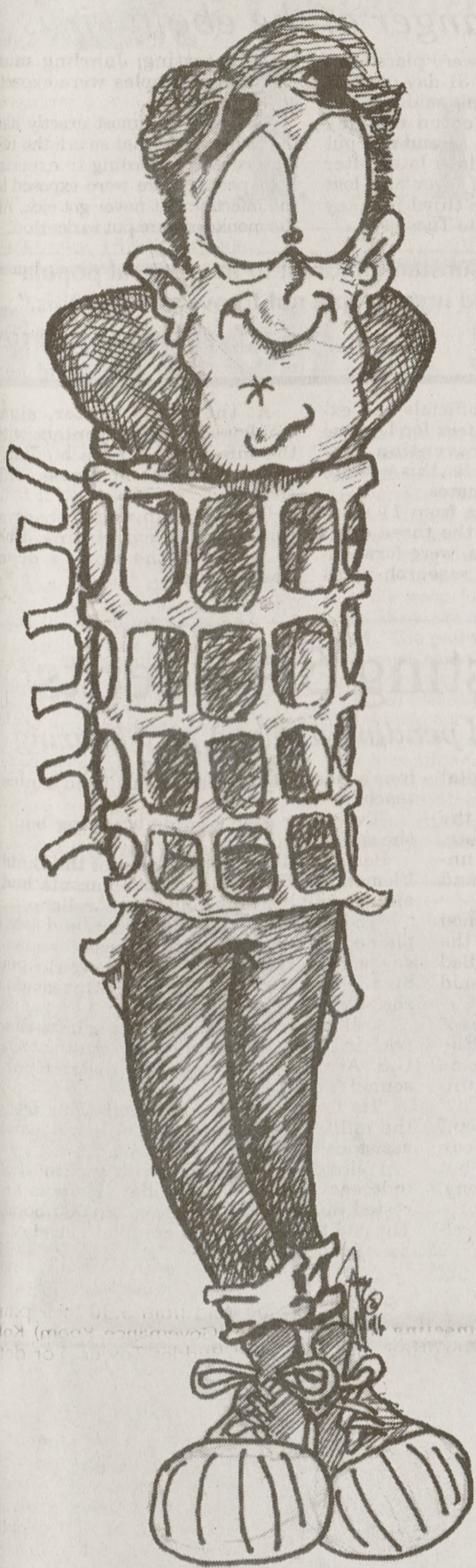


OPINION

THURSDAY
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Construction adds to hectic time of year

According to my watch, it was 12:45. My class was supposed to start at 12:45. Conceivably, I could still get there in time — if my watch were a couple minutes ahead or if the professor were a little bit behind. But my watch has a Wal-Mart battery in it, so it tends to stop occasionally, and it never tells the right time. I was probably several minutes late already.

I hurried by the library, walking in that brisk aerobic walk style that looks kind of silly — especially when you have a weighted-down-with-books backpack slung over one shoulder, like I did.

But when I tried to walk around the sidewalk next to the library, I wasn't looking, and I walked straight into this huge orange net that had been strung up. It reminded me of the time in Cub Scouts when I was playing tag and ran full speed into a swing and got thrown back about 10 feet.

When I looked behind the net I realized there was no sidewalk anymore. It was just a torn-up, tumbling mass of pebbled concrete. Where was I supposed to walk?

Eventually, after extricating myself from the orange net, I had to go around the entire library until I found a small gap in the net. This threw me several minutes behind, and I had to walk in late and feel everybody's beady eyes staring at me.

All because of that doggone construction.

And these nets have appeared everywhere, all over campus. Huge areas are sectioned off, making them inaccessible and just downright ugly. Trees are uprooted. Street lamps are knocked over. Sidewalks are ripped up. Those pesky orange nets are everywhere. A building next to the Physical Plant has even been completely torn down.

And if that weren't enough, there are millions of construction workers walking around on the sidewalks, making the sidewalks even more crowded. Sometimes they even drive their trucks on the sidewalk — traditionally a place reserved for pedestrians — keeping just three or four inches behind you and matching your walking speed perfectly.

Maybe it's something like what you always tried to convince your mom. She would come into your room, which would be strewn with Legos and GI Joes.

"I thought I told you to clean up your room," she would say.



SHANNON HALBROOK
COLUMNIST

"Well, Mom, I am," you'd say. "My room has to be messy before it can be clean. I have to take everything out and play with it before I can put it back."

I guess construction on campus works in pretty much the same illogical way. Maybe they just have to make it ugly before they can make it prettier. Maybe they've got some kind of improvement in mind — maybe someday the campus will look better. But at the rate they're going, we'll be dead from old age long before they've finished. Or we'll even have graduated.

And for right now, things are pretty unattractive.

I had a conversation with a friend over the nuisance of the campus-wide construction and destruction. He said it was particularly bad because of the time of year. It's April — spring. The time of nature and love and beauty and peace and quiet. The time of chirping birds. The time of lying in the sun, worry-free. And the folks in charge have decided to tear up the campus with noisy jackhammers and chain saws.

Everybody's stressed around this time, anyway. Finals are coming up. Everything has to be finished; all the loose ends have to be tied up. The end of the semester is always a rushed time during which tiny nuisances seem like catastrophes. It's the worst possible time to make all these alterations to the campus.

It would be nice to be able to take out my frustration against the construction and the delays and annoyance that it causes, while still preserving the natural peace and beauty of the season.

So, I think I'll bomb the Physical Plant. I don't think this is the first time I've proposed bombing something or somebody in a column, but it just happens to be a nice, neat way of dealing with things.

After all, it's a trend right now to use physical violence to enforce a supposedly peaceful ideology. It's the same kind of philosophy held by abortion-doctor killers, gun-hoarding religious cult members and Unabomber suspects.

I like nature. I don't think it should be disrupted for the sake of the hustle and bustle of campus improvements. And I'm willing to defend my love of nature with the spreading of a little mortar and rubble. What could be more natural?

Shannon Halbrook is a sophomore English major



MAIL CALL

Race relations make some uncomfortable

I feel badly. The race relation problem on this campus is like the number line. The problem does not end. This situation is so evident that everyone feels its existence, but we tend to ignore the problem. When and if the problem is addressed, vicious conflicts are always present. One side is pitted against another side, and at the end of the fight we realize that we should have never fought at all. Why? Because things continue to remain exactly the way we found them. Unchanged.

I decided I would make an individual effort to eradicate this 'social sickness.' One Saturday I went out with two of my peers. One is Hispanic, the other is Caucasian, and I am African-American. Our "mission" was to find a place where we could chill in unison. In this expedition we visited three places. We went to a MAES (Mexican-American Engineering Society) party, a Phi Beta Sigma party and J.D. Wells Saloon. At the end of the night, we had no women and no numbers. The best part of the night entailed making fun of ourselves and people who were either drunk, nasty-looking or stupid. Overall, the night was pitiful, and I was left with an array of negative feelings.

The point of my little odyssey is that Texas A&M University has a long way to go before everyone feels comfy about race relations. There are people who are trying, but the percentage of these people is equivalent to the number of hairs on a bald man's head. Despite all the madness, my plan is to continue to approach everyone on an individual basis. I see this as the best method of socialization. If everyone could try to share a similar opinion, then the strong Aggs who are trying to make a difference wouldn't be labeled intruders or sell-outs. These Strong Aggies should be commended for their bravery, because in the end, only the strong survive. And for those Aggies who want a positive change but need the extra boost, I

have an inspirational message for you: College is like gardening, Weak hoes soon break!

Eric 'e' Durham
Class of '99

We can't judge the past by our standards

This letter is in response to all the articles and letters written about honoring the Confederacy. I would first like to thank Mitch Paradise for the letter he wrote in response to James Harrington's column. Times have changed a lot in the past 130 years. People cannot judge the morality of past generations using today's moral values. Morality has changed a lot since then. We know today that slavery is wrong, but back then many people did not feel it was immoral to have slaves. Just like we can't judge modern times with the morality of the mid-1800s. Back then, having a child out of wedlock or getting divorced was thought to be immoral, but today it happens all the time and people don't think twice about it. The Confederacy should not be judged using today's moral standards. The Confederacy was formed because people felt their rights were being taken away by the federal government, and slavery was just part of the rights they felt were being threatened. Besides, most Confederate soldiers didn't fight slavery, they fought for their state. Back then, when you joined the army, you pledged your allegiance to your state, not the country. I am proud of my ancestors and everybody who fought for Texas and the Confederacy, because they fought for what they believed was right. The Confederacy and its soldiers should not be judged with modern-day morals. Instead people should just accept its place in American history.

Patrick D. Holland
Class of '96

Editor's note: This will be the final letter discussing this subject.

Verbal exams force understanding

In high school, my teachers made sure everyone knew that book learning was not going to help us in college. If we hoped to succeed in higher education, our minds would have to develop beyond regurgitation mode.

However, A&M and many other universities have failed to encourage our intellectual development by mandating huge lecture classes whose only criteria for passing is to make sure that the textbook has been read, formulas have been memorized and the "plug and chug" formula can be followed.

Companies do not need people who can only follow instructions. Companies need people who can improvise, be given a situation and do whatever needs to be done to finish the job.

The question then becomes, how can A&M foster this ideal?

In my murky past as an engineering student, a verbal make-up exam was forced upon me. Apparently the idea is that a student is forced to learn in a much more thorough manner when the ques-



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tions to be asked will not be phrased in the one of three ways the textbook asks them. After two days of Vivarin, nicotine and caffeine, I was ready. Or so I thought.

My exam began with my professor telling me that the equations were useless; if I ever managed to enter the job market, my hirability would not be measured by how many equations I can fit on a three-by-five note card, but by the way I solved the problem.

After an hour of discussion involving why one method was better than the other, I left the office convinced that my only recourse was to Q drop. Unfortunately, the course was a pre-req so I waited to see if the exam grade was high enough to mount a comeback.

Amazingly enough, I did fairly well. Not only that, but when the final rolled around, I knew those sections much better than any other.

Obviously, it is impossible to give every student a verbal exam, as it would quadruple the faculty overnight. Even if A&M was willing to do that, mutiny and

armed insurrection by the students would stop the idea dead in its tracks. Instead, why not make it mandatory for a student to take one verbal final during his or her freshman year? Allow the exam to be taken in any class, as long as it applies to the student's degree.

This would mean that a freshman could take the verbal final in any of the eight to 10 classes normally taken in a year. Professors could announce sign-ups early in the semester to make sure that every student was taken care of and that professors could schedule around them.

Doing this as a freshman has the benefits of making sure that the basic material needed for upper-level classes is known well. It also paves the way for more flexible classes, such as seminars and senior design projects for more majors.

Requiring students to know the subject matter more thoroughly will not only increase a student's chances of doing well later on in course work, but will ultimately train the mind to think more imaginatively — something which is sorely lacking today.

Kieran Watson is a sophomore finance major

MARGULIES
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The Bible does not contribute to objective history education

Most of Reidsville, North Carolina's 12,000 citizens don't see a great deal wrong with using the Bible as text for a class offered at Reidsville High.

After all, the class is a study of Biblical history; utilization of the Good Book seems logical.

No, there's nothing wrong with that. The course is an elective; it is not required for graduation. The students who are taking the class are taking it of their own free will.

Likewise, students in Pontotoc County, Miss., also weren't doing anything wrong when they conducted an optional bible study during school hours or led a morning prayer over the intercom. Participation in both was optional, so the largely Christian population did not pay it any mind.

But the U.S. Constitution separates church and state, so a few eyebrows were raised in both communities. The Supreme Court used this mandate to carve its present opinion on religion in the classroom: The Bible can be used to teach objectively, but not to



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indoctrinate students. The Reidsville case appears to be doing the former, but the Pontotoc case ... well ... they've taken indoctrination to a new plane entirely.

The courts have ruled, and people are still unhappy. Christians want more of a religious presence in school; non-Christians

don't want it at all. What's a school board to do? My answer (as some of you have already guessed) is to discontinue the Bible's usage as text — not because of the Constitution's mandate separating church and state (an argument which, heretofore, has been made trite), but because (gasp) the Bible is not objective.

This is not to say that it is historically inaccurate. The Bible could be used as historical literature to further understand western civilization. Indeed, the Bible stands as the cornerstone for most decisions made throughout western civilization. Without it, the world probably wouldn't have enjoyed the Crusades,

the Third Reich or slavery. We probably wouldn't have encountered eastern civilizations either.

But few of us can ever remember cracking open the Koran when studying the Middle East, the Analects when studying China, or the Mahabharata and the Ramayana when studying Indian civilization.

The Bible, like these other books, is an indoctrination tool by nature. Why else would these books be used by major world religions as the basis of faith?

Perhaps a stronger argument to prove the Bible's non-objectivity is by using the contents of the Bible itself. According to Judeo-Christian doctrine, God was, never has been, and never will be a benevolent being.

According to Moses, God forbids Ammorites, Moabites and illegitimate children into heaven. Not only that, but their descendants "down to the tenth generation" can't get in either (Deut. 23:2-3 NIV). What if the Pope canonized that tenth generation Moabite? See the dilemma we're faced with? Christians will say that the New Testament is

more important than the Old Testament at about this time. But, as Joe Barnhart aptly writes in "The Relativity of Bible Ethics," this argument "collapses when one considers the rage against, and hatred of, most of the human race exemplified in the Book of Revelation." In effect, Christians have used one section of the Bible to pass the other off as a sham, even though the disregarded part is just as important to Christianity as the other. The relativity that exists concerning what is "right" and "wrong" in the Bible destroys all evidence that the Bible is objective literature worthy of being used as text in public schools.

Public schools must — in all conditions — preserve religious neutrality and not show favoritism for religion over non-religion; the Supreme Court rendered this decree in its interpretation of the Constitution. Therefore, schools should not offer such classes at all, even if it is important to the study of our civilization. The relativity of the literature "supporting" the subject doesn't present the subject objectively.

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