

Extracurricular Overload

Abundance of organizations at A&M can lead to a severe burden on students' schedules

SUSAN OVERCASH
The Battalion

Four years ago Emily Baie, a senior petroleum engineering major, wandered onto campus for the first time and was astonished by the size and population of Texas A&M.

"As we walked across campus during freshman orientation, I remember thinking how huge it was," Baie said. "I was overwhelmed."

Many freshmen experience the same feelings of disorientation their first few weeks in Aggieland, clutch-

ing campus maps and leaping to avoid rogue bikers and buses.

However, getting involved in an organization on campus helped Baie meet people and helped Aggieland become the comfortable place she now knows.

"I joined Aggie Fish Club, and it helped me meet a lot of other freshmen," Baie said. "Not only did I hang out with AFC, but we also met other campus groups and really got involved."

But Aggie Fish Club is not the only group available for freshmen to get involved in; recruiting season for student organizations is upon Aggieland again, and

the smell of free candy and freshly printed fliers is wafting from the MSC.

One of the largest student organization recruiting drives on campus, MSC Open House, takes place Sunday. Over 300 organizations will have booths, fliers, applications and free goodies awaiting students.

Amanda Arriaga, executive vice president of marketing for the MSC and a senior management major, is directing Open House this year. She said the event is a good way for new students to find out what is available for them at A&M.

"Open House is the single easiest way to get plugged into what's going on campus," Arriaga said. "Last year, we had over 20,000 students walk through. You can find everything there, from student government to dance groups, anything you want to do."

Organizations offer different opportunities to potential members, from service to social aspects, and try to market this during the recruiting process. When recruiting, many groups combine students' special interests with the opportunity to meet a smaller group of people.

Ryan Conlon, chair of MSC Town Hall and a senior information systems management major, said they offer applicants the opportunity to take part in all aspects of bringing an entertainment event to town, as well as give them a chance to get to know other students.

"We want them to take part in promoting the local music scene, and give them a chance to meet and know a really diverse group of individuals," Conlon said.

With so many groups dangling opportunity and free pizza in front of students' hungry minds and stomachs, it's easy to get overwhelmed in the recruiting process, and thus, over-involved.

According to Arriaga, it's a good idea to apply for many organizations, but choose only two or three to actually join.

"When I was a freshman, I got involved in 10 different organizations," Arriaga said.

"I was going crazy; I didn't have time to do anything. Out of those groups, there were two or three that came out that I've stayed involved in."

Conlon suggested students try to choose a few organizations they are interested in and continue with those organizations throughout college.

But why succumb to the promises of student recruiters at all, especially when the living room couch, "Days of Our Lives," and that oh-so-enticing bag of Funyuns await at home?

Elizabeth Wagner, a freshman biomedical engineering major, said that after being involved in high school, she wants to remain involved in college.

"I want to stay active," Wagner said. "Other-

wise, all there is to do is study."

Dr. Carol Albrecht, sociology internship coordinator and a lecturer in the Department of Sociology, said sociologists have two main theories as to why people join any group.

"The Hector Group Solidarity theory claims people join groups to get things they can't get themselves," Albrecht said.

"They join the group that will give them the most net rewards. It's a very rational, almost marketing type decision making process."

Albrecht cited friendships, social approval and networking opportunities available in Greek organizations and service fraternities as examples.

Albrecht said the second theory is the Etzioni theory, which claims people are rational but rarely highly rational and make decisions based on emotional factors.

"People sometimes join groups because of a sense of loyalty," Albrecht said.

Wagner said she uses her aesthetic judgement as well as her common sense when selecting a group to join.

"If the group comes up to you and starts talking and seems really nice, and if they have food, drink and free stuff — those are things I look for," Wagner said.

"If they do something for other people, they have to make it fun: they have to make it enthusiastic."

Erin Fleming, a freshman English major, said she plans on getting involved for a number of these reasons, to meet people and also stimulate interests that might lead to career opportunities later.

"I also want to give something back to the community," Fleming said.

Albrecht said there are several strategies groups can use to hold onto members once they join.

"They are obligatory groups," Albrecht said. "Groups have to monitor and sanction group behavior. Group behavior is monitored through meetings, social functions and groups functions."

Albrecht said groups also find ways to regulate the behavior of their members.

"They also have to sanction behavior: they punish you if you don't do what they want you to do and they reward if you do what they want you to do," Albrecht said.

"They reward you by giving you privileges. It's a good way to keep membership."

Albrecht said students should exercise their best judgement when selecting groups and be careful to avoid joining a group for the wrong reasons. She said wanting to belong is a bad reason to join a group.

"A lot of times, people join groups because they feel marginal in some sense," Albrecht said. "They join groups that reduce marginality."



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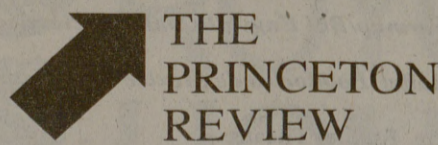
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