

September 16, 1997 Tuesday • September 16, 1997

# The Howdy factor

Declining participation in an outdated tradition illustrates need for change

Howdy, Ags! Oh, those familiar words ring out like sweet music.



**MANDY CATER**  
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Well, maybe to those die-hard Aggies we all know and love.

To the rest of the population on campus (and the planet), "Howdy" is more like a shout out at some hillbilly square dance night.

The first time I heard someone say howdy, I was walking around campus my freshman year, desperately trying to concentrate on finding Heldenfels Hall on the map in my schedule book. Some huge Corps senior walked up and barked, "Howdy, ma'am."

Since I had taken the liberty to skip out on the whole Fish Camp thing, I was not familiar with the procedure.

Assuming he had mistaken me for someone else, I checked my watch to see how long I had to wander to my class. Rather miffed at my unknown brush-off, the guy suddenly transformed himself into a boot camp drill sergeant, and yelled, "Howdy!"

Confused and a little worried that I had taken the Fort Davis rather than College Station exit, I said, "Yeah, hi."

For some bizarre reason, the word howdy is enough to send red-ass Aggies into neurotic frenzy. An unrequited response to this oh-so-intellectual of welcomes is taken as a personal tromp across the MSC grass.

Apparently the howdy tradition has experienced a period of decline in recent years. But fret not, my Aggie friends, a new organization has emerged to rescue the dying howdy.

The Howdy Council, an off-shoot of the ever-necessary Traditions Council has assumed this all-important undertaking.

The group has taken the first step in developing its platform (a requirement of any serious organization). The message, strong and simple, can

be seen on the group's T-shirts (a requirement of any serious campus organization). The shirt's front reads "Howdy," and the back reads "Save the Word."

This powerful statement hints at the impending doom that is inherent with the loss of howdy. Forget the whales, the seals and Amnesty International — howdy must be saved.

The Howdy Council promises to develop activities that will "encourage students to participate in the howdy tradition."

For all you red-ass Ags out there, here's a tip: if people want to say howdy, they will. If they are not interested, it is not your problem. Call them two-percenters if you will, but their decision not to say howdy is just as important as your choice to engage in the practice.

Wearing snappy T-shirts and plastering the campus with placards is probably not going to change anything.

Try giving out guaranteed parking spaces or extra Q-drops, and then maybe those evil two-percenters will be converted to howdy-chanting yahoos.

If that doesn't work, then break out the bayonettes. Can we all take a moment to contact that planet that often conflicts with Aggieland — we two-percenters call it reality.

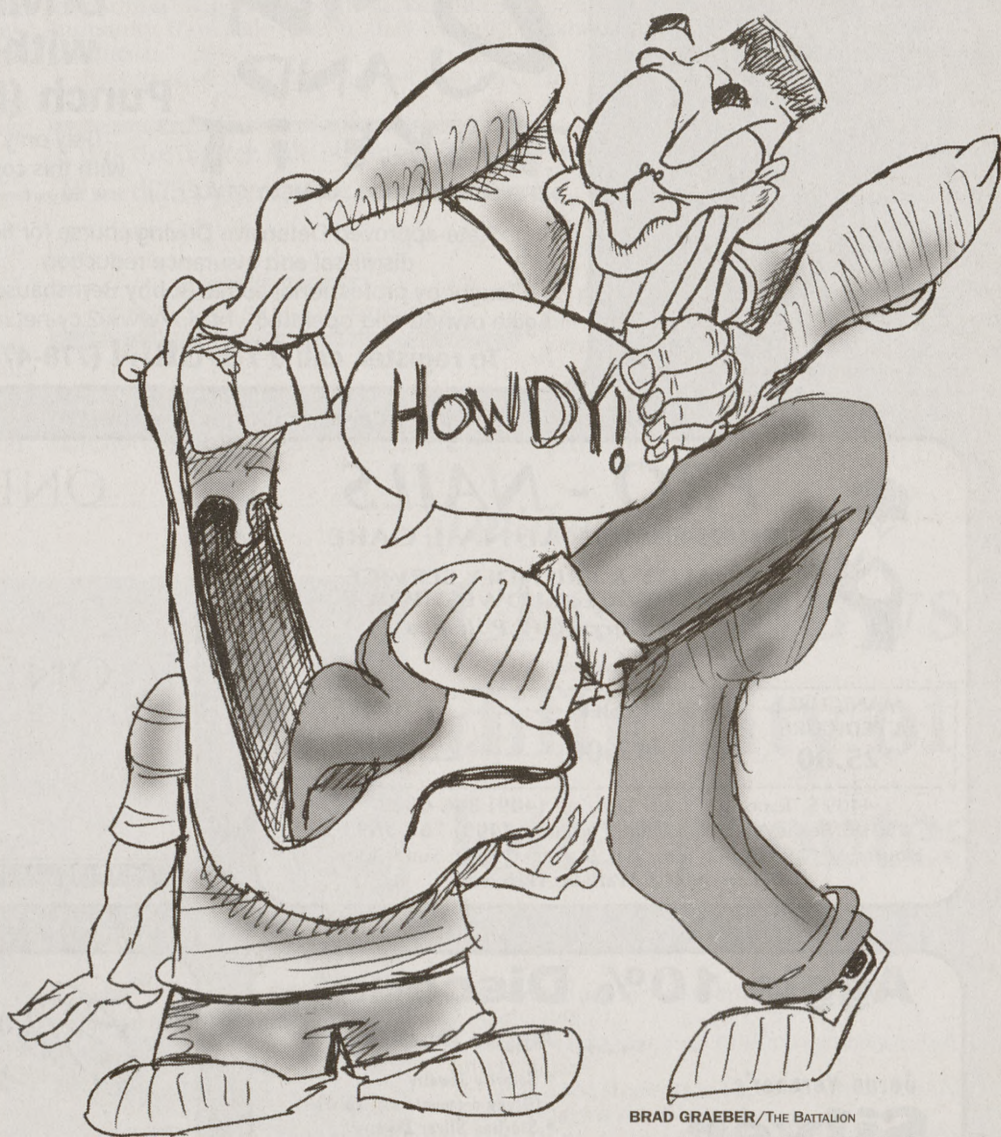
Howdy is a word, not a university requirement. Perhaps the decline of participation in the howdy tradition is an indicator that some traditions are in need of change.

I realize that speaking out against tradition at A&M is like blasphemy, but evolution has proven a remarkably successful mechanism in the past. Some traditions are old, some are tired and some are just stupid.

Rather than rallying cheerful militias for a "Howdy, Dammit" assault, perhaps we should realize that howdy is dying for a reason.

Believe it or not, some people came here to increase their intelligence, so pardon them if they don't participate in a return to those backwoods, tooth-picking, banjo strumming roots.

Mandy Cater is a senior psychology major.



BRAD GRAEBER/THE BATTALION

# Carpool lot addition would solve to campus parking woes

Wednesday, 9:49 a.m.



**JOHN BURTON**  
 columnist

I'm riding shotgun in my roommate's ram-tough Dodge, as we search in desperation for a parking space. A student returns to her car as other vehicles swarm upon her like buzzards on some helpless creature.

The parking situation at A&M is absurd, but this is no revelation. What's new is my plea: give us carpool parking lots, oh divine Parking, Traffic and Transportation.

The carpool phenomenon is nothing new. Dallas, Houston and other cities around the country have devoted millions of dollars to enact complex programs that work. A&M could implement its own carpool program for free, yet the subject seems to stay on the

back-burner. PTTS could designate portions of the most popular parking lots as carpool areas. This would allow vehicles carrying more than one student to park easily. However, this would benefit all students, not just those of us who carpool.

If only 40 percent of students car-pooled, the overall availability of spaces would increase by at least 20 percent. More people per car results in fewer cars with which to compete.

This fall, 13,000 commuter student permits were sold, even though only 8,000 spaces actually exist. (In private enterprise this is called fraud.) This lovely policy was founded on a study of Zachry lot, which showed that each parking space has a turnover of three cars per day, in theory. This reminds me of the "trickle-down" theory of the 1980s, which sounded nice at the time, but now we call it the "piss on the poor" theory.

Tom Williams, director of PTTS, raised the following points about car-

- pool lots:
- 1) Carpooling is difficult to enforce.
  - 2) Student Government has raised the carpool lot issue before, yet nothing happened.
  - 3) Some students carpool already — to split the cost of the visitor garage.
  - 4) Zachry lot is scheduled to expand in the future.

These concerns remind me of George Bush, who in 1989 said "We have a complicated three-way conundrum at this point."

I offer the following counterpoints:

- 1) Carpooling is not difficult to enforce. Simply place a PTTS agent at carpool area entrances to count the number of people in each car. Currently, several PTTS agents guard the card-access gate at the Lubbock and Coke Street intersection. We are paying them to operate an automatic gate system. This is like having a bank teller operate an ATM for you. Relocating these people to carpool areas would give them something to do.

2) Student Government has raised several issues before, but what are the results? You may recall the yell leader run-off quasi-election last year. We wanted a change and voted for it, yet Student Government decided to overrule the results. Thus, it is our responsibility to tell the administration that we have concerns upon which Student Government does not necessarily act.

3) When students pay for a parking tag, they should not have to pay again in the form of garage fees in order to find a parking space. There is obviously a problem when students have to park in the visitor garage.

4) By the time the Zachry lot is expanded, we will be alumni with grandchildren, and will refuse to give money to A&M, because as students we faced ridiculous hurdles in finding a parking space.

PTTS needs to designate a portion of each parking lot as a carpool area. This could be done by placing orange cones (PTTS is the cone conglomerate)

around certain sections. Then have an agent at the carpool area entrance to count how many people are in each car. That's it. No million-dollar construction, and no years of waiting. This immediate relief of parking madness is staring us directly in the face.

Implementing new programs to meet student needs, however, does not bring in big bucks like ticketing and towing. By making more spaces available, revenue (tickets) might decrease, which would leave the PTTS beast hungry. Until PTTS decides to serve the students, it will continue to bear the label of Parking Ticket and Towing Service.

I encourage you to make yourself known. Next time you are waiting for a parking space, write PTTS a note. Stroll by the Koldus building to let them know how you feel, or simply give them a call. It is time for the PTTS elite to feel the rumble of the Aggie bourgeois.

John Burton is a junior bioenvironmental science major.

# When grades are focus, students fail

The chorus has begun. As a professor begins to write on the board, his faithful students immediately ask the pertinent question: "Will we be tested on this?" If something should possess the instructor to say "no," he will be answered by the sound of a dozen pens dropping to the table.

Aggies have lost sight of the reason why they are here. Too many students are more concerned with their grades than the actual acquisition of knowledge.

It is ironic that the same students who burn effigies when a fee increase passes rejoice when their professor announces a walk. Considering how much they are paying for each class day, they should be outraged that class will not be held.

Many Aggies have lost their focus. Students view each class as a mere stepping stone toward their degree instead of an integral part of the education required to earn that degree. Unfortunately, after four (or six or seven) years of "stepping stones" students have a degree with little substance behind it. Instead of learning the course material they have studied the "tricks of the test" from Mr. Bill and managed to squeak past the minimum requirements.

This situation is similar to many Texas public schools which teach students how to pass the TAAS test instead of teaching them actual curriculum. While a large percentage of students may pass the TAAS and graduate, they are unable to respond to questions without a No. 2 pencil and a Scan-tron.

This attitude misses the purpose of education. Instead of training students for the real world, they are trained for a two-hour, multiple-choice exam. Here at A&M, many students are trained for a degree audit.

Students who take classes merely to pass would likely



**DAVID JOHNSTON**  
 columnist

find themselves doing much better academically if they were striving to actually learn the material. Every Aggie has noticed that they do much better in those classes which they are excited about and in which they have an interest.

Each great American has had the primary hand in his or her own education. The most successful Aggies will be those who are not content to merely attend class once every other week and buy the textbook the day before the exam.

Students should not be working to please the instructor, the registrar or even their parents or employer. Aggies should attempt to meet their own set of standards.

The whole notion of grading on a curve is rather disturbing, as well. For some reason, a majority of students are pleased to know they have done as well as half the students in the class — even though they have only mastered 40 percent of the course material.

Students should not continue to justify themselves by pointing out that they are better than someone else. This is the whole logic behind a curve. Because a student can outperform almost everyone else in the class, they somehow have earned a high grade. It would be ludicrous to buy products which are valuable only in contrast to some of its competitors.

Too many Aggies have set low standards, and they are living down to those standards. Students should not limit themselves by only striving for an 'A,' but should learn the course material to the best of their ability.

Aggies should stop settling for mediocrity. Sufficient is not acceptable. They should instead demand to be the "best."

Besides bringing themselves to a higher personal standard, Aggies will find themselves putting more effort into their work, often with better outcomes.

While all students have a responsibility to the taxpayers who are subsidizing their education, in many cases they should stop settling for mere A's.

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