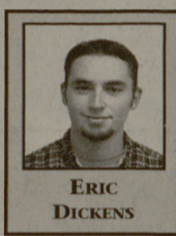


Out of the fish bowl

Fish Camp can mislead freshmen with unrealistic views of Texas A&M

Despite the fact that approximately 4,700 incoming freshmen attended Fish Camp this summer, there are not many wearing their Fish Camp T-shirts on the first day of classes.



ERIC DICKENS

This is probably because it is hard enough being freshmen without wearing shirts that make them stand out even further. Coming into Aggieland, freshmen do not usually have a fully conceived idea of what daily life at College Station is going to be like.

The University has programs like Fish Camp, New Student Conferences, Freshman Orientation Week and so on.

The purpose of each of these is to give the newcomers a glimpse of Aggieland and the innumerable details of daily life.

However, as important and effective as these programs may be, they are not perfect — including Fish Camp.

In helping the new freshmen learn about Texas A&M, many counselors at Fish Camp mislead their freshmen about the reality of college life.

Fish Camp is a rushed process where new students come in as individual high school graduates

but leave a close-knit group of Aggies full of Aggie spirit. And while Aggie spirit is, without a doubt, a good thing, there can always be too much of a good thing.

Being over-exposed to Aggie spirit, all too often some freshmen come out of Fish Camp thinking every day at A&M is going to be like the last four.

While Fish Camp is far from some insidious brainwashing trick, it is an intense four-day affair where freshmen are exposed to the Aggie spirit pumped up to the n-th degree.

Everything at Fish Camp, whether explicitly stated or not, is directed at introducing freshmen to what living in Aggieland is like, but the overzealous mentality and gung-ho Agginess fostered by Fish Camp is simply not a true representation.

Of course it is not likely to see counselors tell their fish, "When you get to A&M, not everybody is going to be as enthusiastic as I am."

But Fish Camp counselors should realize the impression they are giving freshmen about the rest of A&M students is not always true to reality.

There are some 900 Fish Camp counselors and each of them is excited to be working with these freshmen.

That is great, but there are roughly 42,000 other students at

A&M the freshmen did not spend four days in the woods with and aren't going to be so overly enthusiastic about all things Aggie.

In general, daily life at this University is not much different from anywhere else in the world, but you would not know it by watching some Fish Camp counselors at work.

The picture counselors paint of Aggieland would have everybody saying, "howdy" and jumping on freshmen for "pulling out."

In reality, "howdy" is tucked neatly into its maroon colored shoe box until Howdy Week rolls around when some people take it out to feel good about keeping the tradition alive.

And as for "pulling out," unless a freshman is in the Corps of Cadets, chances are nobody is going to say anything about "whooping" when he or she gets an A on a difficult test.

And despite what some counselors might say, if someone asked them at Fish Camp, the distance between the MSC and Sbsa is not 2003 steps.

Certainly the counselors are not intentionally trying to mislead their freshmen, but if their job is to intro-



JEFF SMITH/THE BATTALION

duce the new students to life at A&M, shouldn't their own actions be a fair representation of just that?

The transition into college life is a tough one and freshmen do not need anymore obstacles in their way.

Fish Camp should not have to be a boring, factual, sign-on-the-dotted-line type of introduction to A&M — that is for the New Student Conferences.

However, the staff should get a grip on what daily life in Aggieland is really like and tone down their overly intensified Aggie spirit during camp. Despite what some counselors might think, building the Aggie spirit cannot be finished in just four days.

It is something that grows with Aggies as they learn more and more about A&M through their time spent on campus and even after graduation.

If counselors take a more realistic approach to their freshmen and lighten up on the full-frontal Agginess, they can refrain from giving a false impression to their freshmen of what to expect during their days at A&M.

Eric Dickens is a junior English major.

Absentee advisers Undergraduate faculty missing in action at beginning of semester

There must be a room on campus in which all academic advisers congregate, sip coffee and watch soaps during the first few weeks of school.



ELIZABETH KOHL

It is as if they have extended their summer vacation for a week or two.

Anyone who has ever tried to get in to see an adviser at the beginning of the school year is already impossible.

Trying to go to the office will usually get you little more than a heat stroke. Students or faculty members working at front desks are professionals when it comes to sending students across campus to talk to someone else.

They seem to derive a certain pleasure from it, especially anytime they can get students to cross Wellman. Calling an adviser's office during the first few weeks is just as futile.

Once again the secretary ones, "I'm sorry, none of the advisers are seeing anyone right now. Would you like me to make an appointment for you in November?" One seriously begins to wonder if advisers are aware that add-drop lasts one week.

Students who have become well acquainted with these academic offices have learned to expect a hassle when scheduling problems occur. Just because one has an adviser does not mean he or she has ever spoken with him or her.

Granted, making an appointment with an adviser guarantees that one will see them — eventually.

After sitting around campus for a few hours and waiting in the office for another 30 minutes, a student is finally permitted a moment of talk with the adviser. But a single moment seems to last forever.

Advisers rush students into their office, sit them down, smile and induce themselves, but then a student has seven minutes, so it better wait. One reason for the hassle at the beginning of the school year and throughout the advising system is that, according to the Undergraduate Catalog, academic advising is coordinated by department within the colleges.

Most departments have at least one full-time "advising specialists,"

limiting the staff available to students. Early scheduling difficulties are settled by a few questions anyone could ask and several key strokes at the right computer.

By training students to work with the advising computer systems this problem could be temporarily alleviated during the beginning of the school year.

Students are often better aware of what they need than those entering data in the first place.

In addition to full-time advisers, faculty members are also available to students for advising.

Since the only way to be forced into many classes is directly through the professor, this policy makes sense.

However, few faculty members make it clear that they have the capacity to advise, leaving students to refer to the two advisers allocated to their department.

A simple note on a syllabus or a posted list of available advisers in the department office could make an already congested system slightly smoother.

Students talking to advisers realize that they have a lot of paper work to offer.

Advisers listen attentively as backwards schedules and upper-level problems are explained.

Yet, advisers hands are often tied when it comes to actually solving these problems.

There should be a little piece of paper taped to every advisers desk which states exactly what everyone should be taking and when.

Telling a student to take what he or she wants or changing the order in which the degree plan recommends, seems to be a cardinal no-no.

An adviser who is going to read the Undergraduate Catalog or class schedule would save themselves and who they are trying to help much time by simply handing them the original catalog.

For any student experiencing scheduling difficulty there is always an upperclassman or the Undergraduate Catalog to refer to.

Otherwise good luck finding the little room with the coffee pot, television and huddled group of advisers.

Elizabeth Kohl is a junior accounting major.

Access before improvement

From The GW Hatchet at George Washington University

(U-WIRE) WASHINGTON — The College Board recently released some encouraging statistics concerning the number of minorities taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). A higher percentage of students who took the SAT last year were minorities, although minority performance on the test remains well below national averages.

Minority student participation in the SAT increased by a third over the past decade. Showing improvement in the statistics were African-Americans (seven-point increase, 856 average score in 1999), Puerto Ricans (28/903) and American Indians and Alaskan Natives (42/965). Mexican Americans (12-point drop, 909) and Hispanic/Latino (-5/927) test-takers fared worse as a whole, although the influx of participants in these groups might account for the decrease.

The College Board announced it will offer SAT courses on the Web, which should help students who cannot afford expensive test preparation courses.

Yet, online SAT preparation courses will help only students who have Internet access. The problem with the online service is that the students who lack Internet ac-

cess are often the same students who cannot afford expensive test preparation courses. In these cases, the online SAT preparation material will not help.

The newest statistics from the College Board show clear progress for minorities, not in the form of increased scores, but in increased access to the SAT and therefore higher education. Before a strategy can be devised to raise minority scores, the test must first be accessible to minorities. The College Board is going in the right direction by offering free SAT preparation courses on the Web, but the real answers concerning disparities in scoring must start long before senior year in high school.

Netting cheaper books

From The Diamondback at U. Maryland

(U-WIRE) COLLEGE PARK, Md. — E-commerce has finally begun to take a foothold in the business of book retail. For students and their bank accounts, that is a good thing.

These Web-based companies are able to tap into a database of available books and can distribute them for up to 40 percent off the list price, they claim, in less time than it takes to register for classes. (We saw a lower 10-20 percent difference in a random sampling of texts.)

Venezuelan leader fails country's interests

In the last few weeks, citing that corruption must be cleaned up, President Hugo Chavez shut down Venezuela's Supreme Court.



MARIANO CASTILLO

Not even a month later, Congress shut down, giving Chavez what many political analysts consider dictatorial powers. President Chavez insists he and his newly formed Constitutional Assembly are working within the law and that everything will be back to normal as soon as the new constitution is finished.

Still, many international observers, especially in the United States, are wary that Venezuela's 40-year-old democracy is on the brink of extinction.

As hegemon in the Americas, the United States' main interest in keeping Venezuela a democracy is to ensure that it remains in its sphere of influence.

The United States could care less about poor people in Venezuela as long as they are willing to work for pitiful wages to export oil to the United States. If the government in Venezuela were to drastically change, the United States might have to turn to the Middle East

as its primary source for oil.

It is the poverty stricken citizens of Venezuela, over 80 percent of the nation's population, who are left with no allies.

When they heard the battle-like cries from Chavez for revolution, they perked their ears and got their hopes up, seemingly for nothing.

If the United States is genuinely dedicated to preserving democracy and freedom, the nation's attention to Venezuela should be toward the mountains in Venezuela, which are overcrowded with people, disease and crime, and not toward the political and economic games its government plays.

Organizations such as the United Nations are not involved enough in situations like this.

If they would set their priorities as ideally stated in their constitutions and placed human lives before politics, the rest would follow.

If the United States or United Nations began incentives in Venezuela to help the poor, why would the people even consider electing someone with a shady past like Chavez in the first place? An editorial in the *New York Times* last week thoroughly bashed Chavez and his attempts to shake the country back into shape. The same week two representatives, Cass Ballenger, R-

N.C. and William Delahunt, D-Mass., traveled to Venezuela on a fact-finding mission and reported that everything was being done constitutionally.

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very unstable market both economically and especially politically. No one is willing to invest in this nation, which has so much potential and so many resources.

Many companies that were in Venezuela before the elections have begun to pull their operations out. This translates into a loss of jobs and a lack of new jobs. The economy in Venezuela is frozen.

In the end, to the people that need change the most, the poor, it does not make a difference if Chavez becomes the next Fidel Castro or if he is assassinated tomorrow. It does not matter to them if Venezuela becomes a democracy, dictatorship or even a communist state.

All they want is a brighter future at whatever the cost.

It is unfortunate for them that nations and organizations with such wealth and power as the United States and the United Nations choose to ignore the problem and worry about their own selfish advancement.

It is truly sad to see that the United States' main motives for involvement are keeping gas cheap and keeping Venezuela as one of its political string-puppets.

Mariano Castillo is a sophomore international studies major.

COLLEGIATE ROUNDUP

from U-Wire editorial reports

Most departments have at least one full-time "advising specialists,"