

Drifting away

Students and astronauts lose sight of mission

Asst. Opinion Editor

James Francis
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Fast Wednesday, Astronaut John Blaha returned from a four-month stay aboard the Russian space station Mir, exhausted from the prolonged exposure to weightlessness, he allowed himself to be carried from the shuttle Atlantis on a stretcher.

Each semester, whether fall, summer or spring, students enroll in college and afterward, when they are pushed out into the world to make something worthwhile of their lives.

The correlation between these two lifestyle situations is simple. Students and astronauts are both being placed in experimental environments in order to test the staying power of their sanity and their ability to continue functioning as valuable commodities in society.

On April 4, 1961, Yuri Gagarin became the first human to make a trip into space. Eight years later, the crew of *Apollo 11* became the first humans to land on the moon. These individuals and their accomplishments were the catalysts of a beginning foray into space exploration.

Today, their travels are regarded as dinosaur voyages.

What used to be the nighttime dreams of stargazing children has become a catalog filled with statistics, percentages and bar graphs. NASA and its affiliates now send individuals into space to test how

they react to extended periods of weightlessness, adapt to changes in appetite and psychologically survive being stationed in cramped quarters.

When Neil Armstrong made his prestigious walk on the moon, coupled with the celebrated relay from his spacesuit, one can be sure he was not thinking how superior the United States would look because of his accomplishment. Armstrong, like other astronauts, was a believer in a vision he had harbored since childhood.

But children grow up. They turn into astronauts whose aspirations get crushed by reality and the space program's desire to increase its numbers.

Attending college is no different. The learning processes of old have mutated into one exam after another, continually gauging a student's memory, test-taking ability and I.Q.

Students no longer find pleasure in the college application procedure, dreaming of going to the university of their choice. Instead, they anxiously await a bulging letter in the mail to confirm their higher education goals. And when a thin response is delivered to student mailboxes, reactions are all the same — tears, depression and nausea.

But the troubles do not end when a student gets to college. Once the doors of the administration open, students are constantly subjected to meeting new

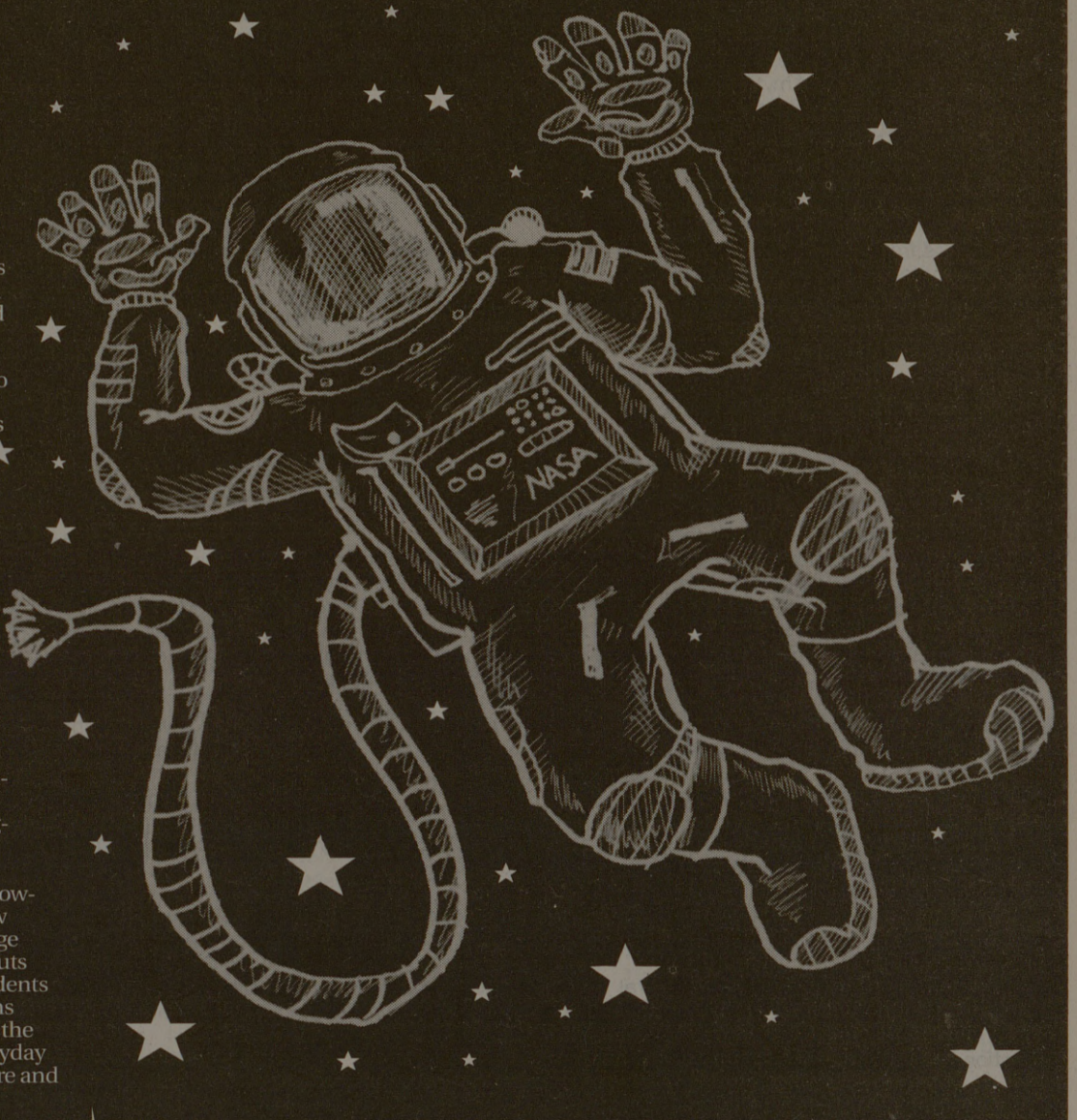
friends, encountering love interests and struggling with self-definition. These are the good things, the things students should be allowed to enjoy.

What corrupts these newfound situations are bumps in the road called tuition, housing, disappointing teaching and the need to always know the infamous social security number for more reasons than are needed.

Moreover, college life mirrors the current situation of space travel and exploration. Individuals go into a new environment hoping to attain life fulfillment. What they come out with is a feeling of disillusionment. They are plagued by governments, systems and concepts too foreign to understand. What they should come away with is a new outlook on an old dream, a reason to continue their search for completion.

Face it. Astronauts and students are the same. While space explorers are wheeled away from a space shuttle, students leave college with enough physical and emotional baggage to keep them from walking straight.

Life for both types of people is slowly degenerating and the days of new discovery in space and on the college campus are over. Although astronauts experience weightlessness and students lose control of ambulatory functions during finals, both are grounded in the realization of life becoming an everyday experiment. The dream of adventure and exploration is dead.



Relationship with new regents depends on students

Executive Editor

Michael Landauer
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A few semesters ago a friend of mine spoke with Mary Nan West, chair of the Texas A&M Board of Regents. She realized how out of touch the regents are with today's college student.

My friend said West, whose term ends tomorrow, was very pleasant, even telling her she was very pretty. The flattery ended when, in the kindest of voices, West said, "You know, I spend a lot of time each year working to make sure that you people can come here, too."

(My friend is African-American.)
 You people? Too?

We were amazed an official with so much control over our university could say something so racist.

But then we realized West is not a

racist. She is a product of a different generation, and does not deserve to be judged by our generation's labels. Times change. In the context of West's youth, her comments that day were meant as anything but an insult. In fact, she wanted only for my friend to know she cared.

But there are better ways. A new crop of regents has been appointed by Governor George W. Bush: Anne L. Armstrong, a rancher and like the idea of a "Regent Orientation."

The Student Body Executive Council, a group Baggett created last semester, could help. The council is a group of student leaders whose organization comes close to representing the entire campus. The Resident Hall Association, Off-Campus

Aggies, Graduate Student Council, Interfraternity Council and the Memorial Student Center are just some of the groups represented by the council. By scheduling a day with each prospective regent, this council could literally walk the candidates through a cross-section of the A&M student body.

Another possible source of tour guides for the prospective regents involves the students working for Dr. Southerland in the Department for Student Services. They have already finalized plans to bring the chancellor to campus next month for a similar experience.

As it stands now, the Board usually sponsors one or two "Meet Your Regent" functions each semester. The problem is the events are just too swanky for college kids. Sure, a few kiss-ups in business suits with agendas show up to become pals with their influential hosts, but this is no

way for the regents to meet "Joe Aggie."

If the new regents spent a day on campus, average students would get a chance to ask questions that are important to them. Some of those questions may stick in the prospective regents' minds, and they will ask them when they fill their position. And when a regent asks a question, it seems to get a more tangible response.

This is something students can do for themselves. If the members of the council take the time to invite the prospective regents to campus and introduce them to student concerns, not only will they be doing a great job representing their constituencies, but they will also show students are serious about their desire to be heard.

If this happens, maybe the gap my friend experienced will begin to narrow. The best part is students will have worked hard to make sure regents who understand their concerns can come here ... too.

Capitalistic principles leave techno-dance fans out in cold

Columnist

Kate Shropshire
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Here's the scene: It's 2 a.m. on a Saturday morning. Drinking buddies are slightly inebriated and all the bars and clubs are closing.

Even in this boozey euphoria, a desire to make the most of the evening still exists. The wandering drunkards traverse to Vertigo because it's open and it's the last place left where they can expend their bustling energy.

Yet a stigma was attached to this last resort. It was seen as a gay or alternative hangout. Even if it was, it's sad that this campus is too homophobic to associate with different people. Like they would be any more welcome at Shadow Canyon. We're here to expand our minds, not close them. Maybe this intimidating stigma forced the image change.

At any rate, I confess Vertigo was more than a last resort to me. It was a haven worth embracing, serving as a simple yet effective substitute for the clubs of Deep Ellum in Dallas. I belong to that eccentric minority group now being discriminated against because of the development of a limited scope of dance clubs for the benefit of a few individuals.

But as more observant Aggies may have noticed, Vertigo is no longer Vertigo. It is now Club Ozone.

Johnny Oates, owner of the club, said no more techno will be played at this new venue. He describes Club Ozone as "a rock-and-roll dance club."

The television in Club Ozone is now tuned to sports, in disappointing contrast to the usual displays of Pulp Fiction, *Ren and Stimpy* and various Japanese animation.

Luckily, dead animals do not yet adorn the black walls of Club Ozone — a popular practice at other dance clubs here. Instead, the "GIG EM" thumb and a somewhat hidden skyscraper have replaced the eclectic neon paintings of the caterpillar from *Alice in Wonderland* and an Escher-esque face complimented by a seductive black light. One could tantalizingly catch bubbles that drifted from the

ceiling while grooving to the beat — but not any more.

Cheli Barrow, a freshman meteorology major, said, "Club Ozone [seems] like a bad rendition of J.D. Wells with makeout couches in the black light. Like I want to see that." Like meat lockers such as J.D. Wells, Hurricane Harry's, or Shadow Canyon aren't enough. Club Ozone is following in the path of other Bryan-College Station hangouts.

Oates said, "We were tired of the format and wanted to change to something different. We wanted to appeal to a wider customer base."

In essence, this statement is ironic. Variety does not exist if a club has conformed to the norm likes and dislikes of the population. It seems the rest of us who do not want to be constricted to "ropers and rockies" have been forgotten.

"Clubs here don't really respect people who want to dance. They are more interested in drink specials," Keith Randolph, a senior environmental design major, said. The words "dance club" have lost their meaning. "In essence, it's not about dance culture at all. It's about accommodating to this town or you won't make it."

I couldn't agree more. Capitalist interests are more important than the views of the minority. This is the repeating pattern in our materialistic society. We cannot escape it. For now, we can only wish for an establishment which plays good techno and does not carry a shameful reputation.

I hoped, when I came to College Station, this campus would have a broad horizon. I didn't want to endure whiny country songs about losing your beer and truck just to hear a few suitable dance tunes. As of now, I don't have the correct attire to attend any of these clubs, much less the tolerance for their foul excuse for music.

Until justice is sought for minority techno lovers, I can only dream. I will resort to underground techno, magic-carpet rides at my place, where at least I have bubbles.

Confederate flag is not racist symbol

In Response to "Stars and Bars a legacy of racism and hatred" by John Lemons on Jan. 29

One should not degrade something they do not understand. The Confederate flag does not stand for hate and racism. It's a symbol of an era in history. The flag represents a group of people whose ideas, way of life, and economic foundation was being torn apart by a greater power, their government. These people rebelled against their suppressors to protect their culture and way of life.

The South was not filled with racist. True plantation owners had slaves, but most were not the "animals" we portray them as. Agreed, there are far more historical accounts of slave owners providing for their slaves and treating them humanely. Slavery was a way of life for those the flag stood for. It played a key role in their economic system. The flag was used to unite a group of people whose way of life was being destroyed. Lets step back in history: A group of people who were suppressed by their government, which also had slaves, broke from the main body from which they came. They rebelled by becoming a separate nation, preserving their way of life. Ring a bell, it was the American Revolu-



MAIL CALL

Confederate flag is not racist symbol

In Response to "Stars and Bars a legacy of racism and hatred" by John Lemons on Jan. 29

Ryan Kirkpatrick
Class of '99

Free thought is not necessarily harmful

In response to Courtney Phillips' Jan. 24 column

Steve Platts
President, Unitarian
Universalist Student Fellowship
accompanied by 11 signatures

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

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