

OPINION

THE BATTALION

Tuesday, March 7

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A war of words

Alternative publications lack journalistic professionalism, misinform their readers

Texas A&M is going through an identity crisis. News events this year at A&M, such as the mock lesbian wedding, *The Battalion's* series on African-American students and 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse have led to questions concerning the University's reputation. The labels of "conservative" or "liberal," and "racist" or "tolerant" have been thrown around more and more in campus discourse. Regardless of whether the University reputation is moving towards the right or left wing, the range of viewpoints at A&M is growing and becoming more vocal.

A significant part of this growth was the addition of *The Aggie Review*, a local alternative publication, to the University community. *The Review* aims to present a conservative perspective on local as well as national issues. The newspaper joins the liberal publication *The Touchstone* as alternatives to the views presented in *The Battalion*. While it is great that the student body now has several opinions to read, the quality and content of these alternative publications leaves much to be desired — namely professionalism and ethics.

It is easy for a student to pick up *The Touchstone* or *Review* and become excited over an issue, but let the reader beware — these publications have nothing holding them to professional standards and as a result readers can become confused and be misinformed.

As A&M students' minds are opening, it is a shame that the publications catering to the far right and far left totally miss the mark, diminishing the role they could play in intelligently discussing the issues.

The Touchstone's cover is adorned by H.W. Beecher's quote, "When a nation's young men are conservative, its funeral bell is already rung." It has the potential of being a welcome viewpoint for liberals in the Brazos Valley and also providing opposing opinions to local papers.

Instead, *The Touchstone* wastes its pages printing different versions of repetitive inflammatory articles. Pick up any

issue of *The Touchstone*, from any year, and chances are there will be a column about how Bonfire is a waste, how unfriendly A&M is to homosexuals and how close-minded students at A&M are to criticism. It reads more like a conspiracy theory 'zine than anything else.

It is ironic that as open-minded as its editors claim to be, dissenting opinions are often accompanied by aggressive replies. Articles in *The Touchstone* are often written as if its readers are retarded. For example, in the February/March 2000 issue, in its bi-monthly Bonfire-bashing article, Danny Yeager writes: "Bonfire is certainly not nearly as bad as or on the scale of Nazism, the World Church of the Creator, the Jim Jones cult, the Ku Klux Klan or Aum Shinri Kyo — and I'm certainly not comparing bonfire supporters to members of any of these groups."

If Yeager truly did not want to make the comparison, why did he include the line?

A skim through *The Touchstone* is enough to see that it is in the business of pushing people's buttons, not offering intelligent liberal opinions.

Judging from *The Aggie Review's* premiere issue, it is in danger of becoming a victim of the same lack of professionalism as *The Touchstone*.

Staff writer Melissa Oestreich wrote about how students are upset that *The Battalion* is becoming "increasingly liberal and one-sided in its coverage of campus news and events." The article seemed extremely biased, as it probably had been planned. During an interview with Marium Mohiuddin, editor in chief of *The Battalion*, Oestreich was pushing an agenda, and twisted Mohiuddin's words to fit her opinion. It is understandable that in a newspaper staffed en-



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

tirely by students, mistakes will be made. However, the ethical breeches in that article rob the rest of the publication of its credibility.

Both *The Review* and *The Touchstone* can be indispensable assets to ensure that a variety of opinions are voiced to the student population. However, until they show the profes-

sionalism that is expected of credible sources, readers need to be careful of what they read and realize that not all publications hold to the same level of journalistic ethics.

Mariano Castillo is a sophomore international studies major.

Christian camp offers many advantages for incoming freshmen

One of the most amazing things about Texas A&M is that a school this large, truly has a place for each of its 42,000 students. But sometimes finding the right place is difficult. Aggies can remember when they arrived at college for the first time — the first impression was awesome, but most of all, it was scary. Freshmen have common worries, such as making new friends and finding a place here at Aggieland.

For some students in particular, aside from being afraid of the little things, there is a much greater intimidation plaguing their weeks just before college. Christian students frequently leave their homes, churches and Christian friends with a great fear of not finding new people who share their faith. Some Christians wonder whether they will be accepted whether

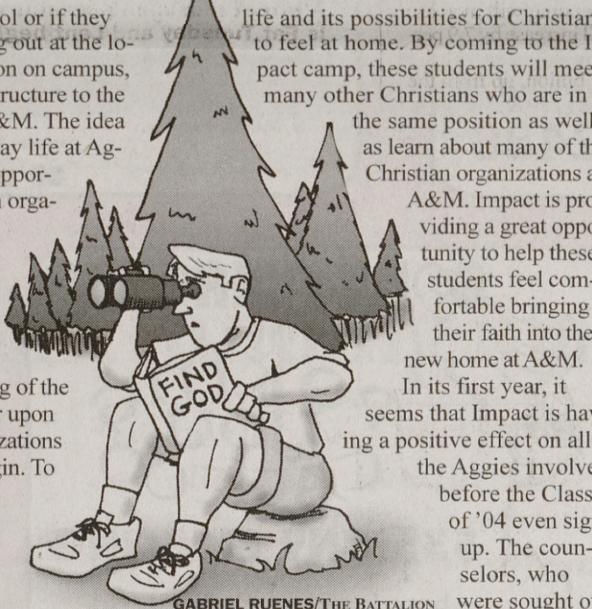


MELISSA BEDSOLE

they do not choose to drink alcohol or if they will be left out if they do not hang out at the local bars. Impact, a new organization on campus, has designed an event similar in structure to the current Fish Camp programs at A&M. The idea is to introduce freshmen to everyday life at Aggieland, as well as to the various opportunities they have to join Christian organizations on this campus.

The Memorial Student Center (MSC) Open House is an amazing chance to learn about many of the organizations on this campus. Just about every Aggie can remember the overwhelmed feeling of the first Sunday of their freshman year upon seeing the long list of those organizations and not having a clue where to begin. To combat this feeling of being lost is precisely the reasoning behind the founding of Impact.

Impact's founder's goal is to introduce freshmen to Aggie



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

life and its possibilities for Christians to feel at home. By coming to the Impact camp, these students will meet many other Christians who are in the same position as well as learn about many of the Christian organizations at A&M. Impact is providing a great opportunity to help these students feel comfortable bringing their faith into their new home at A&M.

In its first year, it seems that Impact is having a positive effect on all the Aggies involved, before the Class of '04 even signs up. The counselors, who were sought out

by word of mouth as well as through various ads and announcements at Christian club meetings, are not only helping these incoming students but participating in a very strengthening experience for themselves. Forming friendships that will support and enhance their faith is a goal of many Christians. So for students searching to find their place on campus, this organization is truly a blessing.

There are students on this campus who are opposed to the idea of the Impact program, fearing that it will take away students from Fish Camp.

However, the Impact camp will only be for one session (the very last weekend before the fall semester begins), which actually makes its campers eligible for more sessions of Fish Camp than the women who participate in sorority rush. And most rush participants have been able to schedule a different Fish Camp session in the past, so experiencing both Impact and Fish Camp is completely possible.

Another worry being expressed concerning

Impact is that the camp will only be promoting specific organizations to its participants.

While the program is intended to introduce incoming freshmen to the different Christian groups on this campus, the counselors will not be promoting any specific group over another.

It is important to help these students understand the differences in these organizations because that is the only way they will be able to evaluate which group would be the best for them.

Impact is an attempt at not only welcoming freshmen to A&M as students, but also making them feel that their values and beliefs are welcome here as well.

Freshmen on any campus around the globe will almost always be a little scared in their first few weeks of school. But Impact's effort will enhance the friendliness of Aggieland and make campus feel even more like a home for new students.

Melissa Bedsole is a sophomore general studies major.

Genetic engineering confuses consumers

Whenever the term "genetically modified" is mentioned in relation to food, a series of images usually come to mind that paint the food industry in a bad light — Bo Pilgrim engineering a chicken with less body fat, for example. Such a scenario would be great for Pilgrim's Pride's bottom line and consumer health in general — but would a person really want to munch on a mutant chicken leg? Understandably, consumers have come to view genetic modification with both humor and apprehension.

The problem with this type of thinking, however, is that it paints a false picture of genetically modified foods being potentially unsafe.

Accordingly, the corporate world is listening to irrational consumer fears and is beginning to discourage the use of genetically modified foods without any scientific evidence to support the customers' concerns. It is a classic example of "crying wolf." The corporate world must change its current position on biotechnology and make a sincere effort to dispel consumer confusion and fear. After all, they could if they wanted.

Two months ago, snack-food giant Frito-Lay publicly asked its suppliers to stop producing genetically modified corn. Known as Bt corn, this specific variety is engineered to produce its own pesticide. As reported in the *Dallas Observer*, Frito-Lay officials admitted their decision was not motivated by solid scientific evidence that connects Bt corn with any sort of environmental or public health hazard. As of today, there are absolutely no credible scientific studies in existence that indicate Bt corn is dangerous.

"Consumers are confused," Frito-Lay spokesperson Lynn Markley said. "It's in the media every day. There's a lot of information out there. We want to step aside, sit on the sidelines, wait and see where the industry goes, see where the consumer confusion falls out."

In other words, Frito-Lay is willing to bury its head in the sand until someone else does the dirty work of informing consumers.

Instead of waiting, companies with the same philosophy as Frito-Lay should take the initiative and take action by investing in consumer education programs. With a consumption rate of 1.2 billion pounds of corn per year, Frito-Lay certainly has the clout necessary to begin a campaign of clearing up this misconception.

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Sadly enough, Frito-Lay is just another faceless company crowding into the bandwagon. During the latter half of last year, high-profile companies such as Heinz, Gerber and Archer Daniels Midland passed policies discouraging genetically modified crops. With environmentalists groups such as Greenpeace and the Organic Consumers Association nipping at their heels, companies including Hershey's, McDonald's, Safeway and Starbucks are also facing severe pressure to drop genetically modified foods.

Not surprisingly, the assertions made by these environmentalists cite no credible scientific studies either. Critics claim that these groups have an ulterior motive — to protect the heavily subsidized European farmers who fear the superior biotechnology of American farmers.

American farmers have lost millions of dollars in corn sales to Europe in the past year alone. According to United States Department of Agricul-

ture reports, American farmers have been the biggest promoters of genetically modified crops since their introduction in 1995. With the potential for higher yields and cheaper and safer pest-repellents, the benefits of genetically modified crops are undeniable. As reported by Reuters, a January straw poll indicates farmers are decreasing the planting of genetically modified soybeans, corn and cotton this year. Currently, approximately one-third of corn and one-half of soybean and cotton acreage in the United States is genetically modified — the obvious economic impact of this simple consumer misconception is sizable.

Those within the field of biotechnology are not jumping for joy either.

"From a scientist's perspective, it's somewhat distressing to see industry adopt positions that are not based on good scientific data," said John Mullet, professor of Biochemistry and Biophysics at Texas A&M.

"Moves by companies like Frito-Lay may send a message to consumers and others that these products are somehow unsafe, and may prevent the deployment of lots of other engineered products that will benefit human health."

At this rate, it seems many more companies will reinforce the faulty message sent by Frito-Lay. This is truly sad because these companies could correct the problem if they wanted to. Remember the fat-free frying oil Olestra? It's side effects, including indigestion and diarrhea, tower over the nonexistent consumer drawbacks of genetic modification, yet Frito-Lay bent over backwards to inform consumers and calm their fears.

Does this contradiction make any sense? Obviously not. Consumers' fears about genetically modified foods are misplaced. Companies should work to allay these fears.

David Lee is a junior economics and journalism major.

MAIL CALL

Kinesiology option should be changed

In response to Summer Hicks' March 1 column,

If I was a student senator, I would submit this plan: Let each student choose to take a physical fitness test each fall (much like the physical fitness tests from high school with pushups, situps, pullups and running). If the student passes the physical requirements of the tests, he/she is free from one hour of KINE for that year. The tests would be repeated for each student in successive fall semesters for more one hour credits until the required four were met. Passing the test will ensure physical abilities, making the NEED for KINE classes remote, and taking the

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 O13 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

The Battalion - Mail Call
O13 Reed McDonald
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843
E-mail: battletters@hotmail.com

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tests in repeated semesters for an hour each, if passed, will ensure consistent physical ability. If students chose to not take the physical ability tests or fail them, they must complete KINE classes.

Choice and health are both met in this option and it satisfies students and the administration.

Andy Bailey
Class of '00

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