

Let the countdown begin: 7, 6, 5...

Students seek motivation for class as semester ends

BY HEATHER BRONDY
The Battalion

Perhaps the most tragic semester in Aggie history is finally coming to a close, and many students wearily approach the end of school with bleary eyes and blurry heads. But the fact is, there are still seven class days left in the semester and another two weeks of reading days and finals.

Kelly Harvey, a junior history major, said the reasons to attend class these last few days are obvious.

"We've made it this far — we might as well finish and use this last week to our best advantage," she said. "If you don't go, you may miss a review, or if you're borderline and the professor sees that you're not coming, then it could mean your grade. Besides, what's one more week?"

Dr. Douglas Brooks, an assistant professor of English at Texas A&M, said getting students to attend class should be part of professors' responsibilities.

"It is important to understand that students have by this point in the semester nearly exhausted their capacity to take in new information," he said.

"As such, professors have an obligation to build on what the students have already learned and to find ways to show them how that knowledge can be applied to new material being taught late in the semester.

"It can be extremely exciting for students to see that all of the hard work they've done had a kind of intellectual payoff, and I think professors would work especially hard during the last few weeks of class to generate that kind of excitement. If they do, students will want to come to class."

Of course, generating excitement for academia, no matter what the payoff, can be a challenge.

Brent Vabis, a senior journalism major, said his professors seem to understand why many students may continue to have trouble these next seven days despite their creative efforts to make class more interesting.

"Normally, professors throw in spontaneous reviews where you can catch up on some of the ideas of what you should know for finals," he said.

"But this semester is different. People are coping in different ways, and some people may just not be ready to go back [to class]. Professors seem to be very understanding to this. My sociology professor actually brought in a counselor to talk to us after the Bonfire tragedy."

Many professors and counselors say it is in the best interest of students to attend class because of the support individuals are finding there.

Tim Novak, director of the Forsyth Galleries and a history professor said students should use the remaining class days, because of the support fellow Aggies give to each other.

"You know, it's not a normal semester," he said, "and students can find more support being at A&M — going to classes, and being where there are people who understand and can support them, then they can find anywhere else."

Brooks said it is on the shoulders of A&M professors staff to encourage students to go about their normal activities, class included.

"It is our responsibility to encourage students to see that it is in their best interest to continue on with the routines of classes and study, even if they don't think they can," he said. "Such routine

gives our lives structure, and structure can be a source of great comfort and strength in times of crisis."

Brooks said A&M should not ignore the school's duty to educate, especially in light of a tragedy bound up in such Aggie Spirit.

"I taught class last Friday," Brooks said, "and told my students that in the spirit of what Bonfire stood for, we had an obligation to uphold this school's commitment to education, to do the best we could to focus on why all of us were here in the first place."

Novak said this semester has been a learning experience.

"[Tragedies] like this, as horrible as they are, teach us and remind us how to be supportive to everyone around us," he said. "No matter who you are or what organizations you're affiliated with — this is an opportunity for Corps members and fraternities and athletes to unite and lend each other support. Barriers are being broken down, and people you'd never normally talk to are suddenly becoming your friends."

Brooks said simply going to class, even to the boring ones which might not affect an individual's major, is an important discipline to acquire.

"There will be a lot of boring and seemingly irrelevant tasks you will have to complete in both your personal and professional lives," he said. "And getting through that class with a modicum of dignity will have been great training for you."

Moreover, if the Zen masters are right, then it is precisely the most tedious and mundane aspects of any endeavor which, when completed, serve as the foundation for mastery."



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