

EDITORIAL

THE BATTALION

Established in 1893

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Bowen cooks up complacent column

This year has been disturbing for most Aggies. The football team has gone from Southwest Conference Champions to Big 12 contenders.

Columnist



Stephen Llano
Senior history major

Buildings previously taken for granted as physical symbols of tradition on this campus, such as Law, Puryear, Downs Natatorium and DeWare, were shattered in the name of "campus improvement." The Corps shrinks and grows in number year after year, and the yell leaders' stories at yell practice get less comprehensible and more violent. Change is

the newest and strongest tradition in these times.

But one thing has remained constant — the continual increase in student fees. If only there was something that could be done to control ever increasing costs.

Unbeknownst to many Aggies, who were disoriented by the bizarre weather phenomena surrounding the Texas Tech game (as well as that unfortunate cat), President Ray Bowen provided justification for these fees to the readers of The Dallas Morning News.

His Oct. 27 column, "Colleges Grapple With Affordability Issue" seems to be an adequate defense of the recent fee hikes that effect Aggies and other students who attend public universities. Bowen states, "Tuition and fees have increased mainly because state governments, faced with difficult budget constraints, have been steadily cutting their support for higher education, forcing public colleges and universities to rely more heavily on tuition and fees."

But what Bowen doesn't define is what those fees are paying for. He cites with great alarm the fact that universities have taken "painful measures" such as "increasing class size, cutting course selections, increasing instructional workload and downsizing administration" in order to make ends meet. It would seem that raising tuition and fees would be the only way public universities could "provide wide access to quality education."

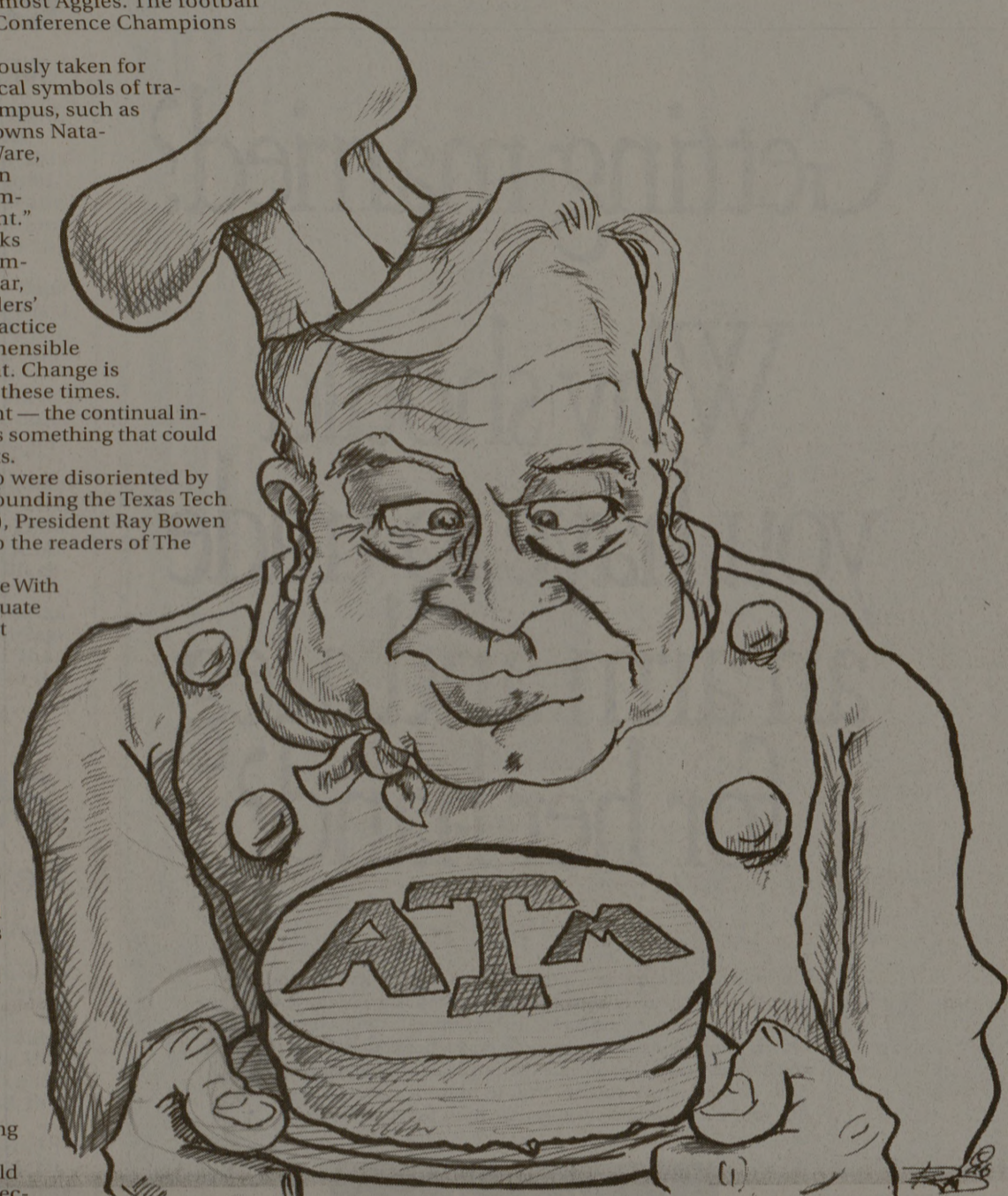
If that is the goal of Texas A&M, being a public university, why did we spend money on a beautiful grass football field instead of opening up more course selections? Since these costs don't come out of students' pockets, they don't affect academic funds.

But indirectly they do. Instead of opening up other sections of SCOM 203 or SPAN 102, we used that money to improve the playing surface at Kyle Field.

Every dollar raised and spent on something other than education costs ebbs away at the goal of education.

And what about those fees that directly impact students? Bowen must not be too concerned about the cost of access when he supports the charging of a mandatory \$50 fee for a sports club. Even though many would pay it anyway, every little unnecessary fee mounts up against those students struggling to pay tuition.

So, who is going to solve this problem? Bowen and many other university presidents are currently serving on the Kellogg Commission, which will determine how to reform access to public universities. One thing that should disturb any university student is the fact that there is no student input into the decisions this committee will make. If access is the issue, question those who have had trouble getting it.



More importantly, instead of defining "expense" to attend a university, the Kellogg Commission should define "frugality." Jeff Smith, of the PBS show "The Frugal Gourmet," offers an excellent definition. He defines it as not wasting anything, or getting the maximum out of whatever high-quality product you buy.

Are many colleges and universities currently frugal? If Texas A&M's recent expenditures are a barometer of what other schools are doing, then Morrill's dream will soon be lost. Bowen's ideology in preserving the ideals of the Morrill Act — access to a university education for everyone — is a goal everyone should support.

But are we really preserving Morrill's original goals when the primary objective of fund-raising is to make the campus look pretty and provide the football team with a beautiful field to play on?

Sure, these things are important, but they need to be balanced with the true reason people attend universities: To better themselves through education.

Let's hope the commission uses frugality in the decisions it makes regarding access to public universities.

SPENDING MONEY

The Legislature should take responsibility for funding education.

In what has become a rerun that can't die, Texas A&M students will probably have to put up with another General Use Fee increase.

Although it may seem to be a knee-jerk reflex, A&M students shouldn't blame President Ray Bowen or the administration this time. The problem is deeply rooted in Texas government, and most of the blame falls upon legislators and their shirking of responsibility.

The fee increase currently on the table has been presented before. In February, Bowen presented a similar increase in an effort to raise the low salaries of faculty and staff. But after complaints from the student body, the Student Senate and the Board of Regents, the proposal was crossed off the Regents' agenda March 22.

Unfortunately, the issue won't go away. A&M's faculty and staff still need better pay to keep the University competitive. And now, the fee increase is practically a done deal.

But because of the shenanigans of the Texas Legislature, the University is raising the GUF to take care of something — faculty salaries — that really aren't under the jurisdiction of the GUF at all.

The GUF should only be used to pay for Physical Plant additions and campus improvements — University rules and regulations state this explicitly. Faculty salaries have traditionally been covered by tuition, which is set by the Legislature.

But now tuition fails to raise enough to pay professors what a world-class university should pay professors, and no one's sure here to get the money.

So rather than come up with the funds to cover faculty paychecks, 10 years ago the 74th Legislature shuffled its feet and pulled a kind of witcharoo. They removed the \$12

cap on fees and raised it to equal the \$32 tuition charge — effectively forcing universities to raise their fees to pay for things that tuition should cover. In doing so, the Legislature passed the buck to each individual university in Texas.

It was an unprecedented and cowardly sidestepping of responsibility. Legislators knew public universities were experiencing funding crises statewide, but they merely shrugged their collective shoulders and said, "Why don't you come up with your own money?"

Obviously, the administration is not to blame; it has doing its best with what it has been given. The trouble is that it has not been given enough, and it has to make up for the deficiencies with another GUF increase. Now it's up to the Texas Legislature to give more money to Texas universities. Although education spending increased 7.3 percent from the previous session, it still was not enough to take care of the long-overdue salary increase.

Where the Legislature should find the money is a bit of a quandary. It can redistribute the funds it currently has, or it can raise taxes to raise for money for the state government in general. It was the legislators' job to find a solution, however; simply deferring their job to universities was a cop-out.

The administration should be commended for recognizing that its faculty is valuable enough to warrant salaries comparable to those at other public universities. But now that money is scarcer than it used to be, this recognition will have its cost. It's a complicated problem — but it will give the 75th Legislature something to address when it convenes Jan. 14. And it ought to be one of its top priorities.

Capitalists discover the fountain of death

How does the saying go? The man's not even cold in his grave?

As most everyone knows, Tupac Shakur died earlier this semester after being shot in Las Vegas. Everyone may not know, however, that the official mourning period now, apparently, over his applies only to those who were mourning him in the first place, of course.

Soon we will be seeing, to paraphrase from a Mel Brooks movie, "Tupac: The Merchandising." The time has arrived for all those with any connection to the ain star to come forward and get aid. Arrived? Actually, the T-shirts have been available since shortly after his death.

They probably started printing them while he was still on life support. Say what you will about "thug life" and just rewards; people don't need their lives trivialized into souvenirs. Following hard on the heels of a posthumously released album and the movie plans, HBO has asked a deal to make, of all the in-the-thing, a TV movie about Shakur. Is the title *Requiem for Tupac*? No. The name of this fine project is *Rebel for the Hell of It: The Life of Tupac Shakur*.

Additionally, Quincy Jones, entertainment industry giant, may be working with TriStar Pictures to make a big-screen production, otherwise known as a real movie.

In the interest of fairness, either movie could be just as bad as the other. My money is on the one being proposed by — get this — Shakur's mother. She also has a book deal in the works. Does this strike anyone as incredibly morbid? Perhaps there should have been giant checks mailed to Shakur's survivors as soon as his heart stopped. That would have spared us the charade and several others in the movie department.

Not that anything with

Columnist



Bryan Goodwin
Junior English major

Shakur's name on it is a losing proposition financially, of course.

The disturbing part about all of this is the incredibly lucrative marketability of death.

Headstones, caskets and ceremonies in general have left the original purpose of a memorial far behind. For instance, just how comfortable does the inside of a coffin need to be, anyway? In the event that the deceased are only napping, they will be able to spend the remainder of his life in cushioned comfort as he asphyxiates. Damn, that's how I want to go.

And what's everyone's favorite get-rich scheme? Life insurance fraud. Is anyone else a little uneasy about the idea of life insurance in the first place? After all, death is assured. Let's rename the stuff and make it part of the lottery. Visualize it: BucketKick — You bet you're gonna die!

Oh, sign me up. Every time someone dies, people rush to cash in. Even the well-deserved pseudo-death the seniors will experience next week during Elephant Walk brings with it sweatshirt sales (though both this year's sweatshirts are terrible).

When movie stars die, their last projects are hurried out the door toward assured box-office success. When rock stars die, MTV kicks their videos into high rotation and every unreleased sound bite of them sneezing is shrink-wrapped and sold ASAP. People who didn't even care much about them in life gather together for mass memorial services that feature a door charge.

When I die, hopefully a few people whose lives I touched will gather together in solemn remembrance of who I was. Hopefully they will not be too sad, as they will have lives of their own to lead. Hopefully, they will make some small memorial for me. And maybe just one movie, tastefully done.



MAIL CALL

Merit, not skin color, proves worthiness

Regarding Aja Henderson's Nov. 19 column, "Whites reap benefits from similar programs":

I am an out-of-state, Hispanic member of the Class of '00, and was proud when the *Hopwood* verdict was read, for I knew that I was admitted to Texas A&M on merit, not because of my country of origin.

To answer Henderson's previous concern about minorities not attending Texas A&M, I chose Texas A&M because of its reputation, and not because of the promise of minority scholarships.

Henderson's comments about "whiteness" reaping all the benefits are as biased as they are ignorant. My mother, a Latino woman with a heavy accent, did not fill out the race box on her college application when she moved to the United States. She got a nursing degree several years later. This shows that perhaps instead of people automatically assuming they will be discriminated against, maybe they should present a good attitude and personality, so that people will remember them as good people, and not by their race.

One more thing to consider: If we instill affirmative action in all work places, then why not in professional sports also? The NBA is comprised primarily of African-Americans. Affirmative action

would increase the number of Hispanics and Asians in the league, although the game's standards may be lowered. That would be fine by me, as long as the league was more "culturally diverse." Perhaps through this example, Henderson can understand that we should disregard race, and simply judge a person on their qualifications.

Julian Gunther
Class of '00

Preacher violates common courtesy

Recently, I was walking past the Academic Building, when Tom the "preacher man" drew my attention. I think he was lambasting homosexuals at the time and, being the open-minded person that I am, I had to hear his views.

I asked him what he thought of other religions and was informed that, in the specific case of the Jews, "Hitler didn't go far enough." I agree that everyone has the right of freedom of speech and, if he had just shown up on the campus, I wouldn't have a problem.

However, I did some research and it turns out that Aggie Christian Fellowship invited him to come down.

If the organization wants some-

one like that representing the Christian faith, by all means, it is welcome to him. But have him speak in Rudder Auditorium ... I don't want to be forced to hear him on campus.

Furthermore, if he believes (and as a representative of the Christian faith, I must assume that all Christians believe this) that Hitler didn't go far enough, I must challenge him: Have his family placed in the gas chambers and make him remove the bodies. Then, he can tell me that Hitler didn't go far enough.

Lisa Foox
Class of '00

Affirmative action provides equality

Regarding Jon Apgar's Nov. 19 column, "Equality hindered by race-based treatment":

Attacking affirmative action has become fashionable. People are entitled to their opinions on this divisive issue, but ignorance pervades the logic of some of the most ardent opponents of these programs, such as Apgar.

Apgar begins his argument by acknowledging the fact that minorities "are at a disadvantage in terms of precollege educational opportunities." Remember that affirmative action may help minorities get into college, but standards aren't lowered for them to graduate.

He then proceeds to say that the standards are lower for minorities in college and that they have a poor chance of succeeding in the job market. This type of thinking is exactly why we need affirmative action.

Apgar says that "affirmative action is not benefiting those who were discriminated against." Imagine life as one large monopoly game. If you told one player that he was not allowed to purchase property and hotels and allowed the rest to do so, the first player would clearly be at a disadvantage. At a later point, allowing him to have the right to purchase property would not benefit him because everything would be controlled by the others. The first player would still be at a disadvantage, and action would have to be taken to level the playing field. This analogy may be applied to the real world, and demonstrates how discrimination in the past affects the present.

Finally, Apgar makes an ignorant comment about "all-black fraternities." As a member of a traditionally black Greek letter organization, I can tell you that our fraternity does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or religion. I should know, because I am not black.

John J. Thoppil
Class of '97

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