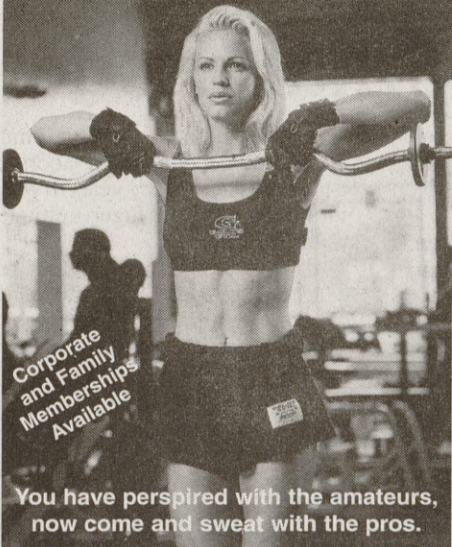


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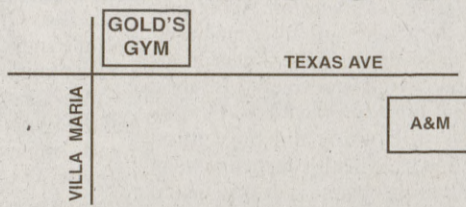
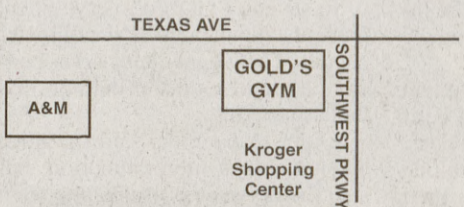
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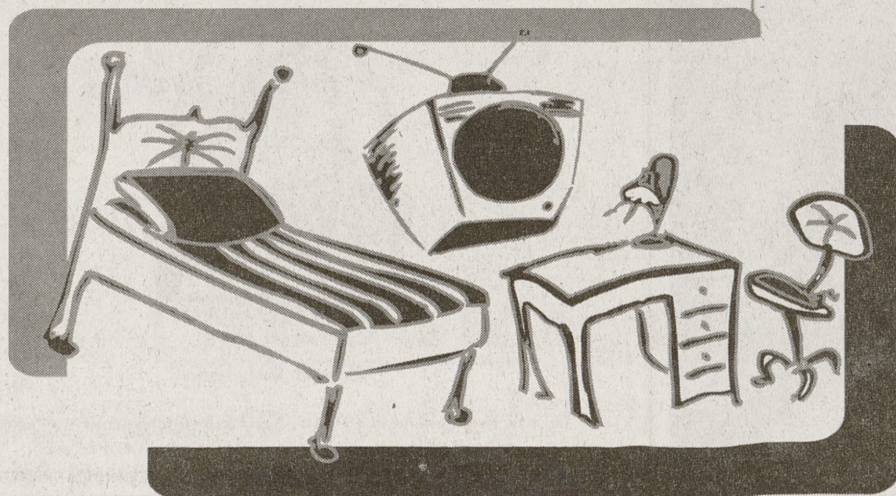
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## Buggin' out

Entomology grad students share research

BY ARUN ARJUNAN  
The Battalion

Fire ants are a continual annoyance in Texas. However for many Texas A&M entomology graduate students, they are also fascinating. These and other pests were the center of academic scrutiny at the Department of Entomology Graduate Student Forum, which was held Friday at the Minnie Bell Heep Center.

Several entomology graduate students had the opportunity to present their current research to a panel of four academic evaluators. This annual conference, which was first organized by Dr. Patricia Petrantoniom, graduate student forum chair and an assistant professor in entomology, has now been implemented as part of the doctoral entomology program.

Dr. Julio Bernal, forum committee member and assistant professor of entomology, said this forum gives graduate students an arena to share their research.

"The seminar allows graduate students to display their research in a competitive and professional setting," Bernal said.

Each of the 13 student presenters was evaluated on the quality of the presentation and completeness of the research. The research was diverse, ranging from foraging patterns of fire ants to forensic entomology.

Jason L. Mottern studied the biological control of fire ants using phorid flies. Instead of using chemicals to kill the ants, the introduction of phorid flies disrupts ant colonies

because the flies compete with the ants for the same resources.

Doctoral student F. Mariana Tenorio concentrated her research on the development of DNA identification protocol for three different species of the key blow fly that inhabit Central Texas, especially in Brazos and Burleson counties. These organisms are important because they are scavengers, often burrowing into decaying corpses. Investigators can determine the time of death by identifying the species of the key blow fly and counting back the time based on the fly's stage of development.

Doctoral candidate, Ronald D. Weeks, investigated the spatial distribution in relation to the fire ants' foraging behavior. His study explored the concentration of fire ants on the environment.

"These investigations provide new knowledge of their foraging behavior and population dynamics and hopefully provide new ways to manage these pests," Weeks said.

Texas A&M students will compete in the Entomological Society of America's national competition.

Jarrad Prasifka, president of the Entomology Graduate Student Association and one of the conference presenters, said this conference helps students prepare for future competitions.

"The forum allows us to prepare for the national competition as well as our professional careers," he said.

Awards for the third annual Graduate Student Forum will be announced later this fall.

**"These investigations provide new knowledge of [the fire ants'] foraging behavior and population dynamics and hopefully provide new ways to manage these pests."**

— Ronald D. Weeks  
Entomology graduate student speaking at annual forum.

# Sci F.Y.I.

Question: Why does your mouth feel cold when you breathe in after eating a breath mint?

Answer: Breath mints cool your mouth in the same way that sweat cools your skin.

The Encyclopedia of Medicinal and Herbal Ingredients states that the active ingredient in breath mints is a derivative of the peppermint plant. This derivative contains high concentrations of menthol, which you may know from its inclusion in cough drops, vapors and menthol cigarettes.

Menthol, like other forms of alcohol, is a highly volatile compound. You may have witnessed high volatility if you have ever spilled rubbing alcohol on a table and watched it disappear almost immediately.

When a liquid something evaporates, it uses up heat causing the surface from which it evaporates to cool down. This is why sweat, which evaporates from your skin, helps cool you down when you overheat.

Also, according to several pharmacists, menthol irritates the sensitive tissues in the mouth. These pharmacists said that the irritation from the menthol makes the nerves in your mouth extra-sensitive (even though enough menthol will eventually numb the nerves). This extra-sensitivity intensifies the cold feeling.

If you have a question about how or why something works, e-mail [scifi@hotmail.com](mailto:scifi@hotmail.com) with your question, name and class.

—Stuart Hulse

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