

Close the door, I'm in here

Students discuss lack of privacy at A&M

BY AMANDA PALM
The Battalion

Whether a student wants it to happen or not, attending a school with over 40,000 students creates a loss of identity and personal space.

From being assigned a faceless ID number to sharing close living quarters with a roommate, finding any degree of privacy at Texas A&M can be a difficult task.

Emily Stroope, a senior speech communication major, said she has lived with the same roommate for nearly two and a half years. They once shared a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment, but moved into a one-bedroom, one-bath apartment at the beginning of the semester.

"We had to get a one bedroom because my roommate is graduating in December and I won't graduate until May," Stroope said. "This way, I won't be stuck trying to sub-lease in once she's gone."

Stroope said making the switch to a smaller apartment was not very difficult, but losing space, as well as her own bedroom and bathroom, did put a strain on everyday life.

"I had to remember what it was like to live in the dorm my first couple of years [at A&M]," she said. "We had to go back to sharing a bedroom and making sure one of us didn't need to be in the bathroom while the other one was in the shower. Stuff like that."

Stroope said finding privacy and time to be alone in the apartment was easy because her roommate's schedule is very different from hers.

"When I'm at work, she's at home," she said, "and when I'm at home, she's in class. Usually the

only time we're there together is at night when we're sleeping or some rare times on the weekends."

Stroope said that if she finds herself in need of time away from her apartment and her roommate, she goes to visit her boyfriend, who lives alone.

"I seek refuge at my boyfriend's apartment sometimes," Stroope said. "He doesn't have any roommates, so I can go there when I know he's not home to get some privacy if I need to."

There are privacy issues on campus other than trying to find time to be alone when living with a roommate.

Currently, a person's Social Security number is used to identify them as a student. That number is printed on the front of ID cards and parts of the number are used to post test results. The use of the Social Security number as a form of student identification began 15 years ago with the introduction of the Student Information Management System (SIMS).

Bob Piwonka, director of student financial services, said the university is in the process of changing the use of Social Security numbers as the major form of identification for students.

"Our goal is to get away from using the Social Security number as quick as we can," he said. "We have a group of committees working on it right now to find out who is using the ID number and how they're using it."

Piwonka said there were some students who voiced concerns about the use of the Social Security number as an ID number.

"This is a University initiative through the department of finance," he said. "When SIMS

came on line, it made sense to use the Social Security number. Now, with the University trying to get into e-commerce, we realize there might be dangers with using the Social as a form of ID."

Yet another privacy issue for students is the new policy of notifying parents of under-age students who have violated University drug and alcohol rules.

Until early this year, the Family Education of Rights and Privacies Act protected the privacy of students' records. A&M is the first university in Texas to notify parents of crimes involving drugs and alcohol.

Eric Cummings, a freshman microbiology major, said he disagrees with the new policy of notifying parents about drug or alcohol violations.

"It's just like it was when I was in high school, and if you got a [minor in possession of alcohol], you were kicked out of any extracurricular activities for six weeks," he said.

"It shouldn't be like that. It's none of the school's business what I do on my own time. I'm over 18, and what I do is my decision. If you don't want your parents to know about the things you do, then they shouldn't find out."

Cummings said the policy is a huge invasion of his privacy. He believes the policy is not going to cut down on under-age drinking or drug use.

"All this is going to do is make people try harder to avoid getting caught," he said.

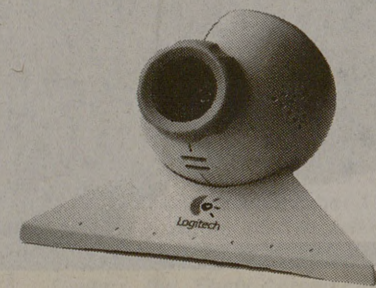
"But as far as cutting down on under-age drinking and stuff like that, it's not going to have any effect at all."



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