

Making the Grade

Constant pressure forces students into compromising ethics

A recent report issued by the Faculty Senate attempted to address problems with student ethics, specifically the plagiarism of intellectual property and the cheating by students who misuse off-campus tutoring services.

Columnist



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This report may be a shock to some, especially at an institution such as Texas A&M where, the Aggie Code of Honor, is something students swear by. Truth of the matter is, individuals often bend, if not break it, which leads to a degradation of the code, the academic system, and even the University.

At universities across the nation, cheating has become an accepted means for students to accomplish academic tasks. This, in turn, causes individuals to take unethical actions, when faced with extreme pressure. The pressures posed by our families, peers, and society, cause those who cannot cope to search for alternative methods to succeed. Students under such pressure will sometimes stop at nothing in their quest for high accolades, which can unfortunately lead to cheating.

Dr. Steven Oberhelman, speaker of the Faculty Senate, expressed his view regarding the temptation to cheat. "Just do your own work and you will be judged accordingly," he said. This is good advice, but sometimes easier said than done.

If one questionable act is accepted or condoned, then the crime of cheating or plagiarizing loses weight, and future transgressions become easier to commit.

Like any problem, punishment is only part of the solution. To truly put a halt to the disease, we must consider how it is transmitted.

Nowhere in history has success had such a bearing on a young individual's life.

From birth, we are programmed to be successful achievers. Our parents tell us all they want for us is to be happy and live a fulfilled life. But, despite what they say, they reward our successes and punish our failures, regardless of our happiness.

Society also plays a major role in forcing students into this "win-at-all-cost" attitude. Individuals who

attain substantial levels of success are routinely placed in front of us as stars, worthy of admiration. The more grand and robust the success, the greater the accolade.

One of the greatest supports of this mentality is television. It shows us the benefits: money, power and influence. All of which can be achieved through success. These rewards have become synonymous with success and happiness.

Students must accept responsibility for our academic indiscretions.

In our quest for success, the members of this generation have developed a significant aversion to adversity. We steer clear of trials and tribulations to make our lives easier. Cheating certainly makes things easier, but it's still wrong.

On top of the normal temptation, the effort by some faculty members to simplify their work load by standardization has led to an even greater urge to take the easy way out. Because professors routinely preach the same materials to students year after year, the local tutoring services have made a business out of old notes, quizzes, and tests. This further leads to the temptation to cheat by purchasing answers. With little or no original thought required in many lower level courses, some students take the

easy way out by copying materials from tutoring services and other sources turning it in as their own work.

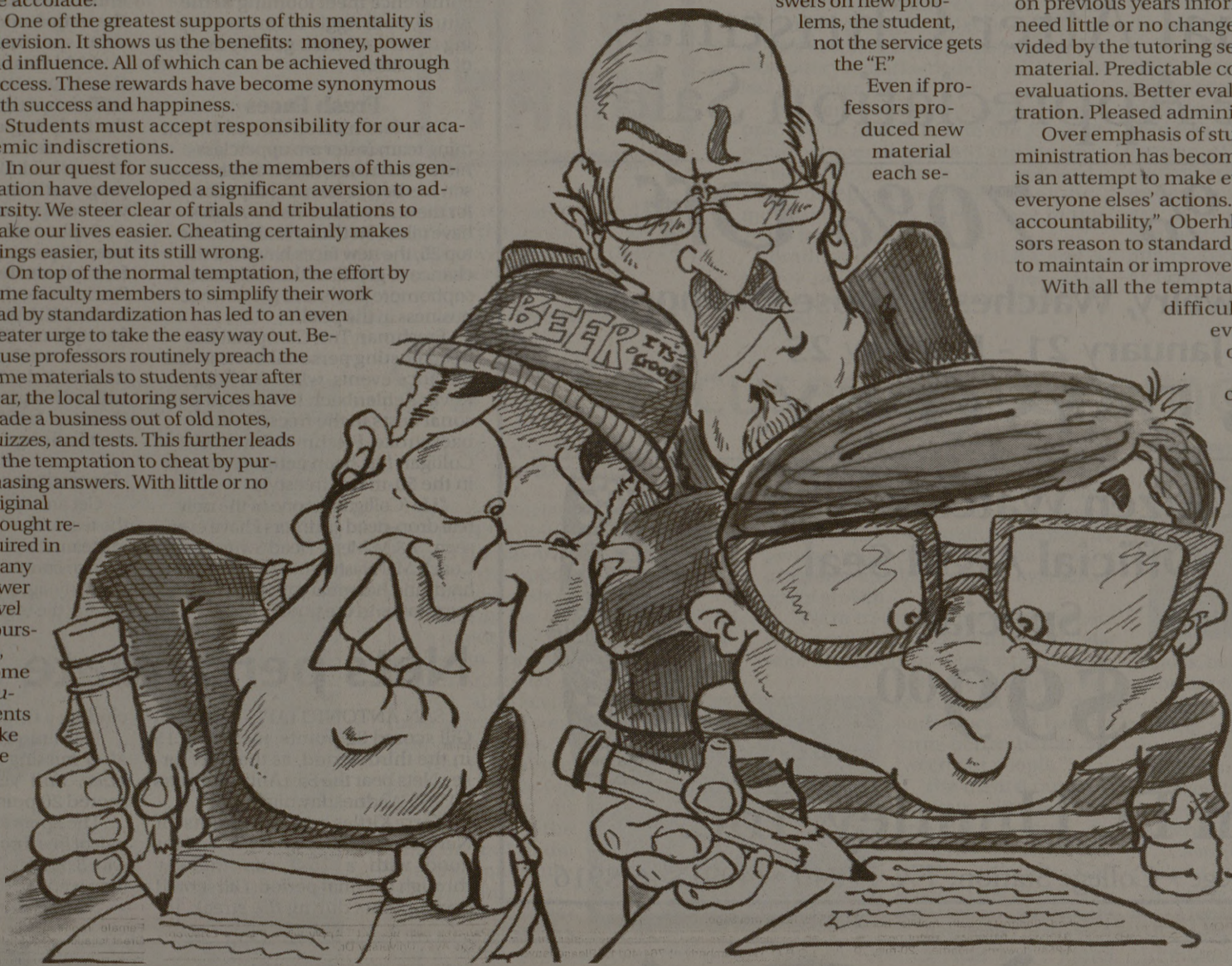
When caught with old answers on new problems, the student, not the service gets the "E"

Even if professors produced new material each semester, they would have nothing to gain by challenging students except poor evaluations. With the current system students know what to expect based on previous years information. Sometimes they need little or no change to the old information provided by the tutoring services to adapt it to the new material. Predictable courses mean better student evaluations. Better evaluations please the administration. Pleased administration, helps with tenure.

Over emphasis of student evaluations by the administration has become part of the problem. There is an attempt to make everyone responsible for everyone else's actions. "We've gone overboard with accountability," Oberhelman said. This gives professors reason to standardize their materials in an effort to maintain or improve their student evaluations.

With all the temptations to cheat, it makes it difficult to adhere to standards, even the hallowed Aggie Code of Honor.

Remember when as a child, we were told repeatedly that "Cheaters never win," well they don't. Even if individuals are successful in cheating, the only ones they have cheated are themselves. They robbed themselves of that feeling that originates deep down in your gut. That feel that you can conquer anything. The feeling of pride in a job well done. Even the praise of others feels hollow and insignificant, when you know you are unworthy. Cheating robs your soul of the water which quenches your thirst for acceptance and self-respect. A cheater gives up their right to dignity and of future success.



EDITORIAL

THE BATTALION

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Ogden plan keeps students involved

Over the last 10 years, the cost of attending A&M has steadily risen from an average of \$4050 to \$7926 per year, an increase of 96 percent.

Former State Rep. Steve Ogden has proposed a fee simplification plan to reverse this crippling trend. All fees not related to the academic quality of the University would be combined into a single fee. No longer would the average fee statement be filled with a myriad of complex, redundant fees. Instead, students would be given one tangible dollar amount to show how much the University is demanding for non-academic purposes.

The Ogden plan proposes the current fee statement be simplified into three categories: tuition, an essential student education fee and a

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tuition service fee. Tuition would be set by the state legislature. The essential student education fee (a fee encompassing student services related to the academic quality of Texas A&M) would be set by the Board of Regents. The student service fee, which would cover all non-academic, non-essential services, would be set by a student referendum.

Students would be given the power to control the amount of the fee through direct referendum. Currently, students can vote on certain fee increases at certain times. However, a referendum on increasing a single fee rarely has a chance to be defeated. Last semester, the ballot for the referendum to increase the Student Center Complex fee was bold enough to

list reasons why Aggies should vote for the increase — hardly a fair ballot.

By voting on a regular basis for all non-academic fees, students attempting to keep the cost of their education at a reasonable price would have the power to reject ludicrous fee increases. If Student Government, the MSC or bus operations attempted to add to the student service fee, they would have to gain the approval of the entire student body during a fair referendum. The fundamental question is whether the student body as a whole should be given the chance to vote on all non-academic fees.

It comes as no surprise then, that groups which stand to lose power through controlled fees have rallied in opposition of the Ogden plan. Student Senators Cass Burton and Mandy Gomez introduced a Student Senate resolution, blasting the Ogden plan as

an attempt to "disguise how funds are being distributed." While the senators claim they are protecting the student body, they neglect to mention it is easier to hide and increase fees when there are dozens of categories on one fee statement. What's more baffling is why the Student Senate, presumably the "voice" of the students, would pass a resolution designed to limit students from voting on their own fees.

The Ogden plan will soon be introduced to the state legislature, and campus debate will intensify. Passage of the Ogden plan would allow current and future Aggies to control their non-academic fees. Defeat of the plan would perpetuate a system of skyrocketing fees and decreased access to education. By giving students the power to control fee inflation, the opportunity to attend A&M can be extended to thousands of prospective Aggies.

HONEST APPROACH

Students should maintain honesty when working with outside tutors.

Off-campus student tutoring services are necessary for some students to keep up in their classes, but the services can be abused when students engage in academic dishonesty.

When used to cheat, the services are a waste of students' time, energy and money that would be better spent on other methods of studying.

Students need to strive to learn subject matter in a thorough manner and gain such an understanding so they will be able to easily advance to upper-level courses. Some tutoring services use old tests donated by students as the basis for their teaching material. Although this is not illegal, it puts students at a disadvantage by only exposing them to a limited view of the subject.

Some professors change their tests from year to year and those in the upper-level courses do not always emphasize the same things that were stressed in the lower-level classes. By taking short cuts and learning only what is absolutely necessary to get from one exam to the next, students are short-changing themselves.

Professors and teaching assistants should make sure they are readily available to answer questions and discuss concerns from their students. This is rarely a problem, because most professors are willing to spend extra time outside of class with

students who are in need. Students should also take advantage of free services offered by the TAMU Center for Academic Enhancement. The Center, located in 241 Blocker, gives students the opportunity to improve reading, writing, math and other skills.

The most popular service is Supplemental Instruction, which is being administered in more than 50 courses this semester. SI sessions are conducted by students who have already completed the particular course and are knowledgeable enough to help fellow students. The sessions consist of group-study time where students can ask the instructor questions, seek clarification, and strive to understand the material better. While this service is readily available to all students registered in a class containing supplemental instruction, many fail to realize the additional help the service could provide.

Still, the common theme through these solutions is work. Students have an inborn responsibility to be thoughtful enough to seek help when they encounter difficulties in class. They must work to fully understand subject material, instead of waiting until the week before a test, relying on a tutor to give just enough information to beat the test, but not enough to fully grasp the material.

By taking shortcuts and learning only what is absolutely necessary to get from one exam to the next, students are short-changing themselves.

Disney lives in politically correct fantasy land

'Pirates of the Caribbean' altered to preserve tolerance, not truth

Food, ahoy! Hungry sailors will soon replace lusty ones at Disneyland's Pirates of the Caribbean when the ride reopens in March after extensive renovations.

Thanks to recent complaints about the lack of political correctness exhibited by the "sexist" pirates, the remodeled ride will favor pirates with growling stomachs instead of those with raging hormones.

Previously, visitors to the exhibit watched pirates as they drank, fought and (gasp) ... chased women. The new exhibit, however, has the pirates chasing women for turkey legs and wine, other than for the usual reasons.

However noble the reasoning behind these alterations, there is no need to alter what is essentially the depiction of basic human (or pirate) nature.

Disney has sacrificed truth to

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satisfy the consumer dollars of certain feminists who contribute nothing more to society than whining. Perhaps these feminists would prefer a ride that features women chasing men, showing the true equality which existed when pirates roamed the seven seas.

The same Disney that couldn't have cared less about political (or historical) correctness in movies like *Pocahontas*, has caved in to demands in an attempt to pander stupidity. Although the angered parties might smile at the "improvements," what is at stake is a sense of truth, history and reality.

Disney may have created its own small world after all, but it cannot isolate itself from reality.

In an era which has become tolerant of anyone and anything, reality and truth should not be sacrificed simply to pacify feminists.

Because visitors complain about the offensive nature of the pirates leads people to wonder if some are just looking to pick a fight.

For example, Judy Rosener, a management professor and women's issues expert at the University of California, was quoted in *The Houston Chronicle* saying, "Chasing women may be entertaining to men, but not to women. And just because pirates did such things doesn't mean Disney has to depict it."

By all means, let's rewrite history to forget the horrible things done in the past.

Jewish people don't shut down Holocaust exhibits because they loathe the Nazis, and most women don't eschew *I Love Lucy* because it portrays a woman happy with her role as a housewife.

Instead, like reasonable creatures, we should expect nothing less than the depiction of truth to ensure mistakes of the past are not repeated. When the gory annals of our past are relegated to the dark stacks of the Evans Library, we are in danger of forgetting the evil that man is capable of.

Disney's attempt to restore peace to its kingdom after a flood of complaints is nothing more than a misguided exercise in futility. Men will be men and women will be women. Likewise, kids will be kids and they will enjoy Disneyland for the magical kingdom it is. Any attempt to hide human nature behind distractions of food seems to be a return to the Victorian era, when a reference to common body parts like a leg or arm would have shocked even a few pirates.

Disney may have created its own small world after all, but it cannot isolate itself from reality.