

The Gimmick of Campaigning

Student body president candidates lack solutions to election process woes

The onslaught is almost over. By Friday, many of the campaign signs, brochures, flyers and other paraphernalia will be scattered where they belong—in some storage shed or garbage dump on the outskirts of town.

Columnist



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Besides dealing with all these flower-petals and their showers of pollen, candidates were assaulted by fliers, campaign speeches, handshakes and commercialized signs sitting in the back of pickup trucks.

Of course, many students wisely disregard such propaganda. But on a campus where it was recently discovered that about 60 percent of the students didn't know the name of the student body president, this trend of ignorance needs to be stopped.

Voter apathy has been a top concern for the Senate lately. In fact, this was an issue the last time I attended a Senate meeting in 1995. And with the speed that the Senate passes legislation, they're probably still in conference.

At this time of year, the fact that ignorance is equated with bliss stems from the simple fact that candidates are jaded. And who can blame them when presidential candidates campaign on empty symbols such as clothing labels, soft drink manufacturers and football emblems.

Only one person can stop this senseless commercialization—the student body president. As defined in the constitution, the president has the power to reform campaign procedure, a power rarely invoked.

Sadly, the majority of platforms don't even scratch the surface of out-of-control advertising and copyright infringement. Most of them concentrate on the need to increase parking availability,

provide more Q-drops and reorganize the structure of Student Government.

Realistically, these are pipe dreams at best. Student Government, in its limited constitutional powers can only re-examine or advise policy action. What this means for student body president candidate platforms is "one out of three ain't bad."

The result is students, who bother to vote, usually vote for names higher up on the ballot; or they vote based on personality combined with name recognition. For the most part, Texas A&M gets a lukewarm, policy-making body.

A simple platform is best. And even without an act of God, many of the ills of A&M life can be solved in a few short steps.

For example, the most cost-effective way to increase parking availability is to ban freshmen from bringing cars on campus. Other universities across the nation do not allow freshmen to bring vehicles to school with them, and this is a successful policy.

Couple this with a residential life policy of giving freshmen first come first serve housing, and the University might increase participation in some of its now dying traditions.

Many freshmen are forced to live off campus by the allocation policy which only gives 80 percent of them a room. The other 20 percent, even if they are in the first round of selection, are given over-assignment notifications.

As far as campaign reform, the senseless barrage of cute, little signs must stop. The new president must set regulations stating all campaign signs should not be above 4 feet tall. And the colors allowed on the sandwich boards should only be maroon and white. We need to get rid of the candidates

who would rather be associated with the giants of corporate America than the university they wish to represent.

A candidate's full name and position sought also must appear on the sign, larger than any slogan gimmick or nickname. Of course, strict regulations must be backed up with strict enforcement. Any sign violating these rules should be removed by the Physical Plant, and the work hours should be billed to the appropriate candidates.

The problem of ballot order can be fixed by providing a random order of names on ballots at every voter poll location. This way, voters would rely less on order and more on substance when they fill out ballots. In fact, such legislation was proposed in the Senate not too long ago. Unfortunately, it was not undertaken.

Moreover, the invasion of privacy by door-knocking and sliding campaign propaganda under residence hall doors is unjustifiable. Door-to-door campaigning must be prohibited, and any corporate copyright infringement on fliers and handouts should not be allowed. When candidates use these materials, it infers that our Student Government is worth no more than a 30-second "please buy this" message.

Campaigning at such a low level is not unique to A&M by any means. Our very own national government has traded in public discussion and debate on serious issues for fancy political commercials, bumper stickers and celebrity endorsements. But Aggies pride themselves by being a cut above the rest.

The next student body president must hold true to this universal Aggie belief by focusing on campaign reform first, thereby giving classes of future Aggies a renewed and viable interest in Student Government.



Aggies create arrogant outlook

While many Texas A&M students endure endless Aggie jokes from hometown friends and neighbors, A&M has risen from a laughingstock to a nationally ranked academic institution over the past decade.

Columnist



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As current Aggies graduate and venture into the world of job hunting, the new-found reputation of the University can be

used as the needed edge to land ideal jobs. However, if students and faculty become too proud of A&M's growth and achievements, an avalanche of Aggie arrogance will soon bury the school in unchecked egotism and unbridled pride.

Most often, Aggie arrogance is evident in August, when preseason football polls are released. In 1995, a preseason poll by the Sporting News put Texas A&M at no. 1, and in 1996 an Associated Press poll ranked A&M no. 12. These early polls often lead Fish Camp countdowns, yell leaders and crew chiefs predict a New Year's Day crown for the National Champion Aggies. By mid-September, though, most of this arrogance is humbled.

However, Aggie sports are no longer the sole source of pride and arrogance on campus. A 1996 U.S. News and World Report ranking of universities placed Texas A&M in the top 50 for the first time. More recently, the April 1997 issue of Texas Monthly declared A&M the best

public university in Texas. The University's enrollment of undergraduate students is the highest in America, and President Ray Bowen claimed A&M's faculty to be one of the finest in the nation.

"We'll judge our faculty against anyone," Bowen said in Texas Monthly. Considering this influx of promising academic news, it is not surprising to see "On the Eighth Day God Created Aggieland" bumper stickers and "What do you call an Aggie Graduate? Boss!" T-shirts on campus every day.

While these benign displays of Aggie pride are humorous to most students at A&M, those not familiar with the University could perceive Aggie pride as arrogance. The reputation of Texas A&M is something each graduating Aggie will take to job interviews. If an employer learns of Aggieland's stellar academic standards and the school's commitment to creating leaders, all Aggies will have an inside track to landing a job. However, when Aggie pride causes students to boast about A&M being God's gift to man, the notability of the school suffers, and the Aggie label can become a maroon letter of shame.

This egotism is not limited to students. Faculty and staff can also contribute to campus arrogance. Though A&M's agricultural research is second to none, the political sci-

ence department publishes more articles than any other university, and A&M sciences are filled with award-winning professors. However, this provides no excuse for being arrogant. Traditionally, the intellectual elite were limited to a handful of Ivy League schools. But as A&M continues to recruit esteemed professors, a standard of excellence must be upheld. While professors have every right to be proud of their accomplishments, arrogance and self-righteousness give the University and its students a sullied reputation.

Aggies have many reasons to be proud of A&M. No school in the state and few in a nation foster the sense of community like that of A&M. Not only do Aggies have this sense of community, but they also have access to the "other" education. The "other" education gives students a chance to build leadership and moral strength, but it also should teach a sense of humility.

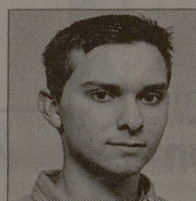
It has been said "Ego is the anesthesia that deadens the pain of stupidity." As A&M moves into the 21st century and attempts to fulfill its goal of becoming a "world class university," Aggies must avoid the temptation of bragging about the University's achievements.

If Aggies quit boasting and stand by their accomplishments speak for themselves, the standing of A&M will continue to grow. But if students degrade themselves to a level of petty arrogance, they risk becoming walking Aggie jokes.

RHA proves unfair to residents

It is common on the Texas A&M campus for students to pay money to attend this institution, be forced to make concessions and never be given the benefit of the doubt when controversy arises.

Columnist



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Students pay out of their ears for barely adequate facilities only to be chastised and mistreated by higher powers. The Department of Residence

Life and Housing is no exception. An incident in Aston Hall last semester serves as a wonderful example of the failure of due process. Not only were the students involved treated unfairly compared to similar experiences in the past, but they also were used as an example to other students and given a harsh punishment as an overly harsh symbolic gesture.

Each year at the Bonfire cut site, a group of freshmen from Aston are recognized by their crew chiefs for their hard work and dedication.

It is a tradition for these recognized freshmen to play a prank on their crew chiefs before Bonfire. The prank usually involves placing a variety of food products in the rooms of the crew chiefs.

This tradition has occurred for many years, with the usual punishment being the freshmen had to clean up the mess they had made.

However, this year the administration went grossly above and beyond past actions.

The freshmen played their

prank, according to tradition, then cleaned up the mess, leaving the rooms in the condition they were in before the prank.

While these freshmen may have gone a little overboard with their prank, no harm was done to anyone and no lasting damage was inflicted on the rooms.

Instead of merely being reprimanded (as had been done numerous times in the past), the freshmen were kicked off campus after a meeting with the South Area Coordinator—barred from Aston.

A subsequent appeal resulted in two students being allowed on campus in different halls and one student, who had no part in the prank other than assisting in the clean-up, being placed on housing probation for two semesters.

These freshmen were singled out and mistreated more than necessary. Although many other pranks occurred in the same period of time in Aston by other organizations, none of the students involved in them were punished. In fact, some resident advisors condoned and even participated in these pranks.

Moreover, no destruction of property actually occurred in the crew chiefs' rooms, because once the proceedings were underway, the rooms were already back to their original conditions.

The punishment handed down

by Residence Life and Housing was unusually severe for the committed act. In 1994, a resident pulled a knife on a resident advisor in an on-campus hall, had received one semester of housing probation. Apparently, threatening a staff member with a knife is less severe than playing a traditional prank.

This prank by the freshmen has been carried out by numerous people in preceding years. Instead of kicking the students off campus (which solves nothing and teaches no responsibility), the students in the past were allowed to implement cleaning programs in the hall.

Perhaps the greatest wrongdoing of Residence Life and Housing was the lack of care for the students in their appeal process.

Students who tried to compromise with the staff and administration after the decision were told by the South Area Coordinator that it was not his problem anymore and to seek help elsewhere.

The problem with this situation is that no third-party intervened to make an arbitrary decision. Only the administration's one-sided, flawed theory of justice was used to reprimand the students.

One conclusion can be drawn from this instance. Although the A&M administration constantly tells students to ask for help when it is needed, the reality is a plea for fairness falls on deaf ears, and students are turned away or given the runaround until confusion and unfairness defeat any chance of due process.

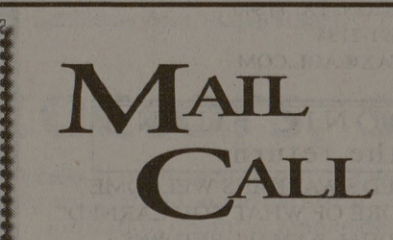


Pro-choice rally strays from issue

Regarding the pro-choice rally Saturday, March 22:

The issue of abortion divides Americans between two foundations of American freedom: individual liberty and sanctity of life. The choice of whether to abort a pregnancy should not be made lightly, but with sobriety and consideration.

Regardless of whether one believes the fetus is "alive" or "human," abortion stops a process which, left alone, results in the birth of a living, human being. Therefore, the decision of whether to have an abortion should be taken seriously. Ideally, it should be made with the support of family, friends, parents



Injured student assisted, ignored

Because of an auto accident, I will be on crutches for two weeks. Most people have been nice to me. People have offered to carry my books and take me to and from school. I have not been so lucky with doors.

There have been a few really nice people who have held doors open for me, but for the most part, people just walk by and let the door shut in my face. I have even had people stand in the Academic Building and watch me attempt to push a door open with my back while trying to drag the rest of myself behind.

This is not an easy feat. And in no way is it easy to be on crutches. I'm hurt by this behavior, especially at an institution like Texas A&M, where Aggies pride themselves on courtesy. Thanks to those who have taken the time to hold open a door.

To those who are too busy or just don't care, I hope if you are ever on crutches, you are lucky enough to be surrounded by helpful people. Unfortunately, I have not been so lucky.

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