

October 3, 1997

# When a stranger is watching ...

## Critically correct stalking laws must be reformed to protect privacy of victims



**MANDY CATER**  
assistant  
opinion editor

abuse, torment or embarrass." The guidelines required that said circumstances occur on more than one occasion, with at least one including a threat of bodily harm to the victim or a member of his or her family. The law decreed that this threat could come via spoken words or actions.

The Texas law took a more victim-friendly stance than many similar laws which require that threats be verbal or actual physical abuse must be present. The Texas law even goes so far as to in-

clude threats to victims' families and personal property. In many states, the lack of adequate legislation leads to a wait-until-there-are-bruises attitude, in which a person must wait until there is an actual attack before they can take action.

The 1994 law was appealed, however, and the 1997 Texas Senate revised the stalking legislation. In order to alleviate the vagueness of the earlier version, the Senate enacted the reasonable person standard in prosecution of stalking. In other words, if the actions "would cause a

reasonable person to fear bodily injury or death to himself or herself or that person's family or household member or an offense against that person's property," then the stalking law can be considered. The new law also requires that the actor must reasonably believe that the other person will regard the actions as threatening to themselves, their family or their property.

The Senate is taking important steps to protect the interests of stalking victims, but the laws are still too soft on stalkers. Under both the 1994 and current laws,

stalking is only a misdemeanor offense, unless there is a previous stalking conviction. This results in many cases being paroled or sentences that simply tap perpetrators on the wrists and tell them to stay away from victims.

Where stalking is concerned, society, it seems, wants to keep it a personal matter. Perhaps due to the mostly domestic context of the crime, most people rely on the out of sight, out of mind approach where stalking episodes are concerned. Cases are viewed as "lover's quarrels" or "personal matters," and other people (often including law enforcement officials) choose to turn a blind eye — usually until it is too late to help.

Citizens and law enforcement officials alike have a responsibility to take action when obvious cases of stalking arise.

As attitudes change, laws will become more powerful and victims will feel more comfortable in coming forward. As the laws stand now, even a conviction does nothing for victims, short of probably ensuring that their stalkers are angrier than they had been previously.

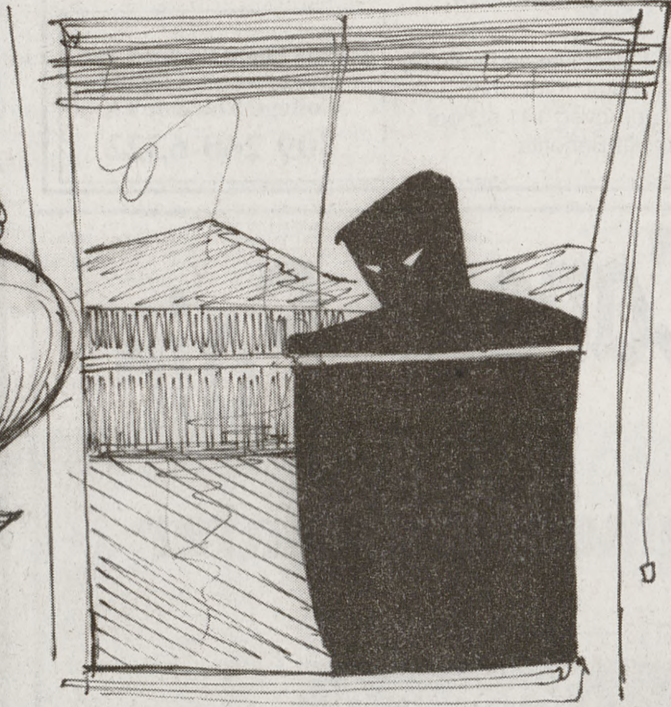
Stalking is a crime and should be seen for what it truly is — a continued violation of personal freedom and peace of mind. Stalking victims are followed, harassed with phone calls and letters and threatened physically.

The Stalking Victim's Sanctuary, an Internet service for victims, calls stalking "a rape that goes on and on," and this definition is fairly adequate.

Stalking is bothersome at best, and at worst, terrifying. Victims lose a sense of control in their lives and are plagued by self-blame, fear and a lack of self-esteem. Their privacy is destroyed, and they are constantly looking over their shoulders.

In a country that proclaims that citizens' rights include life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, there appears to be a conflict. Innocent citizens are being victimized by criminals who abuse their freedoms. Rather than constantly reforming laws to be stalker-friendly, the focus should center on stamping out stalking. After all, Americans should be able to pursue their happiness without constantly wondering who is lurking in the bushes.

Mandy Cater is a senior psychology major.

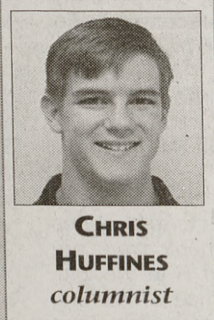


*Jack Spaulding*

# Testing focus sells Texas students short in education

Texas public education is in a slow spiral to Hell. The quality of teachers, funding and a host of other factors in education have all improved, however, TAAS is dragging our state's children to a future lower than most people's opinion of the Battalion's columnists. For those of you who do not know what TAAS is (our respective deity has been very kind to you), let me explain. TAAS stands for the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. As the name implies, this is basically a test of the absolute minimum high school seniors must know to be able to graduate with prospects better than street performer or digger.

The TAAS would be nothing more than a minor annoyance for most students if it weren't for its far-reaching impact. At the district level, the



**CHRIS HUFFINES**  
columnist

TAAS is a major component of what are euphemistically called "Accountability Ratings." These ratings basically determine if a school district is doing its job. Most schools weigh in at the acceptable level.

However, at the campus level, at individual schools, the euphemism starts the echo of "sleeps with the fishes." An individual campus with a low accountability rating for three years in a row can be dissolved under the reasoning that the school has been churning out poorly educated students for three years now, and so "something just ain't right." This is the equivalent of completely changing out the staff of Texas A&M simply because a single student body class brought down everyone's test scores several years running (stupid freshmen).

And, of course, there is the ever-so-popular exit-level TAAS test, administered to high school sophomores and, as necessary, juniors and seniors.

This one can keep students from graduating. It is a waste, but a necessary waste.

The problem comes about because of this

accountability rating bit. The problem is that people do not want to have their school or district labeled as substandard. Therefore, the curriculum has begun to lean heavily toward becoming simply a TAAS preparation course. This would be acceptable, except that the TAAS does not really test students on valuable life skills. It is a little more basic than that.

Suzanne Phelps, Director of Curriculum for Bryan Independent School District, stated that the TAAS is a good test, but if students are just taught TAAS subject matter, then the schools are not doing their jobs.

The solution here is two-fold. Texas must do away with the TAAS. The tests should be burned, the computer files erased and its creators should be dealt with accordingly, their yearly test-score reports mounted on spears on the Texas state capitol grounds as a warning to all others. The TAAS is useless. A more accurate test of what the students have learned is the combined opinions of the more than 50 teachers who have spent day after day with them. As Phelps said, teachers can predict, "with great accuracy," which students

will pass and which students will fail the TAAS.

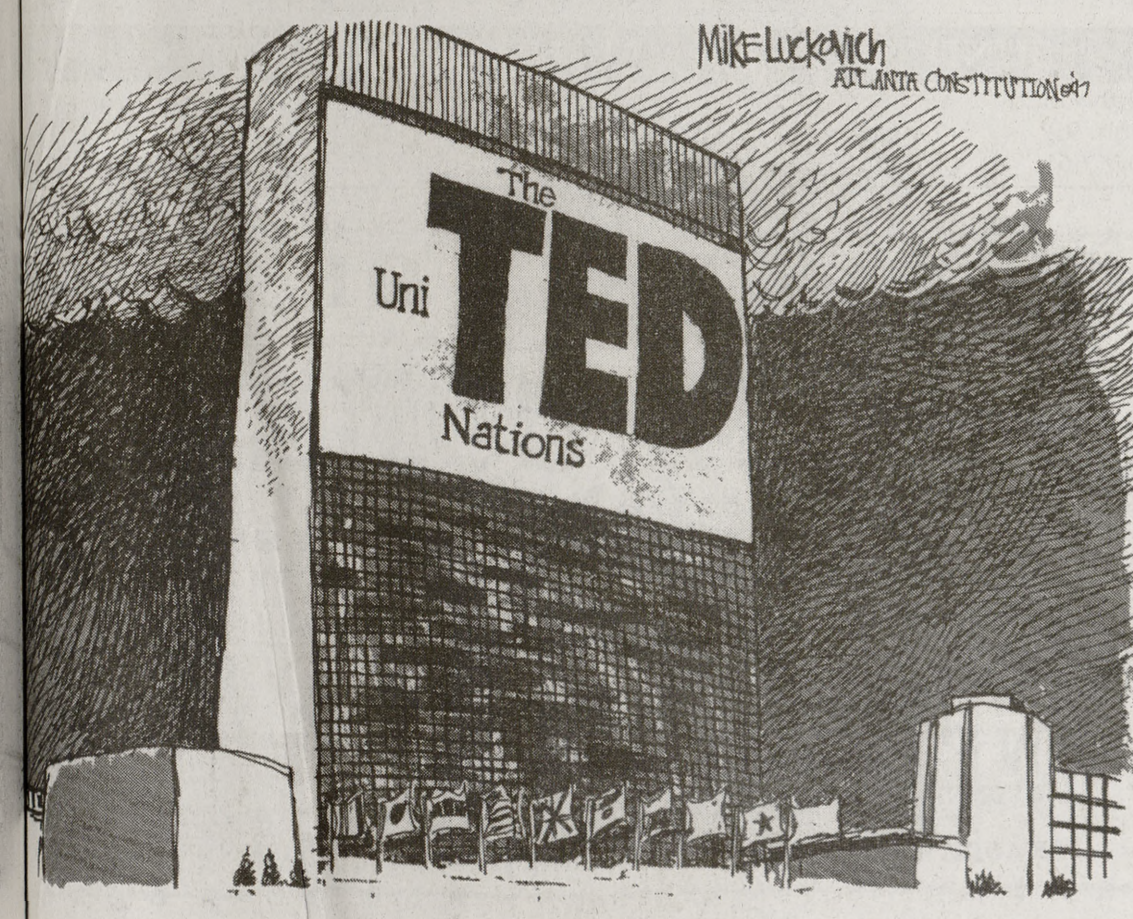
The second part of this solution is for a national curriculum to be installed. Traditionally, those nations with national curriculums have smarter students on average. A nationally mandated curriculum that teachers could focus on would eliminate the slow suffocation that the TAAS is creating now.

In addition, grades within the classes themselves could be used to compare students. Yet another irritating test could be eliminated from students' lives.

The TAAS is a good idea that has begun to backfire dramatically. It is the responsibility of citizens to change the system before it is too late and before the spark of life dies from education as we know it.

Otherwise, the next generation, our children's generation, will grow up having their lives dominated by a curriculum designed to pass one, single test.

Chris Huffines is a sophomore speech communications major.



### MAIL CALL

#### Task force acts as overbearing parent

In response to John Lemons' Sept. 29 column, "Acknowledging the Problem:"

Well Lemons, I believe your report has broken the proverbial camel's back. We are all adults here, and the last thing we need is Dr. J. Malon Southerland looking over our shoulders and insuring we keep our hands in our pockets and our livers clean.

Task Force be damned — if I want to get a little loopy on a slow Tuesday afternoon, I have the right. This is the same right students have to make complete fools of themselves at social functions (i.e. Midnight Yell).

Repercussions (i.e. the lovely Brazos Valley Drunk Tank and so-

cial leprosy) are things the involved parties must consider as real after effects, but the arrogant notion that the corporation we call A&M has not only the ability, but the obligation to dictate our social behavior is absurd.

I agree that idiots are a problem (and a vast minority), but do not screw up my good time to prove your point. We can all get along if you'll leave me alone, and I will return the favor.

If you truly don't understand the infringements involved, I'd love to explain them to you sometime at Duddley's.

Heck, I'll buy.

Clint Van Horn  
Class of '97

Todd Prewitt  
Class of '95

#### Football opinion proves too liberal

In response to Michelle Voss' Sept. 26 column, "Passing the pigskin:"

I want to respond to the root of Voss' argument — that being, her liberal stance. I assign the "liberal" tag to Voss only because of things I observe, not because I know her personally. If I am wrong in my as-

sumption, I stand sufficiently corrected. But as she is a liberal arts major, her past column material and the remarks contained in this current column, I feel justified in my assigning the "liberal" tag to her.

As an intelligent football fan, I can take the "turn the other cheek" approach in relation to her comments. In a country founded on choice, we each have to understand that we are not going to agree all the time.

Didn't this summer see the inauguration of the Women's National Basketball Association? And anyone who says that basketball is not a contact sport has never watched a game.

As a conservative, I will not deny that I am opinionated on many subjects, many of which would be considered hard-line opinions. But the main difference between liberals and conservatives is that conservatives are open about the fact that we are closed-minded about some things. It is the hypocritical nature of liberalism that has caused me to respond, not Voss' opinion. For as they say, everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion.

Keith Gatewood  
Class of '99