

EDITORIAL

WHAT KIND OF PRESIDENT?

With the selection of a University president looming, Texas A&M undeniably finds itself at a defining moment. The turning point Aggies face is not as visible as when women were first admitted or the Corps made noncompulsory, but it is a historic change just the same. The next A&M president must be a man or woman of strong character, with the vision and strength to maintain the University's unique sense of traditions, while moving ahead to remain competitive with peer institutions.

It is not contradictory to believe that A&M can keep its traditions and spirit and simultaneously grow as outlined in Vision 2020. Whoever takes the helm as president must have a firm understanding of this. A leader who will openly and genuinely embrace the traditions that unite this campus is essential to guide the students through change. The loss of Aggie Bonfire has had far-reaching effects on students who are re-examining what makes being an Aggie special. To ignore the importance of traditions would be a devastating blow to A&M history. To become a top public university at the cost of Aggie spirit and camaraderie would leave only a shell of what the A&M former students are so proud of.

A&M needs a president who will support institutional change to improve academics.

Students should take another look at the idea that the changes outlined in Vision 2020 will eradicate what makes A&M unique. Being academically superior to other schools and diversifying the University will not make A&M, "UT-College Station" or "Harvard on the Brazos." As long as the Aggie spirit is passed down from class to class, A&M will always be unique for its emphasis on tradition and the other education. Convincing students of this is not easy, and for that reason a president with a strong understanding of tradition and progress is imperative.

Equally, the necessity of a leader with a strong vision for how to achieve diversity cannot be understated.

There is much to be expected of the next University president. Above all, he or she would ideally live up to the standards set by past presidents, such as James Earl Rudder, whose legacy is inscribed by his statue: "... In all he did, he demonstrated uncommon ability to inspire men, and lead them to exceptional achievement."

Digital degrees?

Distance education cheapens all A&M diplomas



FRANK CHANCE • THE BATTALION

Texas AMC, which became Texas A&M University in 1963, was founded for one purpose — to be an affordable institution of higher education for the residents of Texas, "where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts."

Recently, Texas A&M chose glamour and dollar signs over traditional education. Part of this headline pursuit is through increased graduate and distance education programs. While cat cloning has its place, graduate-level programs should not grow at the expense of solid undergraduate studies at Texas A&M.

Vision 2020, that enigma shrouded in political spin, calls for distinct changes in the undergraduate/graduate make up of Texas A&M. According to Vision 2020, "Texas A&M cannot assume that 'the Aggie spirit' will continue to lure the quantity and quality of graduate students into graduate programs." To the authors of Vision 2020, the solution was to change what education at Texas A&M, or by Texas A&M, will mean. Those who drafted the document foresaw a future where pupil-professor interaction is reduced to bits and bytes, and rates charged to students are unregulated.

The number of degrees offered off campus at A&M is growing. A master's

in mathematics, a 36-hour course graded by projects and take-home tests and taught through video, recently was added to a list of seven degrees offered by Texas A&M. This continues

toward the goals set forth by the Vision 2020 committees. Vision 2020 aims to have one-fifth of the student population pursuing master's degrees. Of those students, Vision 2020 states that half should be in distance education courses and one-fifth of those students not be located within the United States. Vision 2020 also calls for 75 percent of all graduate students not to be from Texas A&M and half not be from Texas undergraduate schools.

The authors are not bad people; many are highly respected community leaders. However, parts of Vision 2020 are misguided. Vision 2020 calls for the establishment of more multi-million dollar tenured professorships. There is arguably little value in retaining millionaire educators when the closest they get to students is through a computer screen. Distance education students, while saving money by not being required to pay various local fees, will undoubtedly pay through the nose in other ways. In regard to distance education, the authors of Vision 2020 wrote, "Continuing education is attractive in that the Coordinating Board does not regulate it. Texas A&M can charge what the market will bear, and high-quality information justifies high fees and tuition." This not only

sounds unscrupulous, but it appears to go against the Aggie spirit.

Investments in campus improvements are not slowing in the face of fewer Aggies in Aggieland. A new campus garage, new athletic and academic facilities, an underpass and a proposed light rail system are at various stages of completion at A&M. Vision 2020 also suggests an increase of \$40 million to \$70 million dollars will be required for distance education to be fully realized. Meanwhile, fewer students in the Bryan-College Station area will reduce the local economic outlook.

Distance education courses have their place, but awarding entire degrees from Texas A&M to students who may have never stepped foot on campus diminishes the Aggie experience and cheapens the diplomas of those who have passed before. It would be difficult to say that Texas Tech, a leader in distance education courses, has gained prestige with the abundance of these classes. However, Tech students otherwise would be faced with studying in Lubbock. Future Aggies of all academic stripes should be encouraged not only to obtain their degree from A&M, but encouraged to attend here as well. The question remains: Can a person get his or her Aggie ring through email?

Matthew Maddox is a sophomore business administration major.



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THE BATTALION

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MAIL CALL

Battalion shows pro-Israeli bias

In response to Chad Mallam's April 10 editorial cartoon:

The message portrayed by the caricature in Tuesday's Battalion is quite outrageous in that it equates an honorable freedom struggle against a brutal zionist occupation — in the face of an overwhelming military power, I might add — with a despicable racist behavior (anti-semitism).

The message conveyed plays right into the hands of the U.S. pro-Israeli lobby, which undoubtedly raises questions as to the intentions of the author. For your information, Jews have lived in Arab societies for centuries and as a community have contributed positively to the advance of these nations.

Moreover, this attack on the Palestinian freedom struggle is

only the latest in what amounts into a pattern of denigration by the author, relayed by The Battalion, of many Muslim causes.

This is not the first time The Battalion has carelessly displayed such disrespect for the minorities that are an integral part of the Aggie family. This attitude goes against the University policy of fostering a welcoming environment at A&M for minorities. Rather, it perpetuates false and prejudicial stereotypes about Muslim minorities in general and Arab students in particular.

As a collegiate newspaper partly funded by our tuition, one has to expect from The Battalion a higher standard of conduct that complies with University policies.

Hicham Bouzekri
Class of 2002

French Jews face violence

France appears to be caught between a rock and a hard place. Long thought of as the "land of good food, good wine and great fashion," a rising trend of anti-Semitism threatens to overshadow the better virtues of France. It is truly saddening to know that as the nation remembers the most atrocious and heinous acts of ethnic cleansing of the 20th century, the Holocaust, French Jews may be en route to a similar fate if their aggressors are not immediately met with firm and direct opposition.

Hate crimes happen more often than we think — even in the United States. But what makes these crimes in France unusual is their correlation to the ever-escalating violence in the Middle East, particularly between Israelis and Palestinians.

French Muslims, in retaliation to the actions of the Israeli government against Palestinians, are waging "war" with the wrong enemy. Synagogues have been burned in Marseille and Strasbourg. In Toulouse, a kosher butcher's shop was fired on, and in Villeurbanne, a Jewish couple was injured in an attack; the woman was pregnant. Petrol bombs have been launched into Jewish sports clubs and cemeteries.

These are only four examples out of

hundreds of attacks that have been staged against France's 600,000 Jews, the largest population of Jews in Western Europe. It is not the French Jews with whom the perpetrators have a problem, but rather the Israelis. As French President Jacques Chirac and a Palestinian representative from Paris pointed out, French Muslims must not "translate their hatred for the Israeli government ... into hatred of the Jews of France."

French Jews claim allegiance to their homeland of France, as was the compelling case for German Jews during the Nazi-Era. French Jews abide by the same codified set of French laws, speak French and maintain regional French customs. If French Muslims wish to voice their dissent for the Israeli government, and it is obvious that they do, then there are peaceful ways to do so without turning against their countrymen and turning France into a dangerous playground for a battle between ideological and religious principles.

Elie Wiesel, in an essay written in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, said, "Collective blame is unwarranted and unjust." French Muslims, rather than collectively reacting against French Jews who have very few ties to Israel, must realize that their actions are

as brutal as how they perceive the Israeli government's actions toward Palestinians. If French Muslims feel the need to scream bloody murder about Israelis waging war with civilians and disallowing certain freedoms and rights of Arab populations, French Muslims must acknowledge that they, too, are waging war with civilians and infringing on their rights.

Amid the uproar, there are a few heroes. French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin is one of them. He has recognized the awesome role France can play in mitigating the entire Middle East process: by the way of leading by example. The people of the Middle East will never achieve the peace they seek until they learn to live among each other and not against each other. France, with its unique composition of Jews and Muslims, can either choose to travel down the trodden path of chaos and destruction or demonstrate how two groups can live together peacefully, side by side, in a shared homeland.

In a world where there are no absolutes, we must continue to strive for that which is ideal. And to all those who strive, Shalom Aleichem, may peace be with you.

Melissa Fried is a freshman international studies major.



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