy faces.

You would think that honest, God-fearing, working people should be up and fearing God by 9 a.m., let alone 12:30 p.m.

At 12:30 p.m., they should be heading for their fourth cup of coffee to ensure they don't doze off in calculus class. Not so for Alt. Here he was, openly and unashamedly admitting to sleeping beyond noon while the rest of the world was busy wiping the sweat from its brows.

But I remained calm. I dared not show that I was even surprised. Those who know Alt are advised to pass on to the weather after a confession like this.

There is good reason for not tangling with Alt on these issues. It would have been extremely dangerous for my robotics class at 3 p.m. if I had raised a topic like this with Alt at 2 p.m.

In fact, even my dinner and night's sleep was in severe jeopardy if I so much as hinted at a whisker of impropriety in such behavior. Alt has been known to hold forth on this

topic for weeks, and if you let him get up on his soapbox, he will confute any preconceptions you may nourish about sleeping and waking up.

And he does sound convincing.

How would you like to have five hours of uninterrupted peace every day to do whatever you pleased? (For him, those five hours are from midnight until 5 a.m.). What scientific evidence exists linking man's natural daily cycle to this arbitrary timing of earth's rotation? (Alt has tested this on himself for a period of two years and his own cycle, he asserts, can adapt nicely to anything between 22 and 48 hours.)

Who needs more than five hours of productive professional interaction (noon to 5 p.m.)? Have you ever felt the sense of euphoria that comes with dawn? (He means that he just debugged his homework for Programming 301). Can you afford to party every evening from 6 p.m. until midnight? (He can, and does. This is his big artillery, and makes most of us want to look at his grades.)

And, finally, great thoughts are easy to ridicule but hard to refute. This inevitably comes up when you say anything sensible, like, "Why can't you be like the rest of us honest God-fearing people?" I have never tried arguing the reverse beyond this point because continuing this discussion further might mean missing breakfast the next morning.

So if ever you see Alt in the morning, just remind him that it's time he went to bed.

Amit Mukerjee is an assistant professor of computer science.

Columns submitted for Farmers Write should be between 700 and 850 words. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit for grammar, style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each column must be signed and must include the major, classification, address and telephone number of the writer. Only the author's name, major and classification will be printed.



College kids evicted for acting like college kids — only at A&M

I'm glad to see Texas A&M is taking such an active interest in the educations of the students who live on campus. North Area Coordinator Jay Lemons and the rest of the student affairs staff are so interested in the academic mission of A&M, in fact, that they have evicted 32 students from Walton Hall's E ramp. Student affairs says the decision was made in the best interest of those students' academic goals.



Mike Sullivan

In a Feb. 17 letter, Lemons told the residents of E ramp, "Our contractual commitment is to provide a living environment that is supportive to the academic mission of this University. It is our belief that relocation at this time best enables the University to support your academic goals."

Lemons stressed in the letter that the action was "NOT disciplinary," but for the love of good grades.

Of the 32 residents who lived in E ramp until Saturday, 10 have better than a 3.0 grade-point ratio. The eight students who lived on the fourth floor of E ramp have an average GPR of better than a 3.1.

Now wait just a minute. If those students were relocated because of academic distress, this University has a little more rearranging to do.

In all fairness, student affairs should conduct a study of the campus dorms and their effect on the academic success of their residents. Logically, any dorm whose residents' average GPR falls below that of E ramp's should be subject to relocation.

Without the aid of a study, however, a good guess would rank the academic performance of E ramp's former students as better than average. If student affairs truly is concerned with the academic

success of campus residents, it has started reorganizing at the wrong end of campus.

There are approximately 2,000 cadets living in an environment far more threatening to academics than that of E ramp. I'm sure most students living in M her, Krueger, Leonard, Gainer, Briggs, Spence, Aston, Dunn, and, on the other side of town, Davis-Gary, wouldn't care to be compared to the academic standards of E ramp, either. By their very nature, most dorm environments aren't conducive to the success of the strictly academically minded.

Obviously, the reason stated in Lemons' eviction notice is simply a facade — a sham to cover his real reason for relocating the students of E ramp.

Further perusal of Lemons' eviction letter exposes an apparent contradiction — perhaps the product of careless writing. The letter states, "... in the interest of eliminating the vandalism to the ramp and the harassment of individuals we feel that this is our only alternative."

Lemons' concern was later echoed by Ron Sasse, director of student affairs, when he said, "We have a responsibility for those buildings. We're talking about stuff that we could go disciplinary about."

If student affairs was concerned with stopping vandalism of the building, why didn't they take disciplinary action instead of hiding behind an idiotic excuse for kicking the students out of their homes?

The reason they didn't "go disciplinary" is because if they had, the students would have been able to appeal the eviction decision to the Judicial Board of the Student Senate — which is made up of about nine students.

Being that the vandalism this semester included such atrocities as water-balloon throwing, shaving-cream fights and drenching of the resident adviser with water, it's likely the board would have decided not to kick the students out of their homes during the middle of the semester — especially considering

the effect such a move might have had on the midterm grades of those students.

Sasse said the students could, and did, however, appeal the decision at different levels of the chain of command — a sort of if-mom-says-no-ask-dad appeals process.

It's clear from Lemons' and Sasse's statements, and the fact that the former residents of E ramp are academically healthy, that vandalism of the ramp — not poor grades — was the real motive for evicting the students.

Despite what Lemons conveniently calls it, the action was disciplinary, which brings us to another contradiction.

At least 12 students kicked out of the dorm because of vandalism are not listed with student affairs as trouble-makers. That's what student affairs told the manager of Parkway Circle Apartments when she called to find out if renting to the students would come back to haunt her. The manager was told by student affairs that a lot of innocent students got a raw deal because of the decision.

If student affairs could determine who wasn't causing trouble, why couldn't they figure out who was? I have a feeling that weeding out the few havoc-wreakers of Walton Hall would have required Lemons to work for his pay, rather than simply scratching out an eviction notice.

Instead, Lemons chose a simple-minded solution to solve his troubles without regard for the feelings or, hypocritically, the academic success of the innocent students.

The worst part of it all is that the students of A&M — including those formerly of E ramp — are paying Lemons' salary and assuming that he is making decisions in the students' best interests.

If this feeble decision is a result of "much consideration and discussion," as Lemons claims, I'd hate to see what would happen if student affairs got careless.

Mike Sullivan is a senior journalism major and the Opinion Page editor for The Battalion.

Mail Call

Bad boys

EDITOR:

Your Feb. 23 editorial shows a rather one-sided view of the E-ramp Walton situation. You accuse the cure as unfair, without fully discussing the cause. As head resident of Schuhmacher Hall, I've had to deal with Walton residents occasionally. Any time trouble happened with Walton, or in talking with Walton staff, E ramp continually came up as a source of problems. I was the Davis-Gary Head Resident when action was taken to group-bill and relocate residents from an area which recorded one-half of all the dorm's incidents and destruction. What do you do?

There is obviously a problem. When a residence hall staff member is assaulted, things have definitely gone too far. As an undergraduate, I lived in an all-male dorm for four years and never saw as much damage or as many incidents. Is this unique to Texas, or just to Texas A&M?

A&M has a lower ratio of dorm staff (resident advisers) to residents than most other universities. Maybe student affairs assumes Aggies are more "mature?"

The only solution offered was using UPD to control E ramp. What officer would want to watch one ramp, becoming a target of abuse, verbal and otherwise? Had the editors checked on the logistics of using an officer? UPD is shorthanded as it is without tying up one officer full-time

to babysit one ramp. Perhaps the editors should spend some time as a hall staff members before criticizing the solution.

How do you handle an area definitely identified as problematic, yet where "I don't know" and "I didn't see anything" are the only answers you get? As for the innocent punished with the guilty, if they were innocent, why didn't they point out the guilty parties? People tend to know what's going on in their ramp. What about the people in Schuhmacher Hall who complained about problems caused by E ramp, such as windows broken by water balloons or BB guns and constant noise? You say the dorm environment isn't conducive to academic success. Then why are my residents complaining? Schuhmacher and McInnis Hall have a "study dorm" reputation and are both fairly trouble-free.

You say there is a "lack of concern for dorm residents." If there was a lack of concern, the problem would have been ignored until something far more drastic happened. I invite the editors to spend a weekend with the on-duty staff member in my quiet dorm sometime.

Peter Warneck, Graduate Student

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. 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 be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer.