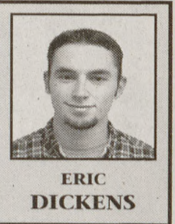


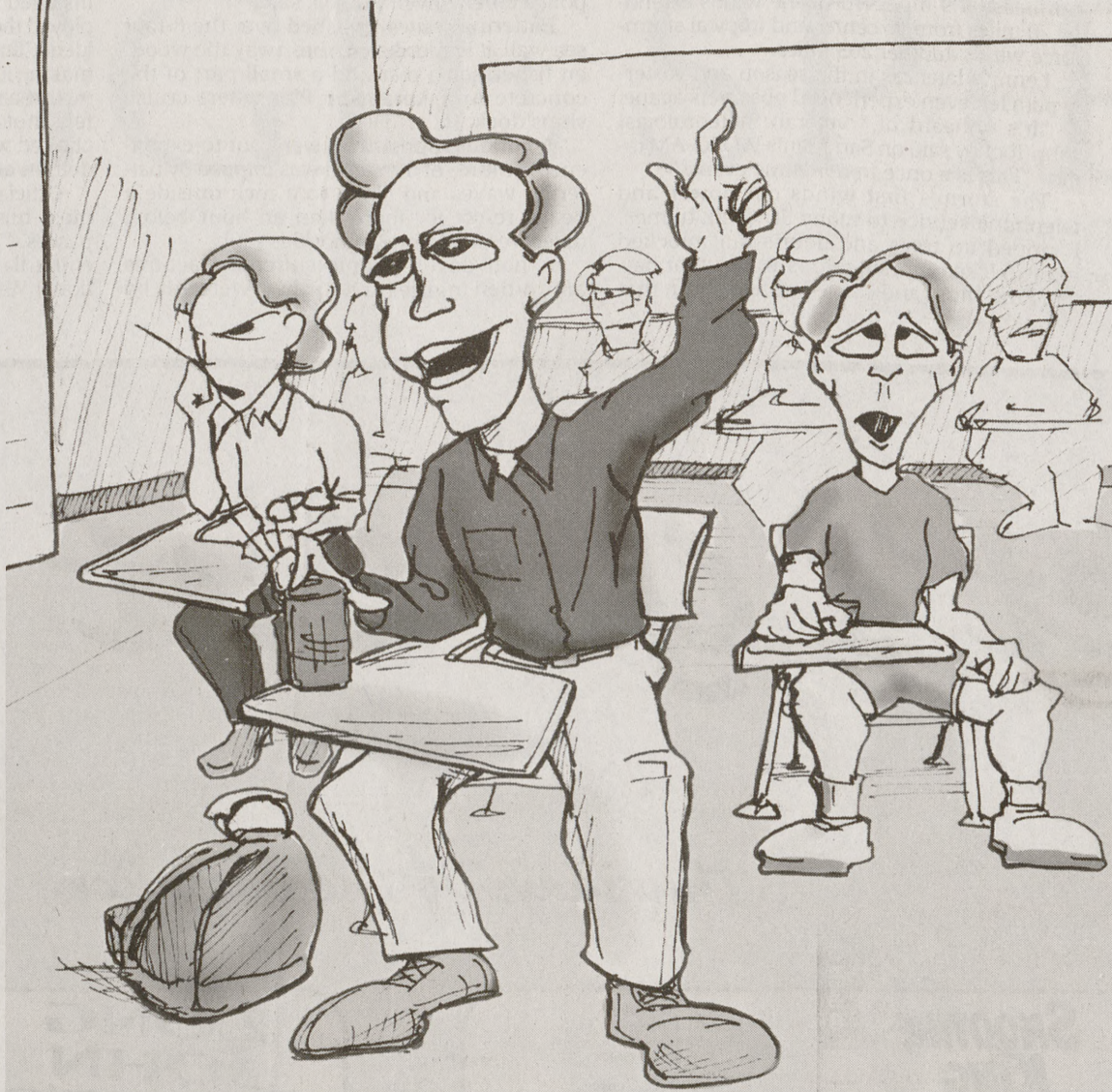
Will that be on the test? Loud students disrupt class, annoy classmates with unimportant banter



ERIC DICKENS

Contrary to what elements and junior high school teachers may have said, there is such a thing as a student question. And chances are, every Texas student has heard plenty of questions asked by obnoxious loud-mouths, usually sitting in the front row of a lecture hall. Students go to class to better understand the subject matter and will sometimes have questions about the material. However, there is a difference between questions that clarify a point and those that add more, usually using information to the lecture. Questions or comments aimed at helping a student understand the material are necessary, but some students seemingly have the audacity to inquire about every detail of a professor's lecture and object the rest of the class to their avoidable delays and pointless side discussions. By adding in their own asinine comments and asking dumb questions like "How come people didn't just say they wouldn't pay the new fee?" these students do not add anything constructive to the professor's understanding of the material, while unnecessarily interrupting the progress of the lecture. Most students go to class to hear the professor talk and explain new material, not to hear their fellow students chime in with their own opinions. The professor is who makes the test and knows what is not important for students to know. If a point is worth elaborating on or, more importantly, will be on the test, professors typically will go into detail about it. When rude students quiz the professor for more information, they bring up issues that are outside of the lesson's intended

scope, they only further complicate the lecture, adding more lines to other students' notes they will have to weed out later when studying for the exam. Students should feel free to ask questions when they do not fully understand something in the lecture, but need to avoid introducing unimportant topics into the lecture. Besides adding useless information to everybody else's notes, students with mindless questions and comments interrupt the professor's intended lesson plan and disrupt the lecture's flow. Class time is valuable, and many times the professor has to rush through the material in order to cover it all. Constant interruptions by inquisitive students hinder the smooth progression of the class through the material. Most students recognize the time constraints of the class and will refrain from asking questions that might slow down the lecture and cause the class to run late. Nevertheless, inane questions in class still persist. These students should realize the ill effects of their interjections and save their questions and comments until after class. The reason a professor has office hours is specifically to answer all those in-depth, extraneous questions a student might think up during a lecture. Instead of interrupting class and infuriating their fellow classmates, students dying to ask questions during class should write down their mid-lecture thoughts and bring them to the professor's office later. There are multiple advantages to this approach. By going to see professors after class, a student can get valuable personal time with them, letting them know the student really cares about the material and his or her grade. Professors usually view students who visit them during office hours as hard workers who are putting in a real effort in their class. This will



JEFF SMITH/THE BATTALION

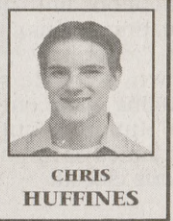
help only when the end of the term draws near and a student is on the borderline between two letter grades. Also, unlike during a class period that is moving quickly and smoothly through a subject matter, a professor will have more time to better answer all of the student's questions and respond to comments. While it is easier to ask the professor in

class, a student is sure to get a fuller, more complete response during office hours. Finally, the most beneficial reason for students to visit their professors is that it helps the other students in the class. A student usually wants to go to class, listen to the lecture and go on to their next class. Extra remarks from the front row are very rarely appreciated

and should be saved for the professor's office hours. By saving their questions until after class, students can find more satisfying answers while sparing their fellow classmates from hearing questions they did not need answered and comments they did not want to hear.

Eric Dickens is a junior English major.

Brutality in prisons must stop

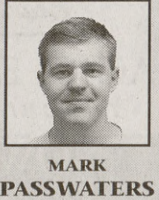


CHRIS HUFFINES

One of the facts about prisons most often overlooked when it comes to debates about prison reform is that prisons are full of convicted criminals. It is true; the maximum-security institutions of this country are full of convicted killers, rapists, robbers and a host of other felons. They are not nice people. As can be expected, when deviants are put in the same enclosed space with other deviants, discipline can become a problem. Discipline is further hampered by the fact that prisoners are given access to amenities and guards are kept from employing force beyond certain restrictive guidelines. The prisoners have privileges, and the guards have none. This needs to change. Guards should be allowed to use whatever reasonable force is necessary to maintain discipline in the prisons. Discipline, of course, would be determined by the Department of Criminal Justice of the state, but it would generally consist of inmates not putting mackerel cans in socks and beating other inmates, not raping other inmates, not making and then using shanks and not actively participating in prison gang warfare, all of which happens with fairly stunning regularity. Before the American Civil Liberties Union and its lap-dog organizations decide to boycott the University because of this column, let it be established first that this change would not condone brutality. There is a very definite line between maintaining order and beating a prisoner. That line is made up of intent and response. Guards who are responding to a breakdown in order and who exert force only as it is necessary to restore order would be perfectly justified. Guards who play "kick the inmate" because they are bored, or even to prevent inmate violence, would be in violation of this policy. How can prison guards maintain order? Rather than beating inmates about the head or pumping in nerve gas, guards can turn to the new types of non-lethal firearms being developed. There are sting bombs, which can best be described as foam-rubber grenades. They sting a great deal, but they do not injure the victim. There is mace and pepper spray. There is foam that hardens and immobilizes those it comes in contact with. There are carbines that shoot bean bags or foam-rubber cylinders. Soap bubbles have been around since the '70s as a crowd-control measure. Electrified riot shields and nausea-inducing sonic guns are also available but are a bit on the more forceful side. In addition, prison intelligence units to disrupt gangs would lessen violence. Inmates can be kept in order, and there are even ways to do it without killing inmates (always a bonus). Will enforcing discipline work? According to a New York prison, Rikers Island, it will. In recent years, guards in the prison have used force to subdue inmates. According to *The New York Times*, violent crime in the prison has dropped by nearly 90 percent. In doing so, unfortunately, the guards have abused that force, resulting in numerous injuries to inmates. This is unacceptable. While a policy of reasonable force would prevent most injuries, a certain number of wounded are going to have to be accepted. While people "on the outside" do not have the stomach to dole out corporal punishment when necessary, it must be remembered that the individuals potentially being injured would be convicted criminals committing violent acts in a volatile environment. The sting ball or shock shield should make the point very clear that this individual is not one of society's golden children, and anti-social behavior like rioting in prison is a bad thing. No one will dispute that prisoners have rights, but it is fundamental to the American system of justice that prisoners would not be in prison had they not violated someone else's rights. If the price of order among the most dangerous prisoners is a small extension of police power to quell disturbances already in progress or to protect the life of guards in jeopardy, then there should be no problem in paying it.

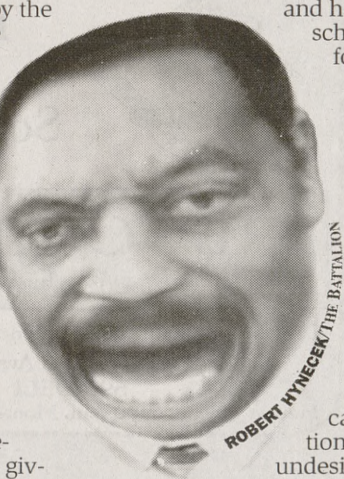
Chris Huffines is a senior speech communication major.

Jackson meddles in Decatur



MARK PASSWATERS

People usually like to take care of things that happen in their own backyards. It is very rare for anyone to want someone else's street to come in with all of the facts and pass a judgment that should be considered. In fact, most people could resent such an action. The people of Decatur, Ill., apparently are like most people. Several weeks ago, seven high school students started a brawl in the football bleachers at game. Four of the seven students were arrested and charged with inciting a riot — a felony. One of the arrested was also charged with battery, and the other three were charged as juveniles. The penalty was swift and immediate. The seven students were expelled from school for two years, in accordance with policies set by the school board and administration of the Decatur school system. End of story. At least, it would have been the end of the story, except for the fact that all of the expelled students are black. After their expulsions were announced, the question of whether racism played a role in the expulsions took center stage. A black resident of Decatur went so far as to tell *The New York Times* that if the students had been white, "nothing would have happened." Enter Rev. Jesse Jackson. Jackson has come to Decatur with the intention of having the expulsions returned and having the students return to school, saying that the penalty given by the Decatur school system is unjust. Jackson has said that the arrests and expulsions are simply "another attack on the students," and that they should be allowed to return to school and receive counseling. If this does not happen, Jackson believes these students will not be able to go to college or get jobs. He also told CNN that the fight was "less violent than a wrestling match." Perhaps Jackson should look at the videotape of the fight. A copy of the tape provided by the father of one of the opposing team's players shows the whole scene — people diving onto the field and toppling over the railing, attempting to get out of the way of seven students as their fists flail wildly. One man, attempting to break up the melee, got punched in the face for his efforts. Not only was the incident more violent than a wrestling match, it was closer to a riot. The man who tried to break things up was the principal of Eisenhower High School, which the students supposedly attended. They "supposedly" at-



ROBERT HYNEKER/THE BATTALION

tended because among the four of them they had missed more than 350 class days. Several of the students were 17-years-old but were still considered freshmen since they had not passed any of the first-year classes. They all had established criminal records. A future in college, which Jackson said was being deprived from them, was certainly not on the horizon. The punishment these students received was not out of the ordinary. It was the standard punishment agreed to by the city's school administration and the school board. There was no special exception made to punish them. On the contrary, Jackson's influence has actually given these students exceptions that other students would not receive. The school board has reduced their penalties to a year-long suspension with an opportunity to attend alternative education classes. But Jackson has said that this is not enough and has led protests outside of all three high schools in Decatur. Earlier this week, he forced his arrest on the Eisenhower High School campus in further protest. "Rev. Jackson has done many wonderful things for this country, but he's picked the wrong case here," Decatur's school administrator told *The New York Times*. He is correct. Jackson's presence in this matter can only be considered meddling. What have these students done to deserve this exception to the rules, which have been in place for two years? Decisions on the distribution of punishment belong to the Decatur school board and the administration. Outside influence is not only undesired, it is undeserved. The rules were on the books, and they were followed to the letter. Jackson's presence in this matter has not helped anyone, except perhaps himself. The longer he orchestrates these protests, the less willing the administration will be to deal with him. In the meantime, other students will continue to be distracted from attending classes in an attempt to go to college and get jobs, which is what Jackson wanted for seven of their sometime classmates. As this debacle continues, Decatur will tear itself apart instead of coming together as a community. The seven students will be no closer to returning to school, and the rest of the town's high school students will have their own educations retarded. But Jackson will be on television screens throughout the nation, decrying the alleged "injustice." Could it be that the greater injustice is what Jackson has caused, not what he claims to be opposing?

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.

MAIL CALL

Jewish beliefs misrepresented

In response to Chris Huffines Nov. 2 column.

Although the Texas A&M Jewish community strongly disagrees with Chris Huffines' article, we do welcome Mr. Huffines' candor. We are offended by the headline for Huffines' piece, "Baptist Call for Jewish Conversion not constitute religious tolerance." We wonder if *The Battalion* would have spoken of any other minority group in the same way. Having stated our objection to the headline, we also found the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) resolution deplorable. It is not our job to defend the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). It is, however, our job to correct the many false assumptions found in Huffines' piece and wonder why *The Battalion* did not question these inaccuracies. First, Huffines accuses the ADL of "media one-upmanship." He paints the ADL as a religiously intolerant group because it spoke out against the SBC resolution. How convenient for him to claim no accountability for statements found reprehensible by a minority community. If other groups targeted his religion, would he not have the right to speak out? Freedom of speech is for everyone. Secondly, Huffines said the ADL spokesperson Abraham Foxman is doctrinally unsound. He builds his argument by taking both Exodus 20:2, the first commandment, and Foxman's statement out of context. Judaism has traditionally acknowledged that there are many paths to God. Jews follow their own path as defined by the Torah and Talmud.

Finally, Mr. Huffines states that every lukewarm Christian knows that Christianity is an extension of Judaism. We acknowledge that there are some common historical roots, but the philosophies are completely different. Judaism is based on a Jew's accountability to God in a day-to-day reality for his or her actions. Christianity is based on actions not being accountable if a proclamation of faith is made. Judaism is monotheistic while Christianity is based on a trinity. Huffines' also discussed the Messianic differences, yet we wonder if he is cognizant of the divergence in definition and cultural context from the original Hebrew word "Mashiach" to its traditional English translation "Messiah." We reiterate that the Southern Baptists can try to convert whomever they choose, but we think it is deplorable to target conversion at a specific group. We quote Rabbi Ofseyer of Dallas' Congregation Shearith Israel and "wish them a notable lack of success."

Greg Meyer
Hillel Foundation

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: **The Battalion - Mail Call 013 Reed McDonald Texas A&M University College Station, TX 77843-1111 Campus Mail: 1111 Fax: (409) 845-2647 E-mail: battletters@hotmail.com**