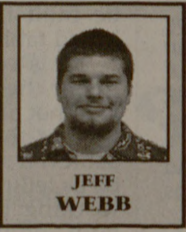


THERE'S MORE THAN ONE MISS AMERICA

The Miss America Pageant might finally allow "less-than-perfect" American women to compete next year.



JEFF WEBB

Future pageants should include American women who can serve as realistic role models.

In order to comply with discrimination laws, Robert L. Beck, president and CEO of the Miss America Organization, announced there might be changes to Miss America contestant requirements.

The new rules would allow women who have divorced or had abortions to participate in the pageant.

Beck recently withdrew the proposed changes until they can be reviewed further by a committee, but he should not back down from his decision.

These possible new rules are a victory for American women who have been told by this organization they are not good enough to represent their country because they have made mistakes with marriages or unwanted pregnancies.

Virginal beauties who look breathtaking in bathing suits may be fine role models, but their status is sometimes unattainable by American women in real life.

State pageant officials said they are unhappy with the rules, claiming the changes would undermine the "high moral standards" for which the contest stands.

But when has getting a divorce after being stuck in a dead-end marriage been considered immoral?

Allowing women with past mistakes, such as divorces or unwanted pregnancies, to rise above and win a contest based on beauty and talent in the eyes of seven judges should be more of an inspiration.

In 1996, more than 1.2 million abortions were reported to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). That means one of every 50 women 15 to 44 years old had an abortion.

The women were more likely to be younger than age 25, white and unmarried — just like most Miss America contestants.

According to the Family Research Council, in 1998, there were more than 1.1 million divorces affecting 2.2 million people in the United States and more than 2.2 million marriages.

With the population base at

approximately 270 million people, one of every 123 people was involved in a divorce last year.

The rules concerning abortion and divorce should be changed so these women have a chance to be represented.

The pageant still bars women with children and married women from competing, the next rules that need to be changed.

The demands on the time of Miss America are great, but they can still be balanced with the rigors of family life.

Imagine the example that would be set for American women if a divorced, working mother were able to glide across the pageant stage and receive the crown as the most desirable woman in the country.

During the talent competition, the contestant could change a diaper while taking business calls.

That projection of her strength of character is more



MARK MCPHERSON/THE BATTALION

worthy than anyone who can win a talent competition by dancing to a selection from *Man of LaMancha*.

Incidentally, that dance is what preliminary talent night

winner Julie Lawrence of Destrahan, La., performed.

She also listed giving dancing lessons to Britney Spears among her accomplishments.

Now that should qualify as vi-

olating these high moral standards pageant organizers crow about.

This year's pageant was filled with high-morale, wholesome characters.

The show was hosted by Mormon talk show hosts Donnie and Marie Osmond.

Judges included Judge Judy Sheindlin, who dishes out her swift justice on a daily television show like Wapner in his glory days, and USA Women's World Cup hero, goalkeeper Briana Scurry.

Miss America 1999, Nicole Johnson, from Virginia Beach, Va., (about as virginal as the pageant can get) handed over her crown and title.

All of these people are fine role models, but there are others not on television who put broken personal relationships behind them, balance their time between two jobs and a couple of kids and still manage to look gorgeous in a one-piece from Victoria's Secret.

Perhaps next year, an American woman who does not come across as perfect as these others will win.

Maybe a single, working mother who balances out her schedule between work and family while still managing to pay the bills will get her shot to be crowned the most beautiful woman in the world.

Jeff Webb is a senior journalism major.

School affiliation fears unfounded

With last January's announcement of an affiliation between Texas A&M and the Houston-based South Texas College of Law, aspiring Aggie lawyers and University administrators alike breathed a collective sigh of relief.

No longer would graduates be forced to migrate to other law schools, such as Texas Tech University or the University of Texas, to pursue their law degrees. A&M finally found its missing link — a well-established, fully functional law school with resources and a reputation that would enhance the University. In return, privately funded South Texas received a higher visibility for recruitment. Hands down, it was a win-win situation for both institutions.

Nonetheless, some forces have conspired against the affiliation. Their opposition to the merger should be stopped.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board felt slighted by South Texas and A&M going ahead with the affiliation agreement before obtaining its approval. The combination of that insult with the prodding of South Texas' main competitor, the University of Houston, allowed the board to rule the affiliation illegal. Early last week, the Texas Supreme Court upheld the board's decision. South Texas appealed the decision.

Both the board and UH believe the blurring of the line between A&M and South Texas was inherently dangerous and that state funding from A&M would somehow find its way to the affiliate law school. In *The Houston Press*, UH officials contend "further dilution of scarce public resources would endanger the quality of existing programs." UH has made it perfectly clear that the affiliation poses a serious threat to its share of the market.

But rather than attempting to stifle healthy competition, UH should spend its energy enhancing its own law program in order to compete with the South Texas-A&M affiliation. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board should spend less time splitting hairs and preventing beneficial academic programs. Instead, they are all using a thin veil to cover up their fear of this strong, mutually beneficial partnership that will inevitably improve the standards of legal education in Texas.

The argument that South Texas will become a public institution is speculative at best, relying on "what if" scenarios. One of South Texas' conditions before agreeing to the affiliation was the right to keep its identity as a private law school. To make South Texas a publicly funded institution anytime soon undermines the entire premise of the school's existence.

Attempts to block the South Texas-A&M affiliation are unjust.

"Arguing what might happen someday in the far-flung future is just very weak," South Texas Dean Frank Read said. "You have to look at what the agreement is now and argue what is on the table."

Other national universities have had state and privately funded components coexist without any fanfare. Penn State University is one such institution.

Like A&M, Penn State was created by the Morrill Act of 1862, which established the nation's land-grant college system. All of the institutions established under the Morrill Act were intended to be state-funded only.

In 1997, Penn State announced a merger with the Dickinson School of Law, a privately funded law school. Dickinson has been able to retain its

status as a privately-funded law school while existing as a part of state-funded Penn State.

Entering its second year, the Penn State-Dickinson affiliation so far has been a rousing success with enrollment numbers on the rise. The South Texas-A&M affiliation would have followed in the footsteps of Penn State-Dickinson.

"Traditionally, a large percentage of the [South Texas] student body consists of Aggies," Karen Severn, pre-law coordinator at the Office of Professional School Advising (OPSA), said. "The affiliation and litigation have made people more aware of the school."

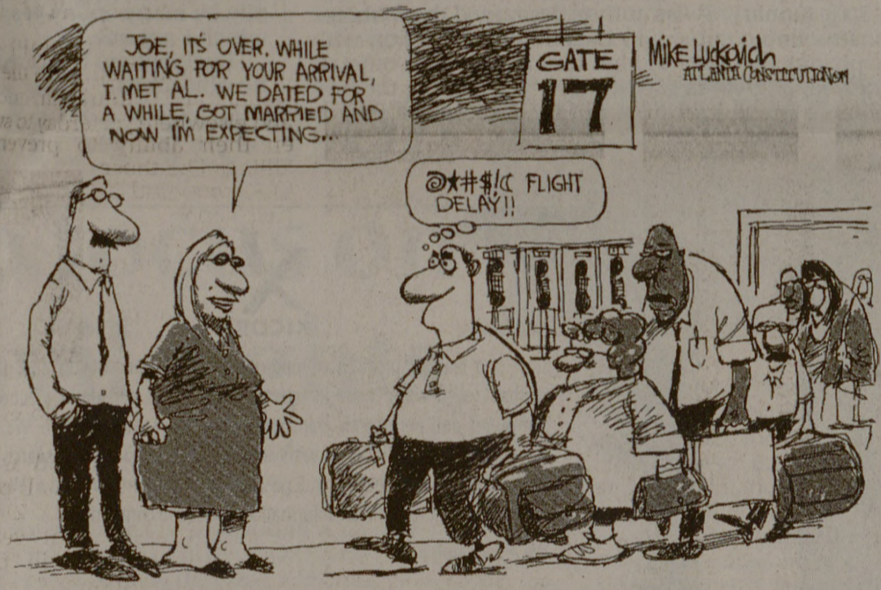
Severn has monitored the South Texas-A&M affiliation from the beginning and believes the potential for academic benefit is immense. Some of this potential is already materializing in actual academic programs. Two weeks ago, OPSA announced the formation of a "3+3" program in which students can study at A&M for three years, bypass their final year of undergraduate classes and move on to South Texas to begin course work on their law degree. "Early admission programs are quite rare for law schools, and this program is the only one in the state of Texas," Severn said.

"Students who elect to pursue the early admissions program will save a year of time, fees and living expenses."

Unfortunately, the pending lawsuit has prevented the majority of joint academic programs from materializing. The actions that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board have taken are an injustice.

Its attempt to eliminate the South Texas-A&M affiliation is fed by revenge and complacency. It is obvious that instead of encouraging improvement in existing programs in order to compete with South Texas, they would rather maintain the status quo and prevent any innovations.

David Lee is a junior economics major.



MIKE LUCKOVICH AT LATER CIRCULATION

VIEW POINTS

Tow jam

The struggle between Parking, Traffic, and Transportation Services (PTTS) and students has reached a new level. Bicycles not parked in the proper spaces will now be ticketed and towed.

Putting aside the fact that "towing" bikes is ludicrous, this new policy raises a valid question — why are people leaving their bikes all over the place?

The same reason that people park in Mud Lot. There are not enough car spaces on campus.

Students are expected to be in class on time, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so. As the size of the University continues to grow, there have been no at-

tempts to deal with transportation difficulties. The overwhelming majority of the student population lives off campus, and many ride their bicycles because they cannot park their cars due to lack of spaces.

This has led directly to an increase in people who ride bicycles, and now the same problem exists for bikes as for cars — where is there to park?

One look at the outside of the Blocker Building or the MSC shows the problem is not limited.

"Towing" bikes is hardly the way to adapt to the situation. Is the administration willing to do something about this blight on the campus or would they eventually have people walk to school?

— Mark Passwaters

Last cut

Something about getting into Kyle Field makes Aggies forget a rule learned in kindergarten: Thou shalt not cut in line.

Breaches of line etiquette are motivated by a worthy enthusiasm to see the game, but swarming crowds of ticket holders have sunk to a new nadir in the department of politeness.

Aggies should know better. Instead of pretending not to see where the end of the line is, they should follow this simple rule of thumb: When people are at a standstill outside of a ramp at Kyle Field, chances are it is not by choice. So do not speed by the patient few. Get in the line. Please.

— Caleb McDaniel

MAIL CALL

Church, state not strictly separated

In response to Jessica Crutcher's Sept. 20 column.

The debate over religion's — especially Christianity's — role in public events and institutions suffers from high emotional content and numerous complications.

Crutcher was exactly right in describing various court rulings concerning public prayer as "demonstrating the indecisiveness of our entire society."

One editorial or one letter will not settle this important issue, but before we can accurately ana-

lyze the conflict, we must fully understand the facts.

There is a common and understandable misconception concerning the origin of the theory of "separation of church and state."

You might hear or read references to this principle as "constitutionally-justifiable" or "constitutionally required."

But it is very important to realize that the words "separation," "church" and "state" appear nowhere in the U.S. Constitution or any of its amendments.

The First Amendment does forbid the government from favoring or persecuting any "establishment of religion." Though this can be interpreted many ways, it is not

specifically calling for a removal or separation of everything religious from everything public or governmental.

Tommy Medina
Class of '01

All religions have right to free speech

In response to Jessica Crutcher's Sept. 20 column.

Crutcher's argument is an example of how freedom of speech is ignored in a mistaken view of religious freedom.

I am a Christian. That is my

choice. Anyone is free to agree or disagree. But no one has the right to tell me I cannot say a prayer to my God, publicly or privately.

I have the right to free speech, which includes prayer. I apologize if some are offended. But I find flag burning and much of what is on the Internet offensive, even though it is not my place to stop it. Freedom is not always agreeable to all. Freedom is not safe, pretty or easy to maintain. But without it, where would we all be?

And if we deny that to one group, how long will it be before it is denied to all?

Jerilyn Gragg
Class of '01

Crutcher is right about one thing. As a Christian, I would feel uncomfortable hearing a prayer to Allah before a game. But the plain and simple fact is that I do not have the right to feel comfortable all the time.

If I want to be able to hear a prayer to God before some games, then I must recognize that Muslims, atheists and others have the right to speak before other games.

If students get up to speak, and they have prepared their own prayer, poem, meditation or moment of silence, then I will listen to whatever they have to say simply because they have the right to say it.

Popular speech needs no defense — it is the unpopular speech that the First Amendment is meant to protect.

Mark Pickett
Class of '00

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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