

THE HIERARCHY

A hitchhiker's guide to student government

Confusion over structure may keep voter turnout low

By Jennifer Gressett
The Battalion

Yahoo! Student government elections are almost over. A year of campaigning will end. No more promises; no more lies. Soon we'll be able to walk across campus without tripping over billboards.

But once the last vote is counted and the winners take office, do we really know what those guys at the student government office are doing? Who's to say they're not just sitting around, twiddling their thumbs and thinking of how great their resumes are beginning to look?

Michael Crain, vice president of the Class of 1994, said this attitude is the primary reason for low voter turnout rates year after year. In fact, at last year's elections, Crain said only 5,000 students voted in the first election.

"We advertise elections on campus and in the Battalion," Crain said. "But if students don't think their votes matter, they're not going to get involved."

Maybe if students understood how student government operated, they would be more encouraged to vote, Crain said. He said the system is similar to our country's government, which is made up of three branches.

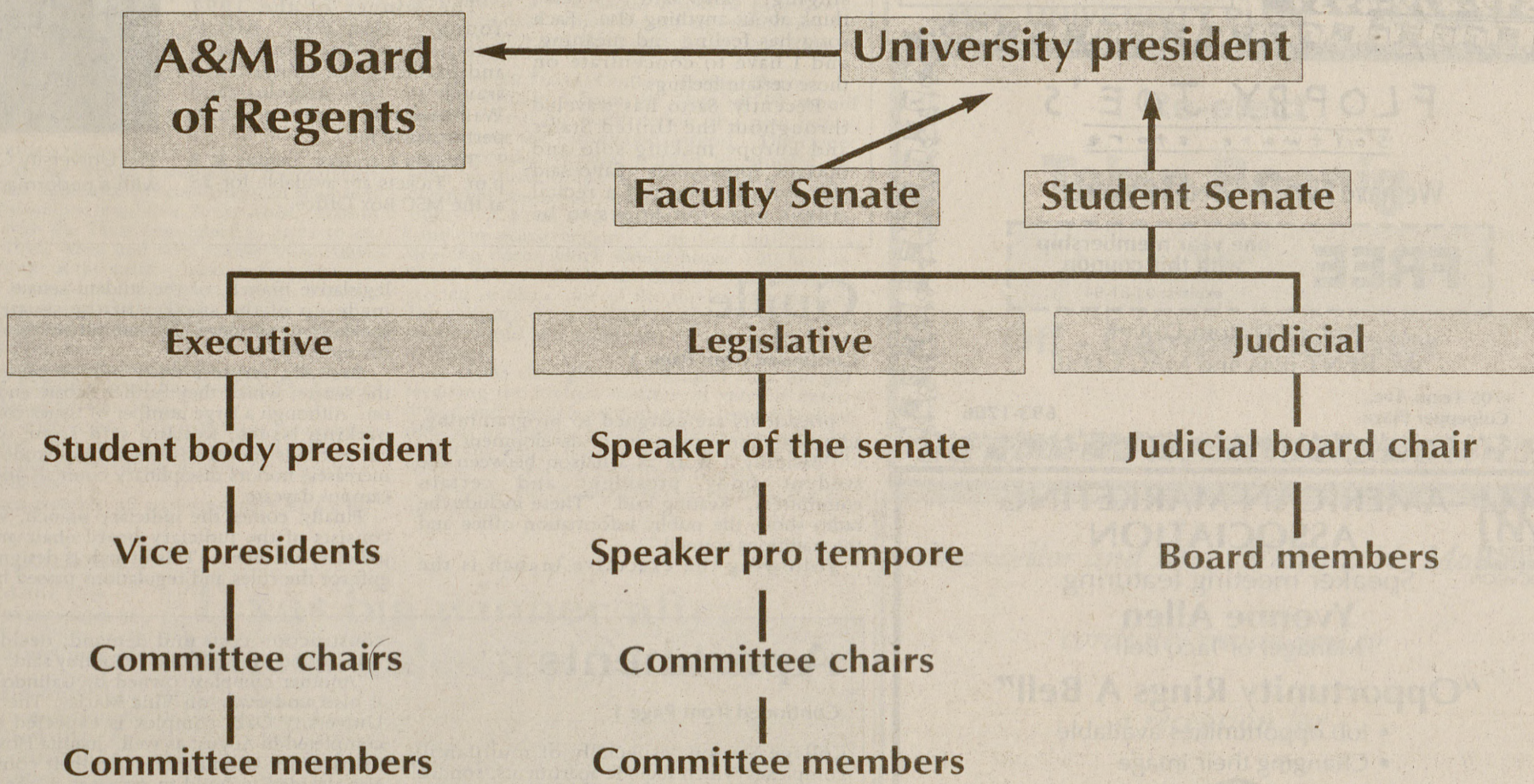
First comes the executive branch, which is led by the student body president. Although his role is very broad, current President Brian Walker said a large part of his work is in the state legislature.

"I work with different groups and civic clubs across the state," Walker said; adding that with 43,000 students at Texas A&M alone, it's difficult to reach everyone.

It's a good thing he gets to appoint up to five vice presidents to assist him.

Vice President Ben Keating says that the job of the vice president is two-fold. Not only does it involve advising committees, but also serving on the executive council of student government.

For example, Keating is responsible for public relations and marketing, while other vice



Executive notes

- The number of vice presidents depends on the student body president's administration. VPs are nominated by the student body president and are confirmed by the Student Senate.
- The committees that fall under the executive branch are event-oriented committees such as Muster, Traditions Council, Public Information Office and Election Commission.
- The number of committees and the VP they fall under depend on the student body president's administration, although this is fairly consistent.
- The committee chairs are chosen by the student body president, the vice president over that committee and the former chair.
- The committee members are chosen by the chair of that particular committee.

Legislative notes

- The speaker of the senate and the speaker pro tempore are chosen by the senate.
- There are five committees under the legislative branch - Rules and Regulation, Academic Affairs, External Affairs, Finance and Student Service.
- The Finance and the Rules and Regulation chairs are chosen by the student body president and approved by the senate. The Academic Affairs, External Affairs and Student Service chairs are chosen by the senate at large.
- The Internal Affairs chair and the speaker pro tempore is the same person.
- Committee members are chosen by the chairs of those particular committees.

Judicial notes

- The judicial board chair is chosen by the student body president and approved by the Student Senate.
- The board members are chosen by the student body president, judicial chair and speaker of the senate and is approved by the senate.
- There are eight board members - two graduate students, two freshmen, two sophomores, two juniors and two seniors. Also, there is an alternate chosen for each class.

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Dealing with a child's homosexuality

Bill and Sandie Martin say they did what any parent should do: they accepted it

By Jenny Magee
The Battalion

Bill and Sandie Martin love their son Mark.

That was the one thing the Martins said they were sure about when their son, a Texas A&M senior, told them he was gay.

"This is very honest," Sandie said. "I'd like to say that I threw my arms around him and said, 'I'm so happy that you're gay.' But, I really did not have a lot to say at first. The only thing I could say and not have any confusion about was, 'I love you.'"

Mark, clean-cut and calmly confident, said that he was really scared about coming out to his parents three years ago.

"My biggest fear was that I would be failing them by telling them that I was gay," he said. "But from the moment I told them, they became the biggest influences in my life."

Bill said there a lot of things about homosexuality that he doesn't understand, but that doesn't affect his relationship with his son.

"I love my son with all my heart," he said. "I will never turn him away because of his sexual preference."

Bill said he was just grateful he still had his son. His voice quivered with emotion as he told of a close friend who had lost two children, one was killed by a drunk driver and the other drowned.

"When I think about what could happen," he said, "I still got my son." From their experiences with Mark, his friends and the students they have met on panels, the Martins said they realize how difficult it is for young people to come out to their parents.

Sandie said one of her favorite quotes about homosexuality is "when children come out of the closet to their parents, oftentimes the parents go in the closet."

Through his position as co-president of the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Aggies (GLBA) and friendships, Mark has heard many stories of parents doing everything from disowning a child to completely refusing to deal with the truth upon learning that their child was a homosexual.

"I'm one of those redneck, macho Texans, and this thing really clobbered me," Bill said. "But I think the key issue is how the parents feel about the children and if they really love them. If you love them, you don't cut your kid out."

Mark said that he has friends whose parents accept their homosexuality, but his parents are really the only ones he knows of that have become involved publicly in homosexual causes and issues.

"Most parents think locally," he said. "They work with their own child, and they don't worry about the world at large."

The Martins first became involved in activism when they appeared on a question/answer panel at A&M for the Division of Student Services. The panel

allowed 250 members of the A&M faculty and staff the opportunity to ask questions about homosexuality.

In November, when Sandie attended a conference for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in North Carolina she was one of the few straight people and the only mother there.

"She got a standing ovation when she stood up and introduced herself," Mark said. "She got up to talk about how she wants to see the day when I can have kids, and when she can be a grandmother to my kids. She impressed a lot of people there."

Sandie said during the car trip to and from the conference she had the opportunity to get to know other homosexual students, the majority of whom she said had not come out to their parents because they feared rejection.

Both Mark and his parents said that young people dealing with homosexuality need a place to turn.

Mark plans to graduate in May with a degree in psychology and become a counselor specializing in gay issues. His mom has similar plans of her own.

"I don't think we're ready for this right now," Sandie said. "But eventually I would like to open our home to kids who come out to their parents and meet with an unfavorable reaction and give them a place to stay."

Mark Martin, a senior psychology major, holds a photo of his parents Sandie and Bill Martin. Mark came out to his parents three years ago and said from that moment they became the biggest influences in his life.

Kyle Burnett/The Battalion

