

The numbers game

Vision 2020's goal requires effort, planning

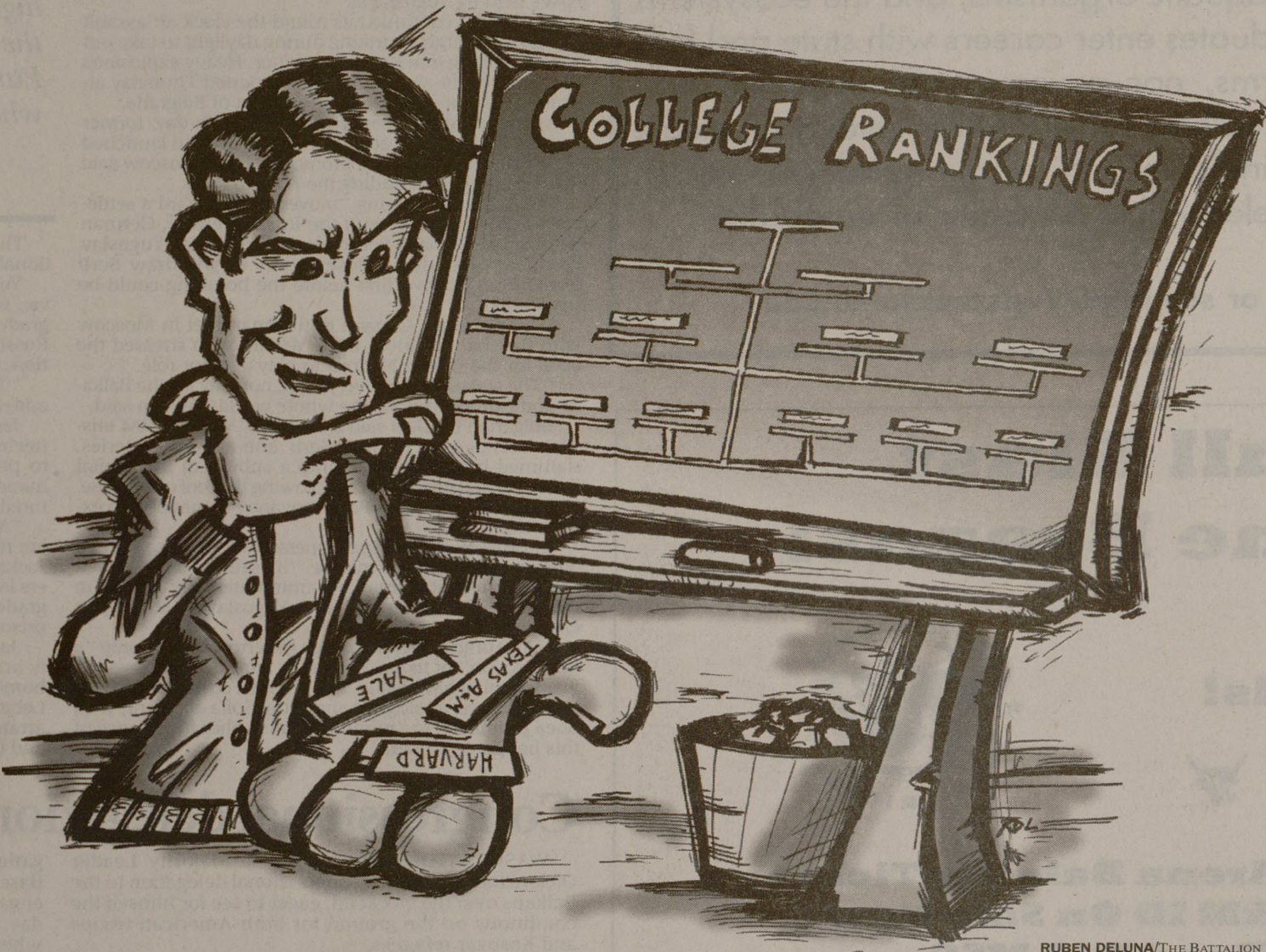
Many Aggies know about Vision 2020. Indeed, it would be hard not to have heard of it, as it is raised at nearly every public Aggie function, including muster.



LUKE SAUGIER

What the average student may not know is what the purpose of the Vision 2020 plan is. Because much of the construction on campus is attributed to the 2020 program, it might appear to the uninformed observer that the purpose of the program is to satisfy the law of conservation of Construction and thereby inconvenience students. Less informed students are likely to know that Vision 2020 has something to do with making the rest of the world aware of the fact A&M is the best school there is by the year 2020. Upon first inspection this seems a daunting task: A&M is unlikely to ever be accorded the same respect as institutions such as Harvard, Yale, M.I.T., Stanford. Even if A&M raised the minimum SAT score for admission to 1000, accepted half as many undergraduates and successfully recruited the president's daughter, there would still be all those Aggie jokes to get rid

Vision 2020 seems doomed to fail. But President Dr. Ray Bowen's drama did not raise no dummy, and it takes more than good looks to be appointed president of our great University. A careful look at the official mission statement of Vision 2020 reveals that the goal of the program is to make Texas A&M University one of the top 10 public universities in the nation by the year 2020.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

This is an achievable goal. According to US News and World Report's college rankings for 1999, A&M is currently the number 15 public university, behind Penn State, UC Davis, Georgia Tech and UC Santa Barbara. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the school ranked number

10 among public universities is ranked 42 in the overall rankings, only slightly higher than A&M ranked two years ago when it made the overall standings for the first time. Given 20 years, A&M should have no problem overtaking the few schools that stand in the way. But in what ways will A&M have to

change to become one of these top schools? Many of the ranking criteria used by US News are fairly abstract, but there are categories that directly affect students, such as admission requirements and class size. University leadership has vetoed raising minimum SAT scores any higher

than they already are, and was quoted in Texas Monthly as saying that they do not want A&M to become a "campus full of geeks."

Because A&M prides itself so much on size it seems unlikely that the number of students denied admission will increase without a corresponding rise in the number of applications. This leads to a problem, though: Does it seem like all the classes are too small when it comes time to register? That might have something to do with the fact that smaller classes get schools a higher rank.

An important but also extremely nebulous ranking criterion is the general perception of the quality of the University. This is judged by having the deans of universities score their peer schools according to quality.

Here is where reputation comes into play. A&M has a well-recognized engineering program and is ranked 16th nationally in engineering, the same as Rice University. A&M is also well known for its veterinary and agricultural departments.

Unfortunately A&M's liberal arts program is not quite as respected. While most engineering students would advocate the abolition of all liberal arts programs, this would not help achieve the goal of Vision 2020.

The lesser-known (or non-existent) programs at A&M must be brought up to speed, hence the addition of a music program and all the talk about diversity.

While A&M will have to change to become one of the top 10 public universities, the changes should all be beneficial. Students will likely see improved facilities, a broader range of classes, and more chances to enrich themselves outside of the classroom.

If all goes according to plan, by the time our children are ready to become Aggies, A&M should be so good that they might not be able to get in. And who knows: with a world class liberal arts department to expand their minds, the students of tomorrow may even appreciate *The Battalion*.

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Price of freedom includes allowing for citizens' stupidity

Thomas Jefferson once said, "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance."



BRENDAN GUY

A good cautionary warning, even if it does come from the man who founded the Democratic Party. But with respect to Jefferson, that is not the whole story. Yes, constant vigilance is a necessity for any free society, but ultimately the price of freedom is much higher. The price of freedom goes beyond eternal vigilance: It is actually something far more difficult to deal with, eternal stupidity.

The reason for this is simple: people, when free to make their own decisions, are sometimes going to make decisions most of us would not agree with — decisions that seem really stupid to the vast majority of people. Some people are going to want to rot their bodies with drugs, alcohol or tobacco. Others are going to want to rot their minds with Jerry Springer, rap music or religious fundamentalism.

There will always be people in any society that want to engage in self-destructive, wasteful behavior, and in a free society the rest of us largely have to tolerate this.

Thus the price of freedom is more than eternal stupidity, it is the rest of us having to tolerate this stupidity. Actually, it is even worse than that because free human beings are capable of so much more than simple self-destructive idiosyncrasy; they are also capable of obnoxious, disgusting and even hateful behavior, and again the rest of us generally have to tolerate this.

Why should we do this? It is difficult to see any real advantage for society in allowing flag burning, Klan rallies or Scientologists, and if it was left to just a simple majority vote, we could probably ban all of these things.

Fortunately, our system of government has checks in place to prevent us from doing this, because that is a doorway we can never afford to open. Yes it is tempting, because let's face it, there are a lot of stupid people out there saying and doing outrageous things, but legislating against those people would ultimately hurt us all.

It is the age old problem of where do you draw the line. If one can ban Nazis from speaking their minds, then why not ban Pat Buchanan and his followers? And if one can ban Buchanan then why not Ralph Reed? And if you can ban Reed ... ?

Of course we could try and say that we would use this power responsibly and only ban the things that are truly harmful. It is a guarantee that would be a lot more reassuring if we did not live in a society that permits alcohol

and tobacco but criminalizes marijuana.

The sad truth is that majority rule does not offer a better guarantee of making wise decisions than any other government type. A majority can be just as stupid, short-sighted and self-destructive as any individual or minority group, and because of that we cannot trust the majority to decide how everyone should think, feel and act. Sometimes, the best way to handle the problem of where to draw the line is by not picking up the marker.

Which is not to say we are completely powerless against the obnoxious, the disgusting, the hateful and the stupid.

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For one thing, any behavior that directly harms other people or their property can and should be forbidden.

Is this legislating morality and imposing our views on other people? Perhaps, but it is also absolutely necessary if human society is to function. But beyond that, there is certainly nothing wrong with confronting people with whom you disagree.

Societal pressure can certainly be brought on people who act in ways the rest of us do not like, even if government pressure cannot. This can be anything from simply talking to a friend who is drinking too much to boycotting a business that engages in discriminatory hiring policies. Everyone should be free to engage in self-destructive, stupid behavior, but that does not mean that self-destructive, stupid behavior should be free. It is ultimately up to each individual to decide if their behavior is worth the cost in societal disapproval and condemnation, that is also the price of freedom.

Freedom is difficult, it would not be worth so much if it was not. Which means that Jefferson might have been right after all, the price of freedom does seem to be eternal vigilance. The tough part is that it is not vigilance against some foreign despot or even against our own government, that would be to easy. The true price of our freedom is not vigilance against other people it is that we have to be vigilant against ourselves.

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GUEST COLUMN

Plight of Sudanese deserves international attention of media

A little boy is starving to death. Week after week without food, except for an occasional mixture of boiled leaves and grass, has reduced him to skin and bone. All his joints are clearly visible, making him look like a skeleton. The pain of hunger burns deep within his stomach so menacingly he can barely think.

He is too weak to stand after walking days and days under the scorching sun in search of food, so he sits — naked, hunched on his heels, head buried between his knees, overwhelmed by horrendous suffering. All this innocent child can do is ask himself, "What have I done to deserve this?"

The world must put an end to the war that is causing the people of southern Sudan immense suffering and loss of life. People who have any sense of humanity should be outraged at the lack of attention the media shows to the Sudanese.

They must demand that the crisis in Sudan — which is the greatest catastrophe on the face of the earth — be given the coverage that it is, quite literally, dying for. Citizens must petition their government to do all within its power to make a just and final peace in Sudan.

In 1998, according to the U.S. Committee for Refugees, 100,000 innocent human beings were tortured, brutally degraded and ultimately killed by the horrible death of starvation in the southern portion of Africa's largest country.

This mass starvation is the result of war and the genocidal acts of the Sudanese government. One hundred thousand people dead, more than twice the size of the student body at Texas A&M, 10 times the number of deaths from Hurricane Mitch and 50 times the number of deaths from the war in Kosovo.

Yet, no one seems to know. In 1998, the media found the scandalous details of an affair between one man and one woman to be much more interesting than the fact that 2.6 million people were facing starvation in this African country. The deafening noise of the Clinton-Lewinsky parade was allowed to drown out the desperate and pleading cries of the dying people in southern Sudan.

Was the affair between one man and one woman truly more important than that thousands of people were dying perhaps the most excruciatingly painful death possible? Or is it that Africans are not worth enough that their tremendous suffering should be consistently and heartlessly ignored?

The Human Right Watch reports that another war induced famine caused 250,000 people to starve to death in southern Sudan in 1998. The U.S. Committee for Refugees states that in the last 16 years, the war in Sudan has succeeded in slaughtering 2 million people in the south and central region of the country — more deaths than any war since World War II.

Many of these were people who simply starved to

death. Most of the deaths were innocent civilians. How many more people have to die before the world acts? How long will it take the world to learn that until there is justice in Sudan, the terrible, unnecessary suffering and death will continue?

The war in Sudan is being fought by the rebels who represent the people of southern Sudan, against the oppressive government of the Islamic and Arabized north. Although both sides are guilty in causing the suffering that plagues the civilians of southern Sudan, the government holds the lion's share of the responsibility. Government forces periodically raid the southern villages like barbarians.

They come wreaking terror on horseback and driving jeeps. They attack villages, burn down homes and crops, steal livestock, murder the men and take the women and children as slaves.

Yes, slavery still exists in Africa. All slaves are treated brutally. Females become sex slaves. The United Nations, UNICEF and Human Rights Watch have all confirmed the existence of wide-spread slavery in Su-

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dan, with government forces being the major culprit. It is largely these village raids that lead to the mass starvation. They send terrified villagers, who are lucky enough to survive fleeing for their lives.

Many of these people then die of hunger. The government of Sudan also tries to starve them to death or into submission. According to Human Rights Watch, in 1998, the Sudanese regime banned relief flights to the most famine-affected areas for two months. By the time the relief ban was lifted, it was too late for many.

The international community must courageously work for peace and justice in Sudan in order to end the horrendous suffering and large scale death. The call for peace is long overdue. Countless children have already had their lives stolen from them by hunger and violence.

For those who have survived, life has been an unrelenting misery. What type of world allows its people, its own flesh and blood, to needlessly die the miserable death of starvation? What type of world closes its ears to the begging cries of suffering children?

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