

## Does the Greek system belong on campus? Greeks bond through service System causes social division



**ERIN FITZGERALD**  
COLUMNIST



Greek life belongs on the Texas A&M campus as much as the Corps of Cadets.

Anyone who has a sense of what being an Aggie means

would agree that it shares many characteristics with being Greek. Just like Aggies, Greeks pride themselves in being a part of something that is rich in history and strives for nothing less than excellence.

Aggies proudly display A&M stickers and license plates on the backs of their cars; Greeks paste on their crests. Aggies frequently wear A&M/TAMU/ATM shirts; Greeks often wear their letters. Aggies participate in traditions; Greeks participate in rituals.

"Fraternity" means brotherhood; "sorority" means sisterhood. There is the same intense feeling of camaraderie at A&M — just look at the Aggie Ring.

Outside of Aggieland, strangers approach one another feeling a common bond simply because gold pieces of metal are wrapped around their fingers. Why? Because they've experienced something which "from the outside looking in" can't be understood and "from the inside looking out" can't be explained. The same holds true for Greeks.

Those who condemn Greek life know little about it and are influenced by stereotypes and falsehoods. For some reason, there is this myth that Greeks aren't Aggies, but merely members of social organizations which party all the time. In the city that consumes the most beer per capita, it's a little hypocritical to condemn any group for partying.

In fact, no bulk alcohol is allowed at Greek parties, and members are subjected to strict requirements on drinking and behavior. The National headquarters of each fraternity and sorority restrict their number of social events.

Let's look at some other facts about these "wild" Aggie Greeks:

• Academically, Greeks possess higher grade point ratios than non-Greeks on average.

• Greeks do more community service than most non-Greeks. Every Greek participates in community service a minimum of once a year. Along with national fraternal philanthropies, most have a local philanthropy. Greeks also do local community service, such as Big Brother/Big Sister programs, visiting boys homes and nursing homes, Adopt a Highway, and A&M's Big Event.

• Greeks are involved in almost every campus organization. In fact, many of the campus leaders are Greek, such as the speaker of the Senate, the president of the 12th Man Student Association and the Honors Student Council president.

True, anyone can do and be

all of these things without joining a fraternal organization. Anyone can also be a fan of Texas A&M football, but it means more when you're an Aggie. You're a part of something special.

Of course, there are always some bad apples that are easy targets. But these mistakes are pure products of society. Non-Greek Aggies have just as many (if not more) incidents of hazing and can be culturally insensitive. Just as paying players doesn't make college football a bad sport, the mistakes made by members of one fraternal organization shouldn't reflect on all Greeks.

The pros outweigh the cons. Those who think

Greeks are superficial and worthless should get off their high horses and look at all the good they bring to this campus and community.

Greeks devote a large percentage of their time to service and studies.

And it takes a lot of character to live up to the standards of fraternal life. Perhaps that is why all but two presidents of the United States since 1823 have been Greek.

If the pride in being Greek is still incomprehensible, Aggies should ask themselves why being an Aggie is so great — it's the same answer.

As for "renting a friend," it's called tuition.

*Erin Fitzgerald is a senior political science and English major and a member of a sorority*

Unlike the civilization after which it takes its name, the Greek system is not the celebration of individualism and accomplishment that it pretends to be. Despite the numerous claims of fraternities and sororities, their primary focus is social. Much lip service is given to community service, academic enhancement and moral standards. When it comes to recruitment, however, the social aspects of Greek life are flaunted the most.

This fact is proven best by the Greeks themselves. When they choose to advertise their own activities via T-shirts, what messages do they portray?

Most often, Greeks are seen donning the garments that celebrate their more Dionysian enterprises. As a civilian, I am continually bombarded by clothing such as the "grab-a-date" and "bastardize-this-culture" shirts. Rarely — in fact never — have I seen the "Upsilon fed the homeless" shirt.

Granted, many of the social events heralded by these articles of clothing actually serve a charitable purpose. Greeks are very good at holding golf tournaments, concerts and chili cook-offs that benefit charities. The unfortunate side effect of this is that it breeds two dangerous mentalities. One is that the idea of throwing money at a problem will solve it. The other being the concept that it's acceptable to help a charity as

long as they can get a round of golf or a drunken romp around a pot of stew out of it.

Because Greek groups rarely claim to be primarily service-oriented, it would hardly be fair to criticize them for their lack of efficacy.

Their social basis, on the other hand, is fair game.

The Greek system is based on a division of people that is as ridiculous and arbitrary as Dr. Seuss' star-bellied Sneetches.

After a selection process which breeds homogeneous, rather than diverse groups, Greeks learn to identify with an organization that celebrates itself for the sole purpose of celebrating itself. This ideology espouses the idea that every Upsilon (Mu, Eta, etc.) should like his or her fellow brother or sister not because of the individual characteristics of that person, but because they are an Upsilon.

The intangible quality of Upsilonhood is apparently available at a price of around \$600 per semester. It varies depending on the selection of letters the individual Greek wants on his or her sweatshirt. The letters themselves don't stand for anything, but why should that matter?

Such capricious divisions of people exist outside the Greek system as well (especially at A&M), but that doesn't make them any more valid.

Of course, these faults lie within the Greek system itself, rather than the individuals involved. But along with the faults inherent in the system, the actions of many Greek groups have shown the human error involved. An individual would have to go back in time as far as Monday to find an example of hazing in one of A&M's Greek organizations.

Year after year, the Greek system has been a constant source of negative publicity for A&M, especially because of the fraternities. Were it not for such vigorous competition from the College Republicans, the Corps of Cadets and the Board of Regents, the Greek system would hold the title for "Most Embarrassing University Group."

I am not suggesting that the Greek system has never done anything positive. Sororities and fraternities have raised thousands of dollars for charities. So have student groups like United Way, Habitat for Humanity and countless others. Only, the latter have managed to do it without ever stealing church playground equipment or breaking into the apartment of a police officer.

Have the "moral standards" and "community service" values preached by the Greek system had any effect on the actions of the numerous Greek members who have committed such transgressions? Obviously not.

Has the A&M Greek community given any evidence to suggest that the next twenty years will be any different? Not one iota.

*Jeff Nolen is a senior psychology major*



### THE BATTALION

Established in 1893

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## EDITORIAL

### SECONDHAND

#### 'Smoking in the board room' stinks of special privileges.

Smoke 'em if you got 'em — even if it goes against campus policy. At least that seems to be the attitude of some members of the Board of Regents.

Some of the regents, including Chairman Mary Nan West, have been smoking in their MSC offices despite the fact that doing so is in direct violation of campus policy.

Former Texas A&M president William H. Mobley inacted the policy in 1993, doing away with a smoking policy that allowed for designated areas of buildings to be used for smoking.

In a memo explaining the new policy, Mobley wrote, "Scientific findings, as summarized by the United States Attorney General and the Environmental Protection Agency, indicate that simple separation of buildings into "smoking" and "non-smoking" sections does not eliminate the unequivocal health risks that result from environmental tobacco smoke."

These health risks still exist in offices in the MSC. Workers in offices near the regents' should not be victims of a selectively-enforced policy when the health risks are so obvious.

As the dangers of smoking have become more publicized, many smokers have dropped the habit. The dangers of side-stream smoke have caused restaurants, airlines and office buildings across the country to

ban smoking. As Mobley stated, simply creating a "smoking" section is not good enough to protect non-smokers' rights. Similarly, allowing one group, no matter how powerful and respected, to break the rules undermines the health of others.

Since the policy states that the ban exists for all buildings "under the administrative purview" of the president, the MSC is not an acceptable place for the regents to smoke.

This kind of blatant disregard of the rules reeks of the kind of behavior that led to the "ice and cups" scandal of 1994. Although law-enforcement will probably never get involved, the infractions are just as serious.

Aside from their clash with policy, the regents should abandon their indoor smoking habits simply out of consideration for others.

The only enforcement in Mobley's policy was a call for consideration and thoughtfulness on the part of smokers, so it is ultimately left to the regents to alter their behavior.

If other smokers can live with smoking outdoors, so can the regents. The regents may have never been reprimanded, but students, faculty and staff members would never get away with smoking in the MSC.

The regents have been caught with a smoking gun. They should put it out.



## MAIL CALL

#### Votes should have strong foundations

I commend the editorial staff for presenting an unbiased account of the major philosophies of the two political parties while underscoring the need for voters to be informed about candidates' positions before they cast their ballots (editorial, Jan. 24).

Too many times I hear people say things without any reference to where they stand on the issues or values that truly define a presidential candidate. Such statements should be backed up by reason and knowledge, not by uninformed prejudices. I have heard it said that people who do not vote have no reason to complain about government. I also believe people who vote ignorantly have no reason to either.

Political apathy in this nation is a huge problem, but there is actually a bigger concern to a representative democracy than citizens not voting, and that is citizens voting for candidates without knowing what, or who, they really stand for.

*Zak Hall  
Class of '99*

#### Debating religion avoids ignorance

I was highly offended by Kieran Watson's column concerning the supposed "pointlessness" of philosophical discussions. I have found discussions of religion and philosophy to be both possible and very useful.

As a Christian with an agnostic father, I learned the skill of engaging in relaxed conversations about such topics rather than violent arguments.

*Aaron McCarty  
Class of '99*

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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