

**Ministry
 plagued by
 odd goals**

There is a shadow of an organization on this campus. It is called the Campus Ministry Association, and its purpose is to promote communication and cooperation among various religious on-campus organizations. There's something wrong with a group which tries to bring religious

Columnist



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groups together to sit down and openly discuss problems with words instead of bombs and bullets. But such a group might have a more sinister purpose: to break down the differences between religions and unite the world under a single worship. The CMA does not claim to be such an organization. Frank Yates, a Presbyterian minister and president of the CMA, said the group is "a professional organization, ecumenical in nature," and its purpose is to create a forum to generate dialogue and respect (not necessarily agreement) among various religious groups on campus. This is a worthy goal, but there are some areas of concern.

The CMA is a "professional organization," which means it is aimed at individuals who serve as ministers to the students of A&M. This could be a problem because some ministries on campus are not directly associated with any particular church or denomination. Therefore, they are not directly represented in the CMA. These groups could wake up one day and find themselves left out of on-campus activities.

This mentality further serves to alienate student leadership in other religious organizations. In fact, the student leadership of several groups did not know they were involved in the CMA before seeing their organizations' names on a flier.

The CMA is planning leadership training for students in the future, but how much religious training can Jewish, Baptist, Mormon, Catholic and Unitarian individuals have in common? There are serious doctrinal differences between these groups which cannot be overlooked easily.

The CMA also is "ecumenical in nature," defined by Webster's Dictionary as "of or encouraging universal Christian unity."

This presents two problems. First, if the CMA pertains to Christian unity, then non-Christian groups, such as the Jewish Hillel Foundation, should not be involved. Second, the CMA seeks to unify, but this is impossible without coming to an agreement in doctrine.

Unfortunately, the CMA is the only means by which religious groups can meet directly with the administration. This alone gives the CMA the same type of power the media wields in national politics.

A group's concerns cannot be addressed if they are not heard, and they cannot be heard if there is no forum to address those in power. If members of the CMA are the only ones who can access the administration, then a certain amount of power is given to those who determine membership requirements.

That individual easily could exclude certain denominations or belief systems, and then lobby against these not-included groups. The outcome between the CMA and other religious organizations is uncertain.

The University should carefully evaluate the organization and how it performs its functions. The CMA should be looked upon with caution and watched closely by those who feel their religious freedom someday might be in jeopardy.

Falling in a big way

Considering the Earth's impending doom, grades aren't crucial

Kaboom! In the time it took to read that word, Earth could be blown out of the Milky Way by an asteroid.

No human will ever comprehend the immensity and complexity of the universe. Grasping the fact that the human race could end in a matter of years is only the beginning of a thought process which could lead humans to think on a higher level.

Whether fretting over a problem with school, work or a relationship, humans need to learn a little humility.

About 65 million years ago, an asteroid hit Earth near the Yucatan peninsula, a collision which wiped out the dinosaurs according to some scientists.

Human life is so trivial when thought of in cosmic terms. In a matter of minutes, the human race could all be vaporized, everything our species has worked for or developed would be gone.

Scientists predict an asteroid, a much larger form of cosmic debris, will hit Earth every 250,000 years or so.

However, meteorites enter the Earth's atmosphere every day. Most are traveling so fast they burn up before impact. But cosmic debris some scientists would consider "small" could easily wipeout the Texas A&M campus.

John Connolly, a scientist at the NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston, said the chance of humans being affected by cosmic debris is rather high.

"The chances of [the earth] being hit by an asteroid are better than [a person] being in a car accident," Connolly said.

Columnist



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In 1994, astronomers had the first opportunity in scientific history to predict the collision of an asteroid with a planet in our solar system. Fourteen months before it was forecast to hit Jupiter, the largest planet in the Solar System, astronomers around the world began preparing for the event. As the meteor closed in on the planet, tension rose. But before impact,

the meteor broke into several smaller pieces.

From Earth, the collision of the first and largest meteorite with Jupiter appeared to be a relatively small explosion — like the size of a mosquito bite on one's back. In reality though, the collision created an explosion the size of Earth, and the fires it ignited burned for over a year.

Obviously, the human race would be history if an asteroid that size hit Earth.

Cosmic collisions occur as planets' orbits around the sun coincide with those of asteroids. Therefore, the laws of probability and chance will ultimately lead to disaster. The severity of the disaster would depend on the size of the asteroid, which can range from a fraction of a mile wide to several miles wide.

To calculate the austerity of an asteroid colliding with Earth, one multiplies one-half the mass of the object times the square of its velocity.

Dr. Duwayne Anderson, a professor of geology, said a major collision would create a reaction unlike any human has ever seen.

"[Asteroids] are traveling several thousand miles an hour,"

Anderson said. "Detonating all nuclear weapons on the planet at the same time would not equal the energy of one of these large asteroids hitting the Earth."

If an asteroid hit the Earth, it would likely penetrate the upper crust of the surface and bury itself several miles deep in the lithosphere causing an explosion. The explosion caused by the impact would project debris for hundreds of miles. A cloud of dust and soot would fill the air,

blocking the sun's rays for several years. If the impact itself did not kill everything, the deprivation of sunlight could wipe out all other living things.

However, not all cosmic debris which falls to Earth is damaging.

This year, for example, NASA scientist Dr. David McKay found evidence of ancient bacteria on a meteorite from Mars.

Attempts have been made to create some sort of device which could throw an asteroid off

course, but not even the most powerful weapons in the United States' arsenal could prevent a massive rock from hitting the Earth.

The cost of building something capable of such a challenge would bankrupt even the richest country.

We are alive for only a fraction of the time it takes for a world to be created or destroyed. It is vital to the well-being of society that humans learn to look at things on a larger scale. That will help ease even the deepest pains.



Justice system fails to change criminals

The criminal justice system falters because emphasis is placed upon vindictive punishment rather than constructive rehabilitation.

Statistics illustrate the depth of this problem. The number of incarcerations quadrupled to 1.5 million people from 1980 to the present, while the overall crime rate has decreased steadily over the past quarter century.

There are so many criminals and repeat offenders that the United States is forced to open three 500-bed prisons every week to accommodate the increasing demand for imprisonment. The costs alone are astronomical. Last year, over \$100 billion went toward law enforcement.

This amount is more money than all federal social programs combined.

Despite the enormity of the costs, the social consequences are even more tragic. In many areas, prison has become a rite of passage rather than a punishment to be feared.

The sheer indignation criminals have toward the system should convince any-

Columnist



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one it is time to rethink and reevaluate the nation's policy on crime and punishment.

The United States incarcerates a higher percentage of its citizens than any other nation with a comparable crime rate.

The key to reforming the criminal justice system is focusing on renewal instead of refusal, and preparing non-violent criminals for integration into society by alternatives to punishment by incarceration.

One alternative is to give non-violent offenders non-custodial time to build skills to ease the transition back into productive society.

Secondly, the distinction between violent and non-violent offenders should be made. It is not justifiable to release violent offenders through the prison floodgates because of overly severe penalties exacted upon those who commit misdemeanors. Mandatory sentencing has stripped judges of sentencing power, making a three-time petty thief equal to an individual convicted of first-degree murder.

In addition to the rehabilitative

measures of education, drug treatment and work skills, prevention should be pursued in an aggressive manner. The first objective should be to propagate more child development programs.

From an early age, children should be guided toward wholesome societal participation.

One of the greatest triumphs of the latter half of this century is the Head Start program, which returns \$7 in benefits for every dollar invested. Former participants in this program achieve more and form a deeper commitment to community.

Another staple of prevention is drug treatment. One program in California returned seven times the state's investment in reduced crime and health-care costs. Criminal acts committed by participants in the program decreased by 66 percent for non-violent crimes and 71 percent for offenses with a weapon.

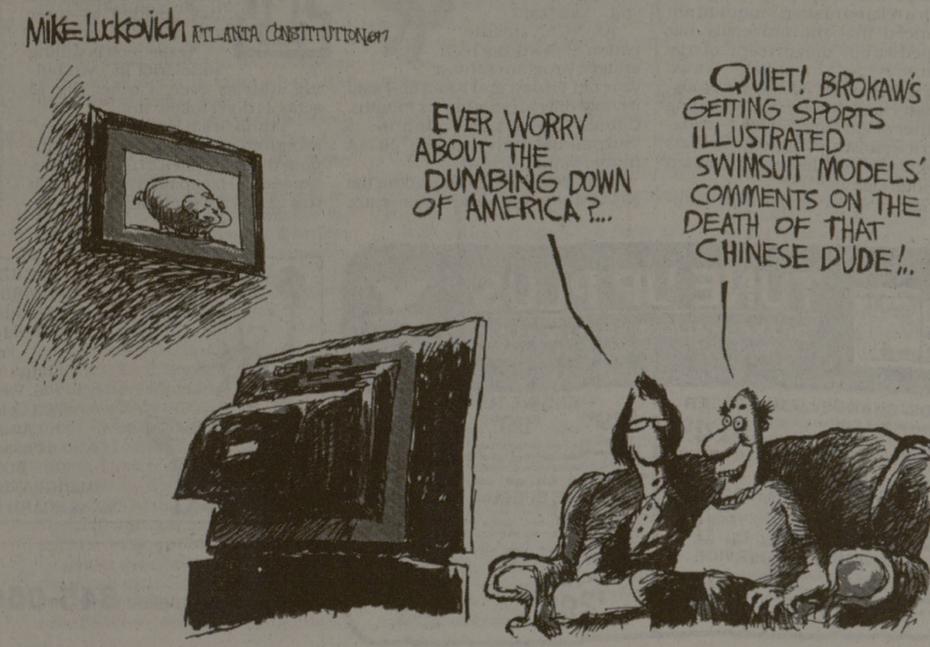
In 1991, for the first time in history, the United States spent more on prisons than it did on education. Society must question the current state of affairs when teachers receive less money in funding and salaries than the prison system.

With education comes the assurance of opportunity, thus reducing the need in some part to commit crime.

Job training also is essential in crime prevention. At-risk individuals must be equipped with the tools to pursue meaningful achievement to bring stability to the shattered inner-city neighborhoods of

this country. Our criminal justice system provides injustice not only to victims, but to society and criminals alike. It is imperative we reassess our antiquated concept of punitive punishment and realize a commitment to rehabilitation, values, dignity and discipline can administer punishment while still ensuring redemption.

Society must question the current state of affairs when teachers receive less money in funding and salaries than the prison system



**MAIL
 CALL**

Honesty deserves respect, recognition

Last week I lost a considerable amount of cash. By "considerable amount," I mean one month's rent money. It was not my fault, of course. I blame it on the dress I wore that day and its inconsiderable lack of pockets. Anyway, I counted the money as "gone" and I went about my way, preparing speeches and looking for secret formulas to stretch my Abraham Lincolns into Alexander Hamiltons. But to my surprise, a young lady by the name of September Smith found the money. She not only found it, she dialed long-distance phone numbers and drove around to find the rightful owner.

September, in all her loveliness, made me ask myself questions that

could be hard for anyone to answer: What would I have done in the same situation? I hope September reads this and realizes her actions are extraordinary and quite uncommon.

Courtney Caswell
 Class of '97

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