

Bucking the system

Aggie Bucks program valuable, but in need of security improvements

Although many students consider the Aggie Bucks debit card system the eighth wonder of the modern world, the convenience of electronic cash does not come without pitfalls.



ELIZABETH KOHL

Last April, an incident occurred that should have alerted students to one of the most dangerous drawbacks of the Aggie Card. Two employees of Applebee's Neighborhood Bar and Grill were arrested for and confessed to debit card abuse related to the Texas A&M Aggie Bucks system. Essentially, the two were caught double-swiping Aggie Cards and taking the additional revenue out of the store's cash. All the while, students were unwittingly cheated out of their pre-deposited money.

This fraud serves as a primary example of not only the inconsistencies that still exist within the Aggie Buck system, but also the need for students to be made aware of such drawbacks by the University.

Unfortunately, students using their Aggie Bucks at locations other than campus vending machines are still at risk of facing similar incidents. Under the current system, vendors accepting the Aggie Card are not required to obtain a signed receipt of sale. Because of the lack of this regulation, some vendors do not even offer a receipt of sale. Students patronizing a McDonald's drive-through window are, at times, verbally informed of their new Aggie Bucks balance.

With an increasing number of local businesses accepting the Aggie Card, A&M should implement, as part of the debit system, the requirement of a signed receipt to avoid further incidents. Students should be required to sign a receipt that would enable

them to check the amount of the sale deducted from their account.

Moving to increase the transaction security only addresses half of the problem. Aggie Bucks and their convenience have become near and dear to many students. However, few students have developed a true concept of the amount of cash they allot for their Aggie Bucks account, and even more have had to learn the hard way just how quickly that deposit can be spent.

Because Aggie Bucks are a fee option, students can pawn off this expense on their parents during registration. Slipped in amidst tuition expenses and endless other fees, Aggie Bucks fees are even passed off by some students as the cost of attending college.

Even students who pay their own tuition may fail to realize that Aggie Bucks can easily become a substantial portion of a fee statement. A hypothetical student, enrolled in a class during the first summer session, might find 22 percent of the fee statement absorbed by \$150 in Aggie Bucks.

Too many businesses accept the Aggie Card for students to resist the temptation of registering for more Aggie Bucks than necessary. Even students who purposefully amass large sums of Aggie Bucks often have trouble restraining themselves from rapidly spending this electronic cash.

Because these funds are intangible, many students find their deposits dwindling much faster than expected. Supersizing that Extra Value Meal seems a trivial expense. Buying dinner for a friend is no problem, so long as the two go somewhere that accepts Aggie Bucks. Even spontaneously purchasing a



KELSEY ROBERTS/THE BATTALION

few CDs does not seem so bad when "real" cash is not being spent.

Aggie Bucks are the black hole of student spending. Just as the lure of swiping a credit card can be addictive, the swipe of a student ID in a vending machine can, too. After opening this Pandora's box of debit spending, A&M could, at the very least, offer an information sheet on the hazards of a debit card. It is hardly understandable how the Aggie Card Website can tout the security of the card without mentioning ways for students

to prevent fraud. The same site lists all the vendors that accept the Aggie Card without so much as a footnote concerning responsible spending.

Each semester, Aggie Bucks become more widely accepted in Bryan-College Station. It should be the responsibility of A&M not only to enact more secure vendor regulations, but to also inform students of possible Aggie Bucks drawbacks.

Elizabeth Kohl is a senior accounting major.

ViewPoints

Wal-Mart gives logic to social isolationism

From birth, people are taught not to be the kind of person who avoids social contact. In elementary school, those who ignore this instruction become bookworms during recess and are called derogatory names such as dorks and nerds.

These "geeks" live in social isolation. Understandably, most people work diligently to avoid being placed in these unflattering categories by family and friends. However, a place where everyone goes could easily turn all people into social isolationists by choice — Wal-Mart.

It is the place everyone goes to at some point because it sells everything and often has lower prices. But one problem with Wal-Mart is that, upon entering the store, a shopper is faced with practically every possible type of human being, each trying to hurry through a shopping list.

Screaming, snotty-nosed kids abound, affirming one's resolve never to procreate. Their incessant screams add a touch of "nails on a chalkboard" effect to the Wal-Mart aisles. Then there are the elderly, who, though very sweet, seem to slow down younger shoppers at every turn — literally. Add in the Britney Spears-imitating teens who yell down the aisle in their bubble-gum chatter while customers try to compare prices, and it is not surprising why people pay psychiatrists more than \$100 an hour for a little peace. The multitude of people in Wal-Mart at any given moment would bewilder anyone. Most likely, however, it would just annoy them, which leads those who some call "dorks" to shop at Wal-Mart in the wee hours of the morning.

In American culture, social isolation has become a serious concern, as people try to understand why some decide to live as hermits. Though hermitism may not be healthy, the Wal-Mart example can show that not all attempts at social isolation are caused by irregularity of the mind.

Americans are increasingly reverting to shopping after hours or online instead of facing the craziness of stores such as Wal-Mart. Instead of seeing such behavior as abnormal, society should look upon these shopping choices as not only sane, but probably beneficial.

— Jill Riley

Denny's restaurants hinder family dinners

Denny's, a restaurant better known for its heart-clogging chili cheese dogs than for promoting traditional values, is making an effort to further the breakdown of the American family dinner. The practice that in the past graced Norman Rockwell's Saturday Evening Post covers is now being taken for granted and wholly ignored at thousands of green and yellow restaurants.

The Denny's restaurants have started a program that offers children free Zoob toys to play with during dinner. The Lego-like play pieces that come in a big ol' bucket, like all the fat from a Moon Over My Hammy, are meant to serve the double purpose of entertaining kids while letting parents relax and enjoy a quiet dinner.

The toys serve this purpose, but they also kill the opportunity for families to communicate in an old-fashioned, but important, way. Somewhere Norman Rockwell just rolled over in his grave.

The devolution of family dinners has been a slow occurrence. Over the past 50 years, the dynamics of family life have changed to the point where everyone in the house has a different schedule and different dinner plans. However, one last bastion of Rockwell-esque happiness is, ironically enough, restaurant. While McDonald's was meant for the quick-stop, yell-at-your-children-while-eating style of supper, Denny's, and restaurant like it, could be the last place where families are forced to sit together and be connected by a booth, if not by love.

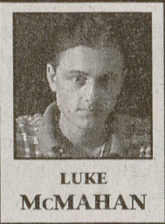
But no, the kids are way too loud, and parents' headaches are way too large for families to eat, and more importantly, talk together. Zoob is a distraction for parents and kids — what they are distracted from is the chance to have real, face-to-face conversation.

Even with today's fast-paced and sometimes separated family, dinners are still opportunities for parents and children to talk. Families that actually have the chance to see each other in person should take the opportunity the evening meal provides. Instead of distracting the children with colorful toy blocks, family members could sit down and ask each other about their days, about their lives or why Denny's serves so many things in skillet. Denny's did not start the fracturing of the traditional family dinner, but by giving kids distracting toys, the restaurant is killing one of an ever-decreasing group of opportunities for families to get together and talk to one another. Norman would not be pleased.

— Eric Dickens

Greenspan undermines investors financial stability

In the investment world, the name Alan Greenspan — synonymous with interest-rate increases — is about as popular as the word bankruptcy.



LUKE MCMAHAN

"You little piece of Greenspan," "why don't you take a long walk off a short Greenspan," and "you son of a Greenspan," are all phrases that could have recently been created by investors to find an outlet for the fury they hold for the not-so-popular chair of the Federal Reserve.

There should be no merciful tears shed for the harsh reputation Greenspan has acquired. His callous demeanor, coupled with his poor judgment and seemingly indifferent attitude toward the financial stability of the individual American, is to blame. Greenspan has turned what was once an immortal economy into a cowardly and beaten dog.

In the past decade, the U.S. economy has grown at an unprecedented pace. The primary force behind this expansion has been the robust labor market, which has a shortage of skilled workers needed to produce the goods and services consumers demand. Companies are spurred to hire as never before. A direct result of this phenomenon has been an increase in the amount of legal tender in circulation. Spending has increased, which, in turn, has reinforced the need for more goods and services. The name of the game has been acceleration. To many people this is an ideal trend, an economic utopia of sorts. However, as has been said before, all good things must come to an end. Enter inflation, an innate characteristic of a booming economy. Simply stated, inflation is the increase in the price of goods and services. Inflation is a concern because it may increase more quickly than the economy.

Greenspan, apparently very proficient in introductory economics, has labeled the threat of inflation his mortal enemy and has dedicated himself to correcting the situation at all costs. Normally, this diligence might be viewed as a good trait for someone of such high influence. Unfortunately, in this circumstance, Greenspan's efforts to curb inflation have resulted in a greater evil — namely the drop-off in the financial markets.

With each of Greenspan's recent five interest-rate increases, the stock market was brought to its knees to recover just in time for the next blow. To Greenspan's credit, however, he has been consistent in defending his position. The chair has reiterated many times that rising inflation will ultimately drive the economy into recession, which is much worse than the short-term damage incurred by the stock market. Greenspan, along with market analysts, has also given Americans reason to believe that, once evidence of slowing inflation is demonstrated, the market will react by surging to previous highs.

Even Greenspan's most implacable enemies have to concede a little to his logic. However, lowering inflation while causing only short-term losses for the stock market is a tricky process, which has recently made a fool of Greenspan. The interest-rate increases must be positioned relatively far apart, and their magnitude must be calculated precisely. The goal is to slow the acceleration of the economy — not to reverse its direction. It is a brilliant theory, but as is evident by numbers from this past week, Greenspan has succeeded not only in slowing inflation, but also in halting the market's progress so abruptly that certain sectors of the economy are now struggling to make ends meet.

Beginning on May 29 and continuing, the playing out of Greenspan's errors has been obvious, following the path of a

pre-drawn graph. Only, for Greenspan, it is the wrong graph.

After reports of rising unemployment came out this past week, indicating declining inflation, the markets surged, and, for the first time in what has seemed like an eternity, the bulls were back ... bad as ever. A half-hour into the trading day, NASDAQ was up 200 points and the Dow was tagging along. Time magazine senior economist reporter Bernard Baumohl's reaction reflected the upbeat sentiments of many analysts when he said, "This is the kind of news that could take some of the uncertainty out of the markets and get stocks going up again."

That was then, this is now. After the frenzy that was Wall Street, the numbers are telling a different story. The automobile, real estate, retail and technology sectors are down sharply because their respective players have reported that interest-rate increases are slowing business more than expected, resulting in low earnings. The finger of blame is immediately pointed at the perch on the top of the financial food chain that houses the awkward figure of Greenspan.

The logical answer to this illogical problem is, fortunately, quite simple. The rate increases were too much, too soon. And the worst might not even be over. The Fed is set to meet in late June to discuss the possibility of implementing yet another interest-rate increase this year. Due to the recent events, however, the topic of this meeting should be to make arrangements for Greenspan to enter the government's Witness Protection Program.

Greenspan's misinterpretation of the economic pulse of the market as well as his overkill reaction to inflation have left Wall Street weakened.

Luke McMahon is a senior industrial engineering major.

Mail Call

Highway flower vital to ecology, speeding not

In response to Jessica Crutcher's June 13 column.

This is the 21st century and most people realize man is not alone on this planet — we share it with many other creatures. The many animals and plants on earth all contribute to each other's. If one looked at the reason why this stretch of highway needs improvement it is because people drive too fast. If the people driving on that highway would not do so at upwards of 85 mph then I can almost guarantee you there would not be so many accidents.

If they were not so stupid to think that by hurling themselves down the road at such speeds they will get where they are going with significant time savings, so many accidents would not occur. Then you

would not need to "improve" that stretch of the highway, and then you could just leave the wildflowers alone.

Charles Ake, Class of '93

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