

It's not the roll of the dice ...

**Bridge offered as pastime for all at University Plus**

BY STEPHEN WELLS  
Staff writer

This close to finals time, any diversion from intense studying is welcomed by most Texas A&M students. After long hours of cramming the information they should have learned months ago into their caffeine-hazed brains, students deserve a distraction.

For those students who need a new pastime and are willing to learn more than what their teachers tell them to, University Plus is offering an "Introduction to Bridge" course, familiarizing students with yet another way to spend their time without resorting to academics.

Sound fun? Bridge is a card game using bidding strategies similar to 42. The object of the game is to auction for the number of tricks you and your partner will take, along with the right to determine the trump suit.

The winner is determined using a point system at the end of the game. Unfortunately, "table talk" is not allowed as it is in 42. The challenge is that a player must describe his hand to his partner using only seven words for the more than five million possible combinations of cards.

Poppy Capehart, the MSC Program Director for University Plus, said the introductory course is the brainchild of suggestions from several student and faculty members.

"Essentially, I had MSC program staff members who asked me if I would consider a gaming program," Capehart said. "We started talking about different kinds of games we could include, and bridge came up. So I started asking around to see if we could hire a bridge teacher. Three days later I was put in touch with Elizabeth Booker, and it turns out she is an accomplished master bridge player. We worked out the contractual details, and needed 8 people to start the class. We ended up with more, so now we have a bridge class."

Elizabeth Booker, the teacher of the introduc-

tory bridge class, said she hopes to teach more young people the art of playing bridge and show them how fun it can be.

"Classes are going pretty well, but I'd always like to play with more young people," Booker said. "When I was in college bridge was the thing to do, but it became unpopular. When the fitness craze came in, smoking killed bridge. Now, most games are non-smoking."

Booker has some words of caution for prospective students.

"I actually hesitate to teach young people," Booker said. "In my day, people got hooked on the game, just like people get hooked on the computer now, and they would play it all the time and flunk out of school."

Bridge is not new to A&M. Only a few years ago an A&M bridge team, short on experience, upset several other schools and won the inter-collegiate ACBL championship. Booker said bridge is difficult to learn to play properly, but for someone who gives it an honest effort, it is worth the time spent.

"It's a great game," Booker said. "It is a complicated game to learn and if you don't practice between classes, you just won't get it. But it is a fun game, and one that you can play your whole life. You can always learn more about it, but you can never learn it all."

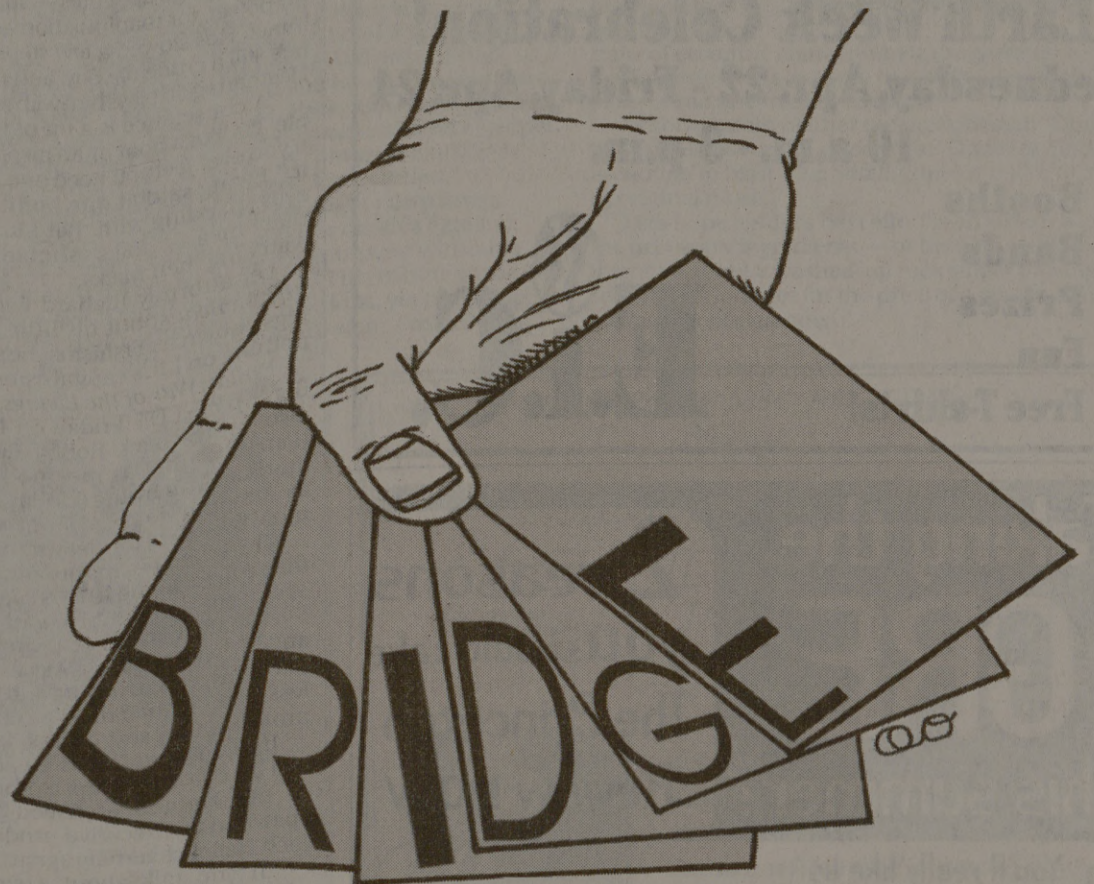
Students should leave the class with an understanding of the game, though.

"You should be able to play social bridge when you're done," Booker said. "You should be able to learn the basic mechanics of the game, bidding, learning how to finesse, count tricks and analyze hands."

If it sounds too complicated, it is not. Booker said she is sure students can leave the class with an understanding of the game.

"I taught in Saudi Arabia, and I ended up teaching over 1,000 people over there," Booker said. "Of those people, I think there were only

It's the cards in the hand ...



100 who I would call hopeless, and they just weren't going to get it. But you will learn the game in this class if you practice."

The classes have something to offer even to the experienced bridge player.

"I've had people take my beginner's class three times and tell me they've learned something new each time," Booker said. "I think you

can learn even more if you already understand the language."

The "Introduction to Bridge" course is available through University Plus. Classes start every Monday through May 11.

To register for the class or to get more information, call 845-1631 or visit the University Plus Center in the lower level of the MSC.

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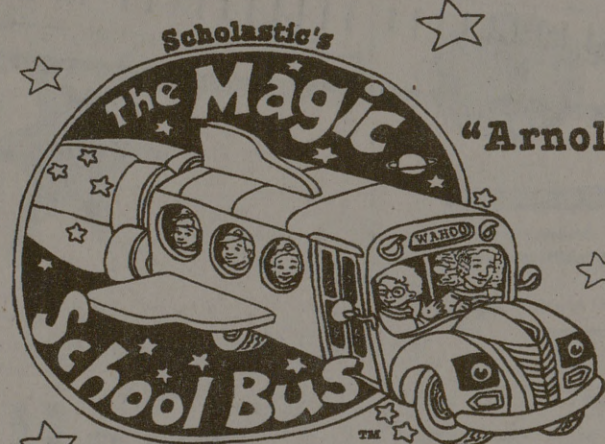
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