

Housing center to survey needs of older-than-average students

By Rose Ann McFadden
Reporter

Needs of Texas A&M students older than 25 will be explored in a telephone survey by the Off-Campus Housing Center. The survey, beginning today, will be conducted through Nov. 8, excluding Saturday and Sunday.

Nancy Thompson, coordinator of the Off-Campus Housing Center, said the housing center is the first university organization to address the needs of older-than-average students.

"Because A&M has such a huge population of traditional students (under 25 years old), no place on campus was willing to provide services for older-than-average students," Thompson said. "When you have limits, you have to put your time and energy where the most students are."

"We want to work toward being advocates for these students," she said. "We want to find out what the issues are for them."

This semester 5,431 older-than-average graduate students and 1,945 older-than-average undergraduate students attend A&M. Reports on national trends indicate these numbers will increase, Thompson said.

She said 250 graduate students and 150 undergraduate students will be interviewed by phone. Students' names will be chosen randomly from a list of older-than-average students.

"It will take students about 10 minutes to answer 45 yes/no and multiple choice questions," she said. Questions will cover topics like where students live, what publications they read, difficulties they experience at A&M and services they would like the University to provide.

Responses to the survey will not be anonymous, Thompson said.

"Students' names, phone numbers, and social security numbers will be recorded with their answers," she said. "These are not personal questions. If someone expresses interest in Off-Campus Center services, we need their name to send them information."

Older-than-average students not interviewed can call the housing center and express opinions or volunteer to participate in the survey, she said.

"They (older-than-average students) expect to move through with ease, but they are frustrated by the size of A&M and its complexity."

— Nancy Thompson

Older-than-average students face problems not experienced by traditional students, Thompson said.

"Many are juggling full-time jobs, families and school," she said.

Older-than-average students often have trouble with day care.

Tabb Tidmore, a 30-year-old senior industrial distribution major, said his wife doesn't work because day care for their 15-month-old daughter would cost about \$200 a month.

Tidmore said, "My number one problem is financial aid. I'm limited as to how much I can receive because my wife doesn't work. It's not enough."

Deborah Swanson, a senior management major, said she and her husband had difficulties finding trustworthy day care for their two children.

"It's really hard to work or study if

you're worried about what's happening to your kids," Swanson said. "We pay the premium cost, but it's worth the peace of mind."

"I can't believe that Texas A&M, with the number of staff, faculty and students with young children, doesn't have some kind of day care program," she said.

Thompson said some older-than-average students have problems because they take evening classes.

"If you come in the evening, park your car, go to class, and go back to your car,

the chance of them getting our information is not great," she said. "If a student is on campus all day, it's easier to get information on services and programs."

Thompson said the survey will reveal the best way to get information to older-than-average students.

Being on campus only in the evening also causes problems with registration, scheduling meetings with professors and getting access to student services that are available only during business hours, she said.

"In no way are we minimizing the difficulties traditional students face," Thompson said. "But they have more access to support groups and services."

Swanson, who came to A&M from Minnesota, said she and her husband have problems finding support groups.

"When you're married and have kids,

it's really hard to meet people in your situation," she said. "You can't go to happy hour if you can't pay the baby sitter."

Thompson said graduate students from smaller universities often have problems adjusting to a university as large as A&M.

"They expect to move through with ease," Thompson said, "but they are frustrated by the size of A&M and its complexity."

The survey may result in changes in student services, registration and administrative office hours, Thompson said.

"Some changes may not come from the Off-Campus Center," she said. "We may work with other departments in the university to say, 'Here is this overwhelming need. What can we do about it?'"

Some University departments have already made changes to meet the needs of older-than-average students, she said.

The Student Counseling Center started a support group for female students who have families and are returning school after long absences, she said.

Also, the housing center published *The Age Advantage*, a booklet listing campus and community services useful to older-than-average students.

Thompson said housing center staff began planning the survey after an increase in concerns expressed by older-than-average students. She said the work of the housing center intern, Bertha Ramones, a graduate student, aided the development of the survey.

Panel encourages blacks to pursue education, pride

By Scot Walker
Staff Writer

The keynote speaker for the National Society of Black Engineers' workshop on black professionals told a crowd of over 200 people in the MSC Saturday that the responsibility for improving the conditions of blacks in society lies not with government or charities but with blacks themselves.

Blake White, product communications manager for Apple Computers, said that American blacks today live in a dual reality of those who have arrived and those who still make up a huge percentage of the poor and the homeless.

After White's presentation, he joined a panel of professionals and educators composed of Dr. Joseph McMillian, president of Houston Tilleson College, Dr. Warren Morgan, president of Paul Quinn College, Warren Davis, a mechanical engineer with Dow Chemical, and Dr. Alan Ledden, a Texas A&M professor of mechanical engineering.

The panel tried to allay students' fears about the negative stigma of attending a predominantly black school. Several panel members also encouraged black students to go beyond four-year degrees by attending graduate or law school, but Morgan disagreed.

"It doesn't matter what degree you get," Morgan said. "You just need to have pride in yourself before you can go out to try and restructure society."

Morgan said the biggest obstacle most black students face is teachers and authority figures who tell them they don't have the capabilities to achieve their goals. Morgan said that he has a measured IQ of 86, flunked out of high school, and was told by teachers he would be never succeed, yet he had a Ph.D when he was 23.

White agreed that the degree itself was not of great importance.

All of the panelists agreed that a student who attends a predominantly black school is just as prepared as one who attends a traditionally white school like A&M.

Morgan said that both types of schools have advantages.

"The big schools have lots of equipment, money, faculty and resources," he said. "But the smaller schools, while having only 30 percent of the total enrollment of black engineers, graduate about half the black engineers in the country, so they would seem to be more efficient at what they do."

He said that the real issue is not whether black higher education should be mixed or segregated.

"The real issue is that the Negro needs education," he said. "It's not so important where he gets it as long as he does."

A&M group trading prizes for 'Howdies'

Texas A&M students may win prizes this week simply by saying "Howdy." A&M's Traditions Council is sponsoring Howdy Week to increase friendliness and spirit on campus.

Students who say "Howdy" to Traditions Council members on campus this week can win T-shirts, free dinners and free entrance to night clubs. They also will receive coupons making them eligible to win prizes, including a free semester at Lifestyles Health Club, a gift certificate to Post Oak Mall and a 12th Man towel autographed by Jackie Sherrill.

Traditions Council member Jennifer Sauter said it is important to revive "Howdy" on campus because A&M is known as such a friendly school.

"I think Howdy Week is important because our University has dramatically changed in the past few years," she said. "Even though we're expanding, we need to remember what A&M is all about, and that's tradition."

88 arrested in statewide abortion protests

A pro-choice group held a rally on the steps of the state Capitol to downplay the significance of hundreds of abortion protesters demonstrating throughout Texas, but the anti-abortion groups gained the attention of police who arrested at least 88 people.

The anti-abortion effort Saturday was part of a national "Day of Rescue" and included demonstrations at clinics in

Austin, Dallas, San Antonio and Houston.

Houston police arrested 22 for blocking passage to one clinic and Dallas police loaded 29 into buses after they were cited for attempted criminal trespassing, police said.

Some protesters in Houston chained themselves around a clinic. As police

worked to free one man, he said, "This is a violent place. This is a place where innocent blood is shed for money."

About 140 protesters at two different women's clinics in San Antonio participated in protests, and police said 37 demonstrators had been arrested and charged with attempted criminal trespass.

About two dozen anti-abortion protesters were arrested in Dallas.

No arrests were made in Austin, where about 300 blocked the entrances to an abortion clinic called Reproductive Services.

Pro-choice activists said they avoided a "media circus" in Austin because they did not ask police to make any arrests.

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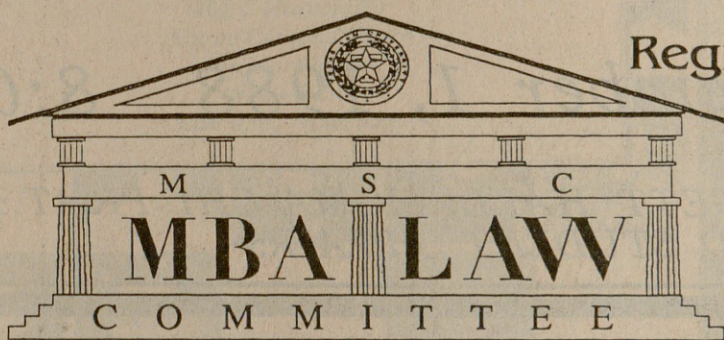
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