

Relying on technology as a crutch

Advances in technology have eliminated many of life's hassles and bothers.

We no longer have to get off the couch to change the channel.

We can put off writing our term papers until the last minute because word processors have made the tedious task of fitting footnotes on the page and erasing typos obsolete.

In a few minutes, with the help of computers and advanced calculators, we can accomplish cumbersome and time-consuming mathematical calculations that used to take hours.

As a timesaving device, these high-powered calculators are a godsend.

However, students have a tendency to abuse the power of this technology. We tend to use computer chips as a substitute for our brains.

When we program calculators for the purpose of eliminating repetitive and time-consuming calculations, they are serving a constructive purpose. When we program them for the purpose of eliminating the need to think things through, technology is contributing to intellectual laziness.

There is no denying the power and convenience of these little pocket calculators. I would never want to walk into a test without mine.

However, I have noticed a significant decline in my ability to do calculations in my head since I purchased a Hewlett Packard 48G a few years ago. I am also much less likely to begin manual calculations that involve mathematical techniques that have been made practically obsolete by these technologi-



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cal machines. Many math problems can be solved just as quickly by hand using traditional methods as they can with a calculator. An example might help illustrate this point.

A linear system of equations can be solved by using Kramer's rule (the mathematician, not the actor on Seinfeld) in about the same amount of time it takes to program the matrix equation into a calculator and press the "solve" button.

This assumes, however, that you remember what Kramer's rule is and how to apply it. I remember learning this mathematical technique my junior year of high school and thinking it was relatively straightforward and easy.

Unfortunately, when confronted with this method in class the other day, I had no clue as to how to apply it. Of course, I could have easily gone to look it up and refreshed my memory.

But I had no need to. My calculator eliminated the need for me to know this piece of information, even though it would be better for me to have this knowledge in

the long run. As a result, I remain ignorant of Kramer's rule.

While this fact is not of great cosmological significance, it is symptomatic of a larger problem: I would rather rely on a machine to do that which I could easily accomplish myself.

The calculator has contributed to my intellectual laziness by removing the incentive for me to learn something.

The calculator has increased the mental inertia that I must overcome in order to gain knowledge. This is not the fault of the calculator. It is a result of the purpose for which I am using it.

Technology itself is not good or bad; it is what we do with it that determines the level of control it has over us.

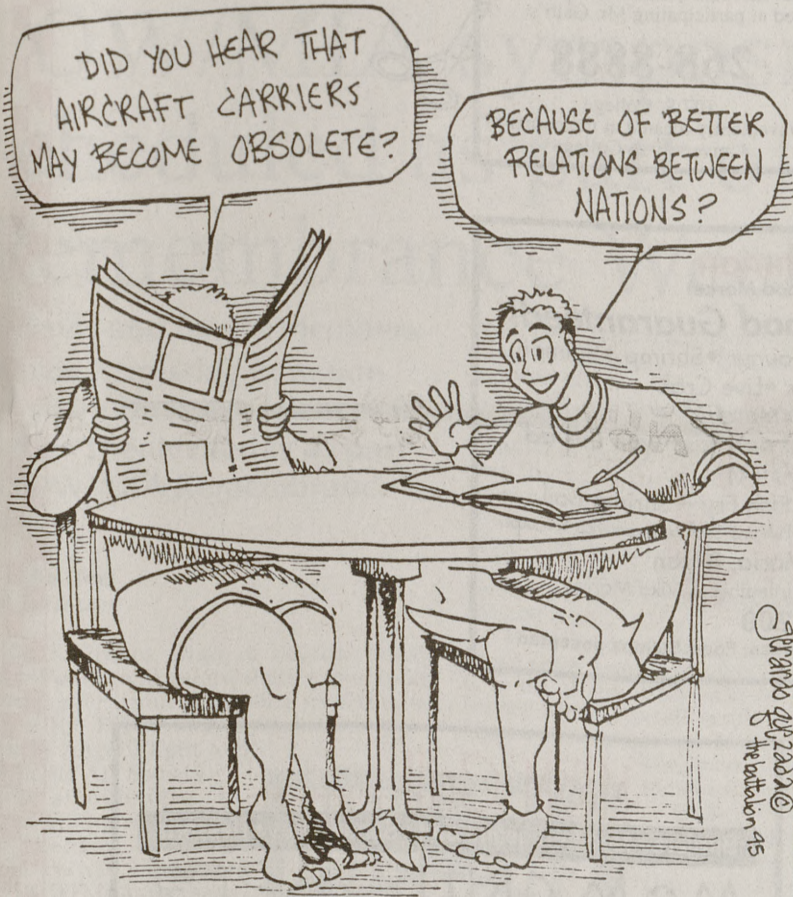
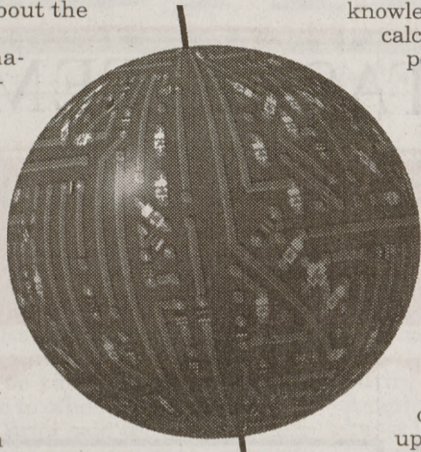
If we use it as a time saver, that's great. When we use it as a mental crutch, we are cheating ourselves.

In the case of the newest generation of high-powered calculators, technology is diminishing our willingness to look things up and think things through.

While we should appreciate the power and convenience they provide, we should be wary of their potential to make us lazy.

We should not let the power of technology cripple the power of our brains.

Jim Pawlikowski is a senior chemical engineering major



The make-believe world of Congress

Many Congress members live in a different world when it comes to ethics

While substitute teaching this summer, I was faced with a humorous situation.

A student, whose teacher I had subbed for, and whom I had talked to several times handed me a note. The 15-year-old girl told me I was cute and asked me if I had a girlfriend.

I laughed, unable to imagine actually dating a high school student. The six year difference between us felt like a century considering the role I played to the students.

To take advantage of my position of authority to go out with a student would have been completely unethical, as everyone would agree.

Well, almost everyone.

Recently, this country witnessed that members of Congress have different ideas of ethical behavior than the rest of America.

Rep. Mel Reynolds, D-Ill., has just provoked collective nausea across the U.S., being convicted of having sex with a 16-year-old and then trying to cover it up. He insisted that the two never had physical sex, and that he had only had "phone sex" with the child.

Apparently, the congressman's fiber-optic sex defense did not ring true to the jury. I doubt the taped conversations of Reynolds telling the girl to wear "peach-colored panties" to his office and ordering her to get sexually-explicit photos of her 15-year-old friend endeared Reynolds to the jurors.

Even more recently, Sen. Bob Packwood offered his resignation from the Senate, after the Senate Ethics Committee unanimously recommended his expulsion.

Initially, he fumed, saying, "I can't recall when any citizen has been put through a process close to an inquisition and never had a chance to face his accusers."



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Frankly, I can't recall when any citizen has kept his job for two full years after 19 women accused him of sexual harassment.

The following day, when announcing his resignation before the Senate, he chose not to apologize to the women and express his regret over the torment he subjected them to.

Instead, he reminisced about how he came up with the Tax Reform Act of 1986 over a couple of pitchers of beer in a bar.

Though Packwood and Reynolds are the worst recent abusers of political power, it seems the power of Capitol Hill makes congressmen behave irresponsibly, unethically and occasionally illegally.

On the same day Reynolds was convicted, David Durenberger, a former senator from Minnesota, pled guilty to charges that he billed the Senate for staying in a condominium that he owned.

Then there's Dan Rostenkowski, the renowned stamp thief.

Granted, most congressmen aren't criminals, but they seem to operate under a different system of values than the rest of us. This Washington Beltway mentality diminishes their credibility in dealing with issues the American people face.

For example, Phil Gramm, who earns \$133,600 as a U.S. senator, has a roll call rate of under 90 percent.

Few people, especially those who earn as much money as he does, can get away with showing up to work less than 90 percent of the time.

Maybe his attendance rate would be better if he didn't take so many trips paid for by interest groups — he took 31 of them last year.

Ironically, Gramm thinks his performance in the Senate merits a promotion to a higher office — like the presidency.

Another important congressman has been busy traveling, too.

This summer Newt Gingrich toured America, promoting a book that he was paid seven figures for, even though someone else wrote for him.

There's nothing wrong with wealthy people serving in Congress, but when congressmen behave like fat cats because of the position they hold, they begin to seem out-of-touch.

Although the Republican-controlled Congress has fought hard to pass populist gimmicks, such as term limits and the balanced budget amendment, the federal government's standing among Americans is lower than ever.

Recently, this country has witnessed members of Congress have different ideas of ethical behavior than the rest of America.

One big reason is Congress' credibility gap. Our country expects its elected representatives to reflect the behavior and values of the people they represent.

To some extent, the American people equate responsible governing with responsible personal behavior.

Currently, it appears that congressmen treat acts such as sex with a child and forcing themselves on women as normal and accepted behavior.

They also seem to feel as if they have somehow earned the "perks" that come with their power.

As long as this perception persists, Americans will trust the House of Representatives like they would a house of cards, and will view the Senate as a ship of fools.

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EDITORIAL SICK POLICY

Beutel needs a policy that attends to the sick and dismisses the fake.

Recently, the Faculty Senate altered the wording of the health center excuse policy, which now prevents instructors from calling the Beutel Health Center to confirm that absent students received treatment.

While this will protect students' privacy, the senate has yet to solve the largest problem regarding the health center excuse policy — student misuse of it.

It is common knowledge that students unprepared for a test, sometimes go to the health center to avoid taking it and to get an excuse to make their test up at a later date.

The current policy requires students to show proof of treatment to instructors to receive a University-authorized absence.

However, doctors at the health center have been complaining about the extra work because students who are not sick are still visiting the clinic.

Doctors are having to treat healthy students who avoid their classes, which wastes their time and limits the time they can spend treating students who need attention.

In addition, some students who have visited the health

center have complained that they were greeted with suspicion by health center workers who did not want the doctors to have to waste their time with healthy, albeit lazy students.

The blame for this mess belongs to the students who have been abusing the health center and its policies in order to shun their responsibilities.

However, giving these "patients" a guilt trip will not solve the problems the health center and the truly sick students face.

The Faculty Senate should revisit this issue in order to find a policy that will cut down on the misuse of the health center while not neglecting the sick students or burdening the doctors even more.

Given that honor and honesty are heavily emphasized at A&M, an ideal solution would be to implement an honor code policy, which would require instructors to trust the students who claim to be sick.

As a consequence, Beutel doctors would not have to treat healthy students.

Although some students would lie to their professors, it's not as if that would be anything new.



MAIL CALL

Answers to debate on football tickets

As employees of the Athletic Ticket Office, we would like to clarify issues regarding football ticket policies. With the exception of the stroller and umbrella restrictions, these policies have been in effect for more than 15 years.

Students who purchase the all-sports pass or the football only option are paying one-half the regular price of a football season bench ticket. This is a savings of more than \$60 each football season. If one purchases the all-sports option, one could pay as little as one dollar per sporting event each year.

The Athletic Ticket Office policy has been to allow the students who do not purchase an all-sports pass or a football only option to purchase a student ticket on Friday and Saturday of the home game week at one-half the original ticket price. The term for this situation is a "walk-up."

If a Texas A&M student who does not have a sports option wishes to draw a ticket any earlier than Friday, he or she is treated as a guest and must pay the full ticket price. This ensures that those students with the sports option will receive their prepaid ticket if drawn by 4 p.m. on Thursday.

Through careful calculation, the ticket office determines the number of guest tickets available. Guest tickets may be purchased by sports card holders only on a first come, first serve basis. This would make it possible for all of the available guest tickets to be sold on Monday; therefore, it is very unlikely that walk-up tickets will be available for the t.u. football game.

Another football ticket policy that has been questioned is the child ticket policy. The policy states that all persons entering the stadium must have a ticket. It is up to the gate person's discretion to enforce this policy if the young child cannot walk and must be held in the parent's arms. Because of growing crowds at football games, the gate people

have been more strict.

Also, it is difficult to compare the ticket requirement for a football game to a baseball game as the number of spectators differs greatly. It is our belief that all children should have a ticket to enter the stadium.

A child requires as much space, if not more, than many adults because of necessities that must accompany a young child, such as a diaper or toy bag. Children often distract other spectators with their movement in the stadium, having their own seating space alleviates many of these problems.

We hope that this begins to clarify the football ticket policies that have confused many in the recent weeks. We encourage students to contact the ticket office to clarify any further questions that might arise.

*Megan Witcher
Class of '98
Sarah Moore
Class of '97
Linda Chandler
Class of '94*

Baxter's liberal ideas don't belong

About a year ago, as H.L. Baxter would put it, I "changed my environment." I grew up in Canada, where wasteful social spending created massive debt and a nation of whiny, government-dependent liberals.

I didn't come to Texas A&M for cowboy hats and country music but rather for tradition, honor and an environment where my beliefs weren't ridiculed.

Am I correct in concluding that Baxter wants more permissiveness and an erosion in those values that have made Texas A&M strong?

I don't pay big bucks (non-resident tuition) to be told that everything I believe in is wrong. More liberalism is not the answer, but if it is liberalism you seek, I believe t.u. is accepting applications.

*Eva Darski
Class of '98*