

How to Sit Useless guide included with chairs

Before the good people at Harrington Education Center decided to slap a much-needed coat of white paint over its interior walls, they thought some cool new chairs might ease the nauseating effects of the fumes. So, they ordered a million — give or take a few.

Columnist



Michael Heinrich
 Teaching certification student

And the chairs provide the comfort only money can buy. But each is equipped with — believe it or not — a "User Guide."

Of course, this absurd inclusion could serve as an endless source of Aggie jokes. But do the manufacturers at Steelcase really believe historical-ly competent chair users will be unable to sit on one of the company's padded seats without the help of an instructional pamphlet?

C'mon, this ain't exactly Microsoft's Windows 95. We're talkin' about chairs!

Apparently these aren't everyday, run-of-the-mill chairs, though. These come from Steelcase's elite "Rally" line. Impressive, huh?

They even come loaded with a deluxe package including wheels, adjustable height, variable-tension back supports and the tightest of technologically advanced swivels.

Oh yeah — and they're blue.

But it's a little known fact that common quirels possess the ability to utilize these features well before any human manages to get halfway through the myriad of jargon-filled instructions.

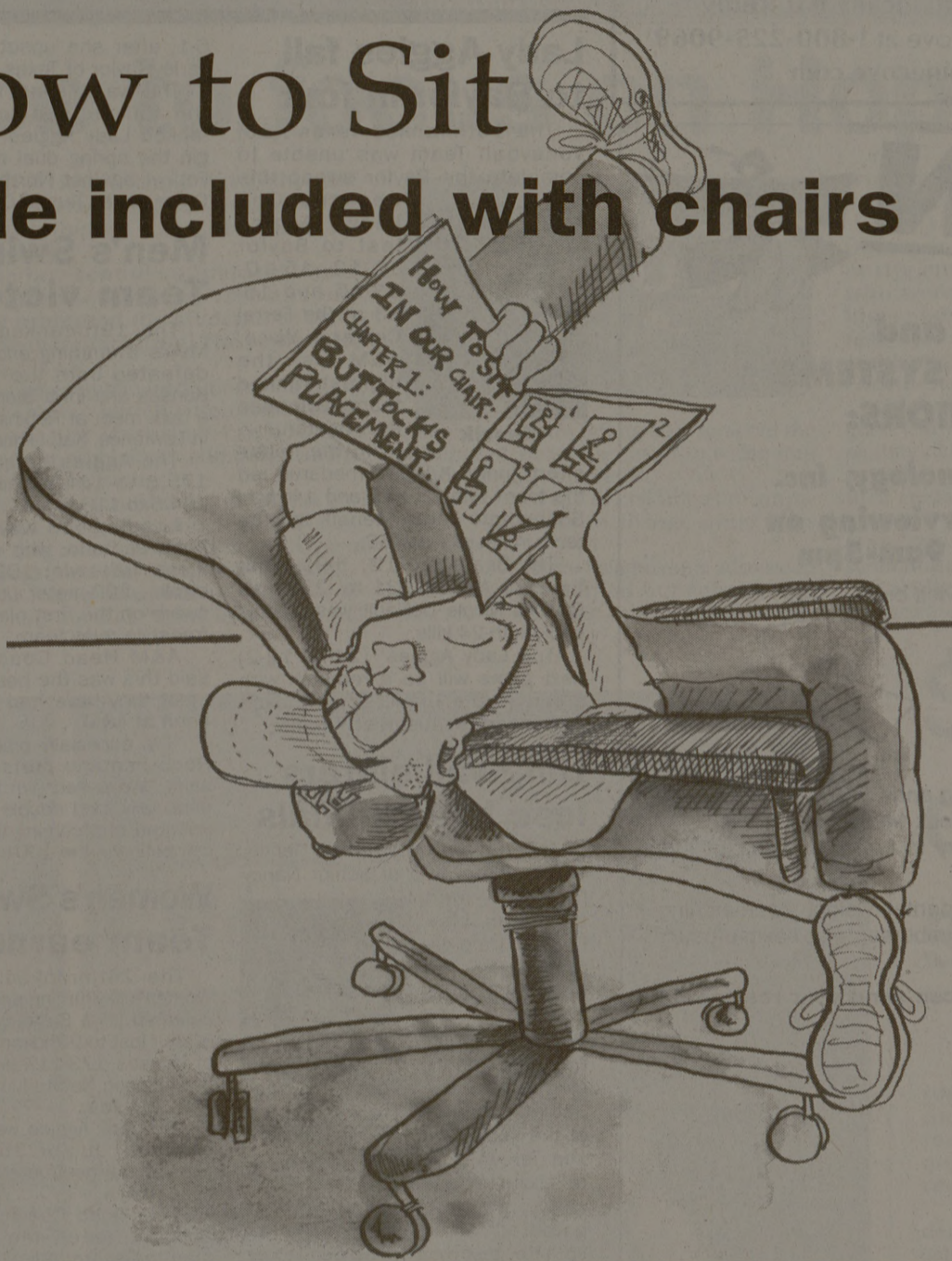
One of the sections even describes the finer points of lubricating the mechanical and pneumatic parts as a requisite for the chair's "basic maintenance" each year. Give me a break — chair maintenance?

Of course, the crafty capitalist department at Steelcase has developed and monopolized a special petroleum-based formula for this purpose. And they proudly market it as "Brush-Lube."

And if some poor sap is willing to buy a little of it, George Strait is still melodically loading ocean-front property in Arizona.

But those who speak the Queen's English aren't the only ones Steelcase has deemed absolutely, positively stupid. The instructional pamphlet is also titled "Guia para el Usuario" and Guide D' Utilisation" and includes the same user information in Spanish and French.

Could it be that Steelcase also assumes these



people don't know how to sit down on swivel chairs? The company's reasons for targeting Spanish-speaking individuals are unknown. But Steelcase must have realized how much the French love those Jerry Lewis reruns. Their brains have been reduced to porridge.

Whether Jim Carrey as a role model has infected the IQs of innocent Quebecois is debatable, though.

But maybe the Allies of the Great Wars should take note of the peculiar exclusion of German instructions. Perhaps Steelcase is quietly hinting Hitler's "master race" mastered the intricacies of swivel seat sitting while leaving the rest of us behind.

Is a Fourth Reich just around the next cubicle or classroom? Only time will tell.

But at least the peace-loving people of earth can sleep easier tonight; the Steelcase chairs in countless business offices around the world and the classrooms of Harrington Tower "meet the requirements of the BIFMA First Generation Voluntary Upholstery Flammability Standard for Business and Institutional Markets."

So, let's not rush to judge Steelcase. Their environmentally friendly management also had the foresight to print the user guides on recycled paper.

And that's something we can all smile about.

Drug testing violates basic human rights

More and more private corporations are employing a technique to make sure they hire the best and the brightest employees from the ranks of college graduates and professionals alike.

Columnist



Jon Aggar
 Sophomore
 Journalism major

Extensive training programs for the newly hired? No. Stepped-up recruiting efforts on college campuses? Nope. Requiring prospective employees to urinate in a plastic cup? Yes.

Drug testing is a ludicrous practice that is not only an invasion of privacy, but also completely ineffective. Of course, I'm not referring to employees whose jobs make them responsible for public safety, such as bus drivers and firefighters. I'm talking about employees who push papers across a desk.

Apparently riding the popularity of the so-called "drug war" and the alarming rise in drug use during the Clinton administration, companies are becoming militant in their attempts to combat drug use among employees.

Although keeping employees from abusing drugs is a noble cause, companies are employing the wrong methods.

Ordering a prospective employee, or a current employee, to urinate in a cup is not only degrading, but also contributes to animosity towards the corporation.

When managers or company big-shots require drug tests, employees feel as if they are not trusted to be responsible on the work site.

This is because drug tests foster the feeling that bosses do not trust the word of employees and require lab-tested results before patting an employee on the back and saying, "I knew you weren't a drug user. This expensive, invasive drug test just 'confirmed' my instincts."

Accuracy is one problem with drug testing. Labs are not 100 percent accurate in their results. Mistakes happen more often than people would like to believe. Many who so fervently advocate drug-testing would not be quite as confident in their beliefs if a drug test came back positive because they ate a poppy-

seed bagel the morning of the test.

That's right — poppy seeds in the bloodstream have been mistaken for heroin.

Constitutionality is another problem.

The Fifth Amendment roughly states that citizens are not to be subject to unreasonable search and seizure without reasonable suspicion of criminal activity.

Drug testing violates the Fifth Amendment because it takes place regardless of suspicion of drug use.

The most clean, sober, law-abiding citizen is placed on the same level as a mind-warped stoner when it comes to drug tests. The reason? Nothing is taken into account when determining who gets tested. It is simply a blanket policy.

Imagine if the College Station Police Department randomly stopped cars on University Drive and gave the drivers alcohol tests and searched the cars for drugs.

The police had no suspicion of criminal activity of those they pulled over and searched. It was a completely random thing. The public would be outraged if this were allowed to take place.

Isn't this just like drug testing? Employers conduct totally random testing of employees with no reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing, yet no one seems to want to speak out against this gross disregard of the Constitution.

Employers should be required under law to administer drug tests if and only if they have reason to suspect an employee of being under the influence of drugs on company premises, or if an employee's suspected personal drug use significantly interferes with his or her performance on the job site.

Moreover, bosses should be more trusting of their employees and accept their word before turning to an unconstitutional drug test.

The next time you attend an interview, don't expect employers to trust you are a responsible, law-abiding citizen. Instead, be sure to drink plenty of fluids and bring a Dixie cup in your briefcase.

Editorial Roundup

The following is a sampling of editorial opinion from Texas newspapers:

Austin American-Statesman on tax reform:
 If Gov. George W. Bush and state lawmakers are actually intent on tax reform in the upcoming legislative session, they have a big job ahead of them. If they change one thing, that will affect another, and that will affect another. Legislators need to be sure they take care to avoid unintended consequences, the best they can.

How much "tax reform" is needed? How long is a piece of string? Lawmakers should be prepared to allow that string all the way to the end.

The Dallas Morning News on term limits:
 The hand jive on term limits has become as predictable as the Macarena. Only twice as tiresome.

Each year, public surveys find that Texans overwhelmingly want the right to decide whether there should be term limits for elected state officials. And each legislative session, the Texas House of Representatives makes certain a term limits bill never gets to the floor for a vote.

With the strong urging of Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock, the Texas Senate voted in favor of a constitutional amendment limiting terms of state officials during the 1995 session. The measure would have placed a 2-year service limit on members of the Legislature and statewide officeholders.

But a similar bill in the Texas House was in need of a heart transplant by the time veteran lawmakers had gotten through with it.

With state elections just days away, Texans for Term Limitations wisely decided to remind voters that happened during the last legislative session.

In pointed radio commercials, the term limits group has been attacking Texas House Speaker Pete Arny, D-Hale Center, for letting the bill get bottled up in committee.

While Texans for Term Limitations has no foolish thoughts that Arny can be defeated, the group is serving notice to him that this issue is not dead.

That's good news for all Texas residents who believe they should at least be given an opportunity to consider a term limits amendment on a state ballot.

For many years, politicians have not been inclined to follow Texans' wishes if they interfere with their own personal goals.

Bullock changed that when he stepped forward in support of a term limits plan. He specifically said his decision was based on the wishes of Texas voters.

Laney says he opposes term limits, but claims he has never blocked any bill from being debated and voted on.

The test of that statement will come in 1997 when the Texas Legislature is certain to have another term limits bill on the docket. Mr. Laney and other mem-

bers of the state House of Representatives cannot keep ducking this important issue. If the House speaker truly feels he has been victimized by the broad-brush radio ads, he can prove the term limits group is wrong during the next legislative session.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram on local telephone deregulation:
 Creating a competitive market for local telephone service in Texas took a huge step forward last week with a ruling by the Public Utilities Commission that removed a huge financial barrier to future competition from long-distance carriers.

The commission ordered Southwestern Bell to grant heavy discounts to AT&T, MCI and three small companies to use its equipment in providing local service. Under the ruling, the long-distance companies will receive a 21.64 percent discount. Southwestern Bell had sought to limit the rate to 15 percent.

By purchasing access to existing equipment and reselling local service to their customers, new competitors are expected to force down phone rates. Once a competitive market has been established, the existing local service providers then will be able to enter full long-distance competition.

Commission members deserve praise after withstanding considerable political pressure from Southwestern Bell and some protectionist state lawmakers. The public is the big winner.

Valley Morning Star (Harlingen) on campaign contributions:

The questionable and possibly illegal contribution of substantial funds from Indonesian sources to President Clinton and the Democrats is generating a welcome new look at the whole process by which huge and ever-increasing amounts of soft money are pouring into the war chests of the major parties. That new concern is long overdue.

Recently, Bob Dole, who opposed virtually ever major piece of campaign reform legislation that was proposed during his years in Congress, called for new laws prohibiting unregulated contributions to political committees from corporations, unions and wealthy individuals, as well as instituting an outright ban on contributions from all noncitizens. ...

Dole's latter-day conversion is welcome, particularly if he's really serious about checking the influence of well-heeled special interests, foreign and domestic, on the political process. A number of promising bills has made it through various stages of the legislative process.

If those bills could be picked up and pushed through, we might have a real breakthrough. Clinton could call a special session of Congress now. If there are enough lame ducks around, campaign reform might have a unique chance: Losing, as the country now is learning again, concentrates the mind of even the most rabid opponent of reform.



MAIL CALL

Two party system achieves balance

Regarding Jeff Freely's Nov. 7 Mail Call "Congress Balances Clinton's Policies":

Finally somebody out there says something intelligent. I myself am socially liberal and politically conservative. I support a society where the government looks to maintain our rights, but that this government is as small as possible.

I am not a member of either party, but chose to support Bill Clinton in this election because I thought he was the best candidate.

Like Freely, I also chose to support people from the Republican party for Congress — with the exception of Phil Gramm.

People have forgotten what our government is about — compromise and checks and balances. Having the White House and Congress controlled by different parties is the best thing that can happen to our country because the parties must compromise in order to get their bills passed.

Believe it or not, the United States government was designed to be slow at passing bills and to have the appearance of "not working correctly" because this aides in having the best bills passed.

It's about time that somebody said something intelligent about this election. We should all thank Freely for being the first to say it.

John W. Kretlow
 Class of '00

Class of '97 shirts not representative

We the members of the Fightin' Texas Aggie Class of 1997 and friends are appalled at the '97 E-Walk sweatshirt design. The individuals on the back of the shirt are not inclusive of all members of the Class of 1997.

We realize a committee chose the design they felt best suited our class. However, they neglected to realize we are more than just a white majority. We are African-American, disabled, Asian, Hispanic and a number of other cultural descriptors.

We also realize there may not have been anyone on that committee who possesses these cultural descriptors. However, we have always been taught that this society is a democracy and in a democracy the majority is to think not only of themselves, their rights, and their privileges, but also the rights and privileges of the minority.

This is an issue of respect. And out of respect for ourselves, and the other members of the Class of 1997, and this University as a whole, we refuse to purchase a shirt that respects only a few.

In addition, we are asking those individuals that have already purchased an E-Walk sweatshirt to return it and receive a full refund. We are also asking the committee to choose a design that is more inclusive so that all concerned parties can feel like they are a part of the Fightin' Texas Aggie Class of 1997.

Danielle J. Taylor
 Kimberly Hicks
 Class of '97

Accompanied by 43 signatures

Towery incorrectly labeled jamming

Regarding April Towery's Nov. 6 music review of Phish:

I must confess I was intrigued by the mention of the band Phish in Wednesday's Music Reviews. I appreciate The Battalion, a "college paper," showing an interest in a band that has never been in the mainstream.

What troubles me is the assertion made by Towery that the members of Phish are "... musicians who know how to play their instruments instead of random jamming." This statement could only come from one who knows little, very little, about the band.

"Random jamming" is what these guys are all about. Traveling down the road paved graciously by the Grateful Dead, they seek the creative energy, which only comes from the live experience. The genre of improvisational music would be a cipher if "randomness" were not allowed. Please turn off your computer to download information about the band for your articles and listen to "A Live One" songs of over 20 minutes await.

As far as calling Phish a rock band, I guess we lizards need to categorize and label things to help us understand.

David B. Barber
 Class of '96

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or fewer and include the author's name, class, and phone number.

The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

The Battalion - Mail Call
 013 Reed McDonald
 Texas A&M University
 College Station, TX
 77843-1111

Campus Mail: 1111
 Fax: (409) 845-2647
 E-mail: Batt@tamvm1.tamu.edu

For more details on letter policy, please call 845-3313 and direct your question to the opinion editor.