

CAMPUS CONNECTION

**Absence, excuse
policy stands as an
insult to students**



**MANISHA
PAREKH**
columnist

The university views class attendance as an individual student responsibility. The University Attendance Policy outlined in the 1997-98 student rules book. A statement such as this leads to inclusion if a student chooses not to attend class for a personal reason, such as a family or illness, the student is allowed to do that.

many students can attest to, this is the real world. In order to be "responsible," a student is required to go through feats of bureaucratic acrobatics.

order to be officially excused from class, students must provide some sort of evidence to substantiate their excuse, whether it be a doctor's note or a death announcement.

interesting to note in a world where college students are expected to serve in the military, make public policy and balance the books of school and work, they are not trusted to know whether they should get a day off from school.

is nice to be trusted with only the "minor" things.

prevailing theory behind the need for verification of an excuse is some students lie in order to get out of classes and tests.

do so many workers in the "real world" who are not required to substantiate every absence. This is in spite of the fact those absentees actually cost the employer money.

when a student is absent, Texas A&M does not lose any money. Students are held to a higher burden of proof than most workers; often leads to students attending class when they should not, for the sake of themselves and others.

when a loved one dies, the survivors often go through a period of mourning during which they are unable to deal with work and school. A number of Aggies who must deal with such a tragedy grow Silver Taps is held.

according to the student handbook, unless the student is a member of the deceased person's immediate family, the absence is excused. It would seem, according to the University, students do need to grieve for their close friends and colleagues.

what must be the reason Silver Taps is held late at night; because it is not in session.

order to excuse an absence, the student must provide "satisfactory evidence to the instructor to substantiate the reason for absence."

what constitutes satisfactory evidence when a family member dies? In some instances, copies of death certificates and obituaries are required.

is nice to know the University is considerate of students during a time of mourning.

the majority of absences, however, are due to illness. Joe Aggie wakes up one morning and has a sore throat, a runny nose and a headache. What should Joe Aggie do? He could follow his mother's advice: get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids. Too bad he can't. According to A&M, Joe Aggie needs to go see a private doctor or go to the Health Center and get an excuse. Apparently the administration thinks most doctors have nothing better to do than treat colds (for which there is no quick-fix medicine) and write excuses for sick students.

the most students and doctors know, that is simply not the case. If a student feels that they are ill, they should call or e-mail their professor, Dr. Ann Reed of Beutal Health Center said.

The primary job [of the physician] is not to provide a note but to care of sick patients.

According to Reed, policies such as the University's have turned the physician into a "policeman for the school."

Doctors can't take care of the ill if they are seeing students who simply need excuses," Reed said.

I feel that it is your responsibility. I don't think that you should be at a school note."

the administration apparently feels doctors should not just be diagnosticians but judges too. Not only must the doctor verify the student is sick, but must also judge whether the illness is "too severe or contagious for the student to attend class."

how is poor Joe Aggie supposed to prove his cold is too severe for him to attend class? That is the doctor's judgment call. So for all the Joe goes through in order to take his sick self to the doctor in order to get an excuse, like a good Aggie, he still may not get it.

Never mind the fact Joe Aggie probably infected countless others with his cold and probably was not in shape to be driving to the doctor. The administration has laid down the law and students and doctors must bend to it.

that sounds kind of familiar, doesn't it?

It is ironic in a world where college students qualify as adults, they still required to get notes from "real" adults to prove they were lying about the reason for their absence.

how much for the Aggie Code of Honor.

Manisha Parekh is a sophomore psychology and journalism major.

PERSPECTIVES

Easing the election

Instant run-offs make for more efficient, fair selection process



**ADAM
COLLETT**
columnist

Patriotical colored campaign signs, among the first harbingers of approaching elections, have begun to appear in lawns and along roadsides around town. These signs for local elections also serve as a reminder campus elections are just around the corner.

An election campaign, whether on or off campus, is long, grueling, emotionally exhausting and financially draining. It is small wonder so many candidates resort to mudslinging and other forms of negative campaigning; they're grouchy and tired of the whole process. Similarly, when an election has to go into Round 2 (a run-off), the negative campaigning typically gets worse, as evidenced by last year's Houston mayoral race.

Election dynamics show candi-

dates aren't the only people turned off by this second-time-around system; lower voter turnout in run-offs allows ballot counters to go home a little earlier than the first election day.

In the 1997 Texas A&M Student Government elections, turnout dropped by nearly 25 percent for the runoff, from 8,911 to 6,745 ballots. A year earlier, turnout suffered a precipitous 55 percent fall, from 10,100 to 4,500 votes cast.

Such turnout reductions cast doubt on the supposition that the traditional single-vote plurality/run-off elections ensure majority support for a candidate. Current Student Body President Curtis Childers occupies his office on the strength of 3,380 votes — about 40 percent of the original turnout and a mere eight percent of the total student population.

However, as yet unheeded policy specialists, such as Rob Richie of the Center for Voting and Democracy in Washington, D.C., continue to ad-

vocate for a better way: the instant run-off election (IRO). Although the IRO can be implemented along several models, the common thread is voters each cast a one-time ballot with multiple choices.

All variations of the IRO are preferential; that is, voters vote for multiple candidates, but the votes are rank-ordered. Preferential methods include the plurality method (the most first-place votes win) and the Borda Count method (each vote receives a point score commensurate with its rank and the highest point total wins). The latter method is often used in rankings sports teams and colleges.

In whatever form, the IRO is practical — it saves the expense and hassle of runoffs and can be implemented with only minor changes to

the current voting infrastructure. The IRO also increases voter turnout, gives voters more options, helps select the strongest candidate, gives minority candidates a fairer shot, and helps candidates better understand the electorate.

And here's the best part: instant run-offs help prevent negative campaigning because candidates know winning is dependent upon them being the second choice of other candidates' supporters. Suddenly, candidates have the negative campaigning crutch yanked away, leaving them to stand or fall on the strength of their issues, which is how it's supposed to work in the first place.

Although city and state governments may be too entrenched in their ways to effectively implement such a system, a student governmental system is malleable enough to withstand the change. Texas A&M's student elections should be modified to include an instant run-off system.

Adam Collett is an educational administration graduate student.

LONE STAR LOWDOWN

State best served by voting for Republicans

Given that the Texas Democratic Party's popularity is sinking faster than Ross Street, the real decision as to who will lead Texas into the 21st century will be made Primary Tuesday. Buffeted by America's rediscovery of its conservative core values, Texans are flocking to the polls to elect Republicans to lead the Lone Star State.



**DONNY
FERGUSON**
columnist

We have elected only the second Republican governor since the 1870s. For the first time in over 120 years, Republicans control the State Senate. In 1996, more Texans voted in the Republican primary than in the Democratic. Even on the federal level, Texas is a GOP stronghold; both U.S. Senators are Republicans and once the dust has settled on the 1998 elections, many expect a majority of Texas' congressmen to be from the party of Lincoln.

Pundits statewide expect Republicans to sweep all state-wide executive offices, retain control of the State Senate and take over the House of Representatives. Therefore, it is vitally important for Texas voters to participate in the GOP primary to set an agenda for Texas' future.

While some primary slots have only one candidate (Carole Keeton Rylander for Comptroller, former yell leader Rick Perry for Lieutenant Governor and State Senator Steve Ogden) most are contested races and deserve close attention.

The candidates listed below comprise the finest Texas has to offer, and if voters truly care about pointing our state in the right direction in the next century, they should go to the polls today to vote for these competent and able men and women.

• GOVERNOR — George W. Bush
Only the second Republican governor since Reconstruction, Bush should cruise to easy victories in the primary and general elections. He delivered on his pledge of property-tax relief and worked well with House Speaker Pete Laney and Lieutenant Governor Bob Bullock,

both Democrats. Expect greater things from Bush when Republicans gain control of the Capitol in November.

• ATTORNEY GENERAL — Tom Pauken
A committed, principled conservative, Pauken will make the Attorney General's office a voice for the people of Texas. Tough on crime and dedicated to common-sense conservative principles, Pauken has earned the Republican nomination for Texas Attorney General. A skilled attorney, Pauken is an experienced legal mediator and brings knowledge and competence to the Attorney General's office.

• RAILROAD COMMISSION — Steve Stockman

Common-sense deregulation and promotion of railway safety are Steve Stockman's top priorities. While in Congress, Stockman represented Texas' 9th District, covering the Southeast Texas coast and served on the House Science Committee's Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment.

There he introduced his own bill, The Regulatory Relief and Job Preservation Act, which provided for common-sense deregulation of the oil and gas industry along with incentives for domestic (Texas) production and expansion. He fought hard for The Deep Water Royalty Act which revitalized Texas' offshore-oil industry and created hundreds of jobs in his congressional district. Stockman has been endorsed by hundreds of state leaders, including a majority of the State Republican Executive Committee, over 50 GOP county chairmen (including Brazos County Chair David Kent) talk-radio host and President Reagan's son Michael Reagan, Texas GOP Vice-Chair David Barton, Betty Lou Martin of Concerned Women for America and the Young Conservatives of Texas.

The Texas Railroad Commission could use someone with Stockman's commitment to free enterprise, job creation and his dedication to our oil and gas industry, the heart and soul of Texas' economy.

• LAND COMMISSION — Jerry Patterson
A Texas A&M graduate, Vietnam veteran, Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel, dedicated proponent of private property rights and a friend of Texas veterans, State Senator Jerry Patterson also compiled an impressive record in

his six years serving the Houston area. Author of the home-equity lending bill which passed last fall, Patterson plans to trade natural gas to power producers and sell the electricity to local school districts at a lowered cost, saving taxpayers \$70 million. Once elected to lead the General Land Office, Patterson will see it serves Texans with honor and efficiency.

• AGRICULTURE COMMISSION — Hamp Hodges

Hodges is a long-time rancher and businessman from Paris (Texas, that is) and a decorated West Point graduate and Vietnam veteran. Hodges' business skills and rich agricultural background make him a natural successor to former Ag Commish Rick Perry. He plans to develop a state-wide fire ant eradication program to deal with the damage fire ants do to crops and livestock and unify the state's boll-weevil eradication program, helping our cotton industry. Texas farmers and ranchers need Hamp Hodges' experience, background and commitment representing them in Austin.

• STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION, DIST. 9 — Don McLeroy

McLeroy, from right here in Bryan, can sum up his educational philosophy in four simple words — back to the basics. If elected to the State Board of Education, McLeroy will fight for better textbooks, discipline and respect for teacher in the schools and greater parental participation. Already recognized as a leader on the Bryan school board and in the community, McLeroy should rise to the head of the class on the Texas State Board of Education.

• STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DIST. 14 — Fred Brown

A self-made success story, Brown is endowed with common-sense know-how and uncommon backbone. Brown represents the best of people of the 14th district and will do so successfully. A caring family man and an active member of the Bryan-College Station community, he will fight for lower taxes, less government and more local control. Brown's common-sense ideals and devotion to his community make him everything a representative ought to be.

Donny Ferguson is a junior political science major.



MAIL CALL

Homosexuality not a contagious disease

I was in shock as I read Donny Ferguson's column on the repeal of the Maine law prohibiting discrimination against homosexuals.

I am amazed he actually advocates a form of discrimination and uses his religious beliefs to justify that attitude. I, too, am a Christian, and I fully embrace the tenet to "love thy neighbor." I am staunchly against any form of discrimination.

While I may not choose to follow a certain lifestyle or identify with a certain belief, I realize all people should be judged solely on their abilities.

Sexual orientation has no bearing on a person's ability to fulfill a job, his ability to pay rent or even his ability to be a good friend and a wonderful person.

The Maine law did not put homosexuality on a pedestal or give gays rights over other citizens; instead, that law ensured that homosexuals would be given the same consideration, the same rights, as everyone else.

Homosexuality is not contagious, and people should stop treating gay people as if they have a communicable disease.

Karen Cormier
Class of '00

Opinions about gays disturb former student

As a former student I am appalled by Donny Ferguson's March 3 column. I would have thought by 1998 even Texas A&M would be more accepting and open to diversity.

Ferguson should be reminded that the vote was not exactly a landslide. At least there are 48 percent of the voters who believe

people should be treated fairly and without discrimination.

I would like to inform Ferguson that I am a healthy, successful individual who plans to live far past 41, is not destructive to anyone, not immoral and has no plans for assaulting religion.

I would like to be able to assault the government's tax codes though. I also have no agenda for forcing acceptance upon anyone. That does not mean I am not entitled to the same rights anyone else has and enjoys.

Lastly, I would like to convey to Ferguson that one's sexuality is not a choice. Why would anyone choose something that brings discrimination and hateful, assaulting people such as yourself into their lives?

This column is personally embarrassing to me as a former student. It gives the impression that Texas A&M is grossly out of touch with the rest of the world. I would like to think that a majority of the current A&M students do not share Ferguson's opinions about gays and lesbians.

Andrew Shell
Class of '85