

BEWARE THE ROBOPROF

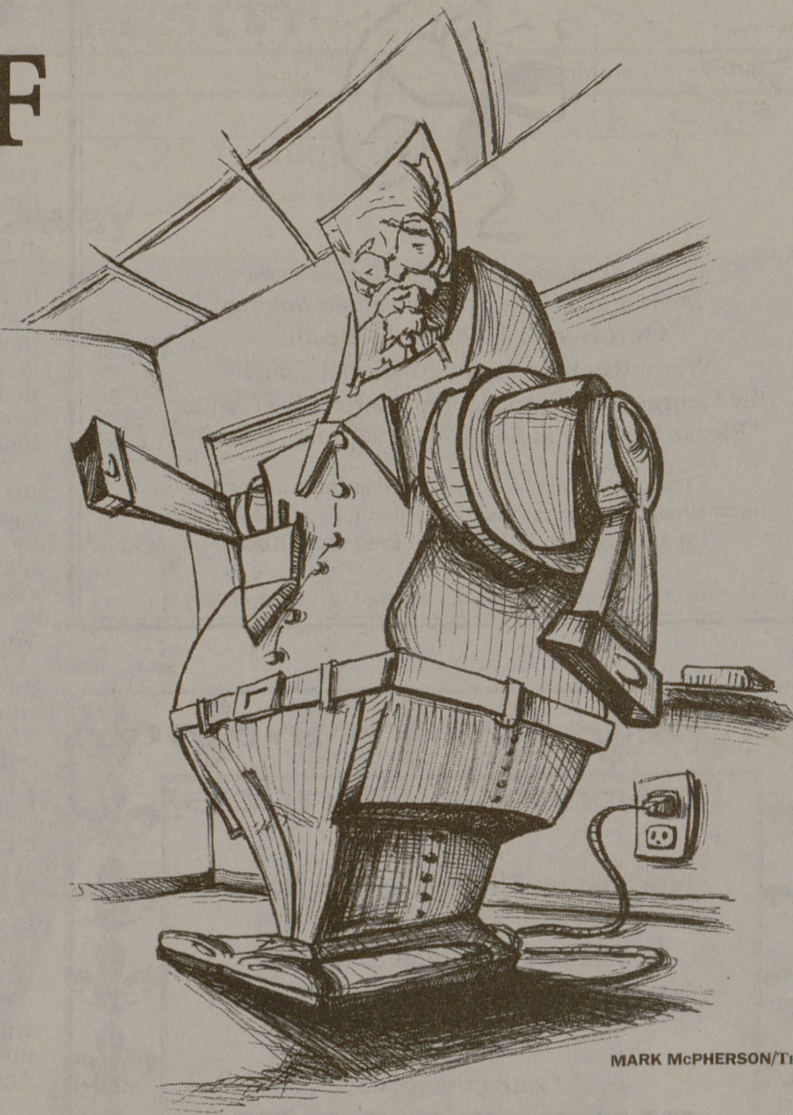
Professors' actions add to students' sparse attendance



JESSICA CRUTCHER

Professors at Texas A&M University tend to become irate when half their students do not show up for lectures after the first week of school. Many attempt to prevent this phenomenon by taking attendance, often making it impossible for students to pass the class if they miss more than a given number of classes. However, it should be noted that although some students do skip out of class, many times it is instead because they doubt they might glean anything useful from lectures. Instead of accusing students of apathy, lecturers should look toward themselves if they notice a consistent drop in attendance from a large percentage of their classes. Students cannot be expected to gain anything from classes if instructors are unable to speak understandable English, choose to lecture directly from a book or are generally apathetic about their classes. Most students have had at least one professor in their academic careers who they would like to see permanently

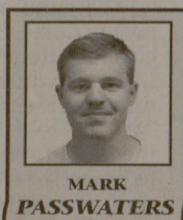
barred from teaching, and sometimes the reason for this hostility is the poor English skills of the instructor. Kristin Yerex, a sophomore health education major, said the difficulty of language barriers in the classroom can impair learning. "How are you supposed to learn anything when your professor speaks Chinese?" Yerex asked. "You cannot pay attention to the lecture because you are too busy trying to understand what she is saying." Yerex's statement expresses the frustration felt by many students stuck with professors they cannot understand. If students do not feel they will benefit from the lecture, they probably will skip class. The professor who chooses to lecture directly from the text at 8 a.m. on a Friday morning also should expect low attendance rates. This kind of professor seems to be the most likely to take attendance in a 300-person class, simply to ensure people will show up. Trying to keep track of that many people takes a great deal of time that could be better invested coming up with a more interesting way to say in lecture what the book has not already said. Basic reading skills are a requirement



MARK MCPHERSON/THE BATTALION

Jessica Crutcher is a sophomore journalism major.

Controversial 'Dutch' biography skews line between fact, fiction



MARK PASSWATERS

Criticism of the book has come from all angles, for many reasons. A good portion of reviewers' criticism attacks Morris' insertion of a fictional character — his own alter ego — into critical moments in Reagan's presidency. Morris, according to the book, was with Reagan when he was shot, when he decided to bomb Libya and during one-on-one meetings with former Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev. After reading Morris' work, it may be considered unfortunate his alter ego did not decide to follow General George Armstrong Custer instead of Reagan, so that he could have gone to the Little Big Horn instead of the White House. Had this happened, we might not have Morris' warping of history. Morris said his insertion of a fake character was intended to make the book more interesting. It also made it fiction. Conversations in the book between "Ed" and former presidents Reagan and George Bush never happened and invalidate any claims Morris may have had



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JEFF SMITH/THE BATTALION

to being historically accurate. The reader is left to wonder what is truth and what is not, and confusion over truth should never happen in a biography. But Morris did not stop at reinventing the historical wheel. He also went out of his way to incite controversy. Morris said Reagan's mental facilities went steadily downhill after Reagan was given a transfusion

of "lukewarm" instead of "warm" blood in 1981 after he shot during an attempted assassination. He also said Reagan was a simpleton unable to understand many of the day-to-day functions of his office — but also too complicated a man for even his wife to figure out. Morris contends that while Reagan was indeed mentally in-

capable of grasping many things, he was as sharp as a tack when it came to such duties as dealing with the Soviet Union. Morris said in the book that SDI — Reagan's "Star Wars" missile-defense program — was based on a comic book Reagan read at age 11, and that Reagan, who spent his presidency fighting "Godless leftists" and "The Evil Empire," tried to join the Communist Party in the '30s. Not surprisingly, these allegations have brought criticism from the Reagans, Bushes and former Reagan administration officials. Despite the reception his book has received, Morris maintains the book is historically accurate. He is correct if historical accuracy is defined by the *National Inquirer*. There is certainly no place for fake characters in a book that is supposed to be an accurate representation of what really happened. When James Michener planted characters from the same family at the Constitutional Convention, at the battles of Yorktown, Gettysburg and Okinawa, he did not try

to pass it off as history. Instead, it became his best-selling novel, *Legacy*. Morris is using the same plot device, but claims his book is different. It is only different in his mind. Morris has put his ego ahead of his duty to present fact with this book. As a result, he has butchered a grand opportunity to honestly relate the actions of a remarkable individual. Authors who insert themselves into situations that really happened or attempt to create controversy should not be considered historians. They should be considered sensationalists and fiction writers. The big loser in all of this will certainly not be Morris, as his book will probably be a best-seller, albeit in the wrong section. The loser will be those hoping to catch an honest portrayal of America's 40th president. They will have to wait for someone to do his or her job properly. Mark Passwaters is a graduate student in electrical engineering.

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Litmus Tests for Racial Bias

When students cannot pass, they sue — at least in the case of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test. In an ironic twist, the TAAS is about to undergo a tough examination set forth by high-school students — one which might cost the exam its life. The Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) has taken up a fight against the TAAS on behalf of seven African-American and Hispanic students who failed the test. The TAAS is an exit exam the state of Texas requires students to pass to receive their high-school diploma. MALDEF is choosing the wrong fight in the battle against poor minority TAAS performances. The problem is not a racially biased test but sub-standard schooling in low-income areas dominated by minorities. MALDEF should realize the value of a standardized exit test, even though disadvantaged minority students might suffer until their schooling is brought up to par. MALDEF charges the TAAS discriminates against black and Hispanic students, noting that three-fourths of students who fail the exam are members of these minority groups, as are the majority of Texas high-school dropouts. States receiving federal education money cannot offer tests which discriminate on the basis of ethnicity. However, each question is screened nine times for any racial bias by a special committee. The questions are not the problem.



JEFF WEBB

LEGAL ISSUES

Part 1 of 5

State tests under fire: Do high-school exit exams discriminate against minority students?

States have standard high-school exit exams, and a federal case in Florida in the 1980s upheld states' legal rights to administer such exams. Deborah Verbil, Texas assistant attorney general, has attempted to relieve doubts about the benefits of testing. "There is no other way for the state of Texas to ensure that students learn the

material that the state of Texas considers important than by an objective test," Verbil said in an Associated Press interview. Verbil's statement illustrates MALDEF's misplaced blame in the case. Blaming the TAAS for failing minority scores is like Bill Clinton grousing at a marathon for being too long. It is not the run — it is the extra cheeseburgers. MALDEF should choose its battles wisely, focusing more on the lack of funding and low standards of poor neighborhood schools and less on the TAAS. Poor preparation of students is what leads to poor test performances, not the test questions. Al Kauffman, MALDEF regional counsel, disagrees with the policy of punishing those students with poor test performances. "It is extremely harmful to our community to deny a high-school diploma to good students who have worked in school for 12 years, been assessed by dozens of teachers and have performed at grade level or above." But simply staying in school for 12 years should not be enough for a diploma. Students must prove they have the necessary academic skills for future success. Kauffman should realize it is more harmful to Texas to approve the graduation of students who may have over-achieved throughout high school and lack the skills to be called products of the Texas education system.

Jeff Webb is a senior journalism major.

MAIL CALL

PTTS proposal hurts students

PTTS's proposal to "allow University parking resources to be better allocated" is nothing more than a blatant scheme to further exploit the student population for more cash. The motive for the proposal to change Southside parking garage to random parking clearly is to enable PTTS to sell more permits than there are parking spaces. PTTS currently cannot get away with assigning two people the same spot, but if they were to convert the garage to "place" parking they could easily assign two or three times as many permits as there are spots while still charging students premium rates. Students pay about three times as much for garage parking as other permits, in part for the convenience of always knowing that you are guaranteed a spot and to know where that spot is. Transforming Southside into another Fish Lot is robbing students of part of the service they paid for. Students should not put up with the Gestapo's money-grubbing schemes, which do

not consider students' best interests.

Jeff Becker
Class of '02

'Unfriendly' not helpful

In response to Eric Dickens' Sept. 29 column.

The more I thought about Eric Dickens' article, the more it did not make sense to me. I have personally never seen a brochure about Texas A&M that has "Friendliest University" plastered across it, but I'm sure they exist. The thing is, I believe that this is a friendly campus, and I came to that conclusion on my own when I visited here my senior year of high school. I never read it, and I already believed it long before I attended Fish Camp. My main problem with the article is that I do not believe promoting A&M as an unfriendly school would be honest or helpful to our cultural-diversity problem. I know this school lacks diversity. That is the one thing I wish I could change, and I think about what I can do every day as a person and in organizations to help this situation. Never did it cross my mind to

stamp out the fact people at A&M are unusually friendly. Why damage one of the best things we have going for us? One might say that you, as a white male, by attending this University are demoting the diversity by contributing to the majority percentages. But do you think it is a good idea to quit allowing white males into this school? No — that's ludicrous, and so is saying that by forgetting about this school's friendliness we can promote diversity. As a female, I have felt sexism at work many times, even here at A&M, but I never thought it would help the problem to label A&M a "Not-so-friendly" University.

Crystal Goodman
Class of '01

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