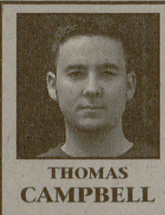


Misguided Rules

Potential dry-campus policy unfair to law abiding students



THOMAS CAMPBELL

One of the hottest topics on campus has been left out to dry by Dr. J. Malon Southernland, vice president of Student Affairs. The Residence Hall Association (RHA) recommended that the campus alcohol ban should not be passed. Southernland has yet to rule on whether the on-campus alcohol ban will become official. He is expected to announce his decision on April 1, because he wants student input. The alcohol ban is not needed and only legislates against students who are not breaking the law. Instead, the University needs to enforce current student policies and regulations.

Currently, if an underage student is caught in possession of alcohol on campus, the student can be fined up to \$500 and be forced to do eight to 12 hours of community service for the first offense, in addition to losing his or her driver's license and being forced to take an alcohol education class. The third time a student is caught, the penalty can be increased to a \$2,000 fine and up to 180 days in jail. These are harsh punishments, but they do not deter underage drinking. If the problem rests with underage drinkers, then a proposal should be adopted to help deter underage drinking on campus — not one to condemn the students who legally and peacefully drink.

It is already illegal for people under 21 to possess or consume alcohol, yet some believe it is necessary to keep students who are over 21 from possessing alcohol on campus. According to the University Police Department, there were two arrests for providing alcohol to minors on campus, as well as two motor vehicle alcohol violations involving students of an unspecified age in 2000. There were, however, 365 citations for minors in possession of alcohol on campus for the same year. The problem does not lie

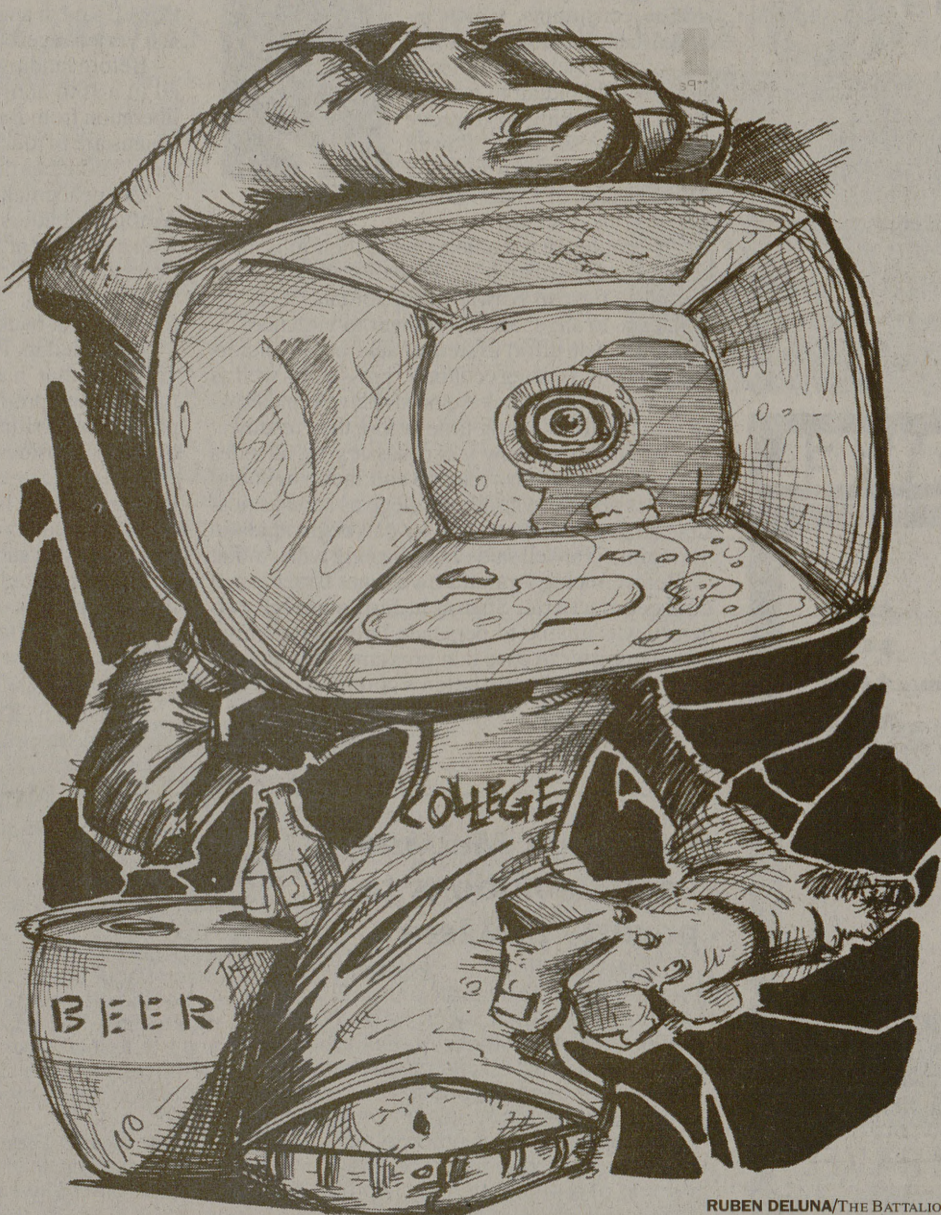
with the students over 21 who consume alcohol, but with the underage on-campus drinkers. Current University policy prohibits minors from possessing alcohol, but if there is still a problem then enforcement for that policy should become stricter.

No one, regardless of age, can consume alcohol on campus in public. University policy states if a student of legal age wishes to drink on campus, there cannot be excessive alcohol in his or her residence, the door must stay closed. These guidelines are fair and represent how the alcohol situation should be handled on campus. As long as alcohol is only allowed behind closed doors, in moderation, it will not interfere with other residence hall occupants' study and sleep time.

If Texas A&M becomes a dry campus, that would include both A&M President Dr. Ray M. Bowen and Southernland's houses, which are on the south side of campus. It is seriously doubtful that Bowen or Southernland would like to have their rights as adults infringed upon because there is a problem with underage drinking. This can be also said for students over 21 who live on campus. These students should not have their rights as adults taken away because of other problem students.

The idea of a dry campus will not work. There should be at least one residence hall solely devoted to students who wish to live in an alcohol-free environment. Enforcing the current policy is the place to start and if alcohol is still seen as a problem on campus, then enforcement should be strengthened. Enforce current policy, and let those who obey the laws live in peace.

Thomas Campbell is a junior agricultural journalism major.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

No tolerance needs to be re-examined



GEORGE DEUTSCH

In recent years, in an effort to discourage potential discrimination lawsuits and ease the minds of parents, an alarming number of school districts across the nation have adopted "zero-tolerance" policies regarding school rules. These policies are designed to present a fair way of dealing with threats from students and on-campus possession of drugs, alcohol and weapons.

However, the policies' results have been nightmarish, causing American Bar Association (ABA) lawyers to recommend ending the school discipline program. Though the program does discourage school violence, both trivial and serious offenses often are punished with the same degree of severity.

This unyielding policy should be abandoned; focusing on the circumstances surrounding individual student cases would produce more justifiable results. There are several examples of the policy's discrepancies in judgment. One Louisiana 12-year-old was turned over to the police after telling schoolmates in the lunch-line, "I'm going to get you," if they ate all of the potatoes before he could get any.

A Virginia middle school student was suspended for weapons possession after a knife was found in his locker. No one seemed to care that he had taken the knife from a suicidal classmate, who earlier that day had told him of her plans to kill herself.

There was also a middle school student suspended for drug trafficking on his school bus — he had let a friend who was having trouble breathing use his asthma inhaler.

Though a student should never have a knife, threaten others or traffic drugs, the circumstances surrounding these offenses do little to merit severe punishment, much less suspension or expulsion.

"Zero tolerance has become a one-size-fits-all solution to all the problems that schools confront," according to an ABA report recommending an end to zero-tolerance

Each student discipline case should be handled individually and objectively, and all the circumstances surrounding the case must be considered. Better judgment should be used by administrators when deciding a student's fate.

policies. "It has redefined students as criminals, with unfortunate consequences."

The result is a guilty-until-proven-innocent mentality that estranges school administrators from the very students they should protect.

"The message kids are getting is, 'Our main enemy is among us, and it is our children,'" said Bernadine Dohn, director of the Children and Family Justice Center at Northwestern University School of Law. "Our whole goal should be to hold onto them until they grow out of it, not look for more and more ways to get rid of the kids."

The question then is what can be done to enforce zero tolerance, while still treating all students fairly and impartially? Each discipline case should be handled individually and objectively, and all the circumstances surrounding the case must be considered. Better judgment should be used by administrators when deciding a student's fate.

Texas has the most effective approach to zero tolerance. In most school districts here there are three offense levels, each carrying punishments appropriate for the violation in question. If school districts in other states would adopt similar approaches, there would be fewer controversial incidents and, as a result, less frequent disruptions to the learning process.

Catherine Krebs, an attorney for the Children's Law Center in Boston, suggested referring questionable cases to independent decision makers, such as psychologists and others who are familiar with adolescent behavior.

School administrators should also consider giving students a say in the decision-making process. Peer-review panels already in use at various schools across the country have been effective in delineating the standards of behavior students expect from one another.

Whatever course of action the nation's school districts decide to take, they must keep in mind that their job is to educate and teach students values, not that there are no second chances.

George Deutsch is a sophomore journalism major.

Reform plan is unconstitutional

Arizona Sen. John McCain R-Ariz. continues to push his bill to reform the campaign finance system. Although the majority of Senate Republicans are opposed to the legislation, Majority Leader Trent Lott has allotted time in late March to debate the proposal. Along with co-sponsor Russ Feingold D-Wis., McCain has scheduled town hall meetings across the country to promote his legislation. The campaign finance system does need repair, but this proposal is seriously flawed because it is based on the false premise that money can be taken away from the political process. Allowing for unlimited donations with immediate disclosure would be more sensible.

McCain's bill is unconstitutional and would greatly increase the media's power. The voting public never warmed to his message, and it is time to put this bad idea to rest.

McCain ran for president last year on this issue and lost. However, this is not stopping the senator.

"John McCain is acting like his campaign for president never ended, CNN's Jonathan Karl recently reported. "Stepping on the toes of Republicans like Trent Lott and others who want to work on President Bush's agenda first, McCain is forging ahead with campaign-finance reform that looks more like a national campaign, much more so than just another bit of legislation working its way through the Senate."



JONATHAN JONES

Though he never made it past the Republican primary, McCain claimed "I have a mandate too." One must hope it is never realized.

The bill would ban the solicitation and receipt of "soft money," which are the funds party committees and elected officials can receive from corporations, unions and interest groups. This bill would make it impossible for political parties to fill their traditional roles of voter registration, turnout efforts and political organization. In addition to the soft-money restrictions, McCain's bill attacks party spending for candidates and issue advertising. The proposal creates a category of "electioneering communications" that would disallow any radio or television message that features a clearly identified candidate for federal office 60 days before an election. This proposal defies several Supreme Court decisions, in particular *Buckley vs. Valeo*, which maintained that soft money expenditures are political speech.

Currently, there are only three ways for a voter to obtain information on a candidate: the candidate's own words, the media and soft money advertisements from groups such as the National Rifle Association or the Sierra Club. A ban on soft money would greatly increase the power of the media by restricting grass-roots political activity. Groups wishing to support a particular issue or candidate would be unable to advertise as extensively. As such, the media coverage of a campaign becomes much more influential.

Money is a necessary element of the political process and is not automatically corrupting. Money can never be

separated from politics, so many different groups have an interest in the decisions elected officials make every day. Businesses, unions, groups and individuals will always seek to have their input considered. As such, there is a better way to approach campaign finance. Americans can and should be able to voice their opinions with money because that is the main tool politicians use to fight for office. Any individual, union, business or political group can give as much financial support as desired to any candidate.

However, there must be immediate disclosure with heavy penalties for secrecy. Complete and open records on every donation would encourage an atmosphere of honesty while allowing money to play its inevitable role in the political process. In this way, any charges of corruption or conflicts of interest could easily be handled.

Deep pockets are necessary to get a challenger off the ground. The old Soviet Politburo had more turnover than the current U.S. Congress. Even the "Republican revolution" of 1994 saw 90 percent of House incumbents re-elected. Last election, that re-election figure was 98.5 percent. Something must be done to allow for greater citizen involvement. The current system is very favorable to incumbents, but restricting soft money is not the answer. McCain is right to point to the current political climate and the 1996 Democratic fund-raising scandals as evidence for the need to reform, but there are more sensible and constitutional ways to make it happen.

Jonathan Jones is a junior political science major.

CARTOON OF THE DAY



HOT DATE WITH AN AG MAJOR

THE UN-CARTOONIST

Russians are no longer U.S. enemies

In response to Mark Passwaters' Feb. 23 column

Many Aggies are too young to remember the Cold War. Perhaps it is a reason why some of them are ready to step into another Cold War so easily. But are Russians enemies once more? Do they really want to be isolated from the rest of the world and spend their efforts and money to produce more weapons again? Let me assure you that the answer is no.

What Russia really wants is to become a stable powerful country, to reinforce its economy and to reanimate its influence on world politics. This goal is not ambitious but rather suitable for any other country of Russia's size, history and culture. The concern about Russia becoming soviet again expressed in Mark's column is actually a fear of a strong independent Russia which would not always agree with

Mail Call

the United States. But why does one need a friend who follows him all the time? Does not a shadow do that better?

Citing the communists' mouth-piece *Pravda* is the worst way to get an impression of what the majority of Russians think. This newspaper published false information, like anyone can do in a democratic country. I would recommend Mark to do his research more carefully before calling for a new Cold War.

Alexei Milkov
Graduate Student

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

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