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GADZOOKS

Liberal groups growing gaining ground at A&M

By Susan C. Akin
 Reporter

Walking across the Texas A&M campus can be a beautiful experience for a newcomer. Lush lawns engulf large brick institutions housing researchers delving the depths of sciences, students striving for A's and University officials delegating tasks for unknown projects becoming reality.

With closer observation, a new person will find many "Vote Republican" stickers, dedicated plaques and statues of the deceased, and countless clean-cut men's haircuts. This conservatism continues by seeping through doors and windows into the classroom.

Students listen intently to copy down every holy word their professor speaks. Question not, for you may be questioned next, someone said somewhere. It was probably said around here.

New students — and even some old ones — may not realize the wealth of original expression, progressive ideas and philanthropic activity scattered throughout the campus.

Whole organizations exist solely to promote such principles.

"Liberal organizations are necessary for this University to function," says Student Activities director Dr. Carolyn Adair. "They provide a balance for the campus, alternative activity and an outlet for people who have different ideas."

There are quite a few organizations supporting liberal attitudes at A&M, such as the National Organization for Women; Gay Student Services; Athiests, Agnostics and Freethinker's Society; Lesbian Rap Group; Young Democrats and the Civil Liberties Union. But they make up a small percentage of the several hundred organizations on campus.

Dr. Wendy Stock, assistant professor in psychology and adviser for the National Organization for Women, says she believes organizations like these are growing at A&M.

"Liberal organizations tend to represent the students' rights and the students' concerns," Stock says. "So the University must adapt to changing student needs as the liberal organizations increase in size."

The increasing growth of Texas A&M has an effect on the attitudes of the student body.

Dave Ellis, leader of the former organization Students Working Against Many Problems, says, "It was inevitable that more liberal minded people would arrive here at A&M and speak out. The University has grown so large so quickly that it can't keep the same small-town conservative attitude."

Liberal organizations are necessary for a university to progress, he says.

"A campus is a university, a universal experience," he says. "If the campus is very conservative it needs some liberal instigators to at least provide a forum for discussion. It's the same with a very liberal campus needing some conservative organizations."

"If the campus is stuck with only liberals or conservatives it will stagnate. One is not better than the other, but it needs a little of both to progress. And if you have people with other views around more things will happen."

"A wide variety of attitudes will attract more people. It will help give the campus a larger mixture of people and a wider cross section of the population, which is healthy for a university."

Students Working Against Many Problems was a recognized University organization that actively debated social and political problems. SWAMP, existing from 1982-85, had about 20 active members participating in several campus demonstrations, community food drives, clothes drives and park cleanups.

"This campus was very conservative and sterile," Ellis says. "You came here and they presented you with a mold and no one seemed to argue against it. Campus life should be a total free-thinking experience and we saw contradictions."

"We wanted to add a little levity to the campus. We thought people were taking things way too seriously. They weren't having any fun with classwork and campus issues. People would walk around and say 'howdy,' but no one was smiling."

— Dr. Carolyn Adair, Student Activities director

"And through this levity we hoped to provoke a little thought. We wanted people to question their values. Not necessarily change them, but at least reinforce them."

"So we did things like having a pro-nuclear war day on campus the same day some country moved their missiles into Germany about three years ago. A pro-nuclear war day is ludicrous. We didn't take a pro or con stance. It was just a little humor to make people think about what's going on outside this campus."

Ellis says SWAMP also tried to promote more free speech on campus.

"The problem was there were always all of these preachers preaching on campus every day everywhere," he says. "It was just this regular group of people and there wasn't any variety in the speech or opposing views heard."

SWAMP allowed students to come to the organization and utilize its privilege to use campus facilities for free speech.

"We gave all the students, no matter who they were, access to campus resources," Ellis says. "Because we thought you shouldn't have to be part of a recognized group to use rooms or get to speak at Rudder Fountain. So we said anyone who wants to do anything come to us and we'll let you use our organization's name."

SWAMP also conducted community services to get more students involved in the community.

"We tried to create more interaction between the University and the surrounding community by sponsoring food and clothes drives and a cleanup project in Hensel Park," Ellis says.

Although SWAMP supposedly is disbanded, Ellis says he hopes someone with a little courage will continue to promote similar philosophies and bring Texas A&M up-to-date with the rest of the nation's schools concerning students' social liberties.

Stock says, "It has been said to me that Texas A&M is 15 years behind the times. And I feel that is a generous estimate."

The NOW adviser says she A&M is getting more liberal. "Liberals here are having a hard time of adversity as the demics did during the Dark when learning was forced underground," Stock says. "I think can keep the fire burning enough and offer opportunities people willing to open their more liberal concepts, things eventually become more accepted around here."

"People here are being forced to accept what the rest of America is experiencing. Women are leaving the Corps of Cadets and in the And Gay Student Services is an eight-year lawsuit to gain status as a Texas A&M University-recognized organization."

Emily Samfield, president of National Organization for Women, says, "I don't understand some people's fears that women are coming take over. They are so many women in the Corps of Cadets, women on the bonfire field."

"They're so hung up on these conditions that its more important education. When you talk about liberals, that's what they're afraid, just leave us with our traditions. Conditions are OK until they're discriminatory and outdated."

The National Organization for Women, which has been recognized at A&M for two years, provides information and support for women concerning various social and political issues.

It has regularly scheduled meetings, which are posted in The Lion and at booths in the MSC, days ahead of time. Its \$15-per-member membership fee includes state and national fees.

Stock says, "We plan to come to provide A&M with information and educational presentations on rape, date rape, sexual harassment and sex counseling."

Stock says she became the adviser for NOW because there were some political things women here that needed to be changed.

"There are a lot of young men and women here who don't understand that feminism is a movement to give women rights and equal powers as men to allow both men and women ability to live up to their full potential."

Samfield says many students understand NOW's principles. "There's been a lot of objection NOW," she says. "Some people we don't belong here. The liberals. And some people we're manhaters, which we're and some people think we're better than men, which we don't."

She says there is a lot of concern on this campus as to women are concerned.

"We have encountered people with deserving women problems not getting tenure," Samfield says. "And the reasons we got the fessor not getting tenure were extremely poor."

NOW currently is working on University policy on sexual harassment.

"People aren't aware here," Samfield says. "We are trying to educate people on what sexual harassment is and what they can do about it."

"There are cases of people withholding grades or refusing that female students leave because it's not an appropriate for a woman."

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Fame of Government
 William Penn 1682

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