

Thursday, March 2, 2000

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High and dry

Substance-free housing option limits students' freedom, college experience

Students moving into one of the four substance-free halls next fall must sign a contract with the following clause: "Residents living in substance-free housing will not use alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs there, and will not return under the influence of these substances."



JILL RILEY

The Residence Hall Association approved substance-free housing last spring because surveyed students living on campus last year expressed a desire to live exclusively with substance-free students. While it is understandable why these students want such an option, substance-free housing does pose serious questions that the A&M staff cannot yet answer.

First, substance-free students will be given the opportunity to exclude those who use any or all of the named substances. No such options will be offered to students who do use the substances, or at least the legal substances.

A&M students frequently hear, and even occasionally heed, the call for a more unified campus. Separating users from non-users does not band students together.

College should prepare students to live in the outside world where people have to associate with others. And there are numerous "others" who use substances, so allowing students to live in a closed-off environment only serves to shut them out from reality.

One must consider whether deeming only one floor of a dorm as substance-free actually gives substance-free students the environment they are asking for. Students living in dorms have access to all floors of their dorm. There are no restrictions barring substance-using Aggies from walking through substance-free halls.

While designating single floors as substance-free is serving the purpose of allowing substance-free students choices of which dorm style to live in while the program is in the testing stage, the program will not be as effective as it would if an entire dorm was dubbed substance-free.

Not only will substance-free students have contact with substance-using students in the dorms, they will also be around substance-users in classes, organizations and jobs.

And when they move off-campus, their neighbor may sit on his or her adjoining balcony while enjoying a Bud Light and a Winston.

Another concern is the reason for offering substance-free housing. An important reason is to increase the amount of students who want to remain on-campus for more than a year, according to Mike Krenz, the area coordinator for north area residence halls.

However, the shortage of rooms available for incoming students is already a problem.

Retaining more upperclassmen in dorms would rob new students of the chance to live on campus — a unique college experience.

Another concern revolves around the 800-plus incoming freshmen who have requested substance-free housing.

Parents usually play a large part in the decision-making that accompanies a student's first year college arrangements. If parents suggest or even demand that a student live in substance-free housing, the student would be signing the agreement to remain substance-free half-heartedly.

Chances are, then, that the tentative substance-free student will break the agreement.

A student could also come to college completely innocent, make some new friends and decide to experiment with substances, which is not a rare occurrence.

Either way, incoming students would be breaking their substance-free pledge, causing problems. So far, discipline actions start with a meeting between the student, Resident Advisor, judiciary board and possible fellow substance-free students. If found guilty, the student will be moved to another dorm or off campus.

Sue Foster, assistant director of dormitory administration, said she could not give a flat statement explaining details of how discipline will take place, but that all breaches of agreement would have to be treated equally.

Sounds fair enough, but somehow it does not make sense that a frequent underage drinker and an occasional cigar smoker would receive the same treatment.



ROBERT HYNCEK/THE BATTALION

And the students who are disciplined will then face a huge ordeal — moving in the middle of the semester, probably off campus since most dorms are full in the fall.

Parents will probably experience an annoyance when they receive that phone call. And when they hear of the new housing expense, annoyance could turn to anger.

Another aspect of substance-free housing that could cause problems is the fact that students and their guests may never enter the hall under the influence.

So if a student suddenly decides to go to the Dry Bean after a really rough test, consumes too much alcohol to be coherent, he or she must hunt for somewhere to crash for the night.

If all substance-free residents are supposed to hang out

with each other all the time because of their shared lifestyle, will the drunk student have anyone else to call? For that matter, could one count on substance-free buddies to help, or expect to be snubbed?

A similar situation could occur if a substance-free student's guest became under the influence.

While substance-free housing will be a reality in Fall 2000, the "what-if" issues are too large to ignore. Before A&M begins such a program, more of these questions should be answered so that such problems could be minimized.

Jill Riley is a senior journalism major.

Media should be present at Waco reenactment

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is hiding something. On April 19, 1993, federal agents stormed David Koresh's Branch Davidian compound in Waco, and by the time the siege was over, 76 people had lost their lives. Most died in the inferno that left the compound in ashes, but several were killed by gunshot wounds.



HEATHER CORBELL

The FBI claims they did not fire a single bullet. Understandably, survivors of the siege have catalyzed an in-depth investigation of FBI actions by filing a wrongful death suit. Further, they want the media to keep tabs on the investigation to ensure that evidence is not compromised by government officials. The FBI's suspicious actions in this case make media surveillance imperative.

Special Counsel John Danforth, who is in charge of the Waco investigation, is trying to keep media out of the inquiry by barring reporters from a reenactment of the siege that may be able to put to rest questions about whether or not agents fired on the Branch Davidians. Infrared tapes of the 1993 siege show unexplainable flashes of light coming from FBI agents.

Branch Davidian survivors claim that these flashes look suspiciously like gunfire. In response to such allegations, Dan-

forth is requiring a reenactment of the movements of federal agents on April 19th. However, he has filed against allowing media presence at the event.

The dramatization, set to take place on March 18th in Fort Hood, Texas, will be taped from helicopters by infrared cameras. The tapes will later be evaluated by experts to determine whether or not the flashes on the original tape coincide with gunfire flashes at the reenactment.

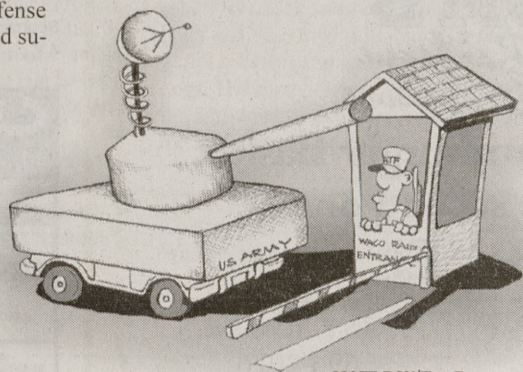
However, government officials (eight congressmen and representatives from the FBI, Department of Defense and Justice Department) and supervisors from the contracted Vector Data Systems may be the only witnesses to the reenactment that will seemingly prove the government's guilt or innocence. A petition by the *St. Louis Dispatch* for media presence has already been rejected because authorities claim that national security and safety could be compromised.

Danforth argues that media involvement will impede the justice process. But a people's government cannot see justice if the people are blindfolded. The media is necessary and inescapable when pursuing the cause of justice. They disseminate facts and help maintain an informed public.

What does Waco have to do with na-

tional security and safety unless one is referring to the people's security and safety from the government? Seventy-six people died when the FBI was on watch. When the government takes an action which results in the deaths of its citizens, the circumstances rightly become a matter of public interest.

The American people have the right to check and balance their government. The easiest way for them to determine when that kind of action is necessary is by stay-



MATT ROY/THE BATTALION

ing informed through the media. Mike Caddell, a Houston attorney for the Branch Davidians, says excluding the press "serves no purpose but to create unnecessary suspicion." He is right. If the FBI does not have anything to hide, why are they being so secretive?

The siege reenactment is supposed to

Research can enhance trips abroad

As the fair weather traveling bug starts to buzz in unsuspecting college students' ears, some adventurous folks may get an itch to take more than just a road trip. Laden with backpacks taller than their younger siblings, passports eagerly awaiting stamps and money belts fortified with travelers' checks, they will squeeze into airplane seats with leg room designed for Spud Webb and fly to the foreign land of their choice. Yet in their haste to pack everything, many students might be forgetting the most important thing of all: to educate themselves about where they are going.

Now, just wait a minute, the average traveler might say. Vacations are supposed to be fun, and education is, well, not always fun. A little pre-travel reading might be too much work or boring to people who are just looking to "have a good time" during their travels. Trips to pubs and crazy pictures at tourist traps are all part of great memories, but there is also much about the surrounding cityscape and countryside to consider. Being aware of not only the current culture and people of a country, as well as the country's past as an influence on its present, can turn a trip into more than just a chance to party.

Students thinking about traveling sometime soon should look at it this way: a rare opportunity may have arisen, and not just the opportunity to fly far from home. After years of complaining about how classes are not applicable to anything in everyday life, students who travel overseas may find real uses for some of the things they were forced to learn. Those history and geography classes they slept through in high school might actually come in handy during a walk through thousands of years of history. Not only could students be excited about merely being in a foreign place, but also about putting what they know about that place to use as well.

Diego Garcia, director of the Memorial Student Center L.T. Jordan Institute for International Awareness, realizes that all travelers do not have the same goals in mind when they set out on a trip. But "any time students can learn about the history or culture of the place they are visiting, they will benefit from that experience," he said.

"There is a mix of [students] who go out knowing nothing and those who do their homework. Their experience would be richer if they did prepare before or during the trip."

Admittedly, most travelers will attempt to study the Cliff's Notes way by snagging one or two travel guides before they leave. However, travel guides, though they have nifty fold-out maps, are overrated for background information. Books like *Fodor's*, *Lonely Planet*, and *Let's Go* are good as starting points, but reading something other than just a snippet of information about a city will bring more benefits to the traveler. If one does not have time to do some secondary reading, at least flipping through histories and biographies of countries and their people can round out one's expectations of the days ahead. And actually paying attention in yet another round of history and geography classes might be a conceivable option with a future trip in mind.

An over-stuffed backpack, a calling card and a pocket book on conversational language are not the only essential things one needs to bring along on a voyage abroad. Knowledge about the history and the culture of one's destination takes up less room in a suitcase than a duty-free bag of goodies from the airport and it lasts a lot longer upon arrival. Not many students have the chance to make these journeys often — so crack open those books and learn a little.

Melissa Johnston is a senior English major.

African-American students also responsible for racism

In response to The Battalion's series on issues facing African-American students:

I acknowledge the social segregation between blacks and whites on campus, and I commend The Battalion for sponsoring this dialogue. However, I do think several important points have been left unsaid. It appears to me that the majority of the blame feels that the cause for this segregation lies in the hands of campus whites and administration.

While it is not unheard of to see a Confederate flag flying off the antenna of John Red Neck's truck, a larger portion of this problem results from attitudes within the black population itself than they have admitted.

Whites are collectively blamed for not eating or socializing with blacks on campus, but at the same time campus blacks consistently group together in a manner that makes me as a white guy feel uncomfortable. When I sit in a cafeteria with 80 percent white people I'm not sitting with the white guys, I'm just sitting. I've always wanted to try to break the racial cliques, but I'm just as intimidated to make the move as the black guy.

Furthermore, it seems that whenever a black person on campus gets involved with whites he's

accused of "trying to be white" or being "a house negro." With these apparently anti-white comments heard frequently on campus how can the black community expect me as a white guy to break that barrier? Of course there are some stupid white people who make us all look bad, but white to black relations are not the only problem.

Perception of the white community by blacks needs to change as well.

Chris Shull
Class of '02

Photo reinforces concerns

In response to J.P. Beato's Feb. 28 photograph.

I am writing in concern to the picture of the Black History poster being burned. Let me say that I was very upset to see something like that, however I was not surprised.

I feel that here at A&M, racism is alive and it thrives. Nothing is said about a Black History poster being burned. This is why racism thrives here at A&M, because no one cares about it. They want to ignore the matter and say "Howdy!" That burning showed the attitude that some students have and that attitude can thrive because the the environment here is conducive for its existence.

Why hasn't the administration made it known to

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:

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