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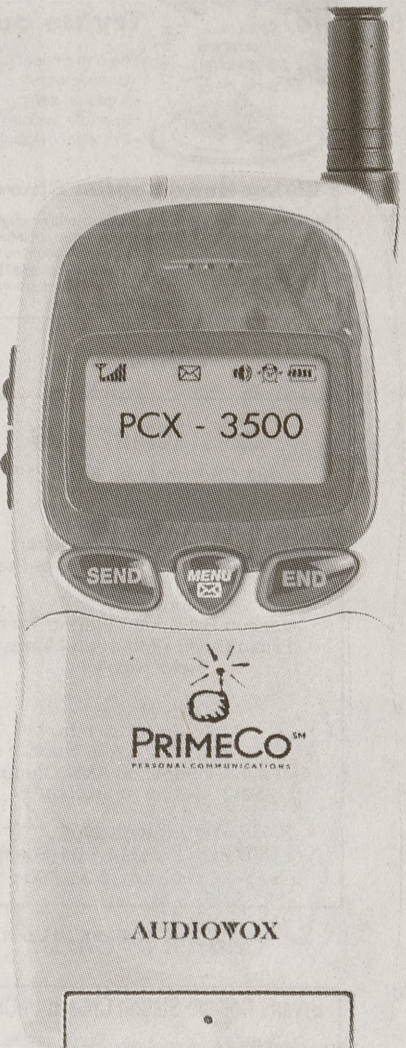
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Counseling services offered to help grief-stricken students

BY AMANDA PALM
The Battalion

The emotional reactions of students and families to the collapse of Bonfire prompted the staff of the Student Counseling Services (SCS) to begin working overtime yesterday.

SCS staff has available to students since Dr. Wade Birch, Student Counseling Service director, and a colleague arrived at the Bonfire site at 5 a.m. Thursday morning.

Birch said he spread his staff out across campus, placing psychologists at the MSC Flagroom, Bonfire site and MSC 145, which served as headquarters for family counseling.

Birch said he wanted to make sure everyone affected by the tragedy had a SCS staff member available to them if they wanted to talk. Other staff members were sent to the Forsyth Center yesterday afternoon to take care of families and students who were not assisted in MSC 145.

Birch spent much of his time at Bonfire site consoling and counseling families of the deceased students.

"I dealt with a family at the site who had been waiting for an hour and a half fearing the worst," Birch said. "But they were not getting any information. I asked them to join me in one of the buses, and then I had to break the news to them that their daughter was dead."

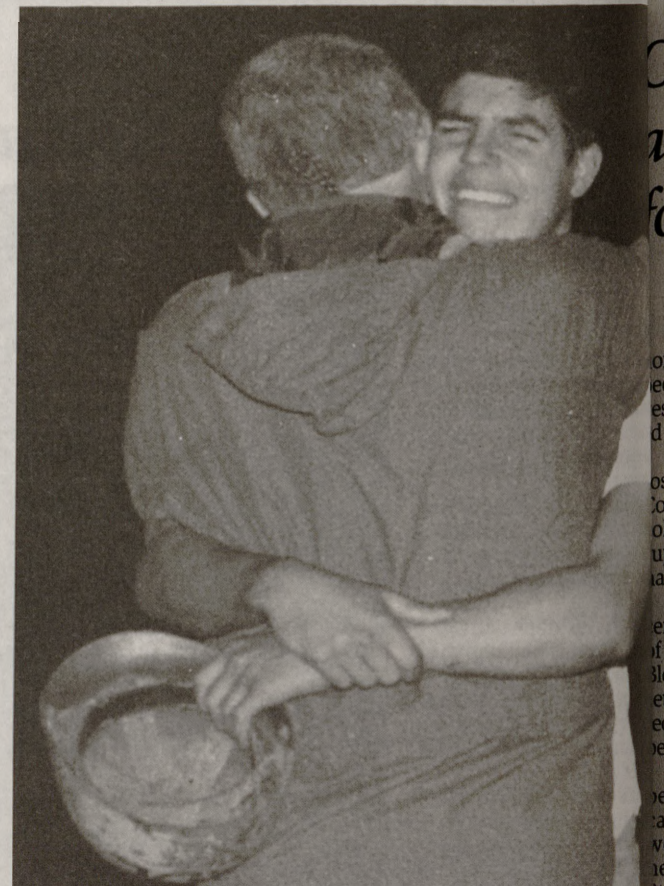
"It was extremely hard for that family because they had been in a phase where they still had hope and then had to go through phase two of dealing with the death."

The SCS Help Line hours have been extended to assist students and families who are unable to meet in person with SCS staff. Help Line services will be available on a 24-hour basis until 8 a.m. Monday.

Susan Varva, Helpline coordinator, said that within 16 hours after stack collapsed, the Help Line received more than 150 calls.

"Most people called wanting information," she said. "They wanted to verify who was injured. People wanted to offer their professional counseling services. We even had a call from Montreal, Canada and the Taiwanese Consulate, both offering their condolences."

The Help Line is volunteer help service comprised undergradu-



Two students comfort each other after the collapse of the Texas A&M Bonfire. CODY WAGNER

Student Counseling Service Hotline available 24 hours until Monday:
845-2700

Student Ministry:
862-4527

Parent Contact Hotline:
1-888-777-6666

Additional 24-hour support available at MSC Flag Room

ates, graduates and former students who have spent 45 hours in training by psychologists. Varva said the line is usually handled by three students, but because of the collapse, there have been five or six students per four-hour shift.

Birch said he wants the people affected by the incident to "communicate, not isolate."

"The staff wants people to know that whatever they are feeling is normal," he said. "It's okay to feel terrible and mixed up, and you shouldn't think you're weak if you have those kinds of feelings. People should not lock up

their feelings. They need to express their emotions."

It is also important for students to maintain their normal lives as best they can, Birch said.

"Students should get up to class," he said. "They need to make sure they eat properly." The Texas Department of Public Safety sent additional counselors to Bonfire site to assist SCS staff.

Sixteen Austin crisis center members arrived last night to assist in case the SCS staff needed assistance counseling students and families.

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