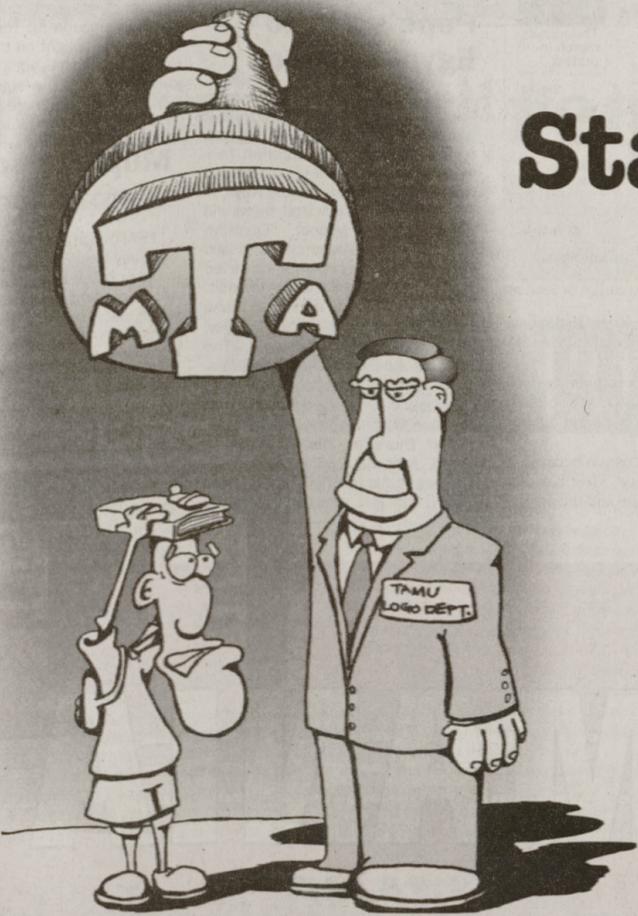


DISAPPROVAL

Stamp of

University lowers standards with cheap merchandise



MATT ROY/THE BATTALION



CHRIS HUFFINES

Some days, it seems one could sell Old Aggs and new students anything, so long as it is maroon and carries the University seal. As Mel Brooks said in his movie *Spaceballs*, "Merchandising, where the real money ... is made." Not limited to binders and legal pads, the University's trademarked logos cover an overwhelming variety of humiliating products and have doubtlessly already spawned monstrosities such as a 1994 NCAA Suspension Memorial Chess set or the sex-ed book *Aggie Sutra*, with over 2000 positions.

And while the University is certainly entitled to squeeze the gullible masses for every penny they may be "persuaded" to fork out — exploitation being in this case the fault of the exploiters — the tragic glut of merchandise reflects poorly on the University, and its production should be slowed or stopped.

Walking down Northgate, it is possible to see Texas A&M checkboards (with football helmets for pieces), Ol' Sarge toilet lids and cheerleader outfits for little girls, not to mention boxers for men and lingerie for, well, that's really for men, too.

Elsewhere, there are maroon and logo-encrusted tuxedos. There are also the Aggie Bonfire groom's cakes and the Aggie Cin-

derella story, and the other literary piracy, all in the interest of the maroon and white.

This is not to say that the usual run of shirts, shorts, hats, flags, wallpaper, paper, folders, binders, pens, pencils, socks, shoes, sheets, blankets, posters, belts, suspenders, Aggieopoly games and bumper stickers prove anything except that the University has sold its soul to Mr. Buck Dollar, but then again, who hasn't? There is a certain amount of class in the "standard" merchandise. But, Texas A&M toilet lids? Who wants to be sitting at their most vulnerable in the bathroom knowing the baleful glare of Ol' Sarge is right behind them, ready to dispense gigs to anyone who does not wash their hands?

And then there are the cheerleader outfits. Aside from the issues of parents dressing small children in the outfit of their college and the whole sexism concern of there being no yell leader outfits for little boys, A&M does even not have cheerleaders. In fact, Aggies are overwhelmingly proud that it does not take a platoon of scantily-clad women to get Aggies to come to the games and cheer for the team, unlike every other inferior school on the planet.

While there are no cheerleaders at the school, parents can still foist happy memories of college — the ones that do not involve too much beer, ex-significant others or bad music — onto the unsuspecting wardrobes of children too young to tie their shoes.

And there is the problem. It is not that the merchandise is so terrible in and of itself (although this has been a close call in some cases), but that this merchandise is being bought by the wrong people for the wrong reasons. The University is happy to take their money without a thought to the fact that it is exploiting the pocketbooks of former students.

At least the University taking advantage of former students to gain revenue to be spent on current students is a refreshing reversal of the usual policy: exploiting current students for the benefit of former students.

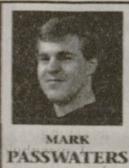
Fortunately, the tacky merchandise, like bell bottoms and pet rocks, is about as long-lived as a mosquito in a microwave. There are enough Aggie jokes in the world. New products do not need to be adding material. Despite everyone's best efforts, some time soon, this commercial could be heard on the radio:

"Now available at a bookstore near you: the official, licensed, Fightin' Texas Aggie Blood Colorer. For those students tired of bleeding red, the FTABC is a series of painless injections that colors the blood of every red-ass student a deep, spirit-filled maroon. Non-toxic or non-carcinogenic, but not both, the FTABC is available at Loupot's, Rother's, the University Book Store, and the MSC."

Chris Huffines is a senior speech communication major.

McCain's portrayal of himself as a rebel just another contradiction

One of the biggest surprises of the presidential primary season has been the performance of Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.). Adored by the media for being a "maverick," McCain rode his "straight talk express" to a shocking victory in the New Hampshire primary before being trounced in South Carolina. With his friendly demeanor and newly found momentum, some have wondered why anyone in the Republican Party would want to oppose him.



MARK PASSWATERS

John McCain does not need any enemies. He sees one when he looks in the mirror each morning.

McCain's own record in Congress does not show him as a maverick out to change the face of the Republican Party. In fact, it shows him to be far closer to the breed of politician currently inhabiting Washington — a hypocrite and political opportunist — not a breath of fresh air. Simply put, the real McCain is everything that candidate McCain is against.

During his campaign to unseat Texas Gov. George W. Bush as the Republican front runner, McCain has insinuated that Bush was taking advantage of his famous last name. To an extent, McCain himself can be considered guilty of the same sin.

Adm. John McCain Sr. was the Commander of the Navy's Pacific Fleet when his son returned from Vietnam, and he assisted his son in getting the plum assignment of becoming the Naval liaison to Capitol Hill in the late '70s. This allowed him to make political connections that were of great use during his first run for the House of Representatives in 1980.

His voting personality since becoming senator four years later is hardly that of a rebel. While McCain attempts to court

independents and some Democrats by claiming to be more liberal than other Republicans, his record screams otherwise.

Elected to replace the retiring Barry Goldwater, the dean of conservative Republicanism, McCain vowed to follow in his footsteps. McCain's performance, as judged by conservative groups such as the Christian Coalition and the Heritage Foundation, would suggest that he has done so. He has averaged an A- on their grading scales and has been endorsed by the National Rifle Association for each of his campaigns.

In a speech given on Feb. 7, McCain said "No president should be anti-union." If he believes in what he says, McCain has just disqualified himself from running for that office. The AFL-CIO gives McCain a failing grade during their annual grading of members of Congress and contends that he has voted against organized labor on every major vote.

On the campaign trail, McCain has repeatedly stated that he opposes the repealing of *Roe v. Wade*, insinuating that he is pro-choice. In the meantime, Sen. McCain has a spotless pro-life voting record for the past seven years.

In truth, McCain's only

real claim to being the GOP's moderate would be his support of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill. His stance on this issue, despised by most Republicans, has separated him from other candidates.

While John McCain may talk until he is blue in the face about campaign finance reform, he clearly does not practice what he preaches. During the campaign in South Carolina, McCain gave a speech condemning the "Iron Triangle" of government and special interest groups. His speech was

beamed back to Washington fund raiser. There, lobbyists wearing buttons saying "McCain hates me" donated \$1.2 million to his campaign.

The founder of Paxson Communications has also donated well over \$1 million to McCain 2000. McCain, in turn, has used his influence as chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee to push the Federal Communications Commission to sign off on the proposed purchase of several TV stations by Paxson.

In 1991, McCain was one of five senators censured by their colleagues for their involvement with Arizona savings and loan swindler Charles Keating. The "Keating Five" were condemned for soliciting and accepting millions of dollars in soft money donations from Keating and providing political assistance to him in return.

Today, McCain condemns other candidates for accepting similar donations. McCain has said that those who support the current campaign finance system are enemies of democracy. Enemy, see thyself.

McCain has placed himself before the American people as a man who is a maverick and a Washington outsider. His voting record, however, would strongly suggest otherwise. McCain has attempted to make character an issue in this campaign. If he is willing to run on a platform that contradicts everything he has previously stood for, he is every bit as bad as those that he has criticized.

If the nation is interested in seeing a rebel, they should put *Star Wars* in the video. Luke Skywalker, who McCain has compared himself to, is a rebel. Sen. McCain is simply another politician trying to shape himself into the flavor of the day.

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.



School board bends rules for player

Texas, like every other state, has laws requiring students to get certain grades to be able to continue playing sports and to be eligible for scholarships. It seems to be a clear regulation and most people would agree that if athletes cannot meet the requirements, they should not be allowed to play anyway. But these rules were not so clear to Cody Spencer, who decided that if he could not change his grades, his only option would be to change the system.



MELISSA BEDSOLE

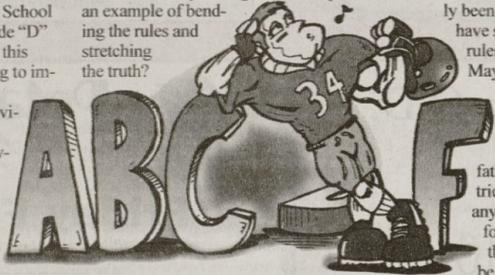
Recently, the Grapevine-Colleyville School District voted to eliminate the letter grade "D" from its grading system. The reason for this change is that the school district is trying to improve the chances for football player Spencer to receive a scholarship to a Division I School. In the past, a grade between 70 and 74 would have been equivalent to a D, but last week's change makes all scores between 70 and 79 equal to a C. Spencer's father asked school officials to change the system, arguing that most schools consider a score between 70 and 79 a C, putting Spencer at a disadvantage.

Despite the elder Spencer's claims of inequity, the previous system was not providing any injustice compared to that which the change will provide the younger.

Spencer is among Texas' top 100 recruits, looking at schools such as Texas Christian University, Texas Tech University, the University of North Texas and Midwestern University.

These schools are going to provide great challenges for a student struggling to pull C's in high school. Is Spencer being set up for failure, or will the special treatment continue at the university he decides to attend? Somewhere along the line Spencer is going to lose in this situation and prolonging this fate is not going to make it go away.

Almost as bad as the idea of this special treatment is the example being set by his family. Spencer's parents are not exactly providing the best guidance for their son by showing him the easy way out in life. And what kind of lessons are the teachers in this district teaching their students by setting an example of bending the rules and stretching the truth?



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

No one is lying in this case, but the truth of it all is that Spencer was not eligible for a scholarship because his grades were too low, but now he is.

Schools will never be equal in their grading or ranking systems, and an attempt to make that possible is unfair to all students. The losers in this situation are the students who worked hard

at earning a C. Their slacker classmates now rise to their level without putting forth extra effort. It is unjust for the school district to make a change for one student.

At some high schools, a 4.0 grade-point ratio will rank in the top 10 percent of the graduating class (securing definite acceptance to any Texas public school), while at others a 4.0 may put a student deep in the second quarter. It is time that students accept the fact that no system is going to be completely fair to everyone.

All the more reason that each student's individual grades need to be of the greatest concern. Spencer's grades have not been improved one bit because of this change; they have merely been manipulated. The Spencer family must have spent hours discussing the reasons the rules should be reevaluated for their son. Maybe, just maybe, if he had spent a little bit of this time on his homework, those grades would not be too low for a scholarship.

Although the intentions of Spencer's father, as well as those of the school district, were to prevent him from suffering any disadvantages, they are setting him up for hardship. His grades are low now and the course load in college is only going to be worse for him. Spencer is eligible for a scholarship now because the standards have been lowered for him, but maybe it is time he raised the standards for himself. Spencer may throw the ball with the strength of the best but having the "brains" just might make his suitors see him as an even greater catch.

Melissa Bedsole is a sophomore general studies major.

MAIL CALL

Austria's new rule worth the early concern

In response to Jill Riley's Feb. 21 column.

Apparently Riley forgot to read about the topic on which she was writing. Let me clear up some misinformation. Mr. Haider's party did not win a popular election. Only about 21 percent of the vote went to his party, leaving about 79 percent that voted against him. However, his party was able to win a few seats in the Austrian congress. The ruling party at the time decided to form a merger with Haider's party and allowed some of those in his party to take over key cabinet positions in the government. Now, for some reason, 200,000 people stand outside the parliament in Vienna daily demanding the end to the coalition government.

A few people might also like to know that some of the "misunderstood comments" made by Haider were that "the men of the Nazi SS were generally men of good moral character" and that "Hitler should be praised for his orderly employment policies."

the time to criticize and subdue the new Austrian government," I found it to be boldly insipid.

Stemming from the fact that I have many family members who emigrated from Poland to Austria in search of a better life and are now the target of the xenophobic government, I would rather stop a power hungry man before he puts them into an "orderly work program" or has "men of good character" come knock on their door and take them away never to be heard from again.

There are a few people who learned from WWII that they should stop this problem from getting worse early on, before anyone has to die. If the entire European Union's, America's, Israel's and Argentina's best political scientists think it the best course to shun Austria until it wises up, then I stand by them because they actually know what they are talking about.

Tom Nowak
Class of '02

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