

A&M among top-10 schools attracting Merit scholars

BY BRADY CREEL
The Battalion

For sophomore chemical engineering major Sam Keen, the choice of where to go to school was a tough one.

Keen, a National Merit Scholar, graduated with the largest class in the history of Midway, Texas — with 20 students in his class.

Although he was already accepted to many schools, including Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Stanford University, Keen had to base his decision on more than just academics.

"It boiled down to financial reasons," Keen said. "I had to have scholarships to come to school, and A&M offered a lot of good scholarships through the Terry Foundation and National Merit Program."

Keen is among many of the nation's top high school seniors who decide to attend Texas A&M each year. This year, A&M attracted 181 scholars, moving the university up two spots to sixth place among the nation's ranking of schools with the most National Merit Scholars.

"They explore just beyond what is required for them to earn a degree, and they expect to be on the cutting edge of things."

"[The National Merit Scholars] are students that will be deciding a lot of the future," Shannon Estrada, recruiting coordinator for the Office of Honors Programs and Academic Scholarships, said.

"Texas A&M is the best of all worlds for them," she said. "They get to experience a friendly campus where they get to experience leadership opportunities."

The number of National Merit Scholars at A&M rose by 32 students from 149 one year ago.

"We increased the number of our National Merit Students by 20 percent this year," Estrada said. "This is the highest year ever. It is a banner year for us. A lot of students want to go to a school that has attracted students like them."

"The academic prestige is important. Texas A&M has distinguished itself already because it is nationally ranked," he said.

Part of Texas A&M's success in attracting National Merit Scholars can be attributed to the recruiting efforts of the Office of Honors Programs and Academic Scholarships.

"Texas A&M has one of the best programs as far as National Merit Scholars visiting," Kelly Shiebert, National Merit Scholar and a sophomore mechanical engineering major said.

Texas A&M has several conferences in which high-achieving high school students are invited to campus. They attend an Honors class and stay overnight in Lechner Honors Residence Hall.

The Office also has an aggressive mailing campaign. Letters are mailed not only from the Honors office, but from the President's office as well.

However, other National Merit students at A&M said their decision was based on A&M's terrific combination of being close to home, affordable and having a good academic reputation.

"I wanted to stay in state, so it was

between Baylor and Texas A&M," Natalie R. Wilson, National Merit Scholar and a sophomore zoology major, said. "After that, it came down to financial reasons. I was able to afford Texas A&M, partly because of the National Merit Scholarship."

Wilson is a Presidential Endowed Scholar, a scholarship awarded by the office of Honors Programs and Academic Scholarships. However, as a National Merit Scholar, she received additional scholarship money from the University.

NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARS Rankings

- 1) Harvard/ Radcliffe
- 2) University of Texas
- 3) University of California
- 4) Stanford University
- 5) Rice University
- 6) Texas A&M
- 7) University of Florida
- 8) Yale
- 9) University of Chicago
- 10) University of Oklahoma

RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

All money awarded by the University and the Office of Honors Programs and Academic Scholarships is independent of any scholarships given by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

Students initially enter into competition by taking the PSAT in their junior year of high school. Students must score in the semi-finalist level to be considered, and must meet further requirements to be considered a finalist.

"The [National Merit] finalists are all excellent. The finalists have the highest potential for college, and they usually have something that makes them stand out," Gloria Ladendorf, public information assistant director for the National Merit Scholarship Corporation, said.

Approximately 8,000 students were named National Merit Scholars last year, and 7,700 are expected this year.

Texas A&M awards a \$2,000 scholarship to all National Merit Scholars who name Texas A&M as their first choice upon becoming a finalist.

"It was a good value for the education, and close to home," Anthony Garza, National Merit scholar and a sophomore chemical engineering major, said.

Having been accepted into both MIT and Texas A&M, Garza was also faced with the decision of whether to go to an expensive private school, but is happy with his choice.

"I don't have any regrets about coming here," Garza said. "Texas A&M is an awesome place."



SALLIE TURNER/THE BATTALION

A student injured in the Aggie Bonfire collapse, who wishes to remain anonymous, looks at the remains of one of the most treasured traditions at Texas A&M University yesterday afternoon. Reflection and remembrance continue everyday on the Polo Fields and in the hearts of every Aggie.

Bonfire commission creates info hotline

BY ROLANDO GARCIA
The Battalion

At its third meeting yesterday, the Special Commission on the 1999 Aggie Bonfire voted to hire Performance Improvement International (PII) to examine what role human behavior may have played in the collapse of the structure, particularly among the bonfire workers.

PII is the fourth investigative team hired to assist the commission in determining the cause of the collapse of the 1999 Aggie Bonfire.

In a presentation to the commission, Chong Chiu, CEO of PII, said mechanical failures and individual human error are usually symptoms of a deeper failure in the organizational and management structure.

The commission also received updates from the three other teams involved in the investigation.

"We've got an extraordinary team of professionals assembled for the task. They're competent, experienced and skilled in their fields," Leo Linbeck Jr., chairperson of the commission, said.

"And I don't think there's any more we could do as far as assembling the necessary resources to find the cause," he said.

One team, led by Fay Engineering, is charged with researching the historical design of past bonfires to determine how the bonfire should have been built.

Armed with photos of almost every bonfire from the last 70 years, as well as prior stack statistics and dimensions, the Fay Engineering team will produce drawings and analyses.

A second team, led by Packer Engineering and charged with investigating the physical factors leading to the accident, reported

they had completed an analysis of the equipment used at the stack, and were now measuring, weighing and classifying the logs.

A soil evaluation and a detailed analysis of the centerpole (which is now in three pieces) to determine the cause of the fracture are currently planned.

Linbeck also announced the creation of a 24-hour-a-day hot line (1-888-765-3977) that will allow individuals to report information concerning the bonfire collapse. Each caller's name may remain confidential.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

The commission also discussed legal issues which need to be resolved with the firms before contracts can be finalized.

Whether the commission is considered an independent state agency or an advisory board to Texas A&M University and whether the commission has the authority to award contracts and spend public funds is yet to be determined.

In a related matter, the commission decided to include clauses in the contracts which pledge that the University will pay for the firms' court expenses if they are called to testify in a lawsuit against the University concerning the bonfire collapse.

Even with the prospect of litigation against the University, Linbeck said the commission would conduct an independent investigation and would not skew the results in any way to shield Texas A&M from legal liability.

"The commission is committed to finding the truth, no matter what it may be," Linbeck said.

The commission has cancelled a meeting previously planned for Feb. 1. The commission's next meeting will be Feb. 22, when it will be presented with a final budget for the investigation.

Senate to discuss fee hikes

BY JEANETTE SIMPSON
The Battalion

The discussion of new student fees tops the Student Senate's agenda for the first meeting of the semester tonight, which includes acknowledging those who offered support during the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse.

Although the agenda for tonight's Student Senate meeting has not been finalized, certain issues will be addressed, Brian Minyard, speaker of the Student Senate and a senior biochemistry major, said.

"There will most definitely be a resolution to thank all of the universities that offered to help us during the bonfire accident," Minyard said. "We want to make sure that we express our gratitude to all who helped us."

Tonight's meeting will also address the possible student fee increases, including increases in the Student Recreation Center access fee and the library access fee.

"I hope to make A&M the epitome of metropolitan recycling."

— Will Hurd
A&M Student Body President

Dr. Fred Heath, Dean of Sterling C. Evans Library, will be giving a presentation addressing the increase in library access fees.

"We are coming back to the students to request this fee increase in order to support the digital electronic revolution that has come upon us more rapidly than we had anticipated," Heath said. "More and more of our materials are becoming available on the desktop 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To continue to make these sources available to the 43,000 students on our campus, we must increase fees to support the technology."

Will Hurd, student body president and a senior computer science and international studies major, is also setting an agenda for the spring semester.

Hurd will focus on an enhanced recycling program and drawing attention to the 2000 census.

"I hope to make A&M the epitome of metropolitan recycling," Hurd said.

Hurd's plan to improve recycling entails establishing basic recycling of materials such as paper and plastics in dorms and offices and then reducing the waste produced by A&M by methods such as increasing the use of online forms to decrease paper usage.

Hurd will also continue to make the Student Government Web page a portal for current students. Hurd said he wants to gear this Website to students, making everything easily accessible. Hurd will also work with College Station officials this semester to educate students on the importance of the 2000 Census.

"The more students that fill out the census card, the more money College Station, and A&M will get in the future," Hurd said.

PTTS aims to improve parking lots

BY JORDAN DAVIS
The Battalion

Texas A&M students owe last semester's parking permit fee hike — the largest since the late '80s — to a slate of new construction projects aimed at improving the campus parking shortage.

One of the construction projects being paid for by the fee increase is currently underway on main campus. The Department of Parking, Traffic and Transportation Services (PTTS) is expanding the size of Lot 50, a commuter lot located just east of the Zachry Building, by approximately 640 spaces.

The expansion, which should be ready for student commuters by Fall 2000, will actually add about 2000 spaces because one parking space generally accommodates three vehicles during the day, Tom Williams, director of PTTS, said.

In order to pay for a long list of construction projects, it was necessary for PTTS to raise fees, something Williams said the University had put off since 1996.

Residents and commuters faced a \$50 fee hike at the beginning of last semester, while the cost of parking garage spots rose \$78.

"The fee increase was necessary to pay for the upcoming building projects," Williams said.

Project	Location	Cost
Parking Lot 50 Extension	East of Zachary	\$ 1 M
Parking Lot	West of Reed Arena	\$800,000
Parking Garage	North of Rec Center	\$ 30 M
Underground Pedestrian Walkway	Under Wellborn Road	\$ 10.65 M
Parking Lot	Olsen Field	\$400,000
Parking Lot	George Bush Academic	\$ 1 M

RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

"Students should keep in mind that the fees A&M students pay are still less than what students at most universities pay," he said.

In addition to the expansion of Lot 50, the fee increase for parking will also offset the costs of constructing a parking garage adjacent to the Student Recreation Center on West Campus and an underground pedestrian walkway under Wellborn Road to make the walk between main and West Campuses safer for students.

Other building projects planned this year are parking lots on West Campus, including new lots at Reed Arena and at the George Bush Presidential Library Complex, as well as new parking areas next to the driving range near Penberthy Intramural Sports Center and an extension of West Drive.

King Jr., Reagan, Kennedy make scholars list of 100 best speeches of the century

BY BROOKE HODGES
The Battalion

Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech took top honors on a survey listing the top 100 speeches of the 20th century.

The survey was conducted by Dr. Martin J. Medhurst, professor of speech communication at Texas A&M, and Dr. Stephen E. Lucas, professor of speech communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The survey polled 280 oratory scholars representing all 50 states. Those polled were asked to list 25 American speeches from the last 100 years and rate each speech's rhetoric and impact.

King's speech placed first because of his use of powerful oratory in a masterful way, Dr. Rick Riggsby, speech communication senior lecturer at A&M, said.

"It was a powerful response to a moral crisis in the nation. Its words painted vivid pictures we could understand. The themes challenged the nation," Riggsby said. "We [the nation] could no longer wait. [The speech] unified the entire nation in the concept of freedom."

"King's speaking ability was a major

part of the [civil-rights movement]," Riggsby said. "His major role was to explain the movement. If you have an organization, and no one to explain the organization, you have a weak organization."

Of the top 10 speeches polled, five were delivered in the turbulent decade of the '60s.

"The '60s raised the bar for oratory because of all the movements [the anti-war effort, civil rights movement, and women's liberation] converging," Medhurst said.

Many of the speeches on the list were delivered in times of crisis, such as former President Ronald Reagan's "Address to the Nation on the Challenger Disaster" which was rated eighth, Medhurst said.

"I think in moments of crisis there has to be some way of communication with the American people," he said. "Ronald Reagan gave the eulogy [instead of the scheduled State of the Union address]. [It was a] moment of crisis. He wanted to assure people that the space program would continue. He wanted to speak to the school children ... which he did."

Reagan tied with former Presidents John F. Kennedy and Franklin Roosevelt for the most speeches on the list, with six listings.

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