

## TURBULENT TIMES

Airplane manufacturer faces mounting criticisms for valuing bottom line over human lives

Boeing has had better fort-nights. In the last two weeks, the Seattle-based aircraft manufacturer has suffered the horror of seeing one of its planes crash into the ocean and the embarrassment of being chastised by the federal government for actions regarding another of its aircrafts.

In both cases, Boeing has wrongly allowed lives to be lost in the pursuit of the bottom line.

Last week, Congress revealed Boeing had released an internal report detailing the possibility 747 aircrafts might explode in flight.

The problem stemmed from excess heat in 747's air-conditioning units, which sometimes ignite fumes from the main fuel tank.

The report was completed in 1980, a full 16 years before TWA Flight 800 blew up in flight.

However, the report was not turned over to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) members until this June.

Boeing claims the report focused on the military version of the 747, known as the E-4B, and that Boeing had no reason to assume the findings would relate to civilian versions.

The NTSB and Congress disagreed, saying that if this memo had been made public earlier, changes might have been made that would have prevented the TWA 800 passengers' demise.

Just when it appeared things could not get worse for Boeing — they did. EgyptAir Flight 990 from New York

to Cairo plunged into the Atlantic Ocean early Sunday morning.

The plane, a 767, came off the assembly line immediately after a plane bought by Lauda Air in the mid-1980s.

Perhaps not coincidentally, the Lauda Air plane crashed in Thailand in 1987 after one of its thrust reversers deployed in flight.

Thrust reversers are intended to slow a craft while landing. Aviation experts say the activation of one during flight would cause the plane to drop like a stone.

Radar returns from the EgyptAir flight suggest a similar situation may have occurred Sunday morning.

In both Lauda Air and TWA 800 incidents, Boeing attempted to deflect any possible blame.

After the tragic TWA accident, Boeing publicly claimed there was no way a catastrophic malfunction could have destroyed the plane. They suggested a bomb had been the cause of the explosion.

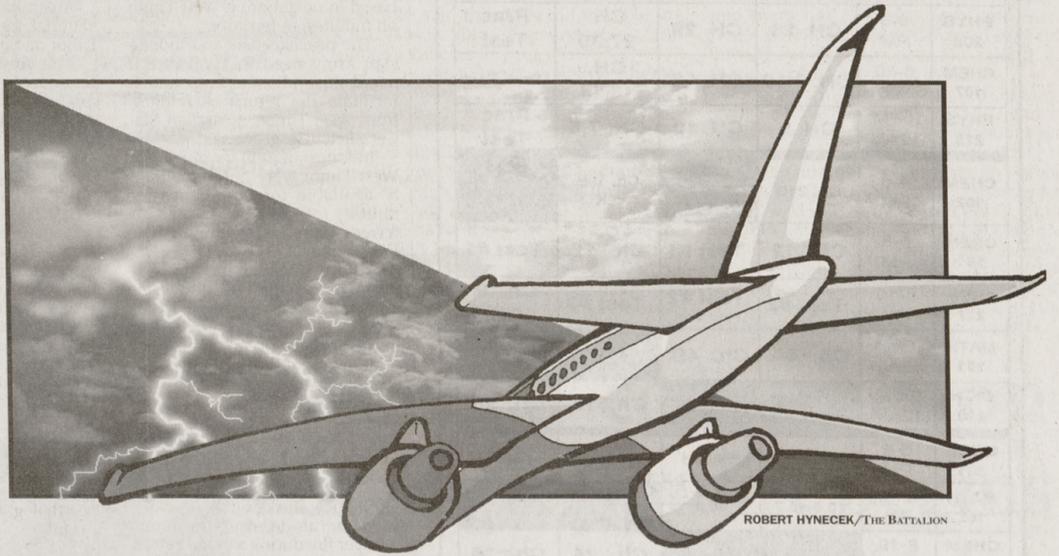
When the Lauda Air 767 crashed 12 years ago, Boeing maintained the cause was pilot error. As a result, Boeing mechanics made only minor modifications to the thrust reverser.

Boeing's attempts to avoid blame do not make the company any different from any other large corporations.

Fessing up to a mistake can cost them millions or even billions of dollars in business.

However, when it comes to making airplanes safe, the situation is different. Some aviation experts feel Boeing was afraid that by admitting design flaws, it would cause its contracts to go to its primary rival, Airbus.

If this is the major reason Boeing did not come clean with its findings,



ROBERT HYNCEK/THE BATTALION

then the company is guilty not only of putting lives at risk but of short-sighted business practices.

It is possible Boeing might lose some contracts to Airbus in the short term, but creating safer aircraft would probably help them quickly regain the confidence of prospective buyers.

Boeing's safety record is still very good, and no airline has ever complained about aircraft defects not being repaired. Making planes safe in the first place

is a vastly superior alternative to being sued for tens of millions of dollars when a plane goes down because of mechanical failure.

Instead of biting the bullet a decade ago, before any of these planes had been involved in tragic accidents, Boeing now finds itself not only an easy target for litigation but also may have lost the trust of potential buyers.

It is never easy to accept responsibility when something has gone wrong, es-

pecially when a mistake leads to disaster. Boeing did what many people do when they screw up — hide.

Now it appears the company will be forced to face the music both publicly and financially for design flaws that could have been corrected a long time ago. It is a terrible tragedy 700 people had to die for these mistakes to be repaired.

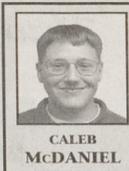
Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.



MARK PASSWATERS

## Bryan trustees should not rush judgment on trimesters

Appear the Bryan Independent School District's Board of Trustees does not have much faith in Bryan High School (BHS). Its skepticism is unfortunate, because it has more reason for optimism than pessimism.



CALEB MCDANIEL

Until recently the high school had languished in the lower echelons of the state's public-education system.

But over the past several years, BHS has proven itself to be one of the more administratively progressive schools in Texas. Under the aegis of an energetic new principal and a hard-working faculty, efforts at reform have wrought numerous changes for the better at BHS.

As a result, for the first time in a long time, Bryan has avoided an appearance on the Texas Education Agency's list of low-performing schools for several years in a row.

By far the most important recent innovation at BHS was the introduction of a trimester scheduling system in 1996.

The new schedule replaced the traditional two-semester school year with trimesters, reducing the number of classes per day while increasing the length of each individual class period.

The system also presents unique scheduling advantages. One of its most attractive features is that it allows students who do poorly in the first trimester to transfer into a different class for the next two trimesters.

However, according to a report in the Nov. 2 issue of *The Bryan-College Station Eagle*, the trimester system is not fixing things quickly enough for some Bryan trustees.

Board president David Stasny told *The Eagle* expectations for the success of the trimester system have not been completely realized.

"My biggest disappointment is that the biggest problems we have with it seem to be fixable, but they haven't been fixed and it's not clear to us why," he said. The Board of Trustees will

meet Monday to discuss a re-evaluation of the trimester system and possible action against it. But if the trustees are wise, they will not strike at the trimester system with knee-jerk impatience.

The trustees' complaints appear to be a classic case of anxious bureaucrats wanting to rush judgment on relatively new policies. For if the trustees judge the trimester system now, they would be rushing.

After all, the system has only been in place for three years, a short time span in the world of education. There has not yet been a graduating class at BHS that has followed the trimester system for four full years, so there is not even a sufficient data set with which to weigh the independent effects of the trimester plan on student performance.

### The prudent policy here is patience.

The trustees' impressions of the system can be based only on anecdotal and abbreviated evidence because there has not been time for long-term statistical trends to establish themselves.

More significantly, the trimester system has not been the only dramatic change BHS has had in recent years.

On top of adjusting to a new principal, BHS has experimented with a variety of new teacher-training programs.

The high school also has combined its freshmen and upperclassman campuses into a newly renovated physical plant this year, a move which has meant wide-reaching reorganizations for both administration and faculty.

In the midst of so much change, BHS must be given time to settle into a regular routine. It would be short-sighted to expect the trimester system to be a miracle cure when the patient is constantly evolving.

What does seem clear from all available evidence is that an overwhelming majority of the BHS faculty supports the

trimester system. Research done last spring by a group of Texas A&M undergraduates surveyed more than a third of Bryan's teachers, and the ensuing report found an incredible consensus among faculty favoring the trimester system.

The most frequently praised feature of the new system was its longer class periods, which teachers said allow them to develop more cooperative teaching strategies and accomplish more on any given day.

Of the 57 teachers surveyed, 41 made comments about class length. An incredible 88 percent of those responding gave positive assessments of the trimester's class-length changes, many noting that longer periods allow for a more relaxed workday, more time to incorporate interactive teaching methods into their curricula and less time wasted on tedious class routines, such as taking attendance.

Even if the trustees find themselves dissatisfied with certain aspects of the system, they must not underestimate the value of a satisfied faculty.

Given more time, an enthusiastic group of teachers and administrators will be able to make perceptible improvements at BHS. But if they instead are shoved back into a system they seem glad to have escaped, the results for students could be disastrous.

The prudent policy here is patience. If the trimester system has not yet lived up to its promised glory, it should be given more time.

The new policy undoubtedly has its kinks, as all young policies do. But the worst thing for BHS now would be yet another systemic change.

Until trustees are sure the system truly is broken, a conclusion which would take at least another three years to reach, their efforts to overhaul it will only exacerbate any existing problems.

At this critical juncture in its development, BHS needs trustees smart enough to give change a chance and courageous enough to stay the course.

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.



MIKE LUCKOVICH ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

### MAIL CALL

#### Homeless cannot claim state funds

In response to Beverly Mireles' Nov. 2 column.

Mireles makes an accurate point with her statement that failure is an option in the United States. However, her "logic" throughout the rest of the column flawed.

While failure is an option in the United States, it is not the responsibility for the citizens of New York to fund this failure.

The price of "opting to fail" is being homeless. The fact that some people actually consider remedial failure is ridiculous.

If a homeless person has \$20,000 to spend on a homeless shelter, perhaps they can afford an apartment.

Additionally, if the actual cost housing one homeless person \$20,000, then the cost of housing 80,000 homeless people \$1.6 billion. This is a large sum money to be handing out.

This money is charity. It is not a consolation prize for failure, and it can come with any strings the benefactor, in this case New York City, wishes to attach.

If a homeless person opts to sleep on the street, then he opts to sleep on the street. If he opts to work, then he opts to sleep in a bed. The

choice belongs to the individual. Mireles undermines a positive program that could actually help homeless people.

To be fair, a large portion of the homeless did not have "the option of failure." The number of homeless people with mental diseases and physical disabilities is staggering. They should receive support from the state.

However, those who "opt to fail" should not.

Joe Schumacher  
Class of '99

#### Sharing one's faith shows true belief

In response to Terrell Rabb's Nov. 3 mail call.

There is a problem with calling for religious tolerance; the nature of religion is that faith in one set of beliefs automatically makes all other religious beliefs flawed.

A Christian cannot look at Jews, Muslims or Hindus and simply think, "They don't believe what I do, but what they believe is probably right, too." That type of thought makes for a weak faith, if it can still be called faith.

Sharing one's faith, illustrated in this case by Southern Baptists' goal of converting Jews, is following through with the doctrine of

the church. In Matthew, Jesus dictates that Christians share the gospel throughout the world, and in fact, the earliest followers of Christ were Jewish converts. This type of aggressive preaching is not new nor is it anywhere near the type of thought which European Jews were subjected to in the 1930s.

No Southern Baptist has proposed concentration camps where the only escape is professing the Christian faith. They just want to be sure everyone is exposed to who Jesus Christ is and what Christianity is.

Personally, I would not want to be part of a religion whose members did not whole heartedly believe that their god is the only God. If you don't believe that way, then what is the point of being part of the Church to begin with?

Pete Chalfant  
Graduate student

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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