

A hazy shade of gray matter

American universities rely on academic bullying to stifle, terrorize young students



JEREMY VALDEZ
 columnist

includes classes where the professor's bark is even worse than the course's bite. Many students have had a professor hand out a syllabus and say something like, "Every year one-third of the students fail this class. I'm not trying to scare you, that's just the way it usually happens."

The next day, one third of the class has dropped, denying itself the chance to call the bluff.

Even if the statistics back the professor's claim (or boast), presenting grade distributions in such a manner does little to inform but a lot to frighten. Studying is scary enough without knowing the instructor has a grim notion of what the final grades will be.

Unfortunately, intellectual hazing does not end with the freshman year. Many students who brave the introductory material find subtle forms of academic ridicule waiting in later classes.

Theory courses in particular are notorious for forcing students to read countless chapters of predigested esoteric thought and then regurgitate it in neat one-page essay tests.

Many instructors are so obsessed with ensuring the reading assignments are actually done they forget to allow for some healthy dissent on exams.

Professors who pen test questions like "Which of our five authors do you agree with the most and why?" or "Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Support your argument with examples from the text." often do not realize that they are hazing students by discounting independent intellect.

Some students who read the text might believe that all five authors should have gotten real jobs or that God angrily hurled both

chickens and eggs, but such innovative arguments, no matter how well they are defended, often go unrewarded in classes where the holy scriptures have a little yellow "USED" label on the spine.

As the twentieth century comes to a close, America looks around to see that walls of gender, race and class are falling or at least being targeted for demolition.

But as old methods of division fall, society actively seeks new ways to create power gradients and stratify itself into upper and lower classes.

The latest, most legitimized upper class is made up of educated people, the technological elite who attempt to secure money, status and power via their acquired knowledge.

As students try to get initiated into this learned society they are subjected to many trials that are analogous to the binges and embarrassment that cadets and aspiring greeks are supposed to be protected from.

The fact that students (and pledges, for that matter) subject themselves to these tortures shouldn't be overlooked. In order for hazing to occur, someone has to agree to be hazed. Not all ritualism is inherently evil.

In fact, hazing ideally serves to foster a spirit of camaraderie and make the reward more valuable.

But when academic hazing serves only to subjugate students and stifle independent thought, the offending coursework ceases to be a tool of education and morphs into an implement of cerebral control, like a paddle used to spank a lesson into your head.

Jeremy Valdez is a senior chemical engineering and journalism major.



University students get derailed on intellectual voyages

What is truth?" Pontious Pilate asked Jesus. "What is beer?" saith the modern college student. Ahh, 20th century University: a pot of nitwits.

A social phenomenon occurring today is the dumbing of America. While people point to the numbers of college graduates and the purring economy signs of intelligent life, some would argue that students are leaving college without any knowledge.

Students are under the delusion that a degree from college is an automatic sign of intelligence. However, the pieces of paper we receive today are mere illusions of intelligence.

This is all a direct result of America's campaign of anti-intellectualism. Americans avoid thinking. If possible Americans avoid brain activity all together. America is brain dead.

We do not care to discuss matters of intellectual import—we're watching the football game. We do not



MICHELLE VOSS
 columnist

care to debate politics—we need more beer. We do not care to understand God—we're out of queso dip.

Sadly, American culture is lost in the superficiality of life. There is little value placed upon cultivating the mind, and no one sees virtue in thinking.

The power of thought is not the emphasis of American life, but the seduction, lure, and enticement of beauty.

Squeeze those buns, tuck those tummies, lift that face, suck that fat, inflate those breasts—you're nothing, girls, if you don't have a pretty face and firm butt.

The obvious dilemma resulting from a superficial focus is an America that is pretty on the outside, but lacking substance underneath the surface.

The institution that is receiving the nastiest case of this superficial bug is the University.

Plaguing academia today is the apathy with which students approach knowledge.

The University has become home to droves of beer-guzzling whiners. Students moan and complain about having to read, write and go to class—how excruciating.

Rather than valuing the opportunity to study, the modern college student views their college education

in terms of dollar signs—how much will it cost me, and how much will I make afterwards?

Rare is the individual who is attending this University because they have a passion for knowledge. Most students see these four, five or seven years as their glory days of gluttony—beer, sex, more beer—then they'll get a nice job, in a nice high rise, in a nice suburb, with a nice lawn and a nice home. On the surface, the education pays off.

While a University should be about emerging oneself in diverse ideas, students today are slapped into their major, sequestered from the rest of the university, pushed out as quickly as possible, and then shoved into a cubicle to perform astounding math for the benefit of Western Civilization. The value of learning is lost.

Instead of questioning their place in the universe or maybe reading a bit of Plato or Nietzsche, students prefer to give existential status to beer and study Shiner ingredient labels.

People are actually afraid of supposed "deep thoughts." Students run away and hide from any thinking that is different from their own.

People are taught to be afraid of delving into their selves for fear of what they might discover. Oh, no, you

may not think like everyone else, after all.

This apprehension about questioning their reality is not of any wonder. With Pop-culture saying it's good to be stupid, as long as you're beautiful, kids are only droves of conformists.

Anyone who falls in the category of "non-conformist" must necessarily be a devil worshipper. When in actuality, the "non-conformists" are the only hope our nation has in saving this culture from materialism qua anti-intellectualism.

Americans seem oblivious to the fact that as the flesh decays, but the intellect is immortal. Narcissism is squelching intelligence in America. We simply are hostile to thinking.

The University also needs to realize they are failing to create critical thinkers. Students only receive a sterilized version of knowledge.

Texas A&M is simply a manufacturer of specialized technocrats. This University is under the delusion that they are creating leaders. In reality, students at this university are willful servants of materialism, the true American value.

Michelle Voss is a sophomore English major.



MAIL CALL

Not cancelling class stands as A&M error

I am writing in reference to the George Bush Library dedication. I think it is a great opportunity and honor for the university, but my question lies with the administration. Why is it that classes are still being held on this monumental day?

While history is being made on our campus, and we are the top story on many national news broadcasts, I am forced to leave my TV to go to my classes.

In addition to this, it is impossible to get to class. Many of the buses and parking lots are being used for this event. If we are going to be expected to go to class, don't take away our means of getting there! Wednesday it took me over an hour to get home on the bus because there were so few buses running on my route.

Thursday when I was trying to get to my 8:00 class, all traffic was stopped on University Drive to let some entourage of big wigs through. Someone please let us out of class!

*Amy E. Pike
 Mindy L. Kinkler
 Class of '98*

Important threads of history absent

The last part of Joey Schlueter's series offers a curiously bland account of recent changes at Texas A&M.

Women in the band? Yes, but only after a long drawn-out lawsuit she doesn't mention. Expanded numbers of student organizations?

Yes, but an obstinate university administration had to be forced by the courts to recognize Gay and Lesbian Student Services as one of them.

Texas A&M has seen progress, but progress has been stubbornly resisted by many.

It is slowly being achieved only through the determined struggles of those committed to a truly diverse, open and egalitarian institution.

*James Rosenheim
 Associate Professor
 Department of History*

Real spirit of season missed by SGA club

This is in response to Kendall Kelly's Nov. 6 "Students fail to recognize contributions, activities that combine to form SGA" column:

I find it very disappointing that a student government committee, in this case the Winter Spirit of Aggieland committee, can admirably raise \$25,000 and then proceed to waste it all on Christmas ornaments, lights and decorations.

This very large amount of money would serve a much better pur-

pose if used for charities such as Phoebe's Home, or even if used to purchase presents for children that otherwise would not receive any gifts for Christmas.

Kelly uses the Winter Spirit of Aggieland committee in her column as a positive aspect of the Student Government Association, but this committee obviously shows the poor set of priorities of the SGA in its wasteful "allocation" of money.

Couldn't the "Spirit of Aggieland" be better served by giving instead of receiving?

So when it "begins to look a lot like Christmas in Aggieland," as Kelly stated, I will be thinking of the children who couldn't have toys and gifts this year because the Texas A&M Student Government Association wanted tree ornaments instead.

*Sam Shamburger
 Jeffrey Whaley
 Class of '99*

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