

Opinion

EDITORIAL

A SINCERE VOTE

In a field of two strong candidates, *The Battalion* encourages students to vote for Zac Coventry in the election for Texas A&M student body president. He has the leadership background and experience to effectively and articulately represent the views of students to University administrators. The race for student body president is particularly important. This position is the primary means of communication between the student body, through elected representatives, and administration officials.

Coventry has the sincerity and positive demeanor needed to achieve and maintain a high level of effective communication. He has held a variety of leadership positions in and out of the Corps of Cadets and has emerged with a reputation for fairness, honesty and integrity. He conducts himself in a down-to-earth manner with high personal standards. The genuineness of his desire to more accurately and completely represent the views of students to administrators is evident.

In addition, Coventry's campaign platform contains specific and attractive proposals as the goal of greater diversity is realized. The creation of a Traditions Partnership to further promote A&M traditions and ensure consistency in education is a good idea, as is the "Aggie 101" class, an optional class through the Traditions Council. An information exchange in the form of a monthly newsletter and detailed open door policy are some of the original and innovative ideas that set this candidate apart. The specifics of his platform are a positive sign of leadership.

Coventry should be elected student body president because he has the marks of a good leader and effective communicator. His high personal standards, leadership experience, sincerity and campaign platform are more than just the filling of a void. He is a student government outsider, and this can be a positive. Oftentimes, an outsider is better able to understand and sympathize with the frustrations of students. The theme of his campaign is working together as a team. If put into action, that is much better for Aggies than simply relating administration views to students.

THE BATTALION

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor in Chief | MARIANO CASTILLO

Managing Editor	BRIAN RUFF	Member	MELISSA BEDSOLE
Opinion Editor	CAYLA CARR	Member	JONATHAN JONES
News Editor	SOMMER BUNCE	Member	JENNIFER LOZANO
News Editor	BRANDIE LIEFFICK	Member	KELLY ZIMMER

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 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 614 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to: 6104 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647 Email: mailcall@thebatt.com



MAIL CALL

Do not eliminate uniqueness

In response to Dharmaraj's March 25 column:

Indurthy wrote, "Individuals have the right to provide the best future for their offspring, and if that means manipulating organic property, they cannot be denied." This supports genetic screening for everything from Alzheimer's disease to baldness.

If the desire is to give the unborn generation the least amount of strife caused by who they are or what they look like, maybe the country should decide on one national skin color. Of course to prevent discrimination based on color, one hair and eye color would have to be chosen. Maybe genetics can unify the future generations in a common sexuality and maybe even religion to further reduce the amount of future persecution.

However, I would argue that the diversity of Americans should not be eliminated. Overcoming diversity to unite under a common banner is a large part of what makes America great. Instead of spending money on preventing future generations

from suffering truly horrific ordeals such as ingrown toenails, we could educate future and present generations on the benefits of diversity and the apparently forgotten idea of ethics.

Terry N. Marquardt
Class of 2004

Hasta La Vista Dr. Bowen

Just received word here in North Carolina via the West to East route of the Pony Express that Ray M. Bowen is retiring.

Best thing I've heard since a Huey brought in my replacement to a Drop Zone in Vietnam in 1966. Bowen has been a complete disaster, attempting to convert A&M into the University of California Berkley (Southwest Campus). He could give tinkers damn about the Corps of Cadets but encouraged cloning of cats (Nothing against you CC). Hopefully his replacement will restore the values and traditions that have made Texas A&M unique in Texas and the USA.

Donald J. Soland
Class of 1959
Colonel, US Army (retired)

HOPE for A&M diversity

Georgia scholarship could encourage minorities



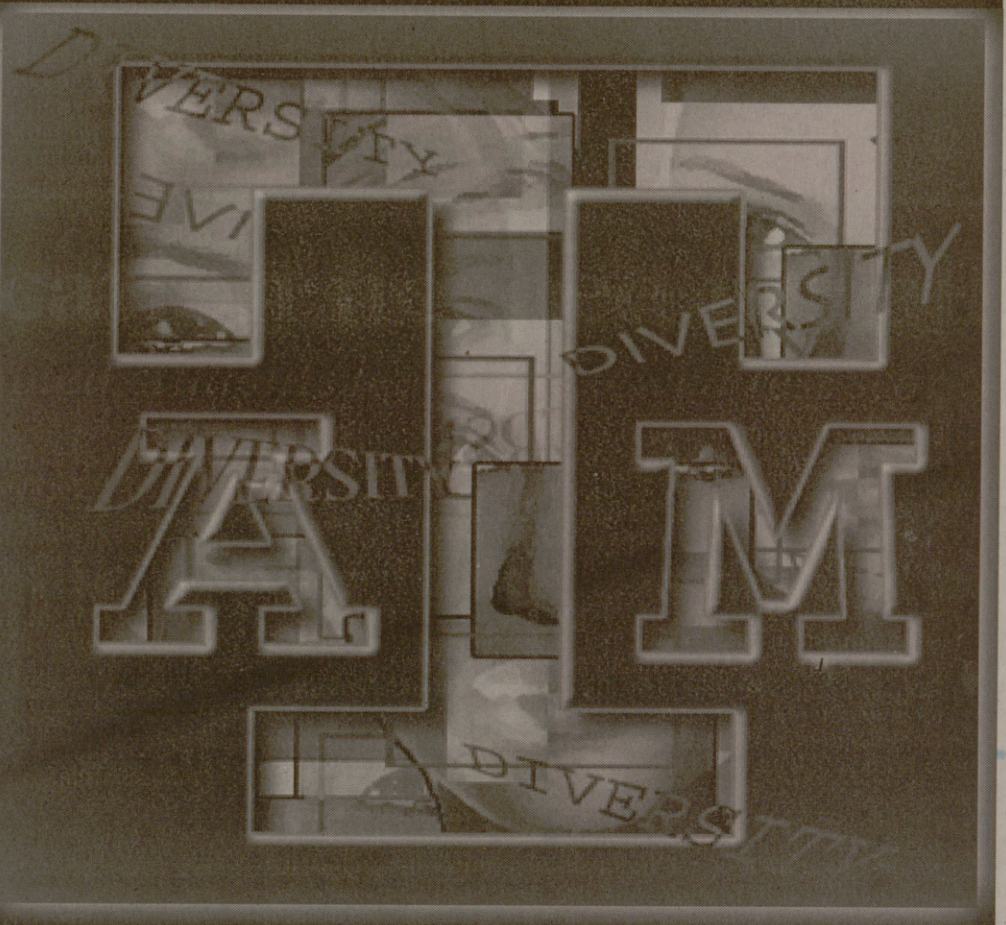
JENNIFER LOZANO

For those in Aggieland who did not think a shred of hope existed for achieving greater diversity at A&M, it is time to think again. The answer is not in the form of top 20 percent admission, affirmative action or any other act that even contemplates breaking the Hopwood decision. Instead, it exists in a truly fair, financial aid program with the appropriate name, HOPE (Helping Outstanding Pupils Excel) Scholarship. The HOPE Scholarship was originally implemented in Georgia in 1993 under the guidance of former governor Zell Miller. The scholarship, which is in its ninth year, is entirely funded by the Georgia lottery and helps provide a public, private or technical college education for hard-working Georgia students with zero cost to taxpayers.

The HOPE Scholarship for a student going to a public institution covers tuition, mandatory fees and a \$150 per semester book allowance. To receive the HOPE Scholarship, a student must have graduated from high school in 1993 (1996 for a private school) or later with a B average and must maintain a B average in college.

Unfortunately, it is a given fact that minorities come from a more disadvantaged economic background than whites and thus have a narrower opportunity of attending even a state university given the increasing cost of higher education. This was the theory at the heart of the top 20 percent plan, which intended to admit the top 20 percent of students at specific economically disadvantaged schools as opposed to the standard top 10 percent. However, this plan met heavy opposition as it was affirmative action in disguise.

Although other scholarship programs exist, they are often shrouded in miles of red tape and leave minorities feeling like applying is not worth the effort. It is these obstacles that create diversity problems in universities like Texas A&M, whose student demographics are incredibly skewed from those of the state. Although Georgia's HOPE Scholarship retains some stipulations, they are not terribly difficult given that students have the opportunity to have their education almost entirely paid for. In fact, these stipulations do little to detract from the beautiful fact that this scholarship does not consider a student's race or family makeup, but only the academic efforts of



DIANA SUAREZ • THE BATTALION

that student, making it a truly equal opportunity for everyone that would result in greater student diversity if implemented in Texas.

A study conducted by Dr. Gary T. Henry and Dr. Ross Rubenstein of Georgia State University revealed that university standards were improving, as opposed to the debated prediction of lower standards that surrounded the top 20 percent proposal. For example, in 1989, before the HOPE Scholarship was created, the average SAT score for entering freshman classes in the University System of Georgia was 976. In Fall 2000, seven years after HOPE began, the average SAT score for incoming freshmen in the University of Georgia System was 1021, 45 points higher and two points above the national average.

Since its inception, the HOPE Scholarship has been the model of a great financial aid program. According to Alma Bowen, the Georgia State Financial Commission Communication Division representative, 43 states plus the District of Columbia and 13 foreign nations have requested information or sent delegations to visit Georgia for

information on HOPE. Also, in 1996 President Clinton modeled his America's Hope program, a tax credit for the cost of two years of education beyond high school after Georgia's HOPE program. About five other states have implemented similar but not duplicate programs.

Even if for some reason this program did not change the demographics at Texas A&M, it would provide an opportunity for a good education for those who would ordinarily presume they cannot afford one. Although diversity is important, it is also important to remember that equal opportunity should be at the heart of this goal. If someone is willing to work hard, he or she should be given the opportunity to succeed, regardless of race or economic status — it is the American dream. Through this program the playing field will be leveled as much as humanly possible, and everyone will have an opportunity to achieve this dream.

Jennifer Lozano is a junior English major.

Equal education needed for all

Special help for disabled students leads to skewed test scores

Disability rights advocates and parents are applauding District Court Judge Charles R. Breyer's recent decision in California to grant special treatment and accommodations to learning-disabled students taking high school graduation exams. But in their quest for academic fairness and political correctness, these people have cheapened the whole notion of high school diplomas and cheated the people they were trying to help out of a legitimately earned education. It is naïve for these parents and advocacy groups to think this is helping students in the long run.

Because this unfortunate ruling sets a legal precedent, other states could soon start adopting similar programs, as over a dozen states are planning on implementing graduation exams in the next few years. Currently, half of all states use standardized exams to test students' basic skills before they are allowed to graduate.

It is a disgrace to this country's educational system when poorly-prepared students are simply passed and ushered out the school's door with a diploma in hand because they were labeled, disabled.

However, it is a disgrace to this country's educational system when poorly-prepared students are simply passed and ushered out the school's door with a diploma in hand because they were labeled, "disabled." Sweeping problems like this under the rug never solves them. To grant special treatment — different assessment methods and accommodations for some students and not others, even if the students in question are deemed disabled — is irrational and unfair.

The growing concern among educators is that many students are feigning disabilities and learning handicaps to get easier treatment on tests and further exploit a system already skewed in the students' favor. Of the two types of disabilities teachers



GEORGE DEUTSCH

deal with, physical and learning, only physical disabilities are easy to measure. A clever student can easily fake a learning disability to fool his administrators and receive unearned grades.

But what about those students who toil endlessly and, in spite of their genuine effort, perform poorly on exams? This passing-based-on-pity system has nothing to offer them.

Unfortunately, a system like this is very problematic because it strips teachers and administrators of much of their duties as school employees. Instead of ensuring that students get a real education, it allows teachers to rid themselves of students after four years, whether these students have learned anything or not. So these students get a bogus education to go with their bogus diploma.

States implementing these learning-disabled test accommodations cannot very well claim to have "standardized testing" when the tests being administered are anything but standard. As Tamar Lewin of *The New York Times* put it, "What is a diploma worth ... if students who cannot read, write or do arithmetic are allowed to pass tests?"

One part of Breyer's ruling, however, was left open-ended. It is still undecided whether these disabled students' scores will be treated and measured in the same way as those under normal conditions, and they most certainly should not be. If teachers test these students differently, they should score them differently as well.

In all fairness, how would one of these potential learning-disabled graduates know if they truly earned the diploma they received? They might never know, but one thing is certain: An illegitimate diploma will not prepare anyone, disabled or not, for life in the real world or a position in today's job market.

As Phil Spears, director of the California Department of Education's Standards and Assessments Division, so eloquently said, "When special [education] kids get out of school, they don't go back to special ed town. They go out and compete with all the rest of us."

George Deutsch is a junior journalism major.