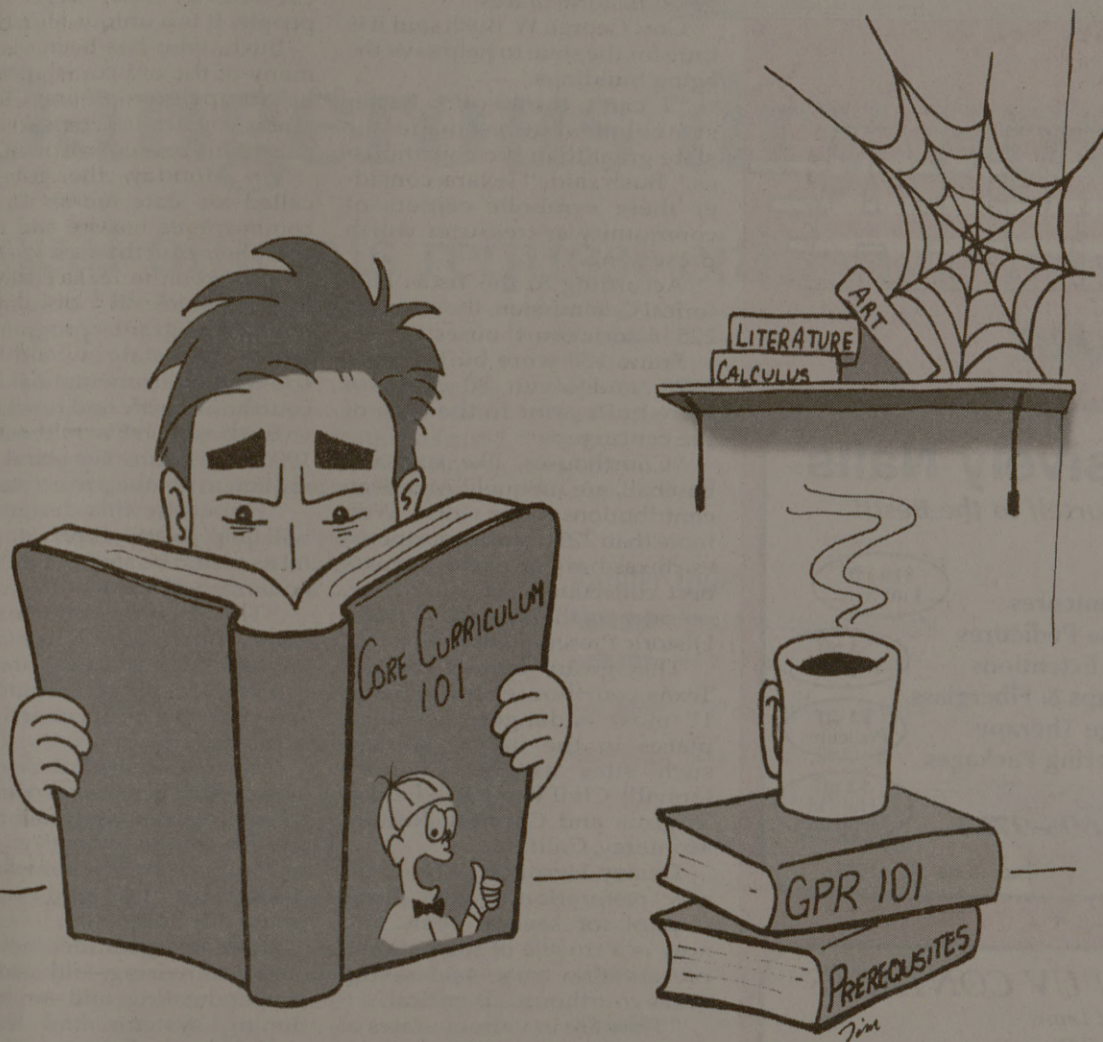


The student machine

Students become robots when it comes to educating themselves



"If the colleges were better, if they really had it, you would need to get the police at the gates to keep order in the rushing multitude. See in college how we thwart the natural love of learning by leaving the natural method of teaching what each wishes to learn, and insisting that you shall learn what you have no taste or capacity for. The college, which should be a place of delightful labor, is made odious and unhealthy, and the young men are tempted to frivolous amusements to rally their jaded spirits. I would have the studies elective.

Scholarship is to be created not by compulsion, but by awakening a pure interest in knowledge. The wise instructor accomplishes this by opening to his pupils precisely the attractions the study has for himself. The marking is a system for schools, not for the college; for boys, not for men; and it is an ungracious work to put on a professor."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Since Ralph Waldo Emerson succinctly described the problem facing universities today in one paragraph 100 years ago, this column should not even need to be written. However, it is possible that some students never have been exposed to the works of Emerson, one of the most renowned American philosophers of the 19th century.

More likely for students to have intimate knowledge of is their grade point ratio, the amount of hours left until they can order their Aggie rings and the number of classes they can squeeze into the summertime at community college.

Through core curriculum requirements, final exams that emphasize the most amount of material learned in the shortest amount of time and distant professors engaged in their own research, the love of learning has been lost.

How often do students look forward to class? How often are students excited about what they are learning?

Typically, students spend hours figuring out their schedule trying to determine which professor teaches the easiest or what class has the highest grade distribution. It is not just the university system, though.

In students' minds, the potential dollar signs that will come from a college degree take prevalence over the pure value of education.

According to George F. Will in Newsweek, only 25 percent of undergraduates are liberal arts majors. More and more students are choosing majors that will lead to profitable careers. College is becoming more of a breeding ground for money making than a place to learn. But who can blame the students?

Recent surveys on college graduates from the Class of '97 reveal that the average salary for liberal arts graduates is \$28,000. Those are some of the best figures seen in years for liberal arts, mostly due to a buoyant economy. Still, a chemical engineering degree tops the list at \$43,762 and a computer science degree yields at least \$38,475.

Universities, though, are places of

higher learning. Their aim and purpose lies within the education of the students, not just the preparation for future careers. Especially at a place such as Texas A&M, which is primarily agricultural and mechanical, it is easy to lose perspective on the importance of a liberal arts education.

Both students and universities are somewhat guilty of the crime of not appreciating learning for learning's sake. However, universities should be the institutions spearheading an interest in preserving knowledge. Students cannot respect the art of learning when their professors seem to find making exams difficult more important than having a real grasp on the material.

If Emerson faced the same deficiencies in education 100 years ago, and these deficiencies still do not seem to have been resolved, perhaps it indicates that universities are a necessary evil. Without universities, higher education would not even be possible. It is a great irony, though, that universities may be the institutions responsible for destroying students' love of learning.

Meredith Hight is a junior journalism major.



MEREDITH HIGHT
columnist

Heroes and those who deserve admiration are close friends

Name the person you most admire. Name the qualities you most admire about that person. Sound familiar?

The saying goes that the qualities one most admires in a person are the qualities that person exudes her or himself.

Maybe not. It's quite a stretch sometimes. I admire Mother Teresa of Calcutta, but my friends would probably say I don't have much in common with her. However, it is true that persons become like those with whom they spend the most time.

It is important for students to have role models — maybe someone older and wiser whom students strive to be like. On the other hand, college is a time for students to make decisions about their lives and futures under their own influence.

As students, we finally have escaped the nurturing of our parents. We are on our own. We can go to church wherever we choose. We can wear the black combat boots, pierce our bodies, dye our hair and stay out past midnight. We can become who we want to be, rather than who the world expects us to be.

More likely than not, we are a lot more like our friends than we would like to admit. I know I have a lot more in common with a few of my close friends than I do with Mother Teresa.

In a group of four or five close friends who see each other or talk on the phone almost daily, most finish each other's sentences for them and know what they are thinking before it comes out of their mouths.

When one of my best friends and I watch a movie, we play a game where we pick out which movie characters represent the people we know. Based upon the characters' words and actions, we can decide for each other who we are like.

So what is the purpose of having a hero? The people we are truly influenced by are staring us in the face every moment of our lives. I can say the editor of *The Washington Post* is my hero till I am blue in the face, but I do not spend every day modeling his mannerisms and studying his character.

We become like our friends subconsciously. We do not sit around in front of a mirror and practice saying certain expressions because they are popular among others. We just pick them up. Words, phrases, ideas, even beliefs often originate from how we allow others to influence us.

The question is, are our friends worthy of influencing us? Wouldn't we all rather be like the person we named when asked who we admire than the buddy next door?

Our college friends should be our heroes. Maybe once we graduate, we will live 12 states apart. Maybe we will have different jobs and different lifestyles. But we have chosen these people to spend time with us. We are free to choose what kind of lives we want and who we want to share them with.

Friends are one of the most important components of our character. They help us grow and watch us change. If one's friends are not persons whom he or she admires, maybe the individual should seek to find other friends.

I have grown closer to a group of a few people in just a couple of years than I ever grew toward anyone I knew in high school or before. I admire and respect each of them individually and hope to become like them in certain ways.

Mother Teresa and the editor of *The Washington Post* have not taught me about love, trust, companionship and friendship the way my friends have.

When someone says, "Name someone you admire," think about it. Maybe it's the person with whom you spend most of your time.

April Towery is a senior journalism major.



APRIL TOWERY
opinion editor



MAIL CALL

Women should be pastors too

In response to April Towery's June 11 column:

Towery argues in her June 11 column that women should not be pastors in the church; "it is the men who are the leaders," she says. Unfortunately, she offers little explanation for this position, simply spouting off Bible verses and wallowing in muddy reasoning.

At one point, for instance, she says

that the Bible can be interpreted to adapt to societal norms and gives as an example the fact that Israelites now eat rabbits, even though the Bible instructs them not to. Similarly, men of the church greet with a handshake instead of a kiss, as Paul told them to do. These, Towery says, are societal adaptations; "[a] woman pastoring a church is not." Why not? Apparently, the reader is supposed to deduce the answer for herself as Towery makes no attempt to back her claim.

At the same time that she is telling us that women should bow down to the leadership of men, Towery assures us that the submission which is required of women "does not equate inferiority." Now let's think for a moment. What would make men more qualified to be leaders than women? Or to put it another way, what are the qualities of good leaders? Intelligence, fairness, decisiveness, foresight, problem-solving skills, and compassion come to mind, to name a few.

Towery needs to do some serious thinking about her position on

women's role in the church and in the household. If she does, she will find that it is simply incompatible with her seemingly feminist assertions that women are not inferior, that "women are ready for progress" and that "the progression of women is a necessity." She's trying to have her cake and eat it too.

Carlynn Whitt

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to: The Battalion • Mail Call 013 Reed McDonald Texas A&M University College Station, TX 77843-1111 Campus Mail: 1441 Fax: (409) 845-2647 E-mail: batt@unix.tamu.edu



State concerned with rank and appearance instead of teaching

Tests are everywhere we go, around every corner of our educational venture. They are the speed bumps or fallen trees in the road that students must overcome to move on to the next level of the game of higher education. Now, one of the more infamous obstacles of our pre-college educational escapades is about to change the rules.

The state is strongly considering changing the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills testing format, which in turn may influence educators to alter their methods of teaching.

The reason the state has been considering changing the TAAS test is essentially the students and teachers. Yes, you read correctly, the students and the teachers are the reasons the state is considering the change.

TAAS test scores have increased significantly in the past five years and the students and teachers are to blame. This kind of news would possibly incite a parade for the teachers and maybe a raise in their pay anywhere else,

but not in Texas.

The TAAS covers four basic criteria: reading, writing, math and social studies. The present version of the TAAS was first administered in Fall 1990. The TAAS is administered to grades three through eight and again toward the end of the student's sophomore year in high school.

The purpose of the TAAS is to make sure that students have learned the basics to move on to the next grade level.

There has been a lot of controversy surrounding the TAAS test in recent years. Some consider the tests a waste of students' time and taxpayers' money. Others say they feel the teachers are just teaching the TAAS tests, and in doing so are shying away from the fundamentals.

Well, if the TAAS is to test the basic skills and a student passes the test, then the students have learned what they needed to learn and the teachers have done their job — it is as simple as that. Apparently, the State Board of Education seems to feel otherwise. The Board feels changes need to be made if the students are doing so well.

The state has stipulated that end-of-course tests be developed for selected high school courses. Pilot tests have been administered for the past two years, and the results of the tests were not available. Changes in the exams also

are being considered for the intermediate grade levels. The changes to be considered are not yet known.

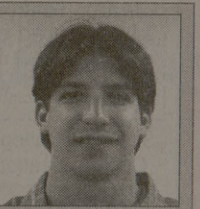
Texas always has been wrapped up in the problems with educational programs and schools. Texans constantly are angered by the fact Texas teachers are some of the lowest paid teachers in the country. This is hard for a majority of those in the profession to swallow, considering it is one of the most important jobs in our society today.

We also are rather embarrassed at the fact our state has been ranked as one of the lowest in test scores. The scores are starting to improve, but the teachers still are not receiving the praise they deserve.

Doctors are paid phenomenal amounts to repair and maintain people's bodies. Lawyers receive a large chunk of money to make sure someone else pays the doctors. How much do those who mold minds and open eyes to all the possibilities get paid? Not enough.

Texas teachers are not receiving the credit they deserve and these recent changes are a perfect example. The teachers are doing what needs to be done, and the tests show this, so why fix something if it's not broken?

Richard Paddock is a junior journalism major.



RICHARD PADDACK
columnist