

# Head-on collision

## Pedestrians put themselves at risk on campus

If you have ever thought a bullseye was painted on your chest, now would be the time to check again. Walking the narrow streets of Texas A&M, students become moving targets.

Every day is open season on pedestrians at A&M. Students who dare walk around campus are assailed constantly by bicycle-delivery persons desperately trying to stay on schedule. More dangerous are automobile drivers, navigating through throngs of students trying to get to class. Unfortunately, pedestrian stupidity and reckless drivers make cars a hazard to any campus pedestrian.

Last week, the Environmental Working Group and the Surface Transportation Policy Project released a report showing that pedestrians in the United States are almost twice as likely to be run over by a stranger driving a car as by a stranger with a gun. Although this fact might merely make a student wary of strangers, the truth is most people fear guns more than they do automobiles. Still, cars pose a greater threat to personal safety, and although guns are banned from campus, cars are not.

According to the University Police Department, there have been six pedestrian-automobile accidents over the past three years. Furthermore, close calls between cars and pedestrians happen every day. Many of these near-accidents are caused by careless pedestrians.

The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Safety Administration reports that 75 percent of fatal pedestrian-automobile accidents are caused by pedestrian error. Pedestrian behavior at A&M supports this fact.

Columnist



**John Lemon**  
 Engineering graduate student

Students step into streets oblivious to oncoming traffic, expecting cars to slow down or stop for them. Obviously, students do not understand basic physics. The kinetic energy stored in several hundred pounds of an automobile moving at upwards of 30 miles per hour can easily kill a pedestrian.

Sgt. Allan Baron of UPD said jaywalking on campus is a violation of traffic safety laws. "That's a misconception, that pedestrians always have the right of way," Baron said. "They only have the right of way in crosswalks."

Although pedestrians outnumber cars on campus, roadways are not democratic. The minority of cars rules the streets.

Conversely, drivers also should be blamed for the risky business of walking on campus. The old adage claims Highway 6 runs both ways. So do the streets of the A&M campus. However, the difference between Highway 6 and A&M is Highway 6 has DPS troopers to control speeding.

Despite a campus speed limit of 30 miles per hour, drivers' reckless speeding endangers students on campus.

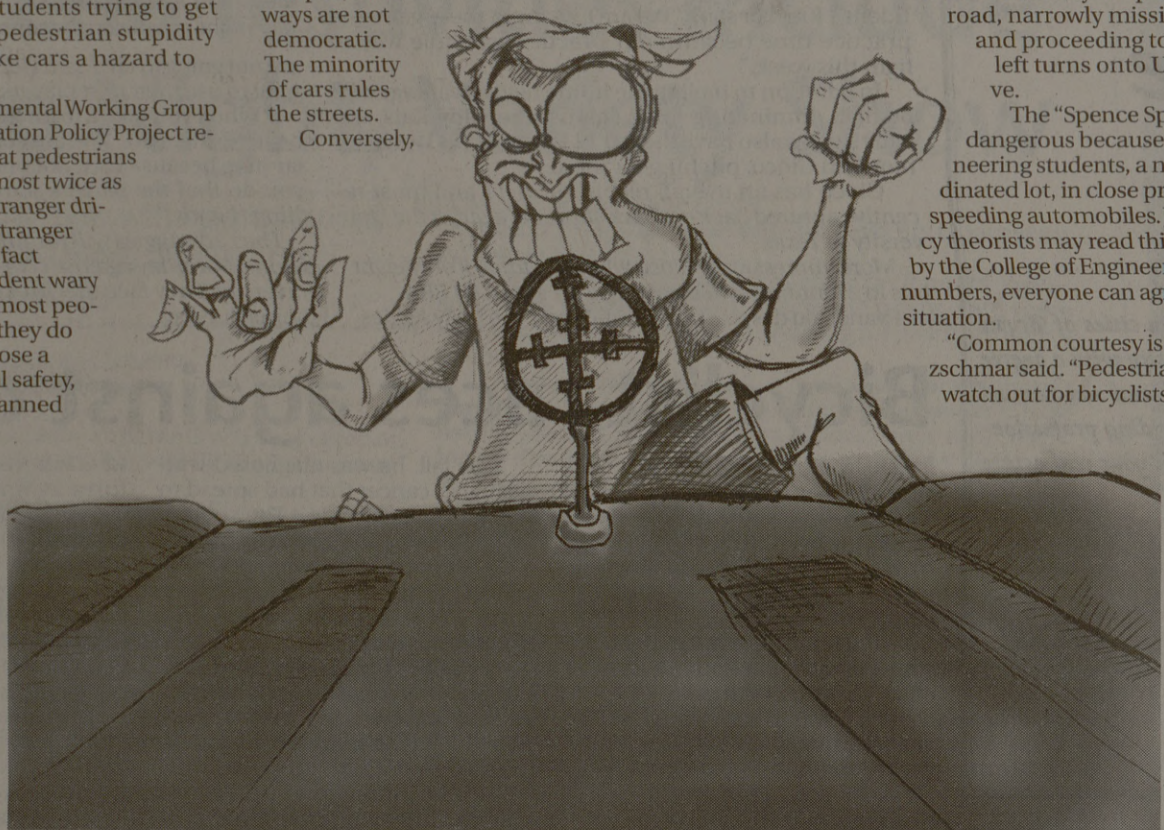
Lt. Bert Kretzschmar of UPD said the University is fortunate not to have pedestrian fatalities. "The streets are so narrow, so well-traveled and walked on that if you're speeding, the results could be dangerous," Kretzschmar said.

Spence Street, which runs between Zachary and the Engineering Physics Building, is particularly dangerous. Cars on this long, straight street have a tendency to speed down the road, narrowly missing students and proceeding to make illegal left turns onto University Drive.

The "Spence Speedway" is dangerous because it puts engineering students, a notably uncoordinated lot, in close proximity with speeding automobiles. While conspiracy theorists may read this as an attempt by the College of Engineering to reduce numbers, everyone can agree this is a bad situation.

"Common courtesy is the key," Kretzschmar said. "Pedestrians have to watch out for bicyclists and cars. Cars have to watch out for bicyclists and pedestrians."

Tragically, drivers on campus will not slow down, and pedestrians are unlikely to stop behaving foolishly until someone gets killed. Courtesy is exactly what is missing from

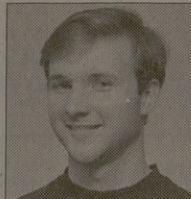


# Social Security Numbers rule students' lives

Texas A&M, student ID numbers show up on everything from registration forms to test forms and results to the display screens seen when entering the Rec Center. There are countless computer files and pieces of paper with ID numbers printed on them. This compromises students' security as citizens and consumers because their ID numbers

are also the Social Security numbers. Social Security Numbers came into being with the Social Security Act of 1935, and were intended for use only by the Social Security Administration. According to John Price of the B/CS Social Security office, they were never intended for use as a universal identifier. The Privacy Act of 1974 required any government agency requesting your SSN to tell you three things: First, whether the disclosure is required or optional; second, what law authorizes them to ask for your SSN; And third, how they intend to use your SSN. Private organizations are not held to the same

Columnist



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laws, but state universities like A&M are.

The potential for misuse of a student's SSN is enormous. *Information Technology Digest* reported that with an SSN and "a dose of computer knowledge or a modicum of effort, one can discover a person's grades, health status, credit record, traffic tickets, retail spending habits, and much more."

According to the Registrar's office, the SSN is used as an identifier because such things as credit hours and financial aid information need to be reported to the state and federal governments, which also use the number to identify people.

The Registrar's office also said the only type of fraud reported on campus has been students (usually disgruntled boyfriends or girlfriends) getting into the computer system and changing another student's schedule. While this can be irritating, it is not all that dangerous, and is usually dealt with quickly and severely. The main way to combat it is

to not share ID numbers with anyone. But there are other potential problems which cannot be prevented or solved so easily.

The first of these concerns employment. The Immigration Reform Law, passed in 1986, requires all applicants for employment to provide their SSN in the application process. Therefore illegal aliens must find a valid SSN/name pair to fool the IRS and INS. In Texas, a border state with a large population of illegal aliens, the result is an increased need for citizens to jealously guard their SSNs.

Another possible area for abuse is credit cards. Every student has seen the plethora of applications for Visa, American Express and Discover cards posted across the campus. They ask for your SSN, according to one company, so they can check your credit rating, which is also linked to you by your SSN. In such cases, it is the company's responsibility to cross-check the names and numbers with the Social Security Administration to make sure they match.

A problem can arise if someone gets your name and SSN off a document, such as a fee slip or test form. He or she can then apply for a credit

card in your name, and it will show up on your credit report.

The main security feature of credit cards, the use of the mother's maiden name as a password, is only useful in protecting access to an established account.

A Citibank associate who refused to be named said her husband had just spent a year trying to correct problems caused by someone's theft of his SSN and the resulting fraud on his account.

Because of these security concerns, other major universities, such as the University of Michigan, have stopped using the SSN as an identifier, opting instead to use a random number having nothing to do with the student's personal information. For government-reporting purposes, UofM's system has a cross-linked database connecting a student's ID number with his or her Social Security Number.

Each time a Social Security Number is written or used, it becomes more likely it can be stolen and fraudulently used. The University should stop jeopardizing students' privacy and security for the sake of their own convenience.

# American media should follow examples set by foreign neighbors

By neglecting the finer points of detailed evaluation and investigation, American media is imparting a very disingenuous impression of news which not only harbors the disastrous effect of apathy and inaction, but leads to misinformed perceptions and averse consequences borne of bad decisions.

Despite the emphasis on entertainment in the media, three German journalists believe the media have the role of focusing on more substantive issues, without undermining the public's appetite for lighter material. In other words, they encourage balance between entertainment values and serious matters so as not to distort or marginalize important events in society and culture.

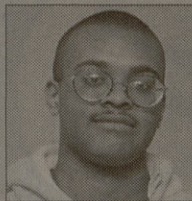
Three visiting journalists, Mandy Asbach, Phillip Velten and Rudiger Bawman, are part of an exchange program initiated by German and American media associations to foster better understanding and cooperation with foreign media. The program arose through a partnership of the former American radio network, RIAS and the Radio In American Sector with the Berlin Commission of Radio and Television.

The journalists are especially concerned with the "infotainment" approach pervasive in American media and what repercussions those influences have on foreign media, which emulate the standards of American media a great deal. As they see it, responding to consumer demands by emphasizing entertainment leads to the dilution of serious news, consequently narrowing perspective of broad and complex subjects since everything is given the same context and gravity.

Unfortunately, entertainment values do not allow viewers to understand broader issues transcendent of society, which may explain America's general apathy toward foreign policy. In fact, the journalists said in Germany the public is keenly aware of foreign policy because the media disseminate information and ideas in a highly relevant manner.

In contrast, American media dilutes news by oversimplifying complex ideas or by focusing on superficial aspects of an issue, such as the strategy of a political campaign rather than candidates' positions. The sum influence of this reduction is a general attitude of indifference toward problems and complacency toward the

Columnist



**General Franklin**  
 Sophomore English major

formulation of solutions. Perhaps the clearest example of this oversimplification and lack of context is the conflict in Bosnia. Although viewers were constantly bombarded with horrific images of mass despair, a proper understanding of the crisis was limited by coverage

bereft of background and analysis, vital to a country contemplating the consequences of intervention, as we were.

The Germans said the failure of instant media lies in the fact television exposes but does not necessarily inform. CNN, the most pervasive of all media outlets, exploits exposure at the expense of proper context when it endeavors to display every minute detail without imparting a reflection of the events. A prime example is a comparison of ABC's and CNN's coverage of the San Diego cult. While ABC attempted to balance its lurid images with reflection and background information, CNN exploited the sensationalism of the tragedy by exposing corpses and exploring the recesses of the compound.

In spite of the reproach the journalists displayed towards media, it is possible to envision an optimistic future if certain endeavors are pursued.

The primary solution is to heighten the relevancy of large ideas to common people by employing more critical analysis, background and explanation. While it is not the media's responsibility to control thinking, it certainly has the task of equipping viewers, readers, and listeners with the information necessary to make choices and pursue aggressive action. The only way to combat the inertia Americans approach some complex problems is for the media to translate the intricate ideas into succinct, ordinary terms important to all citizens to catalyze interest and involvement on the part of the public.

Additionally, Americans must become more savvy and not allow themselves to be manipulated by lurid or fanciful images intended to incite emotion without appealing to logic, intellect, and knowledge. Education has the capability to broaden awareness and perspective by allowing viewers to discern good information from bad by assigning importance and priority on a relative basis. In final analysis, as the journalists concur, a more informed viewership would steer the media from entertainment and toward enlightenment and illumination in a world undergoing rapid and momentous change.



## MAIL CALL

### Media coverage misinforms public

In reply to Brandon Hausenfluck's Apr. 16 column on America's negativity toward the media: In closing statements, the Hausenfluck claims, "that the media produces some trash, but the benefits society gains greatly outweigh the setbacks." True, the media is one of the greatest forums for knowledge, but to say that only "some" trash is produced is a big understatement. As with all things, positive attributes come with equally

negative ones — kind of a yin-yang thing. The media provides information, a sense of community and exposure.

Unfortunately, the media also provides a lot of flawed information, an abuse of power and overexposure.

Personally, the problem I see is media misuse, intentionally and unintentionally.

One part of Hausenfluck's column quoted journalism department head Dr. Charles Self. Dr. Self said, "Our whole picture of the world is profoundly shaped by the media." This is my point exactly.

People should learn to think for themselves.

Our faith in the media, namely television, has become ridiculous. The TV has become a new god.

Again, we can learn much from the media, but power will be abused. People should keep everything in perspective.

Eric Anthamatten  
 Class of '00

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