

STUDENT LIFE

Dining on campus is not fun

Lack of variety, mystery meats make University eateries unpleasant to frequent

In the mid-1980s, in response to other fast-food chains' burgers, Wendy's asked the less question "Where's the exit?" However, in response to quality of food provided at university's cafeterias, Aggies are asking the question "Where's the exit?" One of the greatest things we at Texas A&M is the Aggie title of Honor. One of the things that it stresses is that Aggie don't lie. Thus, this university's food service should immediately change its slogan "Dining on campus is fun."



MICKEY SALOMA
columnist

This slogan is the biggest lie ever to circulate on campus. Dining on campus can be described in many ways, but fun certainly is not an appropriate one. It does not mean to bash the managers and employees that work for Texas A&M Food Services. It's not their fault that the cafeterias are awful. I have no idea who to blame.

Students at Texas A&M are asked to shell out some money to eat on campus, yet the quality of the food should reflect the amount they pay. I just want my money's worth. That's not too much to ask. Unfortunately, we have the fifteen meal plan. Being a member of the Corps requires me to purchase this

meal plan, and I can honestly say that if it weren't for the Corps, I would not have a meal plan. If I had a choice between Duncan chow and starvation, well, starvation would definitely sound like an excellent option.

I left high school thinking that the days of nasty, over-priced meals were over. Little did I know the price and quality of the food would not get any better. In fact I can honestly say it has gotten worse.

My first experience with this university's food services came during breakfast of my first day in the Corps during Freshman Orientation Week. I loved all the different cereals, the donuts and what looked like real eggs, hash browns and sausage.

I am not saying the eggs are not real — they just do not taste like any other eggs I have ever eaten. The hash browns weren't a terrible experience. The sausage was pretty good.

My first taste of college food



appeared to be a pleasant experience for about two hours.

Afterward, let's just say the food got me acquainted with the bathroom for a while.

Dinner on the same night also appeared to be pretty good. I never had both pizza and hamburgers in the same sitting of a meal.

But later, the food proved to be too much for my digestive system, and I was unable to reacquaint myself with the bathroom for five days.

My Mom always taught me when giving feedback, to remember to always include something positive. Well, I love the Lucky Charms. What a great cereal. I commend Food Services on this tasty dish. They truly have out done themselves.

I personally think the food is not terribly bad, however some of the menu choices make the on-campus dining experience less than a pleasurable one.

The biggest problem Food Services has is variety. I think it is about time we

retire the all-purpose breaded meat patty. That patty is the most versatile thing known to man. Sometimes, it is served with gravy and called either chicken-fried steak or country-fried steak. Other times, they put a slice of cheese and tomato sauce on it and throw it on top of some noodles and called it Chicken Parmesan. Last, I suspect that sometimes when this patty is either left-over or too freezer-burnt to serve as is, they chop it up and use it as the beef in stroganoff.

It seems as if for four years, I have eaten the same thing every week. Four years of smelly popcorn shrimp, over-boiled broccoli and green Jell-O with some whipped cream substitute on top have made me a big fan of the Underground and the vending machines.

I just want something that will safely settle in my stomach that is not on food services' rotation schedule. I want something new but not necessarily daring. I am thinking along the lines of beanie-weenies.

I am not an extremist. I will not start a protest or even a boycott.

All I want is variety in the menu and more Lucky Charms.

Until that day, food services should change its slogan to "Dining on campus is fun if you aren't hungry," or "Dining on campus is repetitive and nasty" or simply, "Dining on campus sucks."

Mickey Saloma is a senior journalism major.

CAMPUS CONNECTION

Changes threaten Walton, Hart traditions

Ever wonder where all those Aggie jokes come from? The Department of Residence Life just answered that with their screw-'em-in-pocketbook plan to install air conditioning in all where it is about as come as orange poly-pants.



DONNY FERGUSON
columnist

According to Residence Life, Walton Hall has a problem with low retention rates and parental complaints over the lack of air conditioning.

The proposed plan is to offer Hart Hall as a no-AC option and install window units in Walton Hall in an effort to sell more rooms, with a grandfather clause for current residents.

The catch is, Hart Hall is old, dilapidated and sitting on prime property (translation: sitting ball target) and Walton residents who do not want the unit (the problem being, with windows bolted shut, residents will have choice but to buy the overpriced air conditioning — if you need further explanation, look for "highway robbery").

Instead of a no-AC Hart and an optional-AC Walton, what Aggies will be stuck with is a pile of rubble near Rudder Tower and hundreds of residents forced to pay the University hundreds of dollars for air conditioning they never wanted in the first place.

Under the proposed plan, \$525 per semester Walton rooms will be equipped with a window unit and the price jacked up to \$925 per semester.

Residence Life states it is good business practice to sell as many rooms as possible, which everyone agrees with) and the best business practice they can come up with is to install air conditioning in the non-AC style dorm rooms and then charge a Balcony rate (which even kids running a lemonade stand will tell you is bad business.)

What Residence Life should do instead is offer air conditioning on an optional basis. Many residents intentionally select non-air-conditioned

dorms like Walton because AC would only be used two to three months each school year and the low price allows them to complete an education they otherwise could not afford.

Allowing Walton residents to rent the units on a semester basis is the best plan for all parties involved. All rooms will be wired for AC anyway, and those students who do not want or cannot afford it will not be forced to hand over more money to the University. Anything less would be tantamount to a stick-up.

If "good business practice" is the motive behind the AC scheme, then it is already a failure. Taco Bell can't improve burrito sales by slapping a cherry on it and charging \$19.99, and the University can't sell more rooms if they shove an AC in the window and charge an additional \$400.

Residence Life, if they choose not to offer AC on an optional basis, should either lower the price substantially or offer more amenities such as carpeting, larger closets or larger beds. If Residence Life thinks they have problems selling low-priced rooms in a non-air conditioned dorm, then they should be prepared for the financial disaster that would follow charging over \$1500 for what it a cramped, early 1900's style room with a window unit bolted into the wall.

Upperclassmen will flock off-campus and incoming freshmen will leave at the end of the fall semester, if not sooner.

What Residence Life also ignores is the fact the absence of air conditioning is what makes Walton so unique and valuable to the University. Compared to other dorms on campus, Walton is extremely close knit. In the first few weeks of the fall semester, every door in Walton is kept wide open to accommodate air circulation.

The doors are kept open year-round, even during colder months. Residents gather outside on the benches to study and talk and those who stay inside do so with an open door.

This close-knit community makes Walton one of the University's heavier contributors to traditions and other functions. Countless yell leaders, Student Senators and other campus leaders have come from Walton's close-knit tra-

dition and the installation of dorm-wide air conditioning would destroy that and do serious harm to the University on a cultural, social and traditions basis. As usual, the University has come up with yet another bad idea.

Offering air conditioning on an optional basis is the truest test of Residence Life's intentions. If the plan is to sell rooms, optional AC is a fantastic idea, giving students flexibility and attracting residents. If the plan to squeeze more money out of already cash-strapped students, expect the current proposal to go through.

Installing air conditioners into eventually every room in Walton will force students to cough up exorbitant amounts of money. If you're familiar with University history (annual fee increases, selling more parking tags than spaces and "The Zone,") all signs point to option B.

If Residence Life is correct in its claims, the problem with Walton is parents and incoming freshman upset over the lack of air conditioning, the best plan is to advertise Walton's low cost and unique culture.

Walton is nothing like any other hall on campus, and residents could not care less about the lack of air conditioning when compared to the experience of Load, dinner at Sbsa and other, more unique, Walton functions.

Walton Hall offers something no other hall does, and by advertising it, Residence Life could sell more rooms without having to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on installation and thousands more on maintenance.

So there you have it, yet another example of the University offering tradition to the highest bidder and shutting out the students in the process.

Air conditioning may come to Walton, along with higher costs, dying traditions and generations of prospective Aggies who either cannot afford to come to A&M, or will miss out on one of its most legendary experiences — life in Walton Hall.

Donny Ferguson is a junior political science major.

STATE OF THE UNION

Formerly 'reliable' news sources tainted by tabloids

"I had an alien's baby," cries 500 pound midget."



BEVERLY MIRELES
columnist

Ah, the good ole days, when tabloids were fun and basically goofy.

Times are really changing. Recently, the odds are more in favor of seeing Monica Lewinsky on the cover of all the gossip rags, rather than Liz Taylor. You know someone is scandal material when they not only make the cover of the *Times*, but they beat out Nostradamus' predictions for the future. Infamy at its best, I tell you.

Personally, if I was running a tabloid in this day and age, I would be a little ticked off that all the "respectable" journalists were scooping all my hot stories.

It is really more of a problem for the public than the tabloids, though. Now we not only have to weed out the outrageously false stories that circulate through our psyche, we get to sift through half-truths spread by news institutions that were supposed to be cemented in fact.

True, factual (and sometimes boring) news reporting versus scandalous rumor spreading. Guess which one gets better ratings.

It is pretty much our fault. That is the really infuriating part. Because of our love for puff pieces on septuplets and "hard-hitting" exposes, the well-coiffed Stone Phillips makes it on to NBC's schedule two to three times a week. Oh, God bless America.

But a solution cometh, dear reader. Why don't we just join news reporting and the entertainment industry forever? That way the "decent" journalists like Sam Donaldson wouldn't have to spread rumors about political scandals on national television.

Besides, PBS's ratings would triple if they started airing the McNeil-Lehrer-Scary Spice hour.

A few suggestions on integrating news and entertainment: First, prime time news gets a make over. Norm McDonald would make a great anchor for the evening news. There just aren't enough stories about crack whores — we all know he is the man to rectify that problem.

He could even make fun of the ridiculous stories that make it on the evening news. Dan Rather couldn't laugh when he had to report on the president's "distinguishing mark," but you know he had to struggle to keep a straight face. Everyone else in the nation was laughing.

Secondly, all comedians can be political analysts for the news. This actually worked for Comedy Central during the '96 presidential campaign. Chris Rock made the political system interesting (and funny) to watch in action.

Truthfully, his reports on the GOP convention were more on the mark than any correspondent's from NBC, CBS or ABC.

Finally, "Politically Incorrect" could make the move to prime time. Bill Maher was ahead of the times when he started grouping entertainment moguls and political figures for debates on current issues. Talk about the best of both worlds.

On what other show could Marilyn Manson come on and eloquently remark on topical stories? No other show that I am aware of, that is for sure.

Now, I know that my "big solution" for news reporting would basically rip the last shreds of decency from journalism, and replace newsworthiness with humor. Maybe it would be for the best, though. We need to laugh about our scandals, our political system and the paradoxical nature of humanity.

Perhaps it is just another form of denial, but it is easier to laugh about all the screwy things in the world, than to listen to them in all their painful seriousness.

Beverly Mireles is a freshman microbiology major.



MAIL CALL

Minimum wage attack shows lack of research

I am writing in response to Donny "Rush" Ferguson's lengthy piece in the Feb. 12 issue of *The Battalion* in which he attacks the minimum wage.

I could waste my time and medically tear down his weak arguments the minimum wage has any direct correlation with higher prices

or decreased job opportunities. I could also derive much pleasure from countering some of his more ludicrous statements, such as his claim that busboys and waitresses make as much as \$40,000 a year when tips are added to their "high" minimum wages.

No, I won't waste my time with such attempts. I will limit my comments of Ferguson's column to this: if he is going to take the time to write a lengthy, three-column tirade against the minimum wage, he should at least state correctly what the minimum wage currently is. More than once, Ferguson writes the minimum wage is \$5.50 an hour, when in reality it has only recently been raised to \$5.15 an hour.

The fact he doesn't even know what the current minimum wage rate is should make everyone who read this column wonder about the depth of his knowledge on the sub-

ject and question the truthfulness of his statements.

Keith Volanto
Graduate Student

Prisons serve to keep criminals off the street

In response to Mandy Cater's Feb. 12 column:

Prison's job is not to "rehabilitate" people, it is to force them to accept their actions have undesirable consequences — foremost of which is to deprive them of their ability to participate in that society.

I think most states' citizens would rather spend whatever it takes to punish criminals than to spend one cent to elevate the criminal's standard of living above anything higher than that criminal can get on his or her own.

Criminals make choices to commit crimes that have consequences.

That decision is consciously made to do right or wrong, and the character of the person is the determinant. One taking drugs (or alcohol) voluntarily enters a state where deadly, injurious actions are possible — as surely as if they had put a gun to someone's head. Prison keeps them from the rest of society. Those lacking the character to say "no" are not going to develop it except through life-altering experiences, and certainly never will if they are allowed to escape the consequences of their actions.

No, the harder the prisons are, the fewer people will commit the actions that get them placed in them. There are too many honest, hard-working people who get no state monies spent on their "rehabilitation" to go pandering after rehabilitation money for convicted criminals.

Mike Schoellman
Class of '00