

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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FAILING TO MAKE THE GRADE

'U.S. News and World Report' ignorantly labels Texas A&M "second tier"

When *U.S. News and World Report* came out with its 2002 rankings for the best universities in America, Texas A&M was not included in the much-touted list of schools dubbed "first tier." It seemed like a smack in the face; even though efforts by A&M to push towards a top 10 ranking by 2020 have been progressing smoothly, the school was dropped from the list of the 50 best in America.



CHRIS JACKSON

The opinions held by *U.S. News and World Report* about universities in this country carry plenty of weight in the eyes of many who are searching for a good school to attend, and A&M's sudden drop in rank unfairly represents what is actually going on in College Station, Texas. Even though A&M is ranked as second tier by some, researchers, scientists and benefactors find the school to be first rate and worth their attention. Despite its fall in rankings, A&M continues to be a high-quality school and research center.

To begin with, the *U.S. News* rankings criteria were modified for 2002. When they measured class size, the compilers of the rankings counted multiple sections within classes as one large class. In other words, a class with one mass lecture

and two lab sessions was counted as a single class. Student/teacher ratios skyrocketed because of A&M's large number of classes of this type. A drop in rank, then, can be deceiving if the facts are not looked at properly. However, there are many other reasons why A&M's drop in rank may be looked on with doubtful eyes.

One look at the news from the past few months brings into question the accuracy of a

second-tier ranking for Texas A&M. As an Oct. 15 headline in *The Battalion* mentioned, a report by the University of Florida's Lombardi Program on Measuring University Performance ranked A&M among the top 25 research universities in the country. The school scored a top 25 ranking in six of nine measures, while also ranking number one in total endowment assets. As a research institute, A&M has the confidence of the government and private individuals, who appropriate more money to us than any other school.

A&M's research ventures read like a who's who of elite operations and activities. The school has recently joined in an effort known as the Texas Institute for Intelligent Bio-Nano Materials and Structures for Aerospace Vehicles, a co-op including Rice University, the University of Houston, Prairie View A&M University, Texas Southern University and NASA. The institute will focus on blending bio and

nano technology for use in aircraft. Other notable undertakings include an offer from the Qatar Foundation to establish an A&M branch in the Arab state of Qatar for oil and gas research. If accepted, this branch would greatly support A&M's already top-notch petroleum engineering department, as well as facilitate international experience for an increasing number of students.

A&M has the support of such leading research figures as Stephen Hawking, who will be a guest lecturer in an upcoming physics workshop put on by the new George P. and Cynthia W. Mitchell

Institute for

Fundamental

Physics. As

Christopher

Pope, holder

of the

Stephen

Hawking Chair

in Fundamental

Physics said of

the new research

department,

"This institute

will be the place

in the southern

United States for

string-theory and

other research."

Though a drop in

rankings may tarnish

A&M's image, a truly

top-tier physics institute

along with the

presence of the most

prominent scientist alive

today seem to imply otherwise.

Be it research for

NASA's bio/nano technology

program, international

opportunities for growth in

the Middle East, a top ranking

in endowments for

research or the establishment

of a cutting-edge physics institute,

A&M has much more to

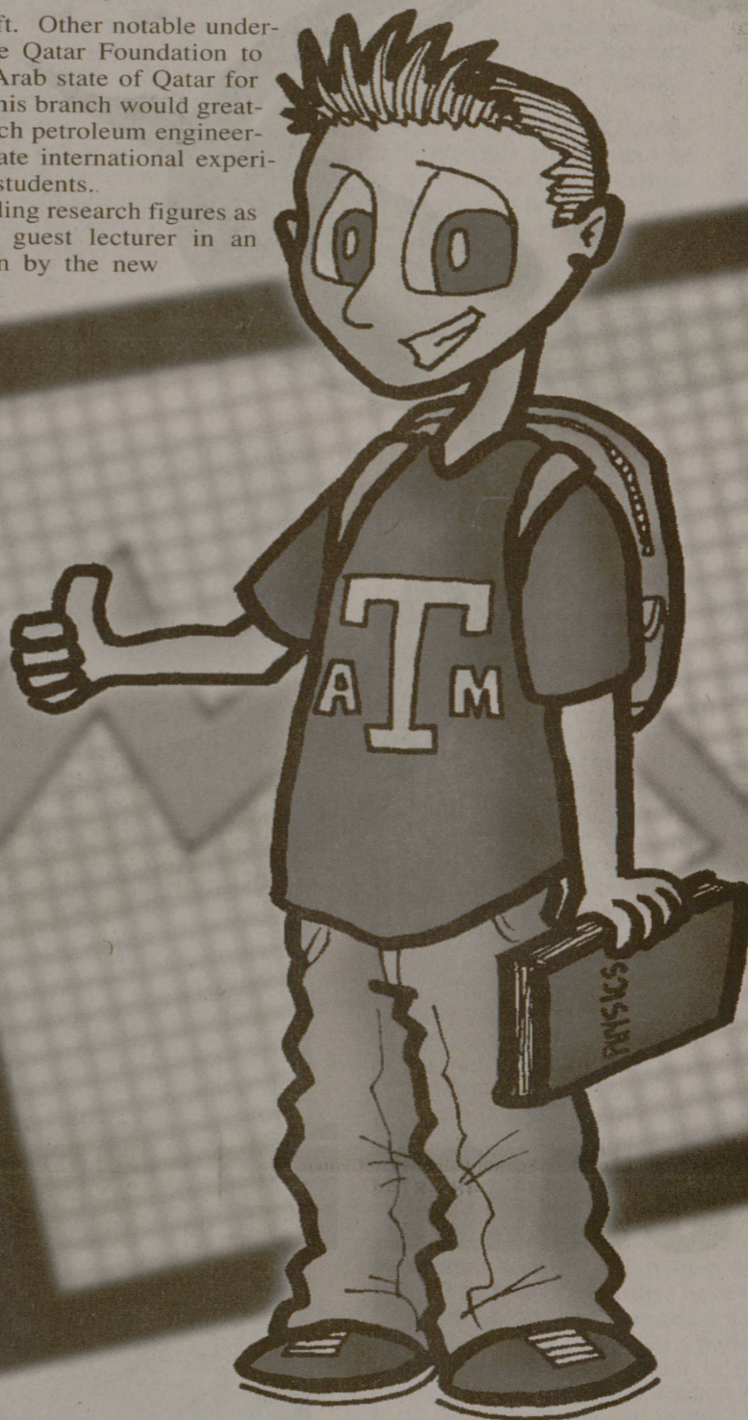
offer the world than *U.S. News*

and *World Report's* second-tier

designation implies.

"...A&M has much more to offer the world than 'U.S. News and World Report's' second tier designation implies."

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JOSH DARWIN • THE BATTALION

Internet spam leaves bad taste with users

(U-WIRE) LOS ANGELES -- In the beginning, everything was free. Web sites like Google, Geocities and Webrrawler offered killer content without a single caveat. Then companies ranging from Yahoo to Sex.com remembered they were supposed to make money. Now it seems that everything on the Internet is either covered with 50 pop-up advertisements or requires an expensive subscription.

Obviously it's natural for companies to want to make money, but it seems no one knows how to make their site profitable without forcing ads down users' throats or charging for content and services.

Users who have been on the World Wide Web since 1994 will recall that back then, everything on the Internet was free because it was basically still a government experiment.

America Online was one of a small handful of major commercial internet service providers which charged an hourly rate to get online. Once users covered that, they were free to surf. Now everyone has unlimited access accounts, but the advertisements start the second users open their browser. Many major providers attempt to set users' home page to their ad-laden "portal page" which consistently contains variations on the same useless information.

Once users have searched for the information they want, they're hit with a dozen lethal pop-up ads from the first Web site they click on. It's as flashy as Las Vegas -- but lacks the sex appeal.

Unbelievably, many sites now use HTML layers or flash to cover their pages with moving ads. Having clicked away the popups, users are forced to wait for these sticky bloodsuckers to retract back into the dark holes they spawned from.

Even TV ads are less annoying -- at least it's possible to change the channel. With some Web sites, it seems like the computer has been taken over by a hacker, not letting users leave the site. Now if users' actually want content, they're in trouble. It's not time to cough up some cash, or at least their e-mail address, name, credit card info and firstborn.

Web sites as varied as CNN.com, Anandtech.com and even Freeservers.com make users pay for anything but their most basic services. CNN charges for every video watched on their site, and Anandtech.com charges for forum access (unless users want to use a crippled, slower version).

Magazine Web sites like Maximmag.com have taken pop-up ads to the extreme. While the content remains free, a user can hardly move from page to page within the site without being inundated with pop-up ads. This takes away from the user experience, and ultimately, this trend means that finding quality content on the internet -- without the distractions -- has become a frustrating experience. It seems that we are increasingly forced to choose between questionable no-name sites or mega-sites that bombard us with ads.

It's totally understandable that companies -- especially content providers -- need to make money off their Web sites. I don't blame CNN or Encyclopedia Britannica for charging money for access to some information.

But Web sites that are more user-friendly might actually make a profit. Dot-com companies are constantly complaining about their low revenues, but at the same time are trying to rip users off with every new "feature" they add to their services. Likewise, bombarding customers with ads is not going to make them want to come back to a site. Until someone comes up with a revolutionary online business model, both users and companies will continue to struggle with these issues.

Derek Lazzaro is a columnist at the University of California-Los Angeles.

Illegitimate fraternities and sororities must get real

On Oct. 8, an article ran in *The Battalion* that profiled self-proclaimed fake fraternities and sororities. The organizations listed were Phi Chi, Lambda Gamma, and Tri Zeta. The members of Phi Chi aim to build relationships with people, going beyond just being acquaintances, and plan social events for their members and guests. Lambda Gamma is a fake sorority that evolved from a weekly lunch group and Tri Zeta boasts it can create random shirts.

Where is the satisfaction in forming an organization that purposely and proudly imitates another? Never has there been such a pointless term as fake fraternity.

It should be evident to anyone, whether they are a proponent of the Greek system or not, the paradox created by a fake Greek organization. It is puzzling that the founders of these organizations on the Texas A&M campus have chosen Greek letters to represent themselves, when they possess an obvious dislike for established Greek letter organizations and what they believe them to represent.

Rather than naming themselves using a clever acronym with letters from their last names, a favorite color, or common interest, they have chosen to represent themselves by the very letters they have set out to disgrace.

Surprisingly, probably to most that oppose sororities and fraternities, there are 52 recognized Greek organizations at Texas A&M. These consist of more than white men and women joined in effort to throw a good party. These organizations are comprised of more than 4,000 Aggies and include four councils, each with a widely diverse membership.

The Multicultural Greek Council's mission is to unite, create and maintain high standards in the lives of fraternities and sororities by addressing, coordinating and developing strategic action plans; to unify organizations, promote higher education, provide community services, enhance leadership and serve as a liaison between the Multicultural Greek Council, the University's undergraduate student body and administration, thereby improving the campus climate, according to the A&M Greek Life Web site.

The National Pan-Hellenic Council exists to provide a venue of cooperation and communication concerning issues of mutual interest for historically Black Greek-letter fraternities and sororities.



KELLN ZIMMER

When a fake Greek organization promotes itself as such, the ideals and purposes of established sororities and fraternities are exploited. The founders of these fake organizations contribute to the stereotypes of Greek organizations simply being social organizations and trivialize the established goals of copyrighted Greek letter organizations.

By visiting any one of the 52 Greek Web sites that exist on the A&M campus, one will find a commitment to service, brother or sisterhood, and scholarship, none of the things that fake Greek organizations claim. Their sole focus is not on making T-shirts and collecting dues as fake fraternities and sororities seem to believe.

People do have the right to establish groups under any name or purpose that they so desire, as seen from the more than 700 recognized organizations existing at A&M. But it is unfair for members to establish groups that are directly in opposition to another, or that mockingly misrepresent the goals of another.

Without a doubt, if a fake Corps of Cadets or fake SGA was established on this campus, there would be an uproar due to the disrespect given to the existing organization's goals and purposes. The outrage should be no less in response to the establishments of fake Greeks.

As the 30th Anniversary Greek Week is well underway this week, the student body should take note of the 52 real fraternities and sororities at A&M. This week those who run Greek Week are aiming to raise awareness and celebrate their service, their diversity, and their unity.

The road to acceptance at A&M is not an easy one for the Greek system, and the establishment of fake Greek organizations can only be seen as a further hindrance to this process as stereotypes and negative images of Greeks are furthered by members of this campus.

Perhaps members of fake sororities and fraternities should re-evaluate their own purposes this week and look to the existing Greek organizations at A&M and what they seek to achieve. Focusing themselves on this could help them to establish their own identity and, in effect, get real.

Kelln Zimmer is a senior English major.