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# Stop-n-go at the drive-thru

## Newly constructed toll booth causes more campus traffic problems

The construction of the Evans Library Computing and Study Complex is making good. The \$30 million facility will offer students desperately needed resources such as computers and, yes, even a new parking garage. It also offers some wasteful expenditures of mysterious origin. The adjacent brick hut at parking Lot 35, for instance, stands out at a cool \$56,000. I don't even say how much the large, bank-esque "drive-thru" lanes in front of the Commons cost, because University officials I attempted to speak with could not give me a dollar amount.



**JOHN BURTON**  
columnist

Maybe I missed the headline over the summer: students demand construction of brick thing with green and red beacons," but was there really a need for this structure? And how many people were at the "We want to pay more fees" rally? When I think of what could make this campus a better place, constructionally speaking, items such as more parking areas, road repairs and refurbishing existing structures top the list. Building a hemlock blockade is near the bottom, next to adding more stuff after George Bush. The main problem with this situation, however, is the difficulty in determining how much money is spent on any particular project. The average person does not have the time or patience to sort through reams of contracts and bids crammed full

of legal jargon. In the optimum world of prudent construction, records of all campus improvements, including costs, would be easily accessible to all students. Texas A&M has a responsibility to give students and Texas taxpayers the opportunity to see how and where money is being spent. A link on the A&M homepage is the perfect place to disseminate just such (gasp) information. This would put the public back into Public Records, and it would eliminate any perceived sleight-of-hand skulduggery associated with large contracts.

The power of information in the hands of students could trigger other outcries. We could find out how much money Coca-Cola collects from its lucrative A&M contract, or how much fuel is wasted because PTTS wants to drive Jeep Cherokees instead of more efficient alternatives. As the iron curtain is pulled back even further, the powers that be would hesitate before imposing pet projects or increasing our newly-renamed University Authorized Tuition. A&M would shine bright as a national model of student-centered spending, and we would be true to our parking tag creed: Ags, we would lead by example.

This week I encourage you to visit the drive-thru monument. Take a sack lunch and a book if you want to, or just quietly contemplate the transformation of your money into this marvel of traffic-light engineering. After all, it is our newest landmark, honoring A&M's tradition of spending money while keeping students in the dark.

John Burton is a junior bioenvironmental science major.



BRAD GRAEBER/THE BATTALION

# Student life stifled on impersonal University campus



**MANDY CATER**  
assistant opinion editor

Texas A&M has always prided itself on being a large campus with a small town atmosphere. Students are constantly reminded of that down home, warm fuzzy "spirit of Aggieland." As A&M continues to grow, though, this feeling is being replaced with machine-like isolationism. The administration's focus has changed from student-centered to money-centered, and the University is becoming a prep school for the impersonal "real world."

A&M students are increasingly being cut off from any personal interaction in their university experiences. Beginning at orientation, students' identities become their social security number. When the student ID card is placed in their hands, students take on their android-like university alter ego. The scanning of a magnet strip becomes the closest students get to a handshake.

Registration is perhaps the most glaring example of this impersonality. In the past, students were required to seek counsel during registration. Discussing possible schedules involved meetings with advisers and sometimes even professors. According to today's system, students simply type in their numerical choices with a Touch-Tone phone. Although this system may be more time-efficient, it basically leaves students alone to rummage through schedule books. Thus, an already frustrating endeavor becomes even more of a hassle, as students often end up with classes that are not well-suited to their degree plan.

As for advising, many students today do not even know their adviser's name. And the student-to-adviser ratio basically ensures that this situation is not likely to change any time soon. As many colleges have only one or two advisers for the entire population of their college, students who do seek out advising face limited availability of appointments.

Personnel problems such as these are not limited to advising staff; students face the same issues in classroom set-

tings. The student-to-faculty ratio seems to grow with each passing semester. Students move students from small classroom atmospheres to large lecture halls. Administrators pad University pocket-books by corraling hundreds of students into packed rooms.

Take for instance the infamous survey course. Classes such as American Literature were limited to rosters of below 50 students just a few semesters ago. Today, the same course might have as many as 300 pupils. Classroom sizes such as these basically ensure that a student will remain an anonymous specter in their professor's eyes. Unless individual professors make unprecedented efforts at outreach, students are forced to basically "sink or swim" through semesters with little or no faculty assistance.

Many professors today even go so far as to encourage students to avoid visiting or phoning their offices if at all possible. With the growing mainstream access to e-mail, students are urged to direct all questions or problems to their professor's e-mail, upon which the student will get an e-mailed response. Once again, human interaction is out the door, replaced by mechanical alternatives.

Even classroom procedures are moving away from traditional methods. Interactive lecture discussions including the entire classroom population are basically impossible in large classes. Even testing seems to be turning toward a mechanized style. Gone are the days of essay tests or papers which professors or graders actually gave students feedback. Today testing is conducted via scantrons. If trends are to be trusted, testing will inevitably become computerized, eliminating any interpersonal communication. Perhaps even distance learning via computer will be a reality, and students will simply tune into a monitor for courses.

The bottom line is, the university experience is becoming one in which students could easily be lost in the crowd. Anonymity is not a possibility, but a reality. In the end, it seems that increasing fee payments are not necessarily indicative of better student life, but instead show where the main focus of the administration is centered.

Mandy Cater is a senior psychology major.

# Lend an Aggie a helping hand

Everyone has read the stories in The Battalion about the Aggies stranded on Highway 6, watching as scores of fellow Aggies drive by without offering help.



**JASON KNOTT**  
columnist

Helping others is something we all agree should be done. Someone actually crossing the line and doing this, however, is a rare occurrence.

A recent story out of Orange County, California, should be a lesson to us. A few selfless bird-lovers discovered a dying eagle, frightened from its home by a construction project. They nursed it back to health and promptly returned it to the wild.

Not to support animals' rights, but this story is very refreshing. If only we treated people more like this. Don't misunderstand; Americans are very "compassionate." The problem is, they are also lazy. Help the poor? Sure. Get personally involved with them? I don't have the time. Besides, charity is the government's job.

And the government is all too happy to take this burden, provided citizens don't mind footing the bill. The results have been less than impressive. Attributing this failure to lack of money rings hollow.

According to Charles Murray, Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, Americans currently spend almost twice as much money on social programs than they would if they simply mailed large enough checks to every family below the poverty line to lift them above it. The additional expense is the staggering amount spent on bureaucrats' salaries.

Even with so many social workers on Uncle Sam's payroll for the express purpose of

helping the poor, too often they are either unwilling or unable to offer the type of help the poor really need. This is a result of fundamentally flawed ideas about the causes of poverty and about the very nature of human beings.

Poverty is not simply a matter of the condition of one's bank account. It is often, though not always, a symptom of a deeper condition of the soul.

Humans are spiritual beings with spiritual needs and motivations. Any charitable effort which ignores this fact, treating hunger and homelessness as self-contained problems, will fail, regardless of how pure the motives. Not only will it be less likely to instill self-reliance in its subjects, but it will be inflicting more harm than good. Making someone comfortable in their destructive lifestyle is a certain way to ensure they do not change it.

Of course, not all poverty-stricken people are there because of bad lifestyle choices. Many are simply victims of circumstance. The problem with government programs is that they, by definition, fail to discriminate between the two cases. As a result, so much is spent giving self-defeating "help" to those whose problems go well beyond their pocket-books, that there is little left to give to those who are in desperate need through no fault of their own.

For these and other reasons, the welfare state should be dismantled. However, rather than wait for this to be accomplished, Americans should do for the poor what their duties as fellow human beings are anyway. They should invest not only their resources, but also their time in helping the poor. In doing so they should make the effort to get to the bottom of the problems, and be willing to challenge those with expensive, self-destructive habits to change them.

It's time for a little tough love. There is simply no excuse for Americans to drive around in their brand-new cars and to spend hours in front of the television while lamenting the pitiful condition of those around them.

Objections to proposals like this usually claim not enough people will do it. This argument amounts to nothing more than saying the ends justify the means. Wanting to help the poor is a noble desire, but this hardly justifies forcing others to contribute their earnings in order to fund programs they do not approve of, which is how things are handled presently.

This is especially true when proponents of such methods are not willing themselves to sacrifice any of their comfort for the cause. Besides this, even if only a small percentage of the needy were helped by private efforts, ending the welfare state would be worthwhile simply to stop its negative effects.

The advantage that private, personal, challenging charity has over other proposals (which is nothing more than new angles on the same old failures) is that it is not simply a theory of what might work. According to Marvin Olasky in his book *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, this was the rule rather than the exception in this country from colonial times until the twentieth century. And it worked, something which cannot be honestly said about anything from the New Deal forward.

The welfare state has failed. Rather than dispute this fact, the game has been for years to argue for one's favorite excuse for this failure. Rather than labeling opponents of expanding entitlements as cruel and heartless, it's time to discuss radically different methods.

Jason Knott is a sophomore economics major.



## MAIL CALL

### Aggie spirit enhanced by sorority sisterhood

In response to Mandy Cater's Aug. 30 column on sororities:

As a sophomore, when I think back on why I came to Texas A&M, I do not have to think hard. I know it is because Aggies are a diverse, but unified student body. I loved thinking that I could come to A&M and do whichever activity or organization I wanted and no fellow Ag would think less of me. But, I found an Aggie who does not share my spirit.

Frankly it disgusts me that for many new incoming freshman the first display of Aggie spirit was an article written by Cater criticizing, belittling and mocking sororities. I pledged a sorority last fall and never once regretted it.

You know what? Sororities are not about designer clothes, expensive perfume or flashing around our checkbook balances.

It is easy to be envious of something that you do not understand. Sororities bring leadership and

growth through a loving sisterhood. They make girls into ladies. There is a bond between each sister that cannot be put into words and that is not because I am some ditzy sorority girl.

As a matter of fact, my chapter has never had a grade point average below 3.0. So much for being stupid.

I really feel it is very unbecoming of an Aggie to belittle another Aggie organization. So before you turn your (tan or untan) nose up to criticize, perhaps you should ask yourself "How much does being an Aggie matter?"

And if I may borrow a phrase from my chapter's motto, "We are Aggies, FIRST."

Anne Reardon  
Class of '00

### Students must show respect toward A&M

In response to Michael Schaub's Sept. 1 column:

It is only the first day of classes and already there is someone complaining about the traditions and uniqueness of Texas A&M. I don't understand why people like Schaub even bother to come to school here.

Our university is based upon the ethics, morals and integrity with which its founders possessed. Any Aggie should be proud that those of us who are not two per centers have enough dignity and pride to carry on these standards that our university was built from.

Being an Aggie means doing

your part to uphold these qualities that we hold so dear. If you don't wish to become a true part of Texas A&M and know what it really means to be an Aggie, at least don't ruin it for the fish.

It makes me ill to know that some day people like Schaub will actually earn their Aggie ring, go into the real world and be a representative of Texas A&M. I just hope they have enough brains to make up for their lack of character.

Lindsey Hilliard  
Class of '00

### Limited parking demands etiquette

Howdy Ags! Contrary to popular belief, there is such a thing as "parking etiquette" on our friendly campus. We all know that the parking situation sucks anyway, so a little kindness will go a long way.

When you enter a row, first look to make sure there isn't another car waiting at the other end. If there is, kindly allow the other car to park in the first available space and then proceed to alternate sides — a car at one end of the row goes, then a car at the other end, and so on.

If you think you got there at the same times as the other car, yield to them (consider it as your good deed for the day).

Also, it is not considered cool to follow your best friend to their car in hopes of snagging their space just because you know them. Wait your turn.

If someone should steal "your" space (oh, sad), it is not good bull to leave a nasty note on their car — no matter how much they deserve it.

Should you feel the need to mention to them that Aggies do not lie, cheat or steal (including parking spaces) just do it in a calm, friendly way.

These rules seem obvious to us. However, our observations this morning found that some off-campus Ags are still a little clueless.

Overall, it is important to remember that only a fraction of your day is spent in parking lots. Keep a sense of humor, and don't let parking lot clowns ruin your day.

Giddy up on the bus, Gig'em and keep on carpooling!

Lana Shinkle  
Class of '98

Dana Fisher  
Class of '99

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class, and phone number.

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