

A welcoming atmosphere?

A&M encourages diversity



MELISSA BEDSOLE

Texas A&M cherishes its history, and there are good and bad aspects included. It is important to realize the history of the University plays a big role in every aspect of the school today, and, like it or not, the current diversity issues are no exception. In 1876, Texas A&M opened its doors to white males, and it took 87 years to change.

In 1963, there was much more debate about women being admitted to the school than there was minorities' admittance. The numbers of women were small for a long time (like the numbers are for minorities now), but these changes take time. Women could have found flaws with the system or complained that things were unfair, but what would that have accomplished? Those women had to decide for themselves if A&M was the right place for them and it was up to them to determine their success.

The University has done its part to meet the demands of minority students who feel unwelcome. It recently added six hours of cultural diversity classes to the curriculum for those entering A&M after fall 2001. Not only are there committees and organizations designed specifically for minority student involvement, but there are nearly 700 organizations on campus that are available for every student, regardless of race, to join.

It is not the University's job to make sure that each student feels good about themselves — becoming a part of this campus is the job of individual students. It should be recognized that many minority students have accepted this challenge and taken their future into their own hands. Whether black, white or purple, the opportunities for success and achievement exist for every student on campus.

In a recent column in the *Houston Chronicle*, Roland S. Martin, a black graduate of A&M, explained, "Despite Texas A&M being overwhelmingly white, it is not a 'white university.'" There have been black student body presidents, black yell leaders, black student senators, black bus drivers, black student workers, and the

list continues. These people did not get their positions because they were minorities; they chose to make something of the opportunities given to all Aggies.

Any Aggie who feels unwelcome at this school is in an extremely unfortunate situation, but pointing fingers across campus is not the way to deal with this. The negative "racism" that is being pointed at many different campus groups is not only disrespectful, much of it is ridiculous.

The idea that traditions could be racist simply does not make sense. In a report for the *Houston Chronicle* one student chose to point her finger at Fish Camp, claiming that it is "not geared for people of other cultures." Fish Camp is geared toward freshmen, and that is all. The entire organization makes a huge effort not to promote any specific organization, and twisting this around to make it seem like a white event is unfair.

This is not to say these issues are unimportant. There should be efforts made, but the

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ideas for these efforts should be better than those that are currently being discussed. Ideas, such as the top 20 percent rule, that focus solely on bringing minorities to this school are providing an even greater inequality to Aggies than ever before.

Students can shrug this off and claim "white people don't understand," but everyone understands being different. Every single person is somehow different — maybe it is their skin color or economic status, a handicap or disability or maybe they come from a single-parent home or have no parents at all — but each person must face the challenges life provides them.

Within the history of Texas A&M, minorities have achieved a great deal of success and if the focus would shift to solving the problems of diversity on this campus rather than blaming or complaining about them, the future of this University will hold their future also.

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A&M not friendly to all



RUBY LEE

With the traditional "howdy" greeting and warm atmosphere, A&M has earned a reputation of friendliness and seems to embody the epitome of Southern hospitality.

However, this friendliness is only applicable under certain circumstances. According to *The Princeton Review Guide: The Best 331 Colleges, 2000 Edition*, A&M was ranked as the third least gay-friendly campus, stating "Alternative lifestyle is not an alternative, at A&M. With this fact in mind, perhaps it is not difficult to see why minorities of all kinds have a negative image of A&M, and may be more than a little hesitant to attend."

A&M is a predominantly white school. This is disturbing, considering the demographics in Texas and realizing

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that demographics at A&M are nowhere near matching those of the state. Blacks comprise 11.5 percent of Texas, yet at A&M, only around 3 percent of the student body is black. Whites not of Hispanic or Latino origin are only 52.4 percent of Texas, yet they comprise almost 80 percent of the entire campus. A recent study reported minorities hold a rather negative view of A&M. Some Aggies were appalled, finding it hard to believe that anyone could feel left out in Aggieland. Ignorance is, after all, bliss. However, it is past time for students to open their eyes and minds to the happenings of their beloved campus.

A&M students have an infamous history of being less than accepting of minorities. For example, in 1992, the self-proclaimed "true gentlemen" of Sigma Alpha Epsilon held a "jungle party" in which the participants painted their faces black and wore grass skirts.

Offense was taken, and, consequently, SAE was fined for racist behavior. Some argue that they were just having fun.

1992 was a frightful year for A&M in terms of improving race relations. During Muster, Frank Cox III, Class of 1965 and keynote speaker, said, "there is already enough diversity" at Texas A&M. That statement is hard to believe, especially considering that almost 82 percent of the undergraduate students at A&M are white, and, apparently, the campus is more diverse than before.

Imagine being a minority on a campus where white is the predominant skin color. Skin color supposedly does not matter, however people still have the innate desire to be around others like themselves. Essentially, people tend to bond with groups in their own race. This is a survival instinct to stay with the familiar and known, rather than venture out into the unknown and chance getting hurt.

Unfortunately, there is no Asian studies department or an African-American studies department. While some may not see the need for it, there is undoubtedly one. The Asian market has been a major player in business for quite some time, and will continue to be for years. Aggies will be at a distinct disadvantage if they do not learn the culture and customs of doing business, and, thankfully, this fact has indeed been recognized by the school, leading to the changes in the core curriculum for students who entered in Fall 2001.

These students are required to take six hours of either international or cultural diversity courses, definitely a step in the right direction. It is hard to imagine how one could even think A&M is friendly to all people when slogans such as, "Aggies, not Faggies," are hurled during gay right marches or where anti-Asian sentiments are scrawled on restroom walls and desk tops. These actions must no longer be dealt with lightly to help A&M become part of the increasingly diverse United States.

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RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION

Catholics' try to change policies to help image

Last week, John J. Geoghan, a former Catholic priest convicted of molesting a 10-year-old boy, was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Geoghan's trial has put the Roman Catholic Church in the spotlight. As Geoghan's story unfolded, a history of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church was exposed as well. The church's failure as a moral institution to inform its parishioners as well as the authorities of these sex-crimes has left a stain on the integrity of Catholic priests.

After being exposed to the public view, the Catholic Church has yielded its full cooperation to police, as well as implemented many new policies reflecting its beliefs and correcting its mistakes. The reactionary procedures of the Catholic Church have been appropriate and adequate, and the public should recognize this.

Much like a child who swept its mess under the rug, the Catholic Church's mess has now been exposed and responsibility must be taken. The church must address past crimes, educate to prevent future problems and respond to the victims of these past crimes. In regard to these alleged crimes, like those committed by Geoghan, the church can only admit its mistakes



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and apologize. The police will handle all other crime related courses of action. So as the church must take responsibility in the trials of questioned priests, it must also be formulating policies to avoid further mishaps that could destroy

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trust of the church. In?

In response to the duty owed to parishioners, the Catholic Church has assured that any future allegations of sexual abuse will result in immediate suspension of the accused until the accusation is properly investigated. Care will then be extended to the victim and the victim's family. Failure to cooperate with authorities, which has broken trust in past cases, is intolerable now. The churches' recognition of this reveals its willingness to embrace change — an observance

that should be noted by the public as well.

Cardinal Bernard Law has adopted a zero-tolerance policy in regard to any sexual abuse accusations in the church. It was revealed through church documents in court that in the past 10 years, the Catholic Church has quietly settled claims against at least 70 priests. As the law has stepped in and carefully examined church documents, the church itself has confronted its mistakes. This zero-tolerance policy is the only acceptable conclusion, as the church must be a place of refuge.

The Catholic Church's proposition to address the possibility that sexual abuse will occur again is a step in recognizing there is a problem. The next task is to educate clergy and parishioners, so that a repetition of abuse can be avoided. The efforts the church has started to implement include more stringent qualifications for clergy as well as certificates of good standing among the clergy to obtain parish transfers. In addition to these stern qualifications, clergy members are required to pass the screening of the board consisting of clergy as well as doctors hired specifically to weed out any possible threats to the church. The undertakings of the church show hope of preventing future abuse, but it is its efforts

toward the already afflicted that demonstrate the church's degree of concern for its parishioners and the hopes of regaining their trust.

Facilities to rehabilitate fallen clergy have been established to address each priest's unique situation. A business might fire its employee for not obeying his contract and possibly even file a suit against him. However, when the company happens to be the Catholic Church, which preaches the value of forgiveness, it is a moral responsibility to reach out to those in need of help, even if it is a clergy member found guilty.

The immense amount of criticism the Catholic Church has endured has been unfortunate, but the church still maintains hope of rebuilding trust amongst its parishioners. The actions the church has taken should reflect what kind of institution it is and what kind of institution it is striving to be. It is easy to identify an organization by its faults, but since religion is a vital part to many people's lives, people should strive to recognize the forgiveness the church has exhibited and concentrate on efforts being made to improve the future.

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