

## EDITORIAL FOR ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

University President Dr. Ray M. Bowen is setting a negative precedent by exonerating tenured professor Dr. Mary Zey despite accusations against her of plagiarism and scientific misconduct. Bowen should not have overturned the decision of Provost Ron Douglas, the University's chief academic officer. By giving Zey a second chance after she was found guilty of plagiarism by an internal investigation committee, Bowen is giving the impression that Texas A&M is not a place where academic integrity is truly valued, and has created a double standard between faculty and students.

If Zey was wrongly accused, reinstatement is the proper course of action. However, it is disturbing to read that the University President maintains that Zey is guilty and judges that it is not a "most offensive of egregious action" that merits dismissal.

Bowen agreed with the investigation's charge of Zey's guilt, but his actions to allow her to continue to teach undermine the weight of his words and the serious nature of plagiarism, an offense most faculty consider the highest level of academic malpractice. A&M academic standards are cheapened when plagiarism charges are not taken seriously in all cases.

When students are found guilty of plagiarism, there are dire consequences to face, expulsion among them. However, Bowen is allowing a tenured faculty member to remain despite agreeing with findings that label her guilty of such an offense.

If found guilty, a student, even one who maintains his or her innocence, much as Zey has maintained hers, receives an 'F' in the course and is subject to expulsion.

The Zey case sends troubling signals to students and faculty. The academic community in is one that has made great strides in recent decades, and has ambition to improve Texas A&M's reputation and academic standing among American public universities. The implication from this case is that improperly using another scholar's work may not result in the expected disciplinary action. Aside from dampening the working environment, Bowen's actions foster an atmosphere of disregard and disrespect for the intellectual property of others.

The committee found Zey passed off the work of other professors as her own, and then engaged in an attempt to cover up the theft of data and prose. Along with spurning academic integrity, this decision is a double standard of the highest order. Most students found guilty of cheating in this manner would never register for another class at A&M. Anything less for those whom students are supposed to look toward for guidance and inspiration should be an outrage.

# CONSIDER THE FIRE

## Fate of Bonfire must be on next president's agenda

Voter apathy has been cited as a failure of modern American democracy. Voters who do not feel they have anything at stake often shy away from the polls. Several millenniums ago, Pericles said, "Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you." However, just the opposite could be said of today's Aggies. In January, nearly 10,000 Aggies voted on an issue, some of whom had no firsthand experience with. More



MATTHEW MADDOX

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than 90 percent of those who voted in the Student Bonfire Survey said they wanted Bonfire to return to the A&M campus. This burning desire for the continuance of Aggie Bonfire has persisted despite its absence, and the decision of its fate rests equally with students and the next University president.

On Feb. 4, A&M President Dr. Ray M. Bowen ended the hopes of many in the Aggie family by cancelling any further University progress toward a Bonfire in 2002. While this eliminated any chance of a University-sanctioned Bonfire next fall, Aggies should not allow their disappointment to overshadow reality. In the February press conference, Bowen made public his realization that future plans for Bonfire still occupy the hearts of many. "My decision only speaks to 2002. I will not be president of A&M after this June, and it is natural that I will not do anything today to take away options for the future." This declaration only passes the buck to the next presidency, which is the key to the next University-sanctioned Bonfire. Recently-elected Student Body President Zac Coventry appears to be a positive

choice for those who favor the return of Bonfire. Campaigning on his hope for the future of the tradition, Coventry described his vision of its return as a series of small victories to be won. He also made clear his desire to work alongside the next administration in this pursuit. Coventry undoubtedly will face an uphill battle against the current status quo but promised to deliver the students' will to the administration.

Student and former student groups already have taken measures to ensure success of Bonfire. The Bonfire Coalition, an organization co-chaired by current and former students, aims to work with the next president to bring Bonfire back to campus. Marc Barringer, a board member in Bonfire Coalition and Class of 1992, cited A&M's lack of camaraderie and unity as the need for the return of the tradition. Barringer also said more than half of the applications to the group have come from the current freshman and sophomore classes. Meanwhile, other groups have continued to work outside the political arena of University relations. The University's apathy turned on itself with several "renegade" bonfires popping up across the state. The people behind these fires are not anti-Aggie. More accurately, they are Aggies who simply have not surrendered their tradition as readily as University politics and University lawyers demand.

Bonfire always has been renegade, a symbol and custom misunderstood by the rest of the world nor wholly sanctioned by this school's administration.

Whether Bonfire happens in the near or distant future will be a function of student determination and the next administration's attitude. Whoever A&M's new president turns out to be, he or she must come to Aggie land with a dedication to work with these students and the resolve to understand their passion. The Aggie spirit is a force to be reckoned with and will be felt. Who listens will depend on the next A&M president.

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### MAIL CALL

#### Aggie Code of Honor ignored

At a University that encourages its students to live by the Aggie Code of Honor, "Aggies do not cheat or steal," how can higher administration, in good conscience, keep an accused plagiarist as a professor? Dr. Mary Zey was found guilty of plagiarism and recommendations were made that she be terminated. Through an appeal process, she was found not guilty.

How can two committees reach such an opposite decision? Could it be because the separate hearing committee, who found her not guilty, included professors at this University who sympathized with her situation or because of some backdoor politics that are not known. Bowen cites that her "contributions to sociology ... entitles her to a second chance." What promise do we have that this is not a repeated offense or that she will not do this again? On every syllabus that is handed out in class and further emphasized by the professor, it states that

there will be no tolerance for plagiarism. What type of precedent is Bowen setting for students who receive a zero on a test for cheating and appeal? Given their past academic record, should they be exonerated? Many consider Bowen a lame duck since his announcement of resignation as president. In all political arenas, a lame duck attempts to pass final legislation or pardons before one's last day in office.

Like Bowen's pardon of Zey, Clinton in his last days pardoned Marc Rich. Clinton has since admitted that hindsight is 20/20 and he should not have pardoned Rich. Similar to Clinton's political mistake, Bowen's decision will have repercussions on the integrity of this University. This is a mockery of all the faculty members and students who have honestly and ethically achieved their status. In the near future will this decision by Bowen be detrimental to the value of our degree and institution? Students think so.

*Marci McClellan  
Class of 2002*

# Wealth should be redistributed



DHARMARAJ INDURTHY

The Texas school system is riddled with problem this much is undeniable. The Robin Hood plan, enacted in 1995, has been inadequate to combat disparities between school districts or the capacity issues raised by a growing student population. The Joint Select Committee on Public School Finance, led by Sen. Teel Bivins, has begun to explore these issues. Texas desperately needs new tax measures and a new system of resource allocation to fairly accommodate the demands on public education.

Under the Robin Hood plan, there is some effort to distribute money to schools equally. Schools are funded mostly from local property taxes and the state. Districts pay a certain portion of their property tax revenue to the state for redistribution, and there is an established minimum "floor" of funding the state guarantees. More wealthy districts with revenue equal to or above this minimum may receive no state funding, and exceptionally wealthy districts with resources exceeding a certain "ceiling" have to return surplus to the state.

Unfortunately, Texas still is plagued with disparities and lags behind the

national average of funding per student. A report by the Center for Public Policy Priorities notes that while most schools have per pupil funding between \$4,000 and \$8,000, the total range is \$3,643 to as much as \$20,859. Pam Hormuth, a lead researcher of the report, concludes, "The resulting inequities in resources, performance and student achievement hurt all Texans in the long run."

That the Robin Hood plan largely fails does not imply that redistribution is inherently a bad idea. To the contrary, one only can conclude that the degree of redistribution is insufficient. In almost any city in Texas, it will be easy to distinguish the more affluent schools from the poorer ones. One must wonder how such gaps could exist in a public system of education. How hard is it to distribute funds so the spending per student is equal? Perhaps this is a naive picture of funding, but certainly this should be the vision.

Some critics suggest that people should not have to devote tax money to schools miles away. Since when has this been a rule? An individual's tax money often is spent on roads he or she will never drive on, programs he or she will never use and salaries of people he or she will never know. In fact, it is almost intrinsic in the idea of taxation that the money be used for the general welfare, not individual welfare. Otherwise, what is the point in taxing at all? Perhaps

some schools will have to give up junior high violin lessons or rent out their indoor swimming pools, but that is a harm one ought to be able to live with.

But even homogenous distribution cannot solve the capacity problems and a general lack of funding. The student body in Texas increases yearly, and only more funding can cope with it. Despite the fact that it is an election year, legislators have to be brave and propose new taxes or tax reforms. Some solutions are extending property tax maximums, imposing new forms of taxation or shifting the burden to the state and businesses. Legislators have to dare to inflame popular opinion or find a way to siphon the necessary funds out of the complex bureaucracy.

A well-informed and educated public is fundamental to democracy. It is this premise that warrants mandatory education and the establishment of public schools. It is important to provide a homogenous public school system that favors no one. It is equally unjust for a public school student to be rewarded for his or her parents' financial successes as it is for a student to be penalized for his or her parents' hardships.

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