

STUDENT LIFE

Work-out wipeout

Exercise fanaticism on campus, nationwide, place too much merit on body

As one enters the mighty, mighty Rec Center, one feels flabby, pudgy, and very white. Actually, one feels intimidated by the sheer overwhelming size of the Rec Center, the "gauntlet of death." To one's right flows a gulf chlorinated water. To one's left an oxygen-sealed room resembling a fish bath is packed full of exercise devices, i.e., Nordics, rowing machines, and that bizarre cross-country skiing machine-thingy. Straight ahead, one notices an obtrusive pseudo-kon which someone happens to be stuck and is being rescued. Then, one happens to notice a reflection of their somewhat flaccid limbs in a mirror and the self-thought begins: "I'm an obese lard." Regardless, we forge ahead, intrepid exercisers, to face the fray. This Kodak moment in the Temple of Doom is the setting of America's chic new religion — working out. While many regularly attend worship at the Temple of Doom, or the Rec, they are oblivious to the philosophical poverty of the working-out movement. Indeed, "record" numbers upwards of 8,500, according to one *Battalion* article, are attending worship at the Rec. Yet, one question begs attention: Why? Why are 8,500 students congregating at the Rec to perform sad rites for an hour and half everyday? Well, one might say that for the modern communist, working out serves as punishment for sins — that box of snack cakes you polished off, the stuffed pizza you ate by yourself.



MICHELLE VOSS
columnist

We seek redemption for our naughty behavior through a rigorous routine of cramping, squeezing, puffing and huffing. Even sweat is holy — it has become the baptismal salt-water of social acceptance. The modish towel one slings over the shoulder while sauntering through the Rec is a sign of piety — "I sweat so much that, not only I could be in the NBA, but I'm holier than thou." In fact, one might go out on a limb and say that those who are faithful to working out are simply propagating a culture obsessed with superficiality. With the closing of the twentieth century, America is packed full of exercise gyms where droves of firm buttocks gather to give praise to one another. And our gyms are just that — warehouses of flesh. They are warehouses of flesh replete with televisions to keep thinking from being a distraction. So, the question pops up again, why? Why do 8,500 people assemble at the commune of fitness? Because like any pop-culture movement, this is the brilliance of commercialization at its best. Nike, Adidas, Reebok, etc. provide the footwear. Panasonic, Sony, GE, etc. provide the boob tubes. Oprah, Jenny Craig, Jane Fonda, etc. provide the chi-chi hipness. Gatorade, All-Sport, Evian, etc. provide the suspense. It's all about marketing. Sure, it's healthy to take a walk around the block. However, it is unhealthy that our nation is under the spell of a myth. The myth that our body is our worth — and for it to be worth anything it must be bronzed, toned and tightened. Working out is no longer about being able to climb the stairs of your apartment building, but rather about a devotion to superficial wellness. Are you willing to fully convert?

Michelle Voss is a sophomore English major.



CAMPUS CONNECTION

Campus should focus on updating existing services, not expanding

The signs of growth in and around campus are easy to spot. Recently, the stroke of a pen finalized the Texas A&M University System's affiliation with the South Texas College of Law, adding a new star to the A&M universe. Not too long before that, the opening of the George Bush School of Government and Public Service sent political science majors scurrying for West Campus shuttles. Near the Bush School, the Reed Arena is the final stages of construction while on main campus the dust is still flying as the library addition is pieced together. And proving that College Station traffic can neither be created nor destroyed, the Texas Avenue construction is slated to conclude just as work on University Drive begins. Clearly, the A&M community is prosperous, healthy and enjoying unfettered growth, all to the benefit of students and staff. Or is it? Has A&M been unnaturally growing in large spurts, letting its current facilities, student services and quality of education suffer? Or has Texas A&M merely been overdue for all this expansion, and is just now getting to where it should be? Despite some current problems, A&M has been keeping its house in order while building for the future. However, as the University starts on its quest for top ten status by the year 2020, it needs to continue to be vigilant about quality. One measure of a university's commitment to present quality is the level of deferred maintenance. Deferred maintenance accrues when a current building needs a basic repair to an area such as the roof or ventilation system. If the problem goes unfixed because the money is unavailable or is being spent elsewhere, the dollar amount of the repair is added to the deferred maintenance estimate. The 1997 Master Plan indicates that A&M has about \$24 million in deferred maintenance. While not at a critical level for a campus this size, that is a \$4 million increase from 1996. Another measure of present quality is satisfaction with student services. Craig



ADAM COLLETT
columnist

Rotter is a frequent recipient of input via his position as Student Services Chair for Student Government. This year, he has fielded both compliments and complaints. While the President's office has made money available to accelerate the installation of Ethernet in the residence halls, the University has not responded to requests to make faculty evaluations and grade distributions more easily accessible via the Internet. While Parking, Traffic and Transportation Services made some student-friendly changes in their bus routes to accommodate summer West Campus construction, complaints about enforcer rudeness, shuttle bus conditions and miscommunication continue. And most recently, construction of new athletic fields has resulted in a net loss of convenient commuter parking spaces. Josh Hennessey, academic affairs chair for Student Government, has been dealing with educational issues. Hennessey reports that while the honors department would like to offer more official honors sections to meet student demand, a lack of funding has prevented that. Another academic problem is blanket grading. In research conducted during the Fall 1996 semester, Hennessey's committee discovered 15 to 20 professors who issued blanket midterm grades. Hennessey also reports that he is starting to hear more complaints about students feeling like numbers and not knowing what's going on around campus. "The University does a great job of providing strong development and great leadership opportunities for its...top achievers... but as the University expands more, it might possibly neglect the development of its more average students," Hennessey said. All of this information shows that the current facility, student services and academic components of the University are not perfect. The question then becomes whether these problems have been caused by administrative neglect of current offerings in a quest for faster growth. Dr. Jerry Gaston, vice president for administration, suggests that as far as facilities go, A&M is just now approaching where it needs to be in order to serve the student body. From 1964 until about 1982, A&M was one of the fastest growing major universities in the nation (fueled by, among other things, the formal admittance of women

and the revocation of obligatory membership in the Corps). That left A&M with inadequate academic space for its burgeoning student body. In fact, a 1996 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board review determined that A&M, for its enrollment size, was still about 447,000 square feet underbuilt. Dr. Gaston also points out that the deferred maintenance is being addressed. Unlike many other universities across the country, "at A&M, we have been working on it diligently." In fact, there is a five-year plan in which all \$24 million in deferred maintenance will be repaired, without adding one square foot to the existing infrastructure. Regent Guadalupe Rangel says that the Board of Regents' primary goal is to take all necessary actions to help A&M become one of the top ten universities in the nation. In that regard she is proud of the recent addition of the Bush School. Although she disagrees with the exact agreement under which A&M affiliated with the South Texas College of Law, she acknowledges that the association was one of the needed steps toward top ten status. But Regent Rangel also indicates that the Board of Regents very carefully weighs all factors before deciding to expand the University in any way. In fact, although the Board would like to explore various options to increase enrollment, it knows that the current facilities and personnel won't support such a move. The University appears to be acting responsibly, though not perfectly, toward its current facilities and programs while working feverishly to add new ones. But there exists a fine line between catching up and overexpansion. Too much growth of infrastructure and programming will mean higher tuition for a lower quality educational product. In an era of diminishing state funding for higher education, Texas A&M needs to continue to carefully consider options for growth. While whole-cloth acquisitions and major construction will certainly boost A&M's stature in the short term, it will be strong customer service and quality educational programs that maintain it. The goal of top ten or world-class status is tempting indeed, but in its quest for Vision 2020, the administration must not lose sight of Quality 1998.

Adam Collett is an educational administration graduate student.

STUDENT LIFE

Bracelets act as fads, not messages

Fashion fads come and go. Whether it is baggy clothes, clothes that are too small, certain jewelry, whatever it is, we have all been a part (or victim) of some of these current trends. One of the newest and hottest trends on campus has to be those W.W.J.D. bracelets. W.W.J.D. stands for, "What Would Jesus Do?" It serves as a reminder to the wearer to act in accordance to the teachings of Jesus Christ, specifically how he would act in situations. It is truly a great task for someone to attempt to better themselves by religion, and that should not be subjected to criticism. However, with every movement there is a small percentage of followers that tends to ruin what could be a good thing. Some people seem to have donned these bracelets only because it looks cool, or all their friends are wearing them. Maybe proclaiming your religious faith is suddenly cool, but how many of these fair-weather Christians will still wear their bracelets when they leave the safety of Aggieland and their socially supportive peer group? Furthermore, peer pressure does not make you a Christian. Going to church every Sunday does not make you a Christian, and neither does a bracelet. There are certain "Christian" people who run around, bracelets intact, drinking it up and partying down in the name of Jesus. These are not isolated events; and it happens way too often not bring this issue to the surface. It is not hard to spot these fair-weather Christians. If one is out at Northgate these people are not hard to spot. They seem to be under the impression that W.W.J.D. stands for What Would Jesus Drink. Or maybe it stands for What Would Jesus Do



JOE SCHUMACHER
columnist

from Monday at 8 a.m. through Friday at 5 p.m.? Whatever the case, these people seem to put their religious teachings and doctrines to the side when it comes time to party. Religion should not be a fashion statement. Fashion fads come and go, religion should not. Religion should be a personal choice that people hold sacred, not just something they do to join a certain crowd or to obtain a little trinket to wear around their wrist. This is not to say that every good Christian should stay home and study the Bible. Wanting to go out and socialize is understandable. Even having a few drinks is probably okay (given the fact that some churches serve wine, it's a pretty safe bet). There is a fine line between socially drinking and getting drunk. So people who wear those bracelets should ask themselves before they go out, "What Would Jesus Do?" Would he go to the Chicken, slam down a few beers and then go cruising for women? Chances are probably not. Maybe these particular people should be paying attention to the initials on their wrist more closely. This is not to say that people are infallible. The Christian religion is based on failure and forgiveness. It is impossible to live a sin-free life, however, people who commit the "big sins" while wearing a bracelet like this seem to be "sinning" in the face of God. This also seems to be a bit sacrilegious. Not everyone who wears these bracelets is a hypocrite. The people who truly follow their own words at all times need to be commended. The people who do not are an embarrassment to themselves and other Christians who are truly trying to live a life closer to God. One could argue that these same fair-weather Christians are trying as well. It does not seem like they are trying hard enough. After all, sacrifice is another Christian doctrine.

Joe Schumacher is a sophomore journalism major.