


Bad drivers clog campus

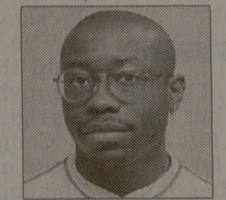
Self-centered arrogance has replaced simple courtesy, and it is evident on campus streets. Our narrow roads must accommodate over 43,000 pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers. The resulting frustration creates rather unfriendly driving conditions in what is supposed to be the friendliest place on Earth. Exacerbating the problem is a legion of drivers possessing both a "look out for No. 1" philosophy and a room-temperature IQ. At any given moment, on any given day, a sizable majority of drivers on our roads just cannot seem to grasp the simple concept of the turn signal. Others have yet to learn that red lights mean stop. Some interpret the phrase "speed limit" as a speed suggestion. Many drivers who crowd the local asphalt are compelled to play "chicken" when changing lanes or turning a the road, while waiting to see how close they can get to fellow drivers before zipping in front of them. Rather than obey traffic laws and customs, they eschew friendliness and exercise arrogance, all for the sake of self-convenience. Not even Dionne Warwick can predict just how bad this problem will become as the student population grows. We have all seen people who are compelled to make a right turn on a red light, people who stop in the middle of an intersection, and those people who decide to pass into an unoccupied lane. Last year, the University Police Department handed out 8,306 tickets for traffic violations, an average of one ticket for every six undergraduates. Of those, 1,882 were doled out in February of 1996 alone, and they represent only a fraction of the irresponsible drivers out there. Clearly, a significant portion of the student population is still in the dark ages when it comes to proper behavior behind the wheel. Some people seem to lose 30 IQ points as soon as they turn an ignition key. Bad judgment and poor manners have played a small part in breeding a legion of drivers who take to the streets and play bumper cars. The swerving, speeding and careening drivers who infest our roadways are more of a symptom of our sick society than an individual disease. Ill-behaved conduct and a lack of decorum are typical of those who have somehow been granted the authority to drive. Politeness and consideration of others have been tossed into the dustbin of history. Quite simply, bad drivers are an eclectic mix of the self-centered and the stupid. Lt. Burt Kretzshamare of the UPD asks students to obey traffic laws and simply use common sense and courteous driving. Common sense and courtesy — that's all it takes. Instead of rudely gesturing "We're No. 1" the next time someone decides to see how closely they can follow without scraping off any bumper chrome, kindly signal, pull over, and let them pass. Friendliness is contagious, and the congeniality challenged may someday return the favor. Texas A&M's bad drivers are the product of both ignorance and an egocentric culture. Bad drivers flaunt their distaste for common decency and etiquette by tailgating, speeding, weaving in and out of traffic and running red lights. Our only hope is that those who still value good manners will demand the cerebrally challenged to show the common sense and courtesy expected of civilized human beings.

Columnist

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Cloning America

Mandatory uniforms stifle individuality, fail to solve problems

Welcome to a new Texas A&M University, where everyone will be required to wear identical clothing. The campus shall be filled with Corps of Cadets clones, fraternity or sorority lookalikes and food service student-worker replicas. Of course none of this is true, but it could occur with the growing number of Texas schools implementing mandatory dress codes and uniforms. However, requiring students to wear preordained uniforms or adhere to strict clothing standards creates an environment where individualism is lost and students become a conglomeration of walking mirrors with no sense of self. In the university setting of A&M, one can almost always pick out individuals who belong to certain organizations. Fraternity brothers wear jerseys with their chapter letters emblazoned on front, but this does not mean they are overachievers who frequent keg parties every weekend and still attempt to preach brotherhood and unity during the week. The clothes a student wears are made of various fabrics, but the individual within is never in direct correlation to the style worn. Once seen as the trademark of private and parochial schools, student uniforms are making a widespread appearance in more public schools every year. And while Houston is only 90 miles away from College Station, 168 of the 257 schools in its independent school district have adopted uniformed attire guidelines. The policies and procedures listed in the schools' programs range from preselected modern clothing to old-fashioned, required garments. Schools are training students to become numbers rather than individuals, but dress codes and the establishment of school uniforms do serve a purpose in certain arenas of today's society. In an Associated Press report issued on

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Feb. 17, 1997, school officials commented on the use and effectiveness of school uniforms and dress codes. Mary Ann Polhemus, principal at Ashford Elementary in Houston, said the school uniforms utilized at Ashford helped "neaten up" the campus. "The kids look wonderful; the kids feel good about themselves," she said. "The fact that we are still seeing such a high compliance rate, I think speaks very well for the fact that the kids like them (the uniforms)." But students in elementary school ultimately have no choice in what they wear, whether in or out of school. At such a young age, the final decision rests with the students' parents. It is the parents' choice to voice their opinion about school uniforms, and their children have to roll along with the punches. This is where the problem begins. If students are exposed to an environment where they are forced to imitate their peers, they will grow to believe differences in the way people look, think and act do not matter. Of course, the world would be a better place if more people saw past skin color, religious beliefs and sexual orientations, but these characteristics also make individuals unique in a society designed to expand. Gallegos Elementary, located in east Houston, introduced uniforms — "red-and-black plaid jumpers, black jeans and a red or white shirt" — into its student conduct rules in the spring of 1996. School officials noted distinct changes in behavior when students were allowed to celebrate Go Texan Day out of uniform on Feb. 7, 1996. Principal Eva Loreda said the students were more clamorous without their uniforms. "The teachers even noticed it. They noticed that their (the students') conduct was so different in the classroom," she said. There is no doubt the students reacted in

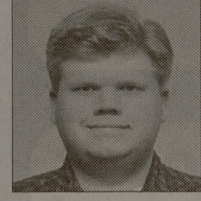
such a way because they had been stagnated in an educational atmosphere filled with clothing constraints. But the reasoning behind the usage of dress codes and uniforms does not stop at the elementary-education level. As students grow and attain higher levels of formal education, rules and policies follow them into their new schools. Within the Pasadena school district, 27 schools have enforced dress codes, and 10 others have instilled mandatory uniform rules. Rick Schneider, the district's superintendent, was quoted in an AP report as saying, "We wanted to minimize or eliminate the gang influences in our schools. One of the things that was rapidly brought to our attention is that clothes apparently possess a great deal of symbolism with gangs." Although a noble approach to rid the district's schools of a serious social problem, Schneider overlooked the personal connection students form with their clothes. Assuredly, "the clothes do not make the student," but an individuality exists when one wears a favorite pair of jeans or newly-purchased jacket. Whether the student decides to join a gang or behave in a manner unbecoming of an ideal student, the final responsibility of how an individual con-

ducts his or her decorum should not be a reflection of the clothes worn. The Texas legislature needs to rethink any future bills or plans to implement dress codes or mandatory uniform guidelines. When students are forced to comply with a rule over which they have no control, the outcome is worse than the beginning situation.



Student Government fumbles yell leader referendum

The yell leader run-off referendum is finally over, and now yell leaders will have run-offs just like every other elected position on campus. Regardless of individual opinions on the issue, the culmination of a powerful political philosophy has occurred because of the dedication of the Texas A&M student body. In The Social Contract, Rousseau said, "The people is never corrupted, but it is often deceived." His words are the most concise explanation of what happened with the Yell Leader run-off referendum. Election commissioner Jason Jaynes threw out 378 votes because several students, including senior yell leader Gary Kipe, were encouraging students to vote in the referendum. Unfortunately, this is the second time in a year that Student Government has casually thrown the sacred voice of the

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people to the wind. But Student Government is obviously uneducated about the power of the voice of the people. Rousseau said, the "people" is a word synonymous with the "general will." The general will is inclusive of everyone under the government. Whenever the general will is consulted on political matters, it cannot be wrong. An example of this is evident in our own country where for over 200 years the general will has elected the president — if the theory was incorrect, the general will would have been wrong and our government would have collapsed. Rousseau also states that institutions and individuals can be corrupted but the general will can never be corrupted — unless it is deceived. Student Government consulted the general will and called the student body to vote

on this issue, then failed to implement the findings. This time the decision of the student body will be implemented, but it does not excuse the casual disregard for liberty demonstrated by the actions of Student Government. Unfortunately, the old adage, "absolute power corrupts absolutely" is still alive and well in the Koldus building. The reason behind the disqualification of 378 votes by the election commission is that Kipe and others were campaigning in the MSC. There is no inherent harm in campaigning. The fact is that Kipe and the others who were in the MSC that day were only encouraging students to vote in an election that Student Government failed to set until the last minute. The material he distributed traced the simple origins of the referendum. At the very worst, someone read it and decided to vote. There is no difference between this kind of influence and one friend telling another, "Hey, did you remember to vote?" Student Government basically

is admitting they do not want students to vote by singling Kipe out as the bad guy. Instead of approaching the issue holistically on a professional level, they have resorted to using their power unjustly, painting an innocent using his unalienable rights as an enemy of the system. Even if the Student Government constitution gives the election commission the right to eliminate votes, it is not justifiable in any case. Whether students' votes were thrown in the trash, every student who participated by voting or signing a petition contributed to an undeniable force — the will of the people to alter government to do what they know is right. The view that representatives in government are an institution separate from the people is a modern-day fallacy perpetuated by those in power. Representative government is always at the beck and call of the people, regardless of how they individually feel about it. The day a representative government decides not to listen to the voice of the people is the day it signs the papers for its own dissolution. Regardless of what those in power believe, they are always forced to do what the general will requires. Instead of blaming Kipe for the loss of liberty, blame the institution of Student Government. Kipe was exercising a basic right — the right of free expression to encourage something. It should be done more on campus as well as in this country as a whole. The only places where this is considered wrong are in authoritarian, despotic governments. On a deeper level, the yell leader referendum proves that government is not separate from the people — it is obedient to the general will. Part of every student's responsibility as an Aggie is to attempt to improve Texas A&M. If an individual feels he is right, he has the right to spread his views to change the system. As far as Student Government is concerned, we can hope that they will listen more to the general will instead of their individual wants and desires.



MAIL CALL

Morales abandons minority students
 The following is in response to Dan Morales' recently stated opinion in which he declared Affirmative action Illegal. The low number of minorities attending Texas A&M is one tradition which this institution does not need. However, when Texas Attorney General Dan Morales recently issued his opinion against using ethnicity as a factor in university admissions, minorities lose support. Morales' written opinion is a step in the wrong direction. By using only "race-neutral" policies, Morales will fail in

achieving his own goal of graduating a cross section of the Texas population. Hispanics and blacks comprise over 35 percent of the Texas population. Yet, according to 1996 fall student body profile at Texas A&M, Hispanics and Blacks make up less than 14 percent of the student body. These disparities indicate that minorities are not attending Texas A&M in representative numbers. Without using ethnicity as a factor in admissions and unless we begin correcting the inequalities faced by minorities in the primary and secondary school levels, we risk becoming an even more unrepresentative student body. Only the state of Texas is be-

ing affected by Morales' opinion on "race-neutral" admissions. As the spotlight turns to Texas for guidance and leadership, we must urge the administration at Texas A&M and the student body to become active in supporting the value of an ethnically representative university.

Maria Jimena Albaracin
 Class of '98
 Accompanied by 14 signatures

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