

Wednesday • September 17, 1997

Can I graduate ???

Required social service to earn a diploma benefits students, communities

The worth of a culture is determined by the worth of its citizens. For far too long the United States school system has, with the aid of some careless parents, been turning out worthless citizens. It has focused on reading, writing and arithmetic, ignoring the other lessons necessary to create a well-rounded person: lessons teaching students to appreciate beauty (art); to develop self-reliance and nurture their creativity; and to seek to improve themselves by improving the environment that surrounds them.



MASON JACKSON
columnist

But on this last point some progress is being made. Beginning next year, high school students in Chicago will have to perform 60 hours of community service before they can receive their diploma.

This isn't the first program of its kind, it has already been instituted in several other cities, and Maryland (official motto: "We're a state, not a city.")

It has also been upheld by federal judges in Pennsylvania and New York.

What does this requirement mean for America? A great deal if it spreads nationally, and if it's done right.

But the perils are obvious. Everything has a loophole, and this requirement surely will, too.

Perhaps carpooling to school will be considered community service, because it improves the air we breathe ... blah, blah, blah.

Or maybe the requirement will be altered by people who completely miss the point, and credit will be awarded to

those who stay out of trouble — "Isn't it nice, the way Timmy didn't maim or kill anyone this semester. Let's give him 25 community service credits."

In order for this to achieve the desired goals, it will have to be administered by people who understand the spirit of the requirement.

Credit fulfillment shouldn't serve as a bribe to achieve other purposes. No other course would be compromised in that way.

This community service requirement should serve two purposes. The most immediate and visible will be the betterment of the community. The less tangible, but perhaps more important, purpose is the betterment of the student.

It will instill respect, both for themselves and others, along with an improved work ethic and discipline. And for some, it will do something that can be hard to come by in today's world — it will make them feel good.

Will all the students involved be affected in such a positive manner? No.

Will most? Maybe, but unlikely. Most students will tick off the hours like it was any other homework assignment.

But there will be a good number of people who are affected, and changed, for the better. They will see in themselves an ability to help others, even when the benefit to themselves isn't blatantly apparent. And anyone who can help others can no doubt help themselves.

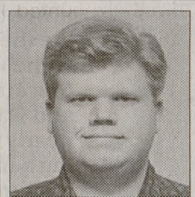
And slowly, believe it or not, we may become a more competent, self-reliant people. Improving our worth as a culture, and cleaning the garbage off the highways at the same time — it just might work.

Mason Jackson is a senior marketing major.



Student Senate must realize its job to represent every Aggie on campus

Now that classes are well underway, books are sort of purchased and syllabi distributed, the fall semester is starting to get in gear.



STEPHEN LLANO
columnist

The first meeting of the Student Senate, which was last Wednesday night, should have been considered just as important as the first couple of days of school.

But Student Senate, constantly brow beat into the ground by just about every student on campus, has a hard time catching attention for even those two weeks in the spring, when wooden signs the size of small mobile homes make the campus look like some sort of paramilitary training camp for future politicians or Amway representatives.

Students need to seriously take a look at Student Senate, as is often preached. This year should be different. Senators should look seriously at the student body, and at their position as (gasp) a real job.

Not all student senators are irresponsible, nor do they all have a disdain for their constituents. But students should not rest until they can say all Senators respect, listen to and act upon what student concerns are presented to them. This is not so far fetched an idea; when the Tampa Bay Bucs are winning, anything is possible.

Student Senate should be treated as a class. A very important class, much like an internship. Senators learn all about the complex interaction needed in a political system or bureaucracy to get things done. This is all accomplished with many smiles and hand-

shakes, and open ended questions to random constituents, on occasion.

Students should not accept this as a "necessary evil," as many political tomes are fond of using. Readers should be able to name their senators and what they stand for, and if they can't, it's not really their fault.

In four years, I have never seen any one of my Senators — Liberal Arts or Northside — stand up in a class and introduce themselves. This should be a requirement at the beginning of each semester for every Senator. Professors will not mind, just ask them before class, as they will not really follow Robert's Rules of Order when they start lecturing.

Another thing Student Senate could do is have constituency days more than once a year. Once a month is fairly reasonable, especially considering the size of some constituencies, such as Engineering or Off-Campus. There is no way that two or three days a year will allow Senate to have a good idea of what the majority of constituents believe about the campus and policies that should be enacted.

As with any class, there should be some required reading for every Senator. The Texas A&M Constitution and Student Rules and Regulations should be familiar to every Senator, just like basic formulas for an upper level engineer, or the steps of mitosis for a biology major. Furthermore, Senators should keep up with every publication A&M produces. Not only The Battalion, but anything distributed by the administration to the students or community or the state. Vigilance is the only rule for Senators who want to be effective.

One place Senators should all be familiar with is the Web page run by the mysterious "Specksnyder" (<http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/Union/6116>). Whether or not you agree or disagree with his views, the benefits of

a "loyal opposition" in politics are essential. Every Student Senator should read this page at least as frequently as they pass notes to each other in meetings. Students can also inform themselves of Senate news and views in a very productive and mentally healthy way, instead of just relying on what others say about their friends who happen to be Senators.

Instead of considering what e-mail response will pacify a constituent who gets in touch with his or her Senator, perhaps really listening to their concerns might prove a better investment of both the Senator's and student's time.

As in any class, there will be those who will ask specifics about how they are graded, or what is going to be on the final. For Senators, the only way to determine success in years past was whether their bill got passed, whether fees went up or down or whether they got reelected. Senators should forget about that, and put at the forefront the one important thing: They were elected by people.

Fellow students put trust in them to represent their views where they can make a difference. Like any class, if the specific rules and percentages of grading are pushed aside in favor of actually trying to learn and grow, success will come naturally.

Hopefully, Student Senate will be able to rise from the old mentality of representation — we do what we want, then "educate" the student body about what we did, to a new system of honest, frequent communication with constituents. It is high time for Student Senate to prove the Senate represents the antithesis of a frequent advertising campaign: "It's not just an adventure, it's a job."

Stephen Llano is a senior history major.

Lack of motivation hinders success of annual blood drive

It's blood drive time again, and the buses are back. You can hardly walk across campus without seeing one of them, but many A&M students don't seem to know they're there.



ANNA FOSTER
columnist

One Friday afternoon last semester, I went to the BloodCare bus on West Campus to give my semiannual blood donation and get my semiannual free T-shirt. I climbed out of the heat into the air-conditioned interior and sat down to fill out my paperwork.

One of the people in scrubs typed my information into the computer and showed me to a private screening booth for my mini-physical. He introduced himself as Jay, took my temperature and blood pressure (both good), and asked me the required personal questions to determine if I had engaged in any high-risk behaviors that would prevent me from being a good donation candidate. I hadn't. Then he did a finger prick to test the iron count of my blood. Unfortunately, it was too low and I was deferred as a donor.

I left, feeling both a little hurt at being rejected and upset that I had to endure a finger prick — the most painful part of the process — for nothing. As I walked away, I heard someone calling my name. I turned around, and saw one of the workers leaning out of the door of the bus with a T-shirt. I was momentarily confused, because I was under the assumption of "no blood, no shirt." I was told, though, that "the most important thing is that you tried, most people don't even do that."

After asking a few questions, I learned that the average donation rate for the Brazos Valley is 3 percent, while the national average is 5 percent. According to Jennifer Nixon, the field consultant for BloodCare, A&M blood drives are on a level with the other universities they service, including the University of North Texas and SMU. What was immediately apparent to me, however, is that en-

rollment at these universities is nowhere near equal to ours, the largest undergraduate student body in the nation.

I also was told that the campus donation rates for the past few years have been dropping. The five-day blood drive averages between 1100-1200 units of blood, down from 1500 units four to five years ago. "A&M used to be competitive with UT," Nixon said, "but since the two schools have stopped actively competing, the donation rates have dropped."

Apparently, unless there is an active threat to our title as "a world class university," A&M students have a hard time being motivated.

I recommend that Alpha Phi Omega, the service fraternity that sponsors the blood drives on campus, start a literal "blood feud" with the t-shirts in Austin to encourage greater turnouts. There seems to be no other way to create the needed initiative for most of the students in Aggieland.

Other reasons, besides lack of motivation, for not giving blood are either inability to donate or fear of the process. Some people are unable to donate for medical reasons, such as being on certain medications or passing out every time they see blood. Such conditions necessarily exempt them from donating, but simply being afraid is not much of an excuse.

The donation process is completely sterile, with everything used only once and opened right before the donor, and friendly, trained "apheresis technicians" do the entire procedure. The actual donation is not painful — there is only a slight sting when they first start — and the entire process is over in about 10 minutes.

After the donation, several different tests are run on the blood to check for infectious diseases such as HIV and syphilis. Then the blood is split into three different components: red blood cells, plasma and platelets. One donation can save up to three lives.

The entire blood donation process takes less than an hour, it makes the University look good and it helps save someone's life. In addition to that, and just as important, the best reason to donate is obvious: a free T-shirt.

Anna Foster is a junior journalism major.



MAIL CALL

Preventing accidents requires student help

We are all saddened, whether it be this campus or another, to hear of a student death, especially when it has some relationship to alcohol and hazing. You, without a doubt, have read about the death of a student at LSU at the beginning of the semester with severe alcohol poisoning at .58 level (an individual

is legally intoxicated at .10 level).

There is almost always some connection between alcohol abuse and serious accidents on our campus. The majority of violations of Texas A&M rules such as hazing, vandalism, assault and sexual assault involve alcohol. Alcohol abuse also has a tremendous negative impact on academic performance and preparation.

Rarely does an individual involved in a serious accident, be it hazing, alcohol abuse or other serious behavior, intend to harm someone else or his or herself. Tragedies, nonetheless, do occur. It is very important to learn and educate others through these experiences.

More importantly, we are sometimes in a position to take positive steps to prevent an accident, injury or tragedy. After the fact, I am sure there are individ-

uals who wish they had stepped forward and had the ability to influence a situation that later turned sour or tragic.

We must be willing to act in a leadership and proactive manner on behalf of our friends and others. I am simply asking each of you to report any kind of circumstances where there is abuse of alcohol or abuse of individuals and/or any form of hazing activity.

I ask that student leaders and individual students work with us to develop more proactive ways in which the University community can communicate our desire for the most healthy attitudes for our friends and fellow students. Toward this end, I am appointing a task force of students, staff and faculty to study alcohol abuse. The charge and membership of the task force will be announced shortly.

Thank you for your attention to this information. I know we all want to enjoy the many positive aspects of Texas A&M and Aggie spirit without these tragic events that are avoidable.

J. Malon Southerland
vice president for student affairs

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