THANKSGIVING HOLIDAYS?

A&M administrators should cancel classes the Wednesday before Thanksgiving

SARA FOLEY

It is a worthy debate: whether to skip Wednesday classes to see more of your family, but risk missing valuable instruction, or to attend classes on Wednesday and make the long drive home after classes, risking fatigue and cutting time spent with family short. Some students are fortunate enough to have classes that are cancelled on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, but some could miss tests, quizzes or extra credit by skipping class.

Almost all public schools and most universities in Texas give three or more days off for Thanksgiving, allowing time to travel and visit relatives not frequently seen. But for some reason, Texas A&M has remained stubborn, denying students and faculty a holiday this Wednesday. To further complicate the situation, much of the decision-making lies in the hands of the professors. Whether class is held is left up to them, and it is this inconsistency that not only leaves traveling plans in jeopardy, but poses numerous inconveniences to students and their families. The Wednesday before Thanksgiving must be declared a holiday.

It is obviously a convenient situation for the professors. If they have impending traveling plans, they can cancel class and go on with their personal lives. However, students often suffer when they are required to attend class on this day, forcing them to put personal obligations on hold. If a student's hometown is more than a few hours away, he has little choice but to skip class, unless he wishes to drive at late hours or arrive late on Thanksgiving Day.

Additionally, if a student intends on traveling with his family to another location, he may have to miss two days of class. For those professors who cancel class or allow students to skip class without penalty, this eases holiday stress. Some professors, however, are not forthright about their intentions of holding class, causing some students' traveling plans to be ambiguous.

Whether class is held or not, most students either travel home on Wednesday or leave on Tuesday, ignoring classes that might be held and any punishment that might occur. Nevertheless, there are those professors who insist that class cannot be missed.

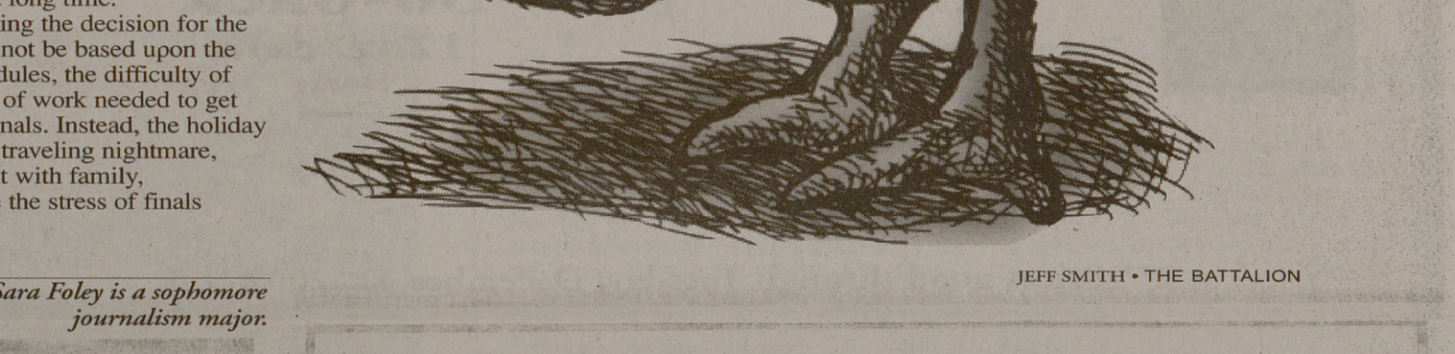
For students who have these professors, they have no choice but to attend, even if their earlier classes were cancelled. It is unfair for those who are required to attend certain classes because of an inconsiderate professor or a difficult course load and ridiculous for a student to put traveling plans on hold because of a 50-minute class that might be held later in the day.

It has come to the point that we practically do have the day before Thanksgiving off, except for the unfortunate few. It is for this reason that the University must intervene. By officially declaring the day before Thanksgiving a holiday, the University eliminates the guessing, the debate over scheduling flight times and the inconsistencies that exist now.

It assures safe holiday travel, and eases any guilt felt by the professors who do choose to hold class on this Wednesday. Thanksgiving is one of the few times during the year when a student can come home and be reunited with family he may not have seen in a long time.

By the University making the decision for the professors, decisions will not be based upon the professors' traveling schedules, the difficulty of the course, or the amount of work needed to get done in the class before finals. Instead, the holiday will become not a rushed traveling nightmare, but a retreat at home spent with family, refreshing students before the stress of finals begins.

Sara Foley is a sophomore journalism major.



JEFF SMITH • THE BATTALION

Internet filters do little to protect First Amendment

JENELLE WILSON

Last week, the Supreme Court agreed to review a federal law that requires public schools and libraries to install Internet filters on their computers if they are to receive federal money, according to *The New York Times*. A three-judge federal court in Philadelphia declared the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), which was signed into law on Dec. 21, 2000, unconstitutional last spring for blocking speech protected by the First Amendment in public libraries. The section of the law that pertains to schools was not challenged and remains in place.

Libraries depend heavily on government subsidies to serve the American public. They should not be forced to install Internet filters – which are notoriously inept at blocking "objectionable" material – on their computers and to violate the First Amendment rights of their patrons in order to keep the doors open. The Supreme Court needs to uphold the lower courts' decision to assure that constitutionally given rights are protected.

According to the Philadelphia court opinion, more than 143 million Americans use the Internet; for 10 percent of these Americans, libraries are the only way to access the Internet and the information available online. While many library patrons are children, adults also use library computers to access the Internet. Yet because of the filters, information that may be seen as harmful to minors is blocked from adults.

What is and is not harmful to minors or objectionable material is subjective.

Few would argue that children should have access to pornography, but that is not the only material blocked. Information about birth control, sexual orientation, abortion and other controversial issues may be blocked because a filter company employee believes it to be harmful. An Internet filter has no right to make that decision. The First Amendment assures individuals and parents the right to make this decision for themselves.

According to the court opinion, Internet filters operate using categories of lists containing web addresses. If a URL is on one of these lists, which can contain between 200,000 to 600,000 web addresses chosen by the company that produces the filter to be "objectionable," it is blocked. However, it is estimated that only 100,000 Web sites contain free sexually explicit material. The filters end up blocking many sites that minors should be able to have access to in a public forum.

The court opinion contains many examples of "overblocked" sites. Surprisingly, several of the blocked sites had content related to religion or churches. The Web site of a Catholic men's group in Nevada was blocked by the Cyber Patrol Internet filter because it inexplicably fit the program's Adult/Sexually Explicit category. The Web site for Orphanage Emmanuel, a Christian orphanage in Honduras, was blocked for the same reason.

Other erroneously blocked sites include local government Web sites, home education information, hockey teams, the Wisconsin Right to Life site and even a Web Site with information about allergies.

> *"Few would argue that children should have access to pornography, but that is not the only material blocked"*

Learning about allergies is in no way harmful to minors, and this example shows just how problematic Internet filters are. Internet filter companies do not properly explore the content of a Web site before it adds the URL to one of the lists.

Internet filters also fail to properly block the sexually explicit material they are designed to block. The filters offer a false sense of security, but with the Internet constantly changing, filters fail to keep up. With an estimated two billion web pages already in existence, and 1.5 million pages added to the Internet every day, underblocking is also a large problem with Internet filters. Children are not protected from the material CIPA seeks to protect them from.

Internet filters are simply not effective. They block Web sites that are not harmful to minors and allow access to sites that are.

Libraries should be places of intellectual freedom. An employee at a company that makes Internet filters does not have the right to determine what information society should be able to see. Adults must be able to determine the information that is appropriate for them to view, and parents should have the final say in what their children may see. To do so is constitutionally guaranteed. To restrict speech protected by the First Amendment because it may be seen as controversial or goes against popular opinion is unacceptable.

Jenelle Wilson is a junior political science major.

MAIL CALL

Religion not really an issue

In response to Leann Bickford's Nov. 21 column:

I am somewhat concerned with the views espoused against differing religious and life choices in Ms. Bickford's article. She feels that it is OK for an organization to discriminate against atheists or homosexuals if their beliefs violate some obscure "moral code." By this same reasoning, corporations could discriminate against atheists or homosexuals by citing the same type of violation. They could take it even further, discriminating against Jews, Muslims or Buddhists because they do not share some Christian value that the corporation was founded upon.

I also find the character assassination performed by Ms. Bickford on Darrell Lambert very misguided. I think his persistence speaks to his respect of and faith in the Boy Scouts of America as an important and relevant organization in the lives of young men. As society progresses socially, though, those organizations that do not progress will eventually become irrelevant. Mr. Lambert does not want to see this happen to the Boy Scouts.

Nick Anthis
Class of 2005

RHA dress code not needed

In response to a Nov. 21 mail call:

Yesterday's mail call was quite appalling to me. As the Moore Hall RHA Delegate and the individual who wore the shirt saying "Howdy F__cker!," I am strongly against the RHA dress code and Mr. Vargo's attacks upon myself and others that don't happen to agree with his opinions.

First off, let me clarify that this shirt actually read "Howdy F__cker!" That's the singular form of the "F" word, for those incapable of quoting a shirt. Also, I have never defended my wearing of the shirt as any sort of guaranteed right. I'll be the first to admit that the shirt was inappropriate, but wearing that shirt didn't make me any less professional in manner, nor did it make my voice at the RHA general assembly any less valid.

Second, Mr. Vargo, in his attack, made a comment about people who "forcefully rebel." I don't know what Mr. Vargo considers forceful, but if I'm not mistaken, those that are visibly against the dress code have only peacefully protested.

Jeremy Burns Minnerick
Class of 2005