

Education can save future of economy

The United States stands in danger of developing a "two-tiered" society like some South American countries with an elite strata of educated people and a lower tier of people locked in poverty because of lack of schooling.

— George Munoz
Chicago School Board president

With a free trade agreement between the United States, Canada and Mexico just around the corner, Munoz's warning is more frightening than ever. If the free trade agreement is passed, high-paying manufacturing jobs for uneducated, American workers will disappear. It will simply be more economical to hire a Mexican worker who will do the same job at a lower wage.

However, rejecting the free trade agreement will only temporarily protect American workers, because if Japanese and European companies can produce products that are just as good (or better) than American ones, no one will buy American goods. Not only would this put American workers out of work, their employers would be joining them in the unemployment lines.

However, the free trade agreement will bring about many job opportunities for Americans, but only for Americans with the education and skills to make themselves marketable. For the educated, free trade will bring an economic boom and a plethora of jobs. For the uneducated, free trade will forever trap them in the endless cycle of poverty many of them have already entered.

There is only one way to keep Americans out of the cycle of poverty: we must keep Americans in school. About one-fourth of Americans entering ninth grade never graduate from high school. In our cities, this rate is even higher (43 percent in Chicago and about 50 percent in Boston). If the drop-out rate continues at this rate, we will be left with two choices: support one-fourth of our population through our welfare system or let them become a permanent — and dangerous — underclass (like those found throughout Latin America).

To solve the drop-out problem, we need to do two things. First, we need to make students aware of the consequences of dropping out. Second, we need to create opportunities for drop-outs to resume their education.

To ensure that a student is aware of the consequences of dropping out, students who wish to drop out should have to meet with a counselor. This counselor should ask them how they will earn a living if they drop out. The

Michael R. Cowen

Columnist

counselor should then inform them they will receive no government assistance of any kind if they drop out — no welfare, no food stamps, nothing. The logic behind this is simple: society has already offered them a tremendous amount of aid — 12 years of free school. By dropping out, these people reject society's aid. Why should society go out of its way to help them any more?

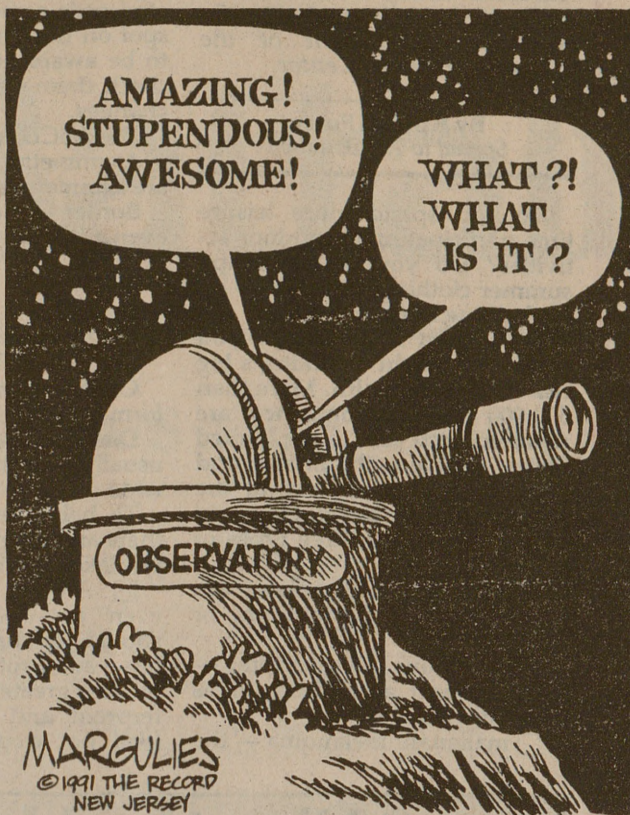
I propose, however, that drop-outs can receive welfare if they return to school, but continued payments would be contingent on good attendance, discipline and the completion of schoolwork. The drop-outs do not have to turn into honor students, but because they are being given a second chance, they should be required to work hard in school. This will help prevent a bunch of people from enrolling in school and either not attending or disrupting the class when they do attend.

There will be some new expenses if this program is implemented — the cost of childcare centers to take care of the children of the students, the cost of adult education classes, etc. However, these costs will be small compared to supporting generation after generation of an uneducated, impoverished family through our welfare system.

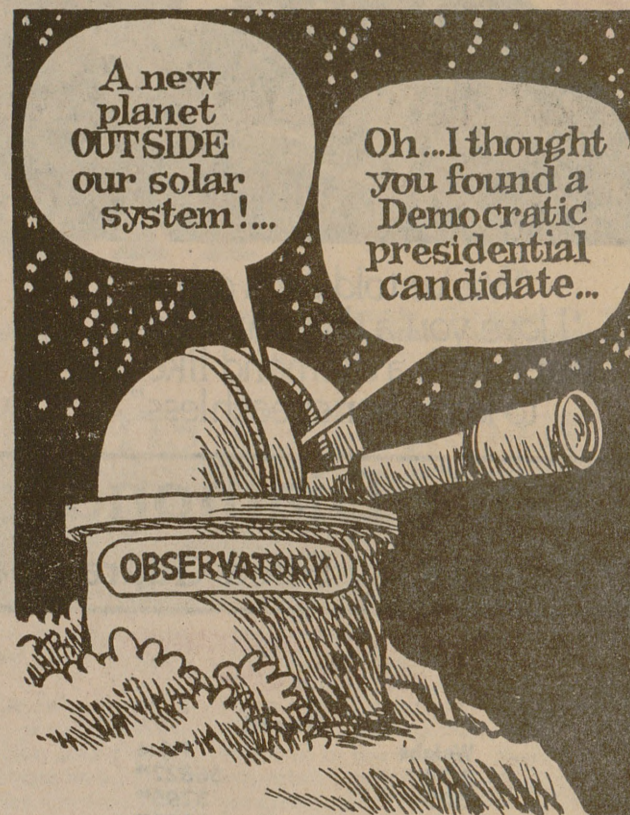
We also need to improve our school system so that students won't want to leave. However, we need to do this in a way that does not lower the quality of education. If we graduate illiterates to improve graduation rates, we haven't helped anyone. If real improvements to our educational system are combined with making dropping out costly and unattractive, then America can be a more competitive, more prosperous nation.

A final point I want to make is that I believe virtually anyone can graduate from high school. In Japan, over 90 percent of students complete 12 years of education in a system much harder than ours. They are only required to complete nine years of it. Unless the Japanese are genetically superior to Americans, I can see no reason why Americans can't graduate in the same numbers. We just need to look back in our history and teach our children they need to work to succeed, not just drop out and take what they are given.

Michael R. Cowen is a senior psychology major.



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MAIL CALL

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Student consumer bill is needed

EDITOR:

Not every high school student who graduated this spring will enroll in a college or university this fall. Many students want to enter the work force as soon as possible and hope to do so by learning new skills at a post-secondary vocational school. Many of these institutions are privately owned and operated. Students attending these schools rely heavily on guarantees by the federal government. In effect, this allows the American taxpayer to subsidize a private business.

That's OK as long as the subsidized business is providing a needed and quality service. If a student relies on a student loan to attend a career school, learns the skills necessary to graduate and obtains a job in that field, then both the student and society benefit. The student takes a small portion of the earning from his or her job and repays the loan. If, however, the student obtains a loan and attends a school where he or she does not receive adequate training or gets trained for a job market that doesn't exist, the student will likely default on the loan. Then the American taxpayer must step in and absorb the costs.

The Texas Legislature is moving forward on important legislation for the student consumers of Texas in the area of proprietary school regulation. While Texas students have a choice of many excellent, privately owned, for-profit career training institutions, they also must beware of institutions that care far more about a loan check than the student. Unfortunately, many students have selected poor quality institutions and have been victimized rather than helped.

The Texas Legislature, led by the efforts of State Rep. Wilhelmina Delco, has addressed this situation by proposing tough legislation to monitor the state's trade school industry. The recommendations come from an 18-month long investigation into proprietary schools chaired by Rep. Delco and Sen. Bill Haley. The bill — HB 2 — strengthens the state's oversight of the proprietary school industry and requires schools to provide a whole list of consumer protections information to prospective students. It is landmark legislation and should be supported and passed into law. Students need the protection this legislation brings to ensure they receive a quality education.

Joe L. McCormick
president

Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corp

Seminar can help seniors

EDITOR:

This letter is in response to Sharon Gilmore's column regarding soon-to-be graduates and their dismay at the job market.

For the past two years, the Association of Former Students and the Career Planning and Placement Center have offered a one-day "Interview and Resume" workshop/seminar for graduating seniors. This workshop is presented by former students of Texas A&M who return to campus and share their expertise and skills in areas of recruitment, interviewing techniques, targeting the resume, professional ethics and examples of good and bad job interviews. The purpose of this workshop is to assist the students and help them prepare for their upcoming job interviews. Many students have indicated they feel they have an "edge" going through the interview process (and securing a job) after attending the workshop.

This year's workshop is around the corner and will be Saturday, Sept. 7, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and will include a luncheon (\$5 charge). Preregistration is necessary and will be Monday through Thursday, September 2, 3, 4 and 5, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the hallway of the MSC, directly across from the post office. Registration is limited to the first 250 graduating seniors.

We look forward to working with and assisting the student body of Texas A&M University.

Jean Herbert-Wiesenburg
Class Programs coordinator
Association of Former Students

Rape cartoon is inappropriate

EDITOR:

I found Mr. Mogonye's July 30 comic strip, Ph.D., highly objectionable. Rape is not a subject of amusement, whether the victim is a man or woman. In a recent issue of Time magazine, which featured a cover story on date rape, it was pointed out that approximately 10 percent of all rape victims are men. It is time the message gets out that all forms of sexual violence are serious and are not to be tolerated. It is as inappropriate to find humor in this comic strip as it is to laugh at Clayton Williams' joke about the weather.

Paul Herrera '93



WILLIAM KENNEDY SMITH
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Organized activities for today's youths will help solve gang problem

What happened to the days when children could play safely in neighborhoods and parks? The kids growing up today are not doing "kid things" anymore. Instead, they're doing drugs, stealing and shooting each other. Gangs are increasing across America at a fast rate.

An article in the Houston Chronicle on Sunday, "Mean Streets," said the lack of organized activities and sports in inner-city neighborhoods has increased the gang population. The summer is an eternity for youths with nothing to do. Some youths join gangs and "hang out" to alleviate boredom while others glue themselves in front of the television.

Our society needs to focus more time, energy and money on its young people. We need more good and supportive activities that will keep children from wanting to join gangs and commit crimes.

"The graffiti across inner-city Houston marks the end of the days

when youths safely used sports and outdoor activities as their ticket to success and suburbia," the Chronicle said.

It's sad to think about the future of these neglected youths. Children can be happy with the simplest things in life. A game of football, soccer or any organized activity can bring the biggest smile to a child's face. But without recreational programs or safe parks, good children who want to play sports are lured into the streets. When there aren't many options, gangs and drugs look appealing.

A disturbing aspect of the gang situation is the age of youths involved. The average age of a gang member last year was 13½, according to the Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Remember what you were doing when you were 13? Probably not playing with drugs and knives.

In "Mean Streets," Houston Police

Sharon Gilmore

Columnist

"We may spend more money to build prisons for these neglected youths to enter in the future than we would on more recreational programs."

Sgt. John Black said, "I think it's just scarier growing up nowadays."

Parks are swarming with drug dealers where laughing children once played, according to the article. Few parks are available for youth to play sports because of overgrown grass, and the number of safe, outdoor basketball courts is disappearing

quickly. Lack of financing, as usual, is the major reason for neglecting the parks.

Fewer parks and recreation programs are offered to youth due to severe cutbacks in the past five years. The inner-city areas have been hit the hardest as a result. Schools that once offered summer recreation programs don't have the money to continue.

Some organizations are offering scholarships for kids to go to summer camp. I was a counselor at a YMCA camp for four years and came across many low-income and inner-city scholarship children from the Dallas area. They had a harsher vocabulary, and their family life was usually not the best, but most of them were good kids who enjoyed all the activities. Opponents of closing school facilities in the summer have made gymnasiums available for a few hours each day. A little bit of recreation is better than nothing. If money were spent on worthwhile activities for youths then maybe fewer young

people would join gangs.

Unfortunately the state's budget doesn't seem too concerned about day camps and general youth activities. The state may spend more money in the long run if children don't learn good values.

The disrespect for the law that gangs practice is most likely to continue in their future. Therefore, we may spend more money to build prisons for these neglected youths to enter in the future than we would on more recreational programs.

Every person deserves a chance to succeed in life. An increase in activities such as organized sports, counseling groups, day camps and social groups would enhance the mental and physical growth of youths.

The future is in the hands of America's youth. They deserve our support and guidance toward a better tomorrow.

Sharon Gilmore is a junior journalism major.