

Stopping the exodus

Diploma recipients should be dissuaded from rudely leaving commencement exercises early

The temptation is understandable. Faced with the tedious prospect of waiting for hundreds of gowns to swish across the commencement stage, many graduates take the easy way out.



CALEB MCDANIEL

After accepting their own diplomas, increasing numbers of Texas A&M students are flocking to the exits at Reed Arena long before commencement exercises have ended.

The scene is becoming all too familiar. Doves of Andersons and Benjamins scurry from the ceremony quicker than New York Knicks fans fled the Garden at the end of Game 5 of the NBA Finals.

Meanwhile, the Ysletas and Wilsons of the class are left to shake President Bowen's hand in front of the few dozen audience members remaining by the time their names are called.

How rude. The growing exodus of graduates from graduation exercises stands in stark contrast to so many refreshing Aggie traditions.

For instance, only a month before diplomas are distributed, graduating se-

niors participate in that strange show of solidarity — Elephant Walk.

While marching across the campus of their soon-to-be alma mater, seniors gladly link arms with their alphabetically-challenged classmates.

But only weeks later, dead elephants unlucky enough to have a name somewhere after Smith will find themselves curiously alone as they sweep across the commencement stage. Bad bull, if ever there was such a thing.

Who would ever think of leaving Muster as soon as the name of their loved one has been solemnly intoned? Audience members barely stir at the occasion, perhaps out of respect for the dead.

But at the graduation roll call, respect for the living is harder to find.

One can even find Aggies being better behaved at football games. Fans who slink away from the field before the final cannon sounds will find themselves saddled with the scorn of their peers. But graduates who escape the doldrums of commencement exercises also escape the disapproval of their fellows.

Such a blatant breach of etiquette cannot be allowed to continue.

Perhaps the fleeing graduates think ac-

cepting their diplomas means repudiating everything they have learned as Aggies.

One hopes they would think again.

If there is anything special at all about "the other education," it is the conviction that it does not stop at graduation. There is nothing special about being polite for four (or five) years only to embrace rudeness at the end of the academic road.

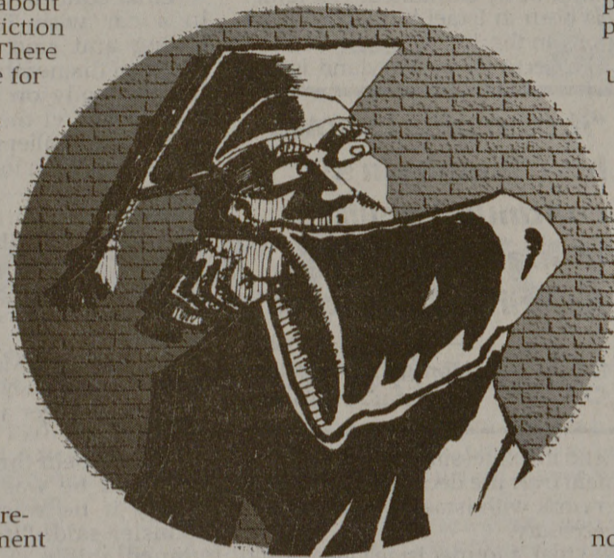
To abandon graduates in the lower registers of the alphabet is an embarrassment to everything being an Aggie is supposed to mean. Therefore, it is especially sad that at graduation, the event at which many visiting relatives and friends get their only impression of the school, some graduates hasten to give Aggies a bad name by starting their post-graduation celebrations an hour or two early.

However, because so many students find the temptation so hard to resist, it would be best for commencement officials to restructure the exercises.

Admittedly, the long hours of listening to mispronounced names are taxing on any attention span.

This problem could be corrected if in-

dividual ceremonies were held for each college, instead of making, for instance, liberal arts majors wait through the engi-



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

neering ceremony. The long hours English majors spend in front of their word processors does not necessarily make

their backsides more amenable to many hours in stiff folding chairs.

But even if this needed change is implemented, it will not by itself solve the problem of exiting Aggies.

Ultimately, the only way to keep graduates for the entire ceremony is to appeal to their sense of fairness.

Those who do not want to wait through hundreds of names have the option not to attend their graduation.

But by their presence, those who choose to attend are admitting the ceremony is important to them.

For them, standing in front of friends, family and classmates to accept their honors is worthwhile.

And if it is worthwhile for those who accept their diplomas first, it is worthwhile for those who accept them last.

Consequently, true Aggies will not ignore a proper courtesy for their personal convenience. They will stay until the last Zwinger is called.

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.

Projected budget surplus should be used to pay off national debt

Since President Clinton took office in 1993, the national debt has increased at the astonishing rate of \$7,051.27 per second.



TOM OWENS

Last week, however, following rosy estimates of giant budget surpluses, President Clinton announced his plan to save Medicare, prevent the imminent collapse of Social Security and pay off the entire federal debt within 15 years.

Though he has been a tax-and-spend Democrat for his entire career, Clinton now seeks to create a "legacy" for himself by

embracing conservative fiscal policy.

However, he can only do this half-heartedly because viewing the enormous liabilities of caring for the poor through the lens of economic prudence would reveal cruel realities the liberal mind cannot accept.

No entity — and especially not a government of inefficient bureaucrats — is capable of eliminating poverty and suffering. The best that can be done is to buffer the extremities, so humanity itself is not degraded.

The problem with Medicare and Social Security is their universal guarantee of financial security and medical care for poor Americans.

Until these tremendous and unpredictable liabilities are trans-

formed into a fixed-cost system of charity, the national debt cannot be truly paid off.

Even if America pays off every last cent of the \$5 trillion debt, millions of poor are still "entitled" by government decree to possibly hundreds of thousands of dollars when they become sick or disabled.

It is fine to speak of compassion and social justice, but doctors, nurses, farmers and drug companies demand and deserve payment for their products and services.

When the recipient of a service is unable to pay, his or her poverty becomes Americans' collective responsibility. The federal system of handouts must be curtailed.

First, Medicare must be

scrapped. An alternative system that could work efficiently is a chain of federal charity hospitals that would provide medical care to those who cannot afford it at other hospitals.

All hospitals would be required to give emergency service to anyone free of charge, but as soon as patients' conditions are stabilized, they would be sent either to a charity or standard hospital based on their ability to pay.

Charity hospitals represent a relatively fixed cost when compared to the current system, while still providing a moral minimum of health care to those who are less fortunate.

Secondly, Social Security, the great pyramid scheme hatched by FDR, should be phased out. Those who have retired, and

those who are about to retire should still be compensated, but the vast majority of Americans should be moved to a privatized system.

By replacing fluctuating liabilities with predictable fixed-cost expenses, America can guarantee a solid fiscal policy for years to come and destroy the insidious philosophy of the entitlement system.

The only guaranteed handout the government should provide to the poor is effective, non-abortive birth control.

Finally, the coming surpluses in the federal budget should be allocated to paying off the national debt.

Even Republicans, sadly, are exploiting the good news of surpluses by promising tax cuts in-

stead of fiscal responsibility.

Reagan's supply-side policies in the 1980s did demonstrate that moderate tax cuts for upper income brackets can actually increase revenue, so perhaps Republican proposals are not as destructive as those of spend-thrift Democrats.

However, the motives of both camps in the budget surplus battle stem more from election-year politics than from a true desire to free America of debt.

This is unfortunate because the good fortune of the current economy may be the last opportunity to pay off the national debt before it becomes completely uncontrollable.

Tom Owens is a senior chemical engineering major.



MAIL CALL

Athletics funding not inequitable

In response to Beverly Mireles' July 5 column.

What R.C. Slocum earns for providing this school with great football scores is well-deserved.

Mireles stated that educators "will never make millions," and that we merely "throw money at athletics."

Money isn't being thrown at athletics. It is being earned. If A&M were horrible at athletics, the funding for the department would not be as high.

However, our athletic coaches work hard to provide this school with great athletes who accomplish many great things, and I believe that is why we fund them.

You forget to mention the athletes.

They come to A&M in hopes of performing well for this University athletically and academically.

As far as A&M's having only 10 art classes, most people come to A&M for its science, engineering and agricultural programs.

Don't you think that if you are attending a university where you are not getting the funding or education you require from an art class, then you need to be attending school elsewhere?

Jennifer Bales
Class of '02

The column's argument is based on equity, not efficiency. Texas A&M is better off financially with a football team, but how A&M chooses to distribute the money is a question of equity.

However, the only department that

has a legitimate claim to athletic revenue is the athletic department. Liberal arts should be funded through potential athletic dollars.

Luke Bolton
Class of '99

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. Letters exceeding the word limit will not be considered for publication.

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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COLLEGIATE ROUNDUP

from U-Wire editorial reports

Congress should not prohibit flag burning

From The Post at Ohio University.

ATHENS, Ohio — Last week in a 305-124 vote, the House passed an amendment proposal that would ban desecration of the American flag. Congress and state legislatures previously have made laws prohibiting flag burning.

Aside from infringing on First Amendment rights, the flag amendment is too vague. The 28th Amendment would read, as proposed in the House, "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States."

But Congress has not defined the word "desecration."

Would desecration not only include flag burning, but ripping up the flag as well? ... What if someone cut up a book of stamps, which carries the picture of the flag? ... Though the goal of the amendment isn't to stop activities like this, the amendment's ambiguity gives the government too much authority to punish people who act out against it.

True, the American flag deserves respect, as it always has been viewed as the purest sign of patriotism. ... But the flag is a symbol of just how much freedom we have in the United States.

If we are truly as free as the Bill of Rights proclaims, this amendment reduces freedom rather than protecting it.

From The Parthenon at Marshall University.

HUNTINGTON, W.V. — Even if there still are some anti-Americans out there who enjoy burning the flag, they have the right to do it. ... Like it or not, our flag stands for the freedom to be able to burn it.

We believe there are probably better and smarter ways to express yourself, but as journalists, we also strongly believe in the First Amendment.

Our lives are centered around freedom of speech and expression. ... If we aren't allowed to burn the flag, then maybe our right to choose a religion or a life partner could be next. And that cannot happen.

Freedom of expression is sacred and must remain in its current form.

Television decency law should be overturned

From the Daily Collegian at Pennsylvania State University.

STATE COLLEGE, Penn. — The federal government is currently appealing a 1996 ruling by a federal judge that struck down part of the Communications Decency Act.

The proposed legislation requires cable operators that don't fully scramble sex-oriented programming to show those programs only between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.

Limiting the hours programs are available won't achieve the effect the law intends — to prevent children from viewing explicit programs.

The real problem is not the scrambled pornography on pay-per-view cable, but that parents are not monitoring what their children watch.

In the name of morality, the federal government shouldn't limit what some people want to see.

In the meantime, if they are determined to limit children's access to pornography, the government should concentrate on helping cable companies improve scrambling technology instead of editing content.

Insurance policy reveals sex discrimination

From The Oracle at the University of South Florida.

TAMPA, Fla. — For decades, women have been trying to convince health insurance providers to pay for prescription contraceptive devices such as Depo-Provera, diaphragms and birth control pills.

But with the advent of Viagra, a pill that helps counteract impotence in men, women have an added incentive to push for contraceptive coverage.

Viagra appeared on the market last year and was quickly included in many insurance plans. Many insurers now cover Viagra but not birth control. This amounts to sex discrimination.

If insurance companies pay to help men improve their sex lives, they must show the same consideration toward women.