

# THE BATTALION

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Tuesday, November 19, 1996

The Batt Online: <http://bat-web.tamu.edu>

## Report predicts decline in education University administrators are urged to improve minority access

By MELISSA NUNNERY  
THE BATTALION

A report from the Texas Department of Rural Sociology predicts Texas will be a state with poorly educated citizens by 2030, leading University administrators to explore methods to improve minorities' access to higher education.

Dr. Steve Murdock, a professor and head of the Department of Rural Sociology, said the report examines what educational changes in Texas' population structure are likely to have in the future. The report indicates that if steps are not taken to improve access to public education for minorities by 2030, Texas will lag behind other states economically.

"Unless we increase access, increase opportunities and increase socioeconomic achievement of minorities, Texas will be a poorer state," Murdock said.

Minority groups are the fastest growing segments of the population. They also have the lowest participation rates in education.

Dr. Charles Lee, vice chancellor for research, planning and continuing education, said the two factors combined could create economic hardships for the state.

"If you extend that out (to 2030), you will have an increasing percentage of the Texas population with lesser education," Lee said. "If we don't find ways to get more

Texans engaged in the educational process, the economy of the state is at risk in the next century."

Lee said it is in the best interest of Texas to ensure the competitiveness its citizens need for the workplace in the future.

He said outreach programs to help young people realize they can go to college would help increase access to higher education.

"It's more than telling them what courses to take to get into college," Lee said. "We have to help them develop self-confidence and believe it is possible to go to college."

Dr. Barry Thompson, chancellor of the Texas A&M University System, said the report

indicates Texas will be a third-world state by 2030 if the number of African-American and Hispanic college graduates does not increase.

"We (administrators) are proposing that ... by 2003 we produce 15,200 more college graduates a year, which will raise us to the national average," he said. "If we don't increase higher education, then the majority population will be poorly educated voters with the ability to shape and make public policy."

Thompson said the Texas Legislature needs to take action to improve access to higher education for minorities to have educated voters in the future.

He said financial aid and grants should be increased

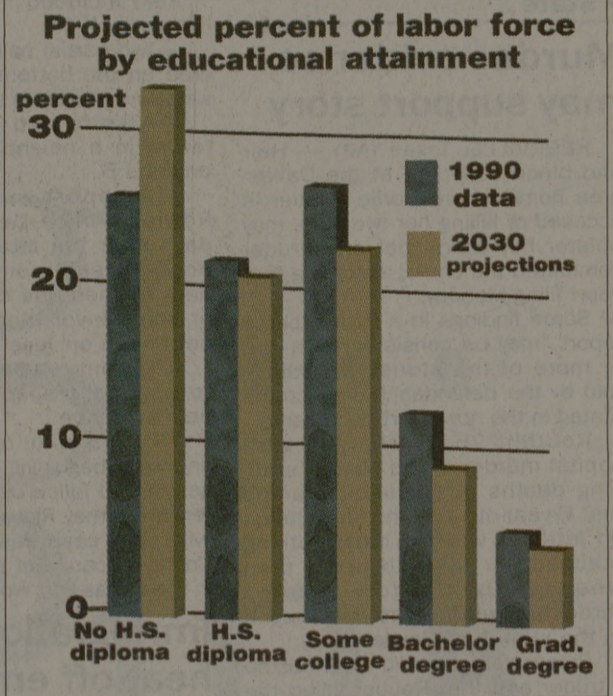
so attending college is easier. Thompson said if public universities form partnerships with public schools, universities can help secondary schools with their teaching methods.

He said access to higher education is a problem that needs to be solved before it worsens.

"Texas must address the problem, and I hope policymakers will begin to address it in the next legislative session," he said.

Murdock said he wants access to higher education to improve as a result of the report.

"The best result of this report is that actions be taken so our projections are inaccurate," Murdock said.



## Beutel cracks down on medical excuses

By JOANNE WHITEMORE  
THE BATTALION

Students at Texas A&M are no longer allowed to use medical excuses from A.P. Beutel Health Center as a way to skip classes and tests.

The University class attendance policy was revised for the 1996-97 school year.

It now states that students who miss class before visiting a physician and are not judged too ill or contagious to attend class will not receive a medical excuse.

Kirk S. Cole, assistant to the director at Beutel, said the revision was prompted by the amount of excuses written the previous year.

"The new attendance policy is based on the fact that we had a high number of excuses that our providers were giving per day," Cole said. "They were for minor ailments where they (students) really didn't need to miss class."

The Student Senate and Faculty Senate jointly revised the class attendance and excuse policy with a committee of students, faculty and staff last year. The policy revisions are included in the 1996-97 University Student Rules.

Cole said many students and faculty are unaware of the policy revision.

"That's part of the reason we're trying to get the information out," he said. "We've dispensed information to the faculty. They don't know about the change, but they need to know."

Dr. Sallie Sheppard, associate provost for undergraduate programs, said deans have expressed their concern over students taking advantage of medical excuses.

She said the faculty is sympathetic to students with legitimate problems, but those attempting to "work the edges" concern the faculty.

"I think there's a double-edged sword here," she said. "A reaction from the faculty could be to say, 'I'm not ever going to count any of these excuses that I get.'"

"That provides a problem for students who are legitimately sick. On the other side, sometimes students can hurt legitimate uses needed by others."

Dr. Lucille Isdale, director of Beutel, said the revision shifts the responsibility of absences back to students. She said it is the students' duty to contact their professors when absent.

Isdale said writing medical excuses for every minor ailment is the same as treating students like children.

"Every other day, we treat them like adults," she said. "But if they do miss a class, we treat them like babies or children. You've got to get Mommy to say you didn't have to go to school today."

Isdale said the policy has helped the center see more students with legitimate problems.

"I had one physician provide 207 patients with excuses," she said. "That's 207 patients we would not have been able to see in the past."



Jennifer Fredrickson, THE BATTALION

**Wired Up** | Lee Houchin, a sophomore computer science major, and David Fuchs, a junior chemical engineering major, record magnetic fields for a physics lab project in Heldenfels Hall.

## Recorder reveals final moments of ValuJet crash

MIAMI (AP) — Passengers screamed "Fire! Fire! Fire!" and a flight attendant warned, "We can't get oxygen back there" during the terrifying moments before ValuJet Flight 592 plunged into the Everglades, killing all 110 people aboard.

The chilling eight-minute tape from the cockpit voice recorder and cabin intercoms shows the crew and passengers in the final moments of the crash.

A transcript of the recording was released Monday as a hearing opened on the mistakes that led to the May 11 crash. Federal investigators believe that 144 oxygen-generating canisters carried in the DC-9's cargo hold either ignited or fueled a fire.

Six minutes after takeoff from Miami International Airport, the pilot can be heard telling the co-pilot: "We got some electrical problems. ... We're losing everything."

A few seconds later, the voice recorder picked up screams of passengers in the cabin, including several women shouting, "Fire! Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Over the next 51 seconds, shouts were heard from the cabin twice more and a flight attendant said only, "Completely on fire" before the cabin fell silent. The last recorded voice from the plane was

that of a crew member telling the tower, "We need the, uh, closest airport available."

The plane crashed 2 minutes, 22 seconds later.

While the flight attendant warned that passengers could not get oxygen, National Transportation Safety Board investigator Greg Feith said there was not enough information to say what may have happened to the oxygen masks that drop down in front of passengers during an emergency.

Relatives of the victims hope the hearing will tell them why their loved ones died.

"I dreaded coming here, but this is something that I have to do

in order to have closure," said Gwendolyn Marks, a nurse whose 23-year-old son died in the crash. "It may be painful, but it was my child and I want to hear what was going through his mind, what was going on in those last minutes."

Investigators did not release the recording itself out of concern for the feelings of family members. That decision upset Richard Kessler, an Atlanta lawyer whose wife, Kathleen, was killed.

"I'm going to Washington after this to try to get them to change the law," Kessler said. He said he wanted to know if one of the voices repeatedly shouting, "Fire" was his wife's.

Panel chooses interns for leadership program

## Panel chooses interns for leadership program

By COURTNEY WALKER AND ANN MARIE HAUSER  
THE BATTALION

Seven faculty and staff members throughout the Texas A&M University System have been chosen to participate as interns in the Center for Leadership in Higher Education mentoring program.

The program's purpose is to prepare participants to be future leaders, chief executive officers and senior managers for the A&M System and Texas higher education.

The program was established in 1994 by the A&M Board of Regents.

Barry B. Thompson, chancellor of the System, said he refers to the program as combat training for the interns who are chosen.

"They are given a chance to interact with legislators, students, chief executive officers and learn the critical skills needed to perform at a high level," he said.

Interns will work side by side with the chief executive officers of 10 state university systems and eight agencies.

Intensive training, in which interns receive hands-on experience and learn problem-solving strategies, are also part of the program.

Patti Urbina, special projects and international programs coordinator for Texas Engineering Experiment Station, completed the initial pilot program in August.

She said the internship was a great opportunity to improve her understanding of the complexities of the System.

"We had the opportunity to see the day-in and day-out routine," she said. "And the decision-making process of CEOs and how all parts of the system fit together as a whole."

Intern responsibilities include addressing employee relations, ethics, leadership behaviors, public policy development, media relations and external fund raising, as well as academic and budget issues. They will also be involved with decision-making, planning, implementation, research and analysis.

Interns were nominated by System presidents and agency directors. Selections were made on the basis of career potential toward a leadership role in higher education, superior communication skills, conceptual skills and practical implementation ability.

Urbina said the opportunity to see other styles of leadership was interesting.

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## Four drown in attempt to cross border

BROWNSVILLE, Texas (AP) — High waves swallowed a group of men, women and children apparently trying to wade across the Rio Grande into the United States, drowning at least four of them. Six others were feared dead.

Authorities searched Monday for the bodies of those killed in the Gulf of Mexico surf at the shallow mouth of the river, which separates the United States and Mexico.

Witnesses saw about 10 men, women and children at the river's inlet 20 miles east of Brownsville on Sunday, Chief Sheriff's Deputy Joe Elizardi said.

"They were walking on a sandbar on the Mexican side. When they got to the end of the sandbar, this large wave came in and swallowed them up," he said.

Elizardi said the victims were believed to be illegal immigrants trying to cross from Mexico into the United States.

Three bodies were recovered Sunday. A fourth washed ashore but was taken back out by the tide.

Two of the bodies were identified as men ages 49 and 19, believed to be from Lahore, Pakistan, Elizardi said. They were carrying Pakistani

passports and business cards suggesting one was an engineer, the other a printer, he said.

Their identities were withheld until relatives could be notified.

The third dead man was not carrying identification papers.

The Coast Guard scanned the ocean by helicopter while sheriff's deputies hunted the deserted beach for more bodies before suspending the search Monday afternoon.

The mouth of the river is a popular crossing spot for illegal immigrants and narcotics traffickers, authorities said. It is generally shallow, with shoals and sandbars that prevent large ships from entering, although in places it's too deep for wading.

"The river's not very wide there, but it is very deep and very dangerous," said U.S. Border Patrol agent Larry Jackson.

Waves were up to 10 feet high along the shore Sunday, and that could have created a powerful rip current that would have pulled the victims away from land, said National Weather Service forecaster Richard Hagan. Waves there normally run 3 to 4 feet, Elizardi said.

"A single wave is not enough nor

## ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT DEATHS IN TEXAS

— More than 300 illegal immigrants die each year trying to enter Texas from Mexico, and most of them drown, according to a study released this year by the University of Houston.

— Prior to Sunday's deaths, seven illegal immigrants had drowned in Cameron County in the last six months trying to cross the Rio Grande, according to the Sheriff's Department.

— Several illegal immigrants have died this year due to over-exposure and dehydration, including eight who died crossing ranch land in Kenedy County.

— Two other illegal immigrants died of heat-related heart failure in July after being transported north to Buda in a stifling 18-wheeler.

mally to carry somebody off and drown them," Hagan said. "I think there was probably a rip current in that area."