

EDITORIAL

THE BATTALION

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REFERENDUM NOW

Students should continue to raise voices and vote on yell leader run offs

If students want to ensure the quality of their yell leaders, they should vote tomorrow to hold runoff elections.

Yes, this may sound like tampering with tradition, and at Texas A&M that rarely happens without a court order. But students have a chance tomorrow to show that A&M is not afraid of change.

Students should ask themselves two questions before they decide which way they will vote. Why is the implementation of runoffs a good idea? And if it is such a good idea, why is anyone against it? Some people claim they were for the plan until they realized it would not provide a majority. However, run-offs do not have to ensure a majority to make a change. The people who claim this as a reason for not supporting runoffs are missing the point.

Although the proposed change in the voting regulations would not ensure a majority for yell leaders, it would provide a change that could effectively destroy the Corps Bloc. For years, the Corps Bloc, a group within the Corps of Cadets, has selected its candidates for campus positions much like a political party. The Corps, which teaches respect for the chain of command, stands behind those candidates, thus giving a small minority on campus the power to decide general election outcomes.

With runoffs, the top four candidates for junior yell and the top five for senior yell would have to represent more than one segment of the electorate to win a runoff. It would certainly minimize the risk of electing a head yell leader with less than 15 percent of the vote.

A runoff system would help students choose the best candidates for the job. It is difficult to choose candidates from a large field. Corps

Bloc thrives on this fact, but if the voters decide to have runoffs, the entire electorate could benefit by the chance to make better choices.

So why are some students against it? Critics say the issue is too complex and not easily understood by the students. But choosing yell leaders is hardly brain surgery, and the electorate can smell fear.

Fear of change is the only apparent reason for taking a position against the runoffs. Some nostalgic students believe that the yell leaders should be an all-Corps organization and that blocking runoffs is the only way to ensure this. Perhaps that is why the last time the yell leaders were all Corps members, they changed the group's constitution to specifically forbid runoff elections. Technically, the yell leaders could pull out of the Student Government election process and conduct their own elections.

Of course, this is not realistic, and before the yell leaders are faced with that option, students must show up to the polls to show how much they want runoffs. Some students have been fighting for this change for years and have hit Student Government roadblocks every step of the way. For example, last spring a similar referendum received more votes than any other item on a Student Government ballot but was later ruled nonbinding. Tomorrow's referendum is the only way to circumvent those roadblocks. If passed, Student Body President would be mandated to change the voting registrations by the constitution.

This time the referendum is binding, and if it passes, students will show they are not willing to allow the fear of a few to affect a decision that should be made by the many.

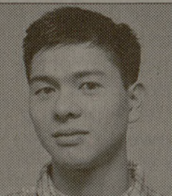
New Year, new traditions

Aggies should honor foreign cultures, traditions

Critics accuse the A&M campus of consisting solely of close-minded conservatives. Although these accusations are not true, some Aggies do remain close-minded to the traditions of other students. Typical snide remarks about another's attire, hair style, cultural events or heritage indicate the lack of respect for other peoples and cultures. Although the severity of this problem is debatable, students should always try to keep an open mind toward unfamiliar customs.

Chinese students began the festivities for the year of the Ox last Friday. Celebration for the Chinese New Year includes a host of traditions that may seem odd, especially to those unfamiliar with the Chinese culture. Likewise, Aggie traditions may appear silly to individuals unaware of the unity they foster. We all know the significance of A&M traditions does not lie in the actions themselves, but in the

Columnist



Travis Chow
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emotions they create. Sharing this understanding of others' customs will help us live up to the world-class university standards A&M boasts.

Aggies who think they cannot relate to cross-cultural students' immigration should recall their own scary transition into college life. Remember how the Aggie traditions helped dissolve the insecurities and anxieties? Fish Camp's exhaustive schedule of yells, games, skits and other warm-and-fuzzy activities gave freshmen feelings of acceptance. Midnight yells and football games

put us all in the same boat: the Aggie team. Greetings of "howdy," though not exercised as often as advertised, maintain an atmosphere of openness and friendliness. These customs of the Aggie culture provide participants with a new sense of home.

When misunderstood folks dare tease Aggies about their crazy, backward traditions, Aggies

stand together because they understand the vital role traditions play. A tradition, no matter how silly or solemn, is invaluable because of its emotional ends not its physical means. Those who have eaten Copenhagen at Fish Camp, given up sleep for Bonfire or shed a tear at Muster can certainly attest to this distinction. They know not to judge a tradition merely by the act, but by the emotional relief and communal bonding.

With this insight, students should empathize with others practicing unfamiliar traditions. For a warm-up, let's look at a tradition celebrated by at least one-billion people every year: the Chinese New Year.

Festivities last a few days. For the more socially inclined, they last a few weeks. Families and friends travel long distances to share old stories and delicious feasts. Customary food items include "lotus seed candy," "melon seeds" and a dazzling array of poultry and seafood. Out in the streets, children set off strings of firecrackers, and men dressed as dragons parade through crowds. Perhaps the most well-known tradition, the exchange of small red envelopes stuffed with money, signifies wishes of fortune and prosperity.

These festivities may seem strange to the casual observer. Some may even wonder why the Chinese need their own new year. Others may associate new-year celebrations with brilliant fireworks and drunken gatherings, not obnoxious firecrackers and family visits.

But to appreciate foreign customs, students should understand through their own experiences, the true significance behind the traditions. Chinese New Year festivities provide cross-cultural students with a sense of home. Practicing native traditions with fellow immigrants can restore the security they left behind. Sentiment from Yi Li, a Chinese international student, on her first Chinese New Year in America, echoes the feelings of those who have ever reached to Aggie traditions when times were rough.

"There were so many Chinese students together," she said. "Even though we are so far away from home, the comfort was there, and I felt at home."

My family and I also rely on Chinese traditions for emotional relief. I went to Dallas this weekend to pay respect to my deceased grandfather. He passed away without seeing his progeny for 15 years, except for my father, who managed to make it back to Hong Kong one week before his death. Since my grandfather's departure, every Chinese New Year's Eve we burn incense and papier-mâché gold nuggets as gifts for his afterlife. This custom is the only way I can remember him.

Whether burning incense or paying respect at Silver Taps, we all rely on traditions for emotional support. The next time someone who dresses differently walks by, we should keep this understanding in mind.



Students should show respect for Silver Taps lest it disappear

After 99 years of Silver Taps at Texas A&M, many students have grown tired and ignorant of the tradition. If Aggies continue to show a half-hearted respect for their departed peers, perhaps the University should consider canceling Silver Taps.

Around campus before last Tuesday's Silver Taps, there were many startling sights. The crowd began to gather at the MSC's side entrance around 10 p.m. In the next 10 minutes, more students joined the crowd and the group grew louder. When the lights at the MSC went out, their volume was lowered, but some students continued to laugh and chatter as they moved toward the Taps site.

Columnist



Glenn Janik
Sophomore
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A freshman organization gathered at Rudder Fountain at 10:10 p.m. Their leaders began to shout marching orders to the vocal troops. Even after the lights went out the leaders continued to bark out, "Shut up!" and "Be quiet!"

When the bells began to toll at 10:15 p.m., some students remained less than observant. On the steps of A.P. Beutel Health Center, a group of students engaged in a rather fierce debate about the O.J. civil trial

verdict. And on the street beside them, cars continued to stream along, seemingly unaware of the impending Silver Taps. At 10:20 p.m., numerous lights at Leggett Hall, the closest dorm to the Silver

Taps site, were still glowing. Some of the other rooms turned their lights off, but left their televisions shadowing a blue glare out of the windows. This allowed anyone fortunate enough to have a window facing Sul Ross to watch both Silver Taps and Seinfeld.

Anyone needing a beacon to show the way to Silver Taps at 10:25 p.m. could have used the Biological Sciences Building West, with the entire second floor aglow.

By 10:30 p.m., the steps of the Ross Volunteer Firing Squad drowned out the sound of cars and any remaining conversation. The guns fired, Taps was played and the students paid their final respects to the departed Aggies.

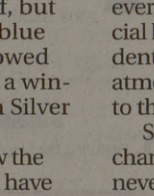
A description of Silver Taps released by the Traditions Council said, "Many changes have been made to the ceremony over the

past century." None of these changes, however, include turning Silver Taps into a social hour. Although the ceremony gives students a chance to come together, the atmosphere on campus should not be akin to the Dixie Chicken.

Silver Taps gives the student body a chance to say good-bye to Aggies who will never see another football game, another ring-dunking or another graduation. Many traditions on campus allow students to be unruly, loud and obnoxious — Silver Taps is not one of them.

It is reasonable to expect students to remain silent for less than an hour, or for campus residents to turn their lights off. Silver Taps' socialites and glowing buildings make the student body look uncaring. Imagine what the parents of an Aggie being honored think when they pass a group of clamoring

Columnist



Joshua Hill
Sophomore
English major

For Bookswap to realize its full potential, textbook publishers must quit milking the universities.

The basic texts for most subjects have been the same for at least 10 years, but new editions still come out every three to five years, gifting every generation of students with expensive doorstops. Fourteen editions of a calculus book are not justifiable.

If important developments do occur in a field, the instructor should have the responsibility to teach the development in class himself.

Liberal arts books also change the cover every three years. Publishers rewrite history books and constantly recognize English anthologies.

A new edition every 10 years would be easier to stomach.

English professor, Dr. William Clark, suspects publishers "create" new editions to keep the prices high.

"The profit motive is a driving factor," he said.

Students, however, can still save a lot of money with the Bookswap system if they use it and spread the word.

Maybe books in the future will be bought and sold for what they are worth.

Little known Internet bookswap saves students cash

Knowledge is power, but it also could be money when textbook swapping time arrives. This program is an Internet system programmed by Sam Fleitman and set up by Student Government to enable students to buy and sell textbooks among themselves.

The system is simple. Everything at the site (<http://www.tamu.edu/bookswap/bookswap.html>) is self-explanatory. The page even features tips on how to set prices and conduct safe bookswap meetings.

The need for such a system has been evident for a long time. Similar systems have been tried in the past, but have failed for lack of proper equipment.

Books bought for their weight in gold can be sold back only for copper, if they can be sold back at all.

Enterprising students can tack up and search notices all over campus, but the chance of finding a needed book is slim.

Bookswap eliminates many of these problems by offering a fingertip, campus-wide bulletin board for books. Clay Gaspard, a junior zoology major, said, "It's an awesome idea. It

revolutionized my life." Gaspard saved \$100 with the system, and he was a bit excited about it.

The biggest problem with the bookswap system is obscurity. Despite a steady flow of publicity over the last few years, few people know the program exists.

This lack of visibility has two adverse consequences. First, the fee every student pays is wasted through ignorance. Second, the program cannot work as well with only a small number of books up for

grabs. At times last year, the list of books for sale was down to two.

Here's something to think about: If half the student body used the program, approximately 20,000 students, the system could save each person about \$100, compiling a university-wide savings of \$2 million.

Rachel Grasso, a junior mechanical engineering major, said, "I wish I'd used it for this semester, but I was just lazy."

"Unfortunately, convenience is slightly on the side of the bookstores. Students must decide how much time they are willing to spend on setting up bookswap meetings.



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Wed. Feb. 12
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