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Bored of education

Professors must learn to skip tedious protocol of classroom rules, regulations

Since it is the beginning of the fall semester, students are busy analyzing and assessing the competence of their new professors. First impressions are under way, and most of us are quick to place our instructors into two categories: "Is it too late to drop this class?" or "What else does this prof teach?"



HELEN CLANCY
editor in chief

But one thing professors tend to forget is that students have only one expectation: the hope that the class is inspiring. So when the first days of class are consumed with "housekeeping" matters, such as discussing the syllabus, checking attendance and listing every bookstore in the known galaxy that sells the course's textbook, eager students are easily disappointed.

Professors waste too much time hassling with the details. They expect students to develop an allegorical interpretation of *Paradise Lost* in one weekend while devoting three class hours to an explanation of the attendance policy. Might as well hire a PTTS officer to teach the class.

While structure is indeed necessary for communication with a large audience, it can stifle the creative energy needed in a college classroom. Students cannot grow intellectually if they are not challenged. Too often, strict guidelines impart a sense of

safety among students; they will not pay attention if they always know what to expect. To put it simply: spontaneity breeds creativity.

For once, I would like to see a syllabus that reads: "Course Requirements: Be responsible." Instead, professors feel obligated to describe exactly what margins and fonts to use in a term paper, followed by a mathematical breakdown of points deducted and awarded.

Somewhere along this line, the purpose of the class is buried and lost.

Professors must be under the impression that students crave organization. And in some cases, this is true. There are students who only aspire to fill their folders with neat, categorized notes. Someone needs to inspire them to greater things—free thinking, impromptu analysis and problem solving.

Ultimately, it is the professor's job to break the timid habits practiced by these students.

Catch them off guard with a random discussion. Demand feedback. Tease them with knowledge they can't find in a book.

Students can read on their own time (well, they're supposed to anyway).

The class discussions that students value most are ones that focus on a marginal, quirky issue related to the text. Too many students have taken classes where the name of the professor is a mystery just one semester later, and not a single topic can be recalled. No college-level class should conclude without a passionate argument

or philosophical pondering.

This isn't to imply that every class should be a melodramatic forum for "speaking your mind," but students should have the opportunity to shine as individuals by sharing their perspectives.

It's okay to break the rules sometimes and stray from the outline on the syllabus. A perfect balance can be achieved by retaining useful guidelines and ditching the

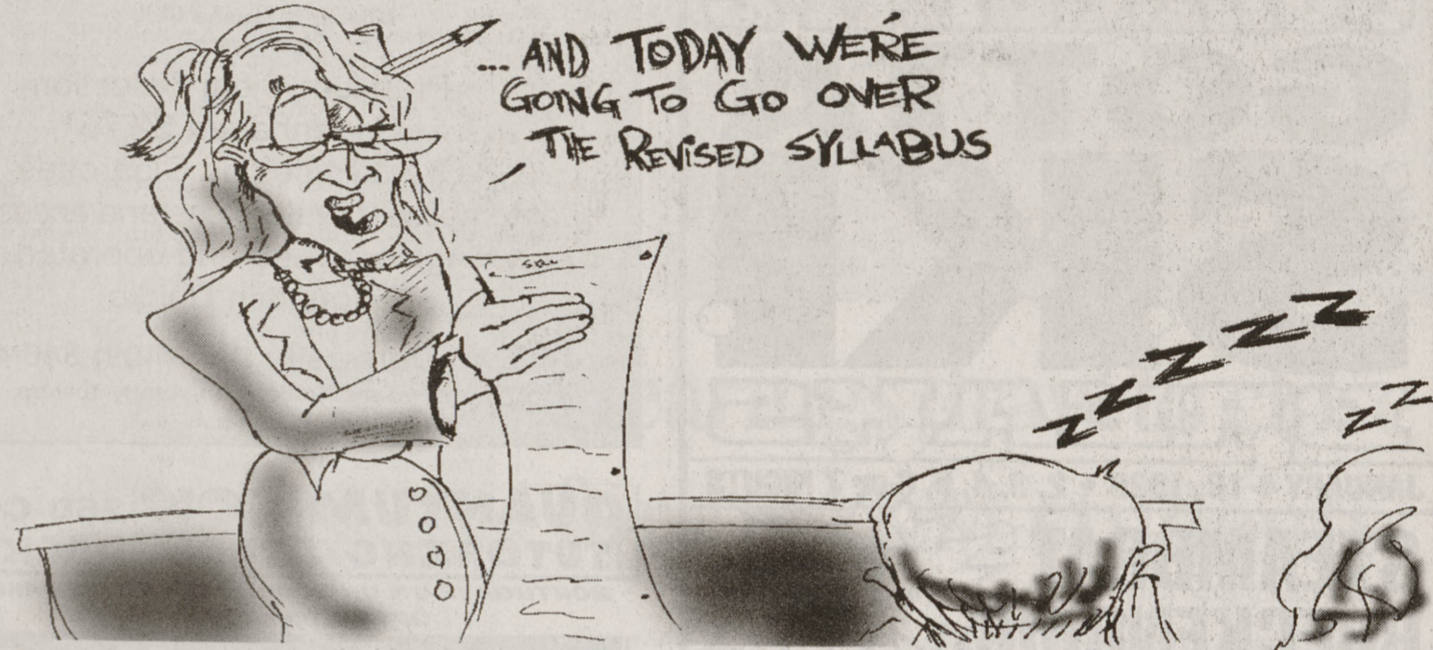
extraneous regulations that foster apathy. For example, a reader would be confused if this column began with its conclusion, or was printed upside down. Likewise, the key to a productive classroom is to observe necessary rules without sacrificing the message.

The "chapter police" won't care if some portions of the text are not utilized. Usually, the discussions that cause pro-

fessors to neglect the book are much more engaging.

Students and professors alike are guilty of ignoring the simplicity of knowledge. It isn't about double-spacing or seating charts or title pages. It's about that pure moment when an idea is defined and committed to memory.

Helen Clancy is a senior English major.



Aggie unity brings student body into close-knit family

"We may have been outscored, but we've never been beat." All good Ags shout some version of this mantra whenever the Men of Kyle "run out of time" before they can rack up more points than their opponents.



DAVE JOHNSTON
columnist

When students hear this sentiment today, they think the speaker is arrogantly refusing to admit defeat, but its original meaning was much different.

Aggies have always maintained a sense of camaraderie. Whenever football fans from another school came to campus, the contrast was stunning. Because of their unity and loyalty to their school, Aggies were able to score a moral victory at every football game.

T-sips were considered inferior fans. They yelled at their own players, threw trash and went home early—even when they were winning. On the other hand, Aggies demonstrated their dedication to the team and the school. Students stood throughout the game, supported the team and stayed to the end (and sang a song together) regardless of whether or not their team had more points on the scoreboard.

Aggies have held a reputation for unity. Current and former students gather to sing how they are "as true to each other as Aggies can be." Unfortunately, some indicators hint that the student body may be less unified now than it was in the past.

Today our football fans are fickle. They leave the game early, because beating the traffic is more important than exhibiting a little Aggie Spirit. Students berate the fellow Ag who won't "uncover" during the yells. When the team loses a few games, the fans complain about the coach, shout at the players from the stands and quit showing up altogether.

Judging by the people in the stands, it looks as if the Aggies have been losing even the games the football team won. Those moral victories, those demonstrations of close-knit Aggie Spirit,

are becoming more infrequent each season.

There are several factors contributing to the decline in Aggie unity. The campus and the student body are both much larger than they used to be.

One political science professor jokingly welcomed his class to the "Bush School located on the California campus of Texas A&M." With the sprawling campus, students do not even share a common environment. While many Aggies never venture on to West Campus, others never wander East of the railroad tracks.

It is difficult for students to share a feeling of community when they do not even share common landmarks or buildings.

The University now has one of the largest undergraduate populations in the nation. It is difficult to maintain a family atmosphere among 40,000 people.

Professor Stadelmann, Director of Religious Studies, suggests that the death of the Aggie joke has detracted from the unity of the student body. When Aggie jokes were more popular, the Aggies were an alliance against the rest of the world. Now that the jokes are less frequent, there is no common enemy for the students to unite against.

As the University continues to grow in vision, it attracts a more varied student body, which makes unity more difficult.

People from different backgrounds can achieve unity by sharing goals, traditions and interests, but the University officials prefer to concentrate on diversity. Instead of accentuating diversity, perhaps officials should focus on common ties the students share.

If A&M will retain its unique reputation for a unified student body, students must purpose to regain their sense of camaraderie. Aggies should not determine their school's value by football teams, or anything else they cannot control.

Instead they should invest themselves in improving their school by contributing to the student body's unity. Each student should focus on the similarities they have with their fellow Aggies. Maybe this will be the first step toward being "as true to each other as Aggies can be."

Dave Johnston is a senior math major.



MAIL CALL

Inefficient transport provides better health

With the first week of school behind us, I feel it is due time to give some credit to PTTS and the changes in the busing system for which it is responsible. The true reason for these changes has escaped most Aggies, so I will gladly clue everyone in.

It has recently been rumored among the elites of academia that the college ranking edition of next year's U.S. News and World Reports would have one newly added criterion: the physical fitness of Campus X.

Armed with this insider information, the powers that be on campus worked feverishly this summer to formulate a plan to gain the competitive edge in this area.

Internationally renowned transportation specialists along with fitness experts Tony Little and Susan Power were brought in to make a strategy and finalize a course of action. The results of these brain exchange sessions were simple... transform the busing system into a model of inefficiency in order to encourage and/or force students to walk, bike, skate and run.

Sure, it is true that inconvenience, frustration and confusion may initially result from this campaign, but one must bear in mind that the administration and their covert fitness committee calculated for this. They are simply doing their part to transform this school into a "world-class university," at least in the eyes of the aforementioned publication.

But who can deny their efforts when you realize that a healthier Aggie populous is the direct result.

Todd Friant
Class of '99

'American code' of ethics breaks norm

With all the talk about the Aggie Code of Honor, and how Aggies too often do not follow it, one begins to wonder why. It could be that another, unspoken "Code," one American society in general follows, takes precedence.



JASON KNOTT
columnist

Despite prevalent attitudes to the contrary, AggieLand is not in a world of its own. It is part of a larger society and cannot help but be affected by the values and norms of this society.

American's live, with increasing consistency, by their own code, and Aggies are no exception. "Life is a party, don't spoil it," is their unspoken motto. With too few exceptions, all those who violate this rule, and only those who violate it, are condemned.

In keeping with this Code, Americans are expected to "tolerate" every kind of deviant behavior, as long as this behavior does not spoil the party for someone else.

For example, few seem to care how often you drink until you can't stand up. Get behind the wheel while drunk, however, and suddenly you're condemned as a dangerous criminal.

For obvious reasons, this attitude manifests itself most blatantly concerning sexual behavior.

People can read all sorts of perverted stories, look at erotic pictures, even engage in unspeakable acts with one another, and the worst thing they can expect to happen is for someone to laugh at them.

Only when they cross the line and try to fulfill their obsessive fantasies with an unwilling partner are most people even likely to speak out against them.

And what of the brave minority who dare rain on the parade, those who take a stand against moral corruption, both public and private?

They are called "right-wing religious fanatics," "intolerant," and "judgmental," all which practically personify evil in the minds of many Americans.

Dare these dissenters of the Code object to having their hard-earned money spent by the government subsidizing the filth often passing as art, and the whole world cries "Censorship!"

And if they object to having their children subjected to so-called "value-neutral" education? Few acknowledge how it is, in fact, very hostile to the values they hold dear. Instead they are given patronizing speeches about the time-honored "separation of Church and State."

Hollywood has become the Code's most willing advocate. Rarely in recent films does someone violate the Code and refer to behavior (which doesn't harm another individual) as deviant or even "sinful." And when they do, they are self-righteous, blood-thirsty, hypocritical, racist, thoughtless bigots.

This is especially true of those who appeal to the "archaic" idea of the authority of God. Note the recent shamelessly one-sided portrayals of

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the Puritans, who, we are to believe, made Nazis look like kindergarten teachers.

The strongest evidence for the general commitment to the Code is the reaction this column is likely to incite in many who read it. Some who disagree with me will no doubt misinterpret my comments.

They will think I support throwing those whose lifestyles I disapprove of into concentration camps or some other such nonsense.

This is not the message of this column. However, what I am saying is that it is time for those who believe in a transcendent morality to "come out of the closet," so to speak, and stop being intimidated.

Stand up for what you honestly believe to be right, and speak out against what you believe to be wrong.

Let those who blindly follow the Code call you names and ascribe all sorts of nasty things to those who think like you.

I, for one, am tired of being told my moral convictions are just a product of my upbringing and that actions I think are wrong should be handled with "tolerance" and "sensitivity." I have a feeling I am not alone.

Jason Knott is a sophomore economics major.



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