

Praying for an end

Allowing prayer at graduation upsetting to some, result of Supreme Court's poor judgement



BRENDAN GUY

Overall I have had a good four years at this university. Yes, there has been the occasional boring class (why do liberal arts majors need science and math classes?) and some of the traditions seem slightly ridiculous, but on the whole this is a pretty good place to go to school.

Unfortunately, the University realizing that soon it will no longer be able to plague me with the core curriculum and the PTTS, has decided on one final, glorious slap across the face to remind me of my time here. Of course, I refer to nothing else but the terrifying specter of school-sponsored prayer being conducted at graduation.

The true horror is that the University does seem to have the law on their side on this one. The Supreme Court, in a rather confusing move since it banned organized prayer in the classrooms and even at high school football games, has ruled that prayer at graduations is acceptable as long as it is initiated by students.

The court's rationale for treating graduations with less First Amendment scrutiny than regular school events is that graduations are comparatively rare, are optional and are conducted outside of the classroom.

This explanation does not make any sense.

It is a basic law of economics that if something is rare, it is more valuable. The rarity of a graduation makes it that much more important than any normal school event, which means the First Amendment should be enforced more rigorously, not less.

As for graduation being optional, true as far as it goes but than technically attending the public schools is optional with private and home schooling being available. And of course graduations take place outside the classroom, but they are still a school — or university — sponsored event.

If a public school or university permits prayer at one of its events it is giving state sanction to one religion over all the others, this is the very thing the First Amendment is designed to prevent.

So basically, the Supreme Court screwed up. There is always a special disappointment when that happens, because the Supreme Court is supposed to be the responsible, dignified branch of the government, the one that protects us from the blunders of the president and Congress, but even the best of institutions is going to make a mistake now and then.

The real issue here is why Texas A&M feels the need to take advantage of the Supreme Court's mistake.

How could having organized prayer at graduation seem like a good idea? Is the University just giving no thought at all to its non-Christian students? Non-Christians are as much Aggies as the Christians are and de-

Brendan Guy is a senior history and political science major.



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

Columnist reminisces about experiences at Battalion, hopes for future of University, students in general

Who knew the end would come so quickly? After three semesters on the opinion desk, I am finally writing my last column.



MANISHA PAREKH

The conservatives can stop cheering now. It has been an interesting three years for this liberal Jain (i.e. non-Christian).

I have learned that Copenhagen is not just a city in Denmark. I have learned that pedestrians truly rule the streets. And I have learned that I am going to hell.

Somewhere in the middle of this culture clash, I decided to try to tell A&M about those people who did not fit into the majority mold. And so my three semesters began.

During this time, I have had many experiences on the desk. I have learned that Texas A&M is not quite the "conservative wasteland" my democratic friends back in Louisiana claimed I was being exiled to.

But it is pretty close.

As much as I love the University, only a truly ignorant person would not admit that A&M is a haven for the conservative, the fundamentally Christian and the sheltered.

During my stint on this desk, I have managed to tick off many different groups on this campus. Conservatives have told me how uninformed and uneducated I am. The sheltered have written me about how I should not try and shake up the status quo. And the religious right have written that I am going to hell.

I have also found myself at the center of controversy. Thanks to a column I wrote earlier this semester, I had the distinct pleasure of receiving a phone call from Tom Short, the itinerant preacher. Yes, I know. I am going to hell for that one, too.

But as much as I enjoyed receiving letters from people who criticized writers' grammar, style and punctuation (and making more mistakes in 150 words than in a whole 10-page Battalion), the best responses have been from those who have applauded what the opinion desk and the writers are trying to do.

I have enjoyed reading the e-mails

from international students, from non-Christians and from racial minorities thanking me for presenting a viewpoint a little closer to their own. I have enjoyed having people tell me that they always read my columns. But most of all, I have enjoyed people informing me that my column made them think.

Because in the end, that is what makes it worth.

I never planned to change anyone's views. I just wanted to make people aware that there are different voices out there. There are different people in the world.

It seems people tend to forget that at this University. People tend to forget that the world is made of many types of people, and most of them do not see the world in the same way.

It is sad to come to place of higher learning and realize that many students are not taking the opportunity to broaden their horizons and learn about others. Worse yet, it is sad to know that they discount others' ideas and opinions simply because those people are different.

And that is my one regret. Even after trying numerous times to let the majority

see what it is like to be in the minority, there were still those who wanted to attack and criticize instead of trying to sit down and calmly discussing and learning.

I am proud to be an Aggie. I plan to tell my children, one day, about my wonderful — and not so wonderful — experiences as an Aggie.

But before I encourage my children to become second-generation Aggies, I want to know that they will feel welcome here and that their ideas will not be looked down on by the majority simply because they are half-Indian.

I do not want my children to feel as alienated at A&M as I have felt many times.

I received my Aggie Ring yesterday. I receive my diploma in August and I will walk away from this University with mixed feelings.

But I will look back fondly on my time as a columnist and as opinion editor for The Battalion. It has been an experience like no other and I would not trade it for anything. Not even if I am going to hell.

Manisha Parekh is a junior psychology and journalism major.

MAIL CALL Alumni grateful for student's honesty

The honesty and character of your student body was demonstrated to me when I returned home from Muster. A credit card service called to tell me that a student at A&M called them to say they had found one of my credit cards on the campus — I had not even missed the card. The student did not give a name so I want to express my thanks through your newspaper.

I am very proud of being an Aggie and even more so after my experienced the last few days.

Phillip McDaniel
Class of '49

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:

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