

# THE BATTALION OPINION

## Responsibility supercedes civil liberty

The problem with today's youth is that young people don't take advantage of their rights.

For example, a 14-year-old punk from Azle, a town northwest of Fort Worth, recently called a girl a "fat cow" without fully understanding that he had a right to do so. Chris Gordon foolishly got himself in trouble again when he cussed at a student during gym class. If he had been aware of his right to free speech, he could have successfully argued his way out of both situations. But unfortunately, it took the American Civil Liberties Union to breeze into Azle and fight for the young ruffian's rights.

On the surface, it may seem silly that a youth is punished for calling a girl names. But when the insult is part of a pattern of harassment, maybe the school should do something. And it seems a lot sillier to allow lawyers to argue that this youth has a right to insult and cuss at his classmates.

Under a new "zero tolerance" rule in the Azle school system, misbehaving youths are put in alternative classes to separate them from domestic site youths that actually behave. (In Mexico and Arizona, they may have to call the class "alternative" or "special.") The school district can do this because of Senate Bill 1, part of an education reform package passed by the Legislature last year. It acts as a sort of crutch to Texas school officials who need a way to enforce discipline.

But what brings them to such dire straits that they need to tamper on the right of school children to insult one another?



My senior year in high school, some freshmen were involved in "jumping" another student. They kicked him hard enough to destroy his jaw and almost caused brain damage. It was the first violent attack in my high school's history, and it all started because a group of boys misidentified the victim as someone who shot them a dirty look in the parking lot.

The school acted swiftly, installing video cameras in the halls for surveillance. As editor of the paper, I jumped on the story and prepared our angle — an invasion of privacy. Oops! I forgot we were in a public place. But my principal was nice enough to remind me of this, and our story took a new twist. The cameras were necessary because of the trend already spotted in the junior high

schools. Every successive class was getting more and more violent. I don't think this trend is unique to Katy. Or Azle. Or Dallas or Houston or Texas ...

Stories from around the country have resulted in a sort of backlash against strict discipline. An Ohio teen was removed from regular classes for giving Midol to another student. A South Carolina sixth-grader was removed from classes for bringing a steak knife to school to cut her chicken at lunch. Schools do need to show a little restraint by not involving the law (as they did with Gordon). Our courts have enough trouble without dealing with school discipline.

But we should look at such extreme cases of discipline and be happy to have a system that is not letting exceptions fall through the cracks. It is certainly better than the alternative. We could have schools without such rules. Students might learn more about how to peddle over-the-counter drugs than about reading and writing. Maybe a youth in a gang could bring a knife to school for lunch and then attack someone with it after school. If such problems occurred, the first question asked would be: Why don't they have rules to prevent these things? Well, they do, and the youth of America better start understanding that rules are meant to be followed. It's a simple lesson, but it's not being taught when the ACLU swarms to the defense of misbehaving youths. So maybe before we teach future generations about their rights, we ought to hold them accountable — in every situation, no matter how seemingly innocent — to their responsibilities.



Michael Landauer  
Senior journalism major

## EDITORIAL

THE BATTALION  
Established in 1893

Editorials appearing in The Battalion reflect the views of the editorial board members. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of other Battalion staff members, the Texas A&M student body, regents, administration, faculty or staff. Columns, guest columns, cartoons and letters express the opinions of the authors. Contact the opinion editor for information on submitting guest columns.

Editorials Board  
Michael Landauer  
Editor in Chief  
Amy Collier  
Executive Editor  
Gretchen Perrenot  
Executive Editor  
Heather Pace  
Opinion Editor

## THINKING SMART Students should approach the opinion page with an open mind

Warning: The opinion page is nothing more than opinion, and as such, should be read with an open mind.

Battalion columnist Aja Henderson has led the way in providing opportunities for some Aggies to overreact. Yesterday Henderson wrote a column pointing out that A&M idol Lawrence Sullivan Ross, a confederate veteran and slave owner, was not a man who deserved respect. That is not to say that Henderson has done anything wrong.

Since Spring 1994, Henderson has contributed her unique perspective to the pages of The Battalion. Henderson should be credited for sharing those views with such an unfriendly audience with a history of not respecting other viewpoints. Students do not need to agree with her, but they should respect her opinion.

When readers respond scornfully with accusations of ignorance and sensationalism, they are ignoring the spirit of the opinion page. Instead of dealing with the fact that someone may have a different view, some readers have opted for the time-tested defense not uncommon among grade schoolers: "You're don't know what you're talking about, and you're just trying to make me mad." A&M has a history rich with

tradition, but it also has a student population of more than 43,000 reasonable, intelligent people who should be able to address issues rather than just hide insecurities.

If students at A&M think of Ross differently than some Aggies did in the past, the University will not crumble, and spirit will not die. Rather, A&M can become stronger by accepting and respecting other viewpoints. How interesting would the opinion page be if everyone who wrote on it had the same perspective? How much would students learn at A&M if they did not interact with students of diverse backgrounds and beliefs?

The students who answer that things would be better under such circumstances are responsible for the poor reputation A&M has in some people's minds of being a homogeneous collection of good boys.

Many columnists over the years have elicited negative reactions from the student body, and that is to be expected. There will never be a day when no one disagrees with at least one view expressed. But that is an ongoing celebration of the First Amendment — one that deserves to be dealt with by readers' reason rather than their insecurity.

## Walk This Way Pedestrians should quit abusing privilege of having right-of-way

Some rules just aren't meant to last: Absolute monarchies came and went; women were granted suffrage; and prohibition was repealed.

But some rules persist, no matter senseless they are. For example, A&M pedestrians, by unspoken rule and tradition, always have the right-of-way on campus streets.

This may have once been a shining example of Aggie courtesy, but the practice has devolved into one of the most abused and unappreciated of A&M's traditions.

Pedestrians too often walk out in front of cars and bicyclists without thinking about what they are doing. Blindly crossing streets is inconsiderate, dangerous and stupid, and students should rethink their unspoken "right" every time they

approach a street. Most people who abide by this "rule" probably assume motorists are trying to be nice when they stop. But drivers simply have no choice — pedestrians at A&M cross streets whenever they want, wherever they want.

On today's congested campus, cars, bicyclists and pedestrians must share the same roads. Pedestrians have become too comfortable with street traffic, thinking they always have the right-of-way, and don't respect the needs of drivers and bicyclists.

Pedestrian apathy is at its worst between classes, when hordes of students and professors flood sidewalks and streets. Drivers at intersections can only watch and wait as law-abiding pedestrians pour into crosswalks. Backlogged

cars, trucks and buses choke the streets. Jaywalkers worsen the congestion, causing roadway confusion.

Jaywalkers at A&M are lucky — most don't get ticketed. University Police Department Crime Prevention Unit supervisor Bert Kretzschmar explained that too many people at A&M jaywalk to give tickets. But common sense would seem to deter jaywalking — if a person is hit by a car, and is not in a crosswalk, he or she is not necessarily protected by law.

And Kretzschmar said two pedestrians were hit by motor vehicles on campus during the 1995-96 school year. That is, two such accidents were reported. The number of collisions is higher, counting bicycle-pedestrian and unreported accidents.

Who the hell wants to get run over? No one, I would think. Then pedestrians shouldn't forget

what Mom and Dad taught them: Look both ways before crossing the street and never jaywalk.

Of course, everyone is guilty of jaywalking and carelessness. I've almost run over spaced-out pedestrians, and I've nearly been hit after mindlessly walking out into the street.

Common sense, apparently, is no longer very common. Courtesy has been forgotten, as well. Surely pedestrians could sometimes consider the drivers' position. They don't like to be stuck at stop signs any more than pedestrians do.

Pedestrians should repay the drivers' age-old favor, and occasionally let the car pass first — especially if the driver has been waiting a while.

Aggies' attitudes toward campus construction is equally amazing. For example, a sidewalk by the power plant on Northside has been closed for

weeks because of construction. Well, they tried to close it. But most pedestrians refuse to move to the other side of the street, and even try to dodge moving equipment.

Aggies are also notorious for trying to scoot around trucks that are trying to back into loading docks.

How ridiculous. If these people don't care about their own safety, they should at least consider the overall traffic problem, because trucks and construction equipment that have to wait for people to move usually block traffic. The inconsiderate need to wake up and get out of the way.

The rules have changed, and Aggies must realize that pedestrians can't always have the right-of-way. With a little more respect, courtesy and common sense, pedestrians could help the campus become safer and friendlier for all those who share the roads.

## Scheduling requires know-how

It's time to schedule classes for the spring semester. But before that can be done, everyone is faced with a series of questions, which have all been compiled into this easy-to-read column.

The first question a student must ask himself is, "Am I coming back next semester?" Some students will graduate, others will co-op. The GPR-challenged among us may be taking sco-pro-in-luced vacations, while others may take a sabbatical to backpack across beautiful Guatemala.

If students aren't doing one of those things then they must be coming back to school. Or doing something else. For returning students, what courses will they take? Do they stay on track to graduate in four (ha ha) years, or perhaps slow down to a medium pace?

And what about those electives? Should they be wasted on a worthless class from the College of Business (yes, I'm bitter) or put to a more worthwhile use, whether experimenting in an unexplored field or pursuing a dream that has been put on the back burner?

For instance, maybe someone is an ag major (specializing in cows) who has always had a place in his heart for quantum mechanics. Or perhaps one is a philosophy major (specializing in trying to legitimize a useless major) who has always been drawn to economics.

If you've got a dream, chase it — you never

know where it will lead, though hopefully not to another sentence this corny. But how do students register for classes at Texas A&M? By using our World-Class Phone Registration System, of course. It is important to make sure you have a touch-tone phone, because if you don't, not only can you not register, but you're also a hillbilly.

The next question is, "Have I made up my schedules?" There is the primary schedule, the alternate schedule and the "I'd sooner drop out of school, live in the steam tunnels and eat at Sbsa than use this" schedule.

Eventually the day will come when your classification gets to register. For example, next Tuesday will be for all juniors from A through L who work in the fast-food industry and walk with a limp.

After spending about an hour on the phone trying to get through, students are faced with yet another question. "Did I dial the wrong number?" If so, this may be why they aren't getting through. After all, the redial button has been in full effect since the initial try.

Will they finally get through only to hear "Welcome to the Richard Gere Fan Club Registration System, your call will be processed quicker than you can say 'gerbil'?" Just to make sure, they should manually dial the number every 10 tries. Once into the registration system, students are guided by the stern yet reassuring voice of Walter Cronkite.

From here on out, things are easy. The voice will even tell students how to spell their last names. If all goes well, the appropriate classes will still be available and only one question remains. "Did you forget to press the pound key?"

acquaintances are the themes behind the idea of Christmas. The money-dependent society that we live in should start Christmas activity when it is supposed to be started — after Thanksgiving.

Regarding Erin Fitzgerald's Nov. 11 column, "Thanksgiving lost in Christmas hubbub": Is it Christmas time already? It must be because the present I bought my fiancée for her Oct. 20 birthday was a fake Christmas tree. It was what she wanted and she's insanely waiting to put it up.

Like most disillusioned Americans, she's a Christmas freak. On Halloween, I went shopping for a cheap costume at the mall and they already had Santa's chair and castle set up for Christmas pictures. What's next?

Today's society is ridiculous in capitalizing off Christmas to the extent they do. Money and material things are not the basis of Christmas. Love and recognition of your



## MAIL CALL

### Capitalism beats out Christmas spirit

Regarding Erin Fitzgerald's Nov. 11 column, "Thanksgiving lost in Christmas hubbub":

Is it Christmas time already? It must be because the present I bought my fiancée for her Oct. 20 birthday was a fake Christmas tree. It was what she wanted and she's insanely waiting to put it up.

Like most disillusioned Americans, she's a Christmas freak. On Halloween, I went shopping for a cheap costume at the mall and they already had Santa's chair and castle set up for Christmas pictures. What's next?

Today's society is ridiculous in capitalizing off Christmas to the extent they do. Money and material things are not the basis of Christmas. Love and recognition of your

prejudiced against something. For Henderson, it is A&M. For other people it is a type of music, a type of girl or guy or even a race. Being a minority, I feel it is my job to break the stereotypes and to be successful in all aspects of my life.

To go off half-cocked, as Henderson does, is just wrong. If she wants to make a change she should be doing and saying positive things, providing the African-American community with a positive female role model.

Miranda M. Olivarez  
Class of '99

Brian Beam  
Class of '99

### Henderson should deal with prejudice

Regarding Aja Henderson's Nov. 13 column, "Sullivan Ross rededication sullies A&M":

For weeks now I have read Henderson's complaints about this or that (A&M Honor Code, 12th Man and now Sully). As far as racism goes, I, as a minority, know it is a touchy subject. Racism is a part of life, and I say this meaning that everyone is

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.