

Misguidance counselors

Quality, accountability of A&M's academic advisers need improvement for students' sake

As an incoming freshman to Texas A&M, many students ask questions such as "Which classes should I take?" "How do I form my degree plan?" "What is the best way to arrange my schedule?" and "What kinds of jobs can I be qualified for with this major?" Unfortunately, many students are at a loss for the answers to these questions because of unsatisfactory academic advising.



SUMMER HICKS

One does not have to be a part of student life at A&M very long to hear complaints about departmental advisers. Often students believe these faculty and staff members are not as helpful or knowledgeable as expected, or they simply do not have time to spend with students. Aggies are assumed to be bright individuals. However, even A&M students have academic questions they cannot find answers to and make mistakes planning their schedules. As a result, they rely on advisers who frequently are busy with teaching and administrative work.

Upon listening to the repeated complaints about various departmental advisers, many illustrations arise in the mind of a student who has often experienced similar difficulties with academic advisers. At a university as large as A&M, it is difficult to ensure qualified advisers. Advisers' qualifications and levels of experience differ by department, which makes the task of pinpointing the cause of various problems that arise.

Questions surface concerning the percentage of time advisers spend immersed in administrative paperwork and the actual time spent with students. What are the other obligations that advisers must fill that cause them to often seem too busy to assist the students they are supposed to be helping?

Many department advisers are lecturers or hold administrative positions, such as department head. They may also be involved in research or be required to fulfill other obligations to the University. These other commitments,

while admirable, distract time and energy from the job students depend on advisers to do.

In addition, some departmental advisers do not seem very knowledgeable concerning professors, classes or curriculum in other departments or colleges. This lack of familiarity with the entire University system is damaging to students if a mistake is made in scheduling or prerequisite requirements.

If students cannot trust the guidance of an adviser whose job it is to help with degree plans and scheduling, whom can they turn to?

It seems easy to place the blame for academic planning mistakes on students by saying that they should have done more research or paid more attention in scheduling their classes. However, after consulting with advisers, students usually take their advice at face value. After all, is that not their job? If students cannot trust the guidance of an adviser whose job it is to help with degree plans and scheduling, whom can they turn to?

Groups such as the University Advisers and Counselors are taking strides to improve the quality of advisers on campus with events such as an annual one-day symposium. This seminar informs advisers of University policies and serves as a professional development day.

In addition, a telephone survey conducted by Measurement and Research Services is polling approximately 6,000 Aggies to evaluate their advisers. Programs such as these are definitely moving in the right direction, but more needs to be done to ensure that

students are paired with advisers who are informed and sensitive to the needs of students.

A student in the College of Education reported that she constantly is frustrated with the situation in her department because she has a different adviser almost every year.

This situation results in a lack of continuity for education majors, and advisers often misinform them because they are not familiar with intradepartmental activities and requirements. For example, one kinesiology student said that he was almost forced to graduate a semester later than he had planned because he

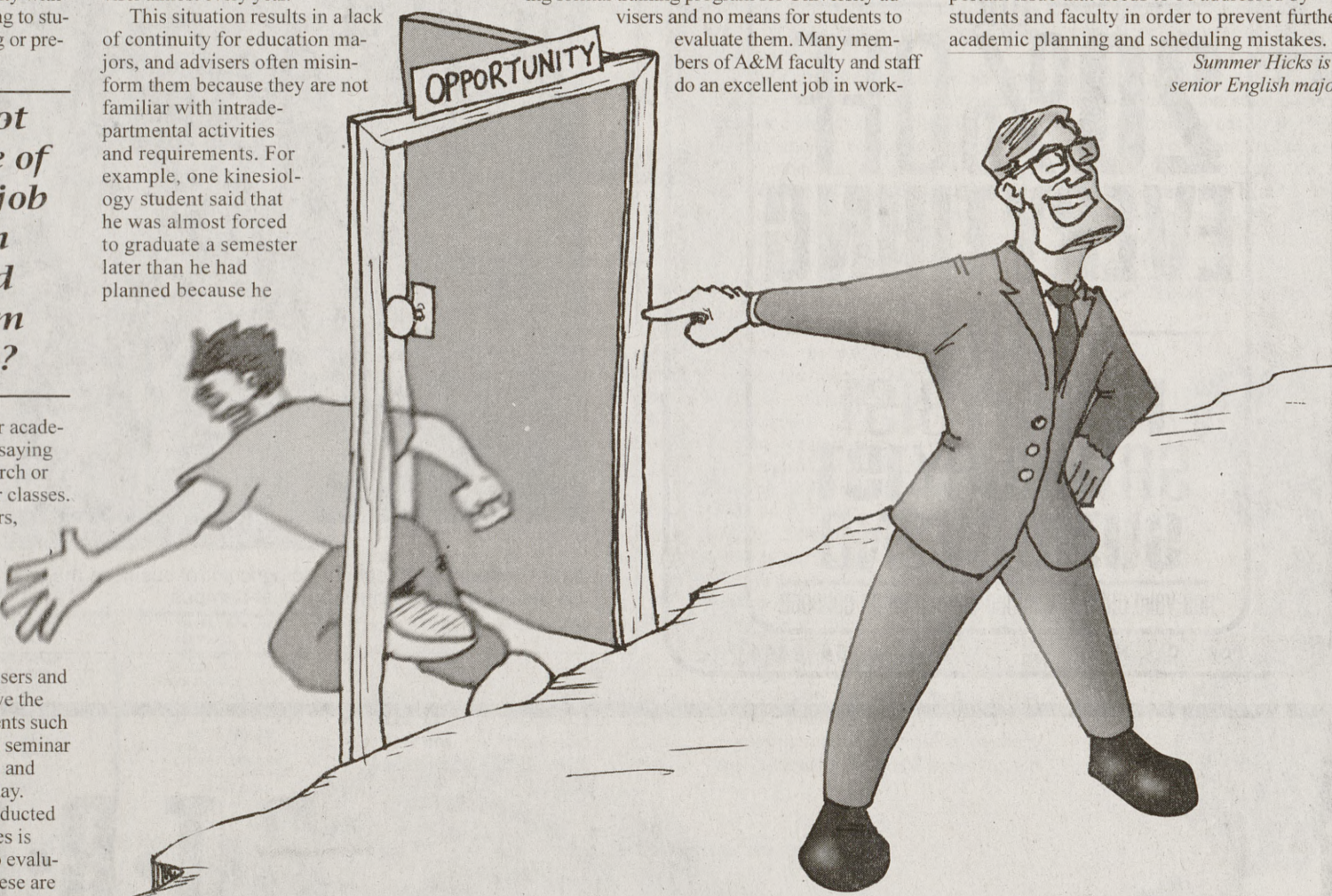
was not notified about a prerequisite that he had not fulfilled.

Again, advisers are often too busy, misinformed, or simply not qualified for the role they are intended to fill. Currently, there is no existing formal training program for University advisers and no means for students to evaluate them. Many members of A&M faculty and staff do an excellent job in work-

ing with students and provide the much needed assistance, but others simply do not meet the standards that should be required at A&M.

Departmental advisers ultimately must become accountable to students. This is an important issue that needs to be addressed by students and faculty in order to prevent further academic planning and scheduling mistakes.

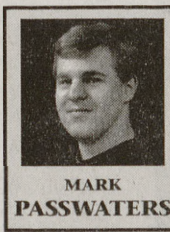
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GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

Gore's new push for campaign finance reform a vapid, hypocritical gesture

Al Gore, the man who single-handedly brought you the Internet, was the primary source for the book "Love Story" and found the pollution problems at Love Canal, is back at work. Since the March 7 departure of the political Luke Skywalker (Sen. John McCain, Jedi Knight) from the White House (which is illegal) to foreign nationals (which is also illegal), Gore pronounced that "there is no controlling legal authority" over how money is raised for campaigns.



MARK PASSWATERS

Organizations varying from *The New York Times* to "The Drudge Report" have said that Gore was actively involved in a planning session in the White House to raise "hard" money (donations to an individual's campaign). Gore's alibi was that he drank a lot of iced tea that day and was in the bathroom when those conversations took place. He must have really had to go; the meetings lasted more than two hours.

Now, details of a memo by Charles LaBella, chief of the Campaign Finance Investigation unit of the Department of Justice, have been leaked to the media. This memo indicates that Gore's actions in both of these circumstances were clearly illegal and warrant further investigation. While Gore refutes the idea that he has done anything illegal, he also claims to have seen the light. He said that he made "mistakes" in the past, and has learned from them.

Gore did not? The possibility that Gore might be so dense and yet think he can be president should be enough to scare the wits out of the American public.

It is more likely, however, that Gore knew exactly what he was doing. He has an established track record of lame excuses when confronted with campaign irregularities. When he and President Clinton were accused of making fund-raising calls from the White House (which is illegal) to foreign nationals (which is also illegal), Gore pronounced that "there is no controlling legal authority" over how money is raised for campaigns.

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Gore has picked up the mantle of campaign finance reformer from the defeated John McCain, and is attempting to run with it. He said he will make the issue "the cornerstone" of his campaign. It is far more likely that Gore is attempting to use it as a smokescreen instead of a cornerstone.

Gore, himself, said that he is "an imperfect proponent" of campaign finance reform. No kidding. "Seeing the light" now is not a sufficient excuse to make up for his repeated abuses of the law to further his political career.

Gore may be an enlightened sinner, but he is a sinner just the same. And his sins would get an average citizen thrown in jail.

The American people should not be fooled by Gore's supposed stance on campaign finance reform. He is more interested in covering his own backside than in covering the problems of "soft" money. By showing that he knows he was a naughty boy and wants to make everything better, Gore hopes that people will ignore his small boo-boos from the past.

The problem for Gore is that these incidents were not small, nor were they boo-boos. They were a systematic work in violation of federal law. If the American people think that such a man is presidential material, they are making more than a small boo-boo.

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major

Are you a student worker?
 The Battalion is accepting letters from student workers wishing to express their thoughts and concerns about the potential end of their early registration. Letters must be submitted by 5 p.m. Wed., March 29 and should be 300 words or less. All submissions should include author's name, class and place of employment. Drop off: 013 Reed McDonald, Email: battletters@hotmail.com, Fax: (409) 845-2647. Editor reserves the right to edit for content, length, style and accuracy.

Judges underestimate teens' ability to decide on abortion

Four pregnant women under the age of 18 recently appealed to the Texas Supreme Court for approval to have an abortion without notifying their parents. A Texas law instated in January requires women under 18 to notify their parents before receiving an abortion, unless the minors gain a judicial bypass. The Supreme Court is deeply divided on the case; some justices feel the current notification law takes too much authority away from parents, while others feel the current system is too strict.



JESSICA CRUTCHER

To gain a judicial bypass, a girl must prove she is educated in the potential medical and psychological consequences of an abortion. This issue of the education of a teen-aged girl is a main object of concern for abortion activists on both sides.

The current judicial bypass law puts too little emphasis on how informed the pregnant girl is and leaves too much power in the personal prejudices of the judge. Texas Courts are failing to recognize that many minors possess the maturity to make their own decisions. In addition, judges must keep in mind that if minors desperate for abortion will be prone to seek more drastic measures denied a safe, legal abortion.

Chief Justice Tom Phillips wrote the majority opinion that to obtain a judicial bypass a minor "must demonstrate knowledge and appreciation of the various considerations involved in her decision." Originally, this was interpreted to mean the girl had to be "educated" by anti-abortion organizations. In February, this was altered by the Texas Supreme court. It stated that the girl does not have to read materials distributed by pro-life groups or by groups such as Planned Parenthood, but instead the girl must prove "whether she has obtained information on the relevant considerations from reliable sources... that enable her to make a thoughtful and informed decision."

So the question are: What exactly are "relevant considerations" and who gets to decide whether the girl in question has made a "thoughtful and informed" decision? The vagueness of the stipulation is dangerous for all concerned parties. A pro-choice liberal judge might not feel it necessary to examine the pregnant girl's situations, allowing her to easily gain a judicial bypass. On the other hand, a pro-life judge could have the power to administer an unreasonably difficult set of questions, then refuse a judicial bypass to the applicant on the grounds she is not "well informed."

In order for the judicial bypass law to work efficiently, the bypass requirements should be more clearly stated and depend less on the individual interpretation of judges. A written test requiring basic knowledge of abortion procedures and possible consequences should be sufficient. In calling for more drastic measures, certain Supreme Court justices are underestimating the maturity of many of the girls requesting bypasses.

Justice Nathan Hecht, one of the court's more conservative members, complained that "well informed, for the court, means only that a minor has thought about what she knows, not that she knows what to think about." Hecht is underestimating the ability of a 17-year-old to make logical decisions on her own.

There is not a magical transformation in which one becomes mature and all-knowing on their 18th birthday. It is a gradual process, and there are many minors who are quite capable of functioning as adults. For example, one of the girls involved in the current legal case is 17, works part time and has a high B average in high school. She took the precaution of using birth control before becoming sexually active, but became pregnant anyway.

She has testified that her parents are "very against abortion," but that having the baby would be "holding me back from... what I want to become." The girl has considered other options, including adoption, and has weighed the consequences. There is no logical reason why she, and other girls displaying equal maturity, should be denied an abortion. Obviously, a person who is willing to bring her predicament before a court of law is serious about having an abortion — and equally serious about her need to not notify her parents. If minors are not granted a legal abortion, they will be prone to seek more dangerous alternatives. Before abortion was legalized, it was not unusual for women to seek unsafe abortion methods out of desperation. There is no reason to believe these girls will not result to the same measures if they are unable to gain court intervention.

It is no easy task for a 15-, 16- or 17-year-old woman to take personal responsibility to educate herself about abortion procedures and consequences, and then to take her case to court — all without the help of her parents. Texas courts should respect these efforts for the display of responsibility they are, and make a greater effort to help the teenagers instead of working only to regulate them.

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 ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 6/2/2001

