

The grading game

Just call me "Miss Hill." I'm a student teacher in a local high school this semester.

One of the 'special' responsibilities that I take care of is grading. So far, I've done more grading than I ever thought possible, and there's still no end in sight.

Grading, while an entertaining activity, also makes me tired. Grading makes all teachers tired.

There isn't a neatly produced handbook on "Effective Grading," which teaches one how to assess accurately with a minimum stress level.

The only way I've found to grade, so far, is to get personally involved in each and every essay, agonize over every misspelled word and thoughtfully assign a numerical value.

Through my work with projects, papers and tests, I've realized that grading is less of an exact science than previously thought.

In fact, if I had known then (my undergraduate career) what I know now (my stint as a teacher), my transcript might have a different look.

But it's not too late for those of you who are still taking classes (most of the entire A&M student body, I assume).

For your benefit, I've compiled a brief guide to help students better understand the mind of the instructor, and thereby achieve that elusive 4.0, or that elusive 3.0 or to achieve any G.P.R. at all.

The most important suggestion is:

- Always talk to the teacher, in advance, about any assignment concerns.

If you are going to have a problem, notify your prof early. This is kind of like establishing an alibi, except it is useful for the average law-abiding student, not just the average criminal.

For that matter, whenever you have a problem or a concern, whether in advance or not:

- Offer a solution instead of waiting for the teacher to give you an answer.

Allow your prof's dreams — of bright, curious students sitting under a shady elm discussing Thoreau — to live. Do not kill these dreams by constantly striving to accomplish the bare minimum.

Comments like "Miss Hill, I missed all of last week, including 3 tests and the movie. And I don't have that term paper done yet. What am I supposed to do!?" make me feel tired.

I want to help students, but I can't possibly come up with all the solutions. I don't know students' schedules or limitations, so invariably any suggestion I generate is met with disapproval.

It's always better when the student comes up with at least a couple of options, and we can work from there.

If you want to put your instructor on the defensive, then skip the next suggestion. Otherwise:

- Do not question a due date as soon as the assignment is passed out. Work hard, then ask for an extension after you've proven to the teacher that you deserve one.

As students, remember that your teachers want to dwell in a land of idealism. When reality keeps slapping us in the face, we become bitter. Allow your prof's dreams — dreams of bright, curious students sitting under a shady elm discussing Thoreau — to live.

Do not kill those dreams with repeated comments about trying to accomplish just the bare minimum.

For example, I assigned a certain project to the class. One of the requirements seemed less than pleasing.

"How much is this part worth, Miss Hill?"

"I don't know, just do it," I replied, tensing up in my shoulders.

"Well, if it is worth a lot, I'll do it. Otherwise I'm going to skip it," the student retorted.

Suddenly I was filled with the desire to jack up the point value of this assignment to half of every other assignment the class has completed — combined.

"It's worth a lot, just believe me."

"Yeah, well how much?"

Again, the urge to grade this student on a 1,000-point scale appears. It's hard to not get defensive when students are trying to get away with as little as possible.

Now I understand how my instructors felt when my classmates and I complained. I understand why those instructors dug in their heels at times. We put them on the defensive, instead of our team.

If you show your instructor that you are willing to put in time and effort, that instructor will be more merciful and understanding, not to mention helpful.

After all, a teacher's goal is to teach. If you, the student, help the instructor meet that goal — even if you are on a different timeline than some of the other students — it will work out better in the end.

Just remember that your instructors are human beings. Treating them that way — with respect, courtesy and intelligence — will help create a professional relationship beneficial to both parties, as well as to your G.P.R.

Erin Hill is a graduate pursuing a teaching certificate

ERIN HILL
COLUMNIST



THE BATTALION

Established in 1893

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STONGER IDEAS

The Student Senate should work to strengthen its multiculturalism bill.

The time has come.

Tonight, the Student Senate will meet and hopefully resolve the proposed cultures requirement. After festering for two years, the Student Senate bill that would require all students to complete a three-hour cultures class has gone nowhere, and it is an issue that badly needs to be put to rest.

The Senate faces three options: leave the bill alone, repeal it and replace it with nothing, or repeal it and replace it with another bill. Of the three, the last one would be the most beneficial for Texas A&M.

The current bill misses the point of ensuring that students receive a well-rounded education. Over 90 percent of students already meet the requirement.

The Faculty Senate bill is a much better proposal. By requiring students to take six hours of culture classes, students would graduate from Texas A&M better prepared to face a diverse world. Also, the bill offers hundreds of classes from which to choose and would not add any hours to anyone's degree plan.

By repealing the current bill and replacing it with a stronger alternative such as the Faculty Senate bill, the Student Senate would be sending several positive messages.

One is that the students and faculty would be in agreement that the University needs a real cultures requirement. This would help President Bowen to make a decision about the requirement, which would finally resolve the issue.

Another message is that the inflammatory and misleading rhetoric by certain students and organizations do not succeed in scaring others into buying a narrow-minded point of view.

Most importantly, the Student Senate would be saying that Texas A&M students are serious about being prepared for the 21st century. If A&M is to be a top quality university, a degree from Texas A&M ought to reflect it.

If student senators realize this, then the choice is clear. A stronger cultures requirement will build a stronger University.

Autos often leave owners sad, bitter

In the early part of this century, at the beginning of the age of the automobile, there were two cars in the entire state of Iowa. Iowa had its first automobile accident when the only two cars in the state ran into each other.

Some may view this as an example of Murphy's Law in action: "If something can go wrong, it will." I think the meaning may be a little deeper: "If you own a car, it's more trouble than it's worth."

No one even questions the usefulness of the automobile. Cars are blindly accepted as a positive contribution to the 20th century. That is, until one really begins to think about the inherent problems a car presents. I've got a little story to illustrate my point.

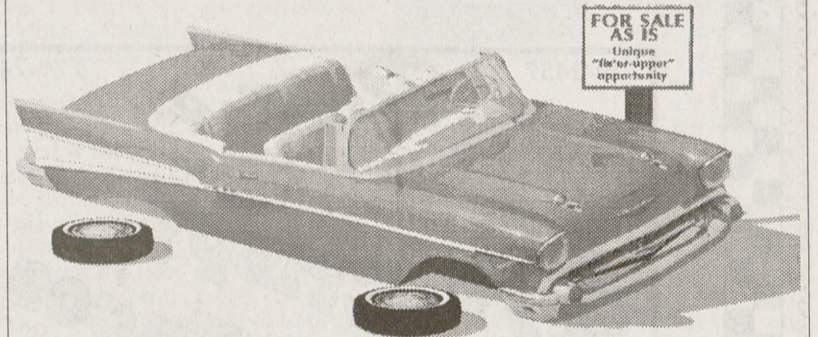
I had just entered my favorite Northside establishment. It had been a difficult week of classes, quizzes and tests. I sat down with a few friends and began to relax.

After about ten minutes of serious relaxation, one of the patrons of the bar stumbled up to me. Although I knew this person well and recognized his tendency to be melodramatic, the look on his face told me something was seriously wrong.

"Brian, don't you drive one of them black Ford cars?" he asked. I replied in the affirmative while dodging the spittle coming from my inebriated buddy. "Well, it just got TOWED," he said with a smile.

I sat there in disbelief, and my automobile-owning life flashed in front of my face. It was shortly thereafter that I would reach an epiphany of sorts.

BRIAN BECKCOM
COLUMNIST



The following day, I spent an hour tracking my car. Upon finally finding it, I was greeted by a friendly voice on the other line. "What do you want?" the woman on the other end inquired. I explained my situation and questioned her about the location of my car.

"We've got it, but you gotta come at 3 p.m. Bring your driver license, proof of registration, a hundred bucks and a six pack of Shafer's Lite to get it out." I grabbed my friend and we jumped into his car. We began the journey into backwoods Bryan.

As we pulled into the run-down building, I had a feeling that I had seen the place before. A strange-looking youngster with a banjo sat on the front porch strumming a song. A 300-pound Rottweiler stood guarding my car and watering the tires. I entered the building and was greeted by a smiling older man with one tooth.

He made an odd comment about how pretty my mouth was and then asked for the money. I paid in cash, walked out backward and drove quickly away. It was then that I realized that cars are more trouble than they're worth.

Why is it that Americans are so in love with their cars? Is it because Americans love the convenience of the automobile, or is it something else? Cars are seen as a status symbol, a mode of transportation, and a sign of maturity. However, my brief experience with the automobile has been a love-hate relationship, to say the least.

I purchased my first car shortly after my sixteenth birthday. It was a 1965 Mustang, and although it only cost me about a \$1,000, the maintenance soon surpassed this figure. I loved driving that car. The problem was, the darned thing was in the repair shop about ninety percent of the time.

When I first came to Texas A&M, I didn't know about the reputation of the campus Gestapo. I would park my car, get out, check the tires and look up to see a yellow welcome note on my windshield.

I could've bought Texas A&M a blue-chip wide receiver with the money I spent on parking tickets.

I think our politicians would be well advised to address the issue in the upcoming political season. For example, Bill Clinton is on a tirade about the evils of tobacco. His energy would be better spent preaching about the evils of the automobile. Automobile-related fatalities greatly outnumber smoking related deaths.

If our president were to go on television and argue the case for a return to the horse and buggy, his re-election would be assured. The number of highway fatalities would be greatly reduced. Drunk driving would be curtailed, and women drivers would be eliminated.

I don't even have to mention that it would save Aggies a ton of money in parking tickets and tow truck fees. Imagine how hard it would be to put a parking ticket on a horse. And imagine the difficulties attaching a tow cable to the business-end of a wild stallion.

Brian Beckcom is a senior computer science major



MAIL CALL

Don't throw litter away: Recycle it

This letter is in response to Sara Lloyd's letter in Mail Call on Oct. 11. She is bothered by people who litter passively, like Ags who pick up their Battalion and let the included advertising insert fall to the ground.

She suggested that these Aggies use their amazing, dexterous hands and their "monkey thumbs" to pick up the insert, carry it over to the trash can and throw it away.

Although this is the typical American attitude of "Don't litter. Throw your trash away instead," Lloyd has a point.

The newspaper inserts don't belong scattered all over the ground and sidewalks.

But, they also don't belong in the trash. They belong in a recycling plant. So many people refuse to change their "consume and dispose of it" lifestyle.

Everyday, I see hundreds of Aggies throw away their aluminum cans just because the trash can is only 15 feet away while the recycling bin is a whopping 20 feet away.

And then there are the Ags who don't bother to do anything with their trash — they just leave it where it seems most convenient and walk away.

Not an ounce of guilt is evident on their faces. It's sad that so many people have let convenience replace their respect and responsibility for the Earth.

Please don't pick up your Battalion insert and throw it away in the trash.

Recycle it.

Recycle your aluminum can, too. While you're at it, you might as well recycle your Battalion.

Also, you don't have to throw away your empty glass or plastic bottle. Put the lid on it. Put it in your backpack. Take it home. Then recycle it.

Everyday, each person disposes of three and a half pounds of trash. That's 1,280 pounds of trash per year per person.

Two-thirds of our nation's landfills have filled up and closed in the past 20 years.

It is predicted that in the next 18 years, 4,200 of the remaining 5,500 landfills will also be closed.

We have got to start making some serious changes. Which are you going to be: part of the problem or part of the solution?

Ede Epperson
Class of '98

KKK continues its terrible tradition

If I didn't know any better, I would've thought I'd died and gone straight to hell.

This past weekend, my parents and I decided to go to our lake

house, and on our way I encountered a horrific sight.

As we pulled up to a stoplight in a small town called Woodville, Texas, I looked over to see a white bus with the words "Ku Klux Klan" printed in bold letters.

Inside sat a slew of white men who looked very much like skinheads — excuse the stereotype.

I was absolutely shocked to learn that such blatant disrespect for humanity continues today.

As much as this disturbed me, one should have seen the looks on the faces of an African-American family across the intersection.

I am thoroughly disappointed that such blatant and offensive racism still exists in our country.

Melissa Price
Class of '97

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor and will print as many as space allows. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number.

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