

Should taking literature courses be mandatory?

Courses enrich all students **PROCON** Students deserve to choose

I was having a conversation with an old high school friend when I was told the unthinkable. Business majors at A&M are not required to take any literature courses.



HELEN CLANCY
STAFF WRITER

"Are you sure?" I asked. "Oh, yeah. We just take English 104 and technical writing. No literature."

No literature. Literature directly relates to the issues faced by our society, regardless of a person's field of study. The basic ideas expressed hundreds of years ago stood the test of time for a reason — because they challenged the boundaries of rudimentary thought.

A literature class helps a student articulate creative and independent thought much more than any multiple-choice graded survey course. With so many students taking departmental tests, the challenge of individual thought is fading away.

Along with business majors, engineering and biomedical science majors don't take literature. They are required to take speech communication and technical writing. The core curriculum only mandates that they be able to speak and write, but not to read.

Considering the sheer number of business, engineering and BIMS majors (which is about 16,990), it's scary to think that they will graduate without studying Chaucer, Milton or Rousseau. Critical thinking might take a back seat, but at least they will be able to speak and write.

After all, this is the '90s — it's much more entertaining to watch Oliver Parker's Othello than to read Shakespeare's play. There's no reason to pore over Gulliver's Travels when it can be seen on NBC. (Gulliver's Travels is a piece of 18th century satire, for the 16,990 students who aren't required to take literature.)

Perhaps I take it for granted that my parents and I are able to discuss and debate classic literature. Whenever I ask my stepfather if he studied a particular author, he says, "Of course I did. Everyone had to read that in my day." Even though he's a t-sip, I must give him some credit.

After all, when the baby boomer generation went to college, the classics were still being taught alongside history, math and biological sciences. It was important to build a foundation upon which future knowledge could rest, but now that foundation is of secondary importance. Students are more concerned with finding a high-

paying, cosmopolitan job than with enriching their personal knowledge. The courses they take are applied toward their résumé, not their mind.

Although the core curriculum has a humanities requirement of six hours, students rarely opt to fill it with literature. It's a tough subject, and it's

much easier to take the legendary "easy-A" classes like jazz appreciation and history of western dress.

What will happen when the so-called Generation X comes of age? Literature has been a key to our past that has been kept alive by academic interest. Its appreciation will probably be lost, except to those who major in it.

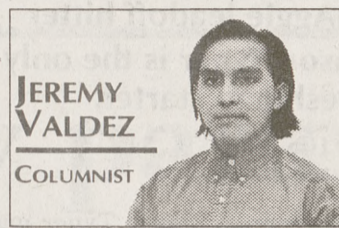
An immeasurable amount of knowledge is disregarded when 16,990 students choose not to take literature because they are not required to.

With all this in mind, I shudder at my future of teaching high school English. I have a greater responsibility than I had first suspected. The literature I teach students could be their last exposure to it, especially if they plan to attend a "world-class" university.

Perhaps Texas A&M knows Voltaire all too well. Cultivate your own garden, but don't expect the University to provide any tools.

Helen Clancy is a sophomore English major

I have a dream. One day, literature classes will be held in a shiny new Reed Arena. In the floodlights of the new holler-house, an english professor will gaze upon a sea of students, and see the glittering displays of thousands of Hewlett-Packard calculators shining back at her. There will be engineers in the class; their numbers shall be legion.



JEREMY VALDEZ
COLUMNIST

In this brave new world, Aggie engineers will bring to bear all the eloquence of Shakespeare, Hemingway and Milton:

"To engineer, or not to engineer; that is the question / Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The uncertainty and decay of outrageous entropy, / Or to take our slide rules against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing end them."

My dream would become a nightmare, however, if engineering majors were forced against their wills to take literature classes.

There are two ways that engineers could be required to take literature classes. One method would be to expand the core curriculum by adding more compulsory classes. The other would be to force engineering students to fill their existing humanities requirement by taking literature classes.

First of all, most engineering students find that their degree plans take at least five years to complete. Add the fact that many engineers choose to participate in cooperative-education programs, and you have a recipe for a six-year bachelor's degree.

Adding additional hours to the core curriculum could make students out of the elderly.

But requiring students to fill

their existing humanities hours with literature classes wouldn't be fair either. Currently, engineering students can spend their meager humanities allowance on courses in history, music, or even literature. The choice is theirs, as it should be.

Undoubtedly, the study of literature would make engineers more insightful professionals. The proponents of a literature requirement question how we could oppose a higher standard of education. The biggest reason for the opposition is that the new requirement would rob students of their already scarce academic freedom. In "Paradise Lost," Milton wrote, "Better to reign in hell than serve in heav'n."

Certainly, Milton would have understood how students would rather exercise some control over a limited curriculum than have a "better" degree plan imposed upon them.

Engineering students who recognize the value of literature either take challenging classes or they find their literary fix through outside reading. The few students who do not appreciate literature probably won't develop an affinity just because the subject is mandatory.

The aim of literary study should be to gain a better understanding of self and a greater capacity for independent thought. Forcing adults to take prescribed classes hardly celebrates the notion of "independent thought."

Students are already working hard to meet university requirements, prepare for future professions, and furnish themselves with a well-rounded education.

It would be possible to achieve all three of these goals ... if students had the patience and funding to stay here for eight years. Most students choose to do the best they can in four or five years.

And most do a very good job in their time here. Texas A&M has already assembled a competitive core curriculum. It is great to encourage students to study literature within the bounds of their degree plans, but placing yet another formal requirement on them would be wrong.

For some, the shrinking of their scholastic freedom could make the best of times become the worst of times.

Jeremy Valdez is a senior chemical engineering major



Rec fee should be optional

Working out is good, but I just can't do it enough to justify the amount of money I pay for facilities. Granted, I am an exception to the rule: I pay for the Rec Center, belong to a gym and have a workout center in my apartment complex. I'd be one big muscle if I took advantage of all my opportunities to pump iron.



ERIN FITZGERALD
COLUMNIST

Instead, I feel like my money is being wasted. I doubt I'm alone. I just don't want to drive all the way to campus when I have other — closer — options.

Still, I have to pay the mandatory fees for attending Texas A&M.

Something students probably don't know is that they are charged twice for the new Rec Center and recreational sports. Yes, every Aggie pays the \$50 "Recreational Sports Fee," but they also pay the "Student Services Fee."

Hidden in this broadly termed charge is funding for the Department of Recreational Sports. Last year, Rec Sports consumed the second largest portion of the fee, 16.5 percent of the generated \$7 million.

That means, in addition to the \$50 fee, each student pays another \$14.

Of course, \$64 a semester doesn't seem like a lot to pay for using the nation's second-largest recreational sports center. That's only 60 cents a day. Students are getting a great deal, right?

Wrong — 65 percent of the Rec Sports portion of the Student Services Fee pays for wages and salaries, and part of the \$50 Recreational Sports Fee pays for people in charge of operations. However, the underlying problem is that students do not use the facility enough to justify the cost.

Looking at the Department of Recreational Sports' entrance statistics, it can easily be figured that last semester's daily average equals 3,617 people — less than 1 percent of the student body.

Weekends are worse. On Saturdays and Sundays, 50 percent fewer people enter the Rec Center. Football games and hangovers must be the excuses for the smaller attendance.

How about the fact that kinesiology classes usually meet there Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday? Stu-

dents, who pay tuition for the classes, are required to enter the Rec Center.

Still, Rec Sports boasts that 74.9 percent of "members" have used the facility. If this is so, then that means that either students go to the Rec Center about once a week, or a lot of people have gone (possibly just to tour it) and not returned.

Yet, the students approved paying for the new building, so our complaints are useless. Nothing can be done now — the thing's been built.

And despite 74.9 percent who have at least set foot inside of the new building, that leaves over 15,000 students who have not. Still, all students are stuck paying another fee — for 20 years — which seems only to be taken advantage of by the minority.

Perhaps, while discussing the \$8 per hour increase in the general use fee, the \$6 increase in the Student Services Fee, the \$4 dollar increase in the Health Center fee, and the possible 9.5 percent increase for on-campus housing, the administration and Board of Regents should discuss other ways to fund the Rec Center.

The obvious solution is to make the fee optional and open up "membership" to the Bryan-College Station public. It's definitely the largest and least expensive club around. But, then the Rec Center would cease to be part of Texas A&M.

Or would it? Off-campus groups use other facilities, such as Rudder Tower and the MSC, all of the time.

Well, who would care if the Rec Center weren't specifically for students? It might surprise the administration, but when choosing where to go to college, a super-sized sports facility is not a top priority for the college-bound.

However, cost is. The average student can look forward to an increase in fees of about \$270 next year. A&M isn't the most expensive school, but fees cost almost twice as much as tuition. And, as A&M continues to build west, the Recreational Sports fee just adds to the unnecessary, ever-increasing fees.

Erin Fitzgerald is a senior political science and English major

JOB RE-TRAINING for the 21ST CENTURY:



MAIL CALL

Magic Johnson was not an adulterer

Philip Leone's Feb. 20 column in the Batt touched on athletes with HIV. Unfortunately, it also included an accusation against NBA star Magic Johnson that is totally false. He started by correctly stating Magic Johnson led a promiscuous lifestyle early in his career. But then, for whatever reason, Leone went on to state, "The fact is we tend to forget Magic is an adulterer." Your facts are in error. Magic Johnson is a courageous and inspirational person and to

throw around false accusations of adultery is not only irresponsible, it is unprofessional. In the future, The Battalion might want to do a service to its readers and verify its facts before it goes dragging someone's name through the mud.

David Robinett
Class of '97

Promise Keepers face persecution

In response to H.L. Baxter's column, "Exclusion is never the best way" I would like to make a few comments and observa-

tions. I can tell Baxter hasn't been to a Promise Keepers (PKers) conference because of false observations in his column. First of all, each PK gathering usually has in attendance 50 to 60,000 men.

I have been to 2 myself, one in Dallas at Texas Stadium and one in Houston at the Astrodome and each time the stadium was practically full.

Secondly, if Baxter had actually attended a conference he would see men of many different races, young and old; not just "Middle-aged and white."

Thirdly, Baxter seems to think that PKers main purpose is to "evict women as a family figurehead," and have men "usurp the role of leader in their families."

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The basis of PKers is the fact that in most families the mother is the spiritual leader, in prayer, taking the kids to church, etc., while father sits idle by, shirking his responsi-

bilities as a spiritual leader equal to his wife. PKers tries to instill into the fathers to become men of God and help their wives instead of letting them do it alone.

Last but not least, Baxter agreed that the family unit needs to be strengthened but he "didn't think including Christianity in this endeavor was the right way to do it."

My only question to him is, if God isn't the one to turn to in order to strengthen the family unit, what's the right way to do it?

I know we as Christians will always be persecuted till the end of time but just consider this, a movement that has more than half a million members of all different races, denominations and walks of life must have some power that is holding them together and I believe that is the power of Jesus Christ.

Brian George
Class of '97