

# Opinion

## Open-mindedness in the liberal arts isn't all that great

How often in college have we been strongly exhorted by our professors or peers to "keep an open mind?" Or how many of us in arguing with someone holding a strong opinion contrary to our own have resorted to calling him "closed-minded" to discredit his position?



Brian Frederick

they are able to deduce that no amount of wishing or believing to the contrary will enable someone to avoid the consequences of jumping from a cliff. You do not find scientists and engineers exhorted their students to be open-minded to the ideas that the sun revolves around the earth or that one can build a skyscraper without a foundation.

A very different view prevails in the liberal arts, where man and his relations with other men is the proper study. There it is held that no such laws govern human relations as govern nature. No reality about men can be known (if it even exists), and even if it were knowable, one cannot derive general laws governing human relations from that knowledge. "You can't be certain that you are right!" they tell us. We must be open-minded and accept everyone's personal opinion.

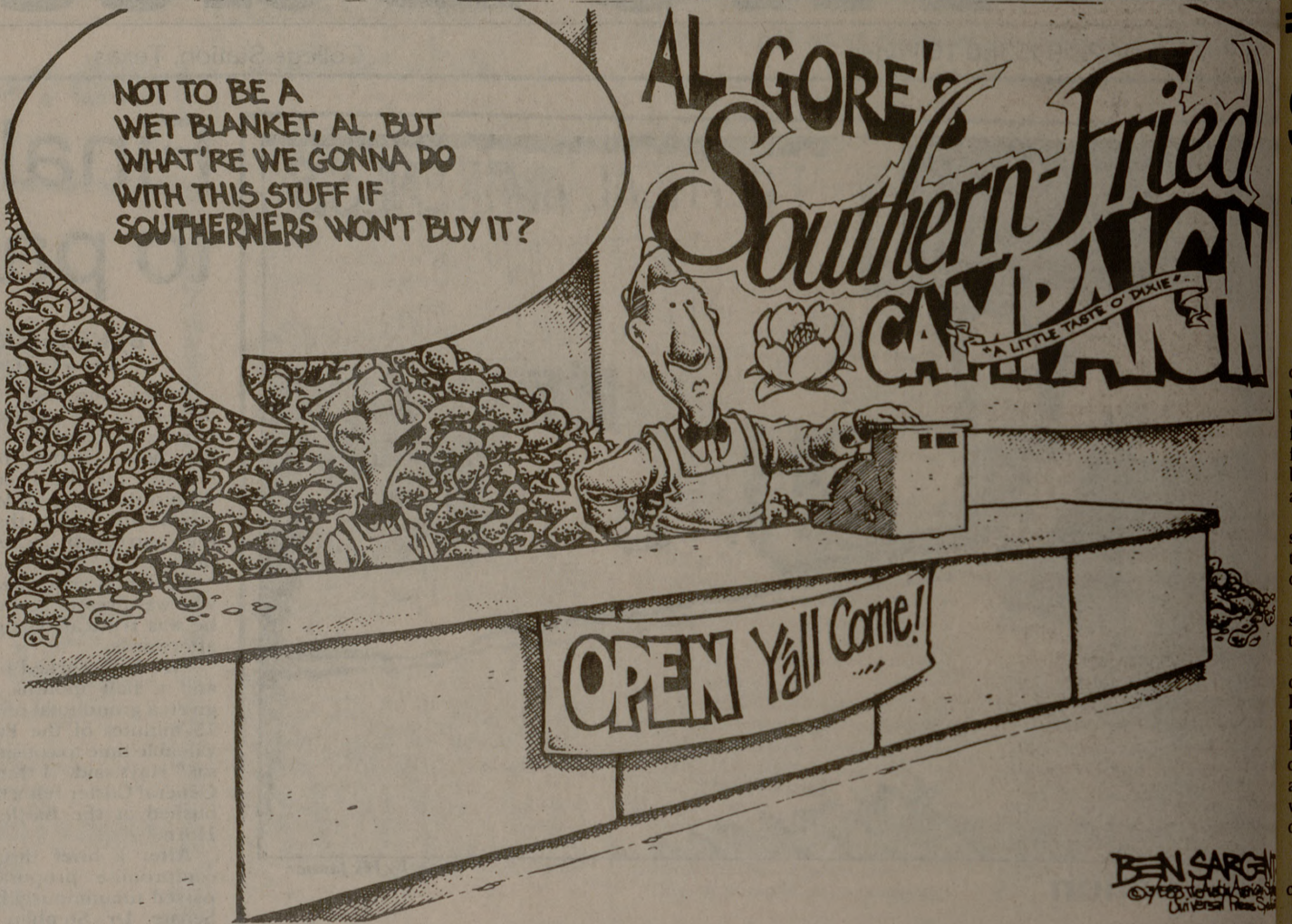
We must then tolerate and accept other cultures because we have no basis for claiming that our own is better. We can live peacefully with communism because they are people "just like us." (Our history professors are careful to point out all the "great atrocities" of American history and the "humane" accomplishments of the Soviet Union.) It is closed-minded to call the USSR the "evil empire," for that is horribly intolerant and judgmental. It doesn't matter that there is a wealth of empirical evidence upon which to base such a judgment.

We furthermore are told that we must tolerate and accept "alternative lifestyles" because no one can say one way of life is better than another. It doesn't matter that these "alternative lifestyles" breed deadly diseases. Moreover, these "lifestyles" lead to broken homes. The suffering of children in these "homes" doesn't matter as long as all acts between consenting adults are accepted. It doesn't even matter that there is abundant empirical evidence that broken homes lead to higher social costs: crime, poverty, and wasted lives.

No, we can't know reality in the liberal arts, and thus we cannot determine right and wrong behavior for humans. For some reason, an engineer can know for certain what size and strength a steel beam must be to support a floor, but the liberal arts cannot determine how men can best live. Sunk in this intellectual impotence, they can offer men no better rule to live by than open-mindedness.

Whether it be a man's personal standards or a society's standards encapsulated in its laws, men need standards by which to live. It is the proper domain of liberal arts to determine what the human realities of our existence are and how we as humans should best respond to them. All ideas and behaviors are not of equal merit. By preaching their indiscriminate open-mindedness as the standard for living in society, the liberal arts fail to give us the tools for distinguishing between the good and the bad in life, much to the detriment of mankind.

**Brian Frederick is a senior history and Russian major and a columnist for The Battalion.**



## Mail Call

### Congratulations, Brian

EDITOR:

After almost two semesters of being puzzled by Brian Frederick's articles, matters have finally become clear. I now realize that his column is a parody of anti-intellectualism, fascism, racism, misogyny and religious fanaticism.

Thinking back, the tip-off came in his column on school newspapers. He said censorship of school newspapers really wasn't all that bad because the only press that matters in this country is the privately owned press. Not one to be ham-handed, he left his readers to draw for themselves the logical consequence of the comment. *The Battalion*, since it is not privately owned, doesn't matter; therefore, Brian Frederick's column, since it is contained in *The Battalion*, doesn't matter. Great work! A mark of a great parodist is self-parody!

To the resourceful Brian, I say: "Congratulations for a while, you really had me going. Now, however, you have joined Joe Bob Briggs on my list of favorite columnists. Now I chuckle my way through each and every one of your columns. (By the way, the timing of the one about not being able to be moral unless you are religious was perfect. You were lampooning that TV preacher from Baton Rouge — right?)"

Larry Hickman  
Department of Philosophy

### SOS for ELI

EDITOR:

I am very pleased that some authorities at A&M are interested in the problems faced by international new graduate students in the ELI, and I want to make some comments.

After a month or two during the semester, I realized that I was being forced to enroll in just a fairly normal and easy English course. It did not have the quality it was meant to have. I have had much better English courses in my own country. Let us consider that students admitted to A&M must have had scored at least 550 on the TOEFL test. This score means a good, working knowledge of the English language, so a course intended for people to improve should be a really hard and comprehensive course. This is not what the ELI offers. Even some students who registered voluntarily in the ELI feel disappointed by the kind of education that they found. And GUESS how much it costs!

Besides academics, I want to comment on the way international students are catalogued before the ELI staff. They give us a booklet at the beginning of the semester telling us such things as: "Please always come to classes. Do not cheat. We know that in other countries it is a normal practice but not here. Respect your professors, that is the custom in America. Be punctual." A funny thing for masters and PhD students to hear, don't you agree?

Several of my friends and I who have taken an ELI course feel that the course(s) did not help at all. We all share experiences about learning more about English and American culture through American friends in one week than in the whole semester at the ELI. We know that we have the obvious problems of a person who has just switched languages, and we are eager to overcome these problems but I feel that the place to do so is not the ELI, given the quality of the courses. And anyway, people with more than 550 on the TOEFL are perfectly capable of coping with the first months, which will be difficult anyway,

without taking any English course. After all, "Practice makes perfect."

Alfonso R. Ledezma, grad student

### The shanty quiz

EDITOR:

The shanty:  
a) makes us learn about apartheid.  
b) makes us angry with the Students Against Apartheid for defacing the Texas A&M University campus.

I think the answer is b.

Chris Samsury '90

### What the shanty means

EDITOR:

In contrast to the fantasy of dancing toads atop the Harrington building last spring, this campus was presented for a few short hours with a shattering reality in the form of a humble shanty. This was a stark reminder of the suffering of 23 million blacks in South Africa under the cruel system of apartheid. Apartheid is a system based on racism in which blacks cannot vote, travel freely or express ideas freely. Americans turn a blind eye as the South African government employs its army-like police force to silence those who disagree with its policy of apartheid, commonly using such tactics as "banning," imprisonment without trial, torture and murder. The South African government last year imposed a total blackout and has now banned all political activity by blacks. Families are often driven from their homes and relocated in "homelands," or shantytowns without electricity or plumbing. Then, as white suburbs develop closer to the homelands, the government may send policemen who bulldoze the shantytowns without warning, destroying everything, in order to force blacks to move out of the encroaching white view. Out of sight, out of mind.

I was saddened when I saw that Texas A&M "bulldozed" its shanty. I urge the Botha-Busters to pursue establishing a permanent shanty sanctioned as a university art and awareness exhibit. Maybe the daily sight of this cruel reality will penetrate the insular world of A&M and encourage students to demand the university to divest from companies that support the economy of apartheid. The current United States policy of "constructive engagement" that supports companies that invest in apartheid has been condemned as morally wrong by every major South African black leader, including Nobel prizewinner Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Student support for divestment in many of the nation's top academic institutions in many of the nation's top academic institutions, including Harvard, Yale, Columbia and Berkeley, has led to their partial or total divestment. Texas A&M's burning desire to become a "world class" university might be achieved if we lead the campaign of divestment from South Africa in Texas colleges. The Botha-Busters shanty is an essential first step of awareness that will hopefully lead to vigorous student support of human rights and divestment in South Africa.

Melanie Shouse '90

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.

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