

A&M should hire more African-American professors

I was floored. I walked into my women's studies class on the first day and there stood a professor who... ta da! Actually looked like me!

Considering that I am a junior, what does this say about Texas A&M?

I quickly hit the streets (or should I say — Rudder Tower) to find some answers to the Big Question: Why aren't there more minority professors on this campus?

The answer is partially determined by what our University has to work with. I visited Dr. William L. Perry, associate provost and dean of faculties, for the scoop.

He spoke in terms of a "pool." Basically, the pool is the number of qualified applicants from which a new faculty member is selected. When looking to hire a tenure-bound professor, that pool must consist of people who have doctorates.



AJA HENDERSON
COLUMNIST

The problem? The pool of minorities (Texas A&M defines that as African-American or Hispanic) is miniscule. According to recent figures from the National Research Council, blacks and Hispanics only received 1,106 and 834 Ph.D.s respectively out of over 26,000 degrees awarded in 1993.

To further illustrate how small the pool is, only 41 blacks and 56 Hispanics received Ph.D.s in engineering that year. Keep in mind that not all of the people in this tiny pool will choose to become professors.

Minorities, who often cannot rely on financial support from their families, usually bear the full expense of their graduate education on their own, so it is easy to see how a high-paying offer from a top corporation could be far more lucrative than, say,

coming to teach at a school with a slaveowner chilling on the lawn. One glance at those numbers makes fears about a minority takeover of jobs downright silly.

I asked Perry why the pool was so small. He responded that the answer was complex, but he thinks a big part of the answer is that minorities have historically been denied access to graduate programs.

Just a few decades ago, minorities were not allowed to place one non-white toe into the doors of most Ph.D. programs.

The Civil Rights movement swayed that somewhat, but Perry said we are still in the process of eliminating the vestiges of a system that was segregated.

So, what does A&M do to get professors of color here? Well, they recruit from the rosters of the minority Ph.D. students.

They let prospective professors talk to faculty networks to get a fair assessment of what to expect here. Finally, before any faculty member is hired, the selection committee must show that it has developed a diverse pool of applicants for the position.

Maybe we just need to up the ante and try much harder to make Texas A&M a good fit for minorities.

If the pool is not sufficient in this area, the faculty recommendation can be scratched, and they can be forced to go back to the drawing board. So far, that has never happened.

Last year, there were 36 minority and female faculty members hired. That number seems pitifully low.

Dr. Woodrow Jones Jr., dean of the College of Liberal Arts and the only black dean on this campus (yes,

there is a black dean here), says the small pool makes the competition for minority professors stiff, and prestigious private schools can make more lucrative offers than public institutions. A professor is going to go where he or she is offered the best opportunities and resources to further his or her career.

Why did Jones come here? "It was a good fit," he said.

Well, maybe we just need to up the ante and try much harder to make Texas A&M a good fit to more minorities. Students need to see professors of color, and not just visualize minorities as the workers around here who serve or scrub for them.

Students of color need to see strong role models. Maybe then they will be inspired to become a professor and make a difference in a young person's life.

Aja Henderson is a junior political science major

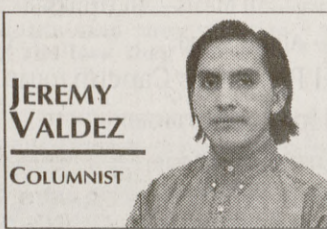


VMI puts new face on 'seperate but equal'

The Virginia Military Institute does not accept women. It does, however, accept about 30 percent of its funding from the Commonweal of Virginia. Now the U.S. Supreme Court must decide if these two facts in concert make up a violation of the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal protection under the law.

In the 1896 landmark Plessy v. Ferguson ruling, the Court failed miserably to recognize the injustice of racial segregation when it upheld Louisiana's right to place blacks on "separate but equal" rail cars. Now, 100 years later, attorneys for the federal government argue that Virginia is practicing a similar and equally unjust form of segregation by funding the males-only program at VMI.

The attorneys for the federal government are wrong. A closer examination of their apples-to-oranges comparison suggests that Virginia might have discovered a fair and viable form of "separate but equal."



JEREMY VALDEZ
COLUMNIST

VWIL supplement their already competitive curriculum with additional physical and health education activities.

VWIL cadets actually attend classes and field training at VMI several times each week. They don't, however, live in the VMI barracks, and they don't participate in the hazing traditions.

And that's just fine with the women of VWIL.

Jennifer Atkins, a cadet in Naval ROTC, said of VMI, "We've been there. We've made friends there and seen their traditions. We see their camaraderie. They really join together, in their own way. But we have different ways of doing the same thing — we're making our own traditions here."

Those unique traditions face an uncertain future if VMI integrates. The female cadets have been told that if the Supreme Court sides with the federal government, VWIL will continue to receive state money for four years. Then Mary Baldwin College would finance the program for one additional year. After that, VWIL may be forced to find alternate funding or shut down.

Single-sex institutions give scholars a larger selection of educational philosophies to choose from. Their policies are unfairly compared to those of racial segregation, which severely limited the opportunities of millions.

Racial segregation failed for two reasons. The facilities and opportunities to which African-American citizens were subjected were clearly inferior and unequal. But of equal importance is that the color of one's skin must be seen as superficial in a free society.

To argue that gender is equally superficial is to deny the awesome influence of our sexuality. And since real gender differences do exist, people have the right to choose an educational program with a good measure of sexual privacy. Individuals seeking coeducational military experiences can find them at places like West Point, Annapolis, Colorado Springs and College Station.

The federal government can't forcibly integrate VMI without threatening the future of all single-sex schooling. The fate of a unique form of higher education hangs in the balance.

VWIL Cadets like Melissa Carr don't see themselves as a disenfranchised group in an inferior facility.

"We aren't here because we can't attend VMI," she said. "We're trying to set up a new program. It's just another kind of military education, and it definitely has equal value. We get a lot of attention since we're an all-women program, but hopefully everyone will settle down and realize that we have a great opportunity here."

It can be successfully argued that VMI and VWIL are separate, equal, and happy. Also, it seems the vast majority of the cadets who will be affected agree that their educational purposes are best served by separate designs. So why, in an age when society is supposed to cherish diversity in everything, is the government trying to force a healthy, unique educational environment to homogenize?

Jennifer, Melissa and their male counterparts deserve an answer. But more importantly, they should be guaranteed the right to pioneer and learn in the venues of their choice.

Jeremy Valdez is a senior chemical engineering major



MAIL CALL

Anti-Greek argument suffers from ignorance

Friday's slugfest between Erin Fitzgerald and Jeff Nolen concerning the issues of Greeks on campus has definitely opened the proverbial can of worms and, I must say, I am one of those worms. As a newly initiated and fully active member of a fraternity, I have, as I freely admit, only begun to understand Greek life. So how could a "civilian," such as Jeff Nolen, who is so obviously "influenced by stereotypes and falsehoods," be knowledgeable enough to effectively refute the well-versed arguments for the Greek system made by fellow Greek, Erin Fitzgerald? The obvious answer is, he couldn't.

First of all, Nolen said groups of people with common interests and goals should be labeled "homogeneous," the definition of which happens to be the following: "Of the same or similar nature or kind." As Greek organizations go, why should we strive for a heterogeneous (meaning totally different) group when all we would do is create "social division" within our organization? In which case, we would not be able to label our groups "fraternities," or "sororities," because there could no brotherhood or sisterhood between people with nothing in common.

James Collins
Class of '99

If ignorance is bliss, then Jeff Nolen should be sublimely happy. In his article about the Greek system on campus, he not only demeans Greeks, but also stoops so low as to include the College Republicans, Corps of Cadets and Board of Regents in his view of "Most Embarrassing University Groups."

Comments such as these make me wonder how much time he has actually spent among people from each group and how well he has gotten to know them. I know of people in my dorm who are members of sororities. These people are not the "star-bellied Sneetches" Nolen makes them out to be, and they are not just Greek symbols. They are caring, spirited Ags with their endeavors concentrated in different areas.

As for Nolen's attacks on the Republicans, the Corps of Cadets and the Board of Regents, they seem to have no basis in reality. I have several friends and acquaintances in the Corps, and none of

them exhibits embarrassing behavior. In fact, the Corps is one of the most respectable establishments on campus.

JoAnne Whittemore
Class of '99

It is possible for friends to rationally argue religion

The stereotypes presented in Kieran Watson's article paint an ugly picture. Watson implied that those who share their faith with others are bloodthirsty, hateful lunatics who are out to condemn and destroy those whose opinions differ. Maybe Watson has had some bad experience with this kind of discussion and decided that all those with religious views are the same. I am very sorry to hear it if that is the case, but I speak from experience as well and I assure you that it is possible to have a meaningful, civilized religious discussion, and it happens everyday.

Brad Cook
Class of '98

Kieran Watson's column concerning religious debates was a waste of good newsprint. To suggest that we would be better off running away from discussion and debate concerning our religious and philosophical ideologies is ludicrous. Does Watson want us all to be opinionless zombies? How will anybody ever gain insight into other's beliefs if we all just avoid debate because it might lead to an argument? A true debate is when both parties merely defend their position in a mature manner.

I for one enjoy discussing my religious views with others. It not only introduces me to alternative philosophies, but allows me to defend my faith. In fact, it strengthens it. Those of us who are mature and have an open mind can debate religion. A true friendship is not ruined because two people have differing views.

Jon Appgar
Class of '99

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Challenger's impact still felt 10 years later

Yesterday marked a very important anniversary in the history of the United States' Space Program. Ten years ago, on Jan. 28, 1986, the crew of Shuttle flight 51-L was lost 73 seconds after liftoff.

As seven brave souls raced to the skies and into our high frontier, they carried with them the spirit of humanity, seeking knowledge and truth about the world we live in.

I vividly remember the events of that fateful day. The explosion was traced to a faulty O-ring design in the solid rocket boosters. A debatable decision was made to continue with the countdown, even though the morning temperature was colder than any previous launch.

The O-ring in one of the booster segments did not seal properly in the cold temperature, thereby allowing hot exhaust gasses to blow out the right aft segment like a flame torch.

As the Shuttle continued its ascent, the escaping gasses severed a supporting strut that held the booster to the rest of the spacecraft, thereby causing it to rotate and strike the main external tank. Structural failure resulted causing the inner liquid hydrogen and oxygen tanks to rupture.

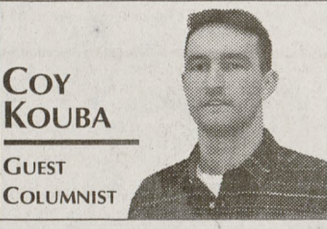
The two fuels reacted violently and exploded in a gigantic fireball. What had been such a graceful flight was snuffed out of existence in the blink of an eye.

The two solid rocket boosters, now free from the Shuttle, continued their skyward journey as the remains of the Challenger fell some 46,000 feet to the Atlantic Ocean.

The TV cameras zoomed out to stare at the ugly smoke trails, and the flight announcer, who was looking only at his data screen, solemnly said, "We obviously have a major malfunction here."

The whole world stood in shock and disbelief as this cruel twist of fate took place before their very eyes.

The launch was being broadcast live



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GUEST COLUMNIST

across the country to thousands of young school children. This flight was to begin bridging the gap between advanced technology and everyday life, as evidenced by crew member Christa McAuliffe, who was to be the first

teacher in space.

Another Space Shuttle would not fly for the next two-and-a-half years, while we picked up the pieces and allowed our wounds to heal.

After 24 successful flights, we were rudely reminded that spaceflight is not without large, uncalculated risks.

While their flight may have ended abruptly, their mission has carried on. Jane Scobee, and Texas A&M graduate and wife of shuttle commander Dick Scobee, courageously asked only hours after the accident to keep space exploration alive, and for the mission of that flight to continue.

And indeed it has continued; through the hard work of the crew's families, the Challenger Center was born. This hands-on educational learning center is located in many places throughout the country where school children and teachers go to learn about math, space and science.

To this day, Challenger Centers continue to teach and inspire our young with their own dreams. In this way, the mission goals of that flight have been fulfilled.

The Challenger incident has forced many to question the viability and importance of the program. Many argue that space exploration is too costly, especially when more pertinent problems exist here at home — too many people are dying of starvation, our environment is polluted and diseases still go uncured. Yes, these problems are im-

portant, but if we don't seek out new wonders and push our frontiers forward, these problems here on earth will remain with us forever.

In terms of committed resources, NASA receives only 0.9% of the federal budget, and it still faces more cutbacks.

In comparison, the military receives about 20% of the federal budget. Given that amount of money, most people don't realize the benefits we've enjoyed from our space exploration.

Over 30,000 spin-offs have been recorded since the beginning of the space program; microwave ovens, advanced medical life support, food processing technology and microgravity research only scratch the surface.

NASA will probably never again enjoy the financial resources of the Apollo program days.

However, we will never stop expanding our horizons. It is our intrinsic, curious drive to search and explore; it's the same drive that led Columbus to the New World and Lewis and Clark to the Pacific.

Civilizations that stop exploring and expanding become stagnant and die. We will always continue to take those risky steps into the unknown, just as the Challenger crew did.

We will go to Mars one day and eventually leave the bonds of our solar system; that has already been decided. It's only a matter of when that is to be determined.

As former President George Bush so eloquently said, "The Challenger Seven lived in vibrant pursuit of a dream, and as long as we continue to pursue that dream, as long as we help it to touch the lives of our young people, then it can be said that we never truly lost those seven brave souls."

Coy Kouba is a graduate student and president of Students for the Exploration & Development of Space

