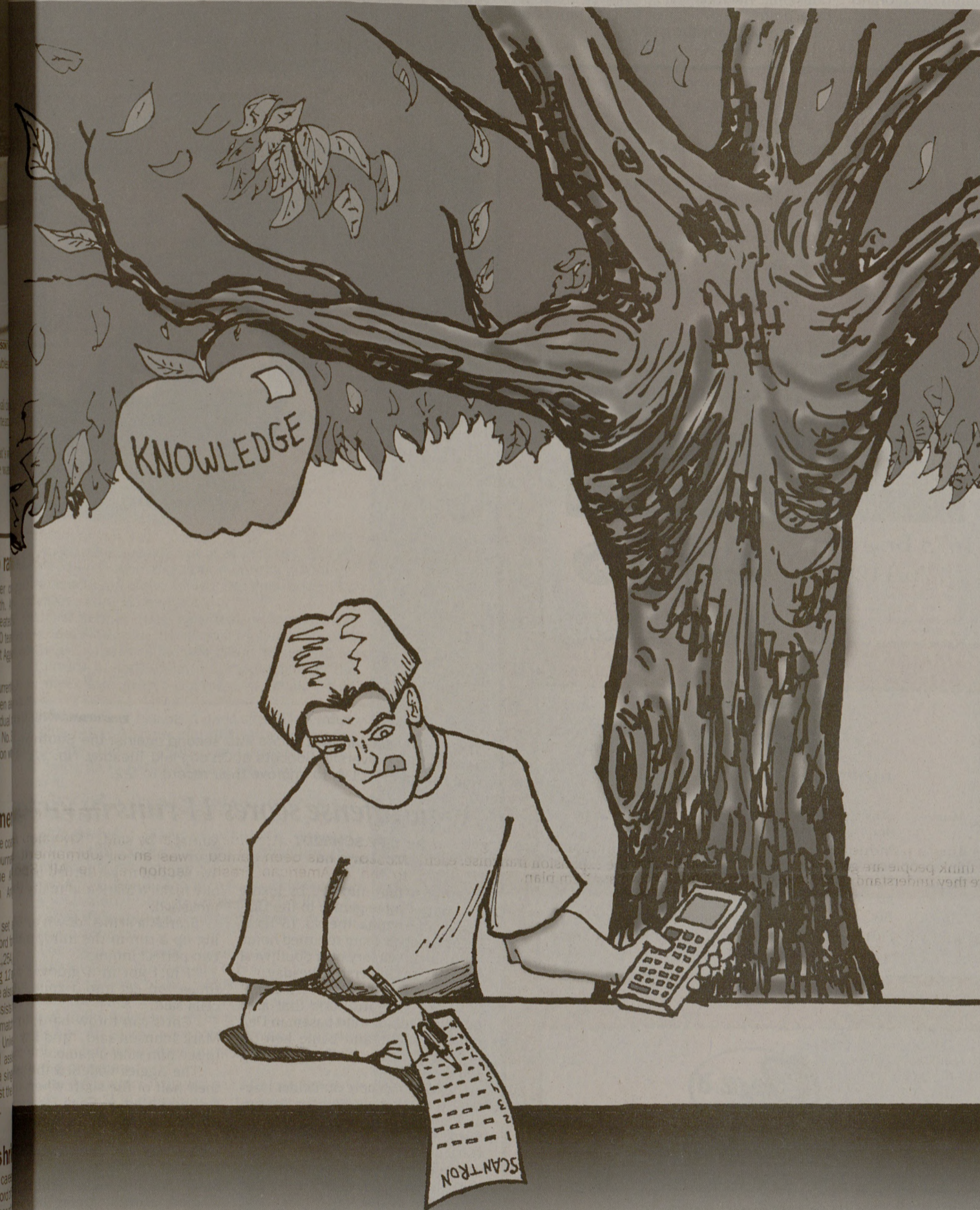


Ignoring the fruits of education



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

Students need to look beyond grades, embrace joy of learning

At Texas A&M, grades have taken importance over learning and students are sacrificing their quest for knowledge in pursuit of higher GPAs.



CHRISTIAN ROBBINS

Is it possible to enjoy learning and still make good grades? The answer lies within the problem, which is the administration, teachers and students.

Higher education is a huge financial investment. Students invest in themselves in order to become marketable within the work force and also to become informed citizens.

Doug Clayton, human resource manager for GE Capital said, "A college degree gets your foot in the door, because we know that you have the will to complete objectives that you start, but after that it's how you perform that keeps you here."

Once students enter the work force and society in general, they cannot perform efficiently if they have learned nothing but how to memorize enough material to make an "A" on a test without actually learning the material or why it is useful in life.

In many curricula, there is one of two flaws. First, some departments make the student's degree plan so rigorous and structured that the student cannot take anything outside of his or her major.

How can anyone become a well-rounded student when they have to spend 4, 5, 6 or 7 years in classes that only pertain to one subject? It is extremely difficult to take a class when the punishment is prolonged graduation or paying out-of-state tuition.

Von Goethe said, "They teach in academies far too many things, and far too much that is useless."

Departments should keep this in mind, when developing curricula. They must realize that in order to make students marketable, students must be diverse and well-rounded.

A student may make straight "A"s in industrial distribution, but when he or she is in a relaxed business setting and someone makes a reference to famous literature, a college graduate should not draw a blank because only basic literature was allowed in their college curriculum.

Teachers are the catalysts of the classroom. Some teachers have no choice but to teach toward a test, but in other cases, there is no excuse. Many professors have had the same test for years and instead of altering the test to fit what their students have learned; they alter what they teach to fit the outdated test. The

professors' lack of enthusiasm is seen by their monotonous tones as they babble directly from notes and in extreme cases directly from a textbook.

Students recognize and rave about teachers who are excited about a subject. These are the classes that stay full when attendance is not taken. When a professor is excited about a subject, most students are excited, too and class material remains the focus, not grades.

Teachers need to give students credit for making it to college. It is improbable that any professor would like to pay thousands of dollars to hear someone read directly from a book or piece of paper. Reading a nice poem, passage or even from the syllabus for clarification is fine, but reading from American Government: Past and Present, 5th edition is unacceptable. All college students can read. Professors have the power to peak interest in a subject or halt it all together. In some subjects, open discussion is not possible or productive, but guest speakers, like a mathematician or an accountant, can help students learn how the subject pertains to real life situations.

Students are the most affected and damaged by putting grades before learning. Students have the tendency to forget why they decided to come to college. Yes, students come here in hopes of finding jobs after graduation, but why (besides money) did they want that job? What did students love about their majors? What did that love about learning?

There should be no joy in a 4.0 if there are no thoughts, experiences, and new knowledge to back it up.

Students can also be part of the solution by paying attention in class and not facilitating collective stupidity by asking repetitive questions. But students must also begin to respect questions and comments of others and not become disgruntled when the class discussion progresses to something that may be relevant and helpful in learning, but not included on the test.

Tests will never be abolished in a public school and they should not be, but the material tested over should reflect real life experience. Is it possible to enjoy learning a still make good grades? Yes, good grades and sincere learning go hand in hand. The reward for all of the hard work, money and dedication students put into a higher education should not be manifested in a high GPA, but vast knowledge, experience and introduction to society as a well rounded citizen.

Christian Robbins is a junior speech communications major.

Science without humanity may spell end for artistic as well as scientific community around nation, world

There is a growing danger that science and the humanities are growing farther and farther apart. For example, last fall, composer Michael Gordon and librettist Matthew Maguire debuted an opera about chaos theory entitled, appropriately, Chaos.



CALEB MCDANIEL

From the reeling reception the opera received from music critics, it appears the title says it all. The cacophonous musical progressions and discordant harmonies were indeed chaotic, if not anarchic, and the subconscious repetition of the libretto rilled home the central premise of chaos theory — "The movement of a butterfly's wing in Beijing can magnify till it sets a Kansas cyclone spinning."

At that point in the score, the opera as a person might say, "Give me a break." Modern mathematics and music do not mix. Things like superstring theory just were not meant to be string arrangements. Ill-conceived operas like Gordon's and Maguire's seem to prove the idea that science and art should go their merry ways and never the two should meet. Physicists are stuck to quarks and painters can stick to collages. Madama Butterfly should not try to kick up Kansas cyclones.

On the other hand, "Chaos" illustrates the

difficult dilemma that art and science find themselves in at the end of the 20th century. In a civilization where the arts have always communicated the central values of being human, what happens when science begins to encroach upon those values?

This question is played out on much smaller levels even at places like Texas A&M University — what is a science-based research institution to do about those pesky humanities?

As abstract or seemingly melodramatic as such questions must be, citizens of a scientific age must face them. As the new millennium approaches, we must be careful to avoid one of Gandhi's most timely social sins — science without humanity.

On its most basic level, Gandhi's warning reminds us that science cannot be conducted without humanity if only because alone humans delve into science.

In reality, that reminder is what the opera "Chaos" tried to convey. In the Feb. 14 issue of *The New York Times*, composer Gordon revealed the deeper point behind his score.

"If you don't know anything about science," Gordon says, "you might think it's this very cut-and-dried thing."

The opera instead tried to capture the "very human, very raw way" scientists work. "The scientific process is as human as the artistic process," he said. "It's an emotionally driven, passionately driven endeavor."

In other words, even physics can be poetry because both are produced by human

beings. But to deify physics and throw out poetry would throw out the passion of the scientific enterprise, the youthful exuberance of a Bill Nye, the Science Guy. For the aim of science is not to undermine arts, but to understand Michael Faraday's wide-eyed revelation, "Nothing is too wonderful to be true."

It should be obvious that science without humanity would not only be boring — it would be self-defeating. As science becomes increasingly theoretical, we must not allow it to become sterile and static, because "Science" is not its own self-sustaining personality suspended somewhere in the ether — it is something humans do. And scientists cannot take off their humanity, their deepest sense of what is beautiful or right, just to put on their lab coats.

The danger of such a divorce between science and scientists, however, raises a second specter that our civilization is just beginning to fathom. Science without humanity would also mean science unconstrained by ethics and morality.

This danger grows more real by the decade, and hopefully its worst realities have already been lived out by the Nazi scientists who conducted torturous experiments on human babies. Our moral dilemmas with science may not be as salient as the inhumanity of the Nazis, but just because they are more subtle does not mean they are less important. An age of genetic engineering and environmental issues raises human questions that cannot be punched into a calculator.

When confronted with these human issues, science cannot scoff at Pascal's suggestion that knowledge of science will not be as helpful as knowledge of God in times of moral distress.

Science's attempts to find ethics in evolution or morality in the theory of relativity have ranged from the ridiculous to the insidious, and it is high time that human values be reassigned in the scientific sphere. To hear some scientists talk, one would think that a human's only obligation is to his or her genes. Scientific reductionism has begun to reduce morality to math.

To rant about such dangers now may be a bit premature. But the spooky images of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* may not be so imaginary. If science leaves humanity behind, the future world will not be a nice place for humans to live because it will not be human at all.

On a practical level, perhaps the most we can do right now is refuse to let our academic communities teach science without the humanities. Small steps taken now to protect human values and norms from abridgement by science can reap great rewards in the future.

Even though modern science may be more remote from the average human understanding, science is still, above all, a human project.

And science without humanity is chaos indeed.

Caleb McDaniel is a sophomore history major.

MAIL CALL

Clinton removal trial not "circus"

In response to Manisha Parekh's Feb. 16 opinion column.

The Independent Council did not "fail" and the GOP is far from "trained monkeys." For all the personal attacks against Ken Starr, no one disputes his findings.

Even some of Clinton's most loyal defenders acknowledge that he committed perjury and quite possibly obstruction of Justice. These are felonies, and it saddens me that a robust economy and an apathetic public can save Clinton.

He was not prosecuted for private sexual behavior, but for violating an oath more than once, and enlisting others in the fight to obstruct justice. I am thankful for those who stood against the prevailing political winds and decided to do what is right.

Jonathan Jones
Class of '02

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