

Taking education by the book

Students should branch out from course syllabi to gain full education

Students at Texas A&M seem content to have their education handed to them. They fear stepping outside the program listed in their catalog, and hesitate to research anything beyond the scope of their classes.

Frequently, Aggies ask what possesses others to read on their own initiative. They wonder when one finds the time to peruse an enjoyable book. Students who read books not listed on their class syllabi are often treated by their peers as anomalies.

But, students should begin to take responsibility for their own education. They should learn how to acquire knowledge on their own. Aggies should realize the easiest method for expanding their knowledge base is often the scorned and readed library.

On this campus, an attitude of complacency permeates the academic environment. Students only are motivated to learn things included in a course schedule—extra materials appear irrelevant. When professors insert an interesting anecdote into their lecture, students are quick to ask whether the story will be on the next exam.

This state of mind was ingrained in students at a younger age. High schools around the state are implementing TAAS classes, designed to teach students how to pass a test, but they do not provide the means to understand the material.

Unfortunately, this standard of mediocrity is unacceptable in a corporate world. No one should consider education complete at graduation. If students are incapable of independent learning on a campus, where facilities are readily available, they will have difficulty honing these skills later.

As technology advances, most members of the work

force will have to undergo new training. Self-education is not only cheaper, but often more effective. By taking responsibility for their own enrichment, students are able to focus on the information they are interested in, enabling them to work at a comfortable pace.

Most college students prefer the prime time line-up to an evening of reading. Studies show television viewers are in a near-catatonic state. Books, however, are a more profitable pastime, increasing vocabulary and imagination.

Books have phenomenal entertainment value aside from teaching potential. This generation, and this nation, seem to have lost interest in literature. The United Kingdom prints three times as many books as the United States, even though it has only one-fifth of our country's population. Most Americans find "classic" books distasteful. Traumatized by a bad English class, they are scared to have anything to do with a book older than themselves.

While an aversion to time-honored writing is unfortunate,

students should not allow this to define their attitudes toward all books.

A handful of contemporary writers have enticed young people back to the bookstores. John Grisham and

Michael Crichton have developed a large following, but Grisham notes that some people have stopped reading his books, because they are content to wait for the movie version.

Americans are constantly losing their patience for books. This is an era when people live for instant gratification. They see no reason to spend up to a month with *War and Peace* when *Cliff's Notes* are only a few pages, and the movie a couple of hours.

It has been said, "A year from now, you will be no different except for the books you've read and the people you've met."

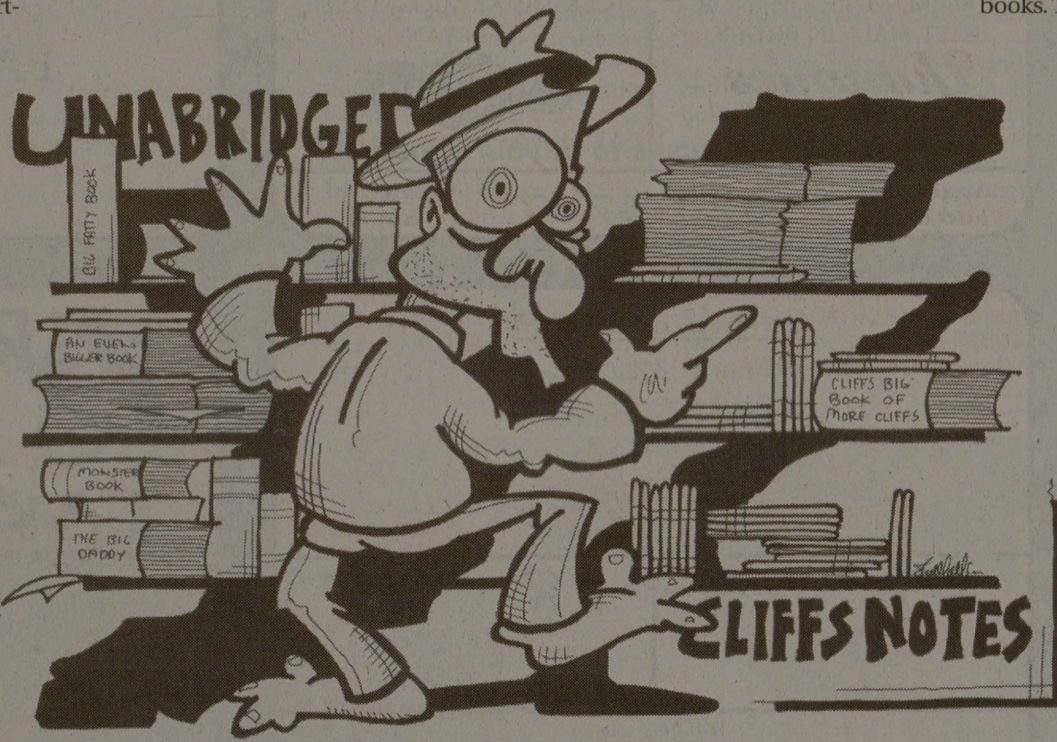
Aggies and other students have ample opportunities to meet many intelligent and influential people, from top researchers to world leaders.

Few students, however, voluntarily expand their horizons through literature. Everyone should continually work through a list of books they hope to read. The average person has plenty of time to spend with a good book. Free time before class, a bus ride or hours in front of the television can be converted into quality reading time. An hour of reading will likely prove more valuable in the future than a night of Must See T.V.

Columnist



David Johnston
Junior
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Victim mentality weakens society's ideals of responsibility

The dog ate my homework, is an excuse we all may have attempted to use during our grade-school years. Unfortunately for some people, making excuses doesn't end in elementary school.

Failing to take responsibility for one's actions is a problem which plagues our culture. Last Tuesday, Stephen Gaines, a former Texas Tech University football player, became part of this problem.

Gaines filed a lawsuit for damages in excess of \$1.25 million against Tech on counts of racketeering, fraud, forgery and negligence.

Christopher Kalis, Gaines' lawyer, said the suit is rooted in the presumption that Tech used him for his athletic ability, while neglecting his academic needs.

His (Gaines') whole attitude toward the system is so skewed because the system was an athletic system, not an educational sys-

tem," Kalis said. "These people (at Tech), as much as they say they have not ignored the academic needs of student-athletes, are giving that idea nothing but lip service. Look at what they're doing to keep these kids eligible."

Gaines' suit is an example of the "victim" mentality that persists in today's society. By claiming his academic misfortunes as a result of Texas Tech's exploitation, he attempts to absolve himself of all responsibility in the matter.

"The main thing I wish I could get out of this lawsuit is for them (Tech coaches and administrators) to quit lying to people, saying they care about education," Gaines said. "After you sign [a letter of intent], they don't care. Their attitude is 'come to practice, miss class.'"

Gaines said that Tech coaches provided him with test answers and fixed classes so he could remain in good academic standing.

After he was placed on scholastic suspension in the spring of 1994, Gaines left the university. Despite spending four-and-a-half years at Tech, he earned only 58 credit hours.

Gaines' claims ignore that athletic scholarships are an opportunity to gain an education, not a ticket to play in the pros. Texas Tech does not owe him an education; he simply failed to capitalize on the opportunity provided to him.

Gaines' allegations of grade-fixing further undermine his position. If these claims are true, Gaines robbed himself by accepting these favors.

The use of victimization to defer responsibility demoralizes individuals. It declares actions as the results of circumstances, as opposed to rational choice. This results in people who believe they are helpless to control their personal history and emotions.

The solution to our responsibility problem is to hold individuals accountable for their actions.

On Jan. 3, in Washington, D.C., Gueorgui Makharadze, a Georgian diplomat who was

intoxicated caused a traffic accident which killed 16-year-old Joviane Waltrick. Makharadze tried to avoid prosecution by hiding behind the diplomatic immunity provided through the Georgian Embassy.

Fortunately, Makharadze did not allude justice. Georgia president Eduard Shevardnadze held Makharadze accountable for his actions by waiving his diplomatic immunity. Makharadze was arraigned on charges of involuntary manslaughter Thursday.

The issue of accountability recently reared itself here at Texas A&M University, as the yell leader run-off election debacle ended. The most disturbing aspect of the proceedings was how little pressure the yell leaders themselves received. While the Student Senate endured a publicity nightmare, the yell leaders were hardly touched. Only yell leader Gary Kipe campaigned for run-off elections.

At any point in the debate, the yell leaders, as a group, could have chosen to implement the student-demanded run-off elec-

tions. However, it took another student referendum to hold the yell leaders accountable for the run-off elections that the student body required of them.

When individuals are not held accountable for their actions, people get away with murder—literally in Makharadze's case. The unwillingness to hold others accountable explains phenomena such as deadbeat dads and prostitute-soliciting politicians.

When individuals take responsibility for their own misdeeds, they can begin to repair the damage they have done.

For Stephen Gaines, it means putting his education in his own hands. For the yell leaders, it means implementing the run-off elections they should have created last spring.

As for Gueorgui Makharadze, no atonement will bring back Joviane Waltrick, but perhaps accepting responsibility for his actions will prevent others from making similar mistakes.

Columnist



John Lemons
Engineering
graduate student

Needy communities should not rely on mandatory volunteer work

Volunteer work is vital to this campus and the country.

Mandatory community service, however, can turn students away from volunteer work permanently. Last week, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that high schools can require volunteer work for students to graduate.

The court case involved Chapel Hill, N.C.

High school student John Bernhard, who sued the city school board for requiring him to serve 50 hours of volunteer service before he could graduate. His family argued that such requirements amounted to slavery. The high court dismissed the "slavery" argument, and refused to hear the case.

At first, it might seem the court

Columnist



Glenn Janik
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made the proper ruling—allowing local schools to make their own decisions concerning volunteer work. However, the impact of the decision is frightening. By allowing high schools to require community service, we eliminate all legal precedent preventing elementary schools or college institutions from requiring mandatory volunteer work.

Volunteers are vital to help solve the numerous problems each community faces. In Bryan-College Station, elementary school children are in need of tutors, the Twin Cities Mission needs soup kitchen volunteers and the Northgate area needs cleaning after every weekend. In each of these areas, Aggies and Bryan-Col-

lege Station citizens have met the needs of the community. The Resident Hall Association cleans up the Northgate area, Aggies flood local schools with reading volunteers and a wide diversity of campus organizations aid the mission. But these volunteers provide help out of the goodness of their hearts, not because they are forced to comply.

A 1996 survey from UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute showed 71.8 percent of college freshmen performed some sort of volunteer work—38.4 percent donating more than one hour per week. Only 8 percent of these students were "forced" to volunteer in high school.

Most students enter Texas A&M with a minimal amount of volunteer experience, but are soon caught up in the college atmosphere of community service. Rambunctious freshmen flock to the Big Event, Replant

and whatever other service projects are available. Should A&M, however, expect these incoming freshmen to volunteer only because they were forced to do so in high school?

Teenagers are inclined to rebel against authority. Forcing community service upon 15- and 16-year-olds could have a dangerous impact. Some of these students would naturally give time to help out their church or school, but forcing them to do so might lead to volunteer backlash. The service becomes burdensome and unsatisfying when it is required. College students enjoy community service because of the camaraderie and sense of personal worth it builds. If younger students fail to experience these positive benefits of community service, they will not seek out volunteer work in college.

Mandatory volunteer work is not

only a contradiction in terms, but a direct conflict with the American ideal of freedom. In countries such as Iraq, 18-year-olds are required to volunteer for two years of military service. This idea may be repugnant to American students, but is the United States being led down the same path?

The AmeriCorp program, a Bill Clinton project that pays college students to volunteer, was designed not only as a community service plan but as a pilot program to test a method for mandatory volunteer service after college. Many in the federal government would rejoice at the opportunity to force students into becoming an indentured labor force, to implement a wide range of social programs. Mandatory volunteers would allow government to staff its programs free

of charge. While some may claim these volunteers are serving their country, forced work without pay will lead to modern-day slavery. If high schools begin with forced community service, the threat of liberal government forcing volunteer work on college students won't be far behind.

Students who grow tired of the self-serving, material aspects of the world can turn to community service as a way to give back to society. But if schools and governments begin to force volunteer service, many individuals may develop cynical attitudes toward helping others. School boards and city councils who wish to see volunteers improve community living need to stay out of the way—in this manner only volunteer work will continue to succeed.



MAIL CALL

Band brings spirit into G. Rollie White

In response to Jamie Burch's sports column on Feb. 20

Burch said the Aggie Band's music "serves no purpose but to destroy fan excitement."

You've got to be kidding me. I honestly can say that nothing grips my heart as much as hearing the sound of "Recall." No song makes it beat as fast as when I hear the opening strain of "Patton" and the whoops of surrounding Aggies.

Burch states, "the student body does

not approve of the current practice of playing marching music," according to a survey that he conducted. My question is: Why aren't there any details of the survey in your column?

Finally, Burch remarks, "why do they call themselves a nationally renowned band if they do not have the proper equipment to play music that any other college band in the country can play?"

As a freshman member of the Aggie Band, I can only suggest one answer: We are a nationally renowned band and the fact that we "march to the beat of our own drum" is what makes it so.

Thomas C. Purdy
Class of '00

Court tightens grip on clinic protesters

In response to the article "Court Says Protesters Can Confront Patients" from Feb. 20

The article deals with the Supreme Court's recent ruling that protesters "can confront patients on public sidewalks as long as they stay at least 15 feet away from clinic entrances." The court ruled thus in order to protect freedom of speech, which is an important right, but there are limits to this freedom. Anti-abortion activists are using free speech in a way that intimidates people into feeling they can't exercise their right to an abortion. Such intimidating speech has a detrimental effect on patients. The court would not have seen fit to set a limit of 15 feet if it didn't feel that the speech of the protester represented some kind of threat.

This ruling brings us one step closer to having no real choice at all.

Katy McIntosh
Class of '97