

EDITORIAL

WRONG APPROACH TO DIVERSITY

Texas A&M is considering a plan to increase campus diversity by targeting students from rural and inner-city high schools. In the wake of the 1996 Hopwood ruling, which prohibits state schools from using affirmative action in admissions and financial aid decisions, this is a difficult, yet necessary, task. Compared to other state institutions, A&M lags far behind in the number of black and Hispanic students. However, this latest diversity proposal is neither the most productive or fair way to achieve greater campus diversity.

This plan would grant admission to the top 20 percent of qualified graduates from 253 targeted Texas high schools determined to be academically and economically disadvantaged, the majority of which are black or Hispanic. The students would have to meet the same requirements as all entering freshmen. The A&M Board of Regents gave approval two weeks ago for the diversity program, pending a review by the Texas attorney general's office.

The result of such a plan would be to admit more minority students. The goal is admirable, but the means are not. The targeted students would have an unfair advantage in a competitive admissions environment because of guaranteed acceptance. This thinly veiled attempt at racial preference is unacceptable and potentially counterproductive to the students it is intended to help, qualified or not.

A better solution is to recruit individual students from targeted schools to increase diversity. This must be dispelled before minority applications and enrollments will increase to comparable levels at other state institutions. Instead of plans that resemble watered-down racial preference, campus organizations need to be involved.

The Black Awareness Committee, Hispanic Presidents' Council and Multicultural Students Association, among others, should take the lead in recruiting minority students to A&M. These organizations should work with the Aggie Recruitment Committee (ARC) to get the next class of Aggies interested and excited about the advantages of A&M. These organizations could visit high schools like the 253 identified by the Texas Education Agency to dispel in person any notions that A&M is an unfriendly atmosphere to minorities. An increase in diversity is an admirable goal, but there are fairer and more beneficial ways to accomplish it.

THE BATTALION

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A senseless surprise

Top 20 plan will not solve problem of diversity

The Texas A&M Board of Regents recently presented a Trojan horse to the state Attorney General John Cornyn. This Trojan horse is decorated with good intentions on the outside, but conceals a



MATTHEW MADDOX

suspected, if not dangerous, cargo within. The contents: a new admissions policy that grants easier access to A&M for students from a selected 253 public high schools. Eligibility for the program will depend on residency, with disregard to merit. Cornyn will decide if the policy is consistent with federal law.

Texas A&M administrators have asserted that the relaxed policy targets high schools identified as low performing or disadvantaged based on local economics and Scholastic Aptitude Test scores. However, Wendy Gramm, an A&M regent and wife of U.S. Sen. Phil Gramm, a non-partisan political organization, filed protest with the state attorney general's office. The group claims that the plan is both academically indefensible and unfair, stating the only

weight that should be given to an applicant's high school is the school's curriculum. Others who oppose the measure include Abigail Thernstrom of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Roger Clegg of the Center for Equal Opportunity and the American Civil Rights Institute.

While some administrators keep a straight face and claim their only intent is to bring students to Texas A&M who are economically poor, most cannot help but refer to their goals as an effort to increase ethnic diversity. Judge Jerry E. Smith, in Hopwood v. Texas stated, "We only observe that diversity can take many forms. To foster such diversity, state universities and law schools and other governmental entities must scrutinize applicants individually, rather than resorting to the dangerous proxy of race... The law school's 1992 admissions process would increase the per-

centages of black faces and brown faces in that year's entering class. But facial diversity is not true diversity."

Despite its racial ties, not everyone is opposed to the proposed policy.

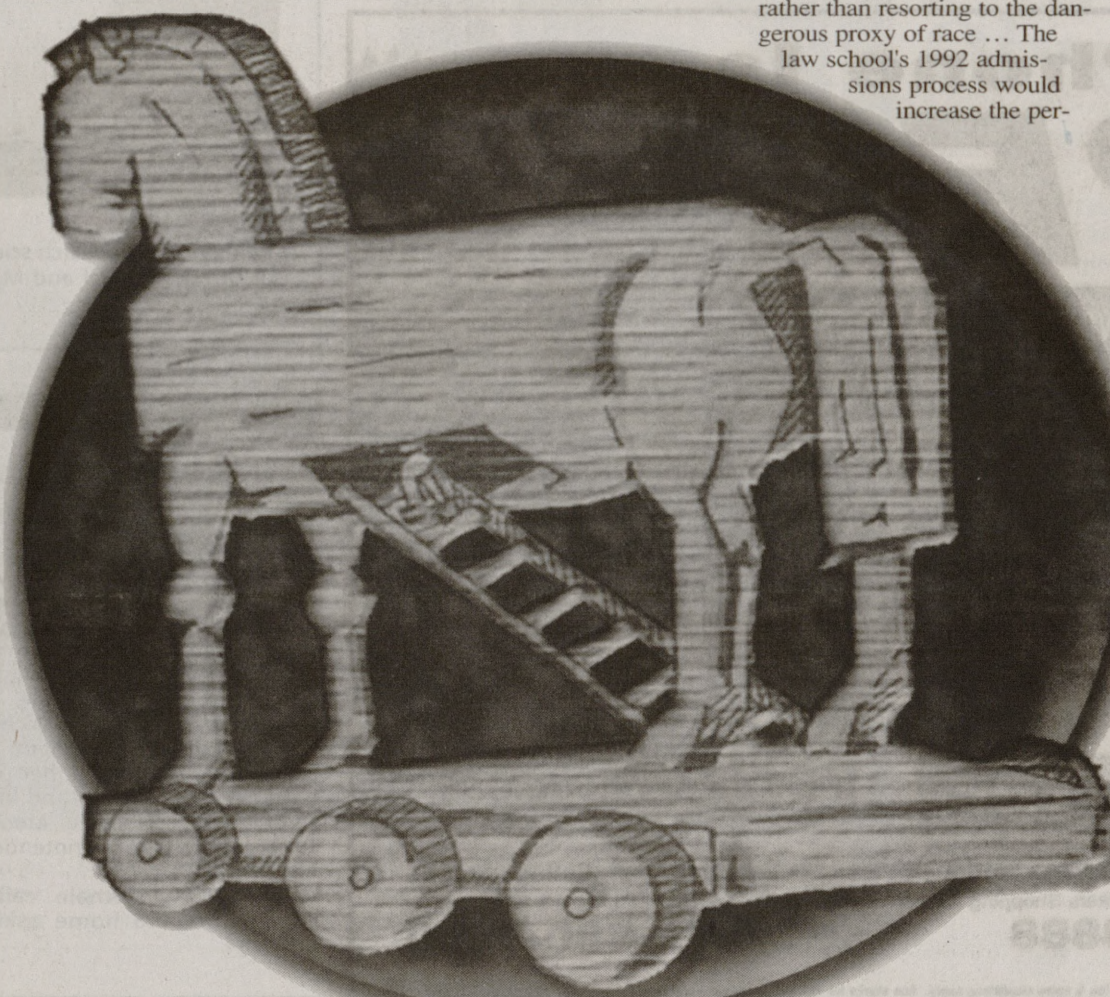
A&M Assistant Provost Dr. Joe Estrada said, "Whatever change we make, we'll make sure it's fair and equitable and not disadvantaging to others." What he may not realize is that the very essence of giving special treatment to 253 high schools is providing them with an advantage, and placing others at a disadvantage.

Counselors at some of the targeted schools have told students not to bother applying unless they are in the top 10 percent. Sadly, that is a truth at almost any high school in Texas. Recently, A&M's admissions have become so swamped and inefficient that many qualified applicants are placed on waiting lists for up to six months. By that time, many, if not most, applicants decide to accept elsewhere.

"It's going to increase enrollment so much that it'll be impossible to get into A&M unless you're in the top 10 or 20 percent of your class," said Speaker of the Student Senate Jack Long.

The real solution that should be sought is one that looks beyond race to attract competitive minority and majority students without using discriminatory policies. Justice is color blind — apparently an approach that has not yet reached school officials. Individual merit, rather than race or "economic" profiling must be utilized as the deciding factor. Top students are only going to attend A&M if it maintains a high, uniform standard for the applicants it admits. To get top students of all races, a sneak attack on equality using percentages will not work. An open effort to raise the bar, not lower it, must be made.

Matthew Maddox is a sophomore business administration major.



DIANA SUAREZ • THE BATTALION

CARTOON OF THE DAY

i AM an American



THE UN-CARTOONIST ©

Avoiding the red tape

Bus driver should be commended for actions taken

Last Friday, a Grimes County jury deliberated for three hours before acquitting former Navasota bus driver Louise Kretzmann in perhaps the most highly publicized unlawful restraint case ever to hit the area. The jury concluded that Kretzmann's actions were reasonable when, in November of 1999, she and an aide used packaging tape to silence and immobilize a disruptive 11-year-old passenger on a school bus. The passenger in question, Calvin Wright, is mentally retarded and has hyperactivity disorder, attention deficit disorder and Tourette's syndrome.



GEORGE DEUTSCH

While at first glance it appears as if Kretzmann went too far when she taped Wright from head to toe like a poorly wrapped Christmas gift, in hindsight her actions were not only reasonable, but also necessary. At the time of the incident, Wright was violently throwing his arms around, kicking his legs and making repeated disruptive noises, possibly endangering himself and the other students in the bus, not to mention frightening everyone.

Even the alert bus driver feared that Wright's episode could potentially break a window or put a student's eye out. She decided to take matters into her own hands, liberally applying thick tape to the boy's animated extremities. Her only reason for doing this was his safety: it was in no way a malicious act.

Knowing that Wright's parents and other authorities might later criticize her decision, Kretzmann even went as far as to record the

taping, not for personal use, but to illustrate the need for the impromptu harness. Played in court, this videotape swayed the jury away from a conviction. The Wright family's lawsuit against Kretzmann, however, is still pending.

The jury's decision to acquit Kretzmann should not be seen as a setback for the handicapped, but instead a praiseworthy verdict that keeps an innocent 43-year-old woman out of jail.

Admittedly, it is very unfortunate that Wright is disabled, and society at large owes the handicapped much more respect and consideration than they sometimes get. But in the real world, one person's civil liberties end where the next person's begin, and no one, whether disabled or not, has the right to have dangerous and foolish outbursts on a school bus crowded with young children. It creates an unsafe environment

ensure the buses' other children a safe ride home, short of leaving Wright on the side of the road. Her actions, which resulted in no one being hurt, should be applauded.

But what if Wright's violent episode was not a temper-tantrum, but instead legitimate shaking associated with his hyperactivity disorder and Tourette's syndrome? If these fits were beyond Wright's control, immobilizing him was still the safest way to handle the situation.

If he has the potential to have these attacks, even infrequently, he has no business being in the tight confines of a school bus where other children can get hurt. There are plenty of other means of transportation for the disabled. God forbid his parents take him to school themselves. It seems, they would much rather sue well-meaning bus drivers and throw fits of their own for any who will listen. This is a shame.

With the time and money Wright's parents are wasting on criminal cases and lawsuits against Kretzmann, they could have long since been devising a better means of transportation for their son. A lawsuit settlement will not fix Wright's condition or undo these supposed injustices. It will only make his parents rich.

This whole matter is an issue of responsibility. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children get to and from school safely, especially if these children can be dangerous to others. A school bus driver is not responsible for protecting her passengers from each other or themselves. That is what the tape is for.

George Deutsch is a junior journalism major.

MAIL CALL

Leave it behind

Aggie Bonfire was a tolerated tradition at Texas A&M University in the 20th century with more than one incident that reflected poorly on the University and its students. In this new millennium, Aggies should seek new traditions. A University-involved Aggie Bonfire in the 21st century as presently proposed will do nothing to enhance the University or its students and will impose obstacles to the University's Vision 2020 plan. Bonfire is a 20th century tradition that should respectfully remain in the 20th century.

Jack Perdue
Class of 1986

The Sbisaga saga

It is another start to a great semester, and yet another trip to the porcelain throne for the next two weeks. There is no need for extra fiber in your diet. Just take a nightly trip to the luxurious Sbisaga dining hall, or should I say the proctologist.

Kris Chesnut
Class of 2003